"The Butō aesthetic and a selection of techniques"

ANKOKU BUTŌ

The Premodern and Postmodern Influences
on the Dance of Utter Darkness

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Chapter Two

THE BUTŌ AESTHETIC AND A SELECTION OF TECHNIQUES

The Butō Aesthetic

The Butō aesthetic has evolved a great deal in the last twenty-five years; although many of the fundamental principles of the Butō movement were first expressed in Forbidden Colors, it is unlikely that the wildly enthusiastic audience for Sankai Juku would have reacted similarly to Hijikata's debut work. The aesthetic revealed in Forbidden Colors was not only adverse to technique, it was also dead set against giving the audience a pleasurable experience. In fact, Donald Richie has described Hijikata's early works as all too often being "distinguished by their length, their apparent irrationality, [and] their intended boredom...."[1] One of Ankoku Butō's original aims was the exploration of the submerged depths of violence and sexuality, but at the same time it attempted to suppress the symbolic expression of ordinary emotions through dance; it discarded music and interpretive program notes; it dealt explicitly with the socially taboo topic of homosexuality. All in all it is not surprising that Ankoku Butō was primarily an underground performance art throughout most of the 1960's.

The movement existed underground in the literal sense as well: it was in the tiny, informal, basement theater-cafes of Tokyo, playing to a converted audience of relatives and friends, that Butō flourished. As the movement expanded and dancers broke off to form new groups, many of the original goals were modified, refined in various ways reflecting the tastes of the individual choreographers. Thus it is that today an art that began as a movement towards minimalism is now often labelled expressionistic; music has once again become an essential element, and interpretive program notes for recent performances have occasionally looked more like magazine articles. A dance form that was violent and virulently set against giving the

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[1]Richie, "Japan's Avant-garde Theatre," p. 2.

audience pleasure is now peaceful and aesthetically appealing; artists who disavowed technical virtuosity have themselves developed a whole series of techniques; an art that tried to distort, warp, and torture the body in order to keep the self in a constant state of fragmentation, now visualizes the body as "a cup filled to over-flowing, one that cannot take even one more drop of liquid," in order to help it enter "a perfect state of balance."[2] This development over time of a diversity of aims and ideals makes it impossible to define an overall Butō aesthetic, except as a loosely held group of attitudes about what dance should be. Ohno Kazuo, for example, who was a major figure in the origination of Butō, has remained on his own unique path, refusing to let his work fall into easy categories. He retains the original "anti-technique" bias of Butō, and therefore objects to many of the techniques that are described in the following sections, feeling that they are too limiting. For instance, he categorically rejects the characteristic Butō crouch, called <u>ganimata</u>, as focussing too one-sidedly on the depths below: "In life mustn't one look upwards as well?"[3] But Ohno's approach is that of a superbly original master who can depend on his enormous personal skill and his charisma on stage, an approach that cannot really be taught. His school in Yokohama is more of a place for Ohno to expound on his deep intellectual and spiritual commitment to the possibilities inherent in dance, than an institution established to teach "how to do Butō." It must also be kept in mind that for any one technique practiced by a particular Butō group, it is always possible to find another group that rejects it, or who may have developed some other technique that has a completely opposite goal. Even the white body makeup, considered such a distinctive feature of the "look" of Butō, was spurned by Tanaka Min and replaced by black or brown makeup in many of his solo dances.

Butō's Rejection of Technique and Use of the Grotesque

From the very beginning Hijikata and Ohno were opposed to technical virtuosity, interested in restricting the body to what it could do naturally, and resolutely set against the use of the body as an expressive tool. As Gōda Nario points out:

> In mainstream dance, pieces and scenes are constructed
> from the outside solely on the basis of a body that expresses
> itself externally, whereas Butō attempts to affirm the dance

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[2]Amagatsu Ushio as quoted in Martin A. David, "Sankai Juku," <u>High Performance</u> 7, no. 3 (1985), p. 18.

[3]Ohno, interview with author, 1 July 1986.

which lies **within** the body--the body is, in itself, contemplated as a small universe--and its structure and performance are thus revitalized.[4]

In practice this restriction of dance to the body's concrete structure meant an eschewal of "realism," understood to mean any attempt to convey a story realistically through dance movements that mimed actions in the everyday world. It was also linked inseparably to an eschewal of "symbolism," which in practice meant an antagonism towards the sort of abstract, symbolic dance movements that the audience could interpret unequivocally as having a single set meaning. Nakajima Natsu, founder of the Butō group Muteki-sha, is typical when she states, "Butō should reject all formalism, symbolism and meaning by expressing our energy and freedom. I am striving, not towards art, but towards love."[5]

As an example of the kind of "symbolic" dance movement that Butō wishes to reject, Butō dancers often cite the <u>kata</u> in Nō drama called the <u>shiori kata</u>: when the <u>shite</u> (main character) raises its hand to face level, palm facing inward, it symbolizes that the character is crying.[6] Instead of this kind of highly stylized movement, which is seen as a gesture selected by a rational mind intent on portraying the emotion of grief in its most refined symbolic form, Butō dancers choose to stress the movement of the body in and of itself, unmotivated by any specific expressive intent. This point is made clearly by Eguchi Osamu in an essay on the Butō group, Hoppō Butō-ha:

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[4]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 86.

[5]As quoted in program from <u>festival International de Nouvelle danse</u> (Montreal, 19-29 September, 1985).

[6]This particular example was both mentioned to me by Ojima Ichirō in a personal interview, and is used in Iwabuchi Keisuke, "Butō no Paradaimu" (The Paradigm of Butō), <u>Butōki</u> no. 3 (1982), unpaginated. (Page numbers cited hereafter refer to translation in appendix. For this citation see pp. 74-5.) The fact is, however, that this kind of explicitly symbolic <u>kata</u> is actually the **rarest** of all the <u>kata</u> in Nō, since the majority of Nō <u>kata</u> have either no explicit symbolic meaning whatsoever (intended purely as a contribution to the total atmospheric effect of the piece), or whose symbolic meaning is completely relative, the same action (for example pointing upward with the fan) having a **number** of different meanings depending on the context of the play. This willful misunderstanding and discarding of Nō as merely "symbolic" was necessary, however, in order for Butō to be able to escape Nō's bonds, and be able to innovatively use other aspects of Nō principles and techniques.

Butō 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 Butō 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 which takes the form, "this means so-and-so" becomes meaningless.[7]

The action on stage is intended to be as resistant to critical interpretation, as multivalent and open as possible, in order to make possible a direct channel of communication between the audience and the dancer. It is hoped that this channel would be able to bypass the symbolic mode, which is seen as tainted by the inevitable intellectualizing process that traps both the viewer and the dancer in conventionalized perceptions. Ironically enough, in pursuit of their goal of creating dance that blocks critical interpretation, most practitioners of Butō gradually left their anti-technique bias behind and from the late 1960's on began to develop a whole range of specialized techniques. For example, the beshimi kata, in which the body convulses spasmodically, the eyes roll up to show the whites, the tongue spews out, and the face is twisted beyond all recognition, represents an attempt to move beyond the usual forms of expression to a level of grotesquery that would make it impossible to apply verbal explanations.

Grotesque imagery of this kind has become almost synonymous with the word "Butō." To understand why the grotesque should have taken on such an important role in the Butō aesthetic, we might turn for a moment to Geoffrey Galt Harpham's recent book, On The Grotesque. According to Harpham the grotesque, like metaphor, has the ability to hold multiple and conflicting interpretations in a kind of uneasy truce, so that "our understanding is stranded in a 'liminal' phase", with the result that, "Resisting closure, the grotesque object impales us in the present moment, emptying the past and forestalling the future."[8] Harpham uses "liminal" in its anthropological sense, to mean that the mind is caught "between two worlds" as it tries to understand rationally what its senses tell it is irrational.

[7]Eguchi, "My View of Hoppō Butō-ha," pp. 89-90.

[8]Geoffrey Galt Harpham, On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 14, 16.

In a passage strikingly similar to the passage from Eguchi's essay quoted above, Harpham goes on to compare the uses of the grotesque in art with that of metaphor in poetry and fiction:

> ...in the case of both metaphor and the grotesque, the form itself resists the interpretation that it necessitates. We remain aware of the referential absurdity of the metaphor despite our attempts to transcend it, and the discord of elements in the grotesque remain discordant....And because it calls forth contradictory interpretations to which it refuses to yield, it disrupts the relationship between art and the meaning of art.[9]

Harpham points out the affinity that artists who espouse an "art for art's sake" position feel for the grotesque: figures that "seem to be singular events, appearing in the world by virtue of an illegitimate act of creation, manifesting no coherent, and certainly no divine intention," are the perfect material for "'aesthetic' artists who insist on the non-mimetic character of artistic creation."[10] Thus Butō's landscape of distorted and commingled forms, half human, half "other," can be seen as an essential element in Butō's anti-symbolic/anti-realism stance, and as part of an overall strategy of blocking critical interpretation in an attempt to reach the audience on an physical ("gut") level.

Harpham, following Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, characterizes the grotesque as a manifestation of the repressed unconscious, or id. In the grotesque's amorphous forms we see intimations of the id as it appears to the ego: that is, as "a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations."[11] When the id, in the concrete form of the grotesque, pierces into our consciousness we become aware of a distinct feeling of **repulsion.** I would go on to say that although we feel repulsed, there is at the same time a reluctant sense of identification: the grotesque, like the uncanny, "is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repressing and then emerged from it...."[12] Butō exploits this relationship between grotesque images and the repressed unconscious in an effort to create a more direct line of communication

[9]Harpham, On the Grotesque, pp. 178-9.

[10]Harpham, On the Grotesque, p. 5.

[11]Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as quoted in Harpham, On the Grotesque, p. 67.

[12]Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" p. 51.

between dancer and spectator. Gōda Nario's description of his feelings while watching Forbidden Colors is a good example of how Butō creates its desired effect:

> It made those of us who watched it to the end shudder, but once the shudder passed through our bodies it resulted in a refreshing sense of release. Perhaps there was a darkness concealed within our bodies similar to that found in Forbidden Colors and which therefore responded to it with a feeling of liberation.[13]

Gōda's experience is a model illustration of the proper response to the use of the grotesque in Butō: his physical sense of repulsion leads to a dim feeling of identification which in turn triggers a sense of release. This liberation of man's "darker side, connected with the vulgar and possibly orgiastic growth processes in the depths"[14] is seen as the crucial first step towards bringing the "high" and "low" into balance, with the eventual goal of reintegrating man into nature.

However, while on one level it is the confused feeling of fascination and repulsion that the grotesque inspires that paralyzes our rationality, and allows this kind of physical communication to occur, on another level the discomfort we feel in the face of the inexplicable becomes the catalyst that sends us scrambling to find meaning, whether by trying to discover an overarching principle that we will be able to use to explain what we have seen, or by normalizing our experience by trying to find connections of resemblance to other better understood entities. This nearly inevitable desire to contain and categorize what we cannot understand stands in constant conflict with Butō's expressed goals, but as Harpham has so succinctly put it, "art lives by resisting interpretation as well as by inviting it...."[15] The fact that "the form itself resists the interpretation that it necessitates" goes a long way towards explaining why it is that a movement that was so set against critical interpretation is nevertheless beginning to generate a significant amount of critical writing, along with a great deal of metaphorical/poetic writing by the dancers themselves.

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[13]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 81.

[14]Harpham, On the Grotesque, p. 73.

[15]Harpham, On the Grotesque, p. 178.

Anti-Individualism and the Uses of Violence

In the literature surrounding Butō there are a number of references to the notion of the individual subject and its status in late-modern society. The antagonism exhibited in these writings towards the ideology of individualism has its history in both the early postwar Japanese intellectual and critical debate on subjectivity (shutaisei[16]) and later discussions, within the context of the 1960's AMPO crisis, about the relation between community and individual autonomy. Sakuta Keiichi, in an article that traces the history of the 1960's controversy over community and autonomy, describes how at that time there emerged in the thought of the "folk-nativist" faction of historians (historians who based much of their insights on the folklore studies, or Minzokugaku, of Yanagita Kunio) the view that submergence in community didn't necessarily prevent autonomy, but might rather be the basis for autonomy.[17] The folk-nativist historians, in line with Yanagita's views on Japanese village communities (buraku), called for a reassessment of the buraku as a potential locus of resistance versus centralized authority and therefore as a possible indigenous basis for a truly Japanese form of autonomy.

Although there are no concrete connections, the ideas of these folk-nativist historians and the resurgence of interest in the native ethnographic work of Yanagita Kunio were a pervasive cultural influence on artists in the 1960's, and Butō was no exception.[18] On a popular level, Yanagita's explora-

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[16]For an analysis of the debate on shutaisei, see J. Victor Koschmann, "The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique," Pacific Affairs, vol 54, no. 4 (Winter 1981-2), pp. 609-631. Koschmann points out in this article that a good deal of ambiguity surrounds the term shutaisei itself, and that a substantial part of the debate was simply an attempt to define the term. According to Koschmann, shutaisei came to mean not only "A form of subjectivity, authenticity, or 'selfhood,'" but it also connoted firm commitment to political action and a stance of independence or autonomy in relation to the potentially deterministic forces of history and social structure.

[17]Sakuta Keiichi, "The Controversy Over Community and Autonomy" in J. Victor Koschmann, ed., Authority and the Individual in Japan (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1978), p. 240.

[18]The following description of Yanagita Kunio's work is based mainly on essays in J. Victor Koschmann, Ōiwa Keibō and Yamashita Shinji, eds., "International Perspectives on Yanagita Kunio and Folklore Studies," Cor-

tion of the oral traditions of the marginal mountain people (yamabito) and the people of the small local farming communities (jōmin) played on the nostalgia of the urban Japanese for their rural roots. In addition, the fact that Yanagita never quoted Western scholars, dealt only with Japan, and insisted on the unique character of Japanese institutions made his ideas very appealing to artists and intellectuals who had been alienated from the West by the AMPO struggle and were searching for an indigenous critical or revolutionary tradition.[19]

For Butō, the most influential aspects of Yanagita's thought were his desire to transcend the modern, with the corresponding antagonism towards the Western ideal of individualism; his interest in breaking through to a collective (or communal) unconscious in order to find a more authentic autonomy of self; and his preoccupation with marginal elements of Japanese society such as women, children, the insane, and the very old, whom Yanagita thought were the unconscious bearers of authentic Japanese tradition because of their structurally inferior position.[20]

Echoes of Yanagita's ideas appear again and again in the work and writings of Butō choreographers. Take for example some of the various techniques that Butō choreographers have developed in response to the problem of the individual subject. Shaving the head (a visual trademark of Butō that can be traced back to the shaved head of the influential German modern dancer Harald Kreutzberg) and coating the nearly naked body with white makeup eliminates all emblems of personal "taste," a step towards freeing the dancer from capitalism's consumer culture. Butō's use of continual metamorphosis to confront the audience with the disappearance of the individual subject by refusing to let any dancer remain a single identifiable character, is another strategy that challenges the modern myth of the individual. These techniques will be discussed separately in subsequent sections of this chapter; for now I wish to examine the role of violence in Butō,

particularly with regard its use as a method to free the dancer (and the audience) from their belief in themselves as a unified subject.

The violence of works such as Forbidden Colors and Revolt of the Flesh originated in response to an assumption that continues to underlie all Butō: that in our modern society any attempt to maintain a sense of individuality, a sense of ourselves as a unified subject, is an effort doomed to failure. The critic Iwabuchi Keisuke sums up this belief: "if one neglects for even a moment the effort to maintain one's individuality, the pressure that our 'information society' (jōhō shakai) wields to force us into homogeneity will violate the individual, render him powerless, abandon, and eliminate him."[21] You might say that for Butō, the best defense is a good offence: since our sense of individuality is only a fragile delusion that could be exploded at any time, it is vital that we immediately begin to explore the possibility of our own inner fragmentation. If we can break through the bonds that have been embedded in our minds and conditioned deep into our bodies by our modern society, we may eventually gain access to our **real** self (what the critic Ichikawa Miyabi has called "the body that has been robbed"[22]). Butō's ritualized violence, with its overtones of primitive sacrifice, help Butō dancers to achieve this goal.

Our sense of ourselves as unified subjects is formed and supported by our unconscious acceptance of those social institutions (including language) which domesticate our more chaotic instincts, instincts that if let loose might play havoc with our belief in a unified rational self. This is one reason that the early experimentation of Ankoku Butō attempted to explore through dance the repressed unconscious of the individual: they hoped that by bringing out into the open those basic desires for violence and sexuality which challenge our everyday norms, the dancer would become aware of his own inner fragmentation, as the conflict between his deepest desires and his belief in his own rationality was made explicit. They were thus committed to, as Gōda Nario puts it, "the close examination of the relationship between existence and sexuality" by portraying on stage those manifestations of it that "come bursting forth from the abyss of darkness."[23] On stage these manifes-

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nell East Asia Papers 37 (Ithaca, NY: China-Japan Program, 1985). Especially useful were Yamashita Shinji, "Ritual and 'Unconscious Tradition': A Note on About Our Ancestors"; J. Victor Koschmann, "Folklore Studies and the Conservative Anti-Establishment in Modern Japan"; and Bernard Bernier, "Yanagita Kunio's About Our Ancestors: Is it a Model for an Indigenous Social Science?"

[19]Bernier, p. 92.

[20]Yamashita, p. 62.

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[21]Iwabuchi Keisuke, "The Paradigm of Butō", p. 77.

[22]Ichikawa Miyabi, " 'Butō' Josetsu" (A Preface to Butō), in Butō: Nikutai no Suriarisuto-tachi (Butō: Surrealists of the Flesh), ed. Hanaga Mitsutoshi (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 1983), unpaginated. Page numbers cited hereafter refer to translation in appendix. For this citation see p. 71.

[23]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 83.

tations of violence were at first directed towards animals such as the chicken in Forbidden Colors:

> In the dance motif of 'killing a chicken,' which Forbidden Colors and Revolt of the Flesh share, one could plainly see the turbulent passion of the boy's youthful flesh, an expression of a dark sexuality which he could neither control nor be set free from.[24]

With Revolt of the Flesh (1968) the violence began to be directed not only at external objects but at the self as well, a natural progression that was brought to fruition in the early 1970's in the dance of Hangi Daito-kan. Hangi Daito-kan was less a "group" than a concept: its work was based on the idea that "only by throwing off the body and transcending suffering can true dance be created, and that Butō begins with the abandonment of self."[25] Ichikawa Miyabi sees this self-directed anger as being the only possible response to a body whose every nook and cranny has been infiltrated by the social institutions of modernity.[26] It is only by abandoning the notion of the individual subject, and fragmenting the body through self-torture, that we can be released from the deeply imbedded social archetypes conditioned into every fiber of our bodies.

The Appropriation of Marginality

As mentioned in the first chapter, since the refined elegance of the fully developed forms of Nō and Kabuki, as practiced today, held no interest for Butō choreographers, they turned instead to the popular origins of classical theater in order "to use the premodern imagination as a negating force to transcend the modern."[27] Butō artists have been interested in appropriating the marginal, outcaste position of Japanese actors in general, but have been particularly interested in appropriating the position of Edo Kabuki actors, who were called kawara mono (riverside beggars), because in the early days they lived and performed on dried out riverbeds, the most temporary (therefore most marginal) of spaces in Edo Japan.

In an agrarian society, the nomadic life of entertainers is often viewed with suspicion; as outsiders, early Kabuki actors had a marginal status in

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[24]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 82.

[25]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 85.

[26]Ichikawa, "A Preface to Butō," p. 70.

[27]Tsuno, "The Tradition of Modern Theater," p. 19.

Japanese society that theater anthropologists such as Yamaguchi Masao and Hirosue Tamotsu have seen as carrying on in the tradition of itinerant priests who travelled from village to village, enhancing their religious rituals and parables with various kinds of performances. Yamaguchi, who has written several articles on the intimate connection between marginality and theater, believes that originally Kabuki actors, like those itinerant priests, "were gods and sacrificial victims, sacred and polluted, visitors from a greater world and at the same time bearers of the sins of the community."[28] Hirosue, in an essay on Kabuki called, "The Secret Ritual of the Place of Evil," writes even more extravagantly that,

> For much of Japanese history bands of itinerant actor-prostitutes spiritually trespassed the country. As itinerant agents of the gods they would dominate the populace. Simultaneously, however, they were forced to relieve the people's suffering, taking their sins and imperfections upon themselves. They were thus as much scapegoats of men as they were the deputies of gods. Capable of impersonating the gods, they also had to shoulder the suffering of man. As Actors on stage they concentrated and purged sins and imperfections, even acting out man's detested death.[29]

By the late Edo period Kabuki actors could no longer truly be seen as 'scapegoat' figures, but Kabuki as an institution retained its unique position straddling the barrier between what was considered the inside and the outside of the Japanese social structure. It had taken on the role of mediator between those on the inside and those excluded categories of people such as burakumin,[30] geisha, the deformed, and diseased, who, by virtue of their exclusion, symbolically maintained the cultural order. Although like geisha, Kabuki actors weren't included in the four classes established by the Tokugawa

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[28]Yamaguchi Masao, "Kingship, Theatricality, and Marginal Reality in Japan," in Text and Context, ed. R.K. Jain (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977), p. 173.

[29]Hirosue Tamotsu, "The Secret Ritual of the Place of Evil," Concerned Theatre Japan 2, no. 1 (1971), p. 20.

[30]Burakumin (literally, "hamlet people") is the modern name for the hereditary outcast group in Japan. They were originally discriminated against because they worked at occupations that in Buddhist terms were unclean, for example, leather working, street cleaning, or caretaking in cemeteries and crematoriums.

government (samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants), their position as outcastes did not subject them to the kind of unmitigated degradation and humiliation that the burakumin faced.[31] Instead, Kabuki actors shared with geisha a special status as outsiders: although they were forced to live separately and were not allowed to marry into the other classes they were, paradoxically, idolized by the populace and were the prime movers behind the Edo period taste in art and fashion.

Yamaguchi has explained this contradiction in anthropological terms: "while the Japanese, like other peoples, needed to reassure themselves of their own identities by excluding certain categories, they also felt a deep need to restore their relationships with these excluded categories, which were charged with metaphorical richness."[32] It was on the Kabuki stage that spectators could witness dimensions of human behavior that were normally excluded from their lives, but which, on some unconscious level, held great appeal and with which they deeply needed to identify. Kabuki, especially the late-Edo period style Kabuki called kizewamono, took the marginal spaces and figures of the Edo era and made them the central focus of their plots: the characters in Sakurahime (The Scarlet Princess of Edo), for example, included thieves, prostitutes, ex-priests defrocked for illicit sexual liaisons, even burakumin themselves; the settings included a cemetery, an execution ground, a burakumin village, a river bed, and a thieves' hideaway in the mountains.

Hijikata and the avant garde wished to appropriate from Kabuki its ability to slip between and through the cracks of the rigid Japanese social structure, seeing in its fluidity and its connection to the "outside" a potential source of creativity (what Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space has

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[31]The Tokugawa government (bakufu) instituted the four class system of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants, with the aristocracy above and the outcasts below. Yamaguchi has elaborated this schema by placing actors and geisha outside the four classes but above the burakumin group. It was only with this class structure's codification into law that being an outcaste became hereditary, as opposed to being the outcome of occupation: there eventually came to be quite a few burakumin farmers, fishermen, and weavers who were discriminated against on the basis of nothing other than their family heritage. For a summation of the evolution of the caste system in Japan, see Hane Mikiso, Peasants, Rebels and Outcastes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

[32]Yamaguchi Masao, "Theatrical Space in Japan, a Semiotic Approach," unpublished manuscript. I am indebted to Prof. Brett de Bary for letting me have a photocopy of this manuscript.

termed "the raw materiality of the possibility of being"[33]), as well as a possible vehicle for social criticism. They also sought to incorporate Kabuki's intimate connections to the dark, taboo, repressed side of everyday life, and hoped that by taking on Kabuki's role of representing all that was seemingly unrepresentable in Japanese society, they might also appropriate Kabuki's "particularly provocative technique of converting the socially negative into the aesthetically positive."[34] To do so they strove to bring into their dance the original meaning of Kabuki, which Tsuno Kaitarō has defined as that which "implies the destruction of our everyday sensory balance through grotesque, comic and exaggerated posturing."[35] As mentioned in the first chapter, because they felt that Kabuki and Nō had been enervated by their respective elevations to high culture, they also turned to Asakusa vaudeville as the 20th century equivalent of Kabuki's original atmosphere of the carnivalesque.

In order to return to either of these "origins" of dance, Butō has had to tread a difficult line, the line that kept this faintly nostalgic, romantic attitude towards folk or popular forms of traditional culture from disintegrating into the kind of uncritical idealization of "pure" Japanese values that in the prewar period was used so effectively by the right-wing military--an all too real possibility considering the path that Hijikata's good friend Mishima Yukio took. Mishima's desire to regain the purity of a mythical Japanese past certainly had an effect on Butō's development, particularly with regard to the revival of interest in indigenous theatrical forms. It may be that he had a political effect on some Butō groups as well; according to journalist Yoshida Teiko, dances performed by Maro Akaji's Dai Rakuda-kan in the 1970's occasionally incorporated sections that exhibited a Mishima-style neo-romantic militarism.[36]

Metamorphosis Exercise

Butō's interest in the marginal characters of the Kabuki stage helps to explain the Butō emphasis on figures that are marginal not only to contemporary society, but to all places and times: characters such as children, the

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[33]Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 218.

[34]Yamaguchi, "Theatrical Space," unpaginated.

[35]Tsuno, "The Tradition of Modern Theater," p. 10.

[36]Yoshida Teiko and Miura Masashi, conversation with author, 22 January 1986.

handicapped (blind musicians are especially prominent), the insane, refugees, the primitive savage, the very old, even scapegoat figures from other cultures (one section of a performance held by Bishop Yamada and Hoppō Butō-ha in Sapporo explored the myth of Prometheus). Those who are the least caught up in the toils of modern culture are seen as being the most in touch with the natural world and with the natural instincts. It also helps to explain why metamorphosis--the transformation of one's body and spirit into the body of another animal or person--should play such a major role in Butō training, since by becoming these marginal characters one comes to identify with their marginal position.

Some of the other uses of metamorphosis in Butō have been touched on elsewhere in this thesis: particularly its use as part of the effort to fight the ideology of individualism. Butō takes as a given the notion that, as Frederic Jameson says, "when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and closed realm in its own right, you thereby also shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the windless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison-cell without egress."[37] One of Butō's goals is to move beyond that prison cell. Recognizing, along with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, that "the 'sane' apprehension of oneself as possessor of a definite, stable, and socially recognized identity is continually threatened by the 'surrealistic' metamorphosis of dreams and fantasies,"[38] Butō therefore skillfully exploits such surrealistic metamorphosis to help destroy the myth of the alienated individual, and replace it with a fragmented self, as the first step towards the ultimate goal of reintegrating man into the universe. The critic Ichikawa Miyabi has suggested that the metamorphosis that lies at the very heart of the Butō "spectacle" is based on "the dual personality, or constant metamorphosis, of various characters, so that eventually, as it becomes impossible to tell one person from another, the individual subject disappears altogether."[39] In this way the audience is forced to take the first steps towards an awareness of the fragility of their own sense of self-unity. For the dancer, on the other hand, Butō's use of metamorphosis helps restore "the body that has been robbed" in the process of socialization into modern society. One way this benefit is achieved is through the use of an improvisation exercise based on the idea of metamorphosis that Hijikata

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[37]Jameson, "Postmodernism," p. 64.

[38]Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 98.

[39]Ichikawa, "A Preface to Butō," p. 71.

developed around 1968, and which since then has become an indispensable part of Butō training.

An actual exercise that novice dancers begin with was described to me by Ojima Ichirō, founder of Hoppō Butō-ha:

> When I was learning to dance with Bishop Yamada, I began by studying a rooster for many days. The idea was to push out all of the human insides and let the bird take its place. You may start by imitating, but imitation is not your final goal; when you believe you are thinking completely like a chicken you have succeeded.[40]

The main objective of this exercise is to exchange the "windless solitude" of the alienated individual for a sense of communion with nature, and to infuse the dancer's body with "a kind of magic that attempts to regenerate both man's sense of being alive, and the power of primitive life, through a return to man as the 'naked insect.'"[41] It is not the form of the animal or object that is important in this exercise, but how well one is able to experience what it would be like to be some other kind of being, whose "loveliness, gentleness, fierceness, and beauty...comes from nothing other than their ability to artlessly adapt themselves to natural laws."[42] According to Gōda, Hijikata wanted to "restore the body to its natural state" by having the dancers experience firsthand the principle that in nature, before an individual plant or animal can develop its own distinctive voice, it must begin by adapting itself to its place in the natural order. The lesson to be learned was that the unique subjective voice is not the result of self-assertion but the natural outcome of "knowing one's place."

Another related objective, mentioned to me by Ojima, is that by doing the exercise over and over for years, one begins to see that one has a greater affinity for some plants or animals over others. This is meant to provide one with a form of self-knowledge about one's fundamental nature, by bringing one closer to those instincts that are most basic. Ojima commented on this technique further:

> So you imitate an old woman and maybe find that you have a real affinity for that particular way of moving; by trying to be different people and things one comes to find which have

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[40]Ojima Ichirō, interview with author, 10 July 1985 in Otaru, Japan.

[41]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," p. 77.

[42]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 87.

the closest relationship to your heart and body, and in this way one finds not only one's own style of dance, but one's own way of being in the world.[43]

The choice of who or what one is transformed into is therefore seen as quite critical, since it might have personal as well as public effects. Some dancers come to be identified specifically with certain animal "characters": Ohsuga Isamu and Hiruta Sanai, who founded the group Byakko-sha (White Tiger Company) are well known for their respective portrayals of a mythical Chinese tiger and a possessed Shinto priestess (miko). Byakko-sha itself specializes in the depiction of various kinds of creatures, both natural and supernatural, and their dances are accompanied by all kinds of live music, including traditional shamisen.

The Metempsychosic Model of Time

By returning to premodern dance and dramatic forms, the Butō dancers and choreographers were able to find an alternative to the Western classical model of dramatic construction, with its emphasis on realistic narrative based in the rationalism of cause and effect and the linear organization of time into a beginning, middle, and end. In breaking through the bonds of Western rationalism, the Butō choreographers hoped to create for a short time on stage a vision of a world which was the antithesis of the modern--a vision that David Goodman has described as characterized by,

> ...anti-linear time, by a dramatic world presided over by the collective imagination, and by "yami" ("the dark"). "Yami" is an endlessly repeating, constantly changing, shapeless form of time. Things are not orderly or predictable but as innumerable and conflicting as thoughts and images.[44]

In the mythical world of primitive thought there is no contradiction between chaos and cyclical repetition, between constant change and absolute equivalence:

> Perpetual metamorphosis is the central premise of mythic thought, which operates on the principle of the cosmic continuum. According to this principle, no realm of being, visible or invisible, past or present, is absolutely discontinu-

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[43]Ojima, interview with author, 10 July 1985.

[44]Goodman, "New Japanese Theatre," p. 166.

ous with any other, but all equally accessible and mutually interdependent.[45]

The theater critic Yamamoto Kiyokazu has given another name to this premodern, ritualistic model of time and being: he calls it the "metempsychosic mode," a model of time in which "there is only process, which is cyclical and endless."[46] Webster's dictionary adds "transmigration" to the definition: "The passing of a soul after death into some other body; either human or animal."[47] Amagatsu Ushio's work with Sankai Juku provides us with a perfect example of the metempsychosic mode at work in Butō. Their dance, Jōmon Shō (Homage to Prehistory) cycles metaphorically through the prehistoric life process of undulating growth, sporadically set back by catastrophe; the continuous struggle to move upward to stand in the light is interspersed with inevitable falls back into darkness.

As would be expected, the characteristic mode of being within the metempsychosic mode is that of metamorphosis, the constant change of one form into another; the privileged form of expression is the metaphor, which allows one to go from one image to the next by means of apparent similarity or affinity, rather than by means of a causal relationship in linear time. The fragmentation of the body in motion leads to the fragmentation of time and space: in Revolt of the Flesh,

> Hijikata rejected our common sense notions of continuity, slicing through time and space. Western dances that are quite sensible, such as the polka or the waltz, appeared before us distorted and chopped up, in order to overturn our preconceived ideas.[48]

He did this by, "fragmenting motion into articulated movements that expressed precisely the temporary forms of each moment"; making no attempt to link these fragmented forms into anything that might encourage the audience to see linear continuity, he entrusted the dance to the simple accumulation of such movements.[49] Since as Frederic Jameson (following

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[45]Harpham, On the Grotesque, p. 51.

[46]Yamamoto Kiyokazu, "Kara's Vision: The World as Public Toilet," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 20 (Fall 1978), p. 31.

[47]Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v. "metempsychosis."

[48]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 86.

[49]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 87.

Lacan) points out, "personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporary unification of past and future with the present before one,"[50] this disintegration of time into discreet moments, and the disavowal of temporal unity, can be seen as one more component of the Butō attempt to fragment the self. Butō asserts along with Jameson that "such active temporal unification is itself a function of language." Eguchi Osamu makes clear Butō's essentially anti-language stance when he says, "Butō breaks through all verbal definitions and snatches the audience's sensibilities away to a state of nakedness."[51] Citing the work of Roland Barthes, Eguchi elaborates on how language, by means of the metaphoric function, imposes itself between man and nature as a kind of pseudo-nature that causes the user to forget that s/he is utilizing a conventional system of signification handed down by previous generations:

> Language, which comes into existence through a union of mutually interacting elements, depends on the fact that words are separated from things to be able to function more quickly and freely. Then the network of meaning, which is based on the metaphoric function, establishes itself as a kind of pseudo-nature--in a sense, it could be said that it is this network which rears the human being.[52]

Rather than attempt to communicate in a world where there is an arbitrary relationship between language and meaning that masquerades as natural, Butō wants to go back to a time when there was a **motivated** relationship between sign and signification, a "pre-Babel" world that Eguchi describes as "a world in which words and things had not yet been differentiated," where everything is simultaneous with everything else, and all hierarchical relations of value have been destroyed and replaced by a "mandala woven from words and resemblances which, as it whirls around, creates correspondences between all things."[53]

The metempsychosic mode can work on the level of the collective unconscious, as it does in Jōmōn Shō, exploring and releasing social archetypes that Butō dancers believe are conditioned deep into the body; or it can work on the level of individual history, working to reveal the deeply repressed subconscious of each person. Ohno Kazuo takes these two levels to be deeply

[50]Jameson, "Postmodernism," p. 30.

[51]Eguchi, "My View of Hoppō Butō-ha," p. 89.

[52]Eguchi, "My View of Hoppō Butō-ha," pp. 90.

[53]Eguchi, "My View of Hoppō Butō-ha," p. 90.

interpenetrating, as one can see in Admiring La Argentina, in which Ohno portrays his vision of the individual life as a microcosm of universal experience: "I had always read about the creation of the world in the Bible. I had always accepted it as legend, but in La Argentina's work I saw it realized in front of my eyes."[54] For Ohno the personal biography can only exist within a universal history, and within our individual memories there exists an "infinity of memories of past human lives."[55] The structure of the work reflects this attitude, **beginning** as it does with the last moments in the life of an old, old woman, who is then reborn in the **second** section in the form of a young girl. Ohno's work in Admiring La Argentina is also a good example of the fragmentation of Western-style dance modes: we might expect when Ohno comes on stage dressed in a flamenco costume and begins to dance to a tango, that we are going to see some kind of imitation "Spanish" dancing. What we see instead are tattered bits and scraps of familiar yet strangely unfamiliar movement swirled together into a whole that paradoxically seems both seamless and discordant. Ohno dismantles the structure of the flamenco before our very eyes, to reveal those emotions that were seminal in the **origins** of flamenco dancing. Admiring La Argentina, far from being an imitation, becomes a primal vision of flamenco's creation.

It seems to me that although neither the Butō choreographers nor the related theatrical avant garde mention it specifically, the metempsychosic mode has many thematic affinities with the aesthetic concept known as jo-ha-kyū, which is omnipresent in traditional Japanese theater. Western dramatic structure generally builds slowly and inevitably up to a **single** dramatic climax, which ends the work. In Japanese theater, on the other hand, the pacing cycles through a **series** of climaxes, each greater than the one before, until with the final and greatest climax we are suddenly returned to the level where we started.

As outlined in Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell's three volume work, Dance in the Nō Theater, jo is a slow, formal beginning, ha breaks this open and develops the theme, and kyū is the final release. The overarching structure of a Nō play moves from a slow, simple beginning (jo), progressively developing (ha) towards a high-powered, complex ending (kyū), which in turn gives way again to jo, in order to begin a new cycle for the next play. The pace of each of the dance sections that go to make up a Nō performance is itself

[54]As quoted in Jennifer Dunning, "Birth of Butō Recalled by Founder," New York Times (20 November 1985), p. C27.

[55]As quoted in Dunning, "Birth of Butō," p. C27. Additional information came from a personal conversation with Ohno, 24 November 1985.

governed by the rhythm of jo-ha-kyū; each has an internal movement from restraint to release, and then back to restraint. The areas of the stage are designated as jo-ha-kyū as well: the upstage third is considered jo, the middle third is ha, and the downstage third is kyū. And of course the pacing, rhythm, and level of complexity of the music in Nō are governed by jo-ha-kyū as well.[56]

It may be that in Butō's revolt against both Western and Japanese traditional theater, the aesthetic of jo-ha-kyū seemed too restricting and old-fashioned for them to claim for their own. On the other hand, it may be such a natural and unconscious part of theater and dance in Japan (Eugenio Barba claims that the three phases of jo-ha-kyū "impregnate the atoms, the cells, the entire organism of Japanese performance"[57]) that it does not need to be explicitly expressed. After all, the idea behind jo-ha-kyū is that asymmetrical, yet simultaneously cyclical rhythm is the natural rhythm of human life, that "the most natural way of being and doing is to begin slowly, gradually build to a climax, to stop and begin again."[58]

Although the structure of a Butō performance does not, of course, necessarily have to follow the pacing and structure of a Nō play, one can often see interesting parallels to it. In Butō, besides the similarity between the metempsychosic model of endlessly repeating time and the cyclical attitude toward time manifested in jo-ha-kyū, jo-ha-kyū is most clearly evidenced in Butō's pacing, especially in its constant movement back and forth between the poles of integration and disintegration: a stage filled with violence and chaos suddenly becomes a vision of idyllic, peaceful beauty, a vision which gives way in turn to a nightmare even more hellish than the one before.

An especially strong point of similarity is the way the opening dances in Butō nearly always correspond to the jo level prescribed for opening dances

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[56]Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell, "Dance in the Nō Theater," Cornell East Asia Papers 29 (Ithaca, NY: China-Japan Program, 1982), vol. 1, p. 7-13; vol. 3, p. 188.

[57]Eugenio Barba, "Theater Anthropology," The Drama Review 26 (Summer 1982) p. 22. In this article Barba, who has been very interested in the possibilities for cross-cultural exchange of theatrical techniques between the East and West, explores certain recurrent principles (among them jo-ha-kyū) in the theatrical practice of East Asia, which he feels might be found useful by actors in the West.

[58]Komparu Kunio, The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives, trans. Jane Corddry and Steven Comee (New York, Weatherhill, 1983), p. 29.

in Nō. For an example of this, one has only to think of the famous first section in Sankai Juku's Jōmon Shō (Homage to Prehistory), in which four whitened, shaved, and nearly naked dancers were lowered upside-down from the proscenium by infinitesimal degrees; nothing could have captured our attention more completely. This was an act that seemed to literalize the "fall of the self," the moment in Zen when the very foundations of selfhood are shattered, and the analytic walls of interpretation collapse, allowing for an intuitive interpenetration into the world's true reality.[59] Another more recent example occurred in the performance of Tefu Tefu by Kisanuki Kinuko at the Joyce Theater in November of 1985. That dance began in complete darkness; it was only after a minute or two that we became aware of a single bluish spotlight shining from the level of the stage floor straight out into the audience. After a few minutes spent staring at that, we became aware that Kisanuki had appeared in our midst. She had entered from the rear of the theater, and was making her way down the aisle towards the stage by means of extraordinarily tiny steps; she looked like nothing so much as a moth hypnotized by the light that shone directly into her eyes (an appropriate image in a piece whose name means "butterfly").

These two examples of opening sections from Butō dances actually have exactly the same goal as the jo level god play has in Nō: that of capturing the audience's attention, while simultaneously putting them into the kind of mood that would be most conducive to appreciating the rest of the performance. The minimal movement in these opening pieces creates a sense in the viewer that time has been slowed to a standstill or stretched out to infinity. Like all accumulative repetition, it forces the viewer to become aware of subtleties, of minute variations that one would normally miss.

While introductory sections are extremely important for sensitizing and preparing the audience for the performance to come, encores have come to play a special role in Butō as well. In traditional theater there are no curtain calls--the closest approximation might be the "after-song" that the Nō chorus sings at the close of a performance to create the right mood for an ending, i.e., to return the audience to the jo level. Butō has borrowed the finale and curtain call of Western theater and dance, but true to form has significantly changed them: they are anything but simple bows. Unlike the Western theatrical tradition, where there is a distinct break between the ending of a performance

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[59]For an evocative look at the influence of Zen on the Japanese avant garde of the late 1950's, see Haga Tōru, "The Japanese Point of View," in Avant-Garde Art in Japan (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1962), unpaginated.

and the curtain calls, so that the actor leaves behind his performance persona and appears before us as "himself," ·in Butō curtain calls there is no diminution of tension, no real "post-performance" break out of character. They are instead completely choreographed, and have a distinct purpose and place within the structure of the work as a whole, usually taking the form of a short hand restatement and summation of the major choreographic ideas of the dance. Ichikawa Miyabi has mentioned in regards to the use of finales in Buto that, "when someone asked me what Butō's distinguishing characteristic was, I jokingly answered, 'Butō is created from the finale!'"[60] Ichikawa goes on to make a comparison between the thickly encrusted white makeup and the structure of time in Butō: "each layer of progress towards the finale paints on the face of Time another layer of white: the finale and curtain calls are the thick accumulation of Time's white makeup."[61]

Sankai Juku's curtain call at the end of the April 30 and 31, 1986 performance of Jōmon Shō was an effective example of the ways in which the curtain call acts to draw the entire dance into focus: standing at the far back with their bouquets cradled in their left arms, they all began swimming their right hands back and forth, flipping them up and down and around. As each dancer slowly drew his left leg back and sank downward to the floor, the hands rose in unison above the dancers' heads, still twisting frantically as though they had minds of their own, with the effect that, as the lights lowered and only their crouching silhouettes remained against the dark blue sky, it now looked as though the group were waving goodbye. The choreography of this curtain call touched again on the focal points of the entire dance: the precise articulation of separate parts of the body that resulted in the sense that a rational mind was not in control of the fragmented body, yet simultaneously a harmony of action between dancers that appeared to stem from a sharing of communal mind, a manifestation of a collective rather than individual will.

It is interesting to note that when Bando Tamasaburo, the Kabuki onnagata (female impersonator) who is something of a cult figure among young Japanese these days, performed at the Japan Society in 1984, his curtain call was equally as superb: one moment he was accepting bouquets from the audience, the next moment, with a single elegant undulation he had transformed himself into a graceful puddle of feminine humility on the stage floor.

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[60]Ichikawa, "A Preface to Butō," p. 70.

[61]Ichikawa, "A Preface to Buto," p. 70.

There was no question of "breaking character": nothing could have so stunningly summed up the provocative eroticism of the onnagata's art.[62]

White Makeup

Ohno Kazuo has said that Butō dancers used white makeup in the early days to cover up the fact that they were still technically immature. Although this might be one explanation for the practice's origin, it doesn't really explain why white makeup has become one of Butō's most distinctive features. According to Ichikawa Miyabi, the first Butō dancers smeared chalk dissolved in glue on themselves to whiten their faces and bodies. Originally these bizarre encrustations were part of the attempt to turn the dancer into some alien "other"; Ichikawa says that their skin made him think of some kind of shellfish, perhaps a mollusk or barnacle.[63] As time went on, however, the dancers began using the same water-based makeup as Kabuki actors use, and from this point, the use of white makeup carried the additional resonance of its resemblance to Kabuki. Here again we have an example of how Butō uses the pastiche technique to incorporate onto itself, for its own purposes, techniques of traditional theater.

Within the Kabuki tradition, white face and body makeup has a number of meanings. Kabuki makeup is intended to both dramatically heighten the natural color of the skin, and to act as a surface on which an elaborate pattern of colored lines (kumadori) can be written. Kumadori signals to the viewer a whole range of meanings about the character being represented (i.e. whether the character is good, evil, god, mortal, ogre, man, woman, child, etc.) Thus, although Kabuki had left behind the idealized masks of Nō theater, the Kabuki face covered with white makeup and kumadori became a living mask that was simultaneously unique (as each person's face is unique) and yet symbolic of the collective ideal (inscribed by means of kumadori with the moral and religious codes of Japanese society).

In Butō kumadori is, of course, eliminated: there is no way to "read" the white makeup of the Butō dancer to learn his or her position in some wider moral context. At the same time, the white makeup and shaved head, and often the lack of costumes, strips the body of the usual identifying characteristics of the individual, i.e., any expressions of personal "taste," leaving only

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[62]When performing in the West, even traditional Japanese performers will give in to Western custom and give curtain calls. However, as pointed out above, they retain their dramatic persona throughout.

[63]Ichikawa, "A Preface to Butō," p. 69.

the body's movement as the marker of difference. Each person has a particular way of moving, and that personal style is considered to be, "the most concrete, definite and pivotal aspect of the body, an absolute fundamental in the individual's body, immune to idealism or human will."[64]

In keeping with the origin of the practice, Butō dancers often layer the makeup extremely thickly and occasionally supplement it with white powder. This choice results in an interesting side effect: if layered thickly enough, during the performance it will continuously flake off in little wisps and eddies, so that the dancer, depending on his or her speed, seems to be either moving through or trailed by a fine white mist. The effect is rather subtle, especially since the dimness of the Butō stage normally only allows the audience to see the barest glimmer of white. Every once in a while, however, the effect is more pronounced, and although it could be interpreted in a number of ways, it seems to me when I see it that the skin of the dancer is literally crumbling away, disintegrating before my eyes. Marcia Siegel, on the other hand, describes the effect this way in her review of Muteki-sha: "reaching a pool of light, she turns, offers the flowers, weeps. A powdery dust rises from her as she moves. She could be smoldering."[65] It can also be used to more dramatic effect, as in this scene from Sankai Juku's Kinkan Shonen, which Arlene Croce describes as one of the "high moments of the evening":

> Dressed like a schoolboy in a cap and short pants, covered
> head to foot with white flour, mouthing silent syllables in
> cavern of silence, [Amagatsu Ushio] suddenly topples over
> backward, slamming the floor with such force that a white
> cloud rises from his clothing.[66]

However it is used, subtly or dramatically, this effect is one more element which helps to create the Butō vision of an unstable world in a state of constant flux, cyclically moving back and forth between the poles of disintegration and recreation.

Another reason that Butō dancers powder themselves with white is that its use helps make the dancer more highly visible, allowing the stage to be darkened far more that would otherwise be possible. It seems to me that

[64]Havens, Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan, p. 225.

[65]Marcia Siegel, "Flickering Stones," Village Voice (15 October 1985), p. 103.

[66]Arlene Croce, "Dancing in the Dark," New Yorker 60 (19 November 1985), p. 171.

this severely darkened stage which is the Butō trademark, characteristically returns to the original, premodern lighting practice of Japanese traditional theater. In premodern Nō and Kabuki, when there was no electric lighting so performances were lit by candles, little distinction was made between the lighting of the stage and the light on the audience, both being equally dim. Butō borrows traditional lighting practices in order to destroy the Western theatrical illusion of an "ideal" world up on the stage that is separate from the "real" world of the audience. It does so by contradicting Western lighting practice, which brightens the stage and leaves the audience in the dark in order to emphasize the distinction between the two. The undifferentiated darkness creates an atmosphere that imbues even the most grotesque images with an evocative, mysterious beauty. It was Tanizaki Jun'ichirō in In'ei Raisan (In Praise of Shadows) who first put forth the notion in 1933 that there was a traditional Japanese "aesthetic of darkness," that was being completely destroyed by the electric lights used in 20th century Kabuki and Nō: "a phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow and color in the dark and loses its beauty in the light of day."[67] Tanizaki links the darkness of the Nō stage with the world in which No was created: "the darkness in which Nō is shrouded and the beauty that emerges from it make a distinct world of shadows which today can be seen only on the stage; but in the past it could not have been far removed from daily life."[68] Butō's desire to bring back this aesthetic of darkness to theater can, in the same way, be linked to their desire to return to a premodern world where the Japanese found, "beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and darkness that one thing against another creates."[69]

The Beshimi Kata

The Kabuki "mie," a kind of theatrical "freeze" that occurs at highly dramatic moments, intensifies the effect of kumadori makeup mentioned above, completely immobilizing the face and body in an expression and gesture that heightens the emotional power of the moment by its sheer extremity (the eyes bulge out and cross, the mouth stretches into an extraordinary grimace, the body seems to blow up to a superhuman size). While Butō

[67]Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, In Praise of Shadows, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward Seidensticker (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, Inc., 1977), p. 30.

[68]Tanizaki, Shadows, p. 26.

[69]Tanizaki, Shadows, p. 30.

discards Kabuki's symbolic patterning of the face, in accordance with their strategy of stripping away specific meaning from particular gestures or techniques, it retains, albeit in a modified form, the mie.

Although, because of the Butō emphasis on metamorphosis--on the body constantly in motion, constantly changing--an actual freeze does not usually occur, there are often moments where a solo dancer stands alone and presents us with a virtuoso performance of the extremes of human expressivity. This is the kata called beshimi, a term the critic Iwabuchi Keisuke borrowed from the beshimi (grimace) mask in Nō.[70] Anna Kiselgoff, in her review of Muteki-sha's performance of Niwa at Asia Society, describes a clear example of the beshimi kata:

> Repeatedly the two performers transform their facial expressions into such extreme and different imagery during the seven episodes that they become virtually unrecognizable...Miss Nakajima, in particular, can tense up every fiber in her body, blow up each cheek or pucker each lip while turning her face into an eye-lolling "mask."[71]

Like Kabuki's "living mask" created through the use of kumadori and the mie, the continuously changing mask of beshimi in Butō aspires to the expression of the universal, but where the Kabuki mie transforms the character into a heroic figure of mythological proportions, the beshimi of Butō, which runs the gamut of all possible emotions, transforms each dancer into an "everyman" or "everywoman."

There were a number of ideas behind the development of beshimi: to begin with, it is an expression of pure metamorphosis, a grotesquery of a level that is impossible to pin down to any particular meaning and so transcends the limitations of dance that depends on the "imitation" of forms in the real world to convey its message. As Iwabuchi describes it:

> The body of the Butō dancer convulses endlessly. It is as though each fiber of the muscles has its own selfish autonomy and shudders violently as it pleases. It is not some kata that cries or is sad, it is the muscles themselves that are crying. The will does not move the muscles, the muscles themselves have their own will. The trembling of the limbs

infects the spectator watching, too; this will of the muscles calls forth the penetrating power of the imagination so that mutual communication between audience and dancer occurs.[72]

The beshimi kata "infects" the audience on a pre-language, non-intellectual level through the release of emotions that have been so deeply repressed in contemporary society that when they break out into the open they will be able to negate our impulse to categorize with words such as "anger" or "love."

A second purpose for the beshimi is similar to that of the metamorphosis exercise and the use of violence: it is anti-individualistic, renouncing modernity's myth of the respect for the individual and purposefully aiming at the destruction of what Iwabuchi has called "the equation, face = individuality = identity."[73] By completely distorting the face out of all recognition the self is relieved of the tremendous pressure to be a distinct "personality" and is able to "fuse" back into a feeling of spiritual unity and tranquility with nature and with itself. By fragmenting the body--emphasizing the separation of the body from the control of the brain by random articulation of the individual parts--the goal of separating the body from the brain that has been filled with the institutional rubbish of modernity is achieved. By letting each body part convulse and spasm as it desires it establishes its freedom from the constraint of society which works its will through the mind of the dancer. I will return to this kata again in the last chapter, since Muteki-sha made extensive use of it in Niwa (The Garden).

Ganimata

Before turning to our analysis of Niwa (The Garden), I will deal with one last technique that has been borrowed from traditional theater and changed. This is the characteristic stance called ganimata, a name that might be translated as a "bowlegged crouch." Gōda Nario, who believes this to be the innovation that established Butō as a fully developed form, identifies its origination in a work by Hijikata of 1972, Shiki no Tame no 27 Ban (27 Nights for 4 Seasons). As he describes the technique, "the weight is hung on the outer sides of the two legs. When one 'floats' the inside of the legs upwards, the

[70]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," pp. 77.

[71]Anna Kiselgoff, "The Dance: Montreal Dance Festival," New York Times (23 September 1985), p. C27.

[72]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," p. 75.

[73]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," p. 77.

knees will turn out of their own accord, and the entire frame of the body sinks down."[74]

There are a number of related reasons for the development of this distinctive stance in Butō. To begin with, there is ganimata's use in the metamorphosis exercise that plays such an important part in Butō training. When the dancers crouch down, a plane hovering 15 centimeters below the stage is created, from which the dancers are helped to experience the viewpoint of insects and animals.[75] "The act of crouching down, with arms hugging knees to make themselves as small as possible," Iwabuchi explains, "is a compression of the self's center, perhaps a reversion to the seed, egg, embryo, chrysalis, cocoon."[76]

The attempt to create a plane 15 centimeters below the stage might once again be seen as a borrowing from traditional dance techniques. Compare, for instance, the description of ganimata given above to the following description of the traditional technique of balancing weight in the hips, called hipparihai (oppositional tension) used in Nō and Kabuki:

> ...to block the hips while walking it is necessary to slightly bend the knees and, engaging the vertebral column, to use the trunk as a single unit, which then presses downward. In this way different tensions are created in the upper and lower parts of the body. These tensions oblige the body to find a new point of balance.[77]

Coincidental to this stress on a new center of gravity is the emphasis in Nō on the actor being solidly grounded, as the Kyōgen actor Nomura Mannojō makes clear:

> The actor must imagine that above him is suspended a ring of iron which is pulling him upwards and against which it is necessary to keep one's feet on the ground.[78]

It is easy to understand how this emphasis on "keeping one's feet on the ground" could have been seen by Butō dancers as the perfect way to counter ballet's expansive movement upward. Iwabuchi Keisuke emphasizes the

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[74]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 87

[75]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 87.

[76]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," p. 76.

[77]Barba, "Theater Anthropology," p. 10.

[78]As quoted in Barba, "Theater Anthropology," p. 12.

contrast between Western modern dance and Butō, by comparing the style of the Butō groups Hoppō Butō-ha and Suzuran-tō with the German dance theorist Rudolf Laban's notion of the "kinesphere":

> In Laban's kinesphere, the basic stance is that of the human rising up, like a tower. In contrast to that, the basic position in the dance of Hoppō Butō-ha and Suzuran-tō is horizontal, level with, or below the earth's surface.[79]

There is in addition a symbolic resonance to the movement downward, as Tokyo Journal dance critic Marie Myerscough points out: "movements in Butō do not commence from the vertical and proceed up, presumably to the 'light,' but from a crouching position, out of which they spread down into 'darkness.'"[80]

One should note however, that although there are certainly strong similarities between ganimata and traditional theater's stress on balance in the hips, Hijikata was at pains to emphasize that ganimata had its source in the natural posture of the Japanese, particularly in the stance of farmers who had to constantly crouch down in their rice fields and who often had to carry extraordinarily heavy loads on their back. Although this stance, which reflects the rigor of premodern life, was disappearing rapidly because of urbanization and modernization, it lingered on in the more provincial parts of the country, particularly in the Tōhoku region where Hijikata was raised. From this perspective, ganimata could be seen as a "natural" stance for the Japanese body, and in fact its genesis has been located by Gōda Nario in "Hijikata's skillful questioning of his own body" through which "he revealed to us its birthplace and formation; that is, he returned to the landscape of Akita."[81] The emphasis on ganimata as a natural posture ties in with Hijikata's belief that the body is a repository for unconscious collective memory and that by recreating (or reliving) certain postures those memories will be reactivated in the viewer as well as the dancer, by means of a direct preverbal channel of communal identity.

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[79]Iwabuchi, "The Paradigm of Butō," p. 76. In Laban's book, Choreutics, the term kinesphere is defined as "the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs...." Rudolf Laban, Choreutics (London: MacDonald and Evans, 1966), p. 10.

[80]Myerscough, "Butō," p. 8.

[81]Gōda, "On Ankoku Butō," p. 85.

The seeming contradiction between Butō's disavowal of technique, and their adoption of kata like ganimata is often played out in comments like the following, in which Amagatsu Ushio discusses an exercise that involves the ganimata stance that Sankai Juku uses in training: "it teaches the students to work against tension and toward a natural body...It is getting to certain natural states rather than learning some technique or form."[82] The question of how "natural" Butō training is becomes most evident when watching Sankai Juku: one is struck again and again by the dancers' virtuoso performance of feats only the most highly trained (and thus unnatural) of bodies could perform. However, whatever the final decision on whether to call forms like ganimata and beshimi "techniques" or not, Hijikata made it very clear what he believed their ultimate goal was to be:

> Butō plays with time; it also plays with perspective, if we humans learn to see things from the perspective of an animal,insect, even inanimate objects. That road trodden every day is alive...we should value everything.[83]

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[82]Ushio Amagatsu as quoted in Jennifer Dunning, "Sankai Juku at City Center," New York Times (2 November 1984).

[83]Myerscough, "Butō," p. 8.

Chapter Three

ANALYSIS OF NIWA (THE GARDEN)

Muteki-sha is a second generation Butō group directed and choreographed by Nakajima Natsu. Nakajima was born in 1943 on the island of Sakhalin, about 20 miles off the coast of Hokkaido (the northernmost island of Japan). After World War II when the island was taken by Russia, all the Japanese were evacuated by sea and forced to leave their homes and most of their possessions behind. The trauma of that event has been captured for Nakajima in the sound of the ship's foghorn (the muteki), which "still resonates in her memory and her work."[1] She began taking dance classes in 1955, studying ballet and modern dance in Tokyo until 1962, when she saw her first performance of Ankoku Butō. She was deeply impressed by the performance, seeing in it an alternative to Western dance forms and principles and immediately began studying with Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo. "In some ways," Nakajima has said, "I feel that I was the first real student of Hijikata and Ohno. Before me there was Ishii (Mitsutaka) and Kasai (Akira), but they were more like colleagues than students."[2] That year (1962-63) a group of dancers was meeting on the weekends in Hijikata's studio. According to Nakajima, "Ohno was mostly teaching improvization; Hijikata gave us a list of books to read during the week. We'd gather together on Friday and work non-stop--whenever we weren't dancing, we were discussing books. It was kind of crazy, but I was only nineteen at the time, so it was very exciting for me."[3]

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[1]Niwa (The Garden), program notes for performance at The Asia Society, New York City, September 27 and 28, 1985.

[2]Nakajima Natsu, interview with the author, 5 February 1988.

[3]Nakajima, interview.