

**The originating impulses of Ankoku Butoh:
Towards an understanding of the trans-cultural embodiment of Tatsumi
Hijikata's dance of darkness**

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Introduction

Ankoku Butoh is a performing art devised in Japan in the wake of the Second World War by the dancer and choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata (born Akita, 1928; died Tokyo, 1986). A highly aesthetic and subversive performing art, Butoh often evokes "images of decay, of fear and desperation, images of eroticism, ecstasy and stillness."¹

Typically performed with a white layer of paint covering the entire body of the dancer, Butoh is visually characterized by continual transformations between postures, distorted physical and facial expressions, and an emphasis on condensed and visually slow movements. Some of the general characteristics of Butoh performance include "a particular openness to working with the subtle energy in the body; the malleability of time; the power of the grotesque."²

While Ankoku Butoh flourished in Japan during the dynamic decades of the 1960s and 1970s, Hijikata's influence has spread with travelling or migrant Japanese performers and teachers, companies and individuals who practise Butoh, or who have been influenced by Ankoku Butoh, or who appropriate elements of its aesthetic for other practices, both within and outside of the performing arts. Ankoku Butoh has inspired, mainly through its originating spirit, Tatsumi Hijikata, a seemingly inexhaustible exploration of the realm of body consciousness.

In his thesis entitled *Towards the Bowels of the Earth*, Paul Roquet categorizes the different approaches adopted by Western scholars and performers in their attempts to understand and define Butoh. The dance has variously been described as "a particular aesthetic, a particular technique, a particular philosophy, a physical rebellion set against all codification, and even a universal

¹ Bonnie Sue Stein, "Butoh: Twenty years ago we were crazy, dirty and mad," *The Drama Review* 30.2 (1986): 107-25.

² Stein, 107-25.

quality present in all performance.”³ Although not exhaustive, Roquet's list serves to illustrate the multiple and often conflicting ideas and discourses that have evolved, and continue to evolve, around Butoh.

It has been suggested that the history of Butoh discourse in English-speaking countries “reflects the acculturation process of a foreign art form: first there is the fascination of novelty, then exoticism, then finally a deepening understanding of the art's own discourse and historical context.”⁴ The challenge to definition is inherent in the form: in a paradoxical process, the Ankoku Butoh performer actively strives “to avoid codification while struggling against the unsustainability of a complete rebellion,”⁵ thus continually undermining attempts definitively to describe the dance's form and techniques. What is regarded as Ankoku Butoh within a contemporary Western context is, however, considered by many Japanese and Western dance critics and academics as a mere diluted and superficial appropriation of Ankoku Butoh. Butoh critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi calls such empty performances “a distorted idea of dance, lets them see the unique manifestation of Butoh in utterly uninspiring performances which present nothing but the most beaten-to-death and moth-eaten of images.”⁶ Groups such as Sankai Juku⁷ and many Western Butoh performers have been derided for their “empty aestheticism.”⁸ From the perspective of this thesis such criticism is valid, and I agree with Kazuko Kuniyoshi that very few Butoh performers display the critical and embodied dedication “to self-investigation Hijikata's Butoh demanded in its creation.”⁹

In order to develop a critical understanding of Butoh and address its misappropriation outside of Japan, a fundamental distinction needs to be made

³ Paul Roquet, “Towards the Bowels of the Earth: Butoh Writing in Perspective,” diss., Pomona College, California, 2003, 7.

⁴ Roquet 14.

⁵ Roquet 10.

⁶ Kuniyoshi Kazuko, *Performing Arts in Japan Now: Butoh in the Late 1980s* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1991).

Online: 6 November 2000 Online. Available: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/Butoh/kuni.pdf>> 3.

⁷ Sankai juku is a Butoh group started by Ushio Amagatsu, a student of Tatsumi Hijikata. The group travels extensively and performs worldwide.

⁸ Roquet 10.

⁹ Ibid.

between Butoh and Ankoku Butoh. The basic meaning of the term has grown and shifted with the efflux of time:

The word "Butoh," now the accepted name of the performing art genre, originated as *ankoku buyo* in the early 1960s. "Ankoku" means "utter darkness." "Buyo" is a generic term for dance often used in compounds: for example, *gendai buyo*, means modern dance, while *koten buyo*, classical dance. Later in the 1960s, *ankoku buyo* evolved into *ankoku buto*.¹⁰

In accord with Japanese dance critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi, I argue that "at the heart of Butoh is Ankoku Butoh, and an inquiry into the broader nature of Butoh must begin with an examination of signs and hints left by the creator of Ankoku Butoh – Tatsumi Hijikata."¹¹ This perspective is shared by Marie Gabrielle Rotie, who regards a critical and dedicated return to the origins of Ankoku Butoh as essential to developing the discourse on and practice of Butoh in other contexts:

In the west, [Butoh] has been open to misinterpretation, partly because of its marginalized presence and the rarity of its performances, partly because of the formalization of its original aspirations. The creative development of Butoh by European practitioners depends on an awareness of the impulses from which it was born.¹²

The central aim of this thesis is to examine the work of Hijikata as a unique approach to the consciousness of human embodiment in Japan after the Second World War. It will proceed by investigating the multifaceted paradoxes and the cultural, personal and philosophical impulses that informed Hijikata's aesthetic strategies and choreographic and dance techniques. I wish to identify Ankoku Butoh as the specific 'quality' in consciousness and embodiment that

¹⁰ Nanako Kurihara, "Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh," *The Drama Review* 44.1 (2000): 10.

¹¹ Kazuko, 6 November 2000 Online. Available: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/Butoh/kuni.pdf>> 6.

¹² Marie-Gabrielle Rotie, "The Reorientation of Butoh," *Dance Theatre Journal* 13.1 (1996): 35.

distinguishes the artistic vision and work of Tatsumi Hijikata. Appreciation of the subsequent development and evolution of Butoh dance depends on the recognition that in Ankoku Butoh Hijikata was giving form to one of “the most precise critical spirits in the history of the consciousness of the body.”¹³

Hijikata was a very vocal figure within the Japanese dance world and he wrote a great deal. He also actively sought to construct an elusive and mystical but influential persona, and acquired a reputation for wilfully embellishing and reconstructing his own past. His writings were informed by a vivid and absurd poetics, through which he sought to undermine rational understanding in a bid to subvert existing notions of human embodiment in performance.

Hijikata used the body as a site onto which to project a critique of the rapidly modernizing Japanese society. He attempted to recapture the immediacy of the physical body, not as a tool to convey form or dance vocabulary, but as a defiant entity that owns its own abilities to generate and express. As Hijikata himself asserted: “What is my work? Yes it’s myself, and I have nothing to show you but my body.”¹⁴ Hijikata’s dance works suggested a new status for the physical body, achieved through the embrace of aspects of embodiment previously least attended to: involuntary movements, convulsions, collapsing, and even facial or bodily distortion. All these have been explored as ways to generate highly confrontational states of being within the body that transcend the individual performer.

In his attempt to evolve a dance form that would liberate and transform human embodiment, Hijikata drew on a variety of sources, both Eastern and Western. His initial strategies of revolt and ‘negative affirmation’ drew inspiration from the works of Western avant-garde figures such as Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille and Jean Genet. Hijikata also actively pursued collaborations with Japanese contemporaries such as photographer and film maker Eikoh Hosoe and literary

¹³ Kazuko Kuniyoshi, 6 November 2000 Online. Available: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/Butoh/kuni.pdf> > 6.

¹⁴ Tatsumi Hijikata, *Yameru Maihime* (Ailing Dancer) (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1983). [Unpaginated]

figure Yukio Mishima. This cross-pollination between Eastern and Western influences served to kindle a dynamic approach to embodiment within the Ankoku Butoh performer. The dance both transcended cultural barriers and manifested a uniquely Japanese approach to dance:

Rejecting existing dance styles of the West and those of his native Japan, and equally uninterested in pedestrian movement, Hijikata attempted to create a dance of ritualistic quality that would transform the human body and mind. He developed and formalized Butoh while drawing on sources from French literature, Western experimental art and theatre, and Japanese folklore – reinventing the sacred in a contemporary art form by combining sources from both East and West.¹⁵

In exploring the originating impulses of Tatsumi Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh I shall utilize a broadly hermeneutic methodological framework. The most effective definition of this methodological approach for present purposes can be found on the peer-generated online Wikipedia website:

Essentially, hermeneutics involves cultivating the ability to understand things from somebody else's point of view, and to appreciate the cultural and social forces that may have influenced their outlook.¹⁶

Hermeneutics offers a system of interpretation capable of embracing the expansive and often contradictory nature of Hijikata's life and Ankoku Butoh, attempting "to avoid overgeneralizations while still critically engaging the material."¹⁷ Paul Roquet has pointed to the dynamic nature of such an approach to the study of Butoh, stating that: "Hermeneutically-informed authors attempt to

¹⁵ Nanako Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing in the Universe: Critical Analysis of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh Dance" diss., New York University, 1996, 2.

¹⁶ "Hermeneutics," Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, 3 November 2007 Online. Available: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutics>>.

¹⁷ Roquet 20.

describe Butoh in all its multifaceted paradoxes and cultural complexity.”¹⁸

Within this hermeneutic system of interpretation I will be using a variety of lenses through which to view the cultural, personal and philosophical impulses that informed Hijikata’s aesthetic strategies, philosophical concerns and choreographic and dance techniques. The hermeneutic approach offers a reflexive and integral method for combining the multiple contexts, conditions and influences of Ankokuh Butoh and the life experience of Tatsumi Hijikata in an attempt to account for the origination of the dance:

In the last two centuries, the scope of hermeneutics has expanded to include the investigation and interpretation not only of textual and artistic works, but of human behaviour generally, including language and patterns of speech, social institutions, and ritual behaviours (such as religious ceremonies, political rallies, football matches, rock concerts, etc.). Hermeneutics interprets or inquires into the meaning and import of these phenomena, through understanding the experience of an insider, or the first-person perspective of an engaged participant in these phenomena.¹⁹

The hermeneutic lenses I will use include a narrative of Hijikata’s life and influences and the development of his aesthetic. Psychological and philosophical observations that contextualise his approaches to embodiment will be used in relation to his life experience and his many sources of influence and inspiration, while post-colonial concepts will be employed to elucidate the complex interactions between East and West and Hijikata’s strategy of resistance in the creation of Ankokuh Butoh. Ultimately the hermeneutical approach enables the orchestration of a variety of dynamic insights into Hijikata’s dance while allowing “a space for the unknown; for the greater complexity that always exists beyond the written word.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Hermeneutics,” 3 November 2007 Online. Available: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutics>>.

²⁰ Roquet 21.

There has been a wide intellectual and critical response to the phenomenon of Butoh, and central to my research and the development of this thesis are three bodies of work. The first is the thesis work of western Butoh scholar and practitioner Paul Roquet called *Towards The Bowels of the Earth: Butoh Writing in Perspective* (1993). Roquet's thesis provides very valuable insight into the many dialectics and discourses surrounding Butoh and lays the foundation for my own hermeneutic approach to the study of Ankokuh Butoh. The second is the very thorough and detailed study of the life and work of Tatsumi Hijikata by Japanese scholar Nanako Kurihara entitled *The Most Remote Thing in the Universe: Critical Analysis of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh Dance* (1996). Kurihara's text provides many essential insights into the dance from a Japanese scholar's perspective and is fundamentally important for insight into and understanding of individual dance pieces. Her first-hand access to Japanese sources and her direct translations from these sources have also been of great value. The third and most illuminating source in terms of Hijikata's philosophical and aesthetic approaches is the notation of a seminar given by Butoh scholar Keisuke Sakurei entitled *"The Body as Dance": An Introduction to the Study of Butoh-ology* (1996). Her work provides a strong and critical soundingboard for questions concerning the development and future of Ankokuh Butoh after the death of Hijikata. Sakurei also vividly describes the challenges facing contemporary and even first generation Butoh performers, and the difference in approaches to embodiment between Eastern and Western Butoh performers that are central to my argument for the trans-cultural potential of Ankokuh Butoh.

The first chapter of this thesis introduces significant climates and concurrences in the socio-historical context of modernizing Japan in the latter half of the 20th century. The history of modernity in Japan is inextricably linked with Western interventions in Japanese life. The most notably destructive of these interventions came in the form of the atomic bomb attacks and the consequent unconditional surrender of Japan and its occupation by the American military. Many avant-garde artists, performers and intellectuals would respond to this experience of

loss and disillusionment with often-extreme strategies of resistance, revolt and reinvention.

Although never overtly part of any of the resistance movements or political agendas of the time, Tatsumi Hijikata's conception of the Butoh body established a distinctive dialogue between a modernizing Japan and the Japan of the past. And although he was "resolutely anti-nationalist, he did share in a nostalgia for pre-modern Japanese life."²¹ Authors such as Yukio Mishima, Junichiro Tanizaki and many others were engaged in similar dialogues between the modernizing present and the traditional past. It should be noted that using Japanese history and national identity politics to shed light on Ankoku Butoh is a not-uncommon strategy. It should, however, be exercised with caution so as to avoid unwarranted generalization and the misleading exoticification of Japanese culture. The chapter shows how Hijikata honed his interest in traditional Japanese folklore and corporeal wisdom while simultaneously finding echoes in anti-modernist sentiments of the time, both Western and Japanese.

The second chapter investigates the origination of Ankoku Butoh through the life and body of Tatsumi Hijikata. The chapter aims to track and orientate the evolution of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh diachronically around three thematic periods identified in the development of the dance: The Revolt, The Nostalgia, and The Nature. These thematic delineations reflect essential shifts in the nature or focus of Hijikata's exploration of dance at specific intervals in his life. Each of the thematic periods came to fruition not in chronological succession, but rather in parallel development. The themes will be introduced through a diachronic narrative, in tandem with discussion of the literary influences, collaborations and performance strategies implicated in the creation of selected dance works from the 1950s to the 1980s. In sum, this exploration of Hijikata's work is conducted through an exposition of his life's journey in conjunction with a hermeneutic investigation into the rich tapestry of the contexts and influences which helped to

²¹ Roquet 18.

shape that journey.

The third and final chapter reflects on Hijikata's approach to embodiment by creating insights into the unmediated awareness and objectification achieved through the Butoh body and the words called Butoh Fu used in Ankoku Butoh training to stimulate this awareness. Some key concepts from post-colonial theory are employed in the development of insights into the cultural cross-pollination behind Ankoku Butoh, and into the resistant strategies mobilized by Hijikata in his dance within the context of a Japan 'colonized' and modernized by the United States of America.

The hermeneutic interweaving of perspectives that characterizes this study implicitly rejects any essentialized approach to Ankoku Butoh and emphasizes the importance of understanding the wide-ranging originating impulses of Hijikata's dance. This chapter argues that Ankoku Butoh cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the subtle interplay between Eastern and Western influences as they relate to the life and work of Hijikata and the spirit with which he originated this dance. Observations made on Butoh dance techniques and philosophy as a dynamic trans-cultural approach to embodiment will in part be based on participant observation in Butoh classes within the Hakutobo²² school of Butoh, as taught by Swedish Butoh dancer and choreographer Su En. Su En is a western Butoh performer who trained under Hijikata's principal performer Yoko Ashikawa in Japan, and is thus a valuable link between the Western body and Japanese dance, a relationship particularly relevant to this chapter.

It is important to note that wherever possible original Japanese sources were used in the research for this thesis. These sources were not wholly translated, but read by a Japanese colleague, who selected sections to be translated with the help of fellow Butoh student Yukio Ikeda. In certain cases the original faxed, photo-copied and hand-notated notes and documentation sourced from the

²² Hakutobo, meaning 'white peaches,' is the group started by Hijikata for his principal performer Yoko Ashikawa, and as such is the closest descendant to the Ankoku Butoh school of Butoh.

Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archive,²³ the private library of Susana Akerlund and other Butoh scholars, did not contain page numbers. Sometimes information sourced from websites is also unpaginated and presented in the form of one long scrollable page. In all such instances, the MLA convention for the citation of unpaginated material has been followed. When the pages of a Web source are stable (as in PDF files), the page number is included as it appears on the actual document sheet in the program in which the document was generated.

²³ Hijikata Tatsumi Kinen Shiriyokan (Hijikata Tatsumi Memorial Archive) Date founded: 1990. 1-6-17 Nakamachi Meguro-ku. Tokyo 153.

Chapter 1: Climates and concurrences

Tatsumi Hijikata was born Yoneyama Kunio in 1928 in a small farming village in Akita prefecture, in the Tohoku region of Japan. Tohoku is made up of Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Yamagata, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures and constitutes the northernmost part of the main Honshu island. Generally considered to be the backwoods or outback of Japan, Tohoku is home to what many consider to be definitive Japanese rural culture. In the first half of the 20th century it was known for its conservatism and observation of traditional Japanese customs. Due to its relative isolation, the region also managed to preserve its unique and unspoilt nature. Although Tohoku is a farming region, its winters are notoriously severe. A winter festival called *Ojika* is celebrated, where local people dressed as demons knocked on the doors of neighbours' houses.

Hijikata's family made their living from their own rice fields and a small noodle shop. His father, a violent and abusive man, loved *Gidayu*, a form of narrative driven dramatic balladry. Admitting to have been deeply affected by his relationship with his father, Hijikata often spoke of the violent outbursts to which his father was prone. In some cases his drunken father would chase him and his mother, threatening them with death.²⁴ In later years Hijikata would refer to his father as "an indescribable tyrant."²⁵ From a very young age Hijikata showed a certain capacity for subversive behaviour. Considered "a wild, unruly child,"²⁶ he graduated late from his Technical School in Akita after having been suspended. (He had urinated on a group of nurses after acting on a bet during a school outing. His wife, Akiko Motofuji, has noted that this form of erratic conduct was typical of Hijikata until his death.²⁷)

It must be noted that Hijikata shamelessly embroidered his past and openly

²⁴ Kurihara 105.

²⁵ Hijikata Tatsumi, in Hijikata Tatsumi, Ashikawa Yoko Gunji Masakatsu, and Ichikawa Miyabi, "*Butoh o kataru*" (Talking about Butoh), "*Hogaku to Buyo*" (National Music and dance). [Unpaginated]

²⁶ Elena Polzer, "Hijikata Tatsumi's 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein'" diss., University of Berlin, 2004, 10.

²⁷ Akiko Motofuji, *Hijikata to tomo ni* (Tokyo, 1973), 42.

invented happenings and situations that were subsequently exposed as contradictory or untruthful.²⁸ Yet whatever the reality, Hijikata's constant thematic and symbolic allusion to his childhood memories suggests that his youth had a deep and lasting affect on him. The majority of Hijikata's own discussions of and writings on Ankoku Butoh refer to his youth and aspects of the Tohoku environment.

According to Butoh student and researcher Paul Roquet, "Hijikata spent many hours alone while his mother worked in the fields."²⁹ One anecdote cited by Roquet tells of how Hijikata used to spend extended periods of time looking at his reflection in a dark pool of water. One day he used a sickle to slash at the water and distort his reflection. Hijikata later translated this experience into a phrase, "cutting the surface of the water," which Roquet identifies as a powerful metaphor for Hijikata's passion for "destroying the barrier between the external world and deeper layers of imagination within the body."³⁰

The bomb

Hijikata's teenage years were blighted by the Second World War, specifically the two nuclear attacks on Japan. The first blast site was the city of Hiroshima, where the US air force dropped a Uranium bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" on August 6th, 1945. It was the first time such a weapon had been used in the history of the world. At 08.16am, in an instant, 90 000 people were killed and 69 000 people were injured by a 10-kiloton atomic explosion.³¹ The lack of a prompt positive response on the part of the Japanese resulted in the dropping of a second bomb on August 9, targeting Nagasaki. Much has been written about the trauma suffered by the Japanese people as a consequence of these nuclear strikes. Richard Rhodes draws on eyewitness accounts in his book, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. One account, from a grocer, vividly depicts the circumstances of

²⁸ Nanako Kurihara has noted several occasions on which Hijikata claimed he grew up in absolute poverty, but this is contradicted by the fact that he came from a relatively affluent family in Akita who owned both property and a noodle shop.

²⁹ Roquet 25.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 14.

those who survived the bomb in its immediate vicinity:

The appearance of people was... well, they all had skin blackened by burns.... They had no hair because their hair was burned, and at a glance you couldn't tell whether you were looking at them from in front or in back.... They held their arms bent [forward] like this... and their skin – not only on their hands, but on their faces and bodies too – hung down.... If there had been only one or two such people... perhaps I would not have had such a strong impression. But wherever I walked I met these people.... Many of them died along the road – I can still picture them in my mind – like walking ghosts.³²

While the explosion from the atomic bomb proved deadly enough, the destruction it wreaked did not stop there. Atomic radiation represented the next wave of attack on the Japanese body. This radiation was an unseen, invisible enemy, affecting people on an atomic level, traumatizing, mutating and radically distorting the Japanese body for several generations after the end of the War.

The Japanese response to this tragedy was effectively to negate the event and embark on rapid, radical and unconsidered mobilization towards modernization. This compulsion to save face was evidenced in the hastily dug graves of victims of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, signalling a time when Japanese society was driving almost irresponsibly towards a hasty reconciliation and the establishment of a modern national identity.³³ The defeat would linger unseen, much like the delayed manifestation of radiation in multiple mutations and extreme deformations, within the modernizing Japanese cultural landscape. Although the evolution of Ankoku Butoh is often too simplistically attributed to the effect of the atomic bomb on the Japanese body, Ankoku Butoh can certainly be said to have originated from the chaos that characterized the Japanese psyche at the end of

³² An anonymous Hiroshima bombing survivor quoted in Rhodes, 14.

³³ Kenneth G. Henshall, *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower*, Second Edition (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 76.

the Second World War. This chaos was fuelled by mounting disillusionment with notions of progress and Western civilization. Nevertheless the bomb came like a deafening knell, announcing the the defeat of the nation and the onslaught of modernity on and in the country.

Modernization

The modernization of Japanese civilization had in fact been in progress since the advent of the Meiji Restoration,³⁴ when Japan was opened to foreign influence. The defeat and occupation of Japan by the Americans accelerated and amplified modernization, to the extent that it was experienced as a flood after World War Two. The concept of Modernism and modernization in Japan was intimately tied up with Westernization and indeed can be construed as something like a colonial enterprise on the part of the West. It became apparent that for Japan “to win recognition by the Western powers it was particularly important to follow a number of potentially risky paths,”³⁵ and the result was the infiltration of the Western world order into Japanese social, economic and cultural life.

After World War 2, Japanese society crumbled and there was an “anarchic spirit in the air.”³⁶ The occupying United States forced a new constitution upon their conquered foe, which inevitably shaped the major social, political and economic issues of the time. Amongst these was the rise of American-style industrial capitalism, which contributed to the loss of native Japanese culture to international hybridization. This was in part responsible for the development of a destructive and anarchic atmosphere that was palpable on many levels of social and cultural life. It was in the resulting violence and turmoil that Butoh came into being.

The rapid growth of urban populations had also consequently been a seedbed to a variety of social problems. In 1895 only 12% of the then-42 million Japanese

³⁴ Henshall 100.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

lived in towns or cities of more than 10 000 people, but by the mid-1930s this figure had risen to 45% of the then-70 million Japanese.³⁷ New civil codes installed by the Occupation government to redefine and “modernize” gender relations, as well as massive urbanization and the ensuing construction of huge impersonal condominium complexes, had destroyed traditional village and family structures. Japan was rapidly transformed into a *joho shakai* or “information society,” in which the masses could be controlled and homogenized by consumer-oriented media and a centralized bureaucratic authority. It was this rapid shift that enforced a narrative of progress in terms of which the rural areas were places of disenchantment and backwardness, the urban environment the very site of success, well-being and the virtuous “modern”. This is evidenced in the popular terminology that evolved at the time: “*Moga*” and “*Mobo*”, which meant ‘modern boy’ and ‘modern girl.’³⁸ To be a “*Moga*” or “*Mobo*” was highly desirable, a sign of virtuous progression from the erstwhile Japanese social order, now seen as oppressive and outdated.

With the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty scheduled for its ten-year renewal in the following year, 1959 (the year in which the first Ankoku Butoh performance was staged) was a volatile moment in Japanese history. A protest movement known as Ampo Struggle rendered concrete a growing sense of antagonism and disenchantment towards America and Europe that had been brewing in the bleak post-apocalyptic atmosphere of Japan in the 1950s. In 1959, artists, students, and disgruntled workers rallied against the treaty, which had become a symbol of Western cultural hegemony and of the industrial growth alienating and dehumanizing the Japanese people.

The culture of resistance and street protest in Tokyo was a highly disciplined, committed one, and especially at the end of the 1950s and the end of the 1960s, the riotous confrontations between organized student groups and police, in such districts as Shinjuku, were violent and

³⁷ Henshall 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

sustained.³⁹

At this time, public spaces became an arena for social and political criticism, as hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens – often led by artists and intellectuals – joined forces in political demonstrations. They protested against the treaty, perceived as establishing Japan as a protectorate and thus effectively a subject of the United States. The same spirit of revolt manifested itself in developments within the contemporary performing arts, most notably in Tokyo.

Yet generally speaking, the intellectual and artistic response to the social climate was marked by resistance to change and a growing nostalgia for a Japan of the past. One novelist of the Meiji era, Natsume Soseki, whose anticipation of this disillusionment predates the Second World War, felt that the Western influence was introducing a cold egoism and producing lonely individuals divorced from roots and kin. The speed at which change had come to the Japanese people was of great concern to Soseki, who felt that the Japanese psyche could not properly integrate and digest this change. In 1909 he wrote a piece entitled *Sore Kara* (And Then), cited by Kenneth Henshall as one of the texts of the time that clearly articulates a resistant, nostalgic atmosphere combined with critical self-parodying in respect of Japanese modernization and Westernization:

Look at Japan... She tries to force her way into the company of world-class powers... She is like a frog trying to become a cow. Of course, she will soon burst. This struggle affects you and me, and everybody else. Because of the pressure of the competition with the west, the Japanese have no time to be... No wonder they are all neurotics... they think of nothing except themselves and their immediate needs. Look all over Japan, and you won't find one square inch that is bright with hope.⁴⁰

³⁹ Stephen Barber, *Butoh's First Images*, 27 July 2002 Online. Available: < <http://www.bookblast.com/English/Writers/BarberT.htm>.> [Unpaginated]

⁴⁰ Soseki, quoted in Henshall 101.

The performing arts

During the modernization process, Japan's performing arts culture gave way to the importation of modern Western theatre and its generic distinctions within the performing arts. This shift within the artistic climate has its roots in the cultural climate after the Meiji restoration in 1868, when Japan began striving towards modernization and imitation of the West.⁴¹ Artists and writers of the time found it difficult to avoid importing Western elements into their work, evincing a growing alienation from traditional Japanese approaches that seemed increasingly like archaic remnants of a feudalistic past.⁴²

During the early 1950s in Japan, two main types of theatre and dance emerged. *Shingeki*' was the term used for theatre and performing arts characterized by a popular culture-driven embrace of Western performance strategies. It drew strongly from the Western emphasis on dramatic literature and realistic style, and formed part of what can be described as a pattern of national cultural self-deprecation.

At this time numerous avant-garde theatre groups formed as voices of protest, performing on the streets or in small, newly-founded theatres. Their performances consisted predominantly of pieces inspired by opposition to Westernizing forms. *Angura* was the term used for underground theatre practitioners in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Japan. It is actually not a Japanese word, but a crude Japanese appropriation of the English word "underground."⁴³ Throwing off the conventional theatre establishment, these youthful avant-garde theatre groups set out to create something new and distinctly Japanese, in this way signalling their rejection of the Eurocentric worldview that affirmed a marginalized and inferior Japan. The birth of Ankoku Butoh marks a very similar and related development in the field of dance, yet it

⁴¹ Henshall 112.

⁴² Kazuko Kuniyoshi, "Modern and contemporary dance," June 2007 Online. Available: <http://www.culturalprofiles.net/japan/Directories/Japan_Cultural_Profile/-10604.html> [Unpaginated]

⁴³ David G. Goodman, "Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 17.1 (1991): 229.

ultimately evolved to transcend the nationalist determinism of *Angura*.⁴⁴

In praise of shadows

Embedded in the themes and qualities of Ankoku Butoh is a powerful deconstruction and subversion of the 'modernity' that attempted to rationalize the Japanese experience in denial of their traditional way of life. Although never overtly part of any of the resistance movements or political agendas of the time, Tatsumi Hijikata's conception of the Ankoku Butoh body established a dialogue with Japanese aesthetics that foregrounded subjects and qualities that celebrated the dark, marginal and shadowy aspects of life. To the extent that this was in part a dialogue between a modernizing Japan and the Japan of the past, it was not especially uncommon in Japan at the time. Authors such as Kunio Yanagida and Junichiro Tanizaki drew strongly on a revival of interest in Japanese anthropology and aesthetic values.

Yanagida, rejecting Western academic models, insisted that the foregrounding of the marginalized elements of Japanese society (the elderly, children, women and the insane) was central to understanding Japanese culture.⁴⁵ Alexandra Munroe suggests that the art of the Edo period parallels the creative climate of the sixties in Japan, both mobilizing shadowy images of horror and cruelty, with an emphasis on ghostly terrors and bloody revenge:

In both periods, such expressions of the darker impulses of the Japanese psyche were a form of protest against the oppressive social system – late Edo Confucianism in the former, and the hypocrisy of postwar democracy in the latter.⁴⁶

This drive to destabilize the hierarchies and reinstate the shadows as a powerful metaphor for Japanese aesthetic sensibilities was echoed in Junichiro Tanizaki's

⁴⁴ J. Thomas Rimer, *Toward a Modern Japanese Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 56.

⁴⁵ Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 192.

⁴⁶ Munroe 192.

work *In Praise of Shadows*. This short essay from 1933 traces the aesthetic corruption of Japanese ways of life by Western influence. The essay was to a large extent an indictment of the frivolous adoption of foreign ways in Japan and a romantic account of the shadows that permeate the pre-modern Japanese lifestyle: from the darkened mouths of geishas to the unlighted alleys in the traditional Japanese home. Tanizaki wrote: "I marvel at our comprehension of the secrets of shadows, our sensitive use of shadow and light."⁴⁷ To Tanizaki, the "much vaunted 'brilliance' of modern electric lighting" was engulfing the precious darkness and shadows that lent enigma and beauty to Japanese architecture, lacquerware and pottery.

While Tanizaki felt compelled to try to save the shadows through writing, Hijikata would come to celebrate within his dance the *Ankoku*, the "utter darkness" and shadowy realm of human embodiment. In discussing his dance, he remarked that "Light, in general, sometimes seem indecent to me,"⁴⁸ and he often referred to light as a 'burden' or a 'brat':

Everything now is light. When we carry light on our backs, isn't the burden borne on the back of our darkness? That brat has everything his own way, eats the darkness greedily, and scatters the remains everywhere. That's why darkness escapes from the night. There's no darkness to nights anymore. Darkness in the past was translucent.⁴⁹

Hijikata saw the overly lit urban landscape of modernizing Japan as a threat to the fears and experiences that are essential to his dance:

The reason that we suffer from anxiety is that we are unable to live with our fears. Anxiety is something created by adults. The dancer, through the

⁴⁷ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 14.

⁴⁸ Hijikata, Tatsumi 1928- in Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. *Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh*. TDR: The Drama Review - Volume 44, Number 1 (T 165), Spring 2000, 52.

⁴⁹ Tatsumi Hijikata, *Wind daruma* (1987), *The Drama Review*. Transl. Nanako Kurihara. No. 1, vol. 44 (Spring 2000) Online. Available: < http://mitpress.mit.edu/journals/DRAM/44-1/pdf/tatsumi_5.pdf.> 8.

butoh spirit, confronts the origins of his fears: a dance which crawls towards the bowels of the earth.⁵⁰

By cherishing and saving a place for Japan's allegedly outdated modes of thought and behavior, Hijikata attempted to rescue "the world of shadows" from its complete absorption into modernity's overly lit urban landscape. This dissenting move, this celebration of the darker realm of human consciousness, would become the central thematic concern of Ankoku Butoh as it was mobilized in the face of modernization.

⁵⁰ Hijikata Tatsumi quoted in Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* (Tokyo: Shufunotomo, 1988), 188.

Chapter 2: The origin of Ankoku Butoh

The life and body of Tatsumi Hijikata lie at the centre of the origins of Ankoku Butoh. Careful analysis of accounts of Hijikata's life and work yields insight into the essential shifts in the nature and focus of his engagement with dance at specific phases of his life. Central themes will be identified in the course of a narrative of his dance career set alongside discussion of the literary influences, collaborations and performance strategies involved in the creation of selected dance works from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Initial alienation

In the late 1940s, Hijikata was inspired to study dance with German Expressionist-influenced Takaya Eguchi⁵¹ and left Akita for Tokyo. Where this inspiration to dance came from I have not been able to verify with confidence. But what is known is that, as a sign of total commitment, Hijikata carried a bag of rice as a gift for Eguchi in the hope that he would accept him as a disciple.⁵² Yet despite Hijikata's sincere intentions, Eguchi refused him the opportunity, saying that he did not have the body or temperament to become a dancer.

Shortly afterwards Hijikata started training under Masamura Katsuku, a disciple of Eguchi in Akita. In 1950 he toured the provinces with Masamura for some performances, yet his ambition and irreverent spirit would in time lead him to the edgy urban Tokyo.

During a trip to Tokyo in 1949, Hijikata saw the first solo performance by Ohno Kazuo. At this time Ohno was a relatively unknown performer, 40 years old. The dance Hijikata saw was set in three parts entitled "Ennui for the City," "Shoes," "A Hat," and "Kind God." Ohno's performance deeply impressed Hijikata, who described the dance as intoxicating and like a poison: "this drug dance stayed in

⁵¹ Eguchi Takaya and his partner Miya Misako were the first in Japan to introduce their own version of *Neue Tanz* from Germany. They both studied with Mary Wigman in Berlin from 1931 to 1933, and then on their return opened a studio in Japan.

⁵² Roquet 25.

my memory. That dance has now been transformed into a deadly poison, and one spoonful of it contains all that is needed to paralyze me.”⁵³ Ohno was by all accounts an intuitive and spontaneous dancer who moved with great fluidity, his dances “intoxicating spectators to enchantment.”⁵⁴ An accomplished dancer, Ohno would later become a central influence in the development of Butoh outside of the Ankoku context and eventually a main proponent of Butoh dance.⁵⁵

Kurihara notes the importance of this encounter and the inspiration it gave Hijikata: “Hijikata's encounter with Ohno was one of the pivotal events of his career. Ohno provided Hijikata with the role model he needed of a male dancer who transcended existing styles, and Hijikata aspired to Ohno's magical power.”⁵⁶ Ohno's contribution to the development of Butoh is important to note, but for the purpose of this thesis Ohno's approach to the dance will only be highlighted where there was a direct influence or concurrence between Ohno's dance and Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh for ultimately Ohno's interpretation of Butoh developed in a decidedly different direction away from Ankoku Butoh towards his own personal expression of the dance.

In 1952 at age 24 Hijikata moved to Tokyo fuelled by ambitions to become a professional dancer. Hijikata's move from Akita to Tokyo was also typical of the growing shift from rural to urban centers in post-war modernizing Japan, a common migration route of the aspirational rural youth. Almost completely rebuilt after an earthquake in 1923 and again after the US air raids in WWII, Tokyo represented a space of constant re-engineering, a space where traditional structures were destabilized and exotic Western experiences were everywhere to be found. Tokyo, in short, was a space in which many young people found a new independence, a bohemian space in which the playing field was literally levelled,

⁵³ Hijikata Tatsumi, “Naka no sozai/sozai” [Inner Material/Material] originally untitled and published in 1960 as a pamphlet for the performance Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE no kai. Republished in *Bihô no Aozôra* [Handsome Blue Sky], (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1987), 28-36, with the title added by the editor. English translation by Nanako Kurihara in *The Drama Review* (2000): 36.

⁵⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 37.

⁵⁵ Roquet 30.

⁵⁶ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 38.

and an atmosphere of radicalism existed.

Hijikata was “enthusiastic about the new cultures pouring in from America and Europe and took up any style of Western dance he could find – ballet, modern, jazz, even Flamenco.”⁵⁷ He faced many of the struggles common amongst young artists of the time, juggling his day job as a worker in the Tokyo docks with his creative ambitions. He spent his nights socializing in dancehalls with his eccentric dress sense and rough, Tohoku manner. Hijikata would also model his appearance on Western rebel figures of the time, slicking his hair back and competing in James Dean look-alike contests.⁵⁸

He began training with Andō Mitsuko in 1953. One year later he would perform his Tokyo debut with Mitsuko’s company, the “Unique Ballet Group”.⁵⁹ From these early days Hijikata’s driven nature and undwindling determination earned him some exposure as a dancer, appearing on television as a member of Mitsuko’s group dancing jazz routines in a suit. Added to his challenging character Hijikata’s unconventional physique was “stiff and bow legged, square shouldered and did not look at all right in his barre lessons”⁶⁰. His one leg was also “noticeably shorter”⁶¹ than the other as a result of being shoved down a flight of stairs in a childhood brawl. Mitsuko recalls Hijikata as a “clumsy but a eager student”⁶² whose spins were so violent that he would crash into the other dancers.⁶³ At the symposium held on Hijikata at the Japanese Society of dance research, Yoneyama Mamako described Hijikata as a “taciturn dancer with a stiff body who was always tense and frustrated.”⁶⁴ Hijikata would over time come to realize that he would never be fully accepted by the modern dance world.

⁵⁷ Roquet 26.

⁵⁸ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 10.

⁵⁹ Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, 62.

⁶⁰ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 13.

⁶¹ Roquet 26.

⁶² Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 13.

⁶³ Yoneyama Mamako, 1987 “Tatsumi Hijikata o Meguro sinpojiumu: Gojunendai kara Rokujunendai no sakuhin o chusin n.i” [Buyogaku 10] (1987): 36-37.

⁶⁴ Kurihara, “Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh”: 12-81.

Motofuji recalls the 1955 performance of dancer Horiuchi Kan as a turning point at which Hijikata came fully to realize his shortcomings as a conventional modern dancer. According to Motofuji, Kan was extremely talented, a virtuoso performer who simultaneously inspired and broke the spirit of Hijikata.⁶⁵ The latter's frustration and attendant feelings of alienation would point to an ongoing confrontation between his aspirations and the form through which he could realize them:

The ballet dancer's straight slender legs, versus his bowlegs, the smooth cool urban Tokyo manner and his blunt, rural temperament; standard Japanese versus his mumbling rural cadences: Hijikata's rural upbringing alienated him from the urbane art scene, both in his mind and in reality as well.⁶⁶

Ultimately, his peculiarly aggressive manner, northern accent and odd physique set Hijikata totally at odds with the urban dance community.⁶⁷ The writer Yagawa Sumiko, who was an acquaintance of Hijikata's in Tokyo, remembers him as "a terribly serious man, not in the least affected, talkative, and one who stares at you as he speaks."⁶⁸ Hijikata's intense presence would in time be reflected in his purposeful subversion of all conventions that attempted to limit his vision, and ultimately, in his defiant dance.

Dissatisfied with his own progress as a dancer, Hijikata left Mitsuko's studio and switched to the Association for Contemporary Performing Arts.⁶⁹ Kurihara speculates that Hijikata might have been drawn to the Association for their unique endorsement of mutual exchange between artists of different genres.⁷⁰ This cross-pollination between styles, genres, media and an overall collaborative

⁶⁵ Motofuji Akiko, *Hijikata Tatsumi to tomo ni* [With Hijikata, Tatsumi], (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1990), 42.

⁶⁶ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 12.

⁶⁷ Roquet 31.

⁶⁸ Yagawa Sumiko, "Saisei no tame no tainai kaiki: Hijikata Tatsumi to ankoku butoh-ha" [Return to the Womb for Rebirth: Hijikata Tatsumi and the School of the Dance of Darkness], *Shinfunin* Jan. 1964: 100, in Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 11.

⁶⁹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 12.

⁷⁰ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 43.

spirit would also become characteristic of the first Ankoku Butoh works in the early 1960s. It was during this time that Hijikata met a variety of artists, including the visual artist Shinohara Ushio, Kawara On and set designer Kanamori Kaoru.⁷¹ Within this social circle Hijikata spent much time discussing art, drinking sake and committing petty crimes in order to survive.

In late 1958, the Association presented a group performance project in which Hijikata participated with a small solo. The project was also his first collaboration with Ohno Kazuo.⁷² Even within the Association, Hijikata's growing alienation from society and his physical peculiarities set the stage for a mounting frustration that would eventually reach boiling point and sever his ties with the dance world. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Hijikata, much like the experimental culture generated in Tokyo at the time, engaged with and found inspiration in contemporary and historical avant-garde movements, particularly in French literature. The French literature of revolt, Dada, Surrealism, and Existentialism, the writings of the Marquis de Sade, Jean-Paul Sartre, and later Antonin Artaud, exerted a major influence on Japanese avant-garde theatre in the 1960s, many of these writers being first translated into Japanese during this period. The engagement with French culture may also to some extent have been a resistance to the American cultural influence that was flooding Japan after the war. Hijikata was known as a "voracious reader"⁷³ who at times drew inspiration from authors with an obsessive intensity, often discussing writers and their literary offerings at late-night drinking sessions. He clearly and perhaps rather shrewdly positioned himself close to the literary and intellectual movements of the time, befriending many of the leading figures in these scenes such as the translator and intellectual Shibusawa Tatsuhiko,⁷⁴ who had translated de Sade's *100 Days of Sodom* into

⁷¹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 12.

⁷² Hijikata met the accomplished expressionist dancer Kazuo Ohno in 1954. At this time Ohno was 48 years old, and Hijikata only 26. This meeting would evolve into a 27-year collaboration, with Hijikata often choreographing Ohno Kazuo's most famous dances, including *La Argentina Sho* (Admiring La Argentina, 1977) and *Watashi no Okâ-san* (My Mother, 1981).

⁷³ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 22.

⁷⁴ Yukio Mishima introduced Hijikata to Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, an erudite scholar of French literature. Shibusawa achieved notoriety when his translation of the Marquis de Sade's 1792 *Les Prospérité du Vice Part II* was seized by the authorities under charges of obscenity. This led to a much publicized court case in 1960. It was through Tatsuhiko that Hijikata acquired more insight into French literature; in gratitude he dedicated a dance piece to him in 1965.

Japanese, Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double* and many other French literary works. Shibusawa consistently engaged in Hijikata's work through interviews and articles and he would become a central figure in the construction of the discourse surrounding Ankoku Butoh.

Throughout the evolution of Ankoku Butoh, Hijikata assimilated into his approach to embodiment the theories and paradigms of authors of predominantly French origin. Much of this material was introduced to him by Shibusawa and in fact first translated into Japanese by Shibusawa himself. Hijikata found particular validation and inspiration in the works of Jean Genet and Antonin Artaud, popular for their preoccupation with the human body in an oppositional state of transformation and revolt against the status quo. Their writing resonated with the atmosphere of "dissidence and corporeal revolution with which Tokyo itself was saturated at the time."⁷⁵

The inversion of aesthetic consciousness

Jean Genet was an exponent of the theatre of the absurd and later a political activist whose literary works greatly influenced Hijikata. Genet was abandoned at birth and lived variously as a vagabond, male prostitute and thief before spending many of his youthful years in prison. He wrote novels, plays, poems, and essays in which he created a parallel cosmos, an underworld of male prostitutes, convicts, pimps and social outcasts. Through his autobiographical novels he transformed the reality of his dark and sordid life into a thing of grandeur, using his imagination to turn his outcast status into the very epitome of freedom and independence from society and its norms. Noting a similar inversion of the moral societal order within Hijikata's work, Roquet observes that "In works such as *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (Our Lady of the Flowers, 1944), Genet created his own moral order, turning criminals into saints, glorifying evil, and freely violating the taboos of the day."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Mark Holborn and Ethan Hoffman, *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul* (New York: Aperture, 1987), 5.

⁷⁶ Roquet 27.

Hijikata's lifestyle at the time had a decadent and entropic energy similar to that of Genet's fiction. Both Hijikata and Genet described experiences and meetings with men "who brought drugs into the toilet" and "played with guns."⁷⁷ They sought the company of thieves and outsiders; as Hijikata put it: "I grew up always sniffing out criminals, that is to say, such company as theirs."⁷⁸ In *The Thief's Journal*, Genet foregrounds his acceptance of his outsider status and embraces the darker realms of human experience: "To every charge brought against me, unjust though it may be, from the bottom of my heart I shall answer yes...I owed to being the coward, traitor, thief and fairy they saw in me."⁷⁹ Through his fictional notion of evil in a state of celebration, Genet paradoxically constructed the sacred in and by his own suffering. In this upside-down, negatively affirmed cosmos, the more agony he endured, the holier he became. Jean Paul Sartre pointed out in his text *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* that "this paradoxical act is a metaphysical rebellion against the world."⁸⁰ Genet embraced pain and sordidness, elevating them to the status of pleasure and beauty:

My life as a beggar familiarized me with the stateliness of abjection
Never did I try to make of [his wretched life] something other than what it was, I did not try to adorn it or mask it, but, on the contrary, I wanted to affirm it in its exact sordidness, and the most sordid signs became for me signs of grandeur.⁸¹

Hijikata read the works of Genet avidly, finding in his writings "a way to turn his alienation in metropolitan Tokyo into a creative force."⁸² Nanako Kurihara suggests that Genet's endorsement of the negative offered "a mechanism by which Hijikata would affirm and embrace his outsider status."⁸³ Hijikata applied Genet's negative affirmation principle to every aspect of his earlier dances, both

⁷⁷ Hijikata Tatsumi interviewed by Furusowa Toshimi and Sato Shigeomi, "Hijikata Tatsumi to Ankoku Butoh" [Hijikata Tatsumi and the Dance of Darkness], *Eiga Hyoron* [Film Criticism] Nov.1972: 29.

⁷⁸ Hijikata Tatsumi interviewed by Furusowa Toshimi and Sato Shigeomi, 29.

⁷⁹ Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 175.

⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 194.

⁸¹ Genet, *The Thief's Journal* 19.

⁸² Roquet 28.

⁸³ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 17.

in theme and in the subversive presence of the body in performance.

Kurihara links Hijikata's traumatic childhood with the fundamental influence that Genet had on his predisposition to strategies of inversion. As previously mentioned, Hijikata's father was prone to violent outbursts against Hijikata and his mother: "My father used to recite *Gidayu*, which he was lousy at, and beat my mother. To my child's eyes he seemed to be measuring the length of every step he took before hitting her."⁸⁴ Hijikata also once overheard neighbours talking about their violent family life as if "reviewing a show."⁸⁵ According to Kurihara, when Hijikata consciously reflected on these memories he felt as though he was playing the "role" of a child in a series of violent plays. He would thus distance himself from the physical reality and absorb the experience so as to re-enact it, feeling that he "had to create a little theatre by [him]self."⁸⁶ To Hijikata life became a performance and vice-versa; he would go so far as to say that all he had been doing was engaging in "A 'Life Dance' - life was all a dance...."⁸⁷

Kurihara suggests that, rather than becoming a victim, through certain disassociative reflexes Hijikata played the role of a child, transforming his home into a stage on which the domestic atrocities were somehow normalized or transcended. The creation of a parallel transformative universe in which marginalized figures are affirmed and empowered was central to both Hijikata's and Genet's creative endeavours. As Genet had in writing, so Hijikata would in dance create his own dark and transcendent cosmos.

One of the first concrete articulations of Hijikata's embrace of negative affirmation and paradoxical strategy appeared in his 1961 article "*Keimusho e*" (To Prison).⁸⁸ In this article he describes the dancer as a prisoner condemned to death. Within the dancer, as within the condemned prisoner, one finds "an intense antagonism

⁸⁴ Shibusawa, "Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh: Interview with Tatsumi Hijikata" 50.

⁸⁵ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 24.

⁸⁶ Hijikata interviewed by Furusawa Toshimi and Sato Shigeomi, "Hijikata Tatsumi to ankoku butoh:" 29.

⁸⁷ Hijikata, "Hijikata Tatsumi to ankoku butoh:" 28.

⁸⁸ Hijikata, "Keimusho e" 44.

between life and death expressed in an extreme and condensed way.”⁸⁹ Hijikata explained the act of dancing as a paradoxical act in which the dancer is “a man not walking, but being made to walk, a man not living but being made to live, a man not dead but being made to be dead.”⁹⁰ This passivity would paradoxically amplify the presence of the dancer and create a dance that attempted to access “the primal vitality of human nature.”⁹¹

Hijikata deliberately cultivated this outsider identity, both on stage and in his everyday life. Through a sustained process of self-mythologization he became known for his bizarre and absurd utterances and erratic and spontaneous behavior. His charisma in combination with this unusual presence drew many young people to him and generated great interest among a variety of authors, performers and critics. In 1960 he told the film critic Donald Ritchie that he wanted to create a cult of outsiders which society would not be able to deny.⁹² It was a vision that he was indeed to realize. He segregated his dancers from the rest of the world and used violence and degradation to shape their relationship to the body. They appeared like “strange underground creatures,”⁹³ shaving their heads and eyebrows, while Hijikata would keep his hair long and wear female kimonos. At all times the group projected the image of “a gang of outlaws.”⁹⁴

The aesthetic sensibility and decadent image of Hijikata and his Ankoku Butoh disciples would also indirectly reinforce certain traditional Japanese views of performers as subversive and dangerous. In the Japanese performing arts of both Noh and Kabuki, performers were traditionally considered outcasts and amongst the lowest on the societal scale. According to Kurihara, such artists were only allowed to do “death-related work, such as execution, the slaughtering and butchering of animals, and working with leather.”⁹⁵ Performers would

⁸⁹ Hijikata, “Keimusho e” 44.

⁹⁰ Hijikata, “Keimusho e” 45.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Donald Ritchie in Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 24.

⁹³ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 25.

⁹⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 133.

⁹⁵ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 25.

themselves act out certain public rituals to appease the dissatisfied gods, and they held within their grasp “the magical power of embodying death.”⁹⁶ Hijikata capitalized on this outsider status, drawing on the grotesque and the erotic to confront his audience. Kurihara suggests that through this negative affirmation Hijikata was establishing his own “brand of shamanism,” both excavating older structures in the Japanese performing arts and engaging with contemporary influences such as Genet. The “reverse utopia”⁹⁷ that Genet created in his texts similarly informed Hijikata’s dark vision, drawing on the regressive discomfort of an inverted cosmos:

I rejoin the nether realms, though it is to the bracken and their marshes, to the algae that I should like to descend, I withdraw further from men. The atmosphere of the planet Uranus appears to be so heavy that the ferns there are creepers; the animals drag along, crushed by the weight of gases. I want to mingle with these humiliated creatures which are always on their bellies... amidst hideous reptiles. I pursue an eternal, miserable death in a darkness where the leaves will be black, the waters of the marshes thick and cold. Sleep will be denied me. On the contrary I recognize, with increasing lucidity, the unclean fraternity of the smiling alligators.⁹⁸

After 1972, Hijikata’s imagery in the dance would more explicitly incorporate traditional strategies such as the *Igyo* [strange appearance] from traditional Japanese dance forms called *furyu* [medieval group dancing].⁹⁹ Hijikata nevertheless consistently denied any such association with traditional theatrical expression and asserted his own mythology of origins: “I was taught by mud in the early spring, and butoh came from a place unrelated to the performing arts of shrines and temples.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Tamotsu Hirotsue, *Henkai no Akusho* (an evil place on the border) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), 67.

⁹⁷ Genet, *The Thief's Journal* 45.

⁹⁸ Genet, *The Thief's Journal* 45.

⁹⁹ Goodman, “Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods,” 236.

¹⁰⁰ Hijikata, “Wind daruma” 4.

Nevertheless, one can discern related or at least similar aesthetic effects and sensibilities in traditional Japanese performing arts. The *Igyo* can clearly be seen in the late Edo period Kabuki, which mostly portrayed ominous murders, hideous ghosts and demons. In his analysis of Japanese theatre aesthetics Masakatsu Genji refers to this foregrounding of the dark and strange within Japanese artistic practice as *Shûaku no bi*, meaning the aesthetics of ugliness.¹⁰¹ Professor in Japanese literature Tamotsu Hirotsue has further evolved this notion of *Shûaki no bi*, maintaining that “‘beauty’ should not be over-emphasized as the single orientating principle within the pre-modern Japanese aesthetic sensibility . . . the grotesque, darkness and cruelty had shared status with beauty.”¹⁰² I argue that Hijikata did not appropriate the concept of *Shûaku no bi* from traditional performing arts directly, but that his sordid beauty was rather templated on the deformed bodies, archetypes and re-imagining of the Tohoku of his childhood.¹⁰³ In this Tohoku cosmos one would find “Wide open mouths, the white of the eyes, animal-like movements, and cramped bodies.”¹⁰⁴ This became the vocabulary of Ankoku Butoh. Hijikata would continually affirm and celebrate this aesthetic paradox or inversion, creating a dance in which “[t]he dirty is the beautiful and the beautiful is the dirty, and it cycles between them forever.”¹⁰⁵ To Butoh critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi, Hijikata “accomplished a reversal in aesthetic consciousness” in which one could find both a “grotesque ugliness and corruption” and “an irreducible beauty and sweetness which are without equivalent elsewhere.”¹⁰⁶

1] The revolt

Hijikata began creating his own performance works at the end of the 1950s. During this initial period he aggressively incorporated socially taboo themes of sex and violence into his work, presenting an expression of the human body in

¹⁰¹ Hijikata, in Tatsumi Hijikata, Ashikawa Yoko Gunji Masakatsu, and Ichikawa Miyabi, “*Butoh o kataru*” (Talking about Butoh), *Hogaku to Buyo* (National music and dance). [Unpaginated].

¹⁰² Hirotsue Tamotsu, quoted in David Goodman, “Concerned Theatre – Japan Thirty Years Later: A Personal Account,” *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, ed. S.L. Leiter and S. Scholz-Gionca (Boston: Brill, 2001), 343.

¹⁰³ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 33.

¹⁰⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 32.

¹⁰⁵ Hijikata, “Ankoku Butoh wa oishii,” *The Other* (December 1974), 73

¹⁰⁶ Kazuko Kuniyoshi, *Performing Arts in Japan Now. Butoh in the Late 1980s* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1991), November 6, 2000. Online. Available: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/butoh/kuni.pdf>> 1.

revolt against contemporary society.

Through his dance Hijikata confronted the latent darkness within the body, resorting to imagery that grew increasingly grotesque. At the centre was what he had found on the margins of society, the dark and suppressed side of humanity. He would foreground his own physical shortcomings as a dancer, performing with stiff and inorganic gestures. He would later even inflict pain on his dancers, a cultic group who embraced degradation and violence.

The paradoxical principle of negative affirmation informed Hijikata's work throughout his career, absorbing energy and nuance from many different sources. Revolting against Japanese and Western standards of beauty and decorum, Ankoku Butoh defiantly pulled the body down from its pedestal and forced upon it radical confrontation and profound transformation so as to subvert the prevailing regime of logic and inhibition. The closer look at individual dance works that follows will reveal how Hijikata attempted to recapture the immediacy of the physical body, not simply as a tool to convey certain linguistic meaning or aesthetic form, but as a defiant entity that owns its own abilities to generate meaning.

***Kinjiki*: the birth of Ankoku Butoh**

1959 was a truly volatile time in Japanese history, a time filled with public expressions of opposition to the US occupation in the face of the renewal of the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty.¹⁰⁷ It is within this turbulent social climate that Hijikata created what is considered to be the first Ankoku Butoh performance, entitled *Kinjiki*, at the 6th Annual Newcomers Performance of the All-Japan Art Dance Association, held on May 29, 1959.¹⁰⁸

The dance consisted of two acts performed by Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno's

¹⁰⁷ Roquet 26.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Blakely Klein, "Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness," diss., Cornell University, 1988, 79.

teenage son, Yoshito Ohno. In the dance Hijikata transformed his appearance by shaving his head and painting his entire face and upper body with black grease, wearing grey bell-bottom trousers, while Yoshito wore only a black scarf and lemon yellow shorts. Nanako Kurihara describes the dance as a “sado-masochistic homoerotic act.”

In the dance, the boy appears stage right. Man, holding a chicken, enters the stage and runs in a circle. Feeling Man’s presence, Boy stiffens, looks at his hands with an anguished expression, and slaps himself as if he knows something bad is going to happen. He walks to a narrow illuminated area stage center, near where Man is waiting in the darkness. They face each other, breathing hard. Man thrusts his chicken into the light. The white wings flutter stunningly. Boy accepts the chicken. He turns his head as if to ask what the chicken means and then returns to stage right, holding it to his chest. The boy places the chicken between his thighs and slowly sinks into a squat, squeezing it to death while man watches from behind. The boy stands in shock. The audience, consisting of predominantly female dancers, was at this point in time utterly shocked, gasping at the sight of the limp chicken at the feet of the boy. The lights black out.

In the second half the dancers performed in total darkness. The audience hears sounds of lips in wet contact, breathing, and sexual moaning. The two men roll around on top of one another. Man shouts “*Je t’aime!*” a couple of times. Boy runs and the man chases him. Towards the end of *Kinjiki* a bluesy harmonica is played by Yasuda Shugo, and the stage brightens slightly. The boy walks away dragging his feet, and holds the chicken in his arms.¹⁰⁹

The performance was greeted with shock and a plethora of mixed emotions. Akiko Motofuji, dancer, choreographer, and Hijikata’s future wife, was thrilled by

¹⁰⁹ The description of the dance is an extract from an interview by Nanako Kurihara with dance critic Goda Nairo on September 14, 1992; in Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 43-44.

the performance, describing it as “electrifying.”¹¹⁰ Dance critic Goda Nairo felt “shocked by the bestiality and homosexuality, and hoped that the boy would escape,” wishing he could himself “flee from the spectacle,” yet at the end of the performance Nairo felt a sensation that was somehow “calm and refreshing.”¹¹¹ What is salient among the various reactions of the audience present at that performance is an idiosyncratic feeling of release and calm, somehow the result of the tense, contained, violent physical expressions within the dance: “It made those of us who watched it to the end shudder, but once the shudder had passed through our bodies, it resulted in a refreshing sense of release.”¹¹² The shocking subject matter and violent activity had somehow transmuted into the “calm” and “relief” experienced by many after the performance, as if a boil had been lanced, or a muscle spasm relaxed.

In no uncertain terms, *Kinjiki* announced Hijikata's break with the dance community in Japan. Labelled “a dangerous dancer” by the All-Japan Art Dance Association, Hijikata pre-empted their protest against his dance by resigning from the organization a few days after the performance.¹¹³ As adumbrated above, outside of the indigenous classical tradition, contemporary dance in Japan was at that time little more than an imitation of existing Western forms and techniques of the body. Hijikata himself made specific reference to superficial dance techniques upon resigning from the Dance Association, accusing Japanese dancers of having “superficial perceptions of their own particular landscapes.”¹¹⁴ In *Kinjiki*, Hijikata mutilated the Western-centric dance conventions upon which modern dance in Japan had drawn since its move towards modernization. According to Nairo, “this performance thrust before the dance world the fact that here was a work that rendered unnecessary the systems and methods ordinarily relied upon by mainstream dance.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Akiko Motofuji, *Hijikata Tatsumi to tomo ni* [With Hijikata Tatsumi] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1990), 56.

¹¹¹ Goida Nairo, “Hijikata butoh sakuhin nōto 2,” *Asubesutokan tsūshin* 5 October 1987: 42.

¹¹² Nairo, “Ankoku Buto ni tsuite,” *Buto Nikutai no suriarisutotatchi* (Butoh: Surrealists of the Flesh), ed. iHanaga Mitsutoshi (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 1983) [Unpaginated].

¹¹³ Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* (Tokyo: Shufunotomo 1988), 62.

¹¹⁴ Tatsumi Hijikata, “Inner Material/Material” (trans. Nanako Kurihara), *The Drama Review* 44.1 (2000): 39.

¹¹⁵ Nairo, “Ankoku Buto ni tsuite.” [Unpaginated]

Absent from the *Kinjiki* performance were the clichéd dance conventions such as meditative and interpretative program notes, music to guide the dance and a familiar vocabulary of technique.¹¹⁶ Instead this was a dance in which “everyday movement such as running was made bizarre by the dancer's rigid legs running with only his heels touching the floor, giving the work a highly unusual atmosphere, although one could discern some gestures reminiscent of jazz and modern dance.”¹¹⁷ All the poses and movements appeared crude and stiff, with an emphasis on muscular tension and lowering the centre of gravity within the performing body as opposed to grace and effortlessness, which seeks to defy gravity.

The use of extremely condensed energy within very minimal movement central to *Kinjiki* would become a very important aspect of Ankoku Butoh dance. The combination of stillness and tension gave the performance an almost ritualistic atmosphere, and often caused a disjunction between the physical action and the emotion conveyed. A typical view of many Westerners encountering Butoh for the first time is that it is boring because there is no action. This lack of action can to a certain degree be seen in other Japanese performing arts. Zeami writes of the Noh Theatre: “what the actor does not do is of interest: the actor does just enough to create a blank space-time where nothing is done,” and a journey is made.¹¹⁸ In *Kinjiki* this quality of movement could best be seen in the ecstatic and languid intensity with which the smothering of a chicken between the thighs of a teenage boy unfolds on stage. Rather than being just slow, the movement is distinguished by its *condensed* energy. Nairo makes specific reference to this condensed directness of the dance, and notes that the slowness, intensity and offensive actions were held in check and complemented by the apparent symbolism employed throughout the dance.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 173.

¹¹⁷ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 46.

¹¹⁸ Zeami in Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre* (New York and Kyoto: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983), 34.

¹¹⁹ Nairo, “Ankoku Buto ni tsuite.” [Unpaginated]

Kinjiki broke all established dance conventions in order to create a dance in which the subject does not express him- or herself through the body, but where the body itself is the expression. This resultant mode of non-representation, where the action is not intended to be an expression of emotional sub-text but rather a presentation of the body's internal perception, would later evolve into more refined strategies and extraordinary manifestations within Ankoku Butoh performance. In *Kinjiki*, however, the tactic would liberate an unforeseen "range of sensibilities"¹²⁰ within the spectators, even causing several members of the audience to have nosebleeds.¹²¹

While the methodological and aesthetic elements that would grow within Ankoku Butoh were not really visible within the *Kinjiki* performance, this first dance introduced the form's intensity, rebelliousness, and characteristic cathartic quality. On a thematic level, it introduced the broader inquiry that would inform all future manifestations of Ankoku Butoh, a probing, on a visceral level, of the darker and shadowy realms of human experience. Ankoku Butoh "had exposed the ruin which dwells in elegance" and the "death which stains contemplation."¹²²

Yukio Mishima and forbidden colours

On a thematic level it is important to note that *Kinjiki* drew its inspiration from Yukio Mishima's 1951 novel of the same name. Mishima himself responded to the performance with overwhelming support and admiration, an honour that stood Hijikata in good stead within the literary and artistic community, as he himself has admitted:

I owe everything to the constant support of Mishima Yukio, our generation's shot with the magic bullet, who always sets an anxious, unchanging fuse to his own work and who made me create my maiden work, *Kinjiki*.¹²³

¹²⁰ Nairo, "Ankoku Buto ni tsuite." [Unpaginated]

¹²¹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 46.

¹²² Nairo, "Ankoku Buto ni tsuite." [Unpaginated]

¹²³ Hijikata, "Inner Material/Material" 40.

The novel *Kinjiki* is a dark and homoerotic story of revenge. The book caused a major uproar in Japan among literary figures and the public alike. Like Jean Genet's works, Mishima's books often evoke negative affirmation in creating sealed, singular, inverted worlds rooted in sadomasochism and detached from reality. Yet it is important to note that the themes of youth, homoeroticism and death that pervade the work of Mishima are seldom acknowledged in Japanese literary criticism of his time. Much like the first performance of *Kinjiki*, his work has met with rejection in established circles. While the West views him as an highly accomplished writer and winner of the Nobel prize for literature, Japan sees him as a rightwing activist whose oppositional literary strategies have had great destabilizing implications within Japan's drive to modernism. After World War II, Mishima became a fervent proponent of a return to the ancient virtues of Japan. This yearning for the lost values resulted in an extreme preoccupation with Japanese corporeality. The most obvious of his obsessions could be found in the ways in which his own homosexual preference was so closely aligned with the traditional samurai code of male bonding that inspired him. He became an avid physical culturist and body builder. An obsession with the body, with its beauty and degeneration, is central to many of his works.¹²⁴

As a writer Mishima drew much inspiration from pre-modern literature, both Japanese and Western, a tendency cited in the first chapter as particular to the resistant strategies exemplified by Hijikata and other artists in the post-war period. This excavation and reinvention of the past would become a pattern echoed in the evolution of Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*. Mishima's body fetish and ultra-nationalism was as much spawned by a genuine concern for what he saw as a country that had lost its dignity to the West as it was an engagement in a darkly homoerotic defiance in the face of this crisis. One of the significant achievements of *Kinjiki* as a dance was that it succeeded in conveying the essence of Mishima's novel.¹²⁵ To what extent the text was used in the creation

¹²⁴ Yukio Mishima (pseudonym for Kimtake, 2003) October 2006, Online. Available: <<http://kirjasto.sci.fi/mishima.htm>> [Unpaginated]

¹²⁵ Nairo, Goida, "Ankoku Buto ni tsuite." [Unpaginated]

of the dance I do not know, but that Mishima was inspired by Hijikata's version of *Kinjiki* and vice versa, cannot be disputed. In response to the first performance of *Kinjiki*, Mishima wrote the following:

Almost every form of art has an awareness of crisis at its root.... This is also true in classical ballet. Those unnatural dance shoes... seem to make the human beings lose balance; they impose a sense of crisis, since the dancer is barely and perilously standing. Avant-Garde dance does not use the dance shoes.... If the requirement of the latter is to realize 'the balance on the verge of crisis,' that of the former is to express the crisis itself.¹²⁶

Hijikata often referred to his Ankoku Butoh dance as "the body on the edge of crisis," and Shibusawa has identified this concept of crisis within Butoh as both "the starting point of 'Ankoku Butoh', as well as its destination."¹²⁷

Sado-masochism and the homoerotic act

Kinjiki portrayed a barbaric sacrifice and featured images of sexual violation, homoeroticism and gender ambiguity that all powerfully affected the audience. In the performance the dominant male figure is seen in vivid contrast to the submissive boy, creating an atmosphere charged with a certain kind of martyrdom and sexual violation. Mishima identified strongly with the crisis that Hijikata foregrounded in his *Kinjiki* performance, recognizing something curiously energizing in the expression of homoerotic sadism. The main characters in Mishima's text, like the dancers in *Kinjiki*, evince the corruption of purity and even celebrate that corruption. In the dance this corruption is shown through disturbing juxtapositions in which the body is given over to darkly erotic experiences, a world of ritual sacrifice in which warm entrails spill into young laps.

Among Hijikata's most obvious breaks with Japanese dance tradition is his

¹²⁶ Tatsuhiko Shibusawa, "Nikutai no naka no kiki: Hijikata Tatsumi no butoh ni tsuite" [Crisis in the Body: On Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh], *Shibusawa Tatsuhiko shūsei IV* (Tokyo: Togensha, 1970), 203-04.

¹²⁷ Shibusawa, "Nikutai no naka no kiki," 204.

exclusion of women from the performance. *Kinjiki* established its approach to embodiment in opposition to the female-dominated mainstream of the dance world. This mainstream was at this time the domain of female dancers typically performing only what their teachers asked of them. Their dances were mostly “pantomimed stories or . . . impressionistic dances about flowers, the moon, or a young girl's dream, to piano music by Chopin and Liszt.”¹²⁸ The early phase of Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh* was rough, hysterical and aggressive – starkly opposed to feminine delicacy. Through their charged ambiguous and erotic presence, the bodies in *Kinjiki* offer resistance to normative, rational binary conceptual frameworks. This tactic served to “undermine the audience's ability to categorize, developing instead a state of undifferentiated awareness where attempts at categorization may temporarily be abandoned.”¹²⁹ Thus in *Kinjiki*, Hijikata aimed deliberately to blur the boundaries between beauty and ugliness, male and female, and even dreamlife and waking. For most of the 1960s Hijikata used men in his dance works as rigid, oppositional and resistant phallic objects. Hijikata's later reflections on *Kinjiki* would highlight this aspect of his negative affirmation and radical distortion: “In the early days I desperately tried to concoct something stiff – an inorganic Hysteria dance.”¹³⁰

The homoerotic tradition

While foregrounding the homoerotic was not an uncommon strategy within avant-garde performance of the time, the highly charged homoerotic male body that Hijikata created does have a unique precedent and context within Japanese society and in particular the performing arts of Japan.

The tradition of male-on-male love was greatly encouraged within the samurai class. It was considered useful to boys in teaching them virtue, honesty and the appreciation of beauty, while at the same time the love of women was often devalued for its so called 'feminizing' effect:

¹²⁸ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing,” 39.

¹²⁹ Roquet 54.

¹³⁰ Hijikata, Tasumi, in Suzuki Tadashi, *Suzuki Tadashi taidanshu* (Tokyo: Libroport, 1984), 133.

But the indelible fact remains that one of the fundamental aspects of samurai life was the emotional and sexual bond cultivated between an older warrior and a younger apprentice, a love for which the Japanese have many names, as many perhaps as the Eskimos have for snow.¹³¹

Homosexuality and sexual ambiguity in Japan had very particular ties to the performing arts, particularly from the 16th to the 18th century. According to McCluskey,

The performing arts were also central to the popularity of homosexual love in Japan. Dating back to the 12th century, under the rule of emperor and despot Shirakawa-In who was particularly fond of homosexual pleasure, the tradition of beautifying male performers began. Young male performers would paint on false eyelashes, perfume themselves and dress in the same style as young girls.¹³²

McCluskey maintains that the decline of this tradition has been a consequence of the Modernization/Westernization of Japan:

At the end of the industrial revolution, homosexuality had disappeared from the social realm. Even today, the Japanese only speak of it as a deficiency or a sexual anomaly. Within Japan's rapid modernization in the Meiji period (1867-1912), the understanding of homosexuality as one particular 'Way' [*doo*] of enjoying sex began to be displaced by Western sexual terms such as *dooseiaisha* (the Chinese-character translation of 'homosexual,' literally 'same-sex-love person'), which suggested that homosexual desire was characteristic of a certain type of person: the homosexual. This stratification of same-sex desire implied that a person

¹³¹ Dennis Rosenfeldt, in Henshall, ed., *A History of Japan* 56.

¹³² Adam McCluskey, *Secrets of Japan* (2002), October 2004, Online. Available: <<http://www.stthomasu.ca/~parkhill/cj01/irepam.ht>>[Unpaginated]

should be nominalized as 'a homosexual' in terms of that desire, ultimately limiting the expression of many of the innuendos and shadowed expressions of beauty and desire in Japanese culture.¹³³

In his novel *Kinjiki*, Mishima mobilized the subversive potency of masochism and homosexuality as a critique of the hypocrisies of post-war democracy. Mishima was particularly critical of the homogenizing and controlling nature of the new order. Homoeroticism in such a context presents itself as a political act defying the way in which Western influence was engineering a new type of society.

The sacrificial nature of *Kinjiki*

The chicken sacrificed during the performance of *Kinjiki* is a prime example of this symbolic play and ambiguity between the “sexual and the sacred, the phallic and the sacrificial.”¹³⁴ The act of killing a chicken, with its primitive sacrificial overtones, was meant in part as an expression of the turbulent sexual passion which modern man suppresses, yet also an assertion of brutality that is to a certain extent seen as “in accord with the realities of nature.”¹³⁵ The boy in *Kinjiki* strangled the chicken in releasing his own “dark passion”¹³⁶.

Chickens appeared frequently in Hijikata’s performances and his writings. In *Kinjiki*, a chicken is smothered between a boy’s thighs, and in *Nikutai no Hanran*, Hijikata’s legendary dance performed in 1959, the rooster is suspended from the flies with its head down. At the end of the first act, Hijikata hung it from its neck, breaking it in the process. Although the chicken was always quite brutally manhandled, Nairo nevertheless reads this as another expression of love towards the chicken, a love fostered in the familiar proximity of this animal in rural life. Chickens were slaughtered for special occasions or festivities, so it is natural that they should also be associated with joy.¹³⁷ This inversion in no sense

¹³³ McCluskey, *Secrets of Japan*, October 2004, <http://www.stthomasu.ca/~parkhill/cj01/firepam.htm>. [Unpaginated]

¹³⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 44.

¹³⁵ Nairo, “Ankoku Buto ni tsuite.” [Unpaginated]

¹³⁶ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 44.

¹³⁷ Nairo, “Ankoku Buto ni tsuite.” [Unpaginated]

attempts to cast the rural agrarian life of old Japan as idyllic. Although farming people like Hijikata's family lived close to the beauty of nature, they did so at the cost of much physical hardship.

The body in Ankoku Butoh would become the ultimate site of this examination of sacrifice, for "a body that has kept the tradition of mysterious crisis is prepared for sacrifice."¹³⁸ The sacrificing of the chicken within *Kinjiki* may be seen as a manifestation of the commitment and sacrifice that Hijikata showed in his decisive examination of the darker aspects of our existence.

***Kinjiki* and the object body**

The body that Hijikata performed in *Kinjiki* was tense, impenetrable and aggressive, a masculine body transformed into an erotic and potent object, a "phallic fortress."¹³⁹ Throughout this period of revolt via the male body in performance, dancers in Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh did not move a great deal, except for explosions of intensity. For instance, dancers would simply sit with their backs to the audience and undulate their back muscles.¹⁴⁰ At other times they would simply be removed from the stage by stagehands, carrying them out like frozen objects with "cadaveric rigidity."¹⁴¹ This erasure of the individuality of the performers and the use of the very materiality of the body as a mask or weapon would become central to Hijikata's approach to embodiment. Hijikata had said that he desired to make his dancer a "dreaming murder weapon."¹⁴² In a description of the performing body in *Kinjiki*, Hijikata emphasizes the objectification of the body:

like the whole body becoming a dangerous weapon, like muscles suddenly severed as a result of a particular movement, the sound of which becomes an accompaniment, like a penis that does not get rusty and is not restricted

¹³⁸ Hijikata, "Naka no sozai/Sozai" 33.

¹³⁹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 49.

¹⁴⁰ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 47.

¹⁴¹ Taijiro Amasawa, "Haikyo ni kitsuritsusuru nikutai: Hijikata Tatsumi no ankoku butoh ni furete," *Gendai no me* December 1972: 245.

¹⁴² Tatsumi Hijikata, "Keimusho e" (1961) in *Bibo no aozora* (1987), 48.

by becoming registered to a theatre.¹⁴³

Stripping away

The Ankoku Butoh body resulted from a process of purging and eliminating traces of social conditioning and conventional, habitual use of the body. Thus Hijikata's long-time academic friend and intellectual stimulus, Shibusawa, saw in Hijikata's work an attempt to "strip away the false purposes that adhere to our body, exposing its alienated beauty to the light of day."¹⁴⁴ But the sacrificial body that resulted met with great criticism. To many critics – and Terayama Shuji in particular – the sacrificial nature of the dance was more a reflection of Hijikata's "isolation and withdrawal" that made the audience feel as if they were watching the "closed circuit of a monologue"¹⁴⁵ – a monologue that alienated more than it engaged. But Hijikata was entirely pleased with the male dancer in his entranced, rigid state ascending the stage with a violent and sacrificial intensity. To Hijikata this objectification could be attained through a reconditioning of the body. This reconditioning depended on a type of pruning of the individuality of the body to create a transformed object in which the

 Joints become like sticks and walk like mould. Hairs do not grow but only move slightly once in a while, and are counted after being solidified with varnish. A pipe is stuck into a rear end. The dew of a poisonous drug is the make-up. The flesh must be shaved. I am a man who truly screams. An ambiguous breast has to be hollowed out. Things which swing must not exist too much. One must eliminate.¹⁴⁶

The objectification of the body becomes an essential tactic towards exploring its generative possibilities, and in my understanding releases a transformative potential.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Shibusawa, "Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh: Interview with Tatsumi Hijikata": 53.

¹⁴⁵ Terayama Shuji quoted in Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 51.

¹⁴⁶ Tatsumi Hijikata, *Bibô no aozora* [Handsome Blue Sky] (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1987), 38.

After *Kinjiki* Hijikata associated less with the dance community and more with those in the new avant-garde – writers, artists, and theatre people. *Kinjiki* touched a nerve, a common sentiment shared by many of the artists and writers of that period:

a gradually increasing sense of protest against the established art world and against a society, that after the trauma of losing the war, seemed powered by a foreign, an American ideal. The rebelliousness of the artists articulated itself in their belief in Japan, in the old, dirty, dark, irrational, obscene and penniless Japan that neither wanted to have anything to do with the modest prosperity of the middle-class nor with an establishment proud of its 'modern' achievements.¹⁴⁷

While *Kinjiki* was in many ways representative of the anti-Modernist sentiments of the time and a rejection of Western civilization, Hijikata avoided the intellectualism of the avant-garde in favour of a deeper investigation into the complexities of experience present in the Japanese body. He denied any overt relations between his work and the cultural scene of the time, insisting: "There is no philosophy before Butoh. It is only possible that a philosophy may come out of Butoh."¹⁴⁸ In this sense, *Kinjiki* stands as the first articulation of Hijikata's philosophy of the body. In response to his resignation from the Dance Association, he clearly outlined his belief in the body and its primary potential to generate dance:

People have superficial perceptions of their own particular landscapes. Underground art turns into mere trendiness not because of external factors, but because of the people who practise it... why don't they try drinking from the wells within their own bodies?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ M. Haerdtter and Sumie Kawai (eds.), *Butoh: die Rebellion des Körpers: einTanz aus Japan* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1986), 21.

¹⁴⁸ Hijikata, "Inner Material/Material:" 38.

¹⁴⁹ Hijikata, Tatsumi 1928- in Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. *Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh*. TDR: The Drama Review - Volume 44, Number 1 (T 165), Spring 2000, 51.

This inner landscape was to become the focus of his work in the years to come. Yet even an inner landscape needs a real space in which to evolve and grow, and at the end of the 1950s Hijikata was fortunate to meet the young choreographer Akiko Motofuji, who owned a dance studio in Tokyo that her father had built for her. It was called the Asbestos-kan or 'Asbestos Hall' because Motofuji's father was an industrial magnate specializing in asbestos production. Both the relationship and the Asbestos studio were essential in affording Hijikata the space and freedom to develop his dance.

Leading to the final revolt

This first decade of Hijikata's choreography centred on the rejection of dance styles both Japanese and Western. These performances were clearly influenced by the "happenings" and other performance art events taking place across Tokyo in the 1960s.¹⁵⁰ These "happenings" attempted to undermine everything that had so far been understood as performance. In much the same way, as Nanako Kurihara puts it:

Hijikata's early works were often a loosely constructed assembly of events rather than strict choreographies. His 1963 dance *Anma – Aiyoku o Sasaeru Gekijō no Hanashi* (The Blind Masseur – A Theatrical Story in Support of Love and Lust), had tatami mats in the audience area where old women played the *shamisen*, some dancers were throwing a ball back and forth on stage and others were riding here and there on bicycles to a Beatles soundtrack.¹⁵¹

While very evocative and fashionable, even this aesthetic was eventually rejected by Hijikata. As Donald Richie points out, "the nature of an avant-garde is to be short lived – eventually the audience becomes accustomed to the new style and

¹⁵⁰ Roquet 32.

¹⁵¹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 19.

no longer finds the form so provocative.”¹⁵²

In his study of the national Japanese body, Jonathan Marshall argues that the paradox that confronted artists like Hijikata was the fact that the body they attempted to localize or objectify, the Japanese body, was one that had to be reconstructed rather than discovered. Marshall locates this predicament within a post-colonial discourse dealing with localist, and regionalist, identity politics, especially in occupied or colonized spaces.¹⁵³ This aspect of the reinvention of the body, therefore, faced a serious problem of self-contradiction after the initial shock value and peak of Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh. The dance was in danger of becoming merely reactionary and in this sense an affirmation of that which it was ostensibly revolting against. Within the modernizing Japanese society, the so-called “Asiatic body”¹⁵⁴ and the local, individualized body existed only as oppositions implicated in dialectics between the modern West and an illusory Japan of the past. Ankoku Butoh initially only had value as a set of antitheses leading to a failed dialectic that Marshall has described as “concepts without substance.”¹⁵⁵ Hijikata would need to transcend this bind by finding a more expansive and dynamic origin for his dance.

Shûaku no bi (aesthetics of ugliness)

In addition to European avant-garde literature, Hijikata drew as Mishima did on many pre-modernist aesthetic elements. His interest in the darker side of human expression resulted in an (unacknowledged) attraction to those Japanese forms of expression that shared Genet’s negative-affirming aesthetic of grotesquery and taboo-breaking obscenity, known as *shûaku no bi* in Japanese art.¹⁵⁶

Hijikata often spoke of the power of darkness, seeing the “disgraceful behavior of men” as “sweaty with potential” for transformation into “the engagement of

¹⁵² Donald Richie, “Japan’s avant-garde theatre,” Online. Available: <June 2003, <http://www.butoh.net>.> [Unpaginated]

¹⁵³ Jonathan Marshall, “Bodies Across the Pacific: The Japanese National Body in the Performance Technique of Suzuki and Butoh,” (*Antithesis* 7.2.) 1995 p3

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ G. Goodman, “Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 44. 2 (1989): 236.

indignation.”¹⁵⁷ The initial aesthetic parallel with *shûaku no bi* is clearly apparent in the 1963 *Bairu Dansu* performance of Hijikata that played with elements of the Japanese grotesque.¹⁵⁸ The dance unfolded as follows:

Impeded by a persistent and intentional awkwardness, the men randomly stumble through a series of balletic posturings, sometimes falling into a unison arabesque but more often falling to the ground in chaos. They wander in and out of pools of light with arms outstretched, mystified and terrified by some dark, unknown presence, and then jump jovially into each others' arms, wrestling and embracing.¹⁵⁹

The dance employs the oppositional strategy seen in *Kinjiki* by first of all seeming to parody classical Western dance moves. This is juxtaposed with an almost abandoned and freestyle physicality that mockingly and ominously characterizes the performance throughout. In the course of the dance the performing men are stripped bare to reveal grotesque body-paintings of exposed flesh. Hijikata's back is painted in colour to appear as if his flesh is splitting open and revealing the bones and organs within illustrations not unlike nightmarish scenes from Edo period (1603-1867) woodblock prints.¹⁶⁰ This inverted and grotesque charting of the body and peeling away of the outer layers of the flesh would reach its ultimate manifestation some years later in one of Hijikata's last stage performances and the announcement of a new era in his exploration of the body: *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* (Hijikata Tatsumi and the Japanese Rebellion of the Body).

Hijikata Tasumi to nihonjin: Nikutai no hanran

In 1968 Hijikata held a solo performance at the Japanese Youth Hall (*Nihon Seinen kan*). The piece is divided into two sets: the first, called “*Hijikata Tasumi*

¹⁵⁷ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 43.

¹⁵⁸ Yoichi Sumi, Fujio Maeda, Takashi Morishita, and Yasuhiro Yanai (eds.), *The Iconology of Rose-Colored Dance: Reconstructing Tatsumi Hijikata* (Tokyo: Keiô University, 2000), cited in Kurihara 43.

¹⁵⁹ Mai Doi Tod, “Dance of utter darkness” (adapted by Naoki Fujita from a senior essay), www.yale.edu/discourses/images/diso2.pdf [Unpaginated].

¹⁶⁰ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 51.

to nihonjin,” means “The Japanese and Tatsumi Hijikata;” and the second, “*Nikutai no Hanran*,” means ‘Rebellion of the Body.’ The title of the dance simultaneously sets Hijikata apart from and asserts his identification with “the Japanese,” while the revolt that the title refers to may be read as Hijikata’s assertion of the body as the primary site from which his dance is generated. The dance is a culmination of Hijikata’s initial period of revolt and draws together his literary influences and pre-occupation with his rural past together in a crazed dance. The following is a brief description of the dance by Kurihara:

Having shed all of his body fat, his hip bones protrude, and muscles and veins bulge in sharp definition. His face is hidden beneath his long hair, and long pubic hairs hang from the base of a golden phallus as well. His dark body and the erect phallus, his hair and the penis's hair echo each other. In fact, his whole body is a phallic object – the protruding ribs and stiffly rising figure typical of his male fetish-body.

Violence permeates the stage. In one scene, Hijikata hangs with all of his weight from the neck of a large chicken suspended upside down from the ceiling. The chicken flaps its wings a few times, then dies, its neck hanging limply.

The audience lets go a deep sigh. In another scene Hijikata runs and repeatedly smashes his body against brass panels which hang from the ceiling. Their sharp edges are knives which may gash Hijikata. They simultaneously become cymbals, their eerie clashes echoing through the space – an effect that becomes an important part of the performance – and flashing golden light out into the audience. The panels begin to spin vigorously and take on a presence of their own as Hijikata challenges the dangerous inanimate partners with all his might.

At the end of the performance, Hijikata ties himself with ropes and is

raised upside down from the stage to the balcony like an inverted Christ. Midway, one of ropes breaks and Hijikata loses his balance. The audience stands up and applauds enthusiastically. The phallic symbolism and fervor of the spectators recall the frenzy of a cult. Hijikata had become the apotheosis of the erotic male body.¹⁶¹

The performance is considered by many, including Kurihara, Roquet and Kuniyoshi, to be a fundamental turning point in the work of Hijikata, announcing not only his departure from the stage, but also the onset of his probing of his Japanese roots identified in this thesis as the 'nostalgia' period within his Ankoku Butoh. From the first performance of *Kinjiki* to *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, one clearly sees Hijikata's "exploration and deconstruction of the social construction of the body develop into a more grounded pursuit of a method to bring the body to a more open and intuitive state."¹⁶² Within this pursuit we see in *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* not only Hijikata's rejection of foreign performing arts influences but also the beginnings of his search for a personal cosmology that would enable him to create with conviction and independently form societal trends. The new departure is summed up by Roquet: "No longer would his dances focus on the rejection of other forms."¹⁶³

Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran seems to be an act of desperation, with Hijikata pushing his body and his Ankoku Butoh revolt to the extreme. Leading up to the performance, he prepared for the physically demanding performance by rehearsing "fiercely for two months before the show. He fasted, drinking only milk and weak miso soup, and exposed himself to artificial lights to acquire a deep tan."¹⁶⁴ The dance is frenetic, horrifying and ultimately alienating. Nairo has even suggested that during this time of radical revolt Hijikata's intense determination to rid his body of social conditioning may have alienated him from his own collaborators and dancers, who eventually

¹⁶¹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 52.

¹⁶² Roquet 12.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 52.



abandoned him and stopped supporting and even performing for him. To Nairo this state of isolation and extreme alienation from Tokyo society led to the “frenzied self-denial” of *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*.¹⁶⁵ Hijikata’s determination to break through the modern conditioned body would see him writhe and contort his body creating a ritualistic dance with a “manifestly primitive nature,” a dance in total “opposition to the vision of a modern Japan.”¹⁶⁶

Artaud and the *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*

Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran was inspired by an article written by Hijikata’s friend and contemporary Shibusawa Tatsuhiko entitled “*Kyotei Heliogabarusus*” (Mad Emperor Heliogabalus),¹⁶⁷ in which Antonin Artaud’s musings on the life of the emperor Heliogabalus were quoted. A review of Artaud’s original text *Heliogabalus, or The Anarchic Crowned* describes the text as “a powerful concoction of sexual excess, self-deification, and terminal violence.”¹⁶⁸ The book explores Artaud’s obsession with the young third century emperor who committed acts of great violence and sexual deviance during his rule. Artaud used the tale of Heliogabalus as a sounding-board for his own world view, born from danger, obsession and dark sexuality. The golden phallus Hijikata wore in the dance and his entry on a Palanquin are all elements derived directly from Artaud’s descriptions of Heliogabalus as he envisions the arrival of the emperor with “his member dripped in gold, immovable, rigid, useless, innocuous.”¹⁶⁹ Artaud’s description echoes Hijikata’s own entrance in *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, which was a grand spectacle resembling “a marvelous timed dance movement, although there is nothing of the dancer about him.”¹⁷⁰ As Artaud envisioned it, this entry was to be a “barren orgy” in which the dancer “unifies the screams, focuses the genetic and calcinated ardor,

¹⁶⁵ Nairo, in Klein, „Ankoko Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences” 79.

¹⁶⁶ Nairo, in Klein 84.

¹⁶⁷ Shibusawa, *Sjinse Jutai* [Immaculate conception] (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 1979). [Unpaginated]

¹⁶⁸ Amazon reviews. Editorial review, Online. Available:

< <http://www.amazon.com/Heliogabalus-Crowned-Anarchist-Creation-Classics/dp/1840681004>.> [Unpaginated]

¹⁶⁹ Antonin Artaud, “From Heliogabalus, or The Anarchic Crowned,” *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1988): 570-1.

¹⁷⁰ Antonin Artaud, “From Heliogabalus, or The Anarchist Crowned” 321.

the ardor of death, the rite of futility.”¹⁷¹

In addition to the thematic mirroring of Artaud’s Heliogabalus we see in the work of both Hijikata and Artaud the formation of a ferocious resistance of the body to society itself.

Danger, ritual and sacrifice

In his writing, Artaud, much like Hijikata, changes the focus of artistic performance from safe reliance on classical technique to the embodied expression of the darker aspects of human experience. Artaud often spoke of the “shadows” as essential; for instance, in the Preface to his seminal text *The Theatre and Its Double* he writes: “our petrified idea of theatre is connected with our petrified idea of a culture without shadows, where, no matter which way it turns, our mind encounters only emptiness, through space is full...”¹⁷²

Throughout his writings Artaud foregrounds darkness as the creative impetus through which the performer sacrifices himself, as an outcry against habitual expressions and techniques: “If there is still something diabolical, and altogether damnable in our times, it is to linger artistically over forms, instead of being like those burnt at the stake, who gesture from their pyres.”¹⁷³ This quest for an ecstatic state in the face of extreme risk and even imminent death was a recurrent theme in the works of the French literary avant-garde, including those of Georges Bataille and Jean Genet, which were avidly read by Hijikata along with Artaud’s.¹⁷⁴ In *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* we see Hijikata’s body driven to the point of starvation through his fasting in preparation for the performance. He moves with an undeniable physical desperation, his movements violent, percussive and trance-like. In the final scene he is strung up and suspended over the audience in a cross shape which could be said to be an

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (trans. M.C. Richards) (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 7.

¹⁷³ Artaud in Andréine Bel and Bernard Bel, “Artaud and the ‘deconstruction’ of contemporary theatre-dance,” (New Delhi: Delhi University and National School of Drama, 1997). [Unpaginated]

¹⁷⁴ Roquet 27.

embodiment of the conception of Artaud's "sacred actor"¹⁷⁵ who sacrifices himself to the audience in an immediate and visceral way. In an article on *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, the critic Okada Takahiko identifies the connection between Hijikata's performance and Artaud's vision as a "primal act":

This is the performance of a primal act, not theatre. It reminds one of the elemental character of theatre, like alchemy, and like Artaud, when the primal gesture reaches its unique shadow, echoing into infinite space, and it possesses an explosive power at the peak of the real world.¹⁷⁶

In both *Kinjiki* and *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* we see an attempt by Hijikata to retain these shadows through foregrounding danger, ritual and sacrifice. Hijikata's engagement with the work of Artaud would persist and Hijikata later created a performance based on a radio play by Artaud called 'To Have Done with the Judgement of God.'¹⁷⁷ As Kurihara puts it: "Hijikata's dance was perhaps close to the theatre that Artaud wrote about but never realized."¹⁷⁸

The origin of gestures

Hijikata's engagement with Artaud's work is manifest in many of his statements about physical gestures. In both theory and performance Ankoku Butoh reflects Artaud's deconstruction of the performer's techniques and emphasizes a return to a radical point of origin in the physical matter of the body:

Impulse the body, turn it back to its bad essence. Do not negate evil, take it up as a body element and destroy it afterwards, extract the trance and joy that helped constituting it, do not ingest them, but reject them so that the being will die of indigestion.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 55.

¹⁷⁶ Okaido Takahiko, quoted in Motofuji, *Hijikata Tatsumi to tomo ni* (1990). [Unpaginated]

¹⁷⁷ Allen S. Weiss, "Radio, Death and the Devil: Artaud's *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*," *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁸ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 55.

¹⁷⁹ Artaud, quoted in A. and O. Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud, Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon :La Manufacture, 1996) 106.

Both Artaud's theory and Hijikata's embodiment have recourse to a blurring of subject and object in order to energise a domain of experience that is "not related to the accumulation of past imprints."¹⁸⁰ This approach mobilizes the motivation for movement in performance towards internal perception as opposed to external expression, necessitating a continual re-construction of the organism as conceived by Artaud: "Man is sick because he is badly constructed.... When you have made him a body without organs then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true and immortal freedom."¹⁸¹

The body of Hijikata

Hijikata has relentlessly emphasized the body as the central source of his dance: "What is my work? Yes it's myself, and I have nothing to show you but my body."¹⁸² In her talk on her self-defined area of investigation of Butohology, Keisuke Sukurai has made a distinction between Hijikata as the originator of Ankoku Butoh and Hijikata as the performer. In *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, Sakurei sees Hijikata engaged in an attempt to "move the flesh to its utmost extreme."¹⁸³ This process is evident in his extreme preparation for *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, which included fasting for weeks on end and pushing the objectification of his own body to its limit. Many who saw Hijikata's performances noted his powerful presence. The critic Miura Masahsi felt fear at Hijikata's performance and started trembling as Hijikata asserted his presence within the performance space:

I have seen a performance of Hijikata Tatsumi. To be exact, I saw him go across a stage. Taking a very long time, a body moved across the stage diagonally. I could see the air on the stage increasing its density, turning to water, and then oil. Once in a while, his subtle movements changed the air

¹⁸⁰ Andréine Bel and Bernard Bel, "Artaud and the 'deconstruction' of contemporary theatre-dance." (Seminar: In Homage to Antonin Artaud- Delhi University & National School of Drama New Delhi, 1997 < <http://aune.lpl.univ-aix.fr/~belbernard/perfarts/artaudec.htm>> [Unpaginated]

¹⁸¹ Artaud in Andréine Bel and Bernard Bel. [Unpaginated]

¹⁸² Hijikata, *Yameru Maihime* (Ailing Dancer) (Tokyo: Hakuishisha, 1983) 1.

¹⁸³ Keisuke Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology" ("Dance Seminar a nishiazabu," Chapters 2 & 3, trans. Asako Maruno, 1996). [Unpaginated]

to sand. The air turned into sand from the edge of his hands and feet. The sand speared like dominoes, covering the stage... I am watching something extraordinary, I thought, as I clasped my sweaty hands together.¹⁸⁴

Within the performance of *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* we see both a radical distortion of the body and an uncertainty in Hijikata's hysterical presence. Sakurai suggests that in *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, Hijikata objectifies his own flesh in order to transcend his embodiment and overcome his experience of alienation within society. This emphasis on transformation would in fact become the essence of Hijikata's dance. However, being both the choreographer and the dancer, Hijikata could not surrender completely to objectification, nor escape the self-consciousness within his dance.¹⁸⁵ The golden phallus may be read as a symbol of this attempt at the total objectification of his body. In one scene Hijikata repeatedly smashes his body against the brass panels suspended on stage and this omits a strange clanging sound. Metal on metal, this loud knoll comes to embody the violent confrontation between the self-aware subject and the objective reality of the body, a confrontation that remains central to Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*.

Gender ambiguity and the *Onnagata* principle

In the first act of *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* we see Hijikata's entire body mobilized as a phallic symbol, yet in the second we see him dressed as a wickedly coquettish female character, exposing his genitals to the audience in a playful yet ominous moment. The blurring of the boundary between male and female was a strategy that Hijikata engaged throughout the years of revolt in the 60s. Hijikata was especially inspired by Genet's first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, written in 1941-42 while Genet was still in prison. The story deals with both rural childhood experience and with sexual metamorphosis – both of which become crucial themes in Hijikata's work. In his dance of the same name Hijikata

¹⁸⁴ Miura Masashi, "*Hitotsu no nikutai ga butai o nanmeni yokogitte itta: Hijikata tatsmui no kyofu*" [One body went across the stage diagonally: The fear of Hijikata Tatsumi], July 2004 < <http://www.ne.jp/masashi/-note.htm>.> [Unpaginated]

¹⁸⁵ Keisuke Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

choreographed Ohno as the character Divine, the aging male prostitute in the novel. In 1961 he would create *Hanin-hanyosha no Hirusagari no Higi* (The Secret Daytime Ritual of a Hermaphrodite), another performance that drew on the blurring of gender roles. From the maiden performance of *Kinjiki* to Hijikata's departure from the stage in *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, we see in his dance a strong thematic similarity to the tradition in Japanese performing arts of gender subversion and transcendence.¹⁸⁶ Although Hijikata himself never claimed to draw on such precedents, we do see these traditional approaches echoed and re-contextualised within his contemporary themes of eroticism, same-sex behaviour and gender ambiguity. The ideal embodiment, the distortions of movement and the deformation of the body that *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* attempts to realize, bear some resemblance to the traditional *Onnagata* technique within Japanese performing arts. This principle draws on the tradition in which the 'other' is totally dissolved through the act of becoming that other, the apogee of which can be seen in male actors playing the female roles in both traditional Kabuki and Noh:

Sexual ambivalence is a special feature in Japanese art, unavoidable in the myriad of avatars of the Buddha and his Bodhisattvas. In the most ancient dances, the 'omoe' and 'buyo', masculine and feminine virtues are declared as interchangeable, situating the body in performance as a fluctuating and changing entity.¹⁸⁷

According to Sakurai: "In order to allow the female to emerge, the male *Onnagata* has to 'become' female through the total embodiment of femininity."¹⁸⁸ The objective is not to play this femininity but to become it. To make *Onnagata* possible within traditional Japanese performing arts such as Noh and Kabuki, it is necessary to "bend the body to an extreme."¹⁸⁹ Therefore the most celebrated

¹⁸⁶ Shannon Caitlin Moore, "Ghosts of Pre-Modernity: Butoh and the Avant-Garde," diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2003, 3.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Onnagata look overtly masculine in physical appearance, for it is their art to bend this masculinity to the extreme in order to become the feminine. This results in a state that allows the organism to transcend identity conflict, an approach to embodiment canonized by Zeami, the lawgiver and major proponent of the Noh form. He refers to it as the actor “growing into” the object that is imitated.¹⁹⁰ In this sense the performer has to become identical with the object and the subject has to dissolve into nothingness so that the qualities of the object may become manifest. “When this identification is achieved, it is not strictly imitation, but rather a ‘realm of non-imitation.’”¹⁹¹ Mere surface appropriation and enactment of the outward traits of the object would fail in this becoming: the body has to be bent to its core in order to allow for the ‘realm of non-imitation’. Sakurei sees this *Onnagata* principle in *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* as a type of “footbinding of the entire body.”¹⁹²

One cannot say with certainty whether or not Hijikata realized this ideal of total becoming or transformation in his own performances. Several critics have pointed to the contrary. To Butoh critics Keisuke Sakurei and Goida Nairo, the performance of *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* was “self-conscious to the extreme.”¹⁹³ Sakurei describes Hijikata’s performance as a “non-hypnotic” experience, a performance in which the “spirit boiled out and over and looked desperate.”¹⁹⁴ *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* may be seen as Hijikata’s ultimate attempt at realizing the desired male object-body within his own performance. While he was able clearly to illustrate the desired consciousness and ideal of transformation, he lacked the total embodiment necessary for his Ankoku Butoh truly to transcend the relationship between object and subject.¹⁹⁵ The fundamental conflict of Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh body lay in the contradiction between his impulse toward entropy and deconstruction

¹⁹⁰ Zeami, in J. Thomas Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki (trans.), *On the Art of the No Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). 32.

¹⁹¹ Rimer and Yamazaki (trans.), *On the Art of the No Drama*. 30.

¹⁹² Sakurai, “The Body as Dance.” [Unpaginated]

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

and the simultaneous impulse to resist total dissolution. He thus created dance works in which the "outwardly aggressive masculine slammed up against its passive objectification."¹⁹⁶ This fetishistic male object body was in a sense trapping Hijikata, "its powers of transformation limited".¹⁹⁷ *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* set the precedent for the basic tension between content and form, object and subject within the body that would become central to the Ankoku dance in the years to come. It also both announced Hijikata's departure from the stage and the onset of a phase devoted to exploration of his roots.

2] Nostalgia

The performance of *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* announced a central shift in the dynamic of Ankoku Butoh from being a reactionary revolt against societal norms to an evolutionary dynamic with a focus on realizing total transformation within performance. Paul Roquet describes the shift as follows:

Here, the first wave of butoh ended. In the following years Hijikata completely refocused his choreography, abandoning purely intellectual challenges and focusing more intensely on the depths of the human body.¹⁹⁸

His focus shifts to the interior reality of the body through his own social history, the roots of which lay in Tohoku. Again in the paradoxical fashion of Ankoku Butoh, this very internal and private excavation process would in time come to represent a more expansive study of the social reality of modern Japan, and even of universal principles relating to human embodiment. Tohoku represented a marginal space, a space that stood in opposition to urban centres such as Tokyo, and as such it offered fertile ground for the exploration of deeply ingrained Japanese habits and traditions. Again, it was the backwaters, the world of

¹⁹⁶ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 57.

¹⁹⁷ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance." [Unpaginated]

¹⁹⁸ Roquet 34.

shadows and mud, that aroused the Ankoku Butoh body.

Kamaitachi

Hijikata returned to the Tohoku of his childhood as early as 1965. The first of numerous trips took the form of a photographic project undertaken together with Eikoh Hosoe. Hosoe was a filmmaker and photographer of considerable renown, and he and Hijikata collaborated throughout the 1960s. They created a film called *A navel and A- bomb* which made direct connections between Hijikata's body and the force of destruction of the American nuclear attacks on Japan. Their collaborations often addressed the disequilibrium and chaos of postwar Japan.

In his initial years in Tokyo, Hijikata desperately attempted to shrug off the rural identity regarded as inferior to the modernizing identity of urban Japan. Now, like Hosoe, he actively attempted to affirm and engage with his marginalized origins. The photographic safari became to a certain extent an attempt to capture the disappearing essence of Japan in the face of modernization and internationalization. Hijikata and Hosoe journeyed to the most remote villages in Akita, where Hijikata performed outdoors, in the natural landscape. The project and resultant book were called *Kamaitachi*, meaning Weasel Sickle.¹⁹⁹ In his performances Hijikata assumed the persona of a mythical weasel god which attacked peasants, leaving deep yet bloodless wounds. The trip became increasingly absurd, with Hijikata being carried about by villagers on a wooden platform or else running through the rice fields in abandon. Hosoe had lied to the villagers, telling them that he and Hijikata were from a television company,²⁰⁰ and the peasants were so in thrall to the new medium that they complied with all the visitors' desires.

The landscape of Akita that framed the body of Hijikata created an almost animated presence in which body and environment were effectively fused. In 1968 both the book of *Kamaitachi* and a travelling exhibition exposed these

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Barber, *Butoh's First Images*, <<http://www.bookblast.com/English/Writers/BarberT.html>> [Unpaginated]

²⁰⁰ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 62.

images to the international community. *Kamaitachi* was typical of Hijikata's many projects in that it played a major role in introducing Ankoku Butoh to the world. Hijikata had considerable flair for collaboration with other artists and filmmakers that enabled his dance to transcend its immediate medium and make an impact both within Japan and abroad.

The female body

From the late 1950s and through the 1960s Hijikata worked primarily with men, creating an extremely masculine dance of revolt that was both shocking and subversive. However, it was through his discovery of the female body that Hijikata realized the transformation towards which he had aspired. His growing fascination with the female body manifested itself in two ways: his discovery of the dead sister inside his own body, and his devotion to his muse – the ultimate embodiment of Ankoku Butoh – Yoko Ashikawa. The discovery or recovery of the feminine led to a refinement of the aesthetic principles and philosophy of the dance.

The sister inside

During the late '60s and most notably in the '70s, Hijikata began to speak of his sister, and sometimes his mother, as living in his body and being a driving creative force within him. Hijikata made regular reference to the internal presence of his sister, who had been sold off into prostitution, often saying: "older sisters disappear suddenly."²⁰¹ At this time a new feminine energy manifested itself externally, as Hijikata started wearing a women's kimono, tying his hair into a bun and speaking in soft and whispering tones, as it is customary for middle-aged women to do.²⁰²

Hijikata described the disappearance of his sister in interviews:

One day, a casual glance around the house revealed that the furniture was

²⁰¹ Hijikata, "Hijikata Tatsumi to ankoku butoh-ha," *Eiga hyōron* November 1972: 22.

²⁰² Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 20.

all gone. Furniture and household utensils are something you can't help but notice. And around that time my older sister, who always sat on the veranda, suddenly disappeared. I thought to myself, maybe this is something older sisters naturally do – disappear from the house.²⁰³

Hijikata was notorious for embroidering and re-inventing parts of his life, a character trait fuelled by his imagination and penchant for self-mystification. Thus it is not known whether his sister was literally sold into prostitution; but what is certain, however, is that the disappearance of the sister and her later re-embodiment were experiences central to the development of Ankoku Butoh. Hijikata initially orientated this new departure in technique around the discovery and excavation of his dead sister inside his body, saying:

I often say that I have a sister living inside my body. When I am absorbed in creating a butoh work, she plucks the darkness from my body and eats more than is needed. When she stands up inside my body, I unthinkingly sit down. For me to fall is for her to fall. But there's even more to our relationship than that. She says to me, 'You're totally immersed in dance and expression but what you are able to express emerges somehow by not expressing it, don't you think?' Then she quietly disappears. She's my teacher; a dead person is my butoh teacher. You've got to cherish the dead.²⁰⁴

Hijikata's memories of Tohoku were refracted through the prism of this "lost sister" within himself. According to Hijikata, keeping this sister inside him was his way of learning about the dead, knowing the dead, and not fearing death.²⁰⁵ "For Hijikata, the 'lost sister' stood for memory in general"²⁰⁶ and facilitated an uncovering of the female "Other" within his male body. Through the medium of

²⁰³ Hijikata, *Yameru Maihime* (Sick Dancer) (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1983), translated and cited in Klein, "Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern" 89-90.

²⁰⁴ Hijikata, "Wind Daruma" 7.

²⁰⁵ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 43.

²⁰⁶ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 62.

his dead sister, “memory, death and the erotic were all conflated in the dancer’s body.”²⁰⁷ Nairo maintains that the discovery of the interior relationship with his sister was an orientating nexus within Hijikata’s notions of embodiment and essential to the development of the Ankoku Butoh style:²⁰⁸ “his work achieved a scale of exquisite gentleness, calm and even magnanimity enriched by Hijikata’s continuous inner dialogue with both his sister and his own youth.”²⁰⁹ Roquet speaks of the importance of Hijikata coming to “recognize the disruptive potential of this female body.”²¹⁰

In the four years following *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran*, Hijikata did not appear on stage once. During this period there were about 20 students living in and near his Asbestos-kan studio. Although he had in the past articulated a strong disdain for the female body, he now developed strong ideas about the potential of female energy:

Women are born with the ability to experience the illogical part of reality and are consequently capable of incarnating the illogical side of dance. If we imagine that a man’s body gathers itself around a center, then a woman’s opens outward in an act of scattering of seeds.²¹¹

To Hijikata, women seemed to be more capable of embodying that which had not yet been conquered by the rationality characteristic of the modernizing and Westernizing trends in Japan at the time. He saw in women an untouched quality that men had lost: “Man, removed from earthy and maternal forces, possesses a ‘poetical’ body – a body touched by the spirit and prisoner of the logical world. Only woman has retained the carnal body, as yet unarticulated in language.”²¹² The demographics of the Ankoku Butoh group changed as more and more women joined, among them Ashikawa Yôko, Saga Kobayashi and Momoko

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Gôda Nairo (1983), in Klein “Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern” 76-77.

²⁰⁹ Nairo (1983), in Klein, “Ankoku Butoh” 81.

²¹⁰ Roquet 37.

²¹¹ Hijikata, cited in Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* 84.

²¹² Ibid.

Mimura. These dancers would in the late 1970s come to constitute the core of the female group Hakutôbô. Ashikawa in particular became the epitome of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh.

Yoko Ashikawa

Ashikawa had been an art student with no formal dance experience, who after reading an article on Hijikata's Asbestos-kan decided to join the troupe in 1967. Soon after her arrival, Hijikata produced and choreographed a recital for Ashikawa. In the program notes he referred to her as the "Fairy of the Asbestos-kan,"²¹³ likening her to a bird with a beautiful voice. Hijikata appreciated her total commitment to his dance, finding himself moved by this dancer who would push herself to the point of falling asleep in his rigorous training sessions. He concludes the program notes by stating: "I shall praise Yoko, a flower, dedicating my favorite poem to her."²¹⁴ Her remarkable ability to transform her body into Hijikata's imaginary constructions inspired him profoundly and in no uncertain terms overwhelmed audiences.

Hijikata began to train Ashikawa and dancer Saga Kobayahsi intensively in the early 1970s, creating a temporary group for them called *Genjusha* (The imaginary animal company). Hijikata had developed a great interest in themes drawn from the Tohoku region's culture and lifestyle and he explored these themes in the dances created for this female troupe. These explorations would become the seedbed for the large-scale production of *Shiki no tame no nijushichiban* (Twenty-seven nights for four seasons). During this time Hijikata was evolving his *Butoh Fu* method in training the young dancers. The movements within his choreography were generated through a type of poetic imagery that he called *Butoh Fu*. Hijikata would often beat a small drum and utter a stream of poetic articulations, to which the dancers would respond with their objectified bodies. Hijikata also started transforming the female body into a fetish

²¹³ Hijikata, "asbesutokan no yosei: ashikawa yoko," in *Bibo no Aozore* (1987) 204. Originally published as a program note for Ashikawa's recital in 1968.

²¹⁴ Hijikata, in Hijikata, Ashikawa, Gunji, and Ichikawa, "Butoh o kataru," *hogaku to buyo*, January 1978. [Unpaginated]

object both within Ankoku Butoh and also through the various entertainment businesses he ran. In order to support the Asbestos-kan, Hijikata ran several “show dance” clubs and started a very avant-garde cabaret club in Asaka that he called Space Capsule.²¹⁵ He would pressure his female students to perform in these clubs until the early hours of the morning, after which he would start their training. The shows at the Space Capsule club where the dancers performed regularly took the form of absurd objectifications of the female body. Kurihara offers us a description of one of the shows featured at the club where a woman is transformed into a cyber-bug:

One of the shows featured a naked woman in white make-up with her hair bristling upward. On her hands and knees on a table in the middle of the audience, she is a strange combination of insect, animal and woman. Metallic feelers with small blinking light bulbs on them protrude from her head and a chastity belt with a flashlight attached to it shines into the spectators’ faces while she opens her legs with a mechanical motion.²¹⁶

This total objectification and extreme moulding of the female form was very erotic, and the combination of women’s bodies with inanimate objects and other techniques such as projections created unusual performances with a unique approach to the relationship between animate and inanimate objects on stage. Yoko Ashikawa was able to create a very particular dynamism within her still, inanimate body. Nairo commented, “It is not an overstatement to say that the emergence of Ashikawa Yoko, who could hold the universe in her backbone, lends infinite possibility to Hijikata’s Butoh.”²¹⁷ Many writers try to convey Ashikawa’s transformation in mythic terms. Tanemura Suehiro has published an insightful collection of articles discussing the mutual influences of butoh and other arts in *Hijikata Tatsumi no hô e: nikutai no 60 nendai* (Towards Hijikata Tatsumi: The 1960s of the Flesh). He describes Ashikawa’s body as a “place of cosmic

²¹⁵ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 43.

²¹⁶ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing”

²¹⁷ Nairo Goida, in Klein, “Ankoku Butoh” 43.

formation and the space of the creation.”²¹⁸ Watching her, the poet Shiraishi Kazuko saw space transformed:

[I]t could only thrust through the ceiling, rise to the heavens, ascend to the infinite space of the cosmos, dive deep to the bottom of the earth to reach the path of the netherworld. She became characters that are found in Kabuki such as prostitutes, ghosts, and princesses.²¹⁹

The ‘art of becoming’ that she practised is deeply embedded in the traditions of the Japanese performing arts, and Ashikawa’s dance appealed immediately to the sensibilities of Japanese audiences. She possessed a distinctive ability to transform her body into anything from a towering presence to a small creature. Many have commented on Ashikawa’s dramatic transformational capabilities. When Shiraishi Kazuko saw her in a performance of the 1976 *Geisen-jo no Okugata* [lady on a whale string] he called her a “once in a decade wonderment.”²²⁰

The ability of Ashikawa to fictionalize her entire body enabled her to become a total and perfect object in Hijikata’s vision of Ankoku Butoh performance. Between them they developed a strategy though which Hijikata moulded her body as a complete object, “he as executor and she as executed.”²²¹ They worked until the early morning hours, creating self-effacing transformations in which Ashikawa metamorphosized her body appearing “completely possessed by a strange spirit.”²²² The critic Tanamura described the relationship between Ashikawa and Hijikata as one in which Ashikawa’s body was like a glove moved by Hijikata’s hands of bone: “This hand pitilessly violates the glove, but the body

²¹⁸ Tanemura Suehiro, “Enkan no shukusai” [Cyclic festival] *Nihon dokusho Shimibun* [The Japan Literary Times], December 1979. [Unpaginated]

²¹⁹ Shiraishi Kazuko, “Kukan ni kitsuritsuru butoh: Aruiwa kitsuritusuru kukan” [Butoh rising in space, or rising space] *Gendaishi techo*, April 1970. [Unpaginated]

²²⁰ Shiraishi Kazuko, “Kukan ni kitsuritsuru butoh: Aruiwa kitsuritusuru kukan [Butoh rising in space, or rising space]. [Unpaginated]

²²¹ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 71.

²²² *Ibid.*

that became the glove envelopes the hand in ecstatic serenity.”²²³ Ashikawa had the uncanny ability to make her body completely receptive to Hijikata’s creative projections. She became to a large extent the one who notated Hijikata’s *Butoh Fu* and kept the notes on the poetic cosmologies that Hijikata originated within her body. She was central in orientating Hijikata’s *Butoh Fu* in its physical form, both through her own embodiment of Ankoku Butoh and her sharp intellect that orchestrated and organized the *Butoh Fu*.²²⁴ Ashikawa has recalled the process of creating dance with Hijikata in these terms:

I thought we could not possibly understand, being so young, but we understood fairly well. We weren’t very experienced, so it was as if he was drawing on a blank page. When he said “roll on the ground,” I rolled on the ground; when he said “walk bow-legged” I did. And he created dance this way, marveling at this “magic box” emptying its contents before his eyes. Our work was so enjoyable at the time! Hijikata would tell us to stick out our tongues and we would stick out our tongues, and then giggle to see how ugly we looked. At New Year’s we stuffed ourselves with rice cakes, then laughed at our swollen bellies. That was how we came to create such interesting dance.²²⁵

One of the amazing aspects of Ashikawa’s transformations was that she managed them without any apparent self-consciousness. We can see this very clearly in *Hitogata*, performed by Ashikawa in 1976.²²⁶ Ashikawa undergoes multiple transformations in this dance, the most interesting of which is an old prostitute being buried at sea:

Ashikawa lies supine in front of a background of wave patterns. Her body is slightly arched; only her back and hip touch the floor. She maintains her whole form with an even tension as if she were an object. Although there is

²²³ Tanemura Suehiro, “*Enkan no shukusa?*” [Cyclic festival]. [Unpaginated]

²²⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 73.

²²⁵ Ashikawa, in Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* 92.

²²⁶ *Hitogata* video recording 1976. sourced at Susanna Akerlund’s private library, Sweden 2003.

no explanation, spectators gather that she is a prostitute buried at sea. The interpretation is possible because this story was popular in the media at the time. The tension of Ashikawa's body implies the stiffness of a corpse, and the arched form, which defies gravity, suggests that she is floating.²²⁷

These subtle movements that could convey entire environments, atmospheres and strange characters would become characteristic of the all-female Hakutobo dance group created by Hijikata for Ashikawa in 1974. Hakutobo was to be the platform from which Hijikata would explore Ashikawa's talent. Ashikawa's powers of transformation remained unparalleled through the 16 performances in two-and-a-half years that Hijikata and Hakutobo produced up to the end of 1976. The dances choreographed by Hijikata during the 70s and 80s were centred on her incredible talent. Ashikawa would perform a myriad of characters and take the stage in highly ornate and exquisitely detailed costumes. These costumes were much like artworks themselves and enhanced the seductiveness of her transformations. When watching *Hitogata* and *Geisinjo no Okugata* one gets the distinct feeling that the scenes with other dancers between Ashikawa's performances exist only to facilitate her elaborate costume changes.²²⁸ She was in no uncertain terms the ultimate manifestation of Ankoku Butoh dance.

Ashikawa takes Butoh abroad

The concentrated emotional power of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh reached Europe through a solo that Hijikata had choreographed for Ashikawa to perform at the Louvre in the *Festival d' Automne* in October 1978. In this performance we see Ashikawa and her Ankoku Butoh body accompanied only by silence and occasional traditional Japanese music as she performs a shuddering array of transformations. Ashikawa's powers of transformation moved those who saw the dance beyond words and inspired lyrical praise by the likes of Allain Jouffrey, who decribed the performance as "a disturbing plunge into the metamorphoses

²²⁷ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 72.

²²⁸ Both performances were screened at Su En's butoh workshop at the Haglund summer camp in July 2005. The performances were recorder with handheld recoder and the quality compromised by the low-light conditions. The dates and locations are unknown, there is also no information on the film-maker.

and questionings of the human body, going to the very roots of anguish. Fascinating [...] In short, nothing like it has been seen before."²²⁹ Jouffrey continues to describe the performance as a profoundly existential experience:

Ashikawa's powers of communication are so intense that spectators felt their bodies tremble, and tears flowed unsummoned. Everything explodes at once. The ruling character of the exhibition – discipline, brevity, and mild reserve – flees in the face of explosion, shudders of fear, the blinking of eyes suddenly exposed to burning sunlight, the palpitations of the heart in the grip of an oppressive emptiness. Everyone present experiences a real feeling of aloneness, an isolation such as they have never felt before."²³⁰

Despite her undeniable prowess as performer, Ashikawa did not pursue an international career with Ankoku Butoh or attain truly wide acclaim outside of Japanese Ankoku Butoh circles. The shy character of Hakutobo and the lack of writing about or from the perspective of Japanese female Butoh dancers grants us little insight into their approach to Ankoku Butoh. What is clear is that Yoko Ashikawa and the female dancers of Hakutobo keep a low profile and are not interested in the media and public recognition for their work. This 'erasure' has become central to the Hakutobo dancers and Ankoku Butoh. It is the approach followed by Swedish Butoh dancer and former student of Yoko Ashikawa, Susanna Akerlund, who reiterates her teacher's humble striving for namelessness within the dance:

Although many people tried to establish the Hijikata myth, they don't know the nameless nature of humankind, self-abandonment, and sacrifice. They should know the nameless nature of butoh. This is the reason why the dancers of Hakutobo always use the family name, 'Ashikawa', and the reason why each dancer has a leading part, because we think everybody is

²²⁹ Alain Jouffrey in *L'Express Magazine* (1978), cited in Kuniyoshi Kazuko, *Performing Arts in Japan Now*, November 6 2000 <http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/butoh/kuni.pdf>, 1.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

on the same level, and that the leading part has no special value.²³¹

Ashikawa and the legendary Hakutobo dancers lived only to create dance and further explore the rich world of Ankoku Butoh.

Cosmology of the body

Hijikata created a universe with a logic that celebrated obscenity, cruelty and vulgarity in opposition to the sanitized modern expression of the time.²³² This world was inhabited by grotesque creatures, deformed figures, ghosts and fetuses. He mediated this cosmology through Tohoku and his childhood memories, which he re-created and related to the unconscious and mythic elements suppressed in contemporary Japan. Hijikata insisted that this dance was born from the body and its environment: "I had no master after all to teach me my first steps in dance. My influences came from those childhood experiences, the trees and icicles I saw then."²³³

Negativity came to evoke life in this cosmology: death, aging, disease, disability and blindness paradoxically evoked new potential. Marginal characters such as the blind, the retarded, and the insane became celebrated characters in the cosmos of Hijikata's dance. He discerned in these figures a potential, an innocence, and an immediacy of expression; he would look for the point of abandon or radical opposition in their experience that gave these characters a unique freedom and strength.

Hijikata's return to Tohoku went beyond an essentializing exotification of a rural past set in opposition to the modernizing Japan. More than a site for the mere excavation of the past, Tohoku became a constructed landscape born from Hijikata's imagination. He recreated the topology of Tohoku and re-identified

²³¹ Susanna Akerlund in Johannes Bergmark (1991), "Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move," June 2005, <http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html>, 8.

²³² Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 155.

²³³ Hijikata, Tatsumi 1928- in Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. *Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh*. TDR: The Drama Review - Volume 44, Number 1 (T 165), Spring 2000, p 54

himself as a man of Tohoku. Critic Nakamura Fumiaki notes the presence in Hijikata's dance after *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* of this persistent reinvention, saying: "Hijikata invented his infancy. He invented Akita prefecture."²³⁴ Ashikawa, on the other hand, saw a more complex interaction between the fictional and the historical: "You could either say that he traced his memory of his early Tohoku experience or you could say that he recreated it. But the form of Butoh did not exist in that memory at the beginning. It took time to discover it."²³⁵

More than just a geographic landscape, then, Tohoku became a cosmology of the subconscious within which Hijikata experienced a sense of wholeness: "A little bell is now resounding in my cursed head, and I believe I just want to sit down like a child, on the threshold of reaching wholeness, in an age of waiting for something to be distributed."²³⁶ The transformation of Tohoku mobilized the material of Hijikata's childhood experience through his imagination, and ultimately through his body. His inspiration for the Ankoku Butoh dance came not from the performing arts, but from the soil of Tohoku and the mud: "But I can, I know, declare that my butoh started there with what I learned from the mud in early spring, not from anything to do with the performing arts of shrines or temples."²³⁷

This was a cosmology that had its origin in physical experience. Hijikata continually located his memories of Tohoku in the body. "Whether it's a squash blossom fading or a horse getting thin in the face, it all comes down to a tale of the body."²³⁸ By extension, Hijikata's incorporation of native motifs in his dances drew strongly on the over-worked bodies of the people that he encountered on trips to the countryside, such as the *Kamaitachi* experience with Eikoh Hosoe.²³⁹

²³⁴Nakamura Fumiaki in Goda, Nakamura, and Ichikawa. 1986. *Butoh wa sekai o enshutsu dekiruka*. (Ekoda bungaku Summer No 10). [Unpaginated]

²³⁵Ashikawa Yoko. "Shintai no naka no tasha o sagasu: Ashikawa Yoko to hakutobo no genza?". (Kikan Shicho 1990 No.7.) p162

²³⁶Hijikata Tatsumi. "From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein" in *The Drama Review*. Transl. Nanako Kurihara. No. 1, vol. 44 (Spring 2000): 57

²³⁷Hijikata, "Wind Daruma," 3.

²³⁸ibid.

²³⁹Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 58.

He was fascinated by these bodies and drew extensively from them when creating the Ankoku Butoh body and the morbid marginal characters and creatures in his dance, like old women, blind girls, ghosts and demonic creatures.

These characters did not exist in any logical or sequential narrative. They were unruly creatures that subverted the time and space that they occupied. "For him the body was not a means but an end, not to be used to transmit ideas, but on the contrary, to question, to rethink, to recreate."²⁴⁰ This resulted in a very particular structure within his dances. They all appear like dreams in which figures appear from and disappear into the darkness. This dream-like quality subverted audience expectations and created a uniquely meditative temporality within the dance. As a result, the Ankoku Butoh of the time was "not a linear composition, not a syntactical arrangement of body movements, but rather the exploration of the exemplary depth of the body itself; not a desire to pronounce a discourse, but to search for meaning."²⁴¹ Hijikata's dancers often show the whites of their eyes, suggesting a totally enraptured state of embodiment or convulsion. This is reminiscent of the imagery of ghosts in Japanese horror stories, indicating their belonging to the world of the dead: "In Japanese culture, rolled-up eyes usually suggest the dead or ghosts. Japanese children play ghosts by rolling their eyes up, and hanging their hands out in front of their chests. In both cases, the whites of the eyes mean that the character belongs to the world of the dead."²⁴² The dancers always appear with eyes closed, or gazing unfocused, or rolled back into their skulls. This disruption of the visual is a strategy that affects all spatial and temporal relationships in the Ankoku Butoh dance. The dead eyes combined with low postures and condensed and intensified movement to create a world wholly unto itself.

The incorporation of a lowered centre of gravity within Hijikata's dance developed in part in resistance to the defiance of gravity in other dance forms, and in part

²⁴⁰ Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, 64

²⁴¹ Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, 64

²⁴² Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 175

through the adoption of the bow-legged movements of the bodies he encountered in Tohoku. Hijikata believed the bow legs or *Ganimata* develop due to the baskets in which young children are kept on the rice fields. To Hijikata the Tohoku body had a certain quality “contained in the folded legs of those babies and it is transformed, faltering and stammering, into bowed legs.”²⁴³ Movement was created using this bandy-legged dancing, with the arms and legs clutched tight to the body, losing their original purpose and left hanging in space, then wandering aimlessly in the dimmed lighting of the stage. In *Ganimata* the weight is hung to the outer side of the legs.

One floats the inside leg upwards which turns out the knees, sinking the entire frame of the body. It is important to note that this technique is no more realistic or natural than standing on tiptoe in ballet. Just like ballet it is a reconstruction of the body, yet it manifests in the opposite direction.²⁴⁴

This reconstruction of a traditional corporeality was echoed in the work of many contemporary authors. For instance, Yanagida Kunio, the founder of Japanese folklore studies, became popular among progressives like Hijikata who considered Yanagida his favourite reading in the 1970s and '80s. Yanagida travelled Japan extensively and wrote about festivals, religious practices, folklore and other traditional narratives. He studied the people deemed 'backward' by narratives of modern progress. Susan Klein has pointed to three aspects which Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh* shares with Yanagida's work:

a desire to transcend the modern accompanied by an antagonism against Western individualism; the idea of uncovering a collective unconscious to reach a more authentic autonomy of the self; and a focus on marginal beings.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Hijikata, “Wind Daruma,” 9.

²⁴⁴ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 160.

²⁴⁵ Klein, “Ankoku Butoh” 88.

For Hijikata's audiences of the '70s and '80s Tohoku was a place of darkness and myth. Critic Watanebe Moriaki has pointed out that throughout the history of the Japanese performing arts, "an archetype of our native imagination had surfaced from beneath the darkness."²⁴⁶ Hijikata characters had been buried in the shadows of the modern world: senile women, invalids, prostitutes and fusions between human and animals. In *Tôhoku Kabuki*, created in 1972, the dancers transform into forms ranging from the barely human to plants and vegetables. Within these subversive transformations Hijikata uses his Tohoku body to drag the newly synthesized and superficial modern body from its pedestal. What is interesting is that the ordered spectacle of the *Tôhoku Kabuki* was highly acclaimed and drew an unprecedented audience for work by an avant-garde artist.²⁴⁷ Roquet attributes the popularity of the dance to the climate of nostalgia prevalent in Japanese society at the time: "The rural agrarian elements in the dance coincided with a wave of pre-modern nostalgia that was sweeping the country, and for the first time an Ankoku Butoh performance met with mainstream success."²⁴⁸

Ashikawa and the Hakutobo dancers continued, however, in their dedication, humility and integrity, to develop the dance to an even more transcendent state. Eventually the dance would communicate beyond the sum of its culturally specific parts, moving towards a universal embodiment of nature and an incantation of natural elements. Ashikawa's body continued to be the vessel through which spectators could live through the dark passions repressed in Japan, conveying the full spectrum of human experience, both dark and light. Hijikata believed passionately in the increasingly universal reach of his dance, an inexhaustible inquiry into body consciousness made possible by Ashikawa's dedication: "Ashikawa's dedication was so complete that she had her own teeth pulled out so that she could better portray old women."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Goida Nairo. 1983. "Buyo wa nani o hyogen suru no ka" [What dance represents. A discussion with Watanabe Moriaki] (*Yuriika*, November 1983) 102.

²⁴⁷ Roquet 37.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 140.

3] Nature

Roquet suggests, as do many other butoh scholars from Klein to Kurihara, that Tohoku was the very seedbed of Hijikata's dance: without Tohoku, the dance would have had no substance.²⁵⁰ But the insistence that the prototypical 'Butoh body' was to be found in the physique Tohoku imposed on its inhabitants by way of its environmental forces is in fact a misunderstanding. In my opinion the aim of the dance was not so much to portray the actuality of the environment as to use the fact of its materiality and its influence on the bodies of its inhabitants in order to transcend geographic and cultural specificity. Klein suggests that the natural order is fundamental and precedes any cultural or geographic specificity, and that the later Butoh focused on rediscovering this order:

the natural state of the body by having the dancers experience firsthand the principle that in nature, before an individual plant or animal can develop its own distinctive voice, it must begin by adapting itself to its place in the natural order.²⁵¹

Hijikata believed in the universal nature of his dance and said in reference to the Tohoku elements in the dance: "Although it is *Tohoku Kabuki*, there is a Tohoku in England. The utter darkness exists throughout the world, doesn't it?"²⁵² While Hijikata certainly emphasized the human figure buckling under the constraints of forces in the environment, in his choreography of the *Tohoku Kabuki*, man and nature became inextricably bound together. In the Ankoku Butoh performances of Yoko Ashikawa, her dance is as much a reflection of the workings of nature as it is of the changes in the body. In *Tohoku Kabuki* the dancing body was not only a shape resulting from deformations imposed upon it; it also represented a transcendent, spiritual and universal quality. The postures in Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh dance not only reflected the bent, broken backs of agrarian lifestyles, but

²⁵⁰ Roquet 24.

²⁵¹ Klein, "Ankoku Butoh" 39.

²⁵² Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

also came to represent the universal hunched position of the fetus. The fetus is a signifier of life but also the position in which many cultures bury their dead. Kurihara identifies the Japanese tradition of burying their dead in fetal positions as “metempsychosis – that the dead would be transported, in this position, to a woman’s womb again. The fetal positions in Butoh may be seen to represent the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth, yet also suggests a regression to a primary state of wholeness.”²⁵³

In Ankoku Butoh’s distinctive fetal crouch “one glimpses a life force emanating from a cramped body as it crawls on the ground.”²⁵⁴

Towards nature

Hijikata passed away in 1986 of liver failure, aggravated by cancer of the rectum. He was 57 years old. Two months before his sudden death, he had his last workshop, *Walking through the Woods of Bresdin*. During this workshop Hijikata created a Butoh *Fu* that relates the body to its external environment through natural imagery:

The scent of the woods, dead bodies of beasts lying here and there, in a
swarm of flies
Your inner feeling is getting thinner and thinner to the extremity,
Your outer feeling is getting higher and higher to the extremity,
The fog is getting thicker and thicker,
He has found himself drawing a ragged mountain,
The universe is full of hydrangeas, the pool of mucus, the withered corn field,
then toward the
Meadow grown thickly by dandelions.²⁵⁵

In his last notated *Butoh Fu*, Hijikata attempts the creation of a body that is

²⁵³ Kurihara, “The Most Remote Thing” 176.

²⁵⁴ Hijikata, cited in Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*. 188.

²⁵⁵ Kayo Mikami, “Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh” <<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

endlessly transformed. He suggest to students a total dispersal of their interiority: "Your inner feeling is getting thinner and thinner to the extremity, your outer feeling is getting higher and higher to the extremity."²⁵⁶ In Hijikata's dance instruction the body and the consciousness of the dancer have to be dispersed endlessly until they literally become nature and transform "into a Japanese poplar being blown in the wind..."²⁵⁷ In this sense the Ankoku Butoh body just "becomes something else by itself."²⁵⁸ In order for this dispersal to be realized, all the habitual interpretations of the intellect, the products of socialization, needed to be reconfigured, resulting in an aggregation and dissolution of the self. Roquet has defined this as a central goal within Ankoku Butoh – "to empty the body of intellectual inhibitions and realize a true metamorphosis onstage."²⁵⁹

As Jonathan Marshall suggests, in Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh it is "not that the mind controls the body, nor that the body tries to free itself from the mind, rather that the body itself becomes an impersonal medium. One may say that the body is not something that exists but something that generates."²⁶⁰ In Ankoku Butoh the body is viewed as a gradually transformed object, as culture shaped by nature.²⁶¹ This re-adaptation of the body to the laws of nature, driven by the central aspiration towards total becoming, created an immensely powerful critique of the modern condition, both within Japan and abroad.

²⁵⁶ Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh" <<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

²⁵⁷ Hijikata, "Wind Daruma," 3.

²⁵⁸ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁵⁹ Roquet 43.

²⁶⁰ Marshall, "Bodies Across the Pacific" 4.

²⁶¹ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

Chapter 3: Trans-cultural embodiment of the Ankoku Butoh body

The process of the creation of Ankoku Butoh synthesized elements both Eastern and Western. The Ankoku Butoh body born from this process is a corporeal manifestation inextricably linked to the life and work of Tatsumi Hijikata and the ultimate embodiment of the dance – Yoko Ashikawa. Hijikata attempted a radical reconstruction of a uniquely Japanese cosmology, drawing on and subverting intrinsically Japanese approaches to embodiment. This cosmology was mediated through various creative prisms within the body of Hijikata, including the dead sister that lived inside him and the reconstructed world of his traditional home prefecture of Tohoku. Hijikata used this cosmology and projected it onto the objectified bodies of his Japanese dancers using a type of poetic language called *Butoh Fu*.

Ankoku Butoh tapped into aspects of Japanese corporeal knowledge that were marginalized during the process of modernization, and it mobilized the darker realm of human consciousness through the body. The result was a resistant and inverted aesthetic that according to Japanese dance critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi celebrated the grotesque and the ugly: “In this grotesque ugliness and corruption, however, there can be found an irreducible beauty and sweetness which are without equivalent elsewhere...clearly, Butoh has accomplished a reversal in aesthetic consciousness.”²⁶²

Drawing also from the works of Genet and his celebration of the underbelly of society, and Artaud’s call for a visceral, physical and primal expression in performance, Hijikata internalized the abject and the dissident as a mode of resistance. The inverted aesthetic turned the frightening into the beautiful, the disempowered into the potent, sordid and abject experiences into dances that embraced the transformative dynamic of human embodiment in resistance to the modern condition.

²⁶² Kazuko Kuniyoshi, “Hijikata Tatsumi ron” [On Hijikata Tatsumi]. (Yuriika, December 1983.) [Unpaginated]

The Ankoku Butoh body and cultural specificity

The spread and development of Ankoku Butoh beyond the sphere of the impulses that had given life to it is problematic. The environment that both kindled and challenged the Ankoku Butoh body in conjunction with Hijikata's richly constructed cosmology for the Ankoku Butoh dancer can for obvious reasons not be experienced by Japanese Ankoku Butoh performers who were born after the Second World War.

Sakurai notes that those first generation performers schooled by Hijikata himself faced a considerable challenge in continuing the Ankoku Butoh work.²⁶³ The fact that Ankoku Butoh relies on a continual revolt against codification goes against the formal notation and development of the dance as a specific form, and as such leaves these performers no clear trace of what is necessary for the dance to develop or what needs to be abandoned:

Under the premise of the "body that has become," [Ankoku Butoh performers after Hijikata] have to start all over again. Moreover, different from the time they were dancing under Hijikata, in order to dance now, they have to accept as a matter of course that they are subjects themselves. And so, they have no choice but to return to where the dancer, Tatsumi Hijikata, quit once.²⁶⁴

Returning to the point where Hijikata quit, or was cut short by his own mortality, lies at the heart of my vision of the future of Ankoku Butoh. I will argue that it is the essential condition for approaching Ankoku Butoh, in order to imbibe the spirit and commitment with which Hijikata approached his dance as a mode of radical resistance. In the years since Hijikata's death we have seen very few succeed.

²⁶³ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁶⁴ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

Butoh in the Japanese context

Many of the 2nd and 3rd generation Japanese Butoh performers and companies have been criticized for evincing a superficial concern with the visual spectacle generated in performance, with only a few retaining the elusive model of the body Hijikata was able to nurture and employ in dance. The Sankai Juku Butoh group and the other Japanese Butoh practitioners sell themselves internationally on the basis of their Japanese identity. Far from enlivening and strengthening Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh, such self-conscious exoticism has added to the distorted and essentialized use of deliberately Japanese materials in the creation of Butoh after Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh.

The Sankai Juku Butoh dance group is but one example of a group created by one of Hijikata's pupils, Ushio Amagutso, that has been criticized for such misappropriation. Amagutso refined the original style of Ankoku Butoh by "removing the tangible and fine folk custom-like details"²⁶⁵ of Japan's agrarian cultural elements. Part of the adaptation by Amagutso may have been necessitated by the difference in spatial and other factors within Western performing venues that radically influences the work.²⁶⁶ The remaining highly theatrical and often exaggerated esoteric elements are seen as a reduction and distillation of the Ankoku Butoh dance, now consisting only in the use of bow-legs and bent postures and a dark aesthetic. It may be said that Sankai Juku refined the contours of the dance in an attempt to achieve internationality, retaining none of the potency of Ankoku Butoh apart from its visual spectacle.²⁶⁷

According to Butoh critic Sakurai, Sankai Juku use Japanese physical expression as an exotic drawcard for their dances.²⁶⁸ To her Sankai Juku has achieved little in "obliterating the outer layer" and the fine details constructed through Hijikata's

²⁶⁵ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁶⁶ It is important to note that, to Hijikata, Ankoku Butoh was most suited to be performed in small spaces, in which the contact between audience and actors is intimate and the gaze of the spectator verges on painful to the dancer. Ashikawa, through her internalization of the gaze, was well suited to such conditions and modes of being. She is arguably unique in her ability to harness the female body to become an object. Her performances are the apogee of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh.

²⁶⁷ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁶⁸ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

Butoh Fu cosmology, which were necessary conditions for Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh. Sakurei also identifies this reductive process in the work of Amagatsu; to her these attempts have proved quite futile and simply "brought to light the emptiness of their practice."²⁶⁹ To Sakurei their approach has little of the integrity of Ankoku Butoh:

They removed the outer layer since they thought it was only an outer layer, then to the contrary, the body underneath became the outer layer, so then the reality and materiality of the body no longer possessed a strong meaning.²⁷⁰

As Roquet points out, Sankai Juku's work is understood both within and without Japanese contexts as part of "essentializing" and "Orientalizing tendencies"²⁷¹ in the development of Butoh dance. Many critics, such as Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Sue Klein, have also derided Sankai Juku "for creating a domesticated, sanitized version of Butoh, lacking the energy and the confrontational character of Hijikata's work."²⁷²

In contrast to Sankai Juku, dancers of Hakutobo like Yoko Ashikawa and the younger Saga Kobayashi chose to face the challenge of continual revolt necessitated by Hijikata's Butoh practice, recognizing the necessity of actively pursuing its dissolution and disappearance in order to never become the "style" of Ankoku Butoh.²⁷³ Sakurei casts a dark shadow on their work:

No matter how they try to dance, they present the reflex influenced body first. By going against their own body movements, from the opposite direction of Hijikata, they may be able to establish a place where the body and form conflict. That is to say, it is completely different from inheriting

²⁶⁹ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁷⁰ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁷¹ Roquet 17.

²⁷² Roquet 45.

²⁷³ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

Ankoku Butoh as a mere traditional performing art. So, I do not think it matters if people like them who stand on a particular footing change the quality of Ankoku Butoh. I think it is an inevitable change.²⁷⁴

Hakutobo's shy character has also kept their version of Butoh out of public sight. With very few performances and no truly active public persona, Hakutobo's work remains in the shadows. The point is not that their work may have more integrity than that of Sankai Juku, but rather that in both cases we see the disappearance of Ankoku Butoh as it once was.

Ankoku Butoh: the confluence between East and the West

One can find Butoh performers and teachers on nearly every continent in the world.²⁷⁵ Contemporary Butoh practitioners across the globe are challenging and exploring mind-body relationships within both the Eastern and Western traditions, and indeed, this confluence of East and West may be essential to the dynamic and continuing relevance of Butoh on a global scale.

Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh authentically and essentially belongs to the Japanese, and yet it is actively pursued in the West. The expansive, dynamic and all-embracing nature of Butoh has made it difficult to develop a critical discourse around the permutations of the dance form in the context of Western performance culture.

In previous chapters I have firmly located the Ankoku Butoh body within a unique, creative dynamic generated between Hijikata and his Japanese social, cultural and physical environment, both in opposition to and in dialogue with Western culture. Hijikata often spoke out against the regulated and dichotomized modern experience: "I abhor a world which is regulated from the cradle to the grave."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

²⁷⁵ Butoh dance had been considered heretic for years in Japan, but in the Western countries Butoh boomed as an original avant-garde dance form. On linking websites such as < <http://www.Butoh.net/define.html>> one can gain an overview of Butoh troupes and individuals from all-over the world.

²⁷⁶ Tatsumi Hijikata in Johannes Bergmark (1991), "Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move,"

As open-ended a cry against authority as this may be, I believe that Hijikata was referring to the way in which life in Japan was changing under the US occupation after the Second World War.

In Chapter 1 I explore the relationship between Japan and the West during the time of Ankoku Butoh's origination. This relationship was a relationship of unequal power, similar to a colonial one. And although there are unique aspects to this relationship that distinguish it from other colonial relationships, the fact remains that "the psychology of the Japan-West relationship resembled in many ways that of colonizer and colonized."²⁷⁷

Postcolonial theory provides a useful perspective from which to view the complex intercultural relations that inform the origination of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh. Adam and Tiffin (1991) see postcolonial theory as having two archives: one is the writing of people whose subjectivities have experienced the influence of colonization; and the other is the writing of those involved in resistance to colonialism, its ideologies, and their present forms.²⁷⁸

In his strategies aimed at subverting the body in performance, Hijikata reconstructed and mobilized the Japanese body in the face of Western modernization and influence, and as such his Ankoku Butoh was also a protest against the dominant modern paradigms of nature, culture, mind and the body. Daniel Charles has argued repeatedly that one cannot understand the work of Tatsumi Hijikata outside of its revolt and strategies of resistance to the modern [Western] condition: "[i]f Butoh has developed starting from ancestral cultural experiences based on the reintegration of the natural order of movements and body positions, it has never ceased to lend to these experiences the meaning of

June 2005, < <http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html> > p 8.

²⁷⁷ William Kelly, " Postcolonial perspectives on Intercultural relations". Th e-journal of Intercultural relations. December 1999 Vol. 2.1. p 4 < [<http://interculturalrelations.com/v2i1Winter1999/w99kelly.htm>] >

²⁷⁸ Adam and Tiffin in William Kelly, " Postcolonial perspectives on Intercultural relations". Th e-journal of Intercultural relations. December 1999 Vol. 2.1. p 4 < [<http://interculturalrelations.com/v2i1Winter1999/w99kelly.htm>] >

a revolt against the power of the West.”²⁷⁹ One might even say that Hijikata’s dance was “a protest against the modern West itself.”²⁸⁰

Yet it is at this point that we must recognize that Hijikata also used and appropriated many elements from the West in the creation of Ankoku Butoh. This is no one-dimensional reaction to oppression: instead, we are confronted with a dynamic mode of resistance that not only opposed the West by itself drawing on an “essentialized” Japanese consciousness, but also appropriated and inverted Western and even colonial strategies of oppression and control in creating its potent critique.

The problem of misappropriation

Within the context of the highly evolved and culturally specific approach to embodiment within Ankoku Butoh, I argue that the Ankoku Butoh body as originated by Hijikata is not directly transferable outside of the Japanese context. What can be stimulated across different cultural contexts is the critical and dedicated spirit with which Hijikata approached the continuous construction and exploration of the Ankoku Butoh body. In the case of Ankoku Butoh the fundamental contrasts in approaches to embodiment between East and West are continually affirmed by a tendency in Western performing arts toward the misinterpretation of exotic Asian performance techniques. Ankoku Butoh in fact mobilizes and uses these very strategies of objectification and othering in achieving its disruption of the relationship between object and subject.

Within the discourse surrounding Butoh, non-Japanese performers and authors either generalize Butoh as ‘Japanese’, or they foreground it as ‘universal’ and assimilate it to other supposedly universal qualities in performance.

Essentializing Butoh’s ‘Japaneseness’ tends to ignore or downplay Hijikata’s

²⁷⁹ Daniel Charles, “The violent Season-La Prefazione” 2002 <http://www.erga.it/edizioni/koss/prefazioneENG.htm>
[Unpaginated]

²⁸⁰ Hisashi Muroi, “Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art” (Art Asia-Pacific vol 3 no.1) Translated by Chiaki Ajioka, 1996 [Unpaginated]

“antagonistic relationship to organized religion and the institutionalized theatre of Noh and Kabuki, and instead employ[s] Buddhist ideas and the concepts of traditional Japanese aesthetics to explain Butoh practice.”²⁸¹

In “Dancing the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of Buto,” Vicki Sanders analyzes Ankoku Butoh using traditional Japanese terminology and continually references Junichirō Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows*. She insists that the “dance is wholeheartedly oriental, from its squat-bodied movement idiom to its spirituality, from its post-Hiroshima rebelliousness to its present-day codification.”²⁸²

The repeated use of cultural stereotypes to elucidate Ankoku Butoh has moreover proved unproductive for performers and audiences alike. In her article on Butoh in America, Bonnie Sue Stein illustrates how Butoh audiences often tend to stereotype the ‘otherness’ of Butoh performances. This results in audiences and performers tending “to accept Butoh at face value, because the dance is ‘Japanese’ and seems to match up with stereotypes about Japanese culture – slow, sparse, ritualistic, non-verbal, passive, incorrigible, and Buddhistic.”²⁸³

Roquet and other scholars identify a similar Orientalism in much of the Western writing on Ankoku Butoh: “For a writer faced with an enigmatic art like Butoh, cultural difference becomes an easy way to explain away any unfamiliar (and possibly unsettling) encounter with the unknown.”²⁸⁴ Edward Said explores the concept in more detail: “A rejection of Orientalism entails a rejection of biological generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices. It is a rejection of greed as a primary motivating factor in intellectual pursuit. It is an erasure of the line between ‘the West’ and ‘the Other.’” Said argues for the use of “narrative” rather than “vision” in interpreting the geographical landscape known

²⁸¹ Roquet 16.

²⁸² Vicki Sanders in Roquet 16.

²⁸³ Bonnie Stein in Roquet 17.

²⁸⁴ Roquet 17.

as the Orient, meaning that a historian and a scholar would turn not to a panoramic view of half of the globe, but rather to “a focused and complex type of history that allows space for the dynamic variety of human experience.”²⁸⁵

The development of Butoh in the international arena has not been a carefully negotiated reconstruction of the Western body according to Ankoku Butoh’s modes of embodiment, but rather a superficial misappropriation. Sakurai maintains that this appropriation occurs at the level of “tracing the shapes” of Ankoku Butoh: this reveals not Butoh, but the reflexes inherent in Western performance techniques and approaches to embodiment.²⁸⁶ It is through returning to the originating impulses of Ankoku Butoh that we can begin to explore conditions necessary for its development. The most important of these was Hijikata’s own spirit and approach to the creation of Ankoku Butoh.

The challenge of continual revolt

The Ankoku Butoh performer’s dance relies on a continual revolt against codification. The notion of radical inversion and continual reconstruction within the body of the Ankoku Butoh performer is of key importance. Inherent in the work of first-generation performers trained by Hijikata is their recognition of the challenge of sustaining the perpetual revolt against codification by returning to the point at which form and content are in continual and dynamic conflict. The conflict between the form and the intention must be perpetuated even if the performance modes differ radically.

I am of the opinion that Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh attempted neither a transcendence of cultural specificity, nor a total return to Japanese corporeal wisdom. Hijikata did not merely appropriate and relive traditional approaches to Japanese embodiment, but also recreated and subverted aspects of the Japanese body through Western and other influences. In this sense Ankoku

²⁸⁵ Danielle Sered, “*Orientalism*” (Fall posts.) 1996, p1 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Orientalism.html>>

²⁸⁶ Sakurai, “The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology.” [Unpaginated]

Butoh was not merely the “tapping of an 'original experience,’”²⁸⁷ but a radical reconstruction and continual revolt. He did not wish to rise above his origins, but rather consistently and critically to reinterpret them. Ankoku Butoh performance cannot therefore be fully understood without reference to its “geographic and cultural provenance.”²⁸⁸ If one is to take Ankoku Butoh performance into any other context, one needs to retain critical insight into the originating cultural impulses, inter-cultural appropriations and dedicated perpetual revolt that gave birth to the specific performance quality.

The relationship between mind and body in Ankoku Butoh

In order to understand Hijikata’s approach to embodiment, we need to foreground key aspects of Japanese consciousness, in particular the way in which no sharp distinction is made between mind and body. In the Japanese paradigm the cognitive or consciousness is not located or controlled in the mind or brain. This is evident in the terminology employed: for instance, the character used for mind is *shin* and the character for body is also *shin*. These characters are often compounded in a word “*shinshin*,”²⁸⁹ which at face value suggests an interrelated unity of mind and body. Secondly the very central principle of *Ki*²⁹⁰ assumes the mind and body to be integrated in a bodily praxis that does not assume “law-like distinctions” like the Western Cartesian binaries.²⁹¹ Western approaches to performance have focused strongly on psychological factors such as character motivation as the driving force for physical action, and has systematically established physical action as inseparable from thought. Within this paradigm the performer has to free him/herself from the mind, and often the art of the performer relies on a desocialization and a return to a state that transcends the mind-body dualism.

²⁸⁷ Muroi, “*Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art*” [Unpaginated]

²⁸⁸ Marshall, “*Bodies Across the Pacific*” 21.

²⁸⁹ Christopher King, “*Japanese Body and the self*” Sociological Sites/Sights, TASA Conference, Adelaide: Flinders University, December 6-8, 2000, p 3.

²⁹⁰ King, “*Japanese Body and the self*” 3.

In contrast, writers such as Muroi theorize that because the Japanese body is inseparable from the mind and culture, it is not treated as a distinct concept in bodily practices such as the performing arts.²⁹² The body does not exist as a concept, but is a given entity that continually generates culture.²⁹³ Muroi insists that in the course of the modernization of Japan, this body was transformed into a concept relating to nature, and that this in effect radically altered Japanese culture. Thus the discourse around the Japanese body must recognize the legacy of colonialism and modernization that underlies the physical experience of the Japanese, particularly during the time of Ankoku Butoh's origination. As Lock has noted, the Japanese body is subject to multiple shifting discourses, shifting views of nature, and constructs around the body, central to which are "debates about the modern and tradition."²⁹⁴ Within these shifting paradigms Ankoku Butoh "attempted to liberate an 'authentic' pre-modern Japanese body from its colonization by the modern paradigms of nature, culture, mind and the body."²⁹⁵

Central to Hijikata's approach was an emphasis and exploration of a new object-subject relationship which subverted and defied Cartesian binaries and the mind-body split. The way in which these categories radically separate the human system of the animate subject and the non-human system of the inanimate object is actively erased in Ankoku Butoh dance. As illustrated in Chapter 2, Hijikata aimed at a total objectification of the body that could lead to transformation of the human form into various things, forms, characters, animals. Hijikata's approach conceptualized the body as a system through which *Ki* as "matter, energy or life force" flows,²⁹⁶ and which is totally disarticulated from the Western association with the disembodied mind.

In Japan, bodily practices are generally described as *Kata*. These *Kata*-

²⁹² Hisashi Muroi, "Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art" 1996 [Unpaginated]

²⁹³ *ibid.*

²⁹⁴ Lock in Muroi, "Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art" 1996 [Unpaginated]

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Hisashi Muroi, "Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art" 1996 [Unpaginated]

cross the boundaries of philosophy and practice in religion, the arts and daily discipline to bring about a conformity of the body. Buddhist religion for example theorizes that since Buddha embodies the Universe, the universe must also be the Buddha's mind and humans as part of this are therefore embodied mind.²⁹⁷

According to King the Kata is a mediation between content and form and not mind and body.²⁹⁸ Kata is thus a simple attempt to manifest the Ki or life force that is already present in bodily practices. The Kata concept thus formalizes a uniquely Japanese approach to integration, a praxis that "consists of correcting of the mode of one's mind by putting the body into the correct posture"²⁹⁹ – which is exactly what Hijikata attempted in Ankoku Butoh.

The unification between content and form is a rare phenomenon in the performing arts. I have no doubt that this state of total becoming was at the heart of Hijikata's quest in the creation of Ankoku Butoh and that Yoko Ashikawa's performances under Hijikata's training were rare instances in which "kata is transcended in true creativity, expressed in the Zen ideal of 'pure action' devoid of reflexive thought."³⁰⁰ Noh virtuoso and theorist Zeami terms this ultimate embodiment that is created by the Noh performer as *Hana* or flower.³⁰¹ This flower is only found in the movements, which are both faithful to and outside of the actor's individual control, as he totally becomes that which he is representing. The beauty of the unexpected actions and movements, which come unconsciously from an accomplished performer, is considered by Zeami to be the supreme flower. This appreciation of action that moves beyond the will is evidenced in many Japanese bodily practices and even in archery techniques.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ King, "Japanese Body and the self" 2.

²⁹⁸ King, "Japanese Body and the self" 3.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Thomas Rimer, and Masakazu Yamazaki, "On the Art of the No Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami" Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p34.

³⁰² Christian Steineck, "The Body as a Medium of Memory" (Philosophy / Japanese Studies; Bonn University, Institute for Research on Modern Japan Journal A) 2000, p12.

To Sakurai, the individuated approach to the body characteristic of Western performance, and the reverence for the personal subject as an expressing individual entity, create an immense barrier to the reception of Ankoku Butoh: "Their bodies somehow cannot become 'objects'. They tend to be flabby."³⁰³ In Western approaches to embodiment we have developed "the assumption that the cognitive and psychological personality has its basis exclusively in the brain."³⁰⁴ In this sense the Western body proves resistant to modes of embodiment in which the individual subject is abandoned and the body is foregrounded as a sentient entity. Sakurai believes that this individuality-driven notion of the mind-body relationship is what results in many Western performers of Butoh resorting to a type of forced mimicry of certain postures and facial expressions that comes across as overly self-conscious or "flabby", as she puts it.

The beauty of the Ankoku Butoh body, then, is not the physical body, nor is it to be found in the physical expression of the individuality of the dancer. Rather, it is the opposite: only when the dancer completely abandons control over his own body and "bends it to the extreme"³⁰⁵ does his body become free. Sakurai sees this quality as lacking in Western performance due to Westerners' "resistance to killing something living...."³⁰⁶ In Ankoku Butoh the body or medium is silenced and completely objectified, the personality and individual will of the performer erased. An accomplished Ankoku Butoh performer reaches a stage in which the body is completely merged with its movements and it is impossible to separate the two. In this paradigm, the body that Hijikata constructed is "a montage" in which "the organic unity of the body is only an illusion: various forces from within and without interact with one another, exchanging information of different wavelengths and combinations."³⁰⁷ The dancer is danced.

³⁰³ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

³⁰⁴ Christian Steineck, "The Body as a Medium of Memory" (Philosophy / Japanese Studies; Bonn University, Institute for Research on Modern Japan Journal A) 2000, p12.

³⁰⁵ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

³⁰⁶ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

³⁰⁷ Hisashi Muroi, "Post-colonial body in contemporary Japanese art" 1996 [Unpaginated]

Embracing the Other

The concept of the Other is important not only in locating the origination of Ankoku Butoh within its socio-political context, but also in illuminating the resistant mechanisms at work in the dance.

For Said (1978), who first popularized the concept of the 'Other' within Western discourse, the West actively manipulated and produced the Orient as its opposite, its other.³⁰⁸ Within this paradigm of 'Othering,' the dominant cultural entity exerts influence over the 'Other' through projecting and affirming certain value judgments on that 'Other.' It is a process that in the postcolonial context sees the Western colonizer constructing his 'Other' as what he is not. In this case the West attributes values of masculinity, democracy, rationality and morality to itself, giving these values power and priority, while it constructs an an orient that is "feminine, sensual, voiceless, backward, and duplicitous."³⁰⁹

Butoh's disturbance of hierarchical relations between mind and body mobilizes this process of 'othering' directly in the creation of the dance. Ankoku Butoh embraces the status of 'the other' for its transformative potential, and strives towards a type of total objectification or 'Othering' of the performer. This turns on its head the power exerted from the dominant position onto the Other as a dominated object. Thus within Ankoku Butoh, the body is neither individual nor particular a result of a state that mobilizes the objectified body to threaten the habitual and socialized modes being of the subject.

Hijikata achieved the objectification of his dancers through a variety of techniques, most notably through metaphorical analogies located within the body called Butoh Fu. The aim of the Butoh Fu is to disrupt the relationship between the dancer's consciousness (or subject) and the body (or object). Hijikata attempted a radical internalization of the conflict between subject and object. He

³⁰⁸ William Kelly, " Postcolonial perspectives on Intercultural relations". Th e-journal of Intercultural relations. December 1999 Vol. 2.1. p 4 < [<http://interculturalrelations.com/v2i1Winter1999/w99kelly.htm>] >

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*

would often refer to this relationship as existing in a state of conflict or confusion. With regard to the sense of objectification that constitutes the Ankoku Butoh body, Hijikata remarked: "I have often had the experience of becoming other than myself."³¹⁰

In Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh this process of othering gains potency through its embrace of the dark and entropic side of bodily expressions. As in the work of Genet, the 'solitude of things,'³¹¹ the fetishism and desperate materiality of the body, are foregrounded and empowered. To both Genet and Hijikata, darkness, degradation and despair offered prisms through which objectification is directed towards transforming the human into something un-human.

In defiance of technique

This ideal of total objectification became more important than establishing any particular technique. In fact Hijikata actively pursued new ways of achieving this state of objectification as a mode of active resistance to "technique." He insisted that his dancers find their own unique path to objectification. He would implore: "scrutinize your own darkness."³¹² Hijikata thus actively questioned technique in creating a dance that could generate spontaneous forms and rhythms that surprise and challenge the very concepts of performance. He used Butoh Fu to consistently blur the relationship between object and subject, so as to disrupt the formalization of expression:

The noise of the silkworms chewing on mulberry leaves is endless – 'jyari-jyari-jyari' – it goes on and on. If the man takes a nap while this goes on he'll gnash his teeth 'giri-giri-giri.' As the silkworms chew on, the sound of their chewing becomes synchronized with the sound of the gnashing of teeth. (...) All the elements are linked to each other. If matters always work

³¹⁰Hijikata, Tatsumi 1928- in Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. *Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh*. TDR: The Drama Review - Volume 44, Number 1 (T 165), Spring 2000, p 54.

³¹¹William Haver, "The Ontological Priority of Violence- On Several Really Smart Things About Violence in Jean Genet's Work", 2004 < <http://them.polylog.org/5/fhw-en.htm> > [Unpaginated]

³¹² Hijikata, Tatsumi 1928- in Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. *Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh*. TDR: The Drama Review - Volume 44, Number 1 (T 165), Spring 2000, p 53.

as they do here, I wonder if dance training is really necessary.³¹³

To put it more succinctly, Hijikata's approach to technique amounted to a perpetual critique in which the performer is liberated through the origination of movement beyond rational understanding or control.

Butoh Fu

In his attempt to achieve the total objectification of the body, Hijikata paradoxically used metaphoric and onomatopoeic language to stimulate his dancers towards a state in which the body is involved in the creation of "metamorphosis instead of metaphors."³¹⁴ Hijikata attempted to mobilize words so as to realize

certain movement concepts, and his words directly described sensations within the dancer's body, as opposed to describing visual images or outward descriptions of body movement. Movement-sensations were originally developed within Hijikata's body and then translated precisely into words.³¹⁵

In *Butoh Fu*, a "word is used as an index to awaken a physical image, a situation in which word creates dance."³¹⁶ So the central function of *Butoh Fu* is to use these images and physicalize them, render them through the body.

In order to present on stage the tension between content and form, Hijikata would mobilize the imagery of his *Butoh Fu* in an attempt to deconstruct the dancer's relationship with his own body:

You begin to move not because you would like to move but because some

³¹³ Hijikata in Johannes Bergmark (1991), "Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move," June 2005, <<http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html>> p 11.

³¹⁴ Sakurai, "The Body as Dance: An Introduction to The Study of Butoh-ology." [Unpaginated]

³¹⁵ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 105.

³¹⁶ Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*" <<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

parts of your body itch you and irritate you. You walk not being led by your will but being forced by something else. Now that your body is completely controlled and governed by numberless hordes of bugs, there's no way but to abandon your ego and dance on the stage without self-consciousness.³¹⁷

After the attack of the bugs Hijikata suggests the dancers imagine physically “eroding sulfuric acid on your skin, sharp needles on your eyeball and odious mucus in your mouth.”³¹⁸ As various aspects of the image are provided in details from various points and perspectives, it becomes hard for the person to relate to them, or indeed to process/administer the directions or imaginary states. Hence, “any possibility of intention for expression is excluded and there appears such a vacant body: a vacant container that keeps obediently accepting the given conditions....”³¹⁹ By means of *Butoh Fu* Hijikata creates a hypersensitivity in his dancers, a state in which “they are forced to dance being possessed by something inevitable alien to their own ego.”³²⁰

Hijikata's *Butoh Fu* words were not meant to guide or direct the dancer, for the words could only be embodied if the body itself was first emptied of personal subjective intentions. As Ashikawa noted:

I saw that existence itself is full of shame. In the face of this shame, I couldn't make even one finger move. It was not a matter of whether I could dance or not. After struggling, I noticed that there was no other way but self-abandonment. At last, I noticed and found where my body was, after I felt the shame of my existence. Therefore, we need a remedy to let our existence become shameful, and the remedy itself is words, existence is driven by words. When the words don't move, the self-abandonment begins.

³¹⁷ Kayo Mikami, *Utsuwa toshiteshintai* [Body as Vessel] (Tokyo: Hashôbô, 1993) [Unpaginated]

³¹⁸ Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*"

<<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

³¹⁹ Kanoko Hata, "Notes for the workshop of "Cry of Asia 3" by A.C.P.C.(Asian Counsel for People's Culture),Philippine, 1998. [Unpaginated]

³²⁰ Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*"

<<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

The word reaches its peak in the condition of self-abandonment. In this condition, the word is embodied little by little. In this phenomenon, the subconscious will also create.³²¹

The end point of this objectification is thus a state in which the Ankoku Butoh dancers “will be transformed to something inevitable on stage without being controlled by reason.”³²²

Butoh critic Eguchi Osamu relates Ankoku Butoh to literary strategies evident in poetry:

Butoh is like poetry in that it, in its very essence, resists the substitutive function in which words are used to express some thing. In poetry, it is the words, in Butoh it is the body – the movement encloses within itself the extreme point which it must seek, while, at the same time, by twisting, jostling, and touching it opens up a symbolic space that enfolds both the reader and the spectator. Needless to say, within that symbolic space, any explanation that takes the form, ‘this means so-and-so’ becomes meaningless.”³²³

In the Western context there is a strong reliance on the word and language, as evidenced in the literary tradition that is the focus of Western performing arts, which assume a distinction between the physical and linguistic. This is a theatre and performance tradition imbedded in the paradigm of opposition between the written text and the execution of such a text. Western performance became far more embodied during the course of the 20th century under the influence of practitioners such as Grotowski, Meyerhold, Antonin Artaud, and Michael Chekov. But this is a recent development in comparison to Japanese approaches

³²¹ Ashikawa in Johannes Bergmark (1991), “Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move,” June 2005, <<http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html>> p 4.

³²² Kayo Mikami, “*Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh*” <<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

³²³ Eguchi Osamu quoted in Susan Blakely Klein, “Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness,” diss., Cornell University, 1988. p 89,90.

to embodiment, in which performers have been using their bodies in a highly specialized way for over 600 years, through forms such as Noh, the quintessential Japanese performing art. It is an approach to performance that assumes a total integration of body and artistic expression, transcending distinctions between form and content.

The Ankoku Butoh dance foregrounds a type of dispersal in which the dancer's will transmogrifies "from something specific into universal nothing." Kayo Mikami (1993) reiterates that this "evolution/revolution occurs not according to the law of cause and effect but according to the providence of Nature It just becomes something else by itself."³²⁴ Within this conception of the Ankoku Butoh body it is impossible to imprison the subject through rational technique, for the body becomes nameless and submerged within its own corporeality. Second generation Butoh performer SU EN likens this to the experience of total becoming, a state in which there are no distinctions between the body and its environment: "When I dance my hands are not hands, my face not face, my feet not feet. My body is part of the environment. The space inside of me and the space around me are one and the same."³²⁵ This state of becoming is realized "the moment it becomes *nothingness* and it starts to revive itself as everything universal."³²⁶ The body in Ankoku Butoh is the object in continual process, "at once always already accomplished at the same time that it is always yet to come and yet neither precedes nor survives its articulation."³²⁷

The gaze and the objectified body.

Nanako Kurihara explores the concept of an external gaze as a conceptual orientation through which Ashikawa internalized her training with Hijikata.³²⁸ For

³²⁴Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh"

<<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

³²⁵Susanna Akerlund in Johannes Bergmark (1991), "Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move," June 2005, <<http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html>> p 8.

³²⁶Kayo Mikami, "Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh"

<<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]

³²⁷William Haver, "The Ontological Priority of Violence- On Several Really Smart Things About Violence in Jean Genet's Work", 2004 < <http://them.polylog.org/5/fhw-en.htm>> [Unpaginated]

³²⁸Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 70.

Ashikawa it is from underneath Hijikata's relentless gaze that the subject hides, diffuses itself and becomes invisible to the spectator. This gaze is a very important aspect of attaining an objectified and 'Othered' body state within Ankoku Butoh and is also a key concept in looking at postcolonial power relations. As Jonathan Schroeder suggests, "to gaze implies more than to look at – it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze."³²⁹

For Hijikata, his dance was not about expressing feelings, but about "being watched, rubbed, licked, and whacked."³³⁰ Kurihara investigates this concept of the gaze in the work of Ashikawa, who has been quoted as saying that her time being choreographed by Hijikata in the small theatre space was similar to "the physical sensation of being chased, surrounded and watched."³³¹ She went on to describe how this awareness manifests in performance: "If you dance halfheartedly, you worry that the audience will get bored. To keep the eyes of the spectators from straying, you develop the perception of being surrounded by eyes that watch every nook and corner of your body."³³² This terrorizing gaze in a way forces the subject to hide itself within the body, to not mediate in the expression of the body. Kurihara observes: "Ashikawa was acutely aware of her body as the object of a gaze, and turned this into a subjective perception in order to achieve a dual state of subject/object."³³³

Through Ashikawa's internalization of the objectifying gaze she created a state of un-mediated and total objectification. Ashikawa used this self-awareness in an attempt to liberate an interiority of the body that dissolved or masked her subjective experience.³³⁴

³²⁹ Jonathan Schroeder, 'Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research'. In Barbara B Stern (Ed.): *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions*. London: Routledge, 1998, p208

³³⁰ Hijikata, "asbesutokan no yosei: ashikawa yoko," in *Bibo no Aozore* (1987) 204. Originally published as a program note for Ashikawa's recital in 1968.

³³¹ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 33

³³² Yoko Ashikawa, "Shintai no naka no 'tasha' o sagasu" [A Search for 'the Other' in the Body: The Present of Ashikawa Yoko and the Hakutobo], *Kikan shicho* [Quarterly Shicho No.7] 1990, p. 162-163.

³³³ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 70

³³⁴ Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing" 35

Johnathan Marshall suggests that the active subversion of the external gaze creates a context in which “the linguistic dispossession of the Japanese by the cultural dominance of the West is turned into physical opposition through the non-verbal expression of Butoh.”³³⁵ The body is realized as a site of resistance through a rehearsal process in which the dancer brings to the surface a physical experience, negating his or her own personal identity in attainment of a more diffused and universal embodiment. The Ankoku Butoh body performs without rational language, repertoire or dichotomous distinctions, without an individual self that can be scrutinized, attacked and alienated. It is a body in a state of resistance to oppression.

The cross-pollination

Ankoku Butoh undeniably drew on a uniquely Japanese model of the body to create a paradoxically transcendent and potent art. The dance has, like many Japanese and Asian arts, become part of the Western performing arts through a legacy of cross-pollination, misappropriation and essentialization. As Roquet puts it: “As Butoh moves into its fourth decade, those seeking to interpret and understand the dance continue to grapple along the edges of its ineffability and trans-cultural complexity.”³³⁶

This trans-cultural dialogue and process of appropriation seems to be an inevitable and global process, and one which continues to open up new vistas for performance in both Eastern and Western contexts. Trans-cultural interactions often have surprising and expansive dynamics that transcend straightforward judgements of exotification and cultural misappropriation. In both its emergence and subsequent history, Ankoku Butoh is a striking example of the kind of dynamic that beggars cultural essentialization.

Antonin Artaud developed his concept of theatre as a ritual with meaning in itself

³³⁵ Marshall, “Bodies Across the Pacific” 15.

³³⁶ Roquet 23.

by observing traditional Balinese performance. His conception of theatre miss-appropriates and exotifies the Balinese performances he saw:

The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigour and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood. This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid.³³⁷

Yet even if he was inaccurate in terms of the detail and codification of the performances, Artaud imbibed the essential significance of the encounter with Eastern theatre, namely its nature as an undifferentiated event in which physical presence is not in any way subservient to the spoken word. This inspired in him a vision of total theatre that was intrinsically true to the nature of Eastern theatre performances, suggesting that appropriation *per se* is not a negative thing, but that it is the vehicle through which and the mode within which it is channeled that are determining factors. Artaud's writings, his conceptions of a theatre of cruelty and the primacy of the body in performance, provided seminal influence on Hijikata and the creation of Ankoku Butoh. Artaud's 1934 text on the Emperor Heliogabalus was, according to Kurihara, the direct inspiration for Hijikata's creation of rebellion of the flesh. Immersing himself in Artaud's writing, Hijikata even wrote an article entitled "Aruto no surippa" [Artaud's Slipper] which is now included in his *Bibo no aozora*.³³⁸ Kurihara underlines the close relationship between Hijikata's seminal performance and Artaud's conception of performance, that this "ecstatic, shocking, violent performance" corresponded to Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty." Hijikata's emphatic decree "I'm cultivating danger..."³³⁹ also echoed Artaud's condemnation of modern Western theatre as being "broken

³³⁷ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre of Cruelty*, in *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (ed. Eric Bentley), Penguin, 1968, p.66

³³⁸ Tatsumi Hijikata, *Bibō no aozora* [Handsome Blue Sky] (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1987), p 3.

³³⁹ Hijikata, Tasumi, in Suzuki Tadashi, *Suzuki Tadashi taidanshu* (Tokyo: Libroport, 1984), p 123.

away from gravity, from effects that are immediate and painful – in a word, from Danger.”³⁴⁰

The relationship between the work of Hijikata and Artaud brings us full-circle in the dialogue between East and West within Ankoku Butoh. This in turn supports the call for a return not to the cultural specificity of Butoh, but rather to the originating impulses and spirit of Tatsumi Hijikata.

The Ankoku Butoh body in performance should not be treated as an unproblematic, transparent device, but as a richly layered, complex unit. One may be able to extract and appropriate certain strategies and mechanisms within Ankoku Butoh’s origins and mobilize these in contemporary contexts and bodies to create a new spirit of revolt. Marie-Gabrielle Rotie, in her own arguments towards a universalizing of Ankoku Butoh, believes that the individual physical response of the performer can “transcend any culturally specific reading,” and “create the possibility of a truly international and contemporary dance.”³⁴¹

Contemporary Western dance communities have adopted this notion, with the result that “Butoh has maintained popularity for several decades now and is a familiar source of inspiration even for choreographers outside the Butoh genre.”³⁴² Rotie has not entirely abandoned Ankoku Butoh’s originating impulses, however, and she balances her argument for the universalization of Butoh with a recognition of the vital force of its origin: “The creative development of Butoh by European practitioners depends on an awareness of the impulses from which it was born.”³⁴³

The Japanese dance critic Goida Nairo roots Butoh within its Japanese context, arguing that “Butoh has brought our aesthetically deformed human body back to its original and innate state by evaluating our ‘bow-legs and shrunken limbs’ as they are, and made them ‘the eternal state of the universe.’”³⁴⁴ These Japanese

³⁴⁰ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (trans. M.C. Richards) (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 42.

³⁴¹ Marie-Gabrielle Rotie in Roquet 19.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Marie-Gabrielle Rotie in Roquet 20.

³⁴⁴ Goida nairo in Kayo Mikami, “*Deconstruction of the Human Body from a Viewpoint of Tatsumi Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh*”

models of the body, combined with Hijikata's creative energy and appropriation of Western philosophy and theorists, realized in Ankoku Butoh a body that perpetually regenerates its own becoming, a body which is inalienable and free from a synthesis of differing influences and cannot become a derivative reflection of dichotomies and dialectics. The Ankoku Butoh body is sentient and stubborn in its defiance of codification and as such can only be left to its own devices, outside of rational thought.

I have argued that the recognition of Ankoku Butoh's originating impulses is essential to developing a Butoh body that is true to its ineffability and trans-cultural complexity. I have suggested that while the Ankoku Butoh body in its becoming and objectification moves 'beyond language,' it certainly does not exist outside of culture. Only by recognizing the cultural specificity and originating impulses of the Ankoku Butoh body can one hope to communicate, through a type of re-engineering, a physical presence on the international stage that mobilizes similar performance strategies. Through the awareness of the originating impulses and cultural context of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh, Western performers, theorists and audience members can situate themselves in relation to the work with more integrity and clarity.

Conclusion

A return to the originating impulse is essential in the development of Butoh beyond the Ankoku Butoh body. Hijikata mobilized the Ankoku Butoh body in radically confronting codification. In the process he excavated and recreated a cosmology unleashed through the Ankoku Butoh body. Within the context of the "perpetual revolt"³⁴⁵ generated by Hijikata in embodiment, the aesthetic strategies of Ankoku Butoh are implicated in an intervention in the construction of the Japanese body and identity – but are not confined to the Japanese alone.

<<http://w01.tp1.jp/~a150397531/etude/deconst.html>> [Unpaginated]
³⁴⁵ Roquet 67.

The dynamic excavation and perpetual reconstruction at the core of the dance is exemplified in the life and work of Hijikata and is essential to understanding the Ankoku Butoh dance and the particular revolt which gave birth to it. For Hijikata dance always started with the rigorous exploration of his body, and it is to this point of conflict and confrontation with the socialized body that he himself and his students.

While the Ankoku Butoh body is culturally and geographically specific, the actual dance performances have become largely transcendent of their origins and the Ankoku Butoh artist is not a captive of his or her ethnography. Butoh dancers within a contemporary context constitute a diverse range of practitioners who draw on an incalculable array of sources to inspire and re-energize this resistance.³⁴⁶ Butoh has a visceral and palpable effect on audiences, a result of the transformation and subversion of the accepted functioning of the body.

Eguchi Osamu (1987) describes this experience as a type of rebirth and return to a point of origin: "What I saw on that stage was a world in which words and things had not yet been differentiated; in short, I beheld the dawn of the world."³⁴⁷ The universality of Butoh in performance is unquestionable and at the same time unquestionably dependant upon the dedicated construction and continual deconstruction of a resistant model of the body.

As I have shown in previous chapters, Ankoku Butoh drew on Japanese corporeal wisdom and Western philosophy alike, combining the two into a potent critique of the modern. While Hijikata attempted to tap the subconscious landscape of the body, he did not simply do this in an attempt to rekindle a Japan of the past. He went beyond the then popular advocacy of a return to Japanese nationalist values, and created a dance that has become a highly potent

³⁴⁶The first performance of Butoh I saw was a dance by the Su En Butoh company entitled *Fragrant* in April 2005. The dance rendered me defenseless in the presence of the bodies of the dancers. These bodies mobilized energetic qualities that engaged my passive body on an elemental level and brought to me visions of the darkest nature. All the performers were from Europe and not a single one of them had trained under a first generation Japanese Butoh performer or teacher. The power of this performance was testament to the potential of Butoh outside of the East.

³⁴⁷ Eguchi Osamu quoted in Susan Blakely Klein, "Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness," diss., Cornell University, 1988, p 89.

proponent of body consciousness, influencing Western performing arts and ultimately receiving more acclaim outside Japan than within.

Still, the central premise remains that the intervention and reconstruction of the body is essential in the transmission of Ankoku Butoh. Standing in the way of the development of Butoh in contemporary contexts is not only its complex cultural context, but also the extreme self-investigation and reconstruction of the body the dance necessitates.³⁴⁸ This process requires a continual and relentless self-confrontation and a dedication to bodily practice and training. Apart from absorbing aspects of the cross-pollination between Eastern and Western modes of embodiment, very few performers have realized Ankoku Butoh in and through their bodies. As Susanna Åkerlund suggests, "Although many people tried to establish the Hijikata myth, they don't know the nameless nature of humankind, self-abandonment, and sacrifice."³⁴⁹

The creation of the Ankoku Butoh by a Western performer may be elusive, yet what has emerged in the course of this research is an intimation of a terrain in which the revolt within the Ankoku Butoh body may be realized anew. Hijikata mobilized Ankoku Butoh as a perpetual revolt against codification. By returning to this point of continual revolt between content and form within embodiment, Ankoku Butoh can act as a primary site for the exhumation of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh body for its repossession in contemporary trans-cultural performance. In fact Ankoku Butoh's eclectic and dissonant origination may be the very impulse that could quicken its appropriation and transference.

Drawing on Western proponents of revolt such as Artaud and Genet (who had themselves found profound congruence in Eastern modes of embodiment), Hijikata developed his Butoh through radical modes of cross-appropriation and

³⁴⁸My professional experience dancing and training with a Western Butoh teacher trained by the first generation master Yoko Ashikawa has been a most revealing experience. I experienced such radical confrontation and re-construction in training with the SU EN Butoh Company. Far from affirming an inability in the art of becoming, it has actively encouraged a similar process of continual conflict between the content and form within my own embodiment as performer.

³⁴⁹Susanna Åkerlund in Johannes Bergmark (1991), "Butoh – Revolt of the Flesh in Japan and a Surrealist Way to Move," June 2005, Online. Available: <<http://www.musiker.nu/frim/Butoh.html>> 7.

even counter-colonization. This did not result in the misappropriation of that which is 'other' (as is often evident in the contemporary Western appropriation and adaptation of Japanese Butoh), but instead embodied a delicate and complex integration between the appropriator and the appropriated: a dynamic that holds the potential for authentic integration and trans-cultural embodiment within Butoh.

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