

# **<sup>1</sup>“Putting your tongue out in the rain”**

## **Butoh Dance : An Essay**

### **Forward**

Defining Butoh is not easy. In doing so, there is the danger of indelibly marking the power of transformation which is at the very centre of this art. I remember how amused the Butoh dancers were when Westerners struggled to find a definition. I remember also their opposition to the argument of rationality which, in their view, emasculated their art.

Butoh was always elsewhere. Of course. It was something else. It was different.

In support of the “truth” approach I shall “describe”, without too many explanations, the aspirations of this avant-garde dance movement in its Japanese context.

I have tried to record haphazardly observations and souvenirs, feelings and atmosphere, which will perhaps recreate the movement of experience. Accordingly I have chosen not to follow a chronological order. For that reason the text below unfolds like the phases of a rehearsal. Every day I come across a passage written the previous day. I reread it to continue and modify the way memory is expressed. I then add ideas which arise in the movement of introspection woven into the idea which I pursue at a given time. I know from rereading myself that this can confuse because the head and the tail are sometimes missing. But must we read it like a sort of exquisite corpse, a game played by the Surrealists.

This was how Butoh was seen. Sometimes “too”slow, often “too” long, incoherent -why not ?-grotesque, pathetic, outsize and out of circuit in Japan, especially-funny, provocative, aesthetic looking or sublime -but inevitably moving. Since the sixties, each decade has revealed different aspects of its development up against the society with which it was in revolt. Over the years, the economy

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the text of the preface to the piece written by the author for the Brazilian work : “Butoh:dança veredas d’alma” by Maura Baiocchi, ed. Palas Athena

has improved, ideals have lost their meaning, principles have become more liberal, the consumer society's relationship with the world is no longer special it is poorer and sclerotic. And so the eighties, the so-called "soap bubbles", brought their influence to bear on the creative spirit in all fields of art. But so far the ongoing rebellion of the Butoh dancers shows through like a water mark.

My attention centres mainly on Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, the two forerunners and the two sides of this avant-garde dance movement, as well as on their earliest pupil, Natsu Nakajima, who introduced me to the world of Butoh. But it goes without saying that it is imbued with surrealism, expressionism, pop'art as much as with Nietzsche Jean Genet, Lautréamont, the Marquis de Sade, Bellmer, Egon Schiele and even flamenco. The unbridled creative artists who performed Butoh in the sixties had not lived in the West and had little or no contact with foreigners. They had studied with those who had bourgeois students of the stage stars in Europe, Mary Wigman or Harald Kreutzberg. Ohno Kazuo's dance was revealed to him at Tokyo's Imperial Theatre when he saw Antonia Merce, called «La Argentina», in the twenties.

Of course they had the opportunity after the war to see American soldiers move into their country and to judge their stature or behaviour. But they met the Foreigner mainly through numerous books whose translations served as nourishment and aid for interpretations. These nourishing influences came together in their sensitive world, their common memory, their search for identity, mixed with daily experience, the rhythm and form of their own culture. Seated on their tatami, drinking tea and warm saké, eating in a plethora of tiny vessels dishes of incomparable flavours, nodding whilst talking to give rhythm to the to and fro of their conversations, laughing and agreeing, comparing tirelessly East and West, as though afraid of losing their collective memory. From their childhood they were steeped in legends, myths, winds, fears, smells and seasons. They appreciated beauty, lunar as well as culinary beauty. They hardly ever touched and greeted each other with a bow. Old men, sometimes dressed

in a kimono, dragged their feet on *zori*. Women of that class often looked independent, strong and hardened by life but their service was always that of shufu, housewives.

***°zori<sup>2</sup>: high-soled flip-flops made of wood with a leather or fabric strap.***

It is impossible to translate the atmosphere, in any language.

And, in this universe the daily round transforms our very existence, by mimicry. And it was beneficial to us foreigners, *gaijin*<sup>3</sup>, to realise how free the other is. How different. Absolutely. Irreversibly. Painfully. Not the same. At all.

I remember this conversation on foreign-ness with the friend who was 13 years older than me and who was introducing me to Butoh. One day, she said to me out of the blue - half-laughingly - that she would never have thought until she met me that it was possible to become the friend of a foreigner ! I remember how taken aback i was, also that I laughed, but asked with astonishment : "A human being, like you are, surprised ?". She replied that what was evident to me was not evident to them ! The Japanese thought that white people were barbarians, therefore different from the Japanese as human beings. When she was young and her mother told her off for being disobedient, she was threatened with being snatched away by The Big White Man. They lived on an island and that was a fact. Even if Japan was not exactly the same, exterior influences were undeniable and they still remained different.

And so I unwittingly learned the fish I ate was Japanese.

## **The Context of Experimentation**

The first Butoh dancers studied classical or modern dance. They

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<sup>2</sup> High-soled wooden flip-flops with a leather or fabric strap

<sup>3</sup> from *gai* exterior and *jin* human – term sometimes used pejoratively

knew intimately the numerous street, shows, including the shinto festivals which measure the passage of time. And thus, enriched with these rites and controlled stage performances, they reaffirm their resistance to propriety and the repression of a bland society which hides the signs of wildness and the untamed.

Above all they are rebels. They provoke. Unclothed, dressed up, disjointed. They are explorers of the outer reaches of meaning, of the senses, of flesh. They are also full of despair. Impotence is sublimated by the ritual of passion, ugliness, horror or violence. Experience outstrips the circumstances of a given time.

During the first *pa-fu-mansu*, spontaneous performances in the town streets in turmoil or elsewhere: genuine meetings, interchanges of synergy between artists and intellectuals spin their web of thought. They enrich it. They dazzle the creative movements and spur on the need to give meaning and memory to history. No one could indicate at that time where Butoh was going because it did not pretend to be a political party.

In 1959, at the Vith young dancers' festival organised by AJADA°, Hijikata presented « Kinjiki »<sup>4°</sup> inspired by a novel by Mishima. The dance lasted 5 minutes. In it a chicken's neck locked between his legs and in the distance a male partner, whose running noises can be heard in the darkness, suggesting the sexual and the forbidden acts which go together. According to the acclaimed Butoh dance critic, Godo Nario, Hijikata "was driven by the desire to shake up the prevalent apathy, to break the unspoken, silent agreement between choreographer and audience, to reinstate a dialogue between body and dance." Of course a tremendous scandal broke out. Mishima was invited back when Kinjiki was restaged. And he paid tribute to Hijikata, which contributed to making his reputation with his contemporaries. "Hijikata Tatsumi is getting ready once again to celebrate his heresy and to worship; he secretly invited me to be present... In my eagerness to attend, I am thinking of putting up a masque of shadows, of bringing mysterious spices and a cross bearing the obscene effigy of Christ wreathed in smiles."

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<sup>4</sup> "Abstinence" translates "Forbidden Colours" for Hijikata's show.

The public demonstration of interest shown to the dancer by the great writer no doubt encouraged avant-garde circles of the time. Indirectly it was a favourable influence on Butoh activity and its long-term survival. It meant that Butoh was part of the Japanese theatre world.

**°“All Japan Artistic Dancing Association” which later became “The Modern Dancing Association.**

**°Inspired by “Jeux Interdits ” - “Forbidden Colors” is the English name of the performance by T. Hijikata.**

**°Yoshito Ohno, the young son of Kazuo Ohno.**

### **“The Last Supper of the Ego” in Butoh**

*“Real avant-garde theatre is rooted in a tradition at the same time as it is in opposition, in constant confrontation.”°*

Traditionally in Japan, to suppress the ego, a student followed existing practice imitated the form of his elders. But in the XXth century, dance was meant to be free and creative. Although contemporary, Butoh is derived from Zen, Buddhism and Tao, which condition its relationship with the ego and its meaning of strictness and collective responsibility.

The ego must be forgotten : it must be replaced and make place for the other self, which is always immediately present.

Remove the references to real life. Butoh is an organic movement and kills the body to give birth to the flesh. The flesh is where multiple consciousness is conceived : biological and cultural, historical and contemporary, individual and collective. They are all demons of the flesh. Surreptitiously Butoh is the very meaning of movement and the emotion engendered by it. The result is not the aim. The purpose of a spectacle concerns the audience For the dancer - and for the thinker - the journey is the goal. Every moment is preparation.

What we have is a world with no pretexts or excuses, without

extenuating circumstances, free of capricious impulses. Pain, suffering, humiliation, difficulty, deprivation have a future only in exceeding the limits and isolation. Without any illusions. Dream and make-believe are the only down pipes which lead to the state of purity

**°“Theatrical Alternatives”, interview with Ogino Suichiro, cultural attaché of the Japan Foundation. He has contributed to making Butoh known overseas**

**°It is important to understand the term “demon” which appears several times in the text. It is used not in the Christian sense but in the Greek way. Daimon means protective spirit as well as spiritual force.**

For this purpose the bodies of the majority of Butoh dancers are painted white. The colour of no colour. Everything emerges from it, reverberates, and is reflected in the eye of the beholder. Although white is well known in Japanese aesthetics, in female cosmetics in traditional theatre, this white is different. It is the white of the palimpsest. It is a mixture of flaking degradation, birth and rebirth, breathing in and out repeatedly, tearing and rending successively. The skin itself is no longer that of the dancer. His identity is a mere show bound to disappear. Dance will strip him to reveal the Other. Is it the world ?

The commitment to Butoh is the way forward. Training is life teaching, its link to the world, its red thread. Copying a shape, imitating or illustrating it, expressing real time are so many processes for Butoh to be absolutely different. Two concepts are expressed clearly : the *kata*, popular in every discipline in Japan for teaching, is a didactic tool, form devoid of personal expression ; and the *katachi*, an individual form which shows the very existence of the artist and promotes his personal expression. These two approaches, opposite in appearance, are to be understood as two tracks which must bring about transcendence. Thus Butoh examines traditional forms of dance, classical and modern, western and eastern, to work out its own vision of dance and dancing where the ego has to be eaten root first to make room for the final moment when space and time are one. The “last supper of the ego” is the final act of giving birth in the flesh to the holistic being, as indefinite and human matter containing

awareness of the whole of creation-animal, vegetable, mineral and cosmic - in the space and time of movement.

### ***Intelligence of the bodies***

For the Butoh dancer of the eighties, the soloist in particular, it was not a question of showing "his vision of life, but the picture of his life and the intelligence of his body. This dancer acts, with all the diversity inherent in subjectivity" like a mirror before which each spectator takes his turn to be face to face with himself. "°He urges individuality to be transcended to reach universality, certain in the knowledge that the revelation of the ego can be a hindrance.

Butoh training consists of tickling the mental space by creating leads and lags between the phrasing of gesture, movement and music. Light is mainly in the service of darkness and *its* settings. Not to light the stage but to point to what is hidden. The transcendence of mental space allows itself to be crossed by all the cosmogonic polarities. Inherent intelligence colours the place of experience and irrigates the presence of the dancer, unaware of consciousness and creative work. Whilst denuding the cells of the flesh, the dancer must travel in the vacuum of his inner conscience to enliven every part of his body, to rouse its many facets and to liberate them even at the cost of disequilibrium, discord and the lack of harmony. Similarly, like the Taoist principle of yin and yang, feminine and masculine, ugliness and beauty, round warmth and distant coldness are embodied in the same shapeless principle of movement without moral judgment. The ability to transform matter by drawing on the original cosmic awareness of the body is one of the riches of Butoh teaching.

Riches and their methodology : when a dancer wants to move to his right he usually points his body to the right, thus marking a conventional approach to equilibrium and harmony.

If the head and arms move one way and the torso and legs another, the same body is subjected to two diametrically opposite instructions. This disequilibrium makes an evident impossibility worse. The result is a grotesque situation.

On the other hand, if the body allows each part to find its own inner coherence, then a hand will dance its dance, the torso will make its own movement and so on with the neck, head, eyes, and tongue : a great cosmic cacophony in the search for times gone by. For the creation of the world lives in every cell, each tiny part contains the whole of Everything. The body shatters the thrust of existence with its rhythmic movements. It changes position and habits, becomes disjointed and incorporates facets of the non-visible which filter into the space of reality. That is why space takes on another dimension. It is no longer certain that the space between the spectator and dancer infers a clear difference. When the spectator is struck, he resists, forgets himself, is subjugated. Irritated and annoyed, he thinks, takes a hold on himself and dives again into the atmosphere where "difference fills the space between the watcher and watched without cancelling each other out."° There are contact times-are these contacts real ? - where the spirit escapes to return to the light of reality and its differences.

The spectator is led a dance.....

That is why a Butoh "performance" is as trying as a period of meditation for the layman. It can inconvenience, calm, annoy, delight-and in the darkness of the assembly rooms, a public of stoic spectators, huddled together, sitting on small cushions, kneeling, cross-legged on the bare floor, suffer from cramp, back-ache, meaning which cannot be seen immediately and time which stretches out without reference points...

But Butoh space-time is quintessentially a spiritual dimension. Not really a moment of trance but dedication to the other side of daily life. Metaphysically in art also. Space is not associated with the material dimensions of the place or the fullness of the gesture. The body stiffens, contracts or unbends. It opens all the spatial limits to leave real time to go back to original time, to creative infinity. It is improvisation, rather than method, that make the spatial and temporal elements of a particular body collide. It emerges from the various memories which take possession of the flesh. The images associated with feelings, like the language of

thought, give body to movement. The process of improvisation allows subjective space to be criss-crossed, to launch a vapour trail on a trajectory, experienced a thousand times over, and yet endlessly renewed.

In the seventies, when the companies were constituted, under the directorship of Tatsumi Hijikata, there was a gradual formalisation of experimental stage work. They drew on fiction which was archaic, primitive and lacking any moral code. The spectator had to be disoriented, moved to the outer limits of the bearable. Everything denied, stifled, held down, mutilated by society had to be made visible "by depriving it of the ability to live, the mystery of the *petite mort*.

And so the Butoh authors were fascinated by the literary and visual ingredients, such as *The Rolls of Hell's Torments*. Or more recently the news item which stirred up passions when Abe Sada was sentenced in 1936 for killing her lover by cutting off his sex. Oshima made a film (*The Empire of the Senses*) of the book when she was released and the photographer Hosoe Eiko took portraits of Tatsumi Hijikata in the presence of Abe Sada. She was then an old wrinkled lady who had become, without her knowing it, the last symbol of the morbid magic of passion.

The declared exploration of all these shady areas had the same theme: death and erotism as a possession. Was it a decisive break with «centuries of refinement and dogma<sup>5</sup>. Was it a question of finding again the primitive body and recovering a living meaning of individual freedom, stripped naked in its terrible statement of impotence.»

### **Ankoku Butoh : Butoh of the shadows**

Yoshida Yoshie, the intellectual and avant-garde art critic, said that you can find «the marks of resistance to forced modernization in the term Ankoku Butoh. The ideogramme *bu*, which can also read *mai*, suggests the dance of the Shaman priestesses of antiquity, the *miko*, who whirled and turned for the

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<sup>5</sup> Théo Lésoualch

rain to fall, or the *tamafuri*, movements and shaking of Shaman bodies in a trance. It also suggests placing oneself in the clearing of another world, a world different from everyday life, or going into a supernatural world. It is therefore a movement which encourages non-verbal communication with the universe. On the other hand, the character to represents the trampling down of the ground, that is the action of summoning up the forces of the earth spirits or the will to shake the world. (...) To call the earth forces, all the earth's energy must be concentrated under the foot. As for the term *ankoku*, the shadows, it refers to the origin of the world which belongs to darkness and is rejected by the light of modernity. It refers also to the world of the subconscious revealed to us by the surrealists »<sup>60</sup> At that time there was little theory about the notion of "shadows". But those who resisted this praise of shade, this glorification of darkness, were exasperated by it. And so the West retained only the name Butoh as a sort of "first name." But the missing meaning disfigures the intention, its scope, cuts it off from its roots, reduces it to the world of aesthetics, to be a dance style. And yet "its shamanic and therapeutic<sup>7</sup> aspect is meant to address the whole of human existence's dimensions. And that was its greatest peculiarity.

In the eighties we lived in a bland Japan. Censorship air blew the pubic hairs where they were to be found. There was a smoothness in speech. And of necessity dialogue was flat and without waves. We would have preferred to tickle the shadows and to play with *suzano-wo* the brother of *Amaterasu*, the « Venerable-divinity-which-shines-in-the-sky».

### **The world and « Procreation” : Omikami Amaterasu: the « Venerable-divinity-which-shines-in-the-sky”<sup>o8</sup>**

Original chaos was pear-shaped. In the beginning, seven generations of invisible gods were born in it. In the seventh

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<sup>6</sup> Extract from an unpublished text for the future French edition of “ Shades of Darkness”by Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sékiné

<sup>7</sup> Taken from notes written by Natsu Nakajima

<sup>8</sup> Story inspired from versions of the following workz:”Eroticism in Japan” unfortunately out of print; “Kojiki: chronicle of ancient things” ed. Maison Neuve et Larose; and “Japanese Mythology” by Nobuhiro Matsumoto

generation, that of Izanami-Izanagi<sup>9</sup>, the isles of Japan were formed together with the elements, trees, plains, and mountains. In great pain, Izanami gave birth to the god of fire, her last born. A great many other kami or divinities continued to be born despite terrible suffering. This included vomiting, urinating and defecating. The god and goddess of Clay and the goddess of Water were among the offsprings. And finally Izanami died exhausted.

Fire, the destructive plague of the countryside and harvests, was said to be responsible. It is associated with Pain, which engenders decomposition, and with the signs of morbidity which haunt the flesh. Their lack of purity will be, for Shintoism, the main theme of an infernal vision stripped of any inkling of wrong - and consequently of atonement.

« It is a kingdom of the dead, that horrible kingdom of Yomi, which illustrates that pessimistic idea, the foundation of Japanese thought, of unjustified punishment, the infallible tribute of life. This fall from grace is potentially with Man from birth.» In place of physical defilement, removed from any notion of wrong, Shintoism invented purification, an essential ceremony in its ritual.

After many mishaps in hell with the ghost of his wife, Izanagi went to the mouth of the river to wash his clothes. Afterwards a number of divinities were born. The most famous in the Shinto cosmogony was Omikami Amaterasu, the "Venerable-divinity-which shines-in-the-sky". From the left eye of his father is born the shining image of the sun to rule the Upper-Plains-of-the-Sky and from his right eye the "Venerable-Moon-Auditor" to rule the night. Amaterasu, who is represented as a kind and indulgent divinity, presides over agricultural work. And there, a host of *kamis* and *onis* ferret about. They are good or bad demons, ill-intentioned or just mischievous, which ceremonies and Shinto offerings try to allure or satisfy. From pictures representing them these *kamis* and *onis* live everywhere : in natural elements, even

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<sup>9</sup> Literally " which seduce each other"

in the most common place objects. They spring from everyday needs of life and the relations of man with his universe.

Amaterasu's brother, Suzanu-wo, «Venerable-Male-Powerful-Swift», was born from the nose of his father. He was a temperamental and impetuous character. He was suddenly taken by the urge to do evil. He cut up the hindquarters of a horse and threw them at the Tapestry Workers in the sky through a hole in the roof. One of these was so frightened she pricked her sexual organs with a bodkin and died. Amaterasu was so infuriated that she immediately withdrew to a rocky cave in her celestial kingdom. And thus, the Upper-Celestial-Plain grew dark and the Country-in-the-middle-of-the-Reed-Field was covered with shadows. Countless disasters occurred. Then hordes of kami gathered together in Calm-Celestial-River, to reflect on how to make her decide to bring back her light to the world. They consulted the soothsayer and prepared the sacred offerings. They collected the cocks with the long crow that goes on forever and made them call out. They had an enormous mirror made and summoned Ama no Uzume, Venerable-Female-Celestial. She stood before the cave and, having decorated her hair and arms, brandished a lance woven with bamboo, jumped into a basin and drummed her feet on the bottom. As she danced, possessed of the holy spirit, she showed the tip of her breast and slipped off her clothes to reveal her whole body and her sexual organs. At this sight eight million *kamis* roared with laughter which immediately rang out throughout the Upper-Celestial-Plain. This roar of laughter brought Amaterasu out of her cave. She could no longer control her curiosity and so she half-opened the door of her hideaway and asked who was causing the hilarity. Ama no Uzume replied : «We are celebrating the presence of a divinity more noble than you, Your Majesty !» The mirror was slipped in the gap between the door and the rock and, oh surprise, Amaterasu saw a radiant face that was no other than her own. She wanted to see more but the kami of Strength caught her by the wrist on the outside whilst the door to the cave was being closed behind her. And so there was light in the world again.

But what is this primeval laugh associated with the sight of the female sexual organs ?

The woman who threatens from her freezing hole (abyss) in the rocks. The organs which attract and which are rejected with great laughter. Legend readily records the laughter of the man who is shown as a last resort the sexual organs of the pursued woman. This is *daiji tokoro* : «important spot». Thus the man paralysed by his own laughter lets the woman escape. At the same time, if laughter is caused by the sight of these organs, then it really is the laughter of the assembled *kamis* which forces the sun goddess to leave her den. Laughter calls on life. It gives light. But if laughter protects man from the shadows, it also cuts him off from "a dimension of the sublime". For laughter in Japan is often defensive. According to the anthropologist Kinkuchi, the verb *warau* was identical to the verb *harau* : "to free from evil by letting go". Laughter would be a salutary, strengthening catharsis as sex is the affirmation of human vitality.

What is this dance of Venerable-Female-Celestial, premeditated, erotic, provocative, improvisation, constructed like a performance ? Would it be a Butoh of the very beginning ? There is no doubt, when we watch films of the first years of Butoh, that the myths and beliefs of ancestral Japan are invested in their bruised bodies.

### **Dance, the flame of the original fire which cannot be extinguished**

That is what I learned when I watched Natsu Nakajima dance : the softness of her movements of suspension, meditation, surprise. I was often asked to sit in on a dancer's first steps and I watched in silence.

It was a sort of *zabuton*<sup>10</sup> dance. That was what I called it for, without flinging round one's arms about, the tension of the slightest gesture attracted the attention of all - animal, vegetable, feminine, masculine rolled into one. The ghost and the human.

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<sup>10</sup> Square wide flat cushion offered for sitting on the tatami

Presence. Evanescence.

It was not necessary to use all the space available for the dance to be danced to the full. I understood when I watched Natsu Nakajima dance.

Dance is in the tension of being there and opens every dimension at the same time. It is not a question of corporeal confrontation with exterior space. «There is movement when one enters into synergy with one's inner space. Thus space is incorporated in the body to merge with the exterior.»<sup>11</sup> The shortage of space forces one to draw on one's own resources and to intensify one's power of expression. And size strengthens the inner force of dancers who are generally small. Artistic forms are imbued with this awareness in Japan. The notion of "degree" is to be found in the term *kakucho*. It is used for the dancer « who has been able to outstrip or overcome his human state, whose gestural expression has reached a higher degree of spirituality.»<sup>12</sup> One of the conditions for obtaining the "degree" is grandeur, *okisa*, which depends on neither the size of the dancer nor on the gestural projection of dance into space, but on the subtlety of techniques for allowing access to a surprising breadth of dance and its presence.

Between strong tension and total release, the repetition of the gesture or the movement entralls the gaze. Within the boundaries of the *zabuton*, dance seems nevertheless to extend and spread. Butoh is the experiment of connecting polarities in series : space is not filled by fullness but by the filling of emptiness. Contraction, condensation, relaxation (slackening ?) ...

### **The sayings which kept me company... which accompanied me**

Natsu said that it is useless to leap and bound about to show off one's verticality : «Look how small I am. And yet Butoh allows me to appear disproportionately tall, as I please. Have you noticed how

<sup>11</sup> Lecture in English by Natsu Nakajima at Taipei University

<sup>12</sup> From the book translated by Don Kenny "Buyo" by Gunji Masakatsu, critic, writer and teacher at the University of Waseda

my legs are curved ?» It is true. The space between the knees and the ankles forms a tulip's corolla. With a twinkle in her eye, she told me her secret : «Haven't you ever noticed ? Well, Butoh training allows me to appear just as I wish! I can cheat. That's how I train dancers for the cabaret. The body is a tool and we can transcend it. The whole of reality can take shape in it. As Butoh dancers we know our bodies well. For the Japanese, it would be ridiculous to leap around like a gazelle, to dance on points and to lift the legs very high as classical dance would have it. Our legs are short , our pelvis is low , we look ridiculous when we imitate you. We had to find other means, other techniques. The Western Christian's movement is always upwards. He looks for an answer in the sky. Our centre of gravity is low and we derive our energy from the earth.»

How often did I hear these phrases ? I remembered them when I met Japanese avant-garde practitioners who, through their films, photographs, arts, literature, theatre and dance - Oshima, Yoko Tadanori, Hosoe Eiko, Terayama Shuji, Hijikata Tatsumi - projected a vision, often infernal, of the body, of sex and of eroticism. It was a sort of relief. Eroticism was, as it were, a possession, decadent, sacred.

The sizes and specific morphology of the dancers are Japanese. But the truth of Butoh rings through all bodies. What causes the oddness? The fact that the conscious and unconscious are mixed up without restriction, without judgment and without morality. Morality has no currency in the teaching of Butoh.

Dimming is enlightenment is dimming...

"Temptation" takes the place of "desire" as a foundation. « The idea of rationality is fundamentally western. That is what separates us.» In the country of Butoh, meaning stretches, doubles up, rises with delicate cruelty in order to rediscover innocence. Here, purity can only emerge from the debris.

**«Natsu»-«Nakajima », ideogrammes : «summer - at the heart of the island»**

When I saw Natsu Nakajima dance for the first time, we had already become friends. Before then I had heard her recall, nostalgically, the past when the history of Butoh was just beginning, and hers also as part of it. She did not talk of dance as we do in Europe. It was more a dance current and identity was very much at stake : it seemed to express a need to survive. Paradoxically, Butoh seemed an attempt to make avant-garde a tradition. And at the same time we happened to feel a certain dogmatic, nationalistic sectarianism. Butoh was its own party. And the internal political relationships were so complex that we wandered about without any confidence.

I regretted that she had given up dancing. But in spring 1982, she decided to rehearse again<sup>13</sup> for an old production with a dancer of hers, Lili. She needed somewhere to rehearse. Anywhere.

At my place.

I was, I remember, curious, expectant and excited.

I was completely unable to breathe. My youth was hanging from a hook. The whole of my being was swallowed up in an imperceptible movement of a giant mouth, strangely lost in darkness. I was held by the blinking of staring eyes. And they were not the eyes of a blind person or of a baby. Innocence rose like sap ... where the watcher or the watched no longer exist.

*A ray of sunlight warms the tatami. Lili is hunkered down. Her feet move under her. Wonderfully. She moves gracefully and maliciously. Hearing the voice of Natsu who is giving orders, she is alienated. The orders are snapped out , the dancer chases after them and they are caught in the orifices of her skin.*

I am dazzled. When I was small, the time of the adult stuck to the walls of my town and my gaze was frozen in terror.

*... the sparks of conscience escaping from the coalescence of time*  
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<sup>13</sup> Rehearsals which will become the show "Niwa" (Jardin). Première in London in 1982

As a child, I could see people through time. I could see them grow older, with their adults' faces even though they were still small, with the face of old age when they were bigger.

And I was in Japan. There, in Butoh, I came across the whole of my childhood, and it was intact.

I really was amazed like the first time one year earlier. Madam Kusada, an old calligrapher and artist, whom I had met at the Ueno Museum, took me to an avant-garde performance on the other side of the University of Waseda. I did not know what sort of event it was. In fact it was Ishii Mitsutaka<sup>14</sup> who performed in a classroom with a saxophonist.

I saw a flame flash across the room and hit the wall and even the corners of the ceiling. Like a fire spreading. I saw the emergence of freedom. I saw it peel away from the flesh.

That is Butoh, I was told. I had just discovered it.

And now, Butoh had become my house

## **Nostalgia**

When you are welcomed into a country as a stranger, you learn the language, its onomatopoeias : here *guili-guili* is something which happens at the last minute ; if it happens progressively we say *dan-dan* ; *don-don* when it happens in quick succession ; *pili-pili* means piquant flavour and *chito-chito* a sound of the rain. In this climate, which we accept, meetings run into each other, overrun, run wild. Something of your being adheres, "sticks" imperceptibly to the walls of the place whose language is without doubt the earth. Nostalgia becomes a value. Its colour is green like moss on motionless stone, like nature hanging on the waves of the still waters of the lake. And so the memory of what is no more is still alive and kicking. There we let ourselves go and write poems to the sound of bamboo cracking under the weight of flowing water. A frog hypnotises us and we see the moon. And in

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<sup>14</sup> One of the premier Butoh dancers ,who will develop his work in Germany in the 1970's

Japan a rabbit lives in the full moon and bright green kappa<sup>15</sup> in the ocean's tides.

Because we know it, we guess it is true.

I have been far from Japan for more than ten years and yet I still feel this *wabi-sabi*, nostalgia attached to the Japanese soul. I feel it when I read the myths which are by no means close to me. Deep down, I see those who are steeped in them. What is hatched subconsciously is full of life. I notice it in the posture of their bodies, the vibrations radiating from their skin, the nods of their heads when they speak, their looks which are really glances. And then there is their laughter. Their laughter often failed to make me laugh just because they laughed ; we did not "laugh" the same language. This laughter was a sort of make-believe. And somewhere, I understood something about modesty, childhood, solitude and delicate generosity.

I am sometimes filled with nostalgia. No doubt it arises from areas of calm silence. From innocence and its guilt free human errors.

### **A few words on origin (something of the origins)**

And when Ohno Kazuo opened his mouth to speak to me, this is what I heard : « I do not think that the body is really transformed, except when it experiences consciousness of life and death. That is why, when I try to confirm my existence, I must of necessity try to trace my failing memory back to my mother's womb where I was born. I try to reintegrate all the weight and bewilderment of my whole body. That is my attitude to life where dance originated (...) and I do not think dance can be perceived outside the link of man with life. There are deep wounds, hidden from view, the heart's in particular, and if you know how to accept them and overcome them, then you will find pain, and pleasure, which words cannot describe. (...) That is when you reach a poetic level which the body alone can express. (...) I think that when men are there, they are surrounded by countless lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Small imaginary aquatic animal

And of course not just by living persons but by the dead also<sup>16</sup>. Not being able to help, in any way whatsoever, in the creation of the world, I fell on my back, feet skywards, upside down. »

In his studio, when Ohno walks, he seems to move with a great cloak on his back. His hands seem to hold it in place : «costume in Butoh is like throwing the cosmos over the shoulder. Whereas the costume covers the body, the body for its part becomes the costume of the soul.» And on his back, Mr Ohno carries the dead, and talks to them from within. A poetic universe is born of this dialogue. And from it they emerge, the present and the absent. He does not fail to be amazed. He is always fondly caressed by tenderness. But from behind those playful eyes, cruel scenes are played out. Indifference also. Somewhere, far from his gaze, I see a string of thoughts pass by and I do not understand. I wait. Sometimes an inextinguishable association of ideas and extraordinary allegories happen to combine and I have to recombine them. I do not know where they come from. I listen. I smile. Absorbed. I would like to speak the language of silence. Fluently. With its words and images poetry alone links us to his ideas. They come suddenly, sign-laden, like openings of doubt, pain and the guilty wound. « Ohno danced among the dead bodies on the battle fields of the Korean war » was whispered in my ear.

Mr O. repeats, while looking straight at me, and with his index finger pointed at the end of his nose : «Judas! It's me. Judas ! It's me». He tells his into any language. It's a tomb, a sarcophagus, a recumbent figure. The figure is Judas. He is Judas. But suddenly he discovers that the tomb is empty - if only it had been, I say to myself, there would have been more Butoh than Inquisition. And then he dances. Judas dances the pardon. And we laugh all together. For the massive lightness of this frail body, guided by the unbelievable heaviness of his large hands, corrects two thousand years of History, with a twist of malicious sincerity, and establishes peace there.

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<sup>16</sup> Different translations of the manuscript notes distributed to students by the master

## The Dead Sea

A dance which causes laughter is a type of dance which has no name.

A dance which causes tears of joy, so right at the time, so sublime : it was that evening in the winter of 1985. Ohno was dancing the première of "The Dead Sea". The soul was in a great state and could not keep still. It was like being shaken by childbirth. The body was in a fit-like state. Overturning. Fusion. Perfect equilibrium. With Ohno I felt like "laughing, crying, jumping, dancing, dying, living, giving thanks."<sup>17</sup>° Transcendancy. The whole being left to its own devices is tested to the limit. Time is letting off steam.

It was the choreography of Tatsumi Hijikata for Ohno and his son at the first Butoh festival, of which he was the originator and director.

I was sitting next to Mrs Ohno. In the dark, I could see her eyes. She was moved in inner silence. I placed my hand on her arm. We exchanged a word and then another. She nodded with a faint tender smile : life was worth living. Could it be measured by the dance ?

Ohno was dressed in the black suit he often put on for the Finale and he falls to his knees to the sound of rapturous, uninterrupted applause which is like a powerful waterfall. Rolled into a ball, he kisses his hands and stretches them out to the audience. With his head lifted high on his shoulders and his hands resting on his knees, he says time and time again : "Excuse me ! Thank you !" His voice is hardly audible.

What a rare stage moment ! All the angels and devils were in the auditorium and they rejoiced. Ohno's name rang out as in a kabuki show, and the sound of hands clapping could be heard like a storm. Ohno would have to go back and start again ! What an

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<sup>17</sup> After a tour in Europe and Israel in 1983, he created The Dead Sea. This quotation comes from manuscript notes with reference to this spectacle

unforgettable performance ! All the teaching of Ohno and Hijikata had been brought together in a contractile mass. It was hanging from a thread drawn tight and silent before an audience totally subjugated.

Since then, there have been performances, other moments, other spectacles. But Mrs Ohno is no longer there. She passed away a few years ago. And her delicate kindness watches over us. I remember it well.

Ohno is still there. He is 96 years old. His skin is blotched ; he is hard of hearing ; his sight is failing; and he is forgetful. But he nevertheless continues his dialogue with the images, the ghosts, the spirits, his mother, God. He reminds me of the words he took hold of - for he seized them and they became lifelike. Ohno set the table for them and fed them : wonderful *tempura*, a bowl of Japanese rice, so white and still steaming, sake, beer, boxes of sweets and words here, and there. Something suddenly struck us that we did not necessarily understand but we knew that the flavour, the colour, the form are the basic meaning, the contents and the container. He was a forthright man, a star in the flesh. He rocked us and we were on the watch for the slightest signal.

There is no need to understand the grammar of mental comprehension. The unknown is at work and works on understanding. The unknown is made dynamic by the prospect of the meeting, the forward movement, the dance of what we have received - certain that we do not take the same train on the return journey... Sleep will no longer be the same. It will be like "Dream and Reincarnation" by Natsu Nakajima on Fauré's Requiem - like Fauré but no longer the same - or like "La Argentina" by Ohno Kazuo when Sensa Mama gently hides away the body of the old man.

Then the edge of another world shows itself...

**« Butoh is not a philosophy but one day perhaps Butoh will give rise to a... »**

Hijikata was a shadowy revolutionary and the small delights of daily life do not have any meaning for him. He does not look on the sky as his elder brother. He looks at the earth, the past, death, the ephemeral, and decline, passing time with his body, his condition and the muddy ground on which he walks with his head bent low. Absence, the invisible, that which is hidden, "shadows" are day to day things, he says seriously. And so the pure young girl becomes the spirit of an old woman, the spirit of a witchlike ghost combing her hair, superimposed with an *oni*, the edges of whose devilish smile go up to heaven. Each shape has its own rhythm, its own shock waves. Then sweetness spreads around. The features relax, the child opens her eyes and there is nothing there.

Baffling apparitions...

So many unexpected facets rolled into one whose clarity stretches its scales between darkness and light, dream and nightmare. «You first step into the world of darkness and from there you seek joy, happiness, satisfaction»<sup>18</sup>

When he first started, Hijikata danced in pigtailed and short socks, leaping around with a daisy in his teeth. He was pathetic and grotesque. On his chest he sported in gold a phallus, like the erotic phallus of Ukiyo-e<sup>19</sup>. And his pubis was adorned with a fluffy kitten. Elsewhere, with one of his dancers « they lifted to their lips the pouch hanging between their legs and abruptly burst it with a bite. A disgusting pink liquid emptied out. Assistants took away their stiffened bodies making military salutes »<sup>20</sup>.

The numerous performances of Hijikata up until the seventies signed his anti-dance commitment vis-à-vis the established criteria. For him it seemed essential to liberate man from the constraints of his sex and his gender. His dance was disjointed, he pulled faces and looked half-man half-woman or laid out like a Christian martyr. « Once male heroism becomes grotesque it

<sup>18</sup> Quotation from the documentary film on Butoh "Percer le masque" jointly produced by the author

<sup>19</sup> Japanese print . Utamaro or Hokusai, artists from the Edo period , the most well known names in the West, produced the "secret" works .They are among the most beautiful in free art in Japan

<sup>20</sup> From the story of creation by Théo Lésoualch "Eroticism in Japan"

surrenders all virility »<sup>21o</sup>.The untamable dance explored the impulse which brought about forms and concepts which were revolutionary at the time.

Hijikata's body forced Japanese identity and history into the flesh of modernity. And from there to universality. History proves it. There are many stage performances outside Japan, (dance, drama happenings and the like) which have been influenced by Butoh. More or less.

### **A myth close at hand**

I am told he is ill; he drinks; he sleeps little; he imagines things; he invents them ;he makes them work; he looks for links and the shapes between them .His look is keen, tense, far-reaching and deep down we can make out kindness in it. And he is shy also. Engaging like a sick incurable child. He has given up dancing. We do not know why exactly. So we speculate. But we know behind the scenes he pulls the strings of the universe he has built up. He carries on directing and teaching in his theatre where his appointed dancer Asbesto-kan and his Hakutobo company perform. And he appears on the apron stage again, plots and backs new dancers, new associations , with Min Tanaka in particular. I notice an attempt to have the former successes parade before him, perhaps for the last time. He has organized retrospectives of his work and his reworked choreography danced. The living myth shows himself and we can see at last films, creations and images of his past performances. Exciting. Curious. Thrilling.

In 1985 he directs the first Butoh Festival in Tokyo with the recognition of the largest cultural enterprises in Japan.

He dies the following year.

### **To die and live.....**

Tatsumi Hijikata's first three dancers are the only ones not to have

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<sup>21</sup> ibid

undergone Western dance training. That is perhaps what made him formalise and codify Ankoku Butoh as a Butoh language. It involved all the ingredients: aesthetic, philosophical, ideological, not to need further training, as classical and modern dance does in the West. Deep down, he hoped to create a dance “which even Westerners would not understand”, to accede to a pure form on which they would feed to extract the philosophical essence. To do that he structured the genius of his imagination by experimentally forming groups of men, of women, and groups of men and women.

His metaphors are the tool of a methodology for forging Butoh and its imaginary world. They are also, basically, the allies of the myths which founded the beliefs and the animist rites of Shintoism and the transcendence of Zen Buddhism. True to the idea that “only the absurd is productive” on stage, gesture becomes prose out of the chaos which is made and unmade :”I hate the idea of a world organized from the cradle to the grave.”The phraseology of movement is put together like a literary quilt. Dance is the host of the old Japan, its soul, its spirits. Hijikata is searching for the stifled sob of the baby left to starve on the path by the rice fields where, in the distance, its parents work. They are bent over, sinking in centuries of muddy water, in the wind blown countryside in which the whirlwind is a demon who kidnaps children’s navels, in which the inclement weather of the north of the island ties the arms to the body and gathers the family round the hearth. Scenes of poverty. His sister is driven out of the family home and sold into servitude. He will not see her again. But he will dance for her, with her, inside himself, always. In Hijikata’s body there was despair. I saw it.

And then there is eroticism. The collective subconscious is the theatre of aesthetic-Butoh. The uncontrollable body’s point of convergence which bursts and decomposes into the infinitely great or small, the prey of the tragic condition of a limited world, in search of infinity. Butoh stems the tide of the human condition and explores the first universe, the uterine, the pre-uterine, the cosmic universe to give form to the formless in the body of the being in a state of watchfulness .It restitutes the unspeakable in a visible form; in a sublime, incoherent form sometimes full of awkwardness. To show ugliness as a vector of

a world from which beauty perforce emerges ,to show the hidden corners of the dark conscience , strongly held back in favour of the harmony dear to Japanese society .But in the secret garden , the quintessence of the being is strained. Where the subconscious has no structure, Butoh is the landscape gardener. Everything is mixed together: shades, old age written in the cells, birth deprived of the future forever unfinished, the death of flesh and the rebirth of the unknown still untold. Flesh is filled with inaudible images fine-combed by the conscience which strains only what has not quite gelled , in amazement.

But sometimes the cerebral filter lets through innumerable apparitions and revelations on the stage and that is where the temptation of Butoh begins or the madness of the one whose mediation has failed.

Then there is something of the cry in Butoh dance. A cry swallowed and kept in the flesh. The tension of the larynx keeps alive the knotted breath which calms the flesh. The whitish flaking of the skin is what sobbing ,skin deep, pierces. Delitescence . The sloughing<sup>22</sup> of the skin shares the cry which “goes right through the world and does not spread.”

Each time Butoh emits its first cry of this awareness of the world...

And if dance is a state of being, it originates in the pure consciousness of movement.

### **The gestures of daily life and their metamorphosis**

Laban conceived a system for noting gestures ; the notations allow gymnastic movements to be recorded for good .But Butoh tends towards a codification of forms through a sort of glossary of metaphor. Each dancer has to rediscover the feelings in his inner being. And the words, phrases, as if by magic and suggestion, set off the repetition of a specific gesture. Everyone must find again the ingredients of a collective culture and memory, in keeping with his own body.

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<sup>22</sup> Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer , chap, 34, ed. Verdier

“Lightening strikes. It goes through the whole body right up to the feet. It touches each toe, stretches them and extends the electric current on the ground. The body unbalances and falls forward. That is when Butoh begins<sup>23</sup>. With self-abandonment.

There are a number of indications listed for training purposes: carry a bowl; wring a towel; hair streaming backwards over a river; a beautiful woman changes herself into an old goat; a woman stitches.

### **Anamorphosis.**

°<sup>24</sup>Insects crawl out from the pores-from each pore-attack the body, around the eyes and organs, eat each other. The human condition devours itself, eats away at the conscience.

Scratch one’s body until it fits, return the flesh to its own oblivion.

Five hundred million insects eat the tree of life.

Conscience is devoured by the insects, but the feeling of matter remains. \*

Or we have notations by Natsu Nakajima for a dramatic work of hand<sup>25</sup> movements° : A long pipe. To comb oneself. The chin on the table. Lipstick. Movements of the flowering cherry branches. Cut a rope with one’s teeth. Pull the rope. Outline of the face. Big nose, etc.

In no case is it a question of imitating an external shape dependent on the body but of a process put into action piece by piece by suggestion from the inside or the outside. If you say ‘sit’ or ‘stand’ to an actor or dancer he will only understand the order. But if you say to him ‘stand: invited by the moonlight’, ‘sit : weighed down by the stone pressing on the top of your skull’, then the shade of meaning is installed in the body of the dancer

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<sup>23</sup> Transcription of the text of filmed rehearsal for ‘Percer le masque’ a documentary film jointly directed by the author

<sup>24</sup> From the note book of the author and the work by Sondra Fraleigh ‘Butoh, Zen and Japan’

<sup>25</sup> Translation by the author of the acts of the lecture by Natsu Nakajima at Taipei University

who climbs the ladder at the bottom of the well of his flesh<sup>26</sup>.”<sup>o</sup>  
That is to say that an indication has several slants to its verbal expression. They are meant to reach every layer of body/mind and to feed them with a multi-sensorial imaginary background, in order to recreate links between the fields of the visible and invisible, of the invisible made visible.

This subtle methodology is all the more complex because it brings into play the intrinsic intelligence which is open on the subconscious and on the total memory to reach a state of “being moved rather than of moving oneself. “Not to become something but to become nothing, a space full of emptiness, ready to leap out into another dimension.

### **Heads and tails : Ohno Kazuo and Tatsumi Hijikata,**

“Butoh is shadows is light, is the mixture of the two” T. Hijikata

The one insists on looking at the sky, towards the light, like at an icon. He is believed to be too Christian.

The other bends over and looks at the furrows of the earth, and it is the ground between his feet that he looks up at, in a vacuum. We feel so Japanese. False school boy quarrels. The two maestro feed off each other. And floods of words, jerky commentaries, surround them with a puff of aura, entered and left by students, old and new.

The one dreams and proffers the face of a disconcerting policy. The other thinks up linkages whose genial formulations he makes available. The first refuses to be tied to a form, the other is a formalist. The one leads classes open to all and acts as a choreographer to no one, for everyone, he says, is essentially his own master. The other founds companies, directs every aspect of their movements, relentlessly. He is sharp eyed, he thinks politically. He is feared. Yes. He shouts sometimes, he insults, he throws objects in the air and somewhere they shatter making a great noise. *Bako yaro ! Stupid bugger !* He shouts out in a leaden

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<sup>26</sup> ibid

silence with everyone holding his breath. He is, sometimes, desperately drunk. But you do not see it in his films or writings : the slightest distraction makes his flies elsewhere ; his anger disappears in smoke.

I have rarely seen a man of imagination surprise you as much...

Hijikata transposes everyday things into a dream world. They become the scaffolding. Yosho Ohno said that Hijikata always knew where he was going on stage . He walks straight. Whereas his father never walked straight. Ohno entered the dance spiritually, dragging his feet, bobbing and weaving, driven by the poetry of love. The stage became the garden of remembrance of a holy universe, the inner vault of the place of worship which he found as a child. He drew on his daily life every day eating with appetite and pleasure, to be satisfied, sweet and savoury, abundantly. He sleeps his fill. He entertains gracefully. He takes the valuable time to rest, to withdraw actively and to garden. Never tiring he throws himself into video images and photographs of his performances, he tells stories and laughs. He reads and looks at pictures in his books and old art reviews *Mizu-e*, delights in them and comments on them in his lessons. In winter, the festive illuminations reminds us that he dresses up in the red cloak and white beard of Father Christmas and off he goes to surprise the children of the Christian school of Kamihoshikawa near to Yokohoma, where he is awaited every year

On the stage, his life and every day movements, metabolized and transcended, are but a vague souvenir-the drawing of a mountain represented as a sign. He is a lyrical and coloured abstraction, joyful, vigorous, faltering, a woman tottering on a sweeping staircase, embracing the light of her blackened<sup>27</sup> cosmetic overflow ; the bushy hair decorated with a thousand flags ; a moustachioed Salvador Dali giving out sweets and asking forgiveness ; a breathless abdo men, dying, giving birth, arms extended leaning on a piano. Those are some of the striking moments oh "The Dead Sea", "La Argentina" and "My Mother".

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<sup>27</sup> K.Ohno's dance inspired the first shots of the film "Fritzcaroldo "by Berbet Schroeder

And in his studio, his weekly lessons are also the substance of daily work: "if you want to understand your body, walk on the floor of the ocean, become the powder of the moth, the whole universe is printed on its wings....(...)Be the flower that drinks the sunlight, be the penetrating light and the blooming flower, as the baby drinks its mother's milk , eats the mother(...) the mother salmon swims against the current, lays her eggs and waits to be eaten by the baby salmon before they grow up and slip down the river to the sea(...)With the fish's dead eye, be those life cycles that go on forever!".

Dance is the experience of vital regeneration, and for that purpose the students are invited to dance with a song of Julio Iglesias in the background since they must learn by not listening to music!

Ohno tells us the story of the spermatozoid and the egg. He seems so distraught when he speaks of so much wasted effort spent by millions of spermatozoids, when one egg, and one egg only, will climb the podium for the gold medal in the procreation games. He is fascinated by this idea I have heard so often .At that moment, he resembles my Polish uncle .I can readily imagine him, Japanese through and through, with payess<sup>28</sup> jumping on his cheeks, strolling down the narrow lanes of a shettel<sup>29</sup>. One bright day, I mischievously passed on this thought He smiled and replied with a knowing air: my wife has some Russian blood in her veins!

Life is a dress rehearsal!

### **«Erotchizumu» : eroticism**

Ohno speaks of eroticism. He says that we can only be erotic for we are the fruit of the sexual act .The body of the foetus is erotic. It swims in the womb of its mother , as the sole swam in its mother before her death: A sole swims in my body, my mother had calmly said on her death bed. As a result of suffering and of

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<sup>28</sup> Yiddish word indicates the only tufts of hair that ultra-orthodox Jews do not cut at the level of the temples

<sup>29</sup> Yiddish word indicating the small Jewish towns of Eastern Europe which had disappeared after the second world war

forcing one's body into the depths of the sea, it has become flat. , This reflection is the heritage from my mother for I realized then that I really was born in my mother's womb."

Finding freedom in the uterus, is that the path of freedom? <sup>30o</sup>

Not to think, not to conceptualize, to free oneself from every prejudice, to be moved,- with no other support than the recollection of master pictures....

The body of Butoh is erotic but does not have a single gender; it has every gender. Flesh, plasticine, mixed by reminiscences of the subconscious. By darkness and light on heat. "Tèmutèshon" temptation, desire-I think I heard that from Maro Akaji<sup>o31</sup> ....he pronounced this word crushing each letter between his lips, like a tasty morsel, a delight. Temptation touches every interdict. And the interdict is not the purpose of good and evil. The interdict is the baring of the faults, of an original pain, of resistance. Ugliness given strength, beautified. The interdict thus confirms its legitimacy as something that exists. Dance would even be the manifestation of desire and the interdict. For Maro Akaji, Tèmutèshon , temptation, seems to be a beginning , without taboos, without any other purpose but itself. Where the adult, the social being, has no standing. Maro, heir to H

The body of Butoh, is erotic but does not have a single gender; it has all the genders. Flesh, plasticine, mixed by reminiscences of the subconscious. By darkness and light on heat. "Tèmutèshon" temptation, desire-I think I heard that from the lips of Maro Akaji<sup>o</sup> .....he pronounced this word crushing each letter between his lips, like a savoury word, a morsel. Temptation touches all the interdicts. And the interdict is not the purpose of good and evil. The interdict is the baring of the faults, of original pain, of resistance. Ugliness made strength, ugliness made beautiful. The interdict thus confirms its legitimacy as something that exists. Dance would be the very manifestation of desire and the

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<sup>30</sup> From the manuscript notes of Kazuo Ohno in the programme of his spectacle dedicated to his mother "Watashi no oka-san"

<sup>31</sup> Maro Akaji was first an actor. He then became a member of Hijikata' company. He founded his own company "Dairakuda-kan" in 1972

interdict. For Maro Akaji, "Témutéshon", temptation, seems to be a mobilization, without taboos and without any other purpose than itself. The adult, the social being, has no hold there. Heir to the teaching of Hijikata, Maro said: "Seize the parts of chaos, and create the whole of chaos. Take hold of facets of chaos and create another chaos. You then find that the latter has nothing to do with the former.

Her nightmare and grotesque performances resemble a dramatic harlequinade in homage to temptation. And at the same, this association, between nightmare and derision, playful scenes, serious and provocative, is a strange challenge to childhood times, its dreams, and its fear of immensity.

From each company and from each soloist radiates a distinct atmosphere, a tributary of the chosen proportions of shade and light.

Between Ohno, icon of light, and the ethereal picture of a female, Hijikata, shadows and despairing virility, companies, like hordes of male and female kami, perform on the stage with their sexual organs taut or gaping. They bite their buttocks and travel on the narcissistic eroticism of their whitened body, from which flows the sweat through widened veins...

### **Panegyric of souvenir**

Ohno Kazuo and Hijikata Tsumi: two beings whose individuality and genius are expressed by different ethical contributions to the world and to freedom. The first is nearly 100 years old; Hijikata died in 1986. He had cirrhosis of the liver; he also had a cancer. He is said to have died in his hospital bed asking questions of dance. He died as he lived: questioning.

In his life and death, rites and myths are born.

Ohno is still alive and dances. He is now a "national treasure."

Butoh was shaped to be re renewed each generation. But it still thrives. Is it because it has given up being "a piece of avant-garde theatre which crawls on the ground?"<sup>32</sup> *Is it because* it remains knowingly in Japan a minority art in the margins of the system-ready to give up being a "dance art" to being an art of "movement of presence in the world"?

And so its main strength is the grounding in perception in the absolute, without any concessions to aesthetic criteria of temporal morality. Being free can only be radical for the performing artist. But can this trial of freedom be perceived thus by the young generation? What will it bring to the development of Butoh? No doubt it is too soon to say....

## Epilogue

You are thrown to the ground by [Butoh.It](#) is itself a ground and the relationship the body keeps with it,-wherever it might be. It is obstinate and remains the flesh as it is which has been explored, which has experienced a critical time and which it has been progressively deprived of the social standing holding it together and leading it astray. It signs *the* meaning of presence for a public which can be deaf, mute, and even blind because it has neither beginning nor end ; it has no right side, no wrong side, and no direction. It is certainly a gangway to the subconscious, a means of revealing a part of the creation of the world .*It is this body of creation*, in creation and within creation. It breathes life into the mental exaltation of the body and at the same time anchors it to the origin of the earth. It fills and irrigates the marrow of its bones with its language. *It scrapes the ego*, removes its scale and bathes it in the hollow of the universe in order to split what is needed. It mixes life which gives gravitas to the dancer's presence. Endlessly.

I cannot say why, after so many years far from Japan, Butoh still keeps hold of me deep down. Did childhood no doubt invent it before finding it again, as a result of a conjunction of circumstances, at "maturation"?

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<sup>32</sup> From Min Tanaka's adoption statement after her meeting with Hijikata tying him to Butoh

## **Nourit Masson-Sékiné – Strasbourg 2004**

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