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TRANSGRESSION AND THE SACRED:

THE BODY AS SEEN THROUGH HIJIKATA TATSUMI'S 'DANCE OF DARKNESS' AND TWO OF HIS CRITICAL WESTERN INFLUENCES, GEORGES BATAILLE AND ANTONIN ARTAUD

Ph.D. Thesis

Catherine CURTIN

2007

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ABSTRACT - Catherine CURTIN

TRANSGRESSION AND THE SACRED: THE BODY AS SEEN THROUGH HIJIKATA TATSUMI'S 'DANCE OF DARKNESS' AND TWO OF HIS CRITICAL WESTERN INFLUENCES, GEORGES BATAILLE AND ANTONIN ARTAUD

This dissertation examines the body in Butoh performance. The transgressive and sacred potential present within Hijikata Tatsumi's[1] dance is considered within a post-structuralist conceptual framework. The cultural and historical contexts within which Butoh emerged and the ideas that Hijikata drew upon in the formation of his dance, are analysed. These include elements from his own native philosophical, spiritual and shamanic traditions and influences from Western thinkers and artists, most notably Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille, who exerted a major impact on his dance. The diverse sexual practices and concepts of gender that existed throughout Japanese history are explored, with special attention given to Kabuki performance for its acts of cross-dressing. I argue that Butoh dance continued the deconstructive process of this theatrical tradition, parodying and disrupting the borders which marked conventional gender roles and fixed identities. Subversive aspects of sexuality were present in Hijikata's performance, as he staged ecstasy in scenes that portrayed violence, the abject and grotesque. These radical corporeal images resonated with key concepts of Bataille and Artaud who pushed the frontiers of the base and obscene and offered a deconstruction of dominant cultural values. I emphasise the parallels between these artists' works, giving special attention to the themes of eroticism, paroxysm, death and cruelty. Finally, this thesis examines how each of these artists profoundly challenged received notions of subjectivity and individual self, through the evocation of heightened states of awareness, the mystical and ritualistic.

---

[1] Hijikata Tatsumi, the founder of Butoh dance, developed in the late 1950s.

DECLARATION

This thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other university. Except where stated, the work described therein was carried out by me alone.

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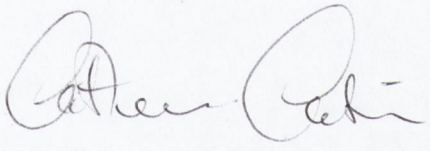
Signed: 

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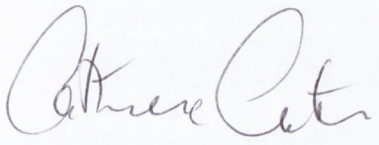

Catherine Curtin

29/09/2006

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Summary

This dissertation examines the body in Butoh performance, which had been denied and neglected in Japanese theatre, hidden beneath numerous folds of silk and then subjected to the authority of the textually based and western influenced *Shingeki* Theatre[1] that emerged in the early twentieth century. The transgressive and sacred potential present within Hijikata Tatsumi's[2] dance is considered within a post-structuralist conceptual framework, which includes feminist and Queer critical strategies. The cultural and historical contexts within which Butoh emerged and the ideas that Hijikata drew upon in the formation of his dance, are analysed. These include elements from his own native philosophical, spiritual and shamanic traditions and influences from Western thinkers and artists, most notably Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille, who exerted a major impact on his dance. Hijikata appealed to these artists, as 'the body' dominated the entirety of their works and because they preferred the Gnostic principles of darkness, as alternatives to the privileging of rationality within their own traditions.

The diverse sexual practices and concepts of gender that existed throughout Japanese history are explored, with special attention given to Kabuki performance for its acts of cross-dressing. I argue that Butoh dance continued the deconstructive process of this theatrical tradition, parodying and disrupting the borders which marked conventional gender roles and fixed identities. Subversive aspects of sexuality were present in Hijikata's performance, as he staged ecstasy in scenes that portrayed violence, the abject and grotesque. These radical corporeal images resonated with key concepts of Bataille and Artaud who pushed the frontiers of the base and obscene and offered a deconstruction of dominant cultural values. The ideas of these artists form the

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[1] *Shingeki* or 'New Theatre' was inspired by Western theatre and dramaturgy.

[2] Hijikata Tatsumi was the founder of Butoh dance, which he developed in the late 1950s.

core of the thesis, as I emphasise the parallels between their works, giving special attention to the themes of eroticism, paroxysm, death and cruelty. Finally, this thesis examines how each of these artists profoundly challenged received notions of subjectivity and individual self, through the evocation of heightened states of awareness, the mystical and ritualistic.

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INTRODUCTION

Ankoku Butoh (the Dance of Utter Darkness),[1] a revolutionary dance form created by Hijikata Tatsumi in the late 1950s, incorporated sensual, erotic, grotesque elements and shocking images. It started primarily as an underground performance art and was born of the dismal and chaotic landscape that characterised Japan following the violent disruption wrought by the atomic assaults.[2] Implicit in Hijikata's work was a powerful critique of the cultural hegemony and rationality of Western influence that ensued in the confused moral climate after World War II. The performing body which had become mired in Western discourses and presumptions, was given primacy and recovered as the site to explore the paradoxes of the human condition, including the continuums of masculine/feminine,[3] erotic/repulsive, active/passive and ugliness/beauty. Transformation became the essence of Hijikata's dance, as it offered new subject positions, deconstructing and destabilising the new ideology in Japan, that of individualism and gender identity. The celebration of taboos such as homosexuality, violence and death emerged as major themes in his work. This was set against a background of New Theatre (*Shingeki)*, created early in the twentieth century and inspired by Western realism, in which gender and sexuality were portrayed according to the heterosexual model that had become normative practice in Japan.[4] Hijikata's work was truly groundbreaking and contributed to the liberating process of affirming alternative sexualities and identities.

My first encounter with Butoh was in 1988, in Seoul South Korea, in a small intimate theatre within the student district of the city. This was a simple venue,

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[1] *Ankoku* translates as 'sheer', 'utter' or 'total' darkness.

[2] Reference is being made here to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki of 1945. Note that Hijikata was a teenager during this time; he was born in March 1928 and died in January 1986.

[3] I will be using terms such as feminine/masculine, male/female in a strategic sense, as they are not intended to infer stable, fixed biological categories. Rather the instability of these gender positions must be emphasised, as will shortly be discussed in the next chapter.

[4] *Shingeki* is a generic term for modern theatre and dance, that is, all theatre that is non-traditional such as Noh and Kabuki. It was inspired by Western dramaturgical and theatrical modes.

without tiers, stalls or circle, just the audience positioned immediately in front of a raised proscenium stage. There were few obvious technical resources employed and the stage design was limited. It was there that I watched a solo performance of a woman dressed in undecorated kimono and *obi,*[5] on a sparse, uncluttered stage. To my recollection there was a plain backcloth of gauze, in neutral shade, the only texture within the setting. Colour was concentrated in the muted pink fabric of her dress, which provided material heaviness to the lightness that her body conveyed. Her only prop was the single branch of a tree, which she swept around the edge of the enclosed space, in ultra-slow motion and utter silence. The bareness of the stage allowed the audience to focus on the simple object and the sustained poise of the dancer. She moved imperceptibly, her passing in time sculptured by the simple spotlight that traced the continuous, almost imperceptible flow of her progression, while making possible the play of light, depth and shadow. The timing was precise and perfectly nuanced, as she sustained an unwavering trajectory and her physical presence pervaded the entire stage. It seemed she moved beyond the limited boundaries of the set's enclosure and her own restricted personal space, conveying a power which captivated the audience. Her seeming translucence possessed a subliminal force, and suggested a poetic, dream-like quality, existing on the threshold of perception and blurring the meeting point of the imagined and actual.

In the darkened auditorium, I watched fully absorbed and mystified. Coming fresh to the work, I was aware that I was encountering a style of performing that was inspired by an austere and radical corporeality that was alien to my sensibility, accustomed as I was to sequential action and the 'filling of the canvas' which characterised conventional Western theatre. It seemed like a new awareness had opened, because long after the performance, it continued in my mind as I reflected on what I had witnessed, trying to make sense and attribute meaning. I was to see several other Butoh performances during my several years in the Far East, and on my many visits to Japan - a disparate yet enigmatic array of

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[5] An *obi* is a wide sash worn high at the waist to secure the kimono.

performances whose pace and rhythm varied greatly, however, which seemed to share certain characteristics. These included an extraordinary discipline and a highly trained physicality rooted in the pelvis that created energised inner tensions and a body freed from the need to express and emote. The emphasis on the immediacy of the stage experience was resonant with a raw and primitive quality that resulted in a dynamic relationship with the audience. It appeared that the Butoh body was not directed by any outward rhythm or music. Empty of any kind of dance technique, it seemed to contain the imprint of an inner notation that led to a gesturing beyond the ordinary, towards the religious and ritualistic.

Several years later, I saw a performance of the highly acclaimed Dairakudakan in a small, basement theatre on the outskirts of Tokyo city.[6] The details of that evening's events are now almost forgotten, but I can recall the impact and highly charged atmosphere of the dance. The audience was mainly composed of young students and alternative, artistic types, in addition to a high proportion of Westerners. Although sharing a similar architecture with the first theatre described, this performance was more elaborately staged and differently paced. There were multiple banks of spotlights, creating and orchestrating changes of mood, tone and atmosphere. These cast flickering shadows and accentuated the incessant flow of visual images and actions that shifted rapidly in time and space for the rapt spectators. The mixed-gender dancers performed almost naked and their bodies were painted metallic gold, appearing androgynous at times, while at others wearing exaggerated phalli. Throughout the performance, they undertook several metamorphoses as sado-masochistic, part-foetal or animal-like - the flow of visual images was incessant and excessive. There was a sense of the provocative as they hurled themselves on stage, with verve, lightness and speed. The action was at times torrential, frenzied and chaotic, interspersed with light-hearted and playful demonstrations and juxtaposed with incongruously shocking music. Such disharmonies accorded with the exaggeration and grotesqueries of

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[6] This was in September 2000 and the performance was entitled *Complete People*. Maro Akaji, a student of Hijikata, formed this group in 1972.

the stage action. Although feeling cramped and confined to a small floor cushion, I enjoyed the dynamic relationship between the audience and dancers, expressed through the audible exclamations of those around me, and the sense of heady intoxication. I have since seen many Butoh performances on my many returns to Tokyo and in Paris, London, Dublin, San Francisco, of companies such as Sankai Juku,[7] and individual practitioners who include Ko Murobushi, Yukio Waguri, Oguri, and many more who have been inspired by Hijikata's work.

In this thesis it is not my intent to trace the evolution of Butoh and the differences between these performers and companies with there wide ranging dance styles. Nor is it to describe the conventions of the work, contributing as that might to essentialist definitions of Butoh that might lead to the formation of a canon of acceptable work. I must state at the outset, that my knowledge of the Japanese language is limited and that my resources are restricted to those in English and French. I remain aware of the subjectivism of my Western thinking and my limited epistemological and metaphysical understandings, however, it is my hope that I might bring 'other' perspectives to Hijikata's work. I aim to bring to bear my very different historical and cultural experiences so that I might contribute new interpretations of early Butoh performance.

This thesis will focus on Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh* of the period May 1959 to September 1973, starting with the performance, *Forbidden Colours* (*Kinjiki)* and ending with *Calm House* (*Shizukana ie*). The collection of records that form the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives of Keio University in Tokyo have been invaluable for my research. There is manifold primary information stored there, including letters, dance scores, posters, manuscripts, photographs and performance programmes. As there are copyright restrictions and limitations on this, the documentary sources used in this thesis will be restricted to those already printed in books and journals. Also there is no sound archive of Hijikata's

[7] This group is directed by Hijikata's student, Ushio Amagatsu.

performances prior to 1972[8] and there are few records of the music which form part of his dance compositions. Visual images contained within film recordings of Hijikata's original dance will be referred to, however as these are sparse and fragmentary,[9] photographs contained in books, especially the publications of the Keio University Research Centre, will form the basis for the dance scenes I will be describing. In addition, magazines, journals, news clips, exhibition records and theses, which contain information, reviews and essays relating to Hijikata and his work, will be used as reference material.[10]

Much of Hijikata's own reading matter is still in the process of being classified and entered into a database by the research team working in the Keio University Archives,[11] so that exact references are sometimes difficult to determine. The lacunae within the information sources have sometimes led to omissions in the available secondary literature. For example, there has been very little account taken of the audience reception, the complex and nuanced interaction between dancer and spectator and interpretations that ensued from performance. The extent to which Hijikata's dance contributed to creating new subject positions and interrupting gender relations is also an area that has received little attention. Although there has been some historical research into the areas of gender attribution and sexual practices in Japan within the wider field of Japanese studies, their relation to theatre/dance and especially to Butoh, remains

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[8] See Kurihara Nanako in Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002, p. 277.

[9] Note that the performance *Story of Chickenpox, (Hoso-tan),* director: Keiya Ouchida, 1972, was filmed as a 16 minute recording. I will be referring to this and two other shorter extracted recorded pieces, *Revolt of the Flesh, (Nikutai no Hanran),* director: Hiroshi Nakamura, 1968 and *Navel and A-bomb, (Heso to Genbaku)*, director: Hosoe Eikoh, 1960, in this thesis. Additionally, a 71 minute recording of Hijikata and his troupe in *Summer Storm (Natsu No Arashi),* by director Arai Misao and filmed on the campus of Kyoto University in 1973, will also be cited. All are filmed in black and white and belong to the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives of Keio University in Tokyo. The CD rom with the book, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh: Surrealism of the Flesh, Ontology of the "Body"*, Japan: the Research Centre for the Arts and Art Administration at Keio University, 2004, contains fragments from the recording of *Revolt of the Flesh.* There are other videos of performance, most notably a 13 minute recording of *The Rose-Coloured Dance (Barairo Dansu,* 1965) and a 12 minute recording of *The Masseur (Anma,* 1963), both by Iimura Takahiko.

[10] It is important to note that my research will be based on English language sources.

[11] This was the situation in spring 2004, when I made a series of visits to the centre.

neglected. In the first two chapters of this thesis, these are the areas I will be exploring, as a background to tracing the development of Hijikata's dance form.

Post-structuralist theories will form the conceptual framework of the study and more specifically for the first two chapters, feminist and critical strategies concerned with the performativity and construction of identity. My intention is to stretch the boundaries of this dance form and to open it to some of the multiple interpretations found within these critical models, while allowing some of its 'Queer' potentiality to show through. As the hallmark of the Queer approach is the exploration and transgression of boundaries, I aim to use it as a lens to explore Hijikata's dance, which itself offered challenges to normative boundaries and conventions, especially those concerning sexual difference, individual subjectivity and embodiment.[12] I also intend to include the ideas found in Hijikata's writings and to bring them into a series of encounters with these theoretical models.[13]

I will be calling on the insights of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, whose work has been integral to critical theory, along with Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, who were pivotal in the evolution of the analysis of sexuality and identity. In approaching this work, I remain cognizant of the issues involved in transporting and applying Western

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[12] Queer approaches emerged during the 1980s from gay and lesbian academic studies, which in turn originated from the radical movements of the 1960s. The plurality of these approaches must be stressed, as the rubric 'queer' encompasses different and sometimes divergent perspectives. The disruptive potential of these theories must also be emphasised, as their overall objective is one of resistance identity. Their aim is to move beyond the confines of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, as a diversity of sexual and gender positions are considered, including bisexuality and transgenderism. Their sphere is not limited to that of sexual orientation however, as they are involved in the interrogation of all categorisations and fixed subject positions. Indeed the rejection and deconstruction of boundaries and binary definitions is their most basic tenet and emphasis is placed on diversity, the constructed and peformative. The ideas of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have been influential throughout Queer theories. Butler's theorisation of performativity for example, is embodied in these approaches. This involves a questioning of the extent to which gender identities are not natural characteristics, but are acquired and imitated.

[13] A range of Hijikata's complete texts from between 1960-1985 were translated into English for the spring 2000 edition of *Theatre Drama Revue,* with the aim of extending the existent research of Butoh. It will be these and other translated sources, mainly newspaper articles, which I will use throughout this thesis.

critical theory to contemporary Japanese theatre, such as the dangers of imposing these academic trends which might reduce it, to that of 'foreign Other'. These Western theories have developed within definitive cultural and historical contexts and are transversed with ideologies. My intention therefore, is to use them as points of departure to be shaped by, just as they shape, the objects of this study. At the same time a historicist perspective will be taken, in an attempt to uncover national and ideological agendas, including those of heteronormativity and patriarchy, to gain insight into any possible resistance towards such critiques. A critical reflexivity and sensitivity to the complexity of such issues will be endeavoured.

A radical reading of the corpus of Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh* will be attempted, which will constantly engage with and examine the limited traces that remain of his performances, in order to explore its subversive potential. I will move between the text and context of Hijikata's creation, alluding to his lifestyle and the people with whom he collaborated. The life of the author will be of interest, as his own gender nonconformity and fractured social existence placed him at the cultural margins and led into his dance. As he embodied the heresy, anarchy and effeminacy that were present within his creative work, I will be examining how he tested the boundaries of gender and subjectivity through both his performance and the way he lived his life. I contend that he put into question modern concepts of normality and identity, while offering a profound challenge to the established bourgeois culture. My intention is not to simply assimilate and fashion elements of his dance or lifestyle to an agenda, or to impose on it any sense of unified structure, pattern or understanding, as this would be intrinsically foreign to the spirit of his work. Definitive insights will not be offered, rather this critical model will be used to interrogate and deconstruct his performances. I will resist any sort of closure that might imply an innate or transcendental meaning in Hijikata's work, instead I will attempt to interrogate, problematise and tease out possibilities. His dances pose multiple questions and interpretations, to which I shall offer possible responses and understandings, while ultimately allowing them to remain open.

This approach will be consonant with the often provocative and indeterminate nature of his creative output, which itself can be seen as a reflection of the contradictions and ruptures within everyday life in Japan during the late 1950s through to the mid 1970s.

Many Western influences, as well as a range of Japanese artists guided Hijikata's unique artistic vision. He socialised with some of the greatest thinkers, writers and artists of his time, including, Mishima Yukio, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko,[14] Takiguchi Shuzo,[15] Hosoe Eikoh[16] and Tadanori Yokoo,[17] among others, with whom he shared a marginal and oppositional relationship to the norms of society.[18] He collaborated closely with these vanguard artists, regularly meeting them in his training venue[19] and engaging in lively interdisciplinary exchanges, while sharing with them an interest in native and foreign culture.[20] They avidly read and passionately discussed the sometimes obscene and erotic writings of Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, De Sade, Comte de Lautréamont and Rimbaud among others.[21] Hijikata's work was an amalgam of traditional

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[14] Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, scholar, writer of erotic literature and translator of the works of the Marquis de Sade, Georges Bataille and Jean Genet. Note that Hijikata's performance of 1965, *The Rose-Coloured Dance [Barairo Dansu]*, was also named, *À La Maison de M. Civeçawa (To the Shibusawa House).* This dedication to Shibusawa is clearly displayed on the poster for the dance by its designer Yokoo Tadanori.

[15] Takiguchi Shuzo, art critic and Surrealist poet, was recognised by Breton with whom he maintained close links, for his translation of Surrealist thought.
Miryam Sas in her book *Faultlines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism*, Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 159 and 161-2, notes the importance of Surrealism through such influences as Takaguchi, as an unspoken but important precedent for Butoh. The surrealistic tendencies within Hijikata's work, although referred to in this thesis, are however, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[16] Hosoe Eikoh, photographer.

[17] Yokoo Tadanori, graphic designer.

[18] Many of Hijikata's associates attested to the various artists he fraternised with, for example, Toshihiro Tanemura, Yoshihisa Tsuruoka and Akiko Motofuji, eds., *Hijikata Tatsumi: Three Decades of Experiment*, Hijikata Tatsumi Memorial, Tokyo: Yushisha, 1993, back cover.

[19] This was in central Tokyo and was named *Asbestos-kan.*

[20] See for example, David G. Goodman, *Angura: Posters of the Avant-Garde*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999, Introduction, pp. 1-2.

[21] Kageyama Yuri in his article, 'Dai Rakuda Kan: Butoh Spectacle' in *The Japan Times Weekly,* January 24, 1987, notes the influence of some of these artists, especially Artaud and Bataille. See also, Nanako Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh' in *The Drama Review, (TDR)*, Vol. 44, issue 1, spring 2000, p. 18.

Japan and the West; it was an intercultural and intracultural activity, in which he brought aspects from disparate traditions and histories into dynamic relationship. Probing the innovative potential within these different elements, he discovered new impulses and a sense of alterity for his own creative output. These cultural fragments were taken from their various contexts, without reference being made to their origins, as Hijikata negotiated a complex dialogue that was not intent on producing 'meaning'. Some of these Japanese writers and artists will be alluded to throughout the course of this study. Special focus will be given to the European elements he embraced, while noting the contradictions that lie within his implicit criticism of Western cultural influences on Japanese society. I will be drawing parallels between these writers' and Hijikata's creative works that will, I hope, pose different ways of seeing his Butoh dance.

While acknowledging that the influences on Hijikata's work were multiple and diverse, in this thesis a reading of Butoh is made primarily through the writings of the Western artists Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud. These writers have been chosen because of their decisive effect on Hijikata's dance, which I contend, resonated with the theoretical concepts they outlined. To date, apart from allusions and references made to these artists, there has been little in-depth study of their impact on the work of Hijikata, therefore I will attempt to supplement the existent research that connects these three artists. I emphasise links between their works rather than asserting any direct or precise influence. My intention is not an analysis or a critical discussion of Hijikata's reading of their work; rather I will use them as a window through which to view his aesthetic vision. All three were provocateurs, involved in the process of pushing things to their limits, acting in defiance of the reality around them. Each experienced physically what they described, as the starting point for Artaud and Bataille was always already the body. It held central position throughout the entirety of their work, while a prominent role was given to subversion, eroticism and the mystical, as deep currents that connected diverse elements. Other intertextual allusions present in Butoh include traces from within Kabuki and Noh traditional theatres, which

Hijikata acknowledges. At the same time however, he distanced himself from Japanese traditional theatre and resisted too close an identification and appropriation.[22] I will endeavour not to draw any essentialist inferences but to allow these features to play, as Hijikata did, through his work.

The 1960s was a period of extraordinary artistic energy and experimentation in Japan. The decade started with extreme youth unrest and massive demonstrations against the renewal of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (known as Ampo),[23] which resulted in failure and a profound disillusionment with politics. It was a period of increasing urbanisation, commercialisation and consumerism. This modernisation process closely emulated the West and was accompanied by an individual quest for personal fulfilment, together with a sense of communal and spiritual dislocation. Its rationalistic thinking had profound effects on the Japanese way of life, suppressing the creative potential that lay within diffuse local knowledges and cultural experiences. Artists, theatre practitioners and intellectuals all sought to affirm in different ways an anarchistic and subversive spirit, in a struggle to find lost cultural identities and radically assert new aesthetics and concepts of Japan's tradition. The unique modernist art forms they created included the bizarre, mystical and superstitious that reflected a pre-modern Japanese sensibility. They revolted against the increased materialisation and de-eroticisation of everyday reality, while ironically combining and incorporating elements of Western culture.[24] Hijikata's work was situated at

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[22] When asked about his dance's relationship with traditional performance, Hijikata responded, 'if I try to systematise what my Butoh is by using traditional arts as the basis, somethings spill over,' admitting that he does make comparisons without making an 'exact study' of them. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'Fragments of Glass; A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi' in *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 66.

[23] Following the end of occupation (1945-1952), this was signed in 1952. The treaty involved a security arrangement with the United States and allowed Japan to focus on its economic growth.

[24] It must be noted that throughout the course of its political, social and artistic history, Japan has maintained an ambivalent relationship vis-à-vis its defining 'Other', that is, Euro-American culture. This has centred on accepting or rejecting Western cultural attributes while evoking or disowning aspects of its own tradition. These issues continued to be present not only in Hijikata's work, but in that of post-war artists and intellectuals, and involved a negotiation of Western and Japanese influences. For several centuries the Japanese tradition accommodated foreign cultural elements, for example, in the Nara period (710-794), Chinese culture was assimilated into the Japanese way of life.

the confluence of these radical and seemingly contradictory impulses and he engaged in some of the most important issues of the day, mainly those which revolved around the status of the body, sexuality, selfhood and the sacred. In this thesis, an examination of the cultural and historical context within which Butoh developed will be considered of utmost importance, in order to avoid abstracting and isolating Hijikata's creative output. An attempt will be made to uncover the hegemonic messages contained within the social, economic, aesthetic and theatrical discourses that were operative around the time of Butoh's inception and the changes that were taking place within them.

In Hijikata's dance, the materiality of the body was expressed in opposition to the textually based modern drama and idealist forms of modern dance. He conceived of his performance as a reaction to the feminine world of classical Western ballet that predominated in the dance scene in Japan.[25] Invoking a provocative aesthetic of the grotesque and 'vulgar', he sought to challenge the complacency of current mainstream performance. His early creative period from 1959 to 1968, was predominantly centred on the male dancer and homoerotic themes consistently featured on his stage. In performance he distorted modern Japanese representations of the male body, positing it as the site for violent and sadomasochistic acts, in ritualised scenes that radically explored the nature of desire, sexual power and pleasure, while simultaneously problematising prevailing judgments of 'normality'.

The first chapter surveys the diverse sexual practices that existed throughout Japanese history and examines how gender identity and desire had became

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[25] Hijikata had started his career as a modern, Western-style dancer but he could not conform to its ideals of lightness and balletic agility. He had also studied jazz and a radical dance form known as Ausdrunkstanz ('interpretive' or 'free' dance). Rudolf Laban and his collaborator Mary Wigman developed this genre in Germany during World War I and it dominated the dance world there throughout the 1920s. The main objective of Wigman's modernist choreography was to make dance an autonomous language that could express the spirit of the time. It was fundamentally expressionistic, intended to reveal authentic inner states and embodied an emotionality that ranged from angst to ecstasy. Self-transformation was an important aspect of Wigman's own performance and in a series of masks and full-length costumes that concealed her sexual identity she confounded conventional notions of gender.

socially constructed over time. I will also look at how they assumed distinctly different meanings when placed in various historical frameworks. The evolution of concepts concerning gender is traced and the ideological transformations that took place, especially with increasing Western influence in Japan, are explored. Special attention is given to Kabuki for its practices of cross-dressing. The importance of this theatre as a site where gender oppositions and sexual discourses could be contested and new meanings created, is discussed. Chapter two elaborates the themes of sexuality, gender and the erotic. I argue that Hijikata's dance continues the deconstructive process of the Kabuki theatrical tradition, going deeper into issues concerning sexual identity. Concepts such as those of essentialised gender and unified self, which had become part of the new ideology, I contend, are undermined in his work. His performances together with those of Ohno Kazuo, the co-founder of Butoh and the first female dancers, are analysed and viewed through the lens of feminist and post-structuralist theorists. The sexual dynamics of Hijikata's performance evolved over the course of his lifetime, as his work gradually moved beyond the strictly male domain. He increasingly incorporated women into his dance, involved in ambiguous gender acts and androgynous bodies through which an indeterminate gender was expressed. Continually present throughout his dance was the practice of cross-dressing, a practice that calls attention to the act of gender performance itself and offers further questioning of sexual identity. I will be problematising the repercussions of these elements throughout this thesis, asking if they subverted the fixed principles of male and female or if they served to reinscribe their binary nature.

The third chapter examines the parallels between the work of Hijikata and the writings of Georges Bataille. A number of themes, including, the sacred, primitive, erotic, taboos, transgressions and Christian imagery are taken, to give further insight into the disruptive potential of Butoh. Attention is given to subjects which dominate Bataille's writings, those of ecstasy, death, violence and the sacred as expressed in Hijikata's performance, which contains I assert, the sacrificial and

mystical qualities of a shamanic ritual. Chapter four examines Artaud's writings and his vision of a theatre that was wholly engaged with the flesh and 'the power of gesture.'[26] He proposed a defiant theatre of agony, frenzy, paroxysm and delirium that was born out of implacable necessity and rigour, elements which have resonance in Hijikata's performance. Both Artaud's and Hijikata's dramaturgy and lifestyle, I argue, profoundly challenged received notions about subjectivity.

The final two chapters take the themes of the subject, sacred and sacrificial further. The renewed focus on the body in Butoh, with its intense physical and mental training, is further examined. This involved total concentration so that every muscle of the dancer's physique was incorporated and the body pushed to an extreme. Hijikata's endeavour to engage the spectator in a deep mutual communication through his visceral images of violence, pain and distortion, resonates I contend, with the notion of 'power of presence' that constitutes the heart of traditional Noh performance. Such 'presence' has been problematised by post-structuralist thinkers such as Derrida, whose work deconstructs notions of coherent, permanent self. These insights correspond closely with important Buddhist concepts, such as that of the emptiness of all phenomena, which includes notions of selfhood. Such realisations are reached through rigorous bodily discipline and meditative practice, in which the interpretive processes of the rational mind are quietened and the reflecting subject is bracketed. It is towards these understandings that underlie Japanese traditional and religious concepts, I argue, which Hijikata alluded to in his dance.

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[26] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, trans. Victor Corti, London and New York: Calder, 1995, p. 61.

CHAPTER I

Historical and Cultural Context: Homoeroticism, Sexuality and Gender in Japan

Introduction: The First Butoh Performance

In spring 1959, the first Butoh piece choreographed by Hijikata, *Forbidden Colours* (*Kinjiki)* was performed in a darkened Tokyo theatre. It was named after the well-known novel by Mishima Yukio[27] and took the unique theme of homoeroticism that had never been depicted on a Japanese stage before. It culminated in the slaughtering of a live chicken on stage, sending shock waves throughout the dance world; *Ankoku Butoh*, the Dance of Utter Darkness had begun.[28]

Two men appear on a semi-darkened stage, their shadows criss-cross and intensify the presence of mystery, expectation and anxiety present in the already ominous setting. The opening scene depicts the older man (Hijikata Tatsumi), whose face and chest are greased in black, in stark contrast to a teenage boy's white youthful flesh.[29] The tension builds as Hijikata circles the boy who is given a chicken that he places between his legs, sinking into a squat, as if to squeeze it to death, while the man looks on.[30] The second part takes place in semi-darkness, without musical accompaniment, only the sounds of breathing and heavy sighing.[31] Rolling on top of one another, one cries *je t'aime* a couple of

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[27] Note that this dance was adapted from Mishima Yukio's novel, which was written in 1952. See Marie Myerscough, 'Tatsumi Hijikata - Avant-Garde Dancer' in *The Japan Times*, February 4, 1986.

[28] It must be noted again that this and other performances that will be described later in this thesis, will be reconstituted mainly through visual images contained in the publications noted (unless stated otherwise). Here photographs in ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 34-5, form the basis of this portrayal.

[29] This young man was Ohno Kazuo's son, Yoshito.

[30] The chicken is frequently present in Hijikata's performance. In Japan and especially in the rural North-Eastern area where he spent his childhood, this animal was a vital food source. Cockerels have a special place in the symbolism of Shinto, as they are considered to be birds of the deities.

[31] The performance took place in silence and was preceded and followed by accordion music

times. In the shadowy setting can be heard the sounds of footsteps, the boy escaping and the man pursuing. Words spoken in French suggest Hijikata's attempt to open up a space for the possibilities of male-male desire, which had been denied within his own culture. In the absence of any sense of context, plot or emotional development, the passion and desire of the encounter are accentuated and repressed anxieties surrounding issues of sexuality are amplified. The young actor appears frozen and immobilised, as though caught in a traumatic event. The combination of confinement of the small, undecorated stage, the menacing shadows cast on a vacant wall and strings attaching the actors create a sense of disquiet and danger, suggesting the forbidden union of an illicit homosexual encounter. (Figures 1-3)

The movement is quiet, taut and coarse, while the muscular tension and level of energy throughout are striking. The piece draws on the Japanese aesthetics of control, concentration and restraint, reminiscent of the classical Noh theatre of the fourteenth century and the stylised sacrificial acts of a ritual.[32] The dancers' stillness and inner power were later to become the central characteristics of all Butoh movements, creating a heightened sense of presence that must have been palpable to the spectator. *Forbidden Colours* lasted only ten minutes but it made a terrific impact on the audience, some of whom were outraged, while others found it extraordinary and compelling.[33]

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played by Yasuda Shugo. See ibid. Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 54.

[32] I do not wish to imply here that there is a single and essential Japanese aesthetic. It is a constantly changing variable, open to reinterpretations, redefinitions and historical developments.

[33] Several members of the Japanese Artistic Dance Association were so scandalised by the performance that they threatened to resign. See Mayumi Saito, 'The Changing Face of Butoh' in *Tokyo Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 206, August, 1998, p. 31.

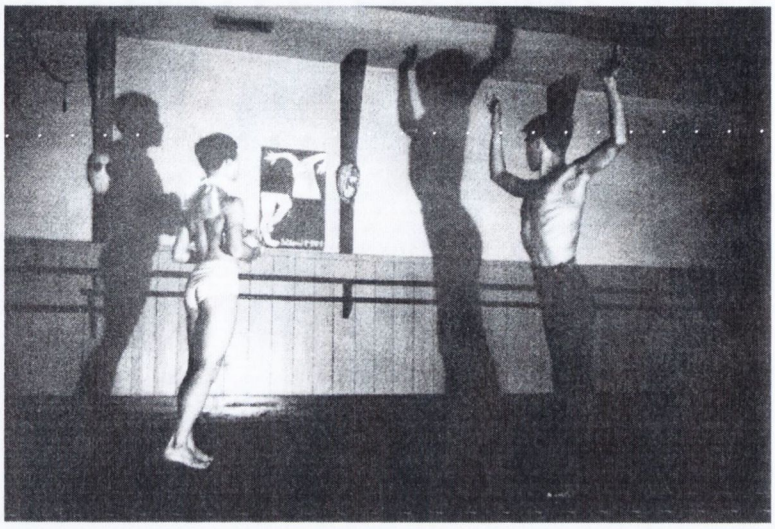

Figure 1

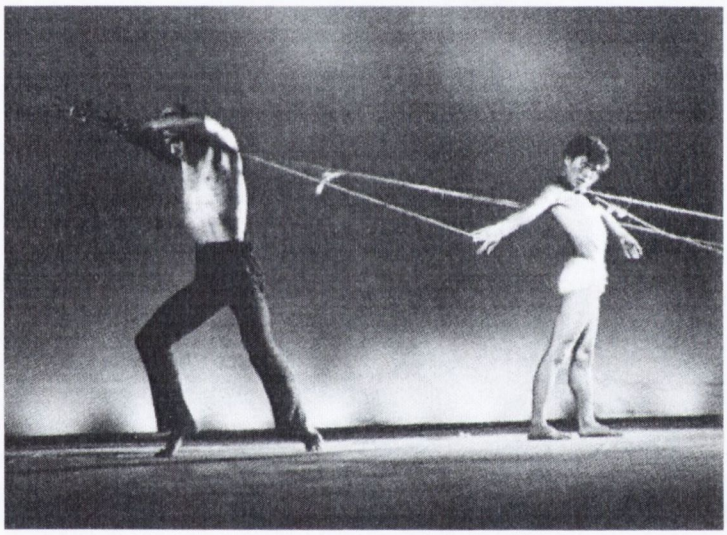

Figure 2

Figure 3

Against a background of a modern theatre that had been attempting a mimetic role for Japanese culture, Hijikata's work stridently created new and controversial positions. He enacted homosexual erotics in the flesh, as a blatant rejection of compulsory heterosexual propriety, in a society that had turned its back on its traditional sexual diversity. Modern Japanese patriarchal culture had become accustomed to representations of romantic love, while the practice of male-male eroticism had come to be policed primarily through its unspeakability and shrouded in secrecy and paranoia. Hijikata's dance points to a past in which a complex diversity of sexual practices existed, which I will now attempt to outline as a prelude to offering descriptions of his performances. Noh Theatre will be briefly described but special attention will be given to traditional Kabuki and I will refer to the later Takarazuka Revue for these theatres' practices of cross-dressing. The importance of traditional Japanese theatre as a site where gender oppositions, cultural and sexual discourses could be contested and new meanings created, is revealed through these theatrical forms. I will be placing Kabuki in a conceptual framework, drawing on those critical theorists referred to in the introduction of this thesis. These preliminaries will act as crucial background to Hijikata's work, which continues this deconstructive process I contend, going deeper into the issue of identity and the continuum of gender and sexuality that exists within the human body.

The Homoerotic Tradition of Japan

The male body as erotic object, so central to Hijikata's contemporary dance, resonates with long established practices and traditions in Japan. These have been well documented, especially from the 1600s with the spread of written publications, poems, novels and the arts, which attest to a complex and diverse realm of erotic practice and pleasure. From the historical traces available, it can be assumed that the practice of male-male sexuality was widespread among all strata of society at least since the middle-ages and accepted within the dominant culture. Individuals were not characterised by their sexual desires and

practices,[34] however, these and the understandings and definitions they registered, underwent profound transformations over time, constituting a historical shifting within the discursive framework, which therefore precludes any notion of a unitary narrative.

During the Muromachi period (1392-1573), it was common for military rulers to have one or more male lovers. Indeed in the fourteenth century, Zeami, the co-founder of the principles of Noh theatre, inspired and became the lover of the shogun Yoshimitsu Ashikaga, when he was just twelve years old. Powerful male patrons are known to have been attracted to youths, as same-sex attraction was accepted practice between older men and young boys.[35] Male-love was not condemned or censured, but coexisted and indeed was considered compatible with heterosexual behaviour.[36] Indeed it was widely known that Buddhist priests often fell in love with their young acolytes, called *chigo*, to whom they would give religious and moral guidance. Such homoerotic sentiment was understood '...to be a sacred force as well as a physical one'[37] and to have been responsible for achieving transcendent states, spiritual awakenings and conversions, as in the Buddhist myths there are many stories of sacred children who were seen as child Bodhisattvas.[38]

Cross-Dressing and Traditional Japanese Theatre

The practice of cross-dressing in performance has a long-standing tradition within Japan and is said to derive from indigenous Shinto and Buddhist religious practices, enacted in the temple dances and earlier folk plays of the Heian period (794-1185). A fascination with cross-gendered performance, continued up to and

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[34] William MacDuff, 'Beautiful Boys in No Drama: The Idealization of Homoerotic Desire' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2, autumn 1996, p. 255.

[35] The concept of *shudo*, 'the way of youth', one of the many euphemisms for male-male sexuality, was a popular ideal.

[36] Men were expected to marry and produce offspring unless they belonged to a Buddhist sect that prohibited marriage. Indeed it was widely known that Buddhist priests often fell in love with their young acolytes, to whom they would give religious and moral guidance.

[37] Ibid, p. 249.

[38] Ibid, pp. 250-3. A Bodhisattva is a deity who postpones enlightenment in order to save sentient beings from suffering.

throughout the Tokugawa period (1615-1868), as it was greatly valued for its sexual ambiguity by both men and women. In the classical Noh theatre of the fourteenth century, women's roles were depicted by male actors and its plays stress a refined, almost feminine beauty, which was referred to under the concept of *yugen*. This term has many connotations including the perishable, ephemeral nature of youthful boyish attractiveness, a common theme in its early drama. [39] These boys were considered less dangerous sexual objects than women, who were seen as polluting influences and as inferior in the cycle of reincarnation. From the 1600s Noh continued as a high cultural dance form available to all classes and received the official patronage of the shogunate. The Tokugawa family supported it and it became an official ceremonial art.[40] This highly symbolic and aesthetic theatre which continues today, contains a synthesis of chanting, music, dancing, acting and other related arts, in order to create what has been described as an 'integrated experience'.[41] The Noh play is not concerned with mimetic representation, rather it discloses in the most distilled and understated terms, a subtle poetry of the stage. Rigorous training and supreme concentration are involved to produce meticulous verbal articulation and powerful symbolic gestures. Habitual, daily actions are substituted by 'unnatural' ways of moving and incongruent positions, involving a mathematical precision and control that culminates in a deliberate and inner tension. Such restraint is frequently broken by forceful movement and explosions of vitality, and a play's silence is frequently juxtaposed with fierce and intensely potent sound. The rhythms of the drums and percussion are irregular and syncopated, evocative of the music of traditional Shinto festivals. These combined with hypnotic chanting

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[39] By the thirteenth century the *wakashu*, boys aged between twelve and eighteen were already replacing the slightly younger *chigo*. Ibid, p. 252. In addition to their sexual charm that continued to derive from their androgynous and highly decorated appearance, their martial qualities were stressed, reflecting the shift in power to the samurai class.

[40] With the Meiji Reformation in 1868 and the fall of the shogunate, Noh virtually disappeared, to be later revived as a form of state entertainment for foreign dignitaries. General Grant of the USA, who encouraged the Japanese government to support this theatrical tradition, revered it. See Shinko Kagaya, 'Noh Performances in Gaichi' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2, autumn 2001, p. 258.

[41] See George W. Brandt and Kuniyoshi Munakata, 'Some Notes on Noh Dancing' in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. VII, No. I, winter 1981 and ibid, Donald Keene, pp. 13-27, for a critique of the essential features of Noh theatre.

evoke an otherworldly quality, pointing to an existence beyond form, that of the supernatural, deities and spectres. Further description of this early theatrical genre will be given in a later chapter of this thesis, in relation to the sacred elements within Butoh.

Kabuki

In the early seventeenth century Kabuki[42] was established, performed by women and very soon after, imitated and infiltrated by prostitutes.[43] There followed a flourishing of this theatrical form, which although considered as disreputable, held endless fascination for its audience. The unrestrained interaction of the sexes within the predominately female Kabuki troupe, however, was cause for controversy, especially when the samurai, the backbone of Tokugawa society, started to frequent performances.[44] Women were prohibited from performing in 1629 when the military (*bakafu*) government clamped down because of rivalries over the attentions of the performers among this warrior class and thereafter *Kabuki* became an all-male art. The female prostitution intrinsic to Kabuki culture was however, merely replaced by that of young males.[45] These boys

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[42] It is interesting that the word *Kabuki* itself carries with it many sexual and subversive connotations. The Chinese characters applied to the term today, indicate 'song, dance and skill'. Etymologically however, *Kabuki* signifies differently, deriving from the word *kabuku,* which originally meant to slant, to be off kilter, to bend forward or by extension, to be eccentric, self-willed and 'deviant'. Ibid, Senelick, p. 84 and Toshio Kawatake, *Kabuki: Baroque Fusion of the Arts*, trans. Frank and Jean Connell Hoff, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2001, p. 128. In Tokugawa society, after Japan's closure to the rest of the world in 1641, public and personal life was restricted by numerous laws and cultural practices. In this enclosed realm, a person whose appearance and conduct were stylishly eccentric and nonconformist and who possessed a certain *savoir faire* was called *kabuki mono.*

[43] According to legend, it was initiated by Izumi no Okuni, an itinerant shrine dancer, who with her troupe in 1603, caused a commotion with burlesque and erotic performances in Kyoto. In the dry riverbed of the Kamo River she would cross-dress (note that the derogatory term 'riverbed beggar', *kawara kojiki*, which Kabuki actors and prostitutes came to be called, derives from this and the low outsider status of actors continued throughout the Tokugawa period and beyond). She would begin by wearing monk's costume (a reference to the religious sources of her dancing), then change to man's kimono, hair bobbed, wearing a dagger sword and sake container at her waist - all men's properties. She also wore a cross pendant and other exotic foreign accessories to emphasise her protest against established codes and protocol. Her most popular performance piece involved a teahouse tryst between a dazzling young man and a prostitute, which exploited sexual nuance to its fullest.

[44] Permanent theatres were built in the designated so-called 'pleasure quarters' and licenses issued, close to the brothels and bathhouses.

[45] It became known as 'boys' Kabuki' (*wakashu)*, a term earlier used for 'sexual youths' and was

represented the ideal of sexually ambivalent beauty and their homoerotic performances were provocatively suggestive and seductive.[46] As Tokugawa society was regulated by a rigorous class system of finely nuanced distinctions and due to the social chaos caused by the promiscuous mixing of classes, they were banned in 1652.[47]

For three hundred years, adult males acted all gender roles. The link between theatre and prostitution, however, remained as male actors continued to sell their sexual services to male patrons, nevertheless there was a gradual disentanglement over the decades that followed.[48] The performing arts were to become a male preserve until the late nineteenth century, in which male actors were given total agency over their representation of the female role on the stage.

The female impersonator, the *Onnagata*, came into being, who cultivated and embodied a notional concept of beauty and elegance through imitating the court ladies and courtesans. This cross-dressed performer extracted and distilled a representation of 'femininity' and codified it through his male body. Painstaking manipulation was involved, to produce highly stylised codes of speech, gait and mannerisms.[49] An abstract 'female essence' was conveyed as sensually erotic, submissive and seductive, shaped by the aesthetics of the youthful male that were idealised within the social milieu of the entertainment world. Throughout the Tokugawa period, in spite of restrictions by the military authorities on various plays, roles and dress, the Onnagata created increasingly innovative and extravagant forms of costume, make-up, gestures and props to signify the woman's role and to cultivate their own unique style of acting. There are many

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part of the trend of male prostitution among all classes, from the priestly and warrior to that of commoners.

[46] At the teahouses close to the theatres, these young boys would also entertain customers by dancing, singing and making themselves available as sexual partners for male patrons.

[47] Ibid, Senelick, p. 86.

[48] The all-importance of *iroke,* that is, physical charm and grace, came to be replaced by a theatre in which artistry and skill became paramount.

[49] Katherine Mezur writes of 'the tortuous ordeal of performing the female body' in 'Japanese Deconstructions of the Female Body' in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 283.

issues and complexities implicit in such female representation, a few of which I will now attempt to briefly address, before returning to them in the next chapter, in the context of cross-dressing and the role of women within Butoh. [50]

In Kabuki, women are appropriated, while men have the authority over her creation and the underlying ideology is male privilege over the illusion of 'woman' on stage. Her subjectivity is subsumed as he manipulates and determines the imagery of the feminine, creating for her a substitution. These overly exaggerated representations[51] also must have acted as a conservative force, reaffirming stereotypes of femininity that are sustained within an implicitly patriarchal system. At the same time, however, the cross-dressed performance alludes to the complexity of gender attribution and brings into play the fantasy of sexual identity. It reveals how the surface of bodies can be inscribed with gender markers, that is, those behaviours and gestures that are commonly perceived as expressions of some coherent and 'essential' core. The Onnagata role begs the question; if a male body can so easily impersonate the voice, movements and mannerisms of a woman, how secure are the boundaries that divide these two sexes, upon which a hierarchy of privilege is based?

The ideas of Judith Butler are apposite here and will serve as critical perspectives for the next chapter in which Butoh performance is described. A materialist feminist who borrows from post-structuralist thinking, her main premise is the performativity of the gendered body. She views these acts which are produced, '...on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying

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[50] I will be taking a post-structuralist/material feminist perspective (or Marxist feminism as it was known in the 1970s). This approach challenges the historical and material conditions of class, race and gender oppression and demands the radical transformation of patriarchal structures. In the late 1980s a split opened between a materialist post-structuralist critique and others that adhere to so-called essentialist positions. Within this approach, I will be strategically using essentialist notions such as those of 'woman' and 'the female body' - concepts from these other feminist perspectives.

[51] Senelick notes this process of exaggeration, '(l)iving as a woman, the male Onnagata could discern womanish traits unnoticed by women themselves: once perceived, they could be extended, accentuated and formalised,' (Ibid, Senelick, p. 90), thus pointing to the theatricality involved in gender performance.

absences,'[52] as illusions which are, 'discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of heterosexuality,'[53] thus perpetuating the prevailing gender system. Gender identity is thus asserted as cultural construction, constituted through persistent performance, or as she outlines through, 'a stylised repetition of acts'[54] and 'that the gendered body is performative suggests that is has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.'[55] Taking drag and cross-dressing as her model, she describes how they highlight appearance as illusion, '(i)n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency.'[56] The effects of such performance 'denaturalise' sex and gender and assert their fragility and lack of substance. In her book *Gender Trouble* she describes the complex relationship between the 'imitation' and the 'original' within drag performance, maintaining that there is always an interdependent relationship, which provokes constant compulsive repetition to construct itself as original.

There are analogies that can be made here with the post-structuralist writings of the French theorist Jacques Derrida. Although he does not apply his theories directly to the human body, his work is of relevance here. He offers a deconstruction of the meta-narratives within Western culture and focuses on the meaning of presence, portraying it as a state in which meaning is always differentiated and deferred.[57] He describes language as empty of meaning because it is an endless process of difference and absence, not able to possess anything in its fullness, which leads to a continual movement from one signifier to

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[52] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 173.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' in *Performing Feminisms; Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre,* Sue-Ellen Case ed., Baltimore and London, 1990, p. 270.
[55] Ibid, Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.
[56] Ibid, p. 175.
[57] Jacques Derrida, *Différance, in Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds., Blackwell, London, 2001, pp. 385-407.

the next along a potentially infinite chain. Any search for an ultimate source leads only to the traces, margins and is ultimately futile, a process which he termed *différance*. Assimilating this in her critique of the drag performance, Butler asserts that through its continual displacements, the original identity on which gender is based is revealed to be 'an imitation without an origin'[58] and therefore lacks any interior essence. It would seem then, that the Onnagata role revealed the constructive nature of gender definitions. Its more extensive outcome however, in terms of altering women's positions within the dominant order, is highly questionable as gender domains remained and indeed became increasingly mutually exclusive as will be explored in the next section of this chapter.[59]

To conclude this section, in her study of cross-dress performance in Japan, Erica Stevens Abbitt states that, '(o)nstage androgyny was a reflection of a society where sexual preference... was not a matter of fixed polarity' rather it was imagined along an expanded continuum. She continues,

> androgyny has proved useful as a means to navigate unknown space in performance - not only the unmarked territory between male and female, or gay and straight, but also the juncture between expectation and reality, history and fiction, other and self.[60]

This suggests that the resonances of the 'Japanese performative body'[61] on stage were complex and far reaching. While gender definitions and categories have been subject to continual change through different historical times in Japan,

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[58] Ibid, Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

[59] As a postscript to Kabuki, it is interesting to note that towards the end of the Tokugawa period, female impersonators started to explore their repressed masculinity, increasing the already profuse range of female types by creating roles which were the antithesis of the shy, docile and virtuous woman. (See Katherine Mezur, *The Kabuki Onnagata: A Feminist Analysis of the Onnagata fiction of Female-likeness*, PhD Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1998, chapter VI). They started to explore more extreme masculine qualities and violence became juxtaposed with torture, eroticism with grotesqueness, as taboos were exposed, conventions thwarted and gender referents challenged further. Such anti-social elements were indicative of a society undergoing extensive change as there were natural disasters and the ruling classes were in decline, leading to political corruption and social unease.

[60] Erica Stevens Abbitt, 'Androgyny and Otherness: Exploring the West through the Japanese Performative Body' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (autumn 2001), pp. 250-1.

[61] See the above title of Stevens Abbitt's article.

the practice of same-sex-sexuality especially that of male-male, has an established tradition which extends back to the medieval period and well before. It would seem then that there existed a more fluid understanding of sexual preference and gender, which was construed very differently from today. Same-sex desire was regarded on equal terms (certainly in the case of the male), as that of heterosexual desire, a subject that prompted heated debates about the value of each and ideas of exclusive sexuality do not appear to have existed.[62] William MacDuff in an article of 1996, notes,

> (h)omosexual desires were not considered defining elements of a unique personal identity nor matters of interest to a mere minority... Rather, artists and audiences of the (medieval) period understood same-sex attraction to be a common occurrence...[63]

This extensive and diverse tradition started to decline however, with the waning of the samurai tradition at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868-1912)[64] and the importation of Western influences.[65] A brief overview of these cultural changes will be described, which will add further background for an appraisal of the radical elements within Butoh performance.

Western Influence

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was a turning point in Japanese history, when after the self-imposed isolation of the Tokugawa period the new political regime

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[62] In the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History and Sexuality*, his 'genealogical' study traces and examines discursive practices in European cultures. In this he uncovers how the individual came to be defined according to sexual behaviours and then regulated through such 'knowledge'. The definition of the homosexual as a stable category and indeed as pathology was created. These discourses proliferated especially from the eighteenth century and increased significantly during the mid-nineteenth century, when there was profuse discussion about sexuality. This was in stark contrast with the past, as prior to the seventeenth century there was much freer expression of sexual practice. See *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, London: Penguin, 1976.

[63] Ibid, MacDuff, p. 255.

[64] This period saw the bankruptcy of the ruling classes and the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate, which had huge implications for the samurai who now became masterless. Consequently these events led to the opening of Japan to the West, the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868 and the so-called restoration of imperial rule.

[65] Japan's first extended encounter with the West began in 1853, with the arrival of US Navy warships led by Commander Perry, who requested that Japan open her ports to foreign trading ships and end its isolationist period of over two hundred and fifty years.

opened the gates to Western influence that led to extreme social upheaval.[66] There were radical changes in the perceptions surrounding homosexual love, as a discursive process of evaluation, categorisation and classification confronted the sexual body and its pleasures. Certain aspects of one's social behaviour, physiology or belief-system, were to become seen as defining aspects of a coherent personality and stable identity. Male-male sexuality became increasingly marginalised, considered unnatural and even perverse.

There are many complex reasons for this process, which must be viewed within the context of the wider political, economic and cultural framework. During this period of developing capitalism and increasing influence of the bourgeoisie, this sexual practice became linked to a now disowned 'feudal' or 'primitive' past. There was a social drive to define individual identities, with the influence of recently imported Western pseudo-scientific theories of sexology and gender, together with subsequent legislature. Christian attitudes towards homosexual practices were also involved. These were adopted in order to resist the process of being regarded as inferior by Western powers.[67] 'Homosexuality' marked the boundary between Japan and the West and emerged as a pathology that needed to be confined and regulated. It must be noted that in the West there were similar developments, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick indicates, 'the proscription of particular acts of "sodomy" (acts that might be performed by anybody), were displaced after the late 19th by the definition of particular kinds of persons,

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[66] As previously noted, the Meiji Restoration brought an end to the feudal system and the Shogunate overlords, who had ruled between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries. This first era was called Meiji after the emperor's name, a custom of designation that has continued to the present day. Prior to this time the imperial dynasty represented little more than a symbolic figurehead.

[67] It must be noted that this assertion is disputed however, by Tsuneo Watanabe and Junichi Iwata, who state that the construction of and subsequent reaction towards homosexuality was 'often erroneously considered to be the influence of Christianity ' in *The Love of the Samurai: One Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality*, trans. D. R. Roberts, London: GMP Publishers, 1989, p. 121.

specifically "homosexuals"',[68] noting that specific personalities were assigned to individuals who performed certain sexual practices.

There were further consequences of this process, as Watanabe Tsuneo and Iwata Junichi in their study of homosexuality state, '(i)t is not only beauty but also bodily existence, or rather "the body itself," which modern civilisation refuses to allow to men' and that, 'the decline of the homosexual tradition was strictly paralleled by the phenomenon of the transfer of beauty into the exclusive possession of the world of women.'[69] These factors resulted in constraints being imposed on male androgyny, cross-dressing and bisexuality.[70] Men were deterred from displaying any 'womanly' qualities and the male body was denied sensual or erotic value. The act of sodomy (*keikan)*, which was increasingly classed as deviant, was ruled illegal in 1873 and became subject to imprisonment.[71] Silence seems to have been a major strategy in the emerging homophobia in Japan, as the sexuality of the pre-modern era became unspeakable and eventually deplored.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Japan attempted to construct a new identity and assert itself as a subject-nation among the international community of nation states. In order to compensate for its semblance as 'Other', that is as feminine in the eyes of the European nations, Japan stepped up its efforts to colonise its surrounding Asian neighbours and thereby define them as its 'feminine Other'. The notion of a 'modern subject' was introduced along with concepts of nation state, race, empire building, which intersected with an epistemological regime that required a new understanding of sexuality and sexual identity. Male bodies were the site for the resulting articulation of power

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[68] Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum and Michael Moon, *Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture*, Duke University Press, 1990, p. 59.

[69] Ibid, Tsuneo Watanabe & Junichi Iwata, p. 130.

[70] In 1872 cross-dressing was ruled illegal.

[71] In 1883 sodomy as a crime was abolished and became regarded as 'indecent assault'. See ibid, Tsuneo Watanabe and Junichi Iwata, pp. 121-122. This and other sexual activities such as sadism, masochism and masturbation, were pathologised and designated as deviant in accordance with Western sexology and psychological sources.

and became mobilised as part of the machinery of war. In Lacanian terms, taking possession of the phallus, that all-powerful signifier and reference point for heterosexuality, was all-important for this project and was accompanied by fears of emasculation and the dissolution of stable ego identity.[72] This led to increased homosociability among men together with an increasing contempt for and silencing of women, who were also relegated to that position of 'Other', as clear boundaries were constructed around gender, individual as well as national identities.[73]

Power/Knowledge of the Body

The widely disparate realities and sectors of society that existed prior to this period were submerged in the new national rhetoric. By the 1880s sophisticated methods of surveillance were in force as part of the modern health care system, which monitored the health of individuals while creating new categories and pathologies. The official medical discourse of sexuality resulted in an unprecedented degree of uniformity compared with the diversity of the Tokugawa period and indeed, the practice of cross-dressing was prohibited in 1873 and strictly policed. It brought with it new scientific and epistemological orders which sought certainties, 'truths' and closures that claimed central positioning in terms

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[72] The 'Symbolic' for Lacan represents the social order of signs, meaning and language acquisition. The child enters this adult realm through the 'mirror stage', that is, the moment when it misrecognises itself and identifies with the perfect, coherent image in the mirror. This is the instant when access is given to autonomous subjectivity and differentiated gender. The central signifier of this realm is the phallus, the Symbolic representation of the Father. The phallus is the expression of a fundamental absence, the desire to be the 'Other', the Father. Because of this sense of alienation, the individual submits to the laws of society. For my argument here, rejecting sexuality focused on the phallus, i.e. heterosexuality, would represent a rejection of the Symbolic order. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1977, pp. 2-4.

[73] That which threatened coherence was repressed internally and once out of view, was projected onto others, as part of the effort to build a coherent sense of self or nation with set boundaries. As part of this process of nation building, Western attitudes towards certain practices such as homosexuality were adopted, to avoid being undermined from within and in turn being 'othered' by the West.

of excluded margins. As Michel Foucault posits, the notion of 'sex' was created,[74] which,

> ...made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle...[75]

His work is of particular relevance here, as he asserts that the knowledge that this 'subtle network of discourses'[76] produces is always enmeshed with systems of power and that power and knowledge imply one another.

A new reality was established in which such control and coercion infused every level of society. Foucault described the 'micro-physics' of power as diffuse and impossible to localise.[77] At the centre of this power/knowledge nexus, Foucault placed the body as an historical and culturally specific entity. These different apparatuses of power he asserted compete to produce, classify and inscribe the body in order to regulate it. The notion of the individual as coherent 'subject' developed and was simultaneously implicated as, '...the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desire forces.'[78] This points to a reality in which individuals exert discipline over themselves and each other in often subtle ways, through the disapproval of 'unnatural' behaviour.

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[74] Although Michel Foucault's study is centred on European cultures, the constructions of sexuality he chronicles are characteristic of those that started to evolve in Japan. Sexuality is emphasised as culturally variable in his works, however, these earlier Japanese sexual practices were similar to those of the ancient Greeks who Foucault describes. He argues that the Greeks did not characterise individuals by their sexual practices or desires and the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual did not exist.

[75] Ibid, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, London: Penguin, 1976, p. 154.

[76] Ibid, p. 72.

[77] In his study *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault discusses the movement away from the spectacle of public torture and execution, which marked the 'revenge' of the ancient regime on the body of the offender. This specular violence was displaced by diffuse micro-operations of power upon bodies that operated as an invisible and disciplinary surveillance. The body came to be increasingly seen as needing to be controlled, examined and manipulated through various discourses. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of The Prison*, London: Penguin, 1977, pp. 26 and 222.

[78] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., London: The Harvester Press, 1980, pp. 73-4.

Judith Butler reiterates this assertion in her work. She agrees with the notion of the body as being permeable and open to political regulation, describing it as both culturally and historically conditioned, indeed as a 'historical situation', which in turn 'reproduces a historical situation.'[79]

The body was to be increasingly controlled in Japan, as the discursive process became more scientific and specialised up until the late 1930s and 40s. At this time, the national policy of eugenics and racial hygiene involved giving physicians powers to perform abortions and sterilisations on women who were prone to certain conditions that were considered hereditary, such as mental health problems, epilepsy and other undesirable diseases.[80] The performative understanding of gender that existed in Kabuki theatre before the Meiji period gradually diminished and monogamous marriage became the new ideal and the sanctioned context for sexuality. As individuals were increasingly defined according to their sexual practices and their erotic desires were controlled, heterosexuality became normalised. Cultural categories of male and female as complementary yet mutually exclusive were conceived. Rigid gender codes were instated which included proscriptions on clothing and appearance, as women for example, were expected to wear kimonos and men to wear their hair short. The demonstration of beauty, charm and sensuality now strictly belonged to the world of women.[81]

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[79] Ibid, Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 272.

[80] Sabine Frühstuck, *Colonising Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan*, University of California Press, 2003, p.12. The National Eugenic Law for the youth was enacted in 1940.

[81] Beyond these external pressures the extent to which these normative ideas and policies were translated into sexual practices is not clear. Written evidence of same-sex practice is sparse, which could be indicative of the need for secrecy and euphemism required within the newly adopted and unfavourable climate. There is evidence, however, that during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, in certain homosocial environments such as boys' educational institutes and the military, these practices continued and were the cause of a great deal of concern as seen in newspaper articles of the time. Ibid, Tsuneo Watanabe et al., p. 122. Taisho period (1912 to 1926), newspapers report concern about the enticement of young men in the universities by other male students. The main concern surrounding these events was, however, lack of discipline rather than condemnation of the actual sexual behaviours involved. We might conclude then, that homosexual practices and pleasure were not totally repressed and subordinated to the needs of the state, in spite of the stringent measures taken. See Mark J. Mclleland, *Male Homosexuality in*

It must be added that with the new American constitution,[82] anti-homosexual statutes and regulations, still common in many American states as well as in most European countries at this time, were not introduced into Japan. There was thus no change in the official policy and male-male sexuality experienced little state-sponsored constraint. Although information about homosexuality during this post-war period is relatively scarce, we do know that the act of sodomy was still under strict control, subject to scrutiny and punishment, but that there was a small gay bar scene in Tokyo, one which was closely linked with prostitution.[83]

Concomitant with these official processes was an extensive theatre review. There were continuous changes imposed on the traditional theatres of Kabuki and Noh and even attempts to close them. Numerous reforms and moral impositions emanating from a new prudery were enforced during the late nineteenth century. These ensued from the attendance of a new class of patrons, which included overseas dignitaries, government officials and noble families.[84] For the first part of the nineteenth century Noh plays often depicted horrific scenes of retaliation and revenge, accompanied by painful and inarticulate cries from the musicians. Demons were also depicted, as were possessions and exorcisms. Kabuki ghost plays often drew from the Noh repertoire and Japanese folk tales, as they continued to portray a vulgar and subversive world of demonic and negative beauty.[85] In a culture greatly attuned to strict aesthetic principles, they depicted gory tales of revenge and treachery, senseless murders, vivid sexual portrayals and deviant behaviours. Japan's shift to building a modern nation state was

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Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities, London: Routledge/Curzon, 2000, pp. 26-7, for a detailed discussion of how young men's sexuality was generally viewed.

[82] This was drafted at the end of the Second World War.

[83] Several novelists attest to there being a gay area in Tokyo, including Mishima in his novel *Forbidden Colours*. See also, Stephen Barber, 'Tokyo's Urban and Sexual Transformations: Performance Art and Digital Cultures' in Fran Lloyd ed., *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002, p. 84.

[84] See Yuichiro Takahashi, 'Kabuki Goes Official: The 1878 Opening of the Shintomi-za' in *TDR* 39, 3 (T147), autumn 1995, for an in-depth analysis of the various reforms that took place during this period.

[85] Ibid, Toshio Kawatake, pp. 172-3, for a description of the creation of the 'beauty of cruelty' in the Kabuki repertoire.

accompanied by the recognition of theatre as one of the most spectacular sites to display its new status in the world and to educate and influence its modern subject.[86] The decadence, grotesqueness and fantasy that characterised late Tokugawa theatre, were eliminated in an effort to elevate the genre to a high art form and to raise moral standards. Stable and naturalised gendered identities of the individual in society were required in performance, by an ideological project which abjected difference and risqué elements in order to reinforce its status quo.

The Status of Women in Japanese Theatre and Society

Against this background, intense debates about the need for the material presence of woman on stage and the replacement of the Onnagata, were taking place. These were premised on essentialist assumptions of the nature of gender (and indeed of the theatre), as biological and anatomical difference formed the basis of these arguments. Ironically, the once 'unmarked'[87] female presence in performance led to greater objectification, increased voyeurism and the subordination of Japanese women.[88] An important part of the state ideology extolled in the Meiji Civil Code, were ideas of 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryosai kenbon)*, which played a part in the Shingeki New Theatre. Although there were debates about the replacement of the Onnagata, the male impersonator did not disappear but became marginalised. Their distinctive features of art, skill, artifice, were set against those of the nature and physicality of 'woman' and they ceased to be viewed as the embodiment of quintessential femininity. At the same time, actresses endeavoured to distance themselves from comparisons with prostitutes and geishas. The new threat became that of heterosexual arousal on stage and

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[86] During the early 1940s, Kabuki was used as a part of a propaganda campaign for Japan's Pacific war. Plays which were seen to foster self-sacrifice and commitment to war, were supported, while those centring on erotic themes were banned.

[87] See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked, The Politics of Performance,* New York and London: Routledge, 1993 for a discussion of woman as 'unmarked'.

[88] Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 9. The female actor appeared on stage in *Shimpa* in the early twentieth century, that is, Western-style naturalistic drama. Kawakami Sadayakko and Matsui Sumako were the first actresses, but the popularity of the Onnagata continued unchallenged.

theatre became sanitised and transformed into an arena for desexualised performance.

The female body, its procreative functions and therefore 'normative' sexuality, was also fundamental to the empirical project, as women were seen as custodians of the future population.[89] They were also crucial in serving the sexual needs of the soldiers in the ubiquitous service stations throughout the newly acquired colonies. Young Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese women were kidnapped from their villages, incarcerated then systematically and sadistically raped by their colonisers (men in battle), under the most heightened violent conditions. This brutality and exploitation was part of an extreme militarised masculinity that was encouraged, widely sanctioned and indeed organised by the military Japanese authorities.[90]

Until fairly recently, relationships between women and their sexuality have remained largely unacknowledged and invisible, in spite of the media sensation that surrounded lesbian practice and double suicides in the early 20th century.[91] Jennifer Robertson in her study of the Takarazuka Revue, notes the dearth of scholarship concerning same-sex sexuality between women compared with that

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[89] The ideology of motherhood was constructed around the domestic ideal of the monogamous, heterosexual relationship. The naturalisation of the family was essential in producing national citizens and it worked to maintain the stability of gender. As Judith Butler observes, the suppression of non-heterosexual forms of sexuality is essential to the operation of such normativity.

[90] A similar system with Japanese prostitutes was established to serve the American occupying forces (1945-52). This was sanctioned by the highest levels of the Japanese government and the general occupation headquarters. The stated aim of this practice was the protection of Japanese women in general from what was seen as the 'predatory tendencies' of their occupiers, but the system was felt to embody the sexual humiliation of the emasculated Japanese. See Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*, London, New York: Routledge, 2002, chapter six and Michael S. Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa: Literature and Memory*, New York and London: Routledge, 1999, p. 132.

[91] See Sharon Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, London, New York: Routledge, Curzon, 2002, p. 5, who asserts that, 'there is almost no contemporary academic discourse in English about lesbian sexuality in Japan.'

of men.[92] The topic of women as subjects of their own desire has never been discussed and remains largely unrecognised in scholarly literature. The complex dynamics of sexual preference were ignored within the increasing Japanese ideology of romantic love and within the framework of heteronormativity, where females were considered objects of male desires. Indeed this individualist pursuit of romantic union was seen as a radical challenge to the more traditional and indeed rigid kinship structure of the patriarchal emperor system, within which traits of submissiveness to parents, husbands and in-laws had been central to women's roles as patriotic subjects. This organisation that existed before the war had contained each family as a sub-unit of a larger family and held the continuation of the family line as paramount. Woman as mother continued to be pivotal in the modern cultural project, as the pre-war ideal of 'good wife, wise mother' did not immediately diminish in the post-war era.[93] Although overt attempts by the state to dictate womanhood decreased in intensity after the war, essentialised differences between women and men continued to be emphasised and to influence state policies.[94] A brief discussion of the role of the *Takarazuka* Revue will offer additional insight into the complexity of attitudes and conventional notions around female sexual practice and identity.

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[92] Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988, introduction, pp. 1-25

[93] The constitution of 1890 denied women both suffrage and participation in political activities. Both sexes were to be loyal patriotic subjects, however, the Education Ministry stressed additional traits for women, which included modesty, chastity and submissiveness to parents, husband and in-laws. Feminism and women's suffrage waned in the early 1930s with increased nationalist sentiment, as they were redefined as un-Japanese and unpatriotic. In 1941, a policy was endorsed for population growth that encouraged women to marry early and produce at least five children. See Kathleen S. Uno, 'Death of "Good Wife, Wise Mother"?' in *Postwar Japan as History*, Carol Gluck ed., pp. 293-322 and Janet E. Hunter, *The Emergence of Modern Japan: An Introductory History since 1853*, London and New York, Longman, 1989, p. 150.

[94] Under American rule the new constitution of 1947 granted women new legal and political rights. In the general election of spring 1946, they were allowed to campaign, stand as candidates and vote. The civil code was revised in 1948 and women were given equal rights regarding marriage, domicile, divorce and inheritance. See Jeffrey Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1952-200*, London: Pearson, 2001, pp. 12-13. In spite of these measures, indirect sexual discrimination continues and women are still disadvantaged in many areas of life.

The Takarazuka Revue

The Takarazuka Revue was founded by Kobayashi Ichizo in 1913 and continues today.[95] In its cross-gender productions 'male' role players, the *Otokoyau*, were and still are today, pivotal to the Revue's extraordinary popularity. As with the Onnagata, their male impersonations draw attention to the slippage between sex and gender, undermining the stability of fixed sexual identity. This patriarchal company, however, was conceived of as a pedagogical institution, a place for resocialising the young women whose individualistic (and therefore unacceptable personality tendencies), brought them there. Using Stanislavskian techniques, the actresses are encouraged to study masculine characteristics by observing foreign celebrities, producing idealised, androgynous versions of 'maleness'. The underlying assumption is that through such study, the Otokoyoku will develop deeper understandings of the male psychology, so that their role as wives and mothers can be performed more effectively. The Revue's main objective differs greatly from that in Kabuki, as it is not the undermining of the gender/social hierarchy but the celebration of a desirable masculinity, and although on stage the women assert an extraordinary freedom from traditional roles, alternative gender positions are not constructed for them.

Robertson links the popularity of some of the roles with a lesbian subtext implicit in the performance. Indeed the appearance of the masculinised female provoked an unprecedented amount of concern and debate in the 1920s and 30s. This centred on definitions of homosexuality among females, which the male-role players and their flirtatious behaviour onstage with the adoring and overwhelmingly female audiences, were seen to encourage. Girls and young women were given special attention, as they were educated within the homosocial milieu of single sex schools and institutes. They were seen as potential sources of sexual deviance and misconduct and were increasingly

[95] The Revue was founded to contribute to the development of Kobayashi's spa resort, Takarazuka. It was part of a craze for the occident and Kobayashi intended it as entertainment that would help increase traffic on his railway line.

monitored.[96] Such reasoning stemmed from a psychologically based sexology intent on defining normative gender identity and sexual desire.

We might conclude, in the absence of discussion about any exotic content within the Review, that it is possible that the company was and indeed still is, so well received because of a combination of the factors discussed here. These include its possible subversive potentiality, as Laurence Senelick states, '...the clash of sanctioned performance, unsanctioned behaviour, and the projection of desire.'[97] I have spent some time examining cross-dressed performance, in order to tease out some of the issues and complexities of these practices, which can be directly applied to those in Butoh dance. Before moving on to a description of Hijikata's performances, I will briefly look at one of the writers who exerted a manifest influence on Hijikata, Mishima Yukio, whose novel *Forbidden Colours* was the inspiration behind his first dance creation, described at the beginning of this chapter. Mishima's works were interwoven with homoeroticism, while his lifestyle and unresolved sexuality convey some of the ambiguities that existed within the larger society.

Mishima Yukio

Mishima Yukio, the internationally renowned novelist and playwright,[98] was a frequent visitor to Hijikata's rehearsal studio, *Asbestos-kan* in central Tokyo, where they exchanged ideas and developed their artistic thinking. His writings reveal a sense of disquiet surrounding male-male eroticism, which is indicative of the profound psychological consequences of the aftermath of war. He also shared a sense of the nihilism, emptiness and despair of this post-war reality with the post-Shingeki generation, a reality that he felt had been severed from the mainspring of traditional culture. He stretched his writing talent to the limit, to

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[96] Ibid, J. Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Theatre*, pp. 67-70.

[97] Senelick Laurence ed., *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, Hanover and London, University Press of New England, 1999, p. xvi.

[98] Mishima (1925-1970), was involved in theatre, in Western-style dramas, adaptations of Noh and Kabuki and was very close to the famous Onnagata, Nakamura Utaemon.

express his response to the complex cultural chasm left after the traumas of conflict, especially his disgust with the soulless materialism and ugliness, which came with the newfound prosperity.

Homoeroticism is a recurring theme in his work, as seen in a short story entitled *Onnagata* which traces the fascination felt by the male protagonist Masuyama towards a female role specialist Mangiku. Masuyama was mesmerised by the female roles he enacted on stage and seeing the actor disrobe in his dressing room, he becomes aware that 'the feminine beauty displayed by Mangiku on the stage had captivated Masuyama as a man' although his attraction for him 'did not reside in any surface illusion'[99] thus realising the deep homoerotic attraction he has for him. In the autobiographical novel *Confessions of a Mask,* 1949, same-sex desire is explored further as Mishima probes the deep layers of his own consciousness, exposing and exhibiting the multiple and often opposing facets of his personality. It traces a young man's growing recognition of his latent male attraction, the exhilaration triggered by intense sadomasochistic fantasies that are overlaid with themes of blood and death. Sacrificial imagery is present in the text, as one passage explicitly describes his first ejaculation that was prompted by a painting of St. Sebastian by Guido Reni. It graphically portrayed a body with open wounds, about which Mishima gave this tribute, 'the supreme agony and ecstasy of painting arrows into his tense youthful flesh,' his imagination and desire aroused by this theatrical spectacle of the trickling blood of martyrdom.[100] An undercurrent of disquiet pervades the novel that borders on self-disgust and loathing, as the protagonist displays an intense inner struggle and desire for social acceptance. Such latent homosexuality continues to trouble him into his adolescence, as he longs for a romanticised notion of lost innocence.[101]

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[99] Yukio Mishima, 'Onnagata' in *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories*, trans. Donald Keene, New York: New Directions, 1966, pp. 143-4.

[100] This painting is well known for its homoerotic associations, as an image of eroticised suffering.

[101] Shortly before his death in 1966, he posed for the photographer Kishin Shinoyama dressed as the martyred saint, his body pierced with arrows and dripping with blood. (Figure 4)

While married Mishima insisted that his private life would remain just that, at the same time maintaining double, perhaps multiple exclusive social identities, while discretely moving between them. His public persona revealed a need for respect in the eyes of others. As a great socialiser he opened his Western, rococo-style, Tokyo home to frequent gatherings and lavish parties for friends and acquaintances, many of whom were from overseas. The house would serve as a theatrical backdrop for him, as it was there in the garden that he posed semi-naked for the photographer Hosoe Eikoh, having seen photographs taken of Hijikata featured in a series *Embrace* that had commenced in 1961. Set against a marble mosaic and wrapped in garden hose,[102] Mishima is photographed supine then standing, looking defiantly into the cameras while holding a mallet shaped like a crucifix. Another picture shows him with rose in mouth, pensive, as if absorbed in his own secret homoerotic world. One further photograph from this series depicts Mishima standing as St. Sebastian, in a provocative pose of his finely honed body, as he looks away coyly from the intrusive gaze of the camera. (Figure 4) The book was published in 1963 as *Ordeal by Roses* (*Barakei*),[103] and marked the start of a two-year exploration in which Mishima strove to create an aesthetic of his own body, the physical results of his increasing infatuation with the corporeal over the intellect.

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[102] See Hosoe Eikoh, *Hosoe Eikoh: Photographs 1950-2000*, Kyodo News Tokyo, Nissha Printing Co. Ltd., 2000, pp. 64-5, for *Barakei* (*Ordeal by Roses*), nos. 6 and 7.

[103] The timing of the second and greater edition of these prints was carefully choreographed to coincide with his own demise, the final chapter of which was appropriately named *Death.* See Mark Holborn, Eikoh Hosoe and Yukio Mishima eds., *Ba-ra-kei: Ordeal by Roses,* Hong Kong: Aperture, 2000.

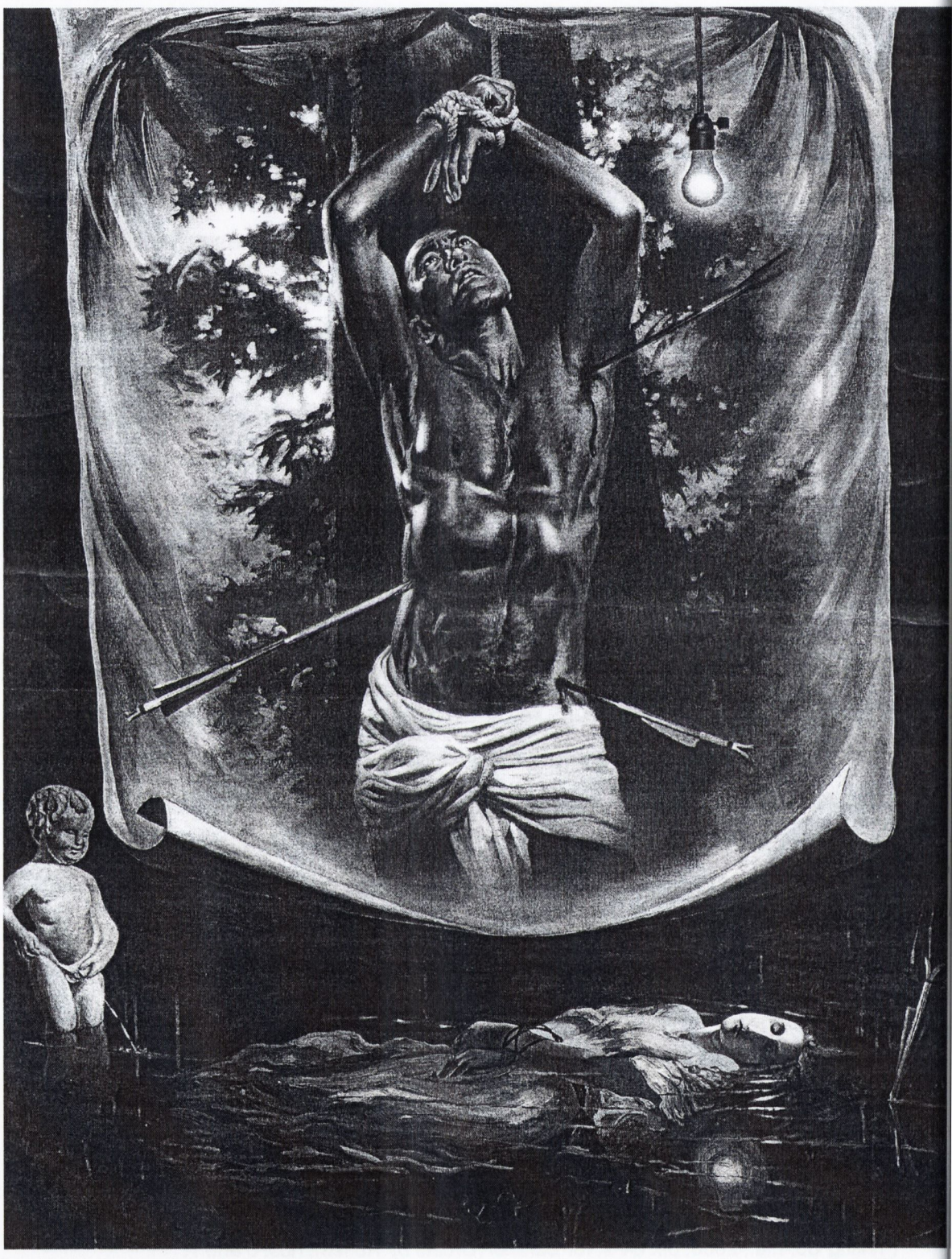

Figure 4

The worlds of classical Greek and Roman civilization fascinated him, which contained as they did, romantic notions of beauty, defined by balance and proportion and the equilibrium of body and spirit, as a reaction to his repulsion towards the ugliness of the modern industrial age. While drawing fervently from the West, his philosophical and aesthetic attitude owed a great deal to his own classical tradition and an idealised past of the Emperor and imperial institutions, while at the same time he repudiated the war-time experiences. Indeed he physically embodied many of these contradictions, asserting his Japanese identity while obsessively adopting that Western cult of the body, muscle building. Through such a rigorous 'disciplinary practice' he became obsessed with an ideal body image, that of an extreme masculinity, the taut muscular body associated with energy, virility and robustness.[104] In his novel *Sun and Steel,* allusions to the strength and form of muscle, the sun, its rays, that world of action and agency, contrast with the night and the metaphor for his creation - the written word, through which he obsessed about darkness and death.[105] Mishima fetishised the male Japanese body as an erotic and mystical source of the Japanese consciousness, while striving to make a link between lived experience and textual representation through his lifestyle and writing.

His later novel *Forbidden Colours* (*Kinjiki*) describes the modern gay scene in Tokyo, the bars and nightclubs that he frequented, in order to research his work.[106] The title exploits the traditional term *nanshoku*, conveyed by the characters for 'male' and 'colour', which was used to describe the sensitivity, gentility and the protocol involved in homosexuality practices prior to the modern period. The second character of the ideogram had come to be understood

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[104] Mishima started bodybuilding at the age of thirty, a discipline he continued for the rest of his life. Having devoted most of his time until that point to his literature, he now started to give more attention to the body, attempting to experience life more directly through physical practices, which also included boxing, karate and kendo. This was a way of counteracting the world of words, which he came to see as corrupting and instead opted for the beautiful, honed body that he equated with spiritual perfection.

[105] See Yukio Mishima, *Sun and Steel*, trans. John Bestor, Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1970.

[106] He vehemently insisted it was for this reason that he visited the gay area of the city.

contemporaneously as a euphemism for sex.[107] Nostalgic allusions are made to this tradition by the title, which are set against the often vulgar and sleazy reality of the life he found in Tokyo's gay district. As referred to earlier, the work was adapted for Hijikata's first dance piece and caused uproar in 1959, much to the delight of Mishima who was present in the audience.[108]

Throughout his life Mishima expressed an obsessive, often ambiguous and erotic fascination with death as an aesthetic ideal, which is reflected in his impulsion to die when still young and beautiful. Profoundly influenced by Nietzsche and Bataille and having consistently dramatised sacrifice in his literature, photography, film and theatre, he put his own subjectivity to the supreme test, as Bataille had done through experimenting with extreme states of consciousness. When he was forty-five years old, Mishima committed the ultimate sacrifice. Exhausting the tragic with the staging of his own death, he performed ritual disembowelment (*seppuku* or *hara-kiri*), in a double suicide with his young companion Masakatsu Morita, with whom there have been suggestions of a romantic liaison.[109] This final act speaks of nostalgia for his traditional and imperialist past, the ultimate cut, challenging the complacency of the present, at the same time ensuring that the past would return through his body. The deep-seated almost paranoid anxieties surrounding his sexuality as expressed through his novels and behaviour, speak of a process of internalising the disapproving gaze resulting from the powerful discourses prevalent at the time. Divided within himself he absorbed that gaze and defined himself through it. In his writings and posturings he ceaselessly created himself as text. At the same time however, he was shaped and created by the 'textuality' that preceded him, that is, by those

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[107] See Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colours: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*, University of California Press, 1995, p. 8, for a fuller discussion of Japanese terms determining male-male sex.

[108] See Mark Holborn ed., *Hosoe Eikoh: Masters of Photography*, Hong Kong: Aperture, 1999, p. 6.

[109] See Henry Scott Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, London: Penguin, 1975, p. 245.

Western-influenced social and ideological systems that sought to restrain his desiring body.[110]

Conclusion

The perspective of gender and desire as a continuum has a long history in Japan and this is reflected in its tradition of onstage androgyny and cross-dressing. An established tradition of male-male-love in Japanese society existed alongside a more fluid understanding of sexual identity and the practice of androgyny. With the country's shift to a modern nation state and the importation of Western influences, gender roles and sexual desire became fiercely polarised. Individuals became defined by their sexuality, the diverse behaviours of the pre-Meiji era were submerged in the nationalist rhetoric and homosexuality became increasingly classed as deviant and was eventually prohibited.[111] Constraints were imposed on male androgyny, cross-dressing and same-sex-sexuality in the late nineteenth century as both male and female bodies became constructed through dominant ideologies, discourses and practices. Within an increasingly heteronormative framework, the body and its impulses were placed under increasing control and regulation by the changing regimes of knowledge and apparatuses of power as described by Foucault. Differences between men and women became increasingly essentialised and women's position strictly prescribed, under a rigid kinship structure of a patriarchal emperor system.

In this chapter, I have taken the Kabuki and Takarazuka theatres and critiqued their practices of cross-dressing. Both the Onnagata and Otokoyaku I argue, draw attention to the slippage between biological sex and gender role. Each

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[110] This is consonant with Derrida's 'il n'y a pas de hors textes', that is, the individual and the body is always already text to be 'read' alongside other texts.

[111] See Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse 1600-1950*, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1999, for an analysis of the shift towards the pathology of homosexuality. He asserts this was due to newly centralised legal codes concerning official 'civilised' morality that set limits on sexual behaviours and their representation in publishing. The restructuring of medical and scientific discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to new and largely negative constructions of male-male sexuality.

points to a performative understanding of sexual identity, as they foreground the artifice of gender and undercut the essentialisms of femininity and masculinity. Crucial questions are posed however, concerning the reinscription of this gender binary, as the intention of the Takarazuka Revue is the celebration of an idealised masculinity that does not create alternative gender roles for women. The work of Judith Butler is considered apposite, most importantly, her assertion of gender as performative and therefore fictitious. Cross-dressing and parody she asserts destabilise the notion of reality and compel a reconsideration of the stability of masculinity and femininity. Sexual identity is foregrounded as an unnatural construction, lacking in coherent, interior essence. The sign is thus a deferred presence, involved in continual displacements and lacking in an original presence. These ideas will set the context for further description of Butoh dance, as in the next chapter close attention will be given to Hijikata's work, to investigate the sexual dynamics of his performance that encompass some of these issues and contradictions. I intend to uncover the disruptive potential within his dance and his challenge to conventional conceptions of gender identity.

CHAPTER II

Sexuality and Gender: The Transgressive Body in Butoh

Introduction: *Revolt of the Flesh*, 1968

As has been evident in Kabuki and Takarazuka, Japanese Theatre was a site where gender boundaries could be crossed and these performances had the potential to undermine the essentialism of the strict binary system of sexual categories. Hijikata's own performance takes this process further, as in spite of the changing definitions of acceptable sexual expression in Japanese society, he started to explore gender inversions on his own stage and to embody a spectrum of male and female characteristics. This process can be seen in the work entitled *Revolt of the Flesh*, performed in 1968, which marked a watershed in Hijikata's career and an assertion of his own definitive style of dance.[112]

In this dance, which was also named *The Japanese and Hijikata Tatsumi* (*Hijikata Tatsumi to nihonjin)*, Hijikata is seen being carried onto the simple, darkened stage on a palanquin, *mikoshi*, under a sunshade, with a rabbit on a platter mounted on a pole beside him.[113] (Figure 5) A series of caricatured and contrasting images are played out in varied intensities of rhythm and texture to the musical accompaniment of a single pianist. Firstly, he appears in a bridal kimono worn back to front, which he removes while loosening his hair. There follows a major shift in the dynamics of the piece when Hijikata reveals a large phallus strapped to his naked body. Painted gold, it refracts splinters of light from the surrounding darkness, while overhead a dead chicken is hanging, strung up

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[112] It must be noted again, that although there is very little accessible film coverage of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh, fragments of this are available filmed in black and white by a hand-held camera. The recording belongs to the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives of Keio University in Tokyo. In addition there is a CD rom with the book, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh: Surrealism of the Flesh, Ontology of the "Body"*, also produced by this Research Centre. This contains fragments from the performance in addition to photographs that are depicted on pages 94-103. All of these sources, with additional photographs published in other books, will form the basis of the descriptions of this dance offered in this thesis.

[113] See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 95.

by its feet. He begins to move in trance-like abandon, growing tall while writhing and convulsing in wild and unexpected animation, conveying an ecstatic vision and hyper-real display. (Figure 6)

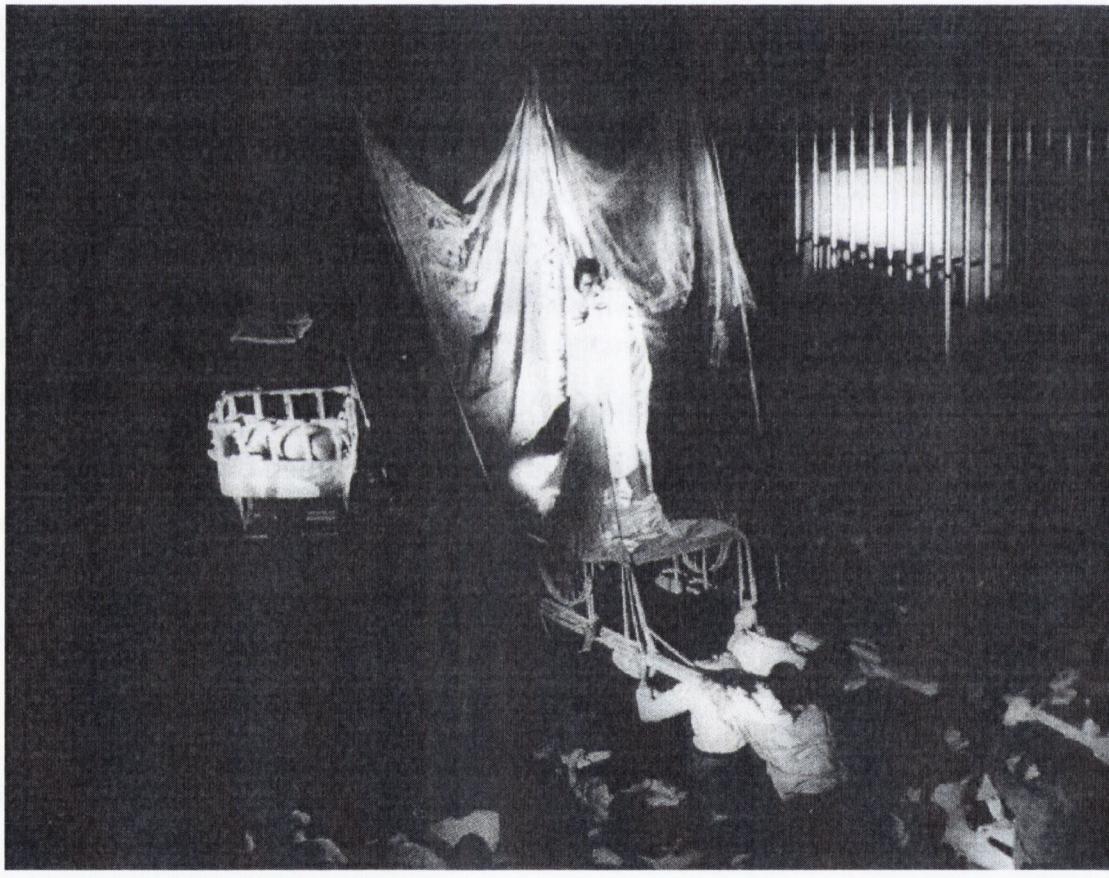

Figure 5

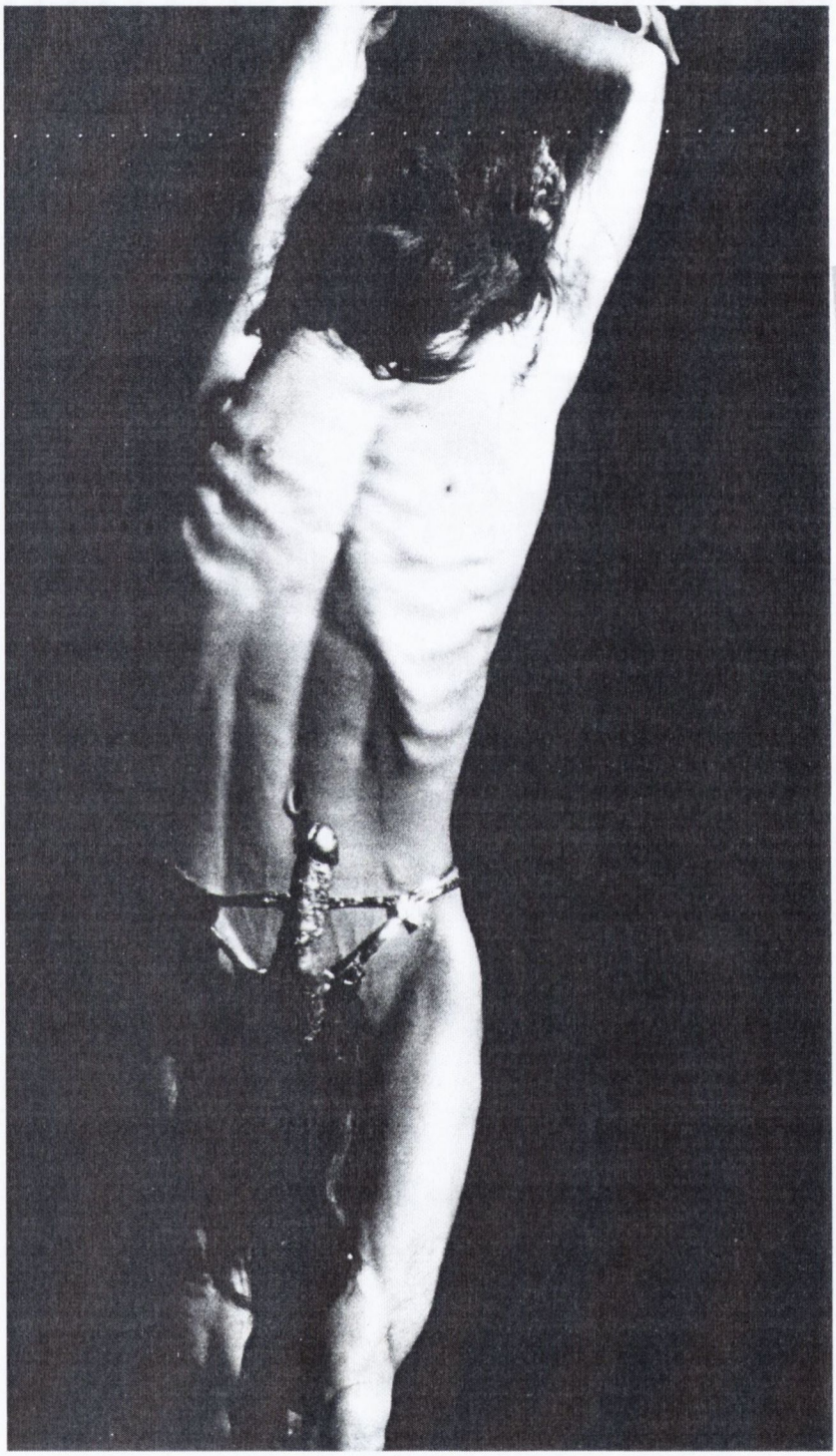

Figure 6

Later Hijikata casts himself in an extravagant outfit, an overly ruched satin ballgown and long black leather gloves. He repeatedly smashes himself against

the steel panels that hang from the ceiling, the edges of these echoing cymbals become like knives as if to slash his skin. (Figure 7) He then mockingly dances a Western style medley that includes the waltz, polka and flamenco, while swirling and toying with the voluminous fabric of his dress, its shimmering surface adding to the visual intensity of the scene.[114] His widened eyes and facial gestures are erratic and unpredictable, while offering a direct and active gaze, as he smirks and flaunts his legs and crotch in sassy and sensuous defiance. (Figure 8) He is seen in a mini dress revealing muscular thighs that conflict with an exaggerated rose-like headdress and long pale silky gloves. (Figure 9) This is followed by the wearing of a knee-length child's kimono with long white socks, at which he coquettishly tugs and peels away. The piece culminates with Hijikata tied from ropes and being raised upside down, his near-naked body draped in a similar white cloth knotted loosely about his loins, as that described by Mishima in the portrait of St. Sebastian. (Figure 10) This Christ-like figure strikes a beatific pose, while appearing as if about to be torn apart in a ritualised act of self-martyrdom. This scene is shot through with bands of blinding light, until darkness envelops the whole stage.

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[114] This would be the last time such Western dance elements would be present in Butoh, marking a new phase for Hijikata's dance which would now incorporate aspects of his own native birthplace.

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

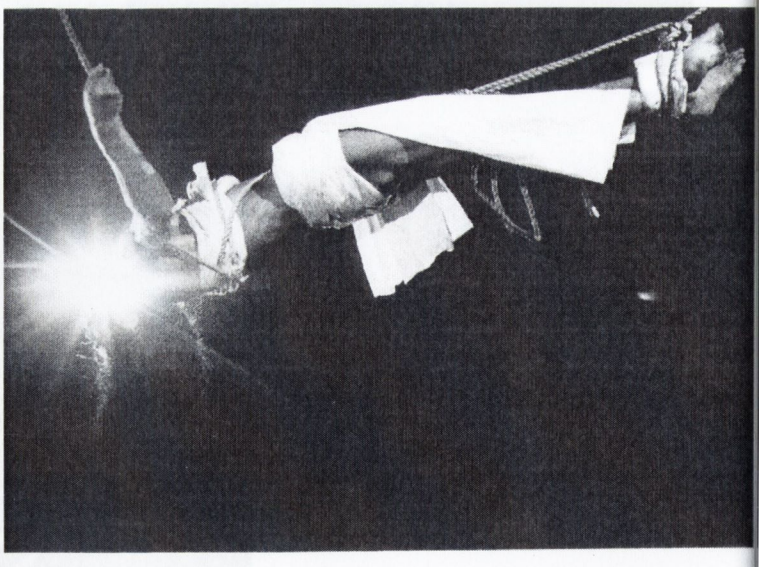

Figure 10

The Political Unrest of the 1960s and Shingeki Theatre

Hijikata's Butoh dance evolved in the late 1950s and during the politically crucial years of the 1960s. This was a period of massive protests throughout the country by leftist intellectuals, students and artists, whose frustration with foreign occupation finally erupted in violent collisions with conservative forces.[115] The failure of these demonstrations represented a major turning point in Japanese intellectual life. The outcome was a ratification of the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty and the continuation of American military bases on Japanese soil. An extreme growing antagonism towards the increasingly close cultural and economic ties with the United States followed, together with disillusionment with politics, post-war democratic institutions and a widespread disenchantment with so-called 'political theatre'.

Shingeki, which evolved in the early twentieth century, had affiliated itself with the orthodox Japanese Communist Party.[116] In the early days, through its naturalism, it had radically confronted the traditional acting culture of Japan and the so-called 'irrationality' of Kabuki and Noh.[117] It was theatre as text, a movement away from the communal and participatory experience of traditional Kabuki performance that involved the multiple senses of the spectator and included the carnivalesque, the transgressional world of evil, homoeroticism and the sacred.[118] This theatrical genre was part of the project of modernisation and was a theatre of text, based

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[115] On university campuses, masses of students and protesters rioted in bloody confrontations with the riot police. Thousands were arrested in these defiant strikes, boycotts and demonstrations.

[116] See for example, David Goodman, *Satoh Makoto and the Post-Shingeki Movement in Japan*, Ithica, London: Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 18-19.

[117] Shingeki really became established in 1924 when it acquired its first theatre building, the Little Theatre, (*Tsukiji*) in the centre of Tokyo, which was founded by Osanai Karoru. This marked the beginning of the orthodox Shingeki movement with Japan's first truly modern theatre, free from Kabuki's influence. With Japan's thrust towards modernisation, this new theatre was set up partly because existing forms were seen as too closely enmeshed with the sacred and ritualistic. The Tsukiji Company dispersed in 1928, after which Shingeki became dominated by a left-wing radicalism that provided artistic unity.

[118] Kabuki plays were multidimensional, containing a rich montage of syncopated rhythms, colour, spectacle, exaggerated gestures and intensified emotions. It was a theatre founded on fantasy and artifice and plays contained unruly passions, villainous violence, demonic forces and even the comic.

on established Western playwrights who included Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg.[119] Its proscenium stage separated the theatre from the audience, thus positing action in a different realm and forging a strong distinction between art and life. The order of signs that constituted this mode of theatrical performance were premised upon Western culture, as it offered a mimesis of an unfamiliar reality, which was at odds with the multi-dimensional, complex and even chaotic Japanese experience that characterised the aftermath of the war.

Shingeki's reliance on modern tragedy with its underpinning of humanist principles, offered little relevance for contemporary Japanese concerns. It was because of this over-reliance on Western models and its subsequent ideological stance, that it now lost appeal with the younger people. A generation of artists committed to a theatre with an alternative ideology and different ways of relating to the audience, introduced 'Underground' (*Angura)* performance.[120] With their radical methods of stagecraft, practitioners staged their performances in smaller, more modest venues such as basements, theatres and even tents. The intention was to go beyond the stylistic confines of Shingeki, in response to a more revolutionary imagination and beyond the established politics of right and left. The depiction of same-sex sexual practice or new images of women however, were not part of its vision as it did little to disrupt the official narrative of gender ideology.

The Arrival of *Ankoku Butoh*

Dance in Japan had never been politically orientated and was much easier to challenge; it remained relatively untouched by the modernisation process and was therefore open to more radical elements. *Ankoku Butoh* was already there with the first performance of 1959,[121] offering an alternative theatrical expression

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[119] See for example, Gioia Ottaviani, '"Difference" and "Reflexivity" Osanai Kaoru and the *Shingeki* Movement' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. II, No. 2, autumn 1994, p. 219.

[120] This term refers to the underground resistance movements of the period as well as the location of performance in basements and other inexpensive venues.

[121] Note this was *Forbidden Colours* as previously described.

and one determined to free the body. Hijikata asserted, '(c)onquerors may have deprived their victims of their language, art, religion, kings and architecture, but dance, ever fertile, slipped past the conquering grasp.'[122] At the site of the performing body Hijikata evokes a multiplicity of meanings, significations and subversions, while rejecting the technical virtuosity of Western dance styles that had become the 'establishment'.

A new movement vocabulary was introduced, one that lowered the centre of gravity as a way to counter ballet's expansive, vertical movement. Hijikata's was an anti-technique, as his aesthetic embraced ugliness, deformity and degradation, while his movement was awkward and ungraceful in the extreme.[123] It reflected his own physical limitations[124] and feelings of being an outsider to the urbane Tokyo art world. Hijikata's sense of alienation was so intense coming from the most undeveloped area of Japan, he based his entire artistic approach on it.[125] He looked back to the foreign, the 'Other' element within his own native culture, to make a nostalgic return to the primitive roots of dance, to a pre-modern, pre-Western model, whose expressive power was derived from the irrational and chaotic.[126] He also evoked the heritage of the traditional Japanese performing arts, in which social outcasts claimed a special connection with the world of spirits and were members of the untouchable classes.[127]

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[122] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al., back page.

[123] Iwana Masaki stated, '(w)hereas techniques are vital to norm-regulated modern dance, to Butoh, in contrast, presence is vital...' in *The Intensity of Nothingness: The Dance and Thoughts of Masaki Iwana*, France, 2000, p. 11.

[124] Hijikata had a physical impairment; he had one leg longer than the other.

[125] Hijikata was born in the Tohoku region of Japan, an extremely undeveloped and rural area of the North East and moved to Tokyo in 1952. People from the area have pronounced and identifiable accents, that are considered humorous and even rude by city dwellers, especially Tokyoites.

[126] Miryam Sas in her book *Faultlines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism*, discusses this nostalgia, as a complex and utopic negotiation of the past. Hijikata's constant appeal to his rural childhood and his use of traditional theatrical, mythological and aesthetic elements she asserts, must not be misread in essentialist terms, as having meaning or representing something. Instead she argues that such allusions to the past are problematised in his work, embellished and opened to different perspectives that would act as stimuli for his creative imagination.

[127] In 1871 the law was abolished declaring 'untouchables' as outcast and non-human.

The beginnings of Butoh are closely linked with the eroticism contained within Tokyo cabaret culture. Hijikata was attracted to and inspired by the seamy underground world of nightclubs, bars, cabarets and the lifestyle of the prostitutes and transvestites he met there. At the end of each day's training, Hijikata's troupe would perform show dances at one of the proliferating hotels and nightclubs in the city.[128] This was to ensure some basic financial security and was encouraged by Hijikata for the experience it offered.[129] There the dancers would perform striptease in the exotic and lavish settings, until the early hours of the morning, while mixing within this demimonde of intoxicants, prostitutes and underground characters. These erotic environments were the backdrops for the sensual and fantasy scenarios they performed on stage. It was here that the dancers could engage and become skilled in the complex power dynamics that circulate between the stripper and spectator, creating the illusion of accessibility as erotic object within the rules of exchange, while taunting the viewer and maintaining overall control. With this alternative existence, Hijikata and his dancers lived at variance with cultural mores, while pursuing frugal lifestyles and striving to avoid the monetary trappings of commercialism.

There are photographs which attest to the troupe's unconventional behaviour, as in one taken close to his training studio, where Hijikata is riding a bicycle wearing an open kimono, his undervests exposed, followed by two of his disciples, one crawling around on all fours.[130] The traditional kimono is a national costume, worn on special occasions such as group rituals and is an inclusive sign that denotes a belonging to Japanese culture. There is strict decorum in the arrangement and fitting of the layers and accessories of the garment, as an expression of correctness and good taste. The visual ambiguity of Hijikata's attire is a clear declaration of his own outsider status and is further intensified by his

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[128] See ibid, Mayumi Saito, pp. 29 -30.

[129] It was common for dancers, actors and artists involved in the post-Shingeki movement to have to support themselves with a variety of odd jobs, ranging from performing in striptease shows, serving in bars, to freelance writing.

[130] Tadao Nakatani, *World of Tatsumi Hijikata, The Originator of Butoh: A Collection of Dance Photographs*, Tokyo: Shinsensha, 2003, pp. 54-5.

outrageous and confused facial expression. It was common for him to wear female kimono,[131] as can be seen in two photographs taken in 1969, where in an absurd concoction his hair is worn long and loose while wearing children's white socks, he walks in front of a group of riot police.[132] (Figure 11)

Figure 11

[131] This practice is reminiscent of that of some Onnagatas who wore their female stage costumes in real life. See ibid, Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre*, p. 89.

[132] Photograph by Takanashi Yutaka, in *'Butoh': Exhibition of Tatsumi Hijikata*, Akita Senshu Museum of Art, Kenzo Okada Memorial, 1991, p. 55.

Judith Butler, analyses such open display of transgendered behaviour and asserts,

> ...it seems clear that, although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performance in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions.[133]

She continues by describing the reactions that the sight of the disruptive figure of a transvestite in public can elicit, those being 'fear, rage, even violence.'[134] Hijikata seems to have been indifferent to such responses; indeed he obviously went to great lengths to provoke those around him. His body became the physical sign of marginalisation, an intermediary space between his art and life. It would also seem that it became the vehicle to question assumptions about gender conformity and social interaction in general. His overall appearance was clearly intended to shock and repulse, and playfully transgressed the codes of socially accepted conduct in a patriarchal and strictly prescribed culture. Derrida's concept of *différance* can again be applied, as a metaphor for the play of displacement of meanings and 'truths' present within his lifestyle and dance. Both offered possibilities for experimentation, from where a multitude of movements and impulses could happen and at the same time, created a space for future potential imaginings.

Early Butoh Performances

Hijikata's first Butoh performance, *Forbidden Colours* in 1959, openly displays the taboo of homoeroticism for the first time in Japan, in a production which contains scenes of the ritualised killing of a chicken on stage, as was described at the beginning of chapter one. In this dance Hijikata is demystifying sexual power and pleasure, portraying it in its naked explicitness, exploring its darker side and depicting sadistic acts. He is bringing 'deviant' sexual behaviour out of the underworld and into the mainstream, a revolutionary act according to the

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[133] Ibid, Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,' p. 278.
[134] Ibid.

feminist theorist Jill Dolan, '(m)aking visible gay or lesbian bodies engaged in sex acts is perhaps one of the most radical ways to disrupt dominant cultural discourse on sexuality and gender.'[135] She goes further,

> (b)ecause gay male or lesbian sex is completely out of place - unimagined, invisible - in traditional aesthetic contexts, the most transgressive act at this historical moment would be representing it to excess, in dominant and marginalised reception communities.[136]

Hijikata's performance is doing just that, as through such excess he is recalling a sexual practice that people could once choose, as part of a system that did not preclude heterosexual relationships and marriage.[137] The piece articulates issues of erotic domination and control, while pointing to the contentions and contradictions present within sexuality itself. It alludes to the Japanese traditional practice of *shudo*, as described in the first chapter, in which a young man became the lover of an older man as the passive object of desire. The exposure and flaunting of a sadistic scenario in Hijikata's dance can be viewed as problematising sexual preference, while alluding to the cultural construction of the homosexual body as controlled. At the same time a critique is offered, of the phallocentric structure of modern society where sex had been robbed of its pleasure, controlled and 'normalised'.

The undercurrent of violence present with the killing of a chicken creates an immediate atmosphere of crisis that was deeply affecting for the spectators witnessing it. In an article in the *Japan Times*, Donald Richie who attended one of the performances, describes the brutality in *Forbidden Colours*,

> ...where all the movements expressed pain, where the dancers seem as though tied to the stage, straining at their bonds, and

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[135] Jill Dolan,'Practicing Cultural disruptions: Gay and Lesbian Representation and Sexuality' in *Critical Theory and Performance,* Genel Reinelt and J. Roache eds., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992, p. 263.
[136] Ibid, p. 272.
[137] Ibid, Gary P. Leupp, p. 3.

> where death appeared on the boards in the shape of murder, a real one - that of a rooster, a new one every night.[138]

The performance insists on the materiality of the body and resonates with the presence of physical pain, as if in an attempt to communicate the feeling of danger, mortality and brutality with the audience. The violence of the sexual act is underscored, as is the humiliation of the emasculated young man, whose impotency and powerlessness are set in contrast with the masochistic and dynamic image of the older male. The apogee of cruelty, (the killing of the chicken), in which the young man is suddenly conveyed as tormenter, appears incongruous, however, with his role as the innocent victim, in what earlier appears to be an assault. There are also further overtones of sexual violation and bondage, with the ropes attaching the two figures and the black scarf tied around the youth's neck that could allude to strangulation. The ambiguous erotics of the piece are expressive of the sexual contradictions and inconsistencies present in Japanese society. These erotics also point to the complexities present in masculinities that exist within a hierarchy of power relations. Emotional vulnerability and subordinate homosexual masculinity are presented alongside male power and violence, which resonates with the brutality implicit in gender politics and that which exists in transactions among men, as part of a system of domination. The portrayal of the debased status of the younger man could reflect the social prejudice allotted to gay men and be seen as a defiant reaction to the limitations placed on desire in contemporary society.

The corporeality of Hijikata's own flesh and the meaning it carried within that specific cultural context had been manipulated and abused in the system of representation and this is his response and challenge to that. In a society that had come to disguise and find such practices increasingly intolerable and to define personal identity through rigid and essentialist sexual roles, Hijikata's stage becomes a site in which to challenge such conceived notions. At the same

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[138] Donald Richie, 'On Hijikata Tatsumi' in *The Japan Times*, 7th March 1987.

time he offers a critique of the power dynamics, cruelty and sadism present within sexual expression and indeed within Japanese culture itself.[139]

Almost all of the dancers during Hijikata's earlier period were male[140] and the strict and controlled posture became the male standard in early Butoh dance. The dancers generally hold themselves firm and upright while appearing strong, dynamic and powerful, qualities that conform to conservative notions of masculine identity. These dancers are sometimes seen performing daring and boisterous feats, as in the performance of *The Masseur: A Story that Supports Passion* (*Anma: aiyoku o sasaeru gekijo no hanashi*) 1963, in which one dancer spins two others on his shoulders who are physically connected, one hooked under the other's armpits. Daredevil courage is displayed in this dangerous stunt within the confined space of the small stage.[141] (Figure 12) In ensemble pieces such as these, subject positions between the male dancers continually shift back and forth, as one emerges more powerful than the other. The action is played out in the context of same-sex identity, which breaks with the fixed understanding of gender configuration 'male/female' construed as active/passive and offers a fluidity of positions for the male body. There is close interaction between the dancers and the action is often animated and virile, as they play ball, perform somersaults and even ride a bicycle on stage.[142] An atmosphere of homosocial camaraderie is created throughout the performance while the dangers implicit in male-male relationships are made tangible. In one scene a few of the bare-chested dancers have their faces wrapped in paper, like those of a mummified

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[139] See R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, for a discussion of the construction of multiple masculinities and diverse gender difference. He develops a theory that is concerned with exposing and deconstructing the gendered dichotomies that shape identities. Such theory was intended to create possibilities for more complex relationships and social realities and to develop different models of masculinity. While acknowledging male power and privilege in the gender order, the concept of masculinity (and indeed femininity), is revealed as a discursive category and as an ongoing, plural and fluid construction.

[140] The one exception being the female dancer Takai Tomiko, who had worked with Hijikata since 1960 and appeared in the dance *Emotion in Metaphysics* in 1967.

[141] See Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 47. As I have not seen the video coverage of this dance, photographs will form the basis of the analysis given here.

[142] In the dance *Revolt of the Flesh,* Hijikata enters the stage riding a bicycle-cart, which was carried by dancers on their shoulders.

body swathed in bandages.[143] This might be read as a metaphor for the shackling of the human psyche, as they are muffled, silenced and subordinated, while solemnly pacing in front of a few rows of the audience who occupy the side space of the stage, set up on a higher tier.[144] (Figure 13)

Figure 12

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[143] This bandaging of the face and body was frequently seen in artists' work of the 1960s as for example, at the opening of their exhibition, several members of the organisation named 'The Neo-Dada Organisers', plastered Neo-Dada posters to themselves and paraded the streets of central Tokyo.

[144] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 46. Tanaka Min, a very close disciple/student of Hijikata, states in homage to his teacher, '(t)he body surface that envelops the flesh is like a wrapping paper; and what is important is the pattern printed on it. The patterns of the society are inevitably printed on the body surface as it rolls around the earth,' as a reference to the cultural inscription of the body. See Min Tanaka, 'I am an Avant-Garde Who Crawls the Earth', *TDR*, 30, T110, summer 1986, p.154. This could be another allusion to the changing inscriptions imposed on the male body as part of Japan's Westernisation process.

Figure 13

The performance *The Rose-Coloured Dance*[145] (*À La Maison de M. Civeçawa, [Barairo Dansu]*), 1965,[146] offers a combination of abstract images, costumes and stage props, which remain cryptic and enigmatic. The stage is set with a two-tiered backdrop, on which several fully dressed boys stand with their backs to the audience. A full portrait of the famous Kabuki Onnagata, the female impersonator Hanayagi Shotaro, in traditional stage role takes central position, an allusion to the traditional act of cross-dressing in performance.[147] One image of the performance reveals a sword-fencer wearing a protective mask in classic pose,[148] (Figure 14) while in another two near-naked dancers are involved in a scuffle, their bodies entwined and folded over one another as they wrestle to the ground.[149] A long rubber tube can be seen exuding from the dancers' mouths, which wraps around their bodies and acts like an umbilical cord. (Figure 15) A confusion of boundaries is implied, as their male bodies are extended through this to emphasise their intimate connection and mutual dependence.

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[145] The colour rose is a euphemism for homosexuality in Japan.

[146] As I have not seen the video recording of this dance, pictures of different scenes will be used to reconstitute the performance here. These are depicted in ibid. Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 49-53 and throughout Sumi Yoichi, Fujio Maeda, Takashi Morishita eds., *The Iconology of the Rose-Coloured Dance: Reconstructing Tatsumi Hijikata,* trans. Mie Ishii and Bruce Baird, Keio University, Tokyo: Tobi Printing, 2000.

[147] Ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 121.

[148] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 51.

[149] Ibid, p. 50. The two dancers were Kasai Akira and Ishii Mitsutaka.

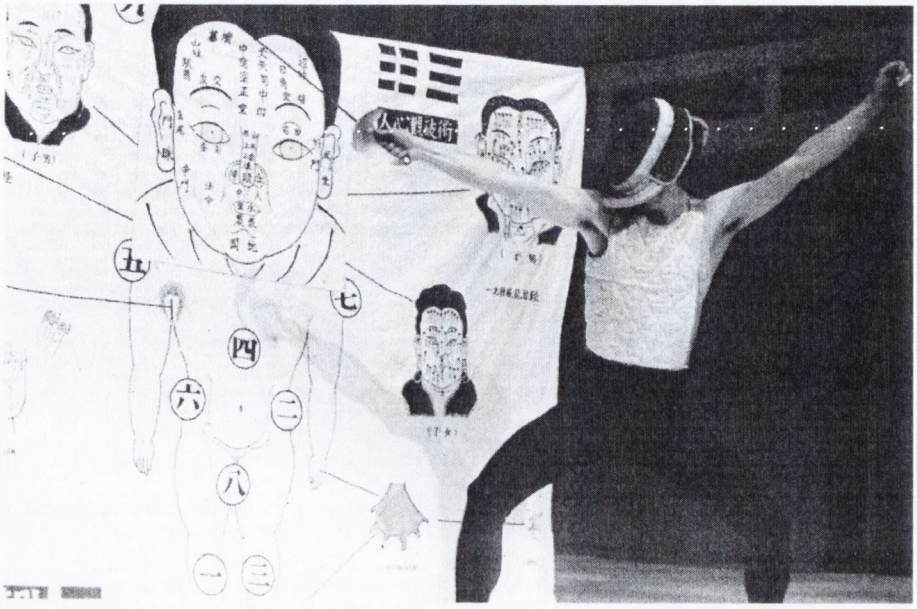

Figure 14

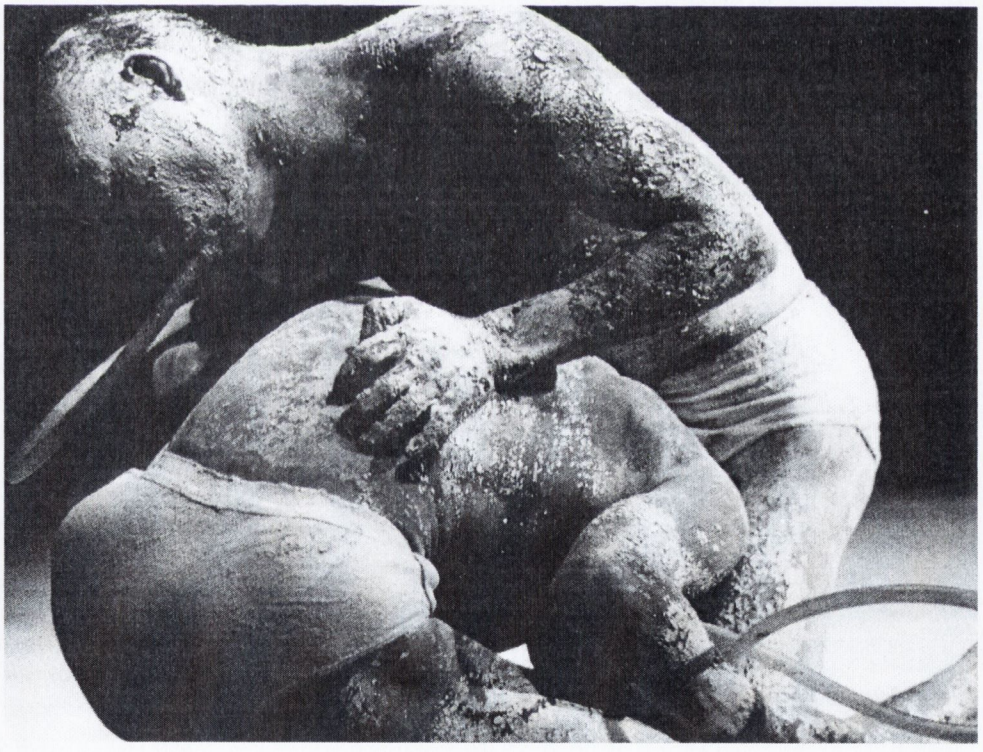

Figure 15

Hijikata is challenging the audience with these obscure and fractured impressions, while the taboo of male-male eroticism and desire is continually present as a subtext. His performances take place outside the normative system of representation, as they are played out in non-narrative form, within which his display of male bodies appears fissured, complex and strangely ethereal. In a culture that had become dependent on stable identifiable categories to secure its 'normality' and acceptance on the world stage, Hijikata evokes a multiplicity of meanings at the site of the performing body, playing diverse identities and fantasies. In his dance, a variety of elements are exposed and set in sometimes absurd and incongruous relationship as a prelude to possible reinterpretation.

In another scene in *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, Hijikata blurs sexual and gender roles further. A sense of flow imbues the scene, as Hijikata performs a refined and surrealistic ballet-like duet with the older actor Ohno Kazuo.[150] Their protracted movements reveal a balletic grace, loftiness and vulnerability. (Figure 16) This choreographed play of male bodies attuned and intimately close, conveys a compelling eroticism and makes visible repressed aspects of the constructed masculine identity. A dramatic shift takes place in the performance, as Hijikata attacks and straddles Ohno from behind. (Figure 17) Ohno is caught frozen in a silent scream, as he reaches out, with a facial expression that could denote either ecstatic pleasure or anguish, or both. There is a sense of the parodic in the scene, as the two men are dressed in identical floaty, long white dresses and Ohno is wearing white face make-up with heavily painted eyes, which makes him seem doll-like and artificial. Hijikata is again alluding to a sexuality that eschews normative practice, in a further subversion of Japanese cultural codes and is representing masculinity in experimental and progressive ways. New images of the 'queer body' are being created, that are resistant to techniques of corporeal inscription and normalisation. He is exploring the nature of power and sexuality outside strict gender dichotomies, in a shocking and

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[150] Pictures of this scene are depicted in ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 52-3 and 172.

perhaps ironic scene that is intended to generate an unsettling experience for the spectator.

Figure 16

Figure 17

The socially taboo theme of homosexuality was the major focus of Hijikata's first creative period of 1959-68, during which he employed solely male dancers, as seen in these first Butoh pieces. Within the contemporary and predominantly feminine, Japanese dance scene, this was a source of extreme controversy. Hijikata's own often naked body and those of his dancers became the site of violence and sadomasochism, as homoerotic acts were repeated in his dances of this period, in scenes that portray ecstasy and pain. Scenes of suffering take place within a solo piece of 1968, *Revolt of the Flesh* while at the same time, Hijikata plays out a series of female impersonations. The sinuous, sensual body rhythms contrast with the other more formal, rigid movements within the piece and with those seen in the dances of the proceeding period.

Performance: *Revolt of the Flesh*

As described at the beginning of this chapter, this performance of 1968 contains scenes of Hijikata wearing an exaggerated dildo and the dance ends with Hijikata, tied upside down from ropes and draped in a white loin-cloth. His shamanic and phallic display is set in jarring juxtaposition with this representation of the cruciform icon, a mischievous appropriation of that most profound symbol of Western Christianity. The heightened eroticism of the previous scene with its phallic pretensions of masculinity, are incompatible with this iconography of tender and yielding sacrifice and its implications of emasculation. Hijikata willingly transforms himself from creative subject of the performance into a sacrificial object, staging a dramatisation of his own self-destruction. The ambiguous and complex responses in Japanese society towards foreign influence underlie the piece.

Hijikata transforms himself into this symbol and vehicle of religious authority, as a release of the sacred that can be seen as a potentially transformative force. At the same time, this mimicry of Western cultural power highlights the weight that lies with the Western 'Other', which had wrought such far-reaching change on Japanese culture. Its rational world and complicit economic and philosophical

principles had worked to construct and maintain the illusion of individualism, an ideology that Hijikata's sacrificial act attempts to violently shatter. In a further allusion to foreign presence and influence, traditional Japanese motifs, such as the kimono, are interwoven with and reinterpreted through, Western styles of costume in his performance. A bricolage is created, which reflects the country's recent history and conflict within itself as a growing modernised power and the older traditional elements of its culture. The dilemmas and complexities of contemporary culture, along with those relating to gender and sexuality, are thus taken up in this dance.

Hijikata unveils and parades the phallus and gives extra emphasis with the gold paint, that colour traditionally applied to Buddha statues and the lavish paintings of the powerful classes, from the sixteenth century onwards.[151] The phallic emblem becomes an object of veneration and constitutes the focal point when carried in procession at certain traditional Japanese *matsuri* festivals. These symbolise the generative power of nature and the genital prowess of the male subject,[152] while emphasising the close relationship between the erotic and the sacred. This attribute of masculinity is over elaborated in Hijikata's dance, as if to accentuate the power and privilege contained within the construction of the modern male self. The embodiment of heterosexual male status, this

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[151] With the sudden affluence of the Momoyama period (1573-1615), gold leaf was the natural background for the often large-scale paintings of the nobility, the landlords (*daimyo*), *samurai* and wealthy townspeople, and continued to feature in the work of certain important schools of artists. It might be noted that genitalia was not only depicted but it dominated the composition of certain woodblock prints, *ukiyo-e*, of the Tokugawa period. Entwined body positions featured in these erotic prints that were known as *shunga*. Laws started to be introduced during the Meiji prohibiting such explicit representation in response to Western expectations. Hijikata appeals to this 'forgotten' and indeed forbidden visual tradition in his performance; his exaggerated display, obscene contortions and poses of sexual play are reminiscent of these scenes. It is also interesting to note that the phallic form features repeatedly in the installations of certain Surrealist and neo-Dada experimental artists during the late 1950s and early 60s. They appear in the work of Kusama Yayoi as a series of soft sculptured dismembered organs while Kudo Tetsumi produced a series entitled *The Philosophy of Impotence* in 1960, consisting of black, phallic objects. See Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, New York, Tokyo: Nissha Printing Company Ltd., 1994, pp. 204-5.

[152] The matsuri are rites held at shrines and temples to mark critical stages in the annual cycle and their main purpose is that of entertaining the gods. Phallic worship has ancient roots in Japan and is still celebrated at many festivals and shrines. Reasons for this practice differ regionally, but it is most commonly linked to fertility, ease in childbirth and prosperous harvests.

transcendent signifier itself,[153] is unveiled and displayed in a male masquerade that simultaneously reveals the vulnerability of Hijikata's emaciated and naked body, thereby challenging sexual power.[154] The genitalia, complete with false and exaggerated pubic hair, are blatantly exposed to the voyeuristic gaze: a mocking hyper-nakedness and a parody of masculine authority.[155]

Hijikata shifts back and forth, switching costumes and creating incongruous identities that he layers onto his 'male' body, in a playful process of deconstruction that undercuts rigid patriarchal roles. As each disguise encourages a multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings, his body at times appears emptied of notions of gender and is revealed as a hollow illusion. This burlesque and continually changing gender display can be seen as defusing expectations of male identity, recreating it as a site of instability. At the same time he flagrantly transgresses the taboo against homosexuality and the increasing de-eroticisation and de-sensualisation of the male body. The crude artificiality of his poses, the volatility and fluidity of his roles, clash with the normative culture where 'homosexuality' and gender had become essentialised and defined as part of an individual's biological makeup.

The impulsive and whimsical nature of the performance contrasts with a society not at ease with the sexual preferences of its population. Hijikata puts on and takes off his femininity, creating meaning upon meaning and in the process gender is exposed as a sexual costume. This complex sign system creates a constructed reality that can be shed wittingly, in a display that has resonance with that of the Onnagata in Kabuki. In a society where gender roles and sexual desire had become fiercely polarised, he ironically plays out the extremes of

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[153] See the earlier notes on Lacan in chapter one of this thesis.

[154] The power of the phallus is also challenged when it is used only for pleasure and not for reproductive purposes, as was seen in Hijikata's first performance of Kinjiki.

[155] Jacques Lacan in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudiene,* Juliet Mitchel and Jacqeline Rose, eds., London: MacMillan, 1982, p. 84, states that 'the phallus can only play its role as veiled.' This implies that it can only maintain its authority in the Symbolic order if it remains a signifier, that is, if it remains hidden and therefore transcendent.

phallic/power and feminine/pleasure, allowing one to seep into and therefore disrupt the other.

Hijikata, like the male Onnagata however, has overall control of the signification and to some extent can determine its outcome, while the actuality of woman is left out of the process. Deep issues arise therefore, concerning the power relationships between the performer/spectator, the visual pleasure for the audience and the objectification of the female body. While woman are appropriated through this ironic representation, her absence is highlighted. Jill Dolan on the subject of male drag observes that,

> ...both spectator and performer conspire to construct a male-identified subject that is left out of the terms of exchange: women are non-existent in drag performance, but woman as myth, as a cultural, ideological object, is constructed... [156]

This denial of real women in representation simultaneously reflects the status of women in Japan even within modern times.

It would seem that, as in Kabuki, there was never any intention to sustain any illusion of a supposed gender reality. The feminine is encoded as an excess that is instantly perceptible to the spectator and as a result, the artifice of gender as fantasy was foregrounded. The spectator is given access to a gender, that of femininity, as a set of somatic signs, played out as surface illusion. Samuel L. Leiter describes moments of the Onnagata's performance when masculine qualities are allowed to seep through the feminine veneer, when the audience is reminded of the male body beneath, then the character '...catch(es) herself up short and revert(s) to more feminine behaviour.'[157] These moments of deliberate 'slippage' between biological sex and character roles, add to the humour of the performance while, '...the entire fabric of constructed gender behaviour is

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[156] Jill Dolan, 'Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?' in *Women and Performance*, 2(2): 5-11, 1985, p. 8.

[157] Samuel L. Leiter, 'From Gay to Gei: The Onnagata and the Creation of Kabuki's Female Characters' in *Comparative Drama*, No. 4, Vol. 3, 1999-2000, p. 509.

illuminated and the artificiality of the Onnagata's art shines forth.'[158] In Hijikata's performance, a coherent impression of the feminine is also not attempted, as is seen in the wearing of fetishised women's costume with a conspicuous and incongruous beard. This combination destroys the illusion and mocks any notion of 'truth' and security contained within notions of sexual identity. Hijikata's ungainly and mannish attempt to play the feminine, results in a performance that appears emptied of sensual appeal.

The continually changing personas he portrays as he switches from role to role reveal an underlying ambiguity and absurdity, a rye joke, as Hijikata appears to wink at the spectators in jest. This gesture surprises, delights and shocks, while at the same time it reveals his authority over the representation. His 'feminine' poses are playful and defiant, making him an object of scopophilic fantasy in which he returns the gaze of the viewer, engaging the audience while demonstrating his full command of the situation, in a play of power and pleasure. The many sets of referents present in the performance upset the erotics of the piece, as his play between identities invites a multiplicity of decodings and sensations that tease and confuse.

Many issues arise concerning the disruptive potential within this dance. Even though his cross-dressed performance draws attention to the blurring of the boundaries between gender role and sexual desire, which would undermine the essentialism of the strict binary system, there is a possible reinforcement of female stereotypes as seen in his coy and flirtatious manner and clichéd images of female attire. A tension is created as the masculine qualities of verticality, ascendancy and power are placed alongside female ones of fluidity, multiplicity and *jouissance*. He appears to endow these polarised qualities with absolute worth, as his phallic display acts as a return to the universal male signifier and serves as a reminder that underneath the frocks, there is the reassuring security of the male body. While highlighting the strict bi-polar nature of gender and

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[158] Ibid.

playing their thresholds, the question must be asked, is he extending their possibilities and challenging the innateness of dominant constructions of male/female nature within the gender hierarchy? In the absence of any substantial research into the context in which this dance was received,[159] possible interpretations of his performance can only be alluded to, however in my view, in the above performance, Hijikata does not fully render these gender categories problematic.

I will now turn briefly to the performance of the co-founder of Butoh who also enacted masquerades of the caricatured 'feminine', in exaggerated costumes and highly mannered poses, which were described earlier in this chapter. As with the exploration of Hijikata's performance, I will attempt to discern the deconstructive potential within Ohno Kazuo's dance for exposing gendered sexuality as cultural construction, thereby creating new and unexpected possibilities.

Exploration of the 'Feminine'

Watching Ohno Kazuo in performance in 1949 was a pivotal encounter in Hijikata's career and one that had an extreme impact on him.[160] Ohno, one of Japan's great solo dancers and already in his forties,[161] became Butoh's co-creator a decade later. Extremely different in temperament and personality, he was described as occupying the opposite end of the spectrum, as light compared with Hijikata's darkness. In contrast to Hijikata's often disjointed style, Ohno's

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[159] As noted in the introduction, available publications and research on Butoh have concentrated on descriptions of the performance/training and its influences; however there has been little concerning audience reception.

[160] Yuri Kageyama, 'Dancer Ohno Gives New Shoes to the Dead' in *The Japan Times*, September 19, 1987. Ohno Kazuo started his dance career with Ishii Baku in 1933, who was introducing Western modern dance to Japan and then with Eguchi Takaya in 1936. Both of these dancers were influenced by (and indeed performed with) Wigman in Germany. They advocated a poetry of the body that could express intense emotions through symbolic movement. See the preface to, 'Kazuo Ohno Doesn't Commute: An Interview', *TDR* 30 (T110), summer 1986, p. 163. Hijikata studied under Masumura Katsuko and with Ando Mitsuko, the former a student and the latter a disciple of Eguchi. It was through Ando that Ohno and Hijikata met in the early 1950s.

[161] Ohno Kazuo was born in 1906.

was lyrical, his movement sinuous, fluid and graceful, as he played such roles as transvestite, prostitute and even flamenco dancer.[162] In an interview in 1987, he spoke of his concern with expressing birth and life, 'the desire to go back into the womb and the wish to never have been born.'[163] This primal fantasy is a recurring theme in his writings as are the tributes to his mother, about whom he described in an interview of 1995, 'the first encounter with beauty in this life is the encounter with your mother.'[164] Like Hijikata, he also assumed and wore the feminine role as an excess, which can be construed as a reminder of the absence of the feminine that had been banished from the male character in modern Japanese society. His work expressed openness to the multiple possibilities of gender and explored the permeable boundaries between sexuality and identity.

Photographs of his performances attest to his wearing women's dress and lavish accessories,[165] in a masquerade of femininity, an extravagant exhibitionism that distorts the feminine sexual identity by interfacing it with his male body. (Figure 18) At the same time overly idealised representations of the feminine, as played out in Kabuki, are rejected. A surface representation is enacted, an exaggerated artifice that does not aspire to anything deeper, or attempt to proclaim any notion of 'truth'. He incorporates stereotypical elements of femininity into his performance, including wigs, hair bows, high heels and stockings in a semiotic excess of extravagantly clichéd images, while emptying them of any erotic value. Instead the exaggerated artifice of his performance is exposed, hyperbolised, taking him almost to the point of caricature and revealing a fetishist fascination with an imaginary world. His constant transformations can be construed as a 'camp' satire of femininity, played out within a variety of intensities that range

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[162] A most notable performance was a solo piece named *Divine* in 1960. *The Masseur* and *The Rose-Coloured Dance* are among the performances in which he also appeared, which were directed by Hijikata.

[163] Ibid,

[164] Ohno Kazuo, 'Going Back to the Origin of life: "My Mother"', 10th November 1995, in *Nikutaemo*, Number 2, summer 1996.

[165] For example, Ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, pp. 73, 77, 83 and 86.

from the theatrical to self-parody. The prismatic effect within his dance eludes definition, reflecting the complexity of notions of gender identity and its lack of substantial stabilising core. The power dynamics involved in his performances can be questioned, because as anodyne as Ohno's performances appear, his representations do have further resonance and formative potential. His images can be seen as pointing to an anxiety around the feminine presence and female sexual power, while maintaining restricted illusions of 'womanhood', taking her to the level of the grotesque and indeed constructing and contributing to a limitation of her role within the accepted status quo.

Figure 18

There are many of Hijikata's performances in which he also assumes exaggerated and satirical women's costume, while exploring fluid gender roles. In

the dance of 1973, *Calm House* (*Shizukana ie*), for example, he has a short beard, moustache and bouffant-style hair while wearing an eclectic combination of accessories, dresses and wrap-around skirts, which are ruched and layered, worn and tattered.[166] The women performers in the same dance also wear a variety of costumes, including male kimono, deconstructing the garments themselves while foregrounding gender as unnatural construction, thus compelling the spectator to reject any 'meaning' it might suggest.[167]

During the mid 1960s, Hijikata started to grow his hair long, wear a kimono and speak in feminine form, believing that this would help his oldest sister to live on within him, a sister who was sold as a geisha when he was very young, 'I keep an older sister inside my body.[168] When I am immersed in creating a dance, she scratches away the darkness inside me, finally devouring it all.'[169] This fascination with the experience of being a woman belies a narcissistic identification with the feminine, a compelling desire to merge with the opposite gender and to experience what women encounter in their own bodies. In this way he attempted to erase differences between the male and female, and opened himself to experience an emotional range other than that sanctioned for men in the public domain. While on the contemporary stage, the sight of the cross-dressed actor was culturally accepted, as illusion and the 'real' were strictly demarcated, however, such daring behaviour outside the theatrical context opened him to the public's disapproving gaze. His refusal to perform any illusion of stable identity, his appearance, demeanour and that of the students who associated with him, was the cause of much consternation among those who

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[166] As there is no video coverage of this dance, I refer here to photographs contained in the book by Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 120-1, for a reconstitution of the performance.

[167] Ibid. p. 121.

[168] In Yoko Ashikawa, 'Ashikawa Yoko, Searching for the Other Person in the Body' in *Tsubushi*, 1990, p. 15, Ashikawa describes how Hijikata 'wore only women's underwear', which she understood to be 'a method of training the body.'

[169] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al. eds., p. 6 and Nario Goda ed., *Body on the Edge of Crisis: Photographs of Butoh Dance Performance and Stages by Tatsumi Hijikata*, trans. Janine Beichman, John Turrent and Tetsuo Kinoshita, Tokyo: Parco Co. Ltd., 1987, p. 85 and 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 77.

encountered them. If we return again to Judith Butler's assertion of the actuality of gender as constituted by the performance itself, Hijikata's behaviour can be seen as a refusal to 'fit' into the pre-existing categories that regulated this reality. His was a challenge to contemporary thinking about identity and an assertion of its non-essential character.

This was the start of his connection with the feminine 'Other' within his own male body, in order to transform more deeply and to dance that 'Other'. In his own words, '(w)omen are born with the ability to live the illogicality of reality and as such, they are able to embody the illogicality of dancing,' and he continues, 'Japanese men have been emasculated by the West.'[170] The second quotation speaks of a possible homophobic anxiety about the feminine and the question must be asked, as to whether Hijikata was appropriating and using the feminine in order to create a fuller, more rounded vision of himself. In an interview of July 1968 with the scholar Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, who questioned his all-male cast, '...are women, then, too fleshy and round for it?' Hijikata replied, '(a) dancer must be able to relate to, for example, a frozen bone that transcends gender. Getting to that point, demands exhaustive examination...'[171] which speaks of his commitment to a more profound interrogation, an unrelenting exploration and complete 'emptying out' of gender, as a result of experimenting with and realising all that is female within the male body. His work contains an ongoing deconstruction and reconstruction, as having separated out a multiplicity of gendered qualities, an eventual unity was achieved and the androgen came into being in his performance.

Many of the bodies in his dances throughout the 1960s and increasingly into the 1970s portray androgynous qualities. This is an androgyny that does not offer

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[170] Mark Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Hong Kong, Saden/Aperture, 1987, p. 14. The loss of power and authority during American occupation led to general anxiety among Japanese men that became gendered, as it involved a fear of emasculation. See Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, University of California Press, 1999, p. 190.

[171] Hijikata, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 51

any sense of transcendence of erotic desires, as portrayed in the art and myths of the classical Western tradition. Instead it involves a physical play of ambiguity, a movement between the bipolar extremes of gender identities, one that transcends sexual stereotypes and spans the spectrum of difference. Dancers in shapeless costume, women dressed in male kimono[172] or almost naked bodies[173] are constantly seen in Hijikata's performances, which convey alternative ways of using and portraying the human form. In reduced scenes, men with white-pasted bodies,[174] or those clad in rags and tatters and often with their heads shaved, display a sexual ambiguity and androgyny. Their grimacing or impassable faces, slowness of movement and often vulgar gestures, add further dimensionality and complexity to the order of signs contained in the performance, offering a variety of possible readings and 'meanings'. Moreover, the movement skills demanded by the dance pieces do not appear to draw attention to the differences between the male and female performers.

Takai Tomiko was one of the first female performers to appear on the Butoh stage, most notably in the dance *Emotion in Metaphysics* (*Keijijo-gaku)*, in 1967.[175] In this performance she dances at times in soft, slow movements, revealing an emotional sensitivity[176] that can also be seen in her male dance partners. Wearing long dresses,[177] their fluid, supple and sometimes protuberant bodies create the undulating movements connected with traditional femininity.[178]

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[172] See pictures of *The Rose-Coloured Dance* in ibid, Tadao Nakatani, pp. 21-3.

[173] See pictures of *Fin Whale,* (*Nagasu kujira*) of 1972, in ibid, Tadao Nakatani, pp. 253-4.

[174] White masks were worn in Noh, which were treated with great reverence, as through them the actors believed they could transform and transpose themselves. White facial make-up was also used in Kabuki theatre and white is also the colour of death in Japan. See Solrun Hoaas, 'Noh Masks: The Legacy of Possession' in *TDR*, Vol. 26, (T96), No. 4, winter 1982, pp. 82-5, for a description of the sacred origins of the Noh mask.

[175] She had worked with Hijikata since 1960. The first time Hijikata choreographed a woman was in 1960 with Motofuji Akiko who became his wife in 1968. As there is no video coverage of this performance, I refer here to photographs contained in the books by Tadao Nakatani, pp. 28-34, and Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 92-3.

[176] Satoko Takezawa, 'Tomiko Takai Story' in *Tsubushi* 1990, p. 11, describes how, 'her performances showed that Butoh is a poem of the human body.'

[177] See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 92.

[178] See ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 98.

This opened the way for a more intense inclusion of the female body in Hijikata's dance.

Ashikawa Yoko

In 1967 Hijikata met with the dancer Ashikawa Yoko, who became his female passive 'Other' and theirs was a remarkable creative collaboration. With her dance debut a year later and that of Takai's, the embodied and previously invisible female was finally brought onto the Butoh stage. The work of the feminist theorist Kristeva is pertinent here, especially her theorising of the 'Semiotic' and the 'Symbolic',[179] terms which denote the pre-Oedipal phase and the place where meaning is produced, respectively. This latter term refers more specifically to phallocentric language, from which she insists, women are alienated and thus silenced. She argues, however, that women should claim this Symbolic order, in order to fragment and change it from within. This paternal symbolic language that is responsible for constructing binary realities and notions of closure, truth and meaning is therefore ruptured by the *jouissance* and erotic drives of the semiotic.[180] The very nature of appearing as a female body on the stage offers multiple interpretations that are always already ideologically shaped.[181] Ashikawa however presents her female body undergoing a process of change, as an unknowable yet potential form that creates alternative images of 'Woman', which open onto the realm of the semiotic.

She was empowered as an independent performer, however not as creator of her own work, for it was Hijikata who was in control and articulating the performance. He attests to the authority he held over his dancers, who formed a cultic group around him, while speaking of his own dedication to his work, 'I attempt to press

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[179] See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon S. Roudinez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 25-7 and 44-9.

[180] Ibid, pp. 256-7 and 388. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York and Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 9-11.

[181] Ibid, Jill Dolan in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, p. 57, states, 'women in representation always connote an underlying ideology and present a narrative driven by male desire that effectively denies women's subjectivity.'

the limits of myself and of my material. From the nature of my work, living beings are my material.'[182] Ashikawa became that material, indeed the most pliable with which Hijikata worked and together they created performances that were intensely daring and charged with experimental energy. Her appearances on the stage however, reveal an awareness of the fictionality of the stereotypes surrounding the female body. At the same time they portray a distinct lack of female sexuality as portrayed through a process of male fantasy and fetishisation. Her performances exerted a powerful force over her audience as she challenged normative definitions surrounding women, subverting the sexual dynamics in which they were construed, that is, as either passive or as sexually solicitous.

In performance Ashikawa's body and those of other female dancers,[183] were contorted into extreme postures, laid out for display, provocatively, semi-naked or clothed in rags and pulled into non-sexualised positions. Ashikawa, intensely aware of the spectatorial gaze, internalised and encouraged it, achieving a dual state, of object/subject and moved beyond this paradoxical union, discarding self-consciousness.[184] At the same time, she thwarted the seductive role as object,[185] and rather than flaunting her femaleness, she challenged the spectator by offering her body as a source of freakishness, assuming multiple extreme and perverse sculptural counter-images. Straining the muscles of her face she affected endless guises and grimaces, contorting and transforming her body while perching on high traditional clogs (*geta),* or in bare feet, scurrying,

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[182] Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 47.

[183] The female dancers Kobayashi Saga and Nimura Momoko danced closely with her in the early performances, for example in *Fin Whale* (*Nagasu kujira*), in 1972 in which they performed a 'bandy-legged dance'.

[184] See Arturo Silva, 'Reality Breakdown at Saison' in *The Daily Yomiuri*, August 29, 1987, for a description of her commemorative performance to Hijikata, at Ginza Saison Theatre. In his article Silva describes Ashikawa's 'twisted, jerking' movements and asserts that Ashikawa, 'mocks sexual congress.'

[185] The film theorist Laura Mulvey in 1975, set out a thesis that explored the ideological nature of representation in film, more specifically, the way the male spectator is positioned to identify with the active male protagonist, thereby obtaining scopophilic pleasure from the experience of looking. Her theory is based on the Freudian/Lacanian model, as she compares cinema with the identification process of the mirror stage. Women are objectified and left out of this active process. See Mulvey Laura, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: MacMillan Press, 1989, pp. 14 -26, for a discussion of the 'split between the active/male and passive/female' pleasure in looking.

bounding or remaining huddled close to the ground. (Figure 19) An animality was created in her dance, as in a typical stance she lowered her body with knees bent and hands like claws and moved across the stage in crab-like motion.[186] A tension was created, of woman as iconic sign, metamorphosed into weird half-creature, or infirm, deformed, the female body in ambiguous contradiction, devoid of gender characteristics and thus refusing definition.[187]

Figure 19

The concept of the 'real' female body was hidden, a presence which defined itself in its absence, one that was continually being deferred, thus playfully reversing

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[186] Ashikawa appears in the film of *Summer Storm (Natsu No Arashi)*, director: Arai Misao, Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives, Keio University, 1973. In this she dances solo, with mouth grimaces, eyes crossed and with claw-like hands. She then appears with two other female dancers wearing high wooden clogs.

[187] For a fuller discussion of Ashikawa's concept of 'becoming' see Yuri Kageyama, 'Dogs "dance" for Yoko Ashikawa' in *The Japan Times Weekly*, February 7, 1987.

any 'truth' concerning female sexuality. The images created often appear deranged and incoherent, eliciting a dramatic ambivalence between desire for and disgust with, the female body that created in the spectator both an exhilarating and uncomfortable attraction/repulsion.[188] For those who watched her, her transformations were awesome, her poses eloquent, her presence compelling.

Among their many metamorphoses, Ashikawa and her female co-dancers often appear cross-dressed in male kimono.[189] There is obvious superficiality involved, as they wear female clogs and hair in bouffant style. We might apply the question raised by feminist writers in *Crossing the Stage* and phrased by Lesley Ferris, '...does cross-dressing undermine conventional masculine and feminine behaviour or does it re-inscribe the binary, the "truth" of masculinity and femininity?'[190] thereby maintaining polarised definitions which are set in opposition. I will now attempt to address some of the issues involved, inquiring into whether their roles challenged strict gender positions.

In performance, attention is called to the fact that it is women playing the roles, as there is an obvious gap between the female identity of the impersonators and their appropriation of the male dress. Ashikawa and the other female dancers, draw attention to the slippage between sex and gender role because they undermine the stability of fixed sexual identity, as was demonstrated in the role-playing of the Onnagata. Jill Dolan in her 1994 study notes on the drag role,

> (a) woman playing a man, or the traditional representation of Woman, is quoting gender ideology, holding it up for critique. By

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[188] It remains an open question whether Ashikawa allowed critical distance and active reception for the spectator. Her performance, I would argue, acted as a movement away from representation that constructs male subjectivity as the ideal spectatorial position.

[189] See pictures of *The Rose-Coloured Dance* in ibid, Tadao Nakatani pp. 21-3.

[190] Lesley Ferris, *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 18.

> standing outside her gendered character, the performer makes gender available for discussion.[191]

The question must be posed then, do these female performers merely reconfirm the existing status quo or are there subversive elements present in their performance?

The implications of their performance are nuanced and varied. Implicit in their dance are factors that are the obverse of the Onnagata role in Kabuki. Here women have the freedom to perform and are allowed to enter the domain of the advantaged sex. They are given access to the subversive power contained in cross-dressing, that of expressing the fluidity and 'costuming' of gender, previously the privileged reserve of the male Onnagata. These female actors substitute for the male, but as a theatrical device the effect is very different from that of the Onnagata. Furthermore, in Butoh practice and its social world, glimpses into other possible freedoms for women are offered, beyond those sanctioned by the dominant structure. These performers, however, appeared not to aspire to the positions of privilege assigned to men, in fact they willingly accepted the power of the male director as it must be noted that the representations were framed and defined by Hijikata. The issue, as with the Onnagata role therefore, is agency, that is, having overall control over the content and direction of performance.

While confusing the conventional sign system by producing these androgynous versions of 'maleness', no attempt is made towards a convincing verisimilitude that would have a greater subversive effect, as Alisa Solomon argues,

> ...male privilege itself is called into question if women cannot only do what men can do... but actually "be" men. What confers male privilege if not some intangible aura of masculinity - and how potent,

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[191] Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Manchester: Manchester University, 1994, p. 116.

> how sure, is that quality when women can put it on as easily as they put on top hats and tails?[192]

Indeed it could be argued as Jean E. Howard does in her study of female cross-dressing, that these female dancers 'strengthen notions of difference by stressing what the disguised woman *cannot* do...'[193] It would seem then that the performance serves to intensify sexual difference by calling attention to women's failure to perform the masculine role signified by her dress.

A question posed by Howard is appropriate here; she asks, is the female cross-dresser 'successfully challenging patriarchal domination, or... serving its ends?'[194] and cautions that, 'one should not concede in advance the power of patriarchal structures to contain or recuperate threats to their authority.'[195] It must be noted that in Japan a masculine female is regarded as subversive, 'unnatural', even threatening to the social order and is perceived as a rejection of sanctioned roles for women. Traditional subject positions, as has been evident were extremely pivotal to the project of shaping the modern nation and precluded any notion of active female desire. I would conclude that their gender performance was not adopted as a political act for undermining the gender and social hierarchy. It might even have acted as a conservative force, reaffirming stereotypes of femininity and sustaining what was an implicitly patriarchal system.

The Female Body

As was described earlier, in Hijikata's performances *Forbidden Colours* and *The Rose-Coloured Dance,* the homoerotic body becomes the site for diffuse possibilities of pleasure. The location of female pleasure is also present in his dance, as for the performance of the latter he commissioned the artist Nakanishi

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[192] Alisa Solomon, 'It's Never Too Late to Switch' in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-dressing*, Lesley Ferris ed., p.148.
[193] Jean E. Howard, 'Cross-Dressing, The Theatre and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England' in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-dressing*, Lesley Ferris ed., p. 41.
[194] Ibid, p. 21.
[195] Ibid.

Natsuyuki to paint female genitalia on the back of one of his male dancers.[196] (Figure 20) The dancer wears a helmet that is imbued with phallic connotations and brought into provocative juxtaposition with the realm of female sexuality. It also offers a reference to the spirit of radicalism of the helmeted youths taking part in the street protests during the turbulent period in 1968.[197] The helmet seems also to denote a headlessness that signifies the imagined castrated state of the female herself. The mellifluous form of the painting possesses an almost poetic quality, as the geography of women's pleasure is sensitively traced. The successive layers to this most secret female space are peeled open, like diaphanous veils revealing her cavernous quality and the call of the void. These surfaces lead to the autoerotic, defined by the feminist writer Luce Irigaray as, 'that pleasure (which) is denied by a civilization that privileges phallomorphism.'[198] Hijikata is giving outline to this site of female *jouissance*, to that which is considered 'a flaw', 'a hole' in the 'systematics of representation and desire'[199] but which nevertheless elicits a form of pleasure which is, 'more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle... in an imaginary rather too focused on sameness,'[200] expressed by Irigaray as she describes the rich and fluid presence of the feminine.

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[196] See Takaaki Miyama, 'Nakanishi Natsuyuki: Painting and the Form of Painting' in *Nakanishi Natsuyuki: Width and Closeness - Form of Painting*, Japan, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, 2002, p. 164.

[197] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 12.

[198] Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 26.

[199] Ibid. Note that Lacan regarded the female sex as a 'gaping hole', for a fuller discussion see Roudinesco E., *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbara Bray, London: Polity Press, 1999, pp. 369-370.

[200] Ibid, Irigaray, p.28.

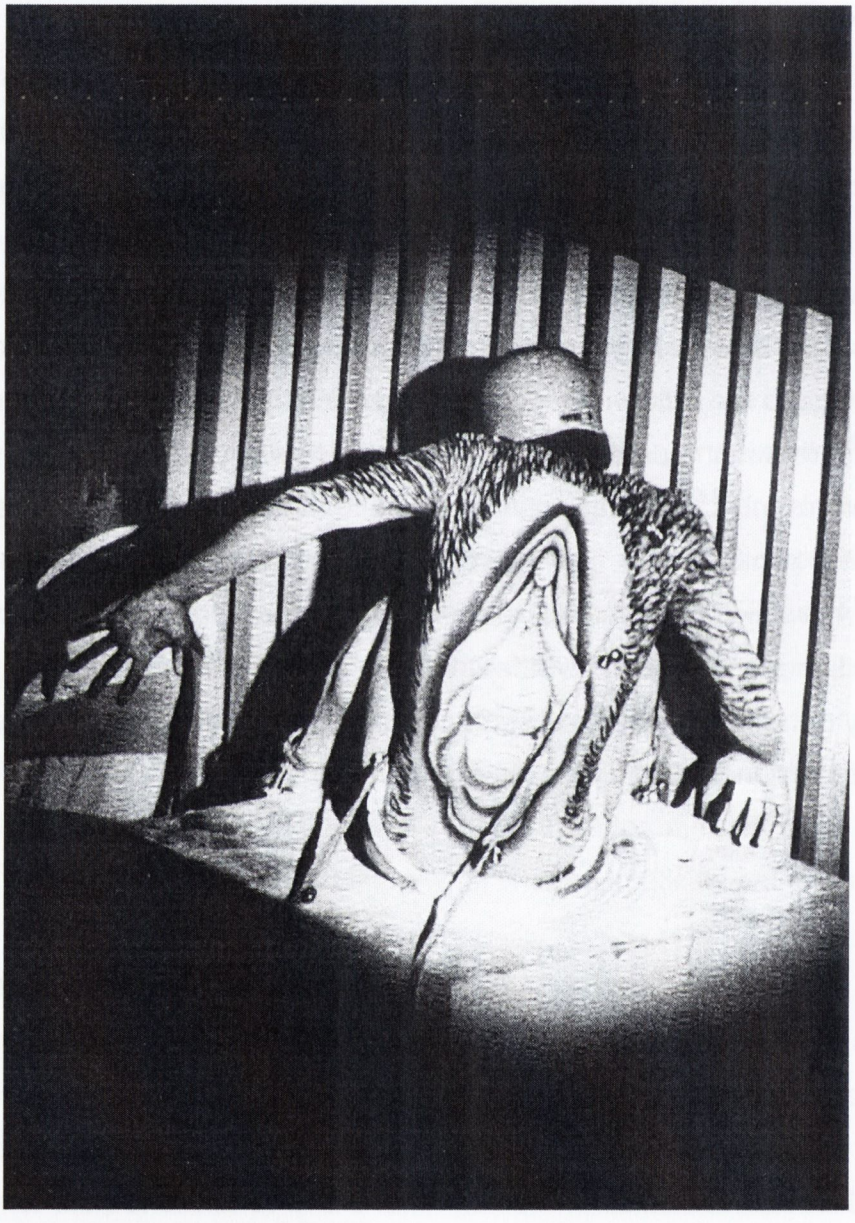

Figure 20

If, as psychoanalysis suggests, this spectacle of female genitalia arouses castration anxiety in the male viewer, Hijikata is not only contesting the boundaries of propriety, but is challenging patriarchal authority. This gaping vulva, that site of lack and place of castration,[201] is vaunted in a close-up image that emphasises its complex and ambivalent beauty, while having nothing of the fetishistic to gratify the male gaze.[202] The question must also be asked, does it gives permission for voyeuristic intrusion? Indeed there are many interpretations that can be offered of this display. Hijikata is certainly subverting the traditional taboo that represses the female body and sexuality. Aware that these were highly regulated through dominant ideologies and practices of chastity within his culture, the vulnerable exposure of woman's most hidden parts forces the viewer to question assumptions about how feminine physicality is viewed and their sexual desires repressed. At the same time by applying paint to the male dancer's body he is establishing it as visual territory, as marked and written over in patriarchal text and discourse. Irigaray's observation that, '(w)omen are marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers,'[203] is both inverted and made literal in the drawing as it is a male dancer's back which is painted, while it is Hijikata and the male artist involved in the act of inscription who retain agency. The painting reveals the unconscious meanings or fantasy creation of the female body as mediated through male projected desires. These artists thus offer, 'a mirror invested by the (masculine) subject' which places the woman 'in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentally,'[204] thereby preserving the prevailing hierarchy of gender and male mastery, which denies women a right to their own bodies.

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[201] As reflected in Freud's and Lacan's accounts of male and female development, in which primacy is given to the phallus. Female nature, they both agree, is characterised by the growing awareness of lack, in Freudian theory the girl appears as a castrated boy when she looks in the mirror. Lacan stayed within the Freudian family framework, but rejected the biologist aspects of his thought in favour of the 'phallus', the paternal symbol. This represents the power of the law and gives entry into the Symbolic order, at the moment of the acquisition of speech.

[202] Ibid, Irigaray, p. 26, here she asserts, 'her sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to see.'

[203] Ibid, p. 31.

[204] Ibid, p. 30.

Hijikata's fractured image of a part of the female anatomy, which has been cut out and rearticulated, can be seen as either subscribing to a fetishised femininity, or alternatively as offering a shrewd deconstruction intended to give new meaning. It can be viewed as a desire to explore the female realm in lyrical form, or this dissection might denote a need to make it more amenable and thus more controllable. Furthermore, Hijikata's delineation shows that the body, far from being passive and neutral, plays a major and active role in perceptions of gender. More might be added of the work of Irigaray that affirms the 'Otherness' of woman, which is of relevance here. She brings the sexed, sensual and previously unmarked female body into rational phallocentric discourse, in an attempt to challenge and disrupt it. The difference of female gender and sexuality is reinstated, placed in relation to 'the noble phallic organ.'[205] Far from depicting it as lack, its multiplicity, complexity and autoerotic nature are asserted, together with its separation from the solidity and finality of male sexuality. This female sexuality is defined by her now familiar image of the two lips[206] as a metaphor for illustrating that it has no single identity, no beginning or end, no definitive point between multiple erogenous zones. Irigaray offers a challenge to the patriarchal structure, which has repressed the possibility of feminine diffuse pleasures and validated male forms of desire and speech. Her work asserts autonomous agency for woman over her own bodily sensations, while dispelling the myths which define female sexuality as being identical with that of the male.[207]

A variety of configurations and articulations of the female body are expressed in Hijikata's dance. At times women performers are scantily clad, while at others they seem weighed down and impeded by heavy layers of cotton-wadded clothing. In *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge* (*Honegami Toge Hotokekazura*),

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[205] Ibid, p. 23.
[206] Ibid, p. 24.
[207] Ibid, pp. 152 and 162. It must be noted that this notion of sexual difference has been criticised as being biologically determinist and essentialist by Judith Butler among others, as she sees the category 'woman' as a construct in phallocentric discursive practices.

a piece performed in 1970, a female dancer wears a spherical prosthesis, depicting a swollen belly.[208] (Figure 21) A variety of 'readings' can be offered. The generous feminine form and powerful maternity conveyed can be seen as a means to contest and overwhelm patriarchal force and authority, as a strategic reassertion of the essentialised female body.[209] Alternatively the woman's tumescent form is offered as a reminder of the emphasis placed on her immanence and procreation, in a phallocentric culture that restricted female sexual desire to the exclusive domain of nurturing motherhood. An unsettling scene is presented, as she lies back with arms outstretched, mouth open, surrounded by rags and parts of what appear to be traditional kimonos, their cotton stuffing ruptured and falling to pieces, like traces left after a trauma. She seems trapped in her position, vulnerable and exposed, her dress is ripped open and the boundaries of her body are broken, while the viewer is positioned at a clear scopic distance. There is a further sense of disquiet and foreboding, as the safety of the womb is aligned with the facial expression of fear. The rough texture of her belly also appears pockmarked, lacerated with open sores, conveying a maternal body made strange, contravening its limits and abjected.[210] This monstrous pregnancy can be seen as an allusion to the mutant births that followed in the tragic aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in summer 1945. Alternatively her cocooned form can also be read as a metaphor for the 'texts' and discourses that circumscribe and confine her physicality. This freakish female anatomy might represent then a revolt against

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[208] Note that there is no video coverage of this performance, but photographs on pages 43-4, of Tadao Nakatani's book, will form the basis for these descriptions. See figures 21 and 22.

[209] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *In Other Worlds*, New York, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 205, for her discussion of 'strategic essentialism'.

[210] The body here is the site of the abject as defined by Julia Kristeva, as it is in a state of non-being and is therefore neither subject nor object. Before full separation from the mother, the unborn child is not yet subject and after death it becomes a corpse and is therefore object. Note that the poster for the performance which graphically portrays a woman with her legs splayed adds further subversive effect. The picture shot is focused on the area of her vagina, which is concealed by a flower, her mouth and eyes are wide open and in the background rolling hills are covered with gravestones. This complex and haunting image of a silent figure ravaged and rendered voiceless, raises issues surrounding power, voyeurism and woman's physical and psychological integrity as subject.

such restrictions and the normative standards of the established bourgeois culture.

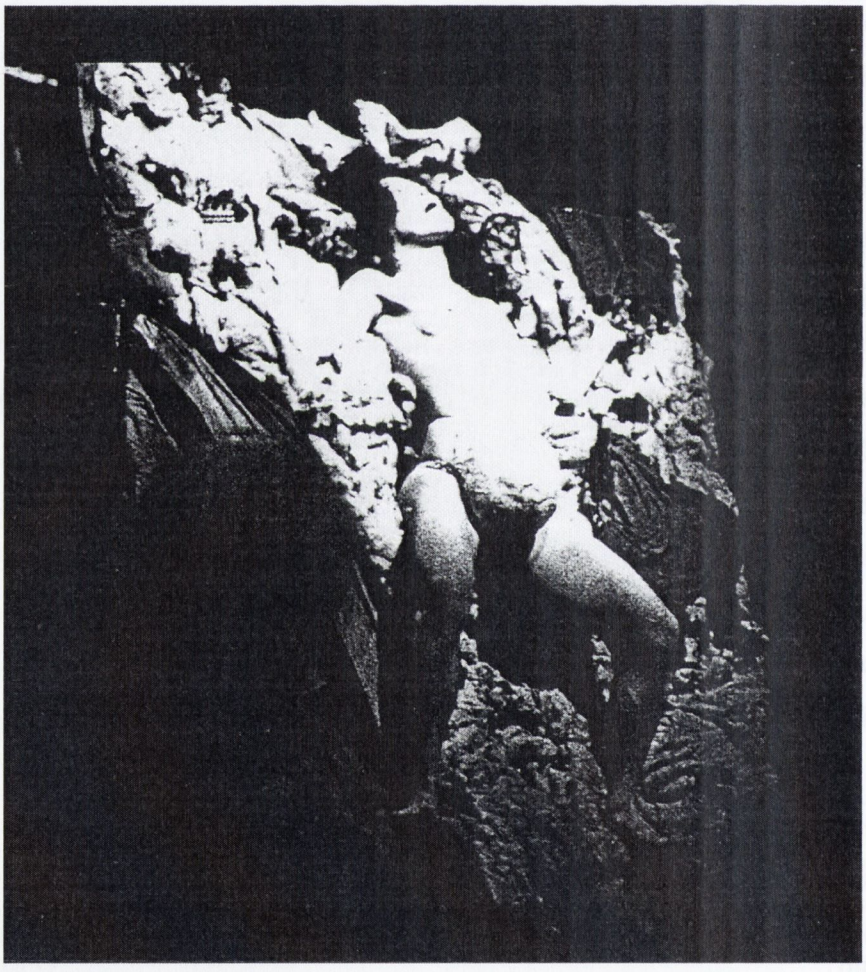

Figure 21

There is another image of a woman's body portrayed in the same dance, in an asymmetrical arrangement, her arms and legs are in reverse and the back of her head is covered by a mask. (Figure 22) The image appears erotically charged as her bare buttocks protrude through her open kimono,[211] creating a disturbing scenario in which she seems simultaneously alluring and victimised. A non-identifiable body is created which refutes familiar boundaries and eschews any sense of wholeness for excessiveness.[212] Two years later a similar configuration appears again in a scene in the dance *Ball as a Plaything* (*Susamedama),* in more provocative posturing, with legs splayed and wearing a smiling mask,[213] which places the viewer in a position of voyeuristic authority. A sense of objectification is further implied in the intriguing and disturbing title, however, the dancer appears to be aware of herself as object of fantasy. She masterfully returns the spectatorial gaze, as if mocking male sexual desire and thereby reclaiming erotic agency. Hijikata is radically transgressing the limits of representation through this incongruous image, as the female form is taken to an unexplored, unimagined place and displayed as an ambiguous site of contradiction. This interchangeable illusion displaces the 'truth' of sexual embodiment and can become the ground for 'unfixing' secure constructions of gendered bodies. The critical distance created can be seen as offering a space from which to question the role of representation in the social construction of gender and sexuality.

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[211] Ibid, Tadao Nakatani, p. 42.
[212] Ibid, p. 43.
[213] Ibid, p. 49.

Figure 22

These manipulated and distorted poses, together with those of Ashikawa as previously described, contain clichéd images that subscribe to stereotypes of femininity, while others embody a rejection of the passive or provocatively erotic positions that Japanese cultural representations tend to impose on women. At the same time the women present on the Butoh stage lack creative freedom and therefore authoritative autonomy. It would seem then that although Hikata's work sought to interrogate culturally approved images of the female body and gendered identity in general, it opened up an exploration of women as subjects within contemporary Japanese culture. It is also possible, and I would argue, that his performance reinforced and exploited to some degree the meaning of these stereotypes, through fictional creations of a male ideal that did little to challenge woman's position in the broader context of Japan's cultural history.

Hans Bellmer's Dolls

The female ensembles in the scenes described above, go beyond the confines of naturalistic depiction and reveal the influence on Hijikata's work of the often fragmented images and perplexing compositions of the artist Hans Bellmer.[214] He produced a series of photographs of two movable adolescent dolls and a picture of his 'second doll' can be found in Hijikata's private collection.[215] (Figure 23) This doll with its central ball joint, double pelvises and pairs of legs was able to express reversible images.[216] His pictures reveal a range of contradictory poses in which the body is dismantled, deformed and rearticulated. These hybrid dolls are constructed out of body halves that are placed in inverse relationship to each other and depict a range of volatile and conflicting emotions. They appear passive and seductive, exposed and traumatised, innocent and violated, vulnerable and sadistic, in eerie and arresting combinations. His later drawings

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[214] Some of Hijikata's associates were very interested in Bellmer, most notably Shibusawa. Odette Aslan in 'A Partir du Dairakuda-Kan' in ibid. Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes*, p. 138, refers to Bellmer's portrayal of a figure with a set of pink and green legs, which she compares with those depicted in pictures by Nakanishi for *The Rose Coloured Dance,* (Ibid, figure IV). Also, Ibid. Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 80.

[215] See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 166.

[216] The first doll resembled an adolescent girl with a movable head and limbs attached to a stiff trunk, of which over thirty photos were taken of it in differing sexualised positions.

explore further the shifting parts of the body, together with new roles and variations of the hermaphrodite and androgen form. Body parts are shifted and reordered, the skin peeled back and the whole interchanged, merged and superimposed, creating unlimited possibilities. These manipulations express his questioning of reality and personal identity as it is conventionally represented, and the act of perception itself.

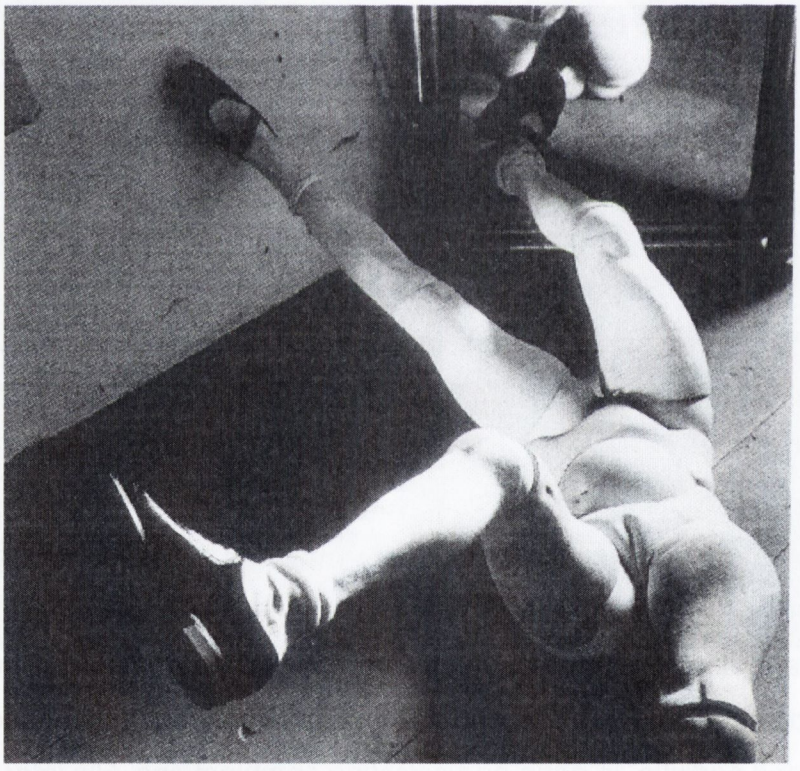

Figure 23

The works are the product of Bellmer's erotic and obscene imagination, as most of them depict variants of sexual 'perversions' such as fetishism and sadomasochism, which flagrantly shatter conventional taboos. They display a promiscuous quality that has much in common with the transgressive eroticism of Georges Bataille, with whom he collaborated.[217] Having been commissioned to engrave the illustrations for Bataille's *The Story of the Eye* in 1947 and for *Madame Edwarda* in 1956, he produced some of his most detailed and compelling work, heightening the sadistic nature of the sexuality found in the novels. The literature of Bataille, along with that of de Sade, Rimbaud and Lautréamont featured among some of his favourite reading.[218] While their work can be seen as seeking to overturn the role of representation in the social construction of sexuality and gender identity, further and more complex issues are raised. The unsettling scenes in Bataille's writing, like the images Bellmer depicts, elicit complex questions around sadomasochism, pornography and male fantasies of domination, vulnerability and submission. The issue again, as with cross-dressing, is that of control, as the idealised and fantasy dolls' images are male-created. They can be seen to set in motion a dramatic dialectic of desire, ambivalence and revulsion towards the female body that could lead to objectification, while reinforcing cultural representations and stereotypes of female passivity.

Hijikata, as has been discussed in this chapter, similarly creates controversial images of the female form in his dance. Dynamic, provocative women who defy gender definition are portrayed, while those set in vulnerable configurations with their most private parts laid bare, are exhibited. He and indeed Ashikawa destabilise and unsettle the order of the body, one that is disarranged and set in reverse, in portrayals that are intended to alarm and disconcert the viewer. These

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[217] Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001, p. 44.

[218] Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000, p. 2 and Peter Webb and Short Robert, *Hans Bellmer: Bellmer and Surrealism 1933-38*, London, New York: Quartet Books, 1985, pp. 50 and 188. Note, as stated in the introduction, these writers also influenced Hijikata.

depictions like those of Bellmer and Bataille, transgress accepted taboos, an area that will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Hijikata made homosexual behaviour visible in a society that had come to disavow a past in which spaces had been offered for other sexual orientations. His performance resonates with pre-modern conceptions of accepted sexual practices in Japan, those which involved same-sex desire, which were still present in the popular imagination. His dance allows for a revision of a reality that had become hampered by strict notions of social identity and sexual roles and provides an opening for the analysis and criticism of contemporary cultural discourses. In this chapter, I have argued that Butoh revokes the praxis of sexual diversity, reinvents the body, transcending gender and recreates it otherwise, as outrageous, repulsive, mortal, violent, passionate and sexual. In order to create a further context for Hijikata's dance, the political unrest of the 1960s, the effects of American occupation and the advent of Underground theatre, have been briefly examined and will be taken up in more detail later in this thesis.

I have described in some detail the early Butoh performances and their depictions of homosocial behaviour, cross-dressing, homoerotic and sadomasochistic acts. In his dance, the sensuous and desiring body is frequently combined with painful, bizarre or incongruous images. The movement towards the 'feminine' within his and Ohno Kazuo's work and Hijikata's own unconventional lifestyle, have been traced, along with the incorporation into his performance of the androgen form. Their parodic and cross-dressed style continued into the performances of Hijikata's principal female dancer, Ashikawa. In her and other female dancers' performances, various configurations of the female body are expressed, as they expose it as a site of contradiction and as a play between sexual embodiment and illusion. The repercussions of these portrayals have been problematised, as for women, I contend, his performance did little to create alternative woman's positions beyond those stereotypes of the

male ideal. At the same time I argue, the body marked by the social and cultural pressures of the twentieth century, is rescued and given agency to take up other relational, more complex potentialities that are resistant to normativity. Hijikata is opening up spaces for different identities, marginal positions, ones that are dynamic, creative, subversive, exposing their constructed nature and denying them their essence.

CHAPTER III

Georges Bataille's Grotesque and Transgressive Body: The Influences on Butoh

Introduction

A series of photographs are the only remnants of the performance *The Rose-Coloured Dance*[219] of 1965.[220] The back of the illuminated stage is draped in a gossamer curtain, against which several men dressed in white stand, with their backs to the audience in two-tier arrangement. Several rows of the raked auditorium can be discerned and the seated audience set in darkness await the performance. Photographers crouch to take photos of a couple of the performers striking flamboyant and extravagant poses at the front of the stage, dressed only in short briefs and multicoloured open jackets. A full portrait of the famous Kabuki Onnagata, the female impersonator Hanayagi Shotaro, in traditional stage role takes central position, an allusion to the traditional act of cross-dressing in performance.[221] To the right, off stage, a brightly lit group of four men sit, draped in Japanese flags. On a wooden cube set next to this row squats a male dancer, wearing a helmet with arms splayed. His back is revealed to the audience, on which is an elaborately painted depiction of women's private and most intimate parts.

A close-up shot of the four seated men, draws attention to the swirls of their flags in contrast to the vertical stripes of the side wall behind them. Two barbers in white outfits start to shave the men's heads, who bow in readiness and passive acquiescence. Crossing in front of them is one of the dancers, whose hair is plastered with chalk, striking an otherworldly and waiflike figure as his whitened

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[219] As previously stated, the colour rose is a euphemism for homosexuality in Japan.
[220] As already noted, I have not seen the video recording of this dance. Pictures of different scenes will be used to reconstitute the performance here. These are depicted in ibid. Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 48-53 and throughout ibid, Sumi Yoichi et al eds.
[221] Ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 121.

skin catches the light. There are other photographs of the performance, for example, one reveals two near-naked dancers, folded around one another, close to the ground and connected by a long rubber tube, their coiled and malleable bodies contrasting with the stiff uprightness of the sentinel figures behind. (Figure 15). Another shows a sword-fencer, wearing a protective vest and mask, his arms straightened. (Figure 14)

A further picture contains Ohno Kazuo wearing white face make-up, heavy jewellery and elaborate dress, standing close to the audience, his hands outstretched as if pleading with a performer off-picture. (Figure 24) A different scene reveals Hijikata poised in long, white flimsy dress, arms wide out to the side. There is a delicacy and understatement in yet another picture, as he and Ohno, in identical dress and with arms around each other, stand *en pointe* with legs outstretched, toes pointing forward. (Figure 25) The gentleness of the scene is broken by the jarring image of Hijikata lying in attack on the back of Ohno, whose arm reaches out, his face expressing distress, ecstasy or quiet submission. (Figure 17)

Figure 24

Figure 25

The transgressive and sensuous body is almost always present in the writings of Georges Bataille, who was a critical influence on the work of Hijikata, as referred to earlier.[222] Hijikata remained profoundly indebted to the work of this scholar and philosopher and there are many points of contact between them. They both shared an interest in certain writers who included for example, de Sade, Lautréamont, Jean Genet and the surrealist André Breton. The writings of Bataille formed part of Hijikata's prolific reading, especially *Eroticism*, a work from which he quoted in his own writings.[223] This translated volume was well known to some of the people with whom Hijikata fraternised and was the focus of the frequent discussions that took place at Hijikata's training venue.[224] Bataille's ideas suffused not only Hijikata's performance, Ohno Kazuo borrowed the title *Ma Mère* for a dance piece of 1981, while many later Butoh dancers who had worked with Hijikata also adopted names from his writings, for example *The Tears of Eros* by Murobushi Ko, performed in 1986. As the reading material of Hijikata is still in the process of being classified at the archives in Tokyo, it is difficult to discern the exact works read beyond that mentioned, however, considering Hijikata's wide circle of friends, their interest in Bataille and the art of Hans Bellmer (who, as has been evident worked with Bataille), we can conclude that Hijikata had a broad awareness and knowledge of Bataille's writing.

For Bataille the body was the starting point for most of his ideas. His fiction is almost constantly concerned with eroticism, those abundant, forbidden and usually obscene moments in his writings, which violate taboos and lie beyond accepted sexual practices. His scatological literature offers novel perspectives of

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[222] Many academics have made reference to this influence, including, Odette Aslan, 'Du Butoh Masculin au Feminin' in ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes*, pp. 62-3, who refers to an article written by Mishima that was dedicated to Bataille and which caught Hijikata's attention. There has been very little in-depth study of the links between their creative works however, an area that this chapter will address.

[223] Muro Jusuke translated this in 1959. In Hijikata's writings, quotes from or references to Bataille can be found, for example in Ibid. Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 45, which will be referred to later in this chapter.

[224] Shibusawa Tatsuhiko for example, was well acquainted with the writings of Bataille and Mishima Yukio was an avid reader, as the above-mentioned dedication would attest.

the impact made by sensual desires on individual existence. Like Hijikata, his work addresses ecstatic pleasures and experiences and takes up the transgressive aspects of sexuality, including sadomasochistic acts and other so called 'perversions'. Erotic situations are continually linked with violence, death, references pepper his writings.[225] It must be noted that many philosophers and theorists have offered critiques of Bataille's work, especially this emphasis on the erotics of violence the sacred and sacrificial. According to the founder of the Surrealist movement André Breton, for example in the Second Manifesto, Bataille was an 'excremental philosopher' who refused to rise above the base and profane. Among the more recent critics, however, Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer*, praises Bataille's 'exemplary' effort in describing the radical and excessive experience of the 'bare life', as he links it with the 'pure and filthy, repugnant and fascinating.'[226] He also suggests, however, that Bataille's inquiries into the sacred were 'compromised' by the misconceptions and ambiguity of the anthropology of his day.[227] It is not my intention in this thesis to critically assess Bataille's work or to take up and develop these arguments. Instead I will analyse Bataille's theories on the body, eroticism and transgression in the light of any traces that can be detected within Hijikata's dance. I will be exploring the ways in which these Bataillean impulses are taken into the realm of Butoh performance. By placing their works alongside each other, I intend to open them to a post-structuralist play that will allow for new perspectives of Butoh to emerge.

There are many links that can be uncovered, as the parodic, burlesque and shifting nature of Hijikata's performance has resonance with Bataille's often anarchic and paradoxical writings. Bataille's theses represent a radical questioning and contestation expressed with screaming intensity, in response to

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[226] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 112.
[227].Ibid, p. 75. Other prominent critics include Jean-Luc Nancy who, for example, points to the limitations and ambiguity of Bataille's concepts in relation to sacrifice. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth of Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1993.

what he saw as the decadence and sterility of life within France between and after the two world wars. Having experienced the deceits and tortures of fascist occupation, the historical rupture resulting from the horrors of Auschwitz and entry into the nuclear age following Hiroshima, he opened a space for the expression of cruelty, death, excess and the violation of taboos. These are provocatively depicted in his writings, as vehicles for reaching through to the mysteries of an 'inner experience' far from the banalities of the everyday. In reaction to what he sees as the 'bankruptcy of bourgeois culture'[228] after the wars, with its materialist and moralistic values, Bataille's writings perform ecstasy, invoking an encounter with the highly sensual. This Dionysian surpassing of the rational and scientific leads to a radical 'unknowing' beyond the reach of any structured epistemology.

Hijikata too challenged the societal and aesthetic taboos of his time, including those of eroticism and death, which emerged as crucial themes in his performance. He had also experienced his country under military and authoritarian discipline,[229] followed by foreign occupation, albeit one profoundly different from that of German Nazism. Hijikata came of age during the post-war period, when Japan was undergoing its own distinct process of modernisation and industrial development, under the constraints of Western economic and philosophical ideologies. Following the ruinous consequences of the war and its abrupt break with the past, the realities of the new society came to dictate vast changes in social attitudes and behaviour. Increasing idealism and individualism were the outcome of the unrestrained consumption that emanated from a capitalist system, which led to increasing entropy in Hijikata's eyes and as he asserted in declamatory style, 'a lethargic generation arrogant with fat and I vomit on its lotioned and powdered, pale effeminate skin.'[230] His performance and

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[228] Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939, (VE)*, Stoekle Allan, ed., University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 32.

[229] This took the form of the sacred status of the emperor, which will be described in more detail in chapter five of this thesis.

[230] Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 40.

writing contain a re-evaluation of his own culture, in which he opposes established values while offering a complex and singular vision that is both revolutionary and contradictory in its effects. Aware that dance existed outside the bounds of theoretical discourse, his reveals a playful, decentring impulse and expresses a flagrant transgression at its most intense.[231]

Just as Butoh cannot be defined, or confined to any single style or manifest tendency, Bataille's often fragmented and fissured work refuses conventional categorisation. A novelist, poet, critic, theorist, even dissident Surrealist, his disparate researches and writings cover numerous disciplines and his terminology moves beyond the bounds of rational usage. It is fundamentally unstable and represents a revolt against the system of language, as he inverts and folds meaning back into itself, thus refashioning linguistic conventions. He writes against language, allowing words to contradict themselves while taking them to the edge of something, their effects becoming more important than any attempt at coherence. In this process of negation, writing is brought to an indeterminate, paradoxical space of meaninglessness, to a point where concepts are deformed, unravel and are no longer able to convey anything other than, 'exhausting the totality of the possible.'[232] This 'sovereign'[233] writing cuts through the concepts of logic, presence, identity and definition, which Western culture claims as its privileged domain, to be replaced by loss, slippage and eventually, the silence which lies at the very heart of thought itself.

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[231] A very close dance disciple of Hijikata's, Iwana Masaki, in reflecting on the need to define Butoh for its future development, says this, 'I have the feeling that Butoh probably exists in a gap that slips through an idea ... I opt to see it as an ever-changing, dynamic concept ...' as a refusal to categorise, contain or place limitations on the dance, in *The Intensity of Nothingness: The Dance and Thoughts of Masaki Iwana*, France, 2000, p. 39.

[232] Bataille, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism, Vol. II and III*, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 14.

[233] Sovereignty is a key yet indefinable term in Bataille's work. He does, however, attempt to describe it several times throughout his writings, one definition being, '... Sovereignty is revolt, it is not the exercise of power. Authentic sovereignty refuses ... ' 'Méthode de méditation' in Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes (OC)*, Vol. V, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 221.

His text is constantly fractured, as he takes endless unexpected tangents and digressions, while exhausting the referential function of terms. New associations and encounters are continually created between words, to express objects which have certain phenomenological qualities in common but which are normally quite distinct. In *The Story of the Eye* for example, a text which contains an intense exploration of erotic fantasy and which unearths deep subconscious images, an interplay of objects such as eggs, bulls testicles, the sun, the moon, etc., is evoked and produced in metaphorical and metonymic chains.[234] One is displaced and compressed into the next, emptying out into a bottomless labyrinth, which is finally beyond the realms of interpretation, thus jolting the reader into a fuller awareness.[235]

Hijikata, in his own writing, utilises similar strategies, taking thought and language to their extreme and creating endless wordplay in order to distort habitual associations and usages. He presents a new language, one that is almost impossible to translate as it disrupts the linear, hierarchical and closed systems of discourse. Ironically and inevitably he was to find himself still within language, as he never refrained from using verbal expression. The long sessions with his artist friends into the early hours of the night attest to this, during which he enjoyed a close camaraderie, animated and somewhat drunken verbal combats. In training sessions vocal instructions were crucial to give visual effect to his thought, as Ashikawa Yoko remembered, '(w)ithout the words we could not dance, so it was like following a poem.. He was creating images all the time. He literally wrote dance.'[236] Indeed from 1972, when he gave up dancing and started to devote himself to choreography, his method was 'to physicalise images through words.'[237] A very close student dancer recalled, 'Hijikata stirred up

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[234] Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, London/Boston: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1979, pp. 43-6.
[235] Roland Barthes, 'The Metaphor of the Eye' in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, Evanston: North-western University, 1985, pp. 239-247.
[236] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 16.
[237] This dance notation is called *Buto-fu*. See Yukio Waguri, *Butofu, ka-den*, (Butoh Book of Flower) CD-rom, Tokushima: Just System, 1998, p. 3.

words. That's how my flesh remembers. When words are stirred up and erect themselves, the body trembles and recalls phantasmagorical movements... ' describing the profound physical impact of the images he forged.[238]

Hijikata calls attention to the arbitrary construction of words themselves, as concepts are forced into new relationships that constantly cancel each other out, grammatical rules are perverted and the closure of meaning disintegrates. The following reflection on the subject of pain serves as a fitting example,

> (b)ut genuine, unprocessed pain can also be perceived as being the equivalent of blurred, absent-minded flesh. Even so, the flesh is nothing more than very well charred newts that are said to restore sexual vigour. It is filled with dark desires...[239]

In this he creates new combinations of meaning that include the motifs of flesh, death and sexuality, recurrent themes in Bataille's work. In his writings, incongruent words are brought into relation, to create potent surreal images that are multi-layered and evoke a rich web of potentialities. They are filled with breaks, detours and reversals that thwart the expectations of the reader and render them untranslatable. At a point in Japan's modernisation process when there was an increasing presence of imposed foreign language, significations and discourses, his mode of writing can be seen as having further import as an act of transgression towards the inflicted discourse of reason.

Hijikata thus did not refrain from using words. In a conversation with Suzuki Tadashi in 1977 he stated, '...dance is created in a place where words are few. Yet many words are gradually becoming necessary, because this is a time when the body is required to put words in order.'[240] This indicates the emphasis he placed on moving through and beyond the enclosure of language. The wider resources contained within the corporeal became for him a complex language

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[238] Ibid, Min Tanaka, 'I am an Avant-Garde Who Crawls the Earth', p.154.
[239] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al. eds., p. 4.
[240] Hijikata, 'Hijikata and Suzuki', *TDR*, spring 2000, pp. 64-5.

system, intricately related to his creative imagination. The body is given free license on stage, replete with metaphor, caprice and endless variability, so that its familiar form is unravelled and transformed. Actions and movements hold a range of possible significations as they arise and dissolve. Hijikata demanded that the audience confront a wide range of interpretations, which precluded any intellectualising process. The experimental structure of his performances moves beyond notions of fixed narrative that results in the creation of a single authentic meaning. In his dance and writing, he creates and explores a world that is blurred and incomplete, pointing to a paradoxical actuality, echoing Bataille's words, '(w)riting is never more than a game played with an ungraspable reality,'[241] a reality then that cannot ever be predicted or fully known.

In the following section, a number of the themes from Bataille's writings that relate to Hijikata's performance will be taken up, prefaced by a description of an extract from *The Rose-Coloured Dance*. This will be followed by a section which contains new interpretations of Hijikata's performances informed by the study of Bataille's corpus, while quotations and examples will be given from each. I will not be making any attempt at comprehensive coverage or chronological sequencing, nor will I be imposing a form on the disoriented and labyrinthine movement of Bataille's thought. This would only flatten his work, force it into completion and thereby arrest, betray and eventually 'miss' him.[242]

The Erotic and Corporeal

Homo-eroticism is a pervasive thread that runs through Butoh performance, as portrayed in *The Rose-Coloured Dance* in the scene just described, in which Ohno submits to Hijikata's sexual advances. A mix of torment and pleasure passes through Ohno's facial expression as their two bodies merge in a moment

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[241] Michael Richardson ed., *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1998, p. 156 and Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone, Venice, California: Lapis Press, 1988, p. 47.

[242] See Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 25-6.

of ecstasy and abandonment. Although the two men are fully dressed, the near-naked bodies of the other dancers are also present in the performance.

Erotic fantasy and sexuality infuse Bataille's writings too, which he insists is central to human life because of their intimate connection with death. They are offered as examples of a 'sovereign' moment of intense expenditure, which compels the expenditure of excess. In the introduction to his work entitled *Eroticism,* he begins by stating the paradox, '(o)f eroticism, one can say that it is the approval of life even to the point of death'[243] and that it is simultaneously, 'an exuberance of life.'[244] Its irruptive forces culminate in that moment of surrender, anguish and the outpouring of pleasure, when taboos are broken and subjective and corporeal existence is torn apart. It culminates in the fusion of our individual and separate existence with that of another, a dissipation of being when the barriers of the ego are surpassed and transcended, as he states, '(t)he whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives.'[245] This extreme sacrifice, in which the violation of one's very being borders on ruin, has a sacramental character, as a profound plenitude and continuity are revealed in connection with the sensuous aspect of death.[246]

Bataille's novels include, as do Hijikata's performances, so-called 'deviant' behaviours that represent a turning away from the goal of procreative sexuality. Sadism, masochism, general debauchery and lesbian desire[247] are present in his

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[243] Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, UK, USA, Australia: Penguin, 2001, p.11.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid, p. 17.
[246] Bataille expresses the dialectic between the sacred and profane, in *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, London: Macmillan, 1980, p. 33, stating, 'there we see, no precise line that can be drawn between the sacred and the sexual.' The mutual relationship between death and sexuality is also repeatedly asserted, as for example in 'Death' in Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader*, Blackwell USA, UK, 1997, p. 245, 'our sexuality finally rivets us to the distressing image of death, and the knowledge of death deepens the abyss of eroticism.'
[247] The sexual practice of the protagonist in the novel *My Mother* (Bataille, *My Mother, Madame Edwarda, The Dead Man*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, London and New York: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1995) is almost exclusively lesbian.

novels and although his male characters engage in male-female sexuality, they rarely conform to the normative sexual practices of heterosexuality. The basest sexual expressions, which include bestiality, are ways he sees of feeling more fully alive, because they allow the individual to enjoy a more profound relationship with the body. Imbued throughout with physical sensation, his writings perform rather than merely represent ecstatic tensions, such as those involved in flesh falling into decay, tortured by violence and death, or the sexual embrace in all its animality, revealing nature at its most filthy and disgusting. The naked body is ever present throughout his work, about which he comments,

> (n)akedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence ... It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of self ... Stripping naked is seen in civilizations where the act has full significance if not as a simulacrum of the act of killing, at least as an equivalent shorn of gravity.[248]

Thus the corporeal opens out to the possibility of complete and final dispossession. It is interesting that Hijikata quotes this passage in his text *To Prison*[249] to which he gives further emphasis, 'the naked body and death are inseparably joined.'[250] In another piece of writing on the same theme, Hijikata asserts, '...the shadow of a naked body sobbing on the edge of the abyss,'[251] expressing the intimacy between nakedness and death itself. Bataille's language is fundamentally related to sexuality and the profane excesses he describes involve a revolution of the body, they pass through and beyond it, until immanence dissolves away.

The Grotesque and Unformed

As two male dancers grapple with each other in a scene within the *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, in the background the ghostly figure of another male dancer

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[248] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 17.
[249] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 45.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 58.

stands, his arms inverted, knees bent, his white body paste forms scabrous patches which deform the skin. Such physical aberration is expressed in many forms throughout Hijikata's dance productions.

Bataille's texts contain an exaltation of abnormality and monstrousness too, in which he expresses concern for the voyeuristic fascination with such 'freaks', as he reminds us that 'each individual form... is to some degree a monster,'[252] that every individual's physical make-up consists of irregularities and incongruities. In the 1930s, Bataille set up a secret society known as Acéphale and proclaimed it to be 'ferociously religious'[253] The surrealist André Masson produced a drawing to depict the deity and emblem for this group, one that is headless and incomplete. The Acéphale is both mutant and fearsome, its arms are outstretched, hands clasping a dagger and flaring heart.[254] Legs astride it reveals torn and gaping intestines and a death skull in place of genitalia, about which Bataille writes, '(h)e is not man. He is not a god either... his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster,'[255] thereby depicting the dialectic of the sacred within the gruesome and mortal.

Hijikata's dance contains bizarre, grotesque and abject elements, twisted and misshapen bodies that challenge societal prescriptions and taboos. In performance, he brings together incoherent elements and places them in unpredictable relationships, creating a complexity of signs and indeterminacies, as his dance interweaves a variety of motifs and themes. The *informe* is one of Bataille's key terms, denoting the formless, shapeless and incomplete. Mimesis and representation are defaced by its workings, as it resists the tendency to arrest and interpret meaning or to impose a rigid shape. Instead it acts as a movement of difference, erasure and pure flux and its operations involve a return

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[252] Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', *VE*, p. 55.
[253] Bataille, 'The Sacred Conspiracy', *VE*, p. 179.
[254] Ibid. Figure 12, p. 180.
[255] Ibid, p. 181.

to the material, the body, to that which is base; an undoing of that which is elevated and held sacred. In the *Critical Dictionary* published in *Documents* in 1929, Bataille defines this term *informe*, which he characterises as, 'serving to declassify.' He uses the subversive images of the crushing of an earthworm and spider to enhance his description[256] to attack the inadequacy of contemporary philosophy. He describes its 'mathematical frock coat' that has attempted to fashion and straitjacket experience, insisting on giving structure and classifying definitions. He goes further, '(t)o affirm on the contrary that the universe resembles nothing at all and is merely formless is equivalent to saying that the universe is something like a spider or a gob of spittle,'[257] thereby alluding to lowly and abject substances and creatures to disrupt its totalising process.

The Heterogeneous and Abject

Mishima Yukio recalled Hijikata's statement, '(t)hrough dance we must depict the human posture in crisis, exactly as it is' and then continues to give an example of such a pose as that of a man urinating on the side of the street.[258] For the backdrop in *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, Hijikata places four men who can be seen from the rear, arranged like sentinels relieving themselves against the wall, thereby confronting his audience with that which had become increasingly regarded as revolting and impure.[259] (Figure 26) The pop artist and graphic designer Tadanori Yokoo was commissioned to create the poster advertising this performance and in his highly decorative somewhat kitsch style, he abstracted the two female characters from the renowned painting *Gabrielle d'Estrée and Her Sister* of the Fontainebleau School. He fused them with other traditional Japanese motifs, such as Mount Fuji and the rising sun flag, and coloured their faces fluorescent pink and green.[260] The original painting was meant as the

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[256] Ibid, Michael Richardson ed., pp. 25-6 and Bataille, 'Formless', *VE*, p. 31.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 123.

[259] Victor the dog from the Victorian phonograph is also present on stage, perhaps as a reminder of a simple, bygone era.

[260] Japan's national flag represents a reminder of the pre-war order of militarism, fascism and emperor worship. Its deep red rising sun is a common motif on the pastiche-like posters of

celebration of a queen's pregnancy but it is seen as a depiction of lesbian eroticism.[261] Tadanori's is a provocative aesthetic and in the centre of the surreal and hybrid collage created, one of the women is indecorously squeezing the other's nipple and liquid spurts out.[262] (Figure 27) To add further subversive effect, those who attended the performance were given a wooden box containing brightly coloured phallic, lip and hand-shaped candy objects wrapped in traditional paper. (Figure 28) The visual impact of the overt portrayal of and covert allusions to, acts such as urination, lactation and masturbation have transgressive power in disrupting strict societal taboos, presenting that which society had conveniently displaced and removed.

Figure 26

Tadanori Yokoo. On the flyer designed for this performance it is contrasted with the surrounding pastel pinks and greens, the colours often recollected by those recipients of the candy distributed by American GIs during occupation, a reminder of the country's lasting shame. See Tatsumi Shinoda, 'US gets Taste of Japanese Modernism' in *Asahi Evening News*, Tokyo, October 13, 1994, p. 1.

[261] See Yokoo Tadanori, *Tadanori Yokoo: All Things in the Universe*, Exhibition, Tokyo, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000, p. 299. It is interesting that this painting also features in Bataille's work, *The Tears of Eros,* p. 101.

[262] See ibid, Sumi Yoichi, et al. eds., pp. 33-4. The artist Nakanishi Natsuyuki first suggested this image.

Figure 27

Figure 28

Bataille continually returns to the subject of the 'heterogeneous', that 'absolute other', which is excluded from rational society. This impure and repugnant threatens coherence and falls outside the knowable and identifiable. Aware that it can never be accommodated within existing language, he nevertheless attempts to make a space for it using a network of terms that rupture the text and disrupt its completion. He is fascinated with extreme elements of detritus and the spillage expelled from the human body, which evoke fascination and revulsion, overwhelming subjects with a disconcerting force. This 'surplus' is transformed into a range of extreme states and experiences that are uncontrollable, such as laughter, intoxication, ecstasy, anguish and pain, which shatter any notion of inner/outer and self/other, 'only when homogenous values are abandoned' will men and women learn, 'to link their *raison d'être* to the violence of their excretionary organs and open themselves to the possibility of the excitement of trances, heterogeneous elements and debauchery.'[263] The force of such heightened experiences leads to a loss of self-presence, where everything is risked.

He writes in the gap, the 'blind spot', as a space of negativity that perpetually unravels philosophical concepts and systems of knowledge. Excretions such as 'sperm, menstrual blood, urine, faecal matter'[264] and metaphors of liquidity pervade his novels, especially *The Story of the Eye*, which discloses an obsession with bodily fluids that take the participants beyond themselves. Half-decomposed corpses, sexual parts, waste products and the repulsive aspects of human-life are juxtaposed in ecstatic encounters. These states and materials that are normally feared and expelled are conveyed in writings, which not only transgress the boundaries of words, but break down and violate the rules of accepted social behaviour. In the above novel for example, the female character

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[263] 'Dans la mesure ou l'homme ne songe plus a écraser ses camarades sous le joug de la morale, il aquiert la possibilité de lier ouvertement non seulement son intelligence et sa vertu mais sa raison d'être à la violence et à l'incongruité de ses organes excréteurs, comme à la faculté qu'il a d'être excité jusqu'aux transes par des éléments hétérogenes, à commencer vulgairement dans la débauche.' *Œuvres Complètes*, *II*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p. 65.
[264] Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade', *VE*, p. 94.

Simone copulates with the narrator next to a corpse on which she then urinates, in a scene that combines sex, death and defilement.[265]

The human wastage referred to by Bataille as heterogeneous base matter; 'blood, sperm' urine and vomit ...'[266] corresponds closely with the abject described by the anthropologist Mary Douglas, who refers to this 'bodily refuse' in her writings. She describes this as 'a symbol of power and danger,' powerful when it is used, for example, in sacrifice with the ritualistic shedding of blood and dangerous because these fluids have passed through the borders of the body.[267] She states '(w)e should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its (the body's) especially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind' and 'all margins are dangerous.'[268] This is because they exist on the boundary of identity and therefore substances belonging to them are often impure and polluting in nature. At the same time she makes clear that, in the case of society at least, '(t)here is energy in its margins and unstructured areas.'[269] Her work is taken up by the psychoanalyst, linguist and cultural theorist, Julia Kristeva. In her writings the abject implies 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite,'[270] kept within the individuated and self-contained body, for fear that it might seep outside the borders and therefore, 'disturb individual identity, system, order.'[271] An individual's awareness of inner and outer distinctions is created in relation to this liminal substance, excreta and the body's orifices through which it is expelled, which in turn forms the basis for the subject/object dichotomy. It insists on the subject's necessary relation to death, corporeality, animality and materiality, those relations which consciousness and

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[265] Ibid, Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, pp. 43-4.
[266] Bataille, *The Impossible*, p. 24.
[267] Note that Kristeva advances Douglas' work on the abject in her explication of its relation to the Symbolic order. See Oliver Kelly, *The Portable Kristeva*, pp. 256-7.
[268] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p. 121.
[269] Ibid, p. 114.
[270] Ibid, Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 4.
[271] Ibid.

reason find intolerable, as, '...refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live,'[272] she asserts.

In her portrayal of the abject, Kristeva gives special attention to the cadaver and states that, '...the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything... '[273] and later, '(t)he corpse... is the utmost of abjection.'[274] Bataille recognised that one of the most basic taboos is that surrounding death itself, about which he asserts, '(i)n raising the barrier of prohibition round which fills him with awe and fascinated terror, man enjoins all beings and all creatures to respect it; for it is sacred.'[275] The slaughterhouse is a theme often raised in his work, as an example of a place that attempts to hide the presence of violence, torture and death itself. A photograph that reveals a line of animal carcasses hanging against a wall in his *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica*[276] is reminiscent of an early one taken by the famous photographer Hosoe Eikoh of Hijikata, who is shown in front of an ordered row of slaughtered animals.[277] (Figure 29)

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[272] Ibid, p. 3.
[273] Ibid, p. 3
[274] Ibid, p. 4
[275] Ibid, Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, p. 31.
[276] Bataille ed., *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica: Comprising the Critical Dictionary and Related Texts*, London: Atlas Press, 1995, p. 74.
[277] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., front inner cover.

Figure 29

Taboos and Transgressions

For his performance of *The Rose-Coloured Dance,* Hijikata commissioned the artist Nakanishi Natsuyuki to paint female genitalia on the back of one of his dancers reveals an indistinctness and 'incompleteness of its form'[278] in the words of Irigaray, offering another example of the *informe*, that concept so central to Bataille's thinking. He is exposing the 'taboo against touching'[279] while giving expression to Bataille's image of the chrysalis through which the writer charts the movement of prohibition/transgression, the interstitial stage on the way to becoming the 'final perfect creature'.[280] At the same time the pubic hair is revealed, a reminder of the abhorrent that is part of the dialectic of desire and seduction, of which Bataille approves,

> (t)he beauty of the desirable woman suggests her private parts, the hairy ones, to be precise, the animal ones... Beauty that denies the animal and awakes desire finishes up by exasperating desire and exalting the animal parts.[281]

The concept of 'taboo' is central to Bataille's writing, which exists as a basic prohibition that distinguishes human from bestial behaviour and which comes into being as an inevitable protection for the social order. An essential component of the taboo is transgression, which he insists entails an inner, psychological awareness of limits and together they form a dynamic interplay that promotes and maintains social stability. Transgression for Bataille opens up the larger economy of the sacred, as it forms the basis of the most profound spiritual insight and mystical experience. In the personal sphere its domain is that of the erotic, which he sees as an essential process in the transition from the animal to human. Eroticism arises in the vacillation between desire and repulsion, attraction and

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[278] Ibid, Irigaray, *The Sex Which is not One*, p. 26.

[279] Ibid, p. 27

[280] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p.39. Note also that Suzanne Guerlac in Allan Stoekle and Liliane Greene, eds., *On Bataille*, Yale French Studies, No. 78, Yale University, 1990, p. 104, states that another synonym for 'chrysalis' is 'nymphe' and its anatomical dictionary meaning is, 'the small lips of the vulva.'

[281] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, pp. 143-4.

horror, as it is inseparable from the repugnance and the abhorrence of sexuality. These taboos represent the move towards order, the rational and scientific and attempt to deny the violence of eroticism as, 'the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation,' indeed it is one, he continues, 'bordering on death.'[282] This and other sources of disruption are excluded from the personal sphere, as for example, through society's emphasis on confining sexuality to the marital situation, but so intrinsic are they to the individual, that they are present within the social sphere in the form of public celebrations for example. He refers to prohibition as, 'that scandal of the mind, that paralysis, that stupor,'[283] but at the same time he maintains, 'generally speaking, human life stripped of prohibitions is unthinkable'[284] because of their irresistible call to disobedience.

Bataille affirms the ecstatic power of so-called 'primitive' society, in which the need for a balanced interaction between the imposition of taboos and moments of transgression are recognised and the extremes of erotic experience are sanctioned and given free play. These are allowed in ritual and sacrificial form within festivals, at certain times and on specific occasions. During these events, laws are suspended, reason founders and new values are summoned, those of the sacred whose meaning lies outside that of prosaic existence. A great deal of his writing is given to describing the transgressive and sacred experience in which individuation is lost and a larger economy opened, through personal loss, waste and destruction, 'sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being.''[285] This 'inner experience' as he calls it, exceeds the bounds of everyday behaviour and involves living at the extremes of experience. He goes further, 'every sacrifice has its cause in the quest for a sacred instant that, for an instant, puts to rout the profane time in which prohibitions guarantee the possibility of life.'[286] A non-linear, mythic time is

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[282] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, pp. 16-7.
[283] Ibid, Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, p. 37.
[284] Ibid, p. 31.
[285] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 22.
[286] Ibid, p. 39.

consequently opened, in contrast to the rational time of mechanised modernity, where harmony is restored and the social fabric bolstered. Hijikata's performance contains such sacrificial, festive and ritualistic imagery, as a return to a primitive and shamanistic reality removed from that of consumerism and accumulation.

The Primitive and Ritualistic

In a solemn and ritualised scene of *The Rose-Coloured Dance,* four of the performer's scalps are shaved by men in white jackets, their shoulders draped in the Japanese flag, an assertion of difference from that Western 'other' and its imposed political, cultural and materialist values. (Figure 30)

Figure 30

The radical historical break in society brought about by the birth of capitalism and its emphasis on productive expenditure, profit and industrious activity, was a major preoccupation and source of disgust for Bataille who declares, '(t)he world... is sick with wealth.'[287] In an argument radically opposed to the rationalist vision of such a 'closed economy', he attempts to subvert existing politics towards a more spontaneous 'general economy' of 'sovereignty'.[288] Bataille's theses state that in such a 'homogenous' bourgeois social order, dependent as it is on commodities, unproductive activity and 'useless values' are suppressed.[289] He believed it is the use made of a society's non-accumulating expenditure and in turn its surplus waste, which determines its form and man's relationship to the sacred domain. This inassimilable waste, which he calls the 'excess', must be spent within and through the communal realm of, for example, the festive, ritualistic, orgiastic, mythical and artistic, where nothing is reinvested and the ultimate meaning of existence is experienced. The intensely disruptive forces of this *dépense* are a central issue to which Bataille continually returns, as an unlimited and ecstatic expenditure. It forms the basis for his alternative ethics, which emphasises 'loss' and serves as an impulse to sacrifice all in a violent annihilation of self-consciousness. Excrement, madness, auto mutilation, mystical trances and obscenity, are taken up in his writings and considered in the context of an expenditure that moves beyond all bounds.

Bataille takes the notion of the 'primitive' that had become fundamental to the West's development of its own sense of identity and indeed superiority, and posits it as 'Other' in relation to that which he perceives as the one-dimensionality of ordinary experience. He points to the archaic forms of excessive and sacred expenditure, in for example, the potlatch of North American Indians described by Mauss in his famous essay, 'The Gift' where, 'a considerable gift of riches, (is)

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[287] *Le monde ... est malade de richesse*, 'L'économie à la mesure de l'univers' in Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes*, *VII*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 15.

[288] Bataille, 'General Economy' in *The Accursed Share Vol. II and III*. See also, 'Sovereignty,' p. 198, '(l)ife beyond utility is the domain of sovereignty' when 'the possibility of life opens up without limit.'

[289] See Bataille, *La Part Maudite*, Paris: Minuit Editions, 1967, pp. 57-60 and 133.

offered openly and for the purpose of humiliating, defying and obligating a rival,'[290] representing an expenditure of pure loss which cannot be rationalised as having reciprocal benefit. The bloody sacrifices of the Aztecs, serves as another example. Here production is subordinated to a limitless destruction that forms the basis for the establishment of powerful social bonds. Such highly symbolic practices and rituals, offer an extreme and transcendent experience, the brutal release of energy and an effusion of primitive communal drives. They have the double purpose of binding the community through the contagion of their violence, while in the presence of death the isolated individual is opened to the terrifying pleasure of almost limitless possibilities. In such proximity to death human beings pay homage to life's precariousness, which they experience through the fear and anguish aroused and the immediacy of the spectacle. During these events the barriers between the individual and universe collapse, and access is provided to the 'heterogeneous' domain of the continuity of existence.

Perhaps the most astute commentator on sacrifice in diverse cultures through history is René Girard, who sees the sacred cleansing ritual as an act that directs violence away from a body of people, while communal bonds are formed and strengthened.[291] Collective tension and violence in the community is redirected and focussed on the victim who is chosen for sacrifice because of his/her marginality, in order to substitute for the dominant group. These victims include a broad cross-section of people who are not fully integrated into social and communal life, including the disabled, deformed, very old and insane, and those individuals who are generally ill defined and outcast from society, the very people Hijikata admired, as they possessed a subversive potential which greatly interested him. All members of society were involved in these events and festivals described by Girard, as they were occasions when, 'social hierarchies

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[290] Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure,' *VE*, p.121.

[291] See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, Baltimore and London: The Athlone Press, 1972, in which he states, 'the function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community,' p. 14.

are temporarily suppressed or inverted,'[292] and he stressed their ritualistic character as they 'commemorate a sacrificial crisis.'[293]

The Architecture of the Body

In Butoh dance, the body is set in constant interplay between extension and contraction while emphasis is given to the lower parts. In *The Rose-Coloured Dance* Hijikata and Ohno dance an elevated and graceful ballet, before falling extended on the floor, while in other scenes dancers squat, roll on the ground or stand with knees bent and weighted to the floor.

In Bataille's writings, the high and low are also constantly inverted and destabilised, which reminds us of the established philosophical oppositions between, 'the impurity of earth where bodies rot and the purity of lofty space.'[294] There are numerous references to the 'architecture'[295] and uprightness of the body contained in his work, which he portrays as being 'as erect as a penis.'[296] The body is continually envisaged on this horizontal/vertical axis, while the oppositions between the perpendicular posture of homo sapiens and the horizontal one of animals, are constantly interrupted and reversed, as one moves into or returns to the other, while neither is valorised.

The upright continually lowers itself, the heavens interact with the earth, the noble becomes the ignoble, eruptive forces collapse and the Icarian elevation fails, being castrated by the sun.[297] In the piece *The Solar Anus* he describes man's daily rising and falling when, 'this great coitus with the celestial atmosphere is regulated by the terrestrial rotation around the sun.'[298] The verticality of man, the phallus and God, are not given precedence, but are placed

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[292] Ibid, 119.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid, Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur', *VE*, p. 35.
[295] Bataille, 'The Mouth', *VE*, p. 59.
[296] Bataille, 'The Jesuve', *VE*, p. 75.
[297] Ibid, Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur', *VE*, p. 34.
[298] Bataille, 'The Solar Anus', *VE*, p. 7.

in the same context as lower forms of existence, which are regarded as base and inferior. At the same time, he constantly reminds the reader of his capacity for squatting and walking on all fours, those states of earliest man grounded in the mud, for which we are all disposed. Both artists employ the act of crawling but towards different ends; Bataille states, 'I crawl in order no longer to be'[299] while Hijikata declares, 'I am an avant-garde who crawls the earth, a corpse trying desperately to become life.' [300]

Bataille then disrupts and reverses hierarchical readings of the body, stating that, '(t)he big toe is the most human part of the body,'[301] a reminder that this debased and neglected extremity is the base for man's erect stance, while man aspires to the sublime light of the celestial and 'human life is erroneously seen as an elevation.'[302] He acknowledges the repugnant within that which is perceived to be pure, while pointing to the attraction of the low and vulgar that lies in the heart of man. Disorientating the symmetry of the body, in an article *The Mouth* he reveals a 'pineal mouth' placed at the exact top of the body, in symmetry with the anus, an organ which emits bestial screams of pain or sexual pleasure, 'I imagined the eye at the summit of the skull like a horrible erupting volcano.'[303] It is folded back upon itself and compared with 'the rear end and its excretions,'[304] and,

> (a)mong civilised men, the mouth has even lost the relatively prominent character that it still has among primitive men. However, the violent meaning of the mouth is conserved in a latent state... on important occasions human life is still bestially concentrated in the

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[299] '...je rampe afin de n'être plus' in Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes III*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 91.
[300] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 64.
[301] Bataille, 'The Big Toe', *VE*, p. 20.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Jesuve', *VE*, p. 74.
[304] Ibid.

> mouth... terror and atrocious suffering turn the mouth into the organ of rending screams.[305]

These 'explosive impulses' are posited alongside the 'closed mouth' which he depicts as 'the narrow constipation of a strictly human attitude.'[306]

Bataille's 'rending scream' would seem an apt description for a classic facial gesture in Hijikata's dance. The expression is called *beshimi* in which the eyes roll upwards and the tongue sticks out, which was perfected by the dancer Ashikawa Yoko who even had her teeth blackened and removed to add to the effect. (Figure 31)[307] These facial grimaces became the hallmark of Butoh and were continually exaggerated and painfully distorted at times by other dancers in Hijikata's troupe. They resonate with the words of Bataille, 'the cry that breaks from a twisted mouth... flung into endless silence, and lost there,'[308] and are reminiscent of the painting *The Scream* by the expressionist artist Edvard Munch.

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[305] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Mouth', *VE*, p. 59.
[306] Ibid, pp. 59-60.
[307] See ibid, Bonnie Sue Stein, 'Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty and Mad', p. 117.
[308] Ibid, Bataille, *My Mother, Madame Edwarda*, p. 150.

Figure 31

Bodily Organs and the Feminine

The female genitalia is shockingly exposed in *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, dissected from the female physique and painted on the back of one of the male dancer's, in exaggerated form. The coherent form of the body is also fractured and parodied in Bataille's novels, as he displays its generally secret parts on almost every page of his texts. The body is fragmented, its form dissolved, as the organs are torn out and disconnected from their usual functions, to be reintroduced into contexts which are radically different.[309] These parts are not fetishised or reified but presented as objects, ones that constantly seep and spill over into each other, just as the boundaries of his words and the outlines of his texts are broken down.

In *The Story of the Eye* the feminine anatomy is manipulated, as the body of Simone is invoked by a fragmentary part, her genitalia or breast for example, independent of any sense of corporal unity.[310] In his collection of works, *Visions of Excess,* articles named *Mouth* and *Eye* are included and these anatomical parts are described as lacking in any sense of hierarchical relationship. In one such piece *The Big Toe*, Bataille describes the 'vicissitudes of organs, the pullulating of stomachs and larynxes, the bloody and involuntary palpitations of the body to which we are involuntarily subject.'[311] This description has resonance with the palpitations of the body in Butoh, as seen for example in *Emotion in Metaphysics*, 1967, in which the rib-cage is emphasised,[312] revealing the abdomen (voluntarily) contracted and muscles tightened as if the viscera are in a state of torsion. The dancer stands coiled on one heel then stretched upright, his vocal cords straining to let out a scream.

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[309] See for example ibid, Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, which depicts scenes of the cutting up, puncturing, putting out of an eye, or using one in sex play and the biting of a bull's testicle like an egg or inserting it into the body.

[310] See for example ibid, *The Story of the Eye*, p. 35.

[311] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Big Toe', *VE*, p. 22.

[312] This is a common posture in Butoh, see ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 127. For this dance a rib cage was painted onto the back of one of the performers.

Allusions to the male phallus are repeatedly made, as has been evident already in Bataille's writings. In *The Pineal Eye* for example, he conjures '(a) severed penis, soft and bloody... substituted for the habitual order of things,' one that is debased and buried, 'in the stench of night.'[313] The phallus is thus denuded of its symbolic privilege as transcendental signifier and the meaning he gives it is often sullied and degraded. At other times it takes on more potent and forceful connotations, as for example, in a nocturnal scene in the important novel *Madame Edwarda* the narrator Troppmann, wanders the prostitute area of Paris, ' ...a heady sense of freedom carried me forward. I felt myself growing bigger. I was holding my erect member in my hand,'[314] which expresses a powerful virility and presents the male appendage as a kind of weapon.[315] This equivocal treatment of the male genitalia compares with the ambivalence entrusted to the female sex. His fascination for both however, is clear, as seen in the phallic and bulbous figurines and drawings depicted on the pages of *The Tears of Eros,* some of which have a transgendered, polysexual and undefined appearance.[316]

Hijikata's own ambivalence towards the female body has been discussed in some detail in the previous chapter, as he sought to explore the feminine through fictional and sometimes disturbing images. Bataille also offers a complex and somewhat contentious approach to sexuality where woman is at the centre. The eroticised female body is the site for the elaboration of his key concepts, as it embodies transgressions, excesses, pleasures and anguish. Women are often presented as paradoxical objects of exchange in his novels, having centrality and agency over their sexual impulses and desires, which often involve the subversion of all constraints and limits.[317] Within the patriarchal society, where

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[313] Bataille, 'The Pineal Eye', *VE*, p. 84.

[314] Bataille, 'Madame Edwarda', *OC*, III, p. 19 and ibid, *My Mother, Madame Edwarda, The Dead Man*, p. 148.

[315] It is interesting that later in the novel, Troppmann is captivated by a Nazi youth parade led by a 'kid degenerately thin, with the sulky face of a fish' who waves a large baton like an 'obscene penis'.

[316] Ibid, Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, pp. 22-34.

[317] As with the female character Simone in *The Story of the Eye.*

women are objects circulated in a system of exchange, excluded from exercising its rules and in a male-devised Symbolic order, where they are reduced to mere signs, Bataille's aspiration to an economy of *dépense* can be seen as offering women greater potential for transgressive sexual encounters. In situations where eroticism holds centre stage, they are taken beyond their traditional roles as nurturing and offer themselves willingly as gifts.

In the novel *My Mother* for example, the main female character engages in an endless round of orgiastic encounters and is totally aware of the power and impact of her excessive desires. Bataille however, does not develop the issues and contradictions raised and the repercussions of such transgression on the women themselves. Although Bataille's female characters do not fit comfortably into stereotypes of woman as complacent or naive, they do fit with those of dangerous femininity, of woman as siren and temptress. These images are flaunted in his novels and elicit important questions concerning the issue of male control and fantasy constructions of the female. These fictional creations and the multiple interpretations of the female body offered are mediated through Bataille's own projected desires.[318] I would argue that although Bataille's work appears to overturn culturally sanctioned images of the feminine and its gendered sexuality and desire, just as Hijikata's dance did, it reinforces to some degree the clichéd images surrounding them. Simultaneously his works offer a critical distance for consideration of how representations affect the formation of identity and open a potential space for alternative possibilities.

Mutilation

In *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, a fencer stands poised ready to attack, his sword outstretched as if to plunge the naked blade into the absent opponent. In the background hangs a poster of the human form as depicted in the traditional

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[318] Bataille's ambivalent treatment of women is further epitomised in his imaginings of the female vulva, which he sees as one pole of a sexual relation, a void and loss, to which he pays tribute because it has close connection with the totality of death. He also states, 'a woman's vulva is sovereign, but it is also laughable' in *Œuvres Complètes XIII*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, pp. 178-88.

medical system, a body that is 'known' through ways other than the surgical scalpel and dissection.

The body is depicted as 'all wound' in Bataille's photographs of the 'Chinese torture victim' of 1905 and displayed in *The Tears of Eros*. In these a young man is seen tied to a stake, his viscera exposed and being ripped from his living body. The executor and onlookers are depicted within the scene as witnesses to the slow dismemberment, partakers in the powerful dynamic of gaze/power between self and other. The closed form of the individual is visibly seen torn open, meticulously hacked to pieces, as the victim is released from the limited sense of self in Bataillean terms. He described these haunting images a 'life in death' and maintained a longstanding preoccupation and indeed, fascination for them. He conveys the profound effect this rupturing experience had on him, '(t)his photograph had a decisive role in my life. I never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, at once ecstatic, and intolerable.'[319] The intense power of these images is unquestionable, as their impact reverberates in and through the body of the viewer. The victim appears rapturous in the moment of death and the juxtaposing of the violence of the scene and the beatific grimace produces complex effects in the observer, who is compelled to connect with the suffering of this 'Other'. This image of ecstatic death reveals a measureless expenditure of energy, a loss without return or benefit, a sacred ruination as was referred to earlier in the Aztec sacrifice.

Bataille describes the heightened states he reaches as he imagines a situation of proximity with death,

> (a) man condemned to die, when after long hours of waiting he arrives in broad daylight at the exact spot the horror is to be wrought, observes the preparations, his too full heart beats as though to burst... When I saw Madame Edwarda writhing on the pavement, I entered a similar state of absorption... Torn apart...'

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[319] Ibid, Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, p. 206.

Hijikata was also intrigued and fascinated by this state of suspension, as he describes, '(a) criminal on death row made to walk to the guillotine is already a dead person even as he clings, to the very end of life,'[320] and he strove to recreate it on the Butoh stage. The fierce antagonism between life and death is pushed to the extreme... a person not dead but made to be dead...' [321] a state which contained a powerful and compelling sense of urgency and immediacy which will be discussed in more detail in relation to Artaud, in the next chapter.

Christian Imagery

Christian imagery is present in Butoh dance, as was described in the final scene of *Revolt of the Flesh,* where Hijikata subverts this iconography, placing it in a performance that contains heightened and delirious scenes of an exaggerated phallic display. In a scene from *Gibasan* of 1972, Hijikata can also be seen appearing Christ-like, his emaciated body whitened by powder and his bearded face smirched with red stains. He strikes an abject figure, his loins are swathed in a simple loin-cloth, suspended, his arms are tied with crude ropes to a rough wooden construction and his head is bowed and adorned by an open Japanese fan.[322] (Figure 32)

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[320] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 46.

[321] Ibid.

[322] This was one of the four pieces comprising the dance *27 Nights for 4 Seasons*. Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 119 and 147.

Figure 32

Throughout his writings Bataille employs Christian concepts and makes references to traditional religious representation, while inverting and going beyond its logic, to rebuild a new sense of the sacred that he felt Christianity had limited and destroyed. He states in his work *Eroticism* that, 'flights of Christian religious experience and bursts of erotic impulses are seen to be part and parcel of the same movement.'[323] His work remains bound to the profane world and offers a return to the impure, ambivalent and passionate sacred abandoned by it.

The Christian tradition contains as he sees it, a fundamental dualist pattern founded on personal moral superiority, one that sets the domain of the divine and transcendent against the 'inferior' world of degradation.[324] He reflects upon the sublime symbol around which the Christian faith has been erected, that is the 'Messiah' or 'Logos' as he is entitled in the New Testament. Christian discourse places the crucified 'Son of God' at the summit of morality, authority and reason, emphasising the possibility of development from the 'low' towards the 'high' pole on the sacred spectrum. This central figure that is raised into this elevated and pronounced position, affirms sacrifice, incarnation, resurrection and victory over death. Notions of sin and guilt are brought to bear on the individual as they are seen as essential to one's being, followed by the possibility of delivery sought through the abstract concept of divine law. In response to the primordial sense of lack and despair experienced by the isolated individual, Christianity offers a remedy through its myth of atonement, redemption and an ideal, abstract 'beyond'.

Bataille reverses this doctrine by stressing Christ's ordeal, abandonment and despair on the cross. He reveals the eternal god become fully man, by emphasising the corporeality of the scene, his naked body, broken and tormented and destined for the abyss, in what he describes as his 'limitless

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[323] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 9.
[324] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade', *VE*, p. 96.

degradation.'[325] Christ's undignified agony discloses an excess and exuberance, in which his integrity is violated. The absolute and regal power of God is plunged into abjection, anguish and is debased, revealing a man dispossessed of any durable paradise. This futile being whose life was without reason is 'unveiled as catastrophe,'[326] but it is while close to death, in misery and suffering, Bataille asserts, that the subject is at its most exalted. It is in that highest state of existence that the self has become worthless and separate existence has been risked. The object on the cross is revealed as, 'the object that love, incapable of liberating itself except outside itself demands in order to let out the scream of lacerated existence.'[327] A reminder that the loss of god and all absolutes leads to a sovereignty of which Bataille approves and to a society based on sacrifice.

The Christian religion has exploited Christ's suffering through art; its representations of the crucifixion posit death at a safe distance, as part of its narrative of redemption. The sacred is represented as plenitude, in which Christ's death is transformed into something homogenous, a stabilising force, no longer real but symbolic. God is portrayed as the source of reason, the word and origin of order and hierarchy, who proclaims a transcendent afterlife, which requires a denial of death as rupture. A discontinuity is implied here as Christian discourses freeze the sacred sphere, giving it only positive meaning. Bataille repudiates this dogma while drawing attention to the etymological root of the term 'sacred' as deriving from *sacer* that originally meant sacred as well as 'soiled', thereby restoring Christianity's profane heritage.[328]

In Bataillean terms this sacred has vanished through Christianity, while man's intimate connection with society and the natural world has been torn apart. Its core aspiration is equilibrium and harmony, while it legitimates the work ethic in all areas of social life. Taboo has become an absolute principle and

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[325] Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', *VE*, p. 119.
[326] Bataille, 'Sacrifices', *VE*, p. 134.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade', *VE*, p. 102, Footnote 2.

transgression that represents man's fall, is something to be vigorously expelled. He believed it has a marked effect in the sphere of personal relations, especially that of sexuality. In this project then, eroticism is denounced as perverse and denied while sexuality is purified. Those qualities that primarily relate to reproduction are retained so that sexuality becomes no longer a laceration[329] of our being, but is made utilitarian and abstracted from the contagion of death. Bataille inverses this belief structure and places the 'ecstatic sensibility' at the 'core of religion.'[330] Furthermore he attacks Christianity because he sees it as being essentially anti-religious, for 'religion' refers he insists, to mankind's inner experience and truth, which Christianity has always sought to disclaim, if not destroy.

He is thus offering a radically alternative vision to that of the Christian faith. As was described earlier, he urges the need for communication through a collective sense of the sacred, in order to recover the mythical structure that underlies ritual forms of sacrifice. The ceremonial offering of the abandoned and abject body, such as that of Christ's on the cross, can thus fulfil an earlier function. It can purge the community of violence and act as a shattering force that marks an opening, an abyss, into which the subject is utterly lost, without meaning or return. In Hijikata's dance, the spiritual is set in conjunction with the most base and in one performance he subverts Christian imagery, which will be described at the end of this chapter.

Bataille's influences on Hijikata's Dance - the Erotic and Corporeal

Hijikata's work explodes the conventional genres of dance and evokes something that lies beyond all conventions and systems, including language. His performance offers a radical corporealism, a body that is exposed and naked. His writing too, struggles to express deeply experienced states of extreme pleasure and pain, in which meaning is stripped bare and the violation of taboos is taken to

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[329] A word commonly used in Bataille's works, as in for example, 'Sacrifices', *VE*, p. 132.
[330] Ibid, Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, p. 37.

the limits of the impossible, to the frontiers of a sacred space containing absolute silence, an area I will be examining in more detail in the final chapter. He eschews the methodical for a more purely physiological and organic rhythm, of asymmetry, oscillation, climax and release that is present throughout the novels of Bataille, in which excessive states of intoxication, debauchery, defilement, illness, dreams or the 'petite mort' of orgasm are described, in a wanton expenditure that defies the economics of measured exchange.

Hijikata's work stages ecstasy in all its pure effusiveness, loss and anguish, violates taboos of nudity and in the tension created the sacred is redefined, as the erotic encounter is identified with the death experience. An intimate connectedness and continuity is offered through the intense sexual encounters he enacts on stage, out of which in Bataillean terms, an extreme individual and corporeal disturbance takes place. As was described with the homosexual encounter in *Forbidden Colours,* eroticism and violation are associated in his performances, as the dancer's body or that of an animal victim is constrained, distorted and transformed into a sacrificial object.[331] Just as for both artists language perverts meaning; eroticism similarly distorts the reproductive purpose of sexuality, as it serves no usefulness but offers instead a radical negativity.[332] In a society such as Japan, which had come to deny the subversive aspects of sexuality while promoting those that relate to procreation, Hijikata's work offers a rejection of the bourgeois family and the social regulation of sensual desire. His stage becomes the site for the pure profusion of pleasures and sexualities that epitomise the principle of transgression and an arena in which to explore and indeed, recall those aspects of sexual behaviour, which although forgotten and denied, were once so intrinsic to the life of the (male) individual in pre-modern Japan.

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[331] For example, in *Kinjiki* a chicken is killed in the context of a homoerotic scene.

[332] Ibid, Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. II and III*, p. 16.

The Grotesque

A celebration of the erotic and grotesque body is offered in Bataille's work. These features resonate with Hijikata's aesthetic, one that embraced the bizarre, sordid and deformed, an abject beauty that celebrates the negative taboo of death itself. He depicts real and imagined animals, which combine disparate parts to produce mutant bodies, in exaggerated and unexpected combination. In the performance *Mandala Mansion* (*Mandara Yashiki*) of 1968, a cat is present on stage and then Hijikata turns into the animal and in the concluding part of the series of *27 Nights for Four Seasons*, he dances as a very large dog. Such transmutation also takes place in the performances of Ashikawa Yoko, who is seen in constant metamorphoses. She transforms herself into several hybrid creatures, abandoning the naturalistic body, for example as a fish-like creature in a scene of the above series, *A Story of Chickenpox* (*Hosotan*). A deranged world is created around these monstrous figures, as Hijikata creatively interweaves an abundance of elements on the stage, to form an imaginative backdrop. These aberrations induce a fascination, repulsion and call on an irrational sensibility that had been lost in the progressive modern era, as Hijikata playfully brings to our attention the undignified, debased and gross physicality of existence.

Hijikata appeals to the 'Bataillesque' body that is a raw, base, unformed materiality, a body open to mutilation, decay, corruption, as if enclosing twisted and entangled innards. In his performances the grotesque guises of his dancers are exhibited like the freakish images seen in late Tokugawa Kabuki, in which ominous demons, cruel murders and hideous ghosts were depicted. In contrast to the perfect and illusory body of classical and modern Western dance, Hijikata's was contorted, possessing a frail, existential quality as if susceptible to emotional and historical uncertainties. He emphasised discontinuity, imbalance, breaks in rhythm, the unexpected and depicted crude and often obscene facial expressions, coarse gestures, creating landscapes on stage of often contorted, commingled forms. The irregular is also conjured, as in for example the dance, *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge,* 1970. In this Hijikata wears a distended white prosthesis

on his left hand and again in more pronounced fashion on his right hand two years later in *Ball as a Plaything*, creating a contradictory, anomalous body, which conflicts with Western associations of beauty that include perfect symmetry, dexterity and balance.[333] (Figure 33) He incorporates the repellent in his work, that spectre which continually haunts the boundaries of social propriety and disrupts the continuity of the body image. In these ways he is confronting the spectator with deviant aspects of material reality, while questioning notions of ideal corporeal beauty. He pushed the frontiers of the distasteful, exposing that which is conventionally hidden in contemporary society, thereby questioning the negative associations of deformity and impairment.

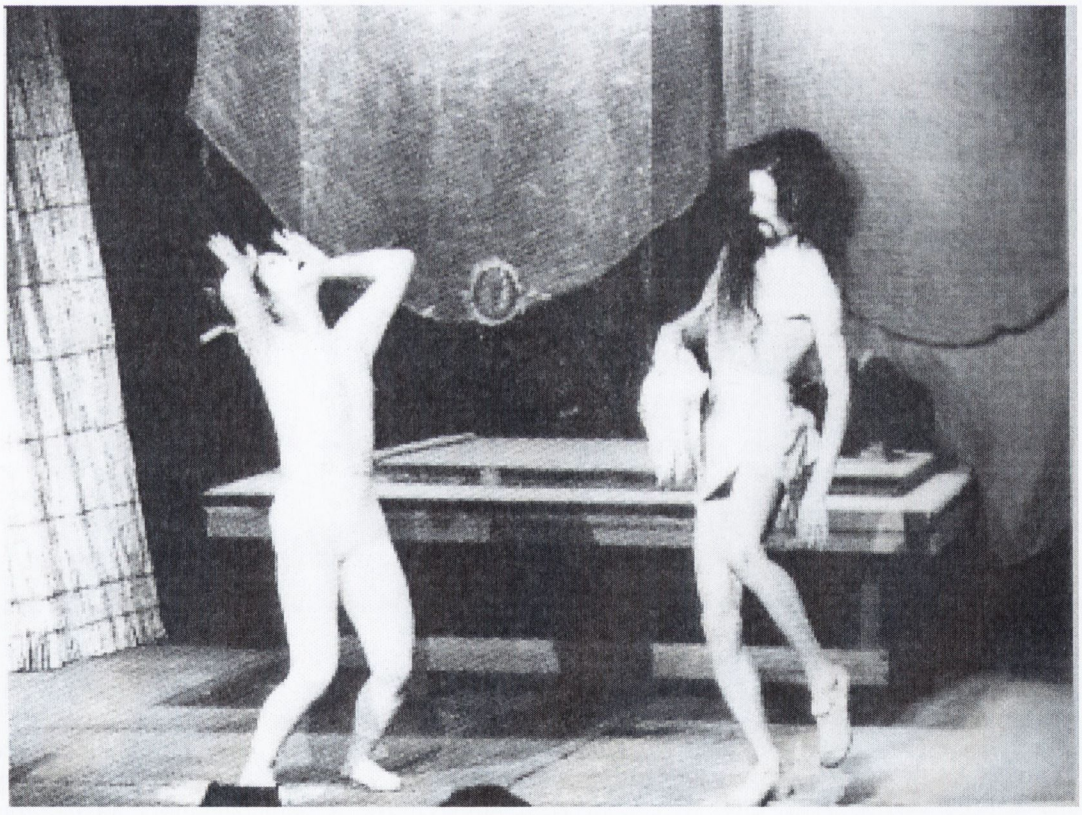

Figure 33

[333] This abstracted limb may also reference a social reality, the ubiquitous amputees in the wake of W.W.II.

A further example of the deranged body can be seen in the scene described at the beginning of this chapter, *A Story of Chickenpox*. Hijikata is revealed lying on his back, his limbs and head raised, appearing wretched, exhausted, as if in a desperate attempt to reach through from the grave.[334] (Figures 34-35) This unravelling and raving phantom figure, his body entangled in cobweb-like threads, with hair matted and knotted, conveys an image of the human form in cadaverous decomposition. This hallucinatory being, appears like an emanation from some other world. A deeply perplexing image is offered as a partial dissolution of the body, offered in all its insubstantiality, as if it is about to enter the realm of discontinuity. The heterogeneity of the ruptured self and its closeness to death is revealed through this 'accursed' scene.[335] It resonates with images of the disfigured, moving ghosts, lacerated by the A-bombs, those human survivors who had witnessed death in life.[336] These living corpses had experienced the most gross violation and debasement of their physical integrity and the extreme alteration of their human identity. Their agonised presence evoked the most primitive fears in Japanese people, about the malign principles at work in the processes of nature, while threatening the boundaries on which definitions of selfhood depend.[337]

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[334] See Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 109. Note that a similar configuration and attire is depicted in a scene from *Calm House*, depicted again on page 157 of this book.

[335] As in the title of one of Bataille's writings, *The Accursed Share*.

[336] His appearance could also be likened to that of the hungry ghosts, *gaki,* the grotesque figures with emaciated bodies and swollen bellies that were depicted in the twelfth-century hand scrolls, *e-maki*. They were invisible to the people around them and lived in the filthy gutters, as their role was to consume all the body wastes and excreta as retribution for their negative karma. The practice of giving food to appease them as a ritual in the temples still occurs today.

[337] As a result they were to become discriminated against within their own society, seen as tainted, unclean, dangerous and foreboding. See Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, pp. 66-7, for a description of the 'living-corpse mythology' that developed among the relatives of the dead. The survivors, *hibakusha*, became outcasts because of the fear surrounding them concerning the after-effects of radiation.

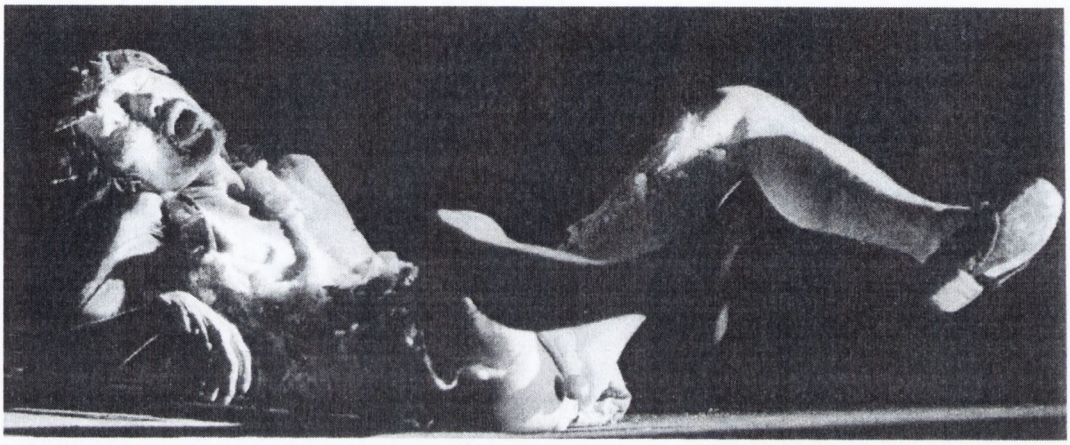

Figure 34

Figure 35

The *informe*

Just as his language lacks any sense of direct and linear representation, so do the elements present on stage where Hijikata creates dissonant images. Untraditional substances are placed alongside common and utilitarian objects, and then adapted for other usages in order to estrange them. Twigs, sticks and other disparate man-made objects like parasols and chopsticks are innovatively brought together and roughly assembled to create stage props, headdresses, masks and parts of outfits, which create a stark contrast with the smooth and streamlined commodities so revered in contemporary mass culture. These can be seen in the series of *27 Nights for Four Seasons*, in which Hijikata fuses a variety of elements and for his dance entitled *Calm House,* an upright flower, bits of leaves and weathered twigs create anomalous assemblages when combined with his tattered, crudely dyed rags and threadbare outfits.[338] (Figure 36)

Figure 36

[338] Ibid, pp. 120-1.

In these often, chaotic arrangements, Hijikata is violating representation as their incompletion renders them irreducible to sense or purpose. They are not offered as signs that should represent anything, but rather as objects which refer back only to themselves and revel in their own 'objectness'. The process of signification or orientation is so undermined in his performance that the spectator is forced to search for new relationships and contingencies. At the same time these 'useless' forms that are so removed from functional machine-made products, offer an opportunity for reflection on the alienation and commodification of human lives and desires, under the increasingly capitalist Japanese economic system.

These compositions together with other subversive images and the disoriented space that Hijikata creates disrupt any concept of structure and express his struggle against accepted patterns and formations. They also question social taboos and take the performance to the edge of what is possible, in an open labyrinthine process where meaning unravels. With the irrational, often bizarre and hallucinatory effects created on the stage, he alludes to and delights in the intricate reality of the unconscious. This ever-surprising imagery that can be seen as an extension of Bataille's ideas is intended to disconcert the spectator, as Hijikata radically explores the possibility of dismantling the form of conventional dance itself. It creates a background against which Hijikata's dancers seem strangely ethereal, floating hauntingly and like the characters in Bataille's novels, exist in a private, solipsistic and inspired world far removed from prosaic existence.

This sense of disorder in his dance does not indicate any deficiency in his method, but rather mirrors the endless flux and disorder of everyday existence. He especially draws attention to that which had been edited in the process of creating a national identity, one that ensured conformity to the existing political and social order. The diverse elements of difference that were left out in the

creation of this totality are foregrounded, exposing the dynamics of its increasingly rationalising and homogenising project.

The Heterogeneous

'Abject' materials, leakage and expelled fluids are present in Hijikata's performances, such as blood, spittle, saliva, which are suggested or actually trickle out onto the stage. The body's apertures and orifices are revealed and left gaping, as mouths and eyes open, tongues spew and legs are splayed. The spilling of blood occurs with the killing of a live chicken in *Forbidden Colours*, the hanging of a dead chicken in *Revolt of the Flesh* and results in sensual and repellent rituals in which Hijikata explores the frontiers of the disgusting, blurring the boundaries of social propriety.[339] Dying chickens are a common theme in Bataille's novels, as in *Rotten Sun* where mythological cults of the sun are invoked in which, 'the cock, whose horrible and particular solar cry always approximates the screams of slaughter'[340] and experiences its final paroxysms. In the novel *L'Abbé C* there are several gruesome images of chickens, hanging lifeless and bleeding, which are linked with the erotic and associated with images of the body, one that 'wriggled about like a chicken under the knife.'[341] The protagonist describes how, '...my limbs hung lifelessly, but in the end it was like the crowing of a rooster,'[342] after having narrowly escaped that ultimate spasm of death.[343] The audience is deeply implicated in these performances, as the visceral intensity and immediacy of such raw and exhilarating experiences have a compelling and destabilising effect.

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[339] It is interesting that in the short film *The Navel and the Atom Bomb*, by Hosoe Eikoh, there are images of a flapping chicken being decapitated, then in its final paroxysms before dying in the sand. The final scene is of an atomic explosion.

[340] Bataille, 'Rotten Sun', *VE*, p. 57.

[341] Bataille, *L'Abbé C*, trans. Philip A Facey, New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1995, p. 53.

[342] Ibid, p. 36.

[343] Also in the above-mentioned film *The Navel and the Atom Bomb*, Hijikata imitates the spasmic rhythms of a chicken with its throat cut.

Hijikata's writings, too, contain references to the abject, such as the, 'dried scum of tears,' 'a scab for a caramel,' 'I was a sperm,' and 'the more vulgar something is, the greater the beauty expressed.'[344] These are just a few of the numerous examples found scattered throughout his work, as he teases and breaks down the physical and social divisions between inside and outside. Hijikata's work then, also constantly appeals to and celebrates the 'gap', the fissure and thereby perpetually attempts to unravel the social and cultural prescriptions of his time. He insists on the presence of the abject in his performance through corporeality, animality and violence that the present-day society had come to disguise and to find increasingly intolerable.

The most base and excluded materials are brought onto his stage. He and his dancers frequently wear ragged clothes, shreds and fragments that appear soiled and rancid. For example in the 1970 piece *Corpse Vine on Famine Ridge*,[345] the kimono, that traditional garment which requires strict protocol in the arrangement of its layers, is here shown dishevelled, its contents punctured and the cotton stuffing spilling out. This could serve as an allusion to the way in which the integrity of the human form itself had been ruptured during the war and to bring attention to the waste landscapes that resulted from the devastation. An appeal to the past is suggested, in an increasingly commodity-driven culture, in which traditional Japanese values and aesthetics were gradually declining. Such traditional garments would seem to stimulate memory, evoking nostalgia, at the same time as marking the transitoriness and exhaustion of the pre-war era. Through such fractured visual disarray, he is undoing pictorial illusion, tracing that which is missing (*la part maudite* in the Bataillean sense). He is offering a radical challenge to aspirations of harmony, symbolic totality and order, found within the official ideal, while hinting at something that lies within the traditional aesthetic sensibility, which includes the irregular, asymmetrical and imperfect.[346]

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[344] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al. eds., pp. 10-11.

[345] Ibid, Tadao Nakatani, p. 46

[346] There are certain key terms associated with Japanese aesthetics, which deserve some description here. The concept of *wabi* includes austerity, transience, simplicity and an

Hijikata often creates ravaged and fantastic landscapes that include, for example in the dance *Fin Whale* (*Nagasu kujira*) of 1972, a mass of dishevelled bedding which is ambiguously rendered as the background to the scene.[347] (Figure 37) It appears carelessly thrown on the floor, torn and in holes, falling to pieces and in a state of putrefaction. The most decrepit and disconcerting elements which are used to mark the limits of the body as a bounded entity and which lie at the interstices of the scientific, philosophical and religious, are thus present in his dance performances. They make reference to deterioration, loss and include images of human decay, excretion and sexual parts, as that which is rejected and disowned by society in its striving for some abstract purity. Hijikata offers a reminder of the corruptibility of human corporeality in its transition from birth towards decomposition, in a natural process that moves ultimately towards collapse, absurdity and death itself.

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appreciation of objects weathered by time. It developed from an intellectual climate associated with Zen together with the complimentary element *sabi*, which added nuances of, the passage of time, solitariness and decay. Together they offer a faded beauty, one of extreme restraint and complete absence of excess, in which the old, the withered and incomplete, are valued more highly than the unblemished and perfect. These concepts became fundamental to the tea ceremony of the 15th century and continued to dominate the arts in Japan up until the Tokugawa period and indeed their presence is still felt today. These qualities are frequently asserted by Hijikata, as for example, 'I cherish... the bodies of the old, withered like dead trees...' in ibid, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 56. Hijikata's wife, who was also a dancer, in an interview with Eric Prideaux, described withered beauty as being a 'Butoh expression', see Akiko Motofuji, 'In Step with Beauty, Life and Death' in *Sunday Time Out: Japan Times,* June 8, 2003.

[347] As there is no video coverage of this performance, I refer here to photographs on page 45 of the book by Tadao Nakatani that will form the basis for these descriptions. See figure 23.

Figure 37

The abject is also revealed through a series of distorted female postures, in which their bodies are broken, reshaped and made strange. As described in the last chapter in *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge* 1970, a woman's body with her arms and legs in reverse is exhibited, the back of her head is covered by a mask and her bare buttocks protrude through an open kimono, which appears as if it has been ripped open. (Figure 38) The fragility of the corporeal boundaries is revealed and her subjecthood placed at risk. This image of a woman (who appears violated) reveals the body in reverse, as if turned inside out, at the same time the parts look as if marked by the residues of a transgression. Two years later a similar but more provocative configuration appears in the dance *Ball as a Plaything,* in which the female performer's legs are wide open and she is wearing a smiling mask, opening herself to the gaze of the spectator, thus evoking the outside turned inwards.

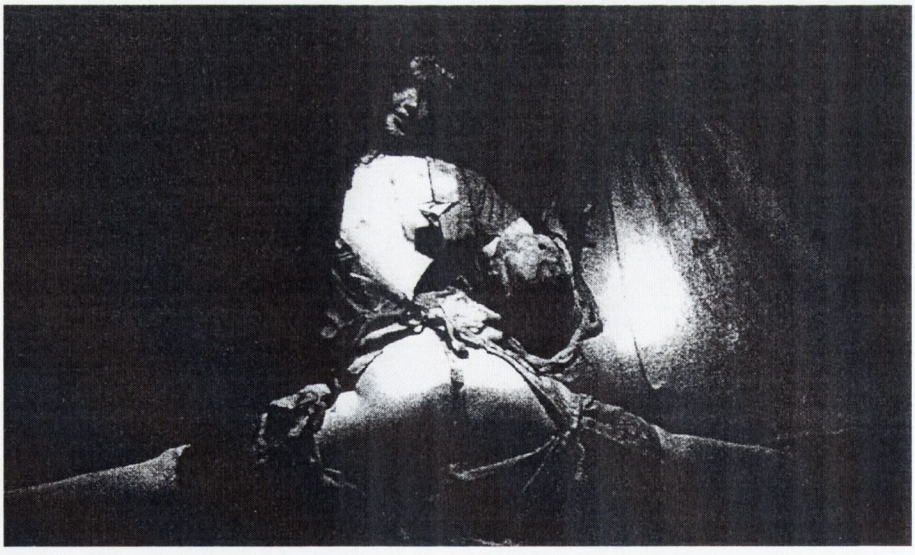

Figure 38

As was mentioned earlier, Hijikata was attracted to social outcasts, associating and sharing ideas with a wide range of individuals, including gnostics, prostitutes and criminals, 'I grew up sniffing out criminals, that is to say, such company as theirs.'[348] These 'interstitial' people can be seen as surplus to the 'restricted economy' of usefulness, in Bataillean terms. As part of Japan's efforts to build a coherent sense of itself as a subject-nation, it sought to exclude those who threatened its culturally constructed boundaries. In this rigorously stratified society, many of these lived on the peripheries as people indifferent to its norms and interdictions. At the same time, they represented the residue spewed out and made invisible by the system of consumer capitalism. In a culture that was increasingly invalidating difference and regulating 'inappropriate bodies', Hijikata reasserts an alternative aesthetics that incorporates notions of attraction/repulsion, which had been alienated and suppressed by dominant social values.

For the dance *Emotion in Metaphysics* (*Keijijiyo-gaku*), 1967, Hijikata had a spinal column and rib-cage painted on the back of one of his dancers, revealing the raw immediacy of a body stripped and set in confrontation with its own flesh and bones.[349] (Figure 39) In discussing society's role of removing the unsettling presence of mortality, Bataille comments,

> (i)n our time, nevertheless, the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship' and '(t)he curse leads them to vegetate as far as possible from the slaughterhouse, to exile themselves, out of propriety, to a flabby world in which nothing fearful remains and in which, subject to the ineradicable obsession of shame, they are reduced to eating cheese[350]

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[348] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 43.
[349] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 93.
[350] Ibid, Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica*, p. 73.

This sentiment could be an apt description of Hijikata's Japan,[351] which had become a culture seeking to disavow disease and decrepitude, with the increase of institutionalised hospitals and indeed abattoirs for the progressively technologised process of death. Death, too, had become a taboo and contact with it increasingly mediated as it was distanced and denied. As part of an extensive process of controlling uncultivated and disorderly elements in society and indeed nature itself, that which was once a central fact of human life had now become intolerable and removed, as Bataille also notes, '(t)he prohibition which lays hold of the others at the sight of a corpse is the distance they put between themselves and violence, by which they cut themselves off from violence.'[352] Hijikata strives to bring his spectators into more intimate contact with such violence and their own mortality, expressed through his words, '... a dead person is my Butoh teacher. You've got to cherish the dead,'[353] and through his performance, which he often stated was a communication with the deceased.[354]

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[351] Cheese would be an obvious reference to Western influences that were responsible for changes in the Japanese diet.

[352] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 44.

[353] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 77 and Nario Goda, p. 85.

[354] Ibid, Yuri Kageyama, 'Dancer Ohno Gives New Shoes to the Dead' in *The Japan Times*, September 19, 1987. There is an abundance of references to death in Hijikata's writings, a most eloquent quotation is cited in Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., ibid, '(t)o make gestures of the dead, to die again, to make the dead re-enact once more their deaths in their entirety - these are what I want to experience within me. A person who has died once can die over again within me. Moreover, I've often said although I'm not acquainted with Death, Death knows me,' (back flap). Also see ibid, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 77.

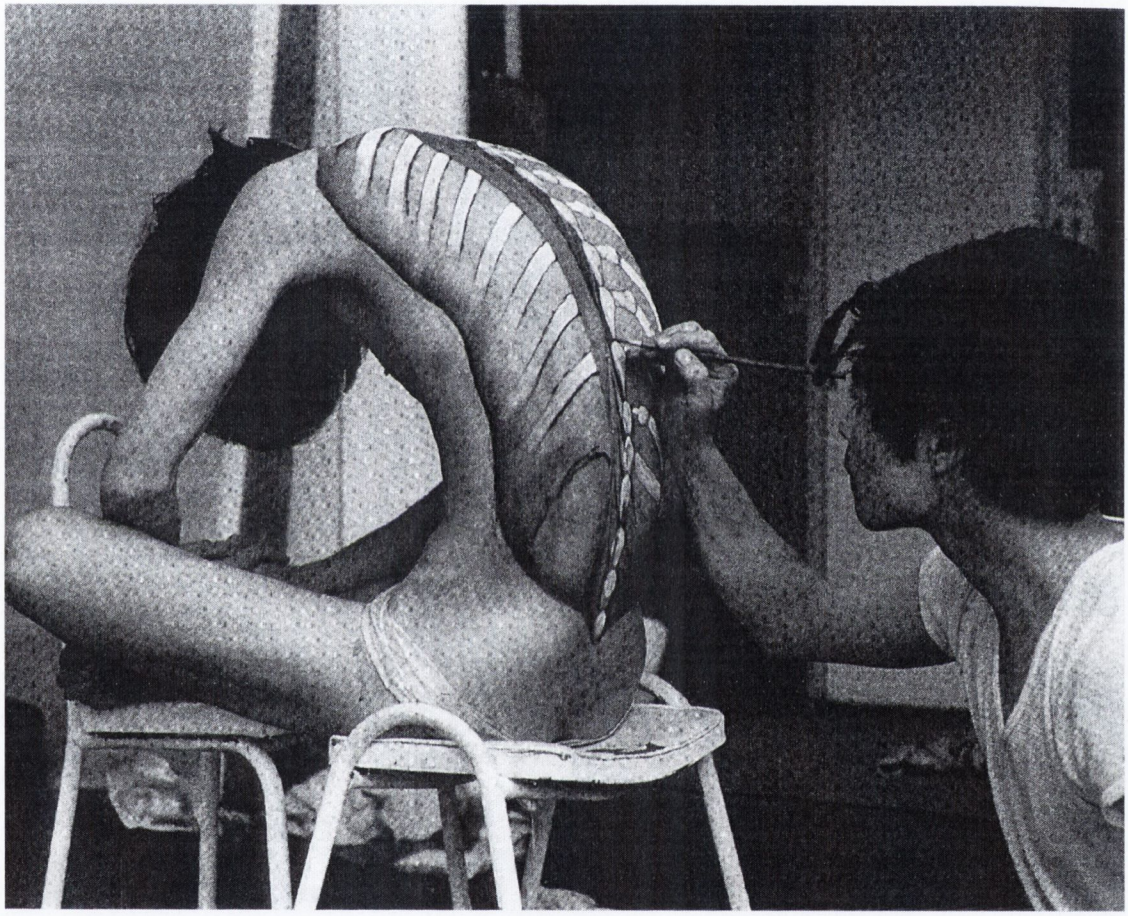

Figure 39

The Festive, Primitive and Ritualistic

Hijikata like Bataille, positions himself in subversive relation to the dominant culture, that of the increasingly wealthy Japan of the 1950 and 60's, with its emphasis on acquisition, work and regulative laws. The imaginative and 'useless' world of his dance reveals an intuitive understanding of Bataille's principles of loss and waste, which pervert the logic of productive meaning.[355] He proclaims his performance as a reaction to the strictures and interdictions of the profane world, 'I am able to say that my dance shares a common basis with crime, male homosexuality, festivals and rituals because it is behaviour that flaunts its aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society.'[356] This culture, which had become so influenced by the alien and alienating cultural hegemony of increasing Westernisation is continually critiqued throughout his work.

There is violent and sacrificial imagery in his performance, as for example in an act ceremonially executed on stage, as described earlier in the dance *Note on Little Genet* (*O-June sho*). In this, one of the dancers has his face cut with a razor blade and blood spurts out, offering a display of the ruptured body transformed into a sacrificial object.[357] Such ritualised acts are worthy of the title of *dépense* and aim for a compelling and transformational experience for those present in the audience. These scenes are often interwoven with sensual and sexual arousal as in for example *Forbidden Colours,* with the slaying of the chicken that takes place within the highly charged erotics of the piece. Hijikata exposes the body's passivity and receptivity to pain in *The Rose-Coloured Dance,* in which the four performers being shaved are draped in the Japanese flag, the symbol of ultra pre-war nationalism. This patriotic fervour was responsible for the excessive brutality of colonisation and its outcome, the Second World War, along with the

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[355] See ibid, Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, in which he states 'the realm of work lies in rival opposition to the realm of sexuality and death' p. 33.

[356] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 45.

[357] See Odette Aslan in 'Du Butoh Masculin au Feminin' in ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes*, p. 58.

aftermath of a humiliation that was exacerbated by foreign occupation.[358] At the same time, Hijikata's performances might allude to the violence inherent in society and its complicity in the wounding of alternative life-styles and sexualities.

Hijikata's work contains a similar 'primitive' impulse to Bataille's, as through his own creative process he attempts to break with cultural rules and limitations, striving for a primordial quality that is mystical, unrefined and intensely in tune with nature. He summons the shamanic experience and appeals to the spirits and disorder of the traditional *matsuri* festival. These Shinto rites of renewal were abundant in the remote region of North-eastern Japan where he was born. These and the folk superstitions that prevailed there are evoked in his dance and utilised for their poetic, potent and often surreal effect.[359] In Shinto belief, all life is lived in community with the *kami*, the deity and during the festivities the social hierarchy is turned upside down, as these gods descend and possess individuals indiscriminately.[360] Even outcasts play an important role, as during the festive period a different order emerges, beyond the everyday structure of normal life.

The *matsuri* embody a rich and complex weave of symbolic layers and meanings.[361] These festive occasions may begin with an extremely solemn ritual,

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[358] These supremacist values were responsible for the colonisation by Japan of Korea, Taiwan and North East China, and then briefly during W.W.II, most of South East Asia. A great deal of bitterness still remains, following the intense brutality involved in these operations.

[359] Shamanic practices also survived for centuries in this region of Japan. In 1967 Hijikata returned to the Tohoku region with the avant-garde photographer Hosoe Eikoh, who was also born there, to perform a shaman-like dance in the fields and villages. In this other-worldly drama, Sickle Weasel, (*Kamaitachi)*, Hijikata played the part of an innocent possessed by a demon spirit who haunted the rice-fields. A publication and exhibition of the photographs took place in the following year. See ibid, Mark Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 12 and phographs in Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 85-91.

[360] *Kami* is usually translated as 'deity' or 'spirit', but a more accurate meaning is rendered by terms such as 'sacred' or 'miraculous'. The *kami* include a vast range of phenomena, a pantheistic, multitude of animate and inanimate beings that can range from mountains, natural forces like the wind, certain animals, to spirits of the dead. They denote a distinctive Japanese religious consciousness, which includes an immediate mode of participation in the sacred, the interpenetration of the divine and human, and the sacrality of the total cosmos. See Shuichi Kato, *Japan: Spirit and Form*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1994, pp. 46-7.

[361] Although Shinto has lost much of its former vitality, the matsuri remain extremely popular. Shinto rituals and myths have been treated as separate and isolated from Buddhist elements. There is however, complex intermingling between the two practices, as often the worshipper is

but intense revelry follows, which may involve nakedness even within the precincts of sacred shrine areas. There is constant tension and interplay between control and the violation of rules, which at times borders on the outright coarse or even obscene. States of rowdiness, raucous laughter and drunkenness are permitted, as dramatic license is given and in the celebratory scenes created, participants step outside the tight strictures of their highly prescribed everyday lives.[362] A central component is the frenzied dance accompanied by the ceaseless rhythm of drums, in which the body is freed from its habitual movements and performers take on associations of divine power, becoming the mediators through whom the dead can communicate. This cathartic and transformative experience involves heightened states of consciousness and bodily sensations that can be shared by crowd members, thus deepening the sense of collective union. Flamboyant, vibrant dress and disguises are worn, while a palanquin or highly decorated shrine, the *matsuri* itself (which transports the deity), is carried wildly and ecstatically through the jostling crowds.[363]

Hijikata summons the ghostly presence of these once profuse festivals, reaching for an immediate, raw and poignant experience. His dance resonates with this more indigenous spirituality that had been to some extent lost and excluded, offering an intense sensory experience of vivid and disturbing imagery, which explodes the boundaries between illusion and reality. In his performance, the sacred and profane worlds are united in a sacrificial rite through the intermediary

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unaware if the deity he is addressing in the festival or shrine, is a Shinto *kami* or a Buddhist bodhisattva. See Neill H.McFarland, *The Rush Hour of the Gods: A Study of New Religious Movements in Japan*, New York: MacMillan Company, 1967, pp. 20-1, also Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingham eds., *Companion Encyclopaedia of Asian Philosophy*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 720 -2.

[362] Herbert Plutschow, *Matsuri: Festivals of Japan*, UK: Japan Library, 1996, pp. 44-7 and Keiichi Yanagawa, 'The Sensation of Matsuri' in *Festival and Rite in Japanese Life: Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion (1)*, Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University Press, 1988, pp. 57-75.

[363] It must be noted that restrictions were placed on the *matsuri* festivals with the opening of Japan to the West, when some of their excesses and indulgences were curtailed and their licentious aspects restrained. They were cast as 'barbaric' and seen as counter to the project of modernity and scientific progress. The carnivalesque scenes of those that remain contain a visual, tactile and auditory mêlée of colour, music, foods and abundant props and have continued to exert an enormous and genuine appeal.

of his own wretched and naked flesh. It is interesting to refer back to Bataille's descriptions of the 'inner experience' which were often framed with concepts of Christian mysticism, however in the absence of a transcendent divine, the ineffable and overwhelming experiences he describes would seem closer to those of the shaman. Such extreme experiences include that of an ecstasy that verges on the abyss and involves a confrontation with death.

In Hijikata's performance *Revolt of the Flesh,* he performs a trance-like, shamanic, wild phallic dance, signifying an awesome 'Otherness' within a present-day reality that was eagerly seeking to distance itself from its 'primitive' past. At the same time, the instinctive and elemental are emphasised in his movement, as he stands firmly rooted with the earth. His hysteria and frenzy are so extreme they appear to border on a loss of consciousness, as his own corporeal self is offered as a sacrificial altar, in an extreme crisis, like that which the call to shamanism demands. The dance resonates with a state of woundedness and self-mutilation, evoked by the spectacle of Hijikata's bound and harnessed body. Their primitive overtones are enhanced by the presence of a rabbit on a pole and a pig in a baby's cradle beside Hijikata as he is carried onto the stage, while a cockerel is seen later hanging by its claws.[364] These hint at sacrifice and the attempt to incorporate the power of the animal, which is central to the shamanic experience. The frenzied crescendo culminates in Hijikata being strung up on ropes, as if having resolved the crisis, he emerges 'resurrected'.[365] In a society defined by its material progress, he allows that 'Other' dimension of the spirits, the gods, the cosmos to enter, in order to take the spectator outside himself and offer more expanded perspectives beyond the realms of ordinary reality.

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[364] See figure 5.

[365] Such a sequence of events is important for the calling to shamanism. See figure 19.

Mark Holborn describes the arduous preparation and resolve necessary for the physical and mental intensity required for *Revolt of the Flesh*.[366] During the month preceding the performance, Hijikata brought his body/mind to prime condition, running every day, fasting, developing a deep tan with infra-red lights and even avoiding socialising with others. These provisions resonate with the call and withdrawal of the shaman initiate from ordinary society. They are necessary for heightened sensitivity and spiritual awareness or in Bataillean terms, a state of readiness through which the 'inner experience' can be evoked.

The Architecture of the Body

Hijikata like Bataille plays with the body's form and architecture. In *Revolt of the Flesh* Hijikata's stretches, exaggerating his height, stiffening his body and increasing the effect of his phallic parade.[367] Other guises display his agile and pliable body in a variety of stances, joints flexed, then stooping towards the floor, a body diminished and constricted then augmented and enhanced. Referring to his own erect body, he described it as a 'dreaming murder weapon'[368] aware of its increased vigour and power, in a continual oscillation between postures throughout his dances. He recoils then crouches deeply abject, or lies supine with the back arched and legs and head barely touching the ground. In this motionless configuration, every fibre of the muscles is in tension and in defiance of gravity, as the body is held in a state of suspension that requires extraordinary control.[369] This involved intense training, during which visualisation exercises were frequently employed, one of which entailed imagining razor blades on the soles and a classic Butoh stance of walking on the sides of the feet with the knees turned outwards.[370] He contrasts this 'bow-legged' (*ganimata*) stance[371]

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[366] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 12

[367] See figure 14.

[368] Ibid, p. 62 and 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 48. The Butoh dancer Tanaka Min who was greatly influenced by Hijikata, described Hijikata's body as, '...always like a weapon, like a knife' in 'Min Tanaka, Farmer/Dancer or Dancer/Farmer: An interview by Bonnie Sue Stein' in *The Drama Review* 30 (T110), summer 1986, p. 146.

[369] See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 24.

[370] This posture was introduced in 1972 and performed by his three principal female dancers, Ashikawa Yoko, Kobayashi Saga and Nimura Momoko, wearing wooden clogs.

with that of 'foreigners' who he asserts, 'say that one should stand on straight, stiffened feet.'[372] This Butoh posture resonates with the words of Bataille who, while reminding us of our commonality with prehistoric man, adds, 'his legs were somewhat bowed; when he walked, the outer edges of his feet carried his weight,'[373] simultaneously recognising what he describes as his 'dignity' and 'creative genius'.[374] This emphasis on this lower part of the body is constantly expressed by Hijikata as in, 'I admire our ancestors who took good care of the feeling in the soles of their feet.'[375]

A return to the earth then is continually invoked in Hijikata's performance and writing. 'I was born from the mud and sod'[376] signals an affinity to the ground and a return again to his rural area of Japan and his preoccupation with his native roots, which act as the backdrop for his way of dance. He described the 'crab-gait',[377] which he developed in his performance, as that which, 'came after crawling'[378] and which might be considered, 'the only possible choice of posture of those who... plough the land.'[379] A distinction is then immediately made with 'the spinning wheel of the West (that) has developed techniques meant to erase or eliminate the legs, which are regarded as mere springs,'[380] which contains an

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[371] The dancer Iwana Masaki describes this position as that of the farmer toiling in the rice paddies, 'his knees then naturally spread and his torso sinks' in *The Intensity of Nothingness: The Dance and Thoughts of Masaki Iwana*, p. 10.

[372] Hijikata, 'Kazedaruma', from a speech given on the eve of the Tokyo Butoh Festival, 1985, in Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 127. See figure 22.

[373] Ibid, Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, p. 17.

[374] Ibid, p. 18.

[375] Taken from a translation by Natsu Nakajima and Lizzie Slater, in Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 121. In Noh theatre the actor also maintains a dynamic relationship with the earth. He is directed towards the horizontal plane in contrast to a more visible use of energy in space and a movement that is outward and upwardly released, as in modern Western dance.

[376] Ibid, 'Kazedaruma', p. 125 and Nario Goda, p. 35.

[377] The 'ganimata' as was described in the last chapter.

[378] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al. eds., p. 9.

[379] Ibid.

[380] Ibid.

obvious mocking of Western dance and its abstract and pure ideals.[381] He rejected the aesthetics of Western forms of dance, their emphasis on upward expansive movement, harmony, flow and balance, focusing instead on closeness with the ground. His clear preference was for, 'a body ... being driven like a stake deep into the earth ... achieved as a result of evolution by which the legs and the head grew upside down,'[382] stated again in reference to his birthplace and the tradition of leaving young children bound in the straw cradle-baskets while their parents worked in the rice fields.[383]

Women, Bodily Organs and the Tattoo

Hijikata's attitudes towards women are complex as at times he expresses very male-centred notions, even stating explicitly his dislike of the feminine, ' ...now, as I struggle to write something, a woman is just no help; she is not even able to serve as an eraser. I have known this for a long time... '[384] Like Bataille he also often privileges women, as with the close attention and time given to his work with Ashikawa Yoko, who was reportedly his favourite student. At the same time, as was described in some detail in the last chapter, his representations and distortions of woman's body on stage could at times be seen as an objectification of the female form, which reinforces cultural stereotypes and fantasies of female passivity. His depiction of a female dancer with a swollen belly for example, In *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge*[385] offers a disturbing scene as she appears vulnerable and exposed in her position, her dress is ripped open and her body pinned to the floor, open to the scopic gaze.[386]

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[381] An intriguing contrast is offered in Hijikata's dance *Ball as a Plaything* in which the wheel of a palanquin used by farm people is suspended from the ceiling, from which hangs farm items such as a horse shoe, trowel and other utensils. See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 142.

[382] Ibid, Toshihiro Tanemura et al. eds., p. 9. He also refers to these children in their cradles with, 'legs all cramped up' in ibid, Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 54

[383] This image was very evocative for Hijikata as it was repeatedly referenced in his writings, as for example in ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 77.

[384] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 56.

[385] This posture and that of another female dancer in the performance, *Ball as Plaything* were described in chapter two of this thesis. Ibid, Tadao Nakatani, pp. 43-44.

[386] See figure 26.

The bodily organs are also conjured by Hijikata, as Ashikawa Yoko remembered that during training sessions he would encourage his dancers to imagine their internal viscera served up as a meal, so that they could prod and inspect each one.[387] The sexual organs are given special attention in his dance, exposed, embellished and displayed. These usually hidden parts are rendered familiar and emptied of their erotic potential. Like Bataille's, Hijikata's treatment of the phallus/penis is unpredictable and capricious, the most striking example being his parade, in *The Revolt of the Flesh*, where he straps an erect member to his waist, embellished in gold and replete with false pubic hair.[388] This takes place as part of a medley of caricatured female impersonations, as if to satirise masculine authority and status. In contrast to phallic rigidity, fullness and privilege, the female vulva is also present in his performance and portrayed as a complex terrain, fluid and lacking in clearly cut boundaries.[389]

The tattoo-like nature of the feminine inscription reinforces the notion of transgression, as the art of tattooing in Japan has been associated with outcasts, criminals and those who lived on society's peripheries.[390] Earliest records depict it as a form of punishment and most recently it is worn by members of the gangster community, the *yakuza*. This mapping of the body creates and defines a sense of identity, organising its boundaries, while placing it outside the mores of Japanese society. Joy Hendry describes the symbolic marginality of the practice in Japan and the blurring of the lines of the body itself, 'since the puncturing of

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[387] Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., pp. 14 and 16.

[388] See figure 14.

[389] See figure 24.
It is interesting that other bodily organs feature in Hijikata's surroundings, as for example the artist Tomio Miki crafted and produced hundreds of ears which appear dismembered and severed from the head, one of which appears above a doorway in his Asbestos Hall training venue. See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 44.

[390] These comprised the *hinin* (non-people), who included certain entertainers and those who dealt with criminals, gravediggers and executioners. Tattoos were also associated with the wandering samurai who had no leaders and other people in transition, such as construction workers. Furthermore, they take on erotic and perverse overtones as several twentieth century writers wrote about the topic, most famously, Tanizaki Junichiro's sadomasochistic story, *The Tattooer,* written in 1910.

the boundary between the inside and outside of the body is a metaphor for the breaking down of parallel boundaries between inside and outside within the larger society.'[391] It thus marks the individual and distinguishes him as part of a collective, while categorising and essentialising his position in the social and cultural order. This declaration of oneself as an outsider invokes the body as a sign system, which is made available and subject to the mechanisms of power and its regulations. From the start of the Meiji period (1868)[392] to 1945, this practice was banned because it had become offensive to modern Japanese sensibility and was seen as crude and barbaric. Just as Bataille was attempting in his writings, Hijikata is questioning and challenging the conventions and values that had excluded certain bodies and evicted them to the realm of the abject.

In the dance *The Rose-Coloured Dance,* a very different tattoo-like inscription is painted on the back of the dancer Ohno Kazuo - the characters *Norinaga*, the name of a famous Japanese philosopher of the Tokugawa period.[393] (Figure 40) Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) was a student of the classical literature of the Heian period (794-1185),[394] and was particularly known for his study of the Tale of Genji,[395] the great novel written by a woman of the court and renowned for its sensitivity to nature and human emotion. It was during this period that the kana syllable system was developed by women, which allowed them to express themselves more easily than men,[396] who continued with the official Chinese writing system, *kanji.* Norinaga developed his own theories of the Japanese aesthetic, ones that were based on the premise that the Japanese mind could be

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[391] Joy Hendry and Raveri Massimo, eds., *Japan at Play: The Ludic and the Logic of Power*, Routledge: New York and London, 2002, p. 32.

[392] As noted earlier, after the disintegration of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, the old feudal regime was toppled and the Meiji emperor ascended the throne. Japan was to emerge from the seclusion imposed by the Tokugawa, to pursue a policy of rapid Westernisation in order to establish itself as a world power.

[393] The artist Nakanishi wrote the name with black tape. See ibid, Sumi Yoichi et al. p. 23.

[394] The Heian Period (794-1185) is considered to have been the birth of Japanese culture, when Chinese influence was in decline.

[395] This is the eleventh-century work of Murasaki Shikibu and is renowned as the world's oldest novel.

[396] This system is distinctly Japanese and simpler than the Chinese kanji system of writing.

characterised as feminine, while in comparison Chinese universalism could be characterised as masculine. He wanted to rescue the original purity of Japanese spirituality from this foreign influence, whose discursive and theoretical reason he found incompatible with man's deepest response to the indefinable sacred. Reflecting on his native texts, he appealed for a return to a simple, direct mode of comprehension, to the natural spontaneity of the Way of the *Kami*. He emphasised Shinto, over the Neo-Confucian and Confucian intellectuality and spirituality of the late eighteenth century. Hijikata's reference to this thinker clearly marked on the dancer's back might denote an allusion to female qualities. This would seem a subversive act when the feminine had become more clearly demarcated and removed from the domain of the masculine, within the strict socially structured definitions of masculinity and femininity that had been instated with foreign presence. There is also present, an intimation of rejection towards the universalising 'Other' currently in Japan and the imposition of its belief systems.

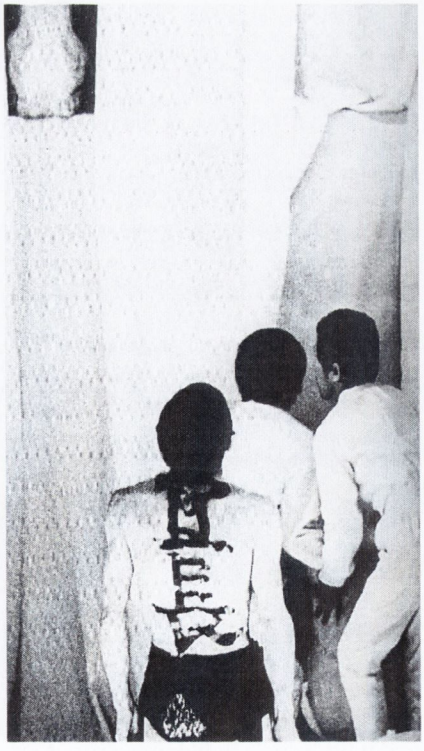

Figure 40

Mutilation and Christian imagery

Hijikata describes a similar fascination with death and mutilation as Bataille, one which involves his own self, '(m)y body longs to be cut into pieces and to hide itself somewhere cold.'[397] In performance he enacts violence against his own body and those of his dancers as we have already seen, cutting and slashing the skin as if in an attempt to erase the body, creating compelling and potent images of its dissolution.

As discussed in the first chapter, Japan had been influenced by Christian attitudes towards sexual pleasure and practices such as homosexuality, which were seen as primitive and perverse. The intention was to resist being treated with the inferiority of 'Otherness' and to ensure the country could exist on equal terms with Western states, as part of an effort to build a coherent sense of nationhood. Hijikata makes allusion to this foreign presence and in reaction to the increasing materialism and rationality of Japanese society that emphasised the fetishist commodity over the sacred he stages himself as an erotic and sacred figure.

In the unsettling and disturbing final scene of *Revolt of the Flesh,* he offers an arresting subversion of Christian iconography in which the symbol of spiritual perfection is exhibited through his own corporeal imperfection.[398] The flesh and blood mortality that Christianity seeks to transcend confronts the spectator; at the same time the metaphysical immortality of the body of Christ is expressed. His status is ambiguous, as the display is highly sensuous while also stressing debasement and vulnerability. The promise of eternal life proposed by the iconography is confronted with the uncompromising manifestation of the physical. His self-martyrdom can be seen as a desire to transcend life while also struggling

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[397] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 56.

[398] See figure 19. Also note that at the centre of Tadanori Yokoo's poster for *The Rose-Coloured Dance* is a small cross on which Ohno Kazuo is placed. This is described as 'a heretical symbol of the destruction of the prohibitions of Christianity,' by Takashi Morishita in, Sumi Yoichi et al., *The Iconology of the Rose-Coloured Dance: Reconstructing Hijikata Tatsumi*, p. 32.

with the 'human' condition. This scene is given extra resonance by being placed alongside another in the same dance, that of the highly charged phallic display. It can also be compared with Bataille's description of the 'potlatch' resulting from the 'spasmodic convulsion in religious despair,' felt by the exploited poor, who rivalled in 'horrible grandeur everything in the world that was rich, pure and brilliant.'[399] The ritual performance presents a complex vision of the abject and the sacred, as Hijikata offers his body as both object and subject, while opening a space for multiple identities, crossings and manifold interpretations.

The Spectrum

There is one final aspect of Bataille's work to be outlined. Implicit in his writing is a dialectical interplay of the contradictions within human nature and the dualities that structure Western logic and experience. The 'distances and oppositions' of what he describes as the 'reduced world of thought'[400] do not seek resolution, or the privileging of one over the other, rather they 'cease to be perceived as contradictions.'[401] These opposing poles and distinctions are endlessly inscribed within one another, then cancel each other out, examples of which include, meaning/non-meaning, good/evil, life/death, human/animal, pure/impure, being/non-being, spirit/matter, subject/object and high/low. In the slippage from one to the next, each is exceeded and collapses in a transgressive, ecstatic and sacred moment, to be dissolved in a paradoxical totality beyond the scope of language.

A similar impulse can be seen in the work of Hijikata as he plays the spectrum of sexual desire, moving through the bipolar axes of male/female, active/passive, rigid/fluid, vertical/horizontal, while exploring the gaps, the excluded spaces between these supposedly fixed points. In performance, the extremes of masculine/feminine, both/neither sexualities are enacted in one body, as was

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[399] Ibid, Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', *VE,* p. 127.
[400] Ibid, Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. II and III,* p. 24.
[401] Ibid, Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur', *VE*, p. 41.

traced earlier in this thesis, in for example, the range of identities and sexual desires Hijikata displays in *Forbidden Colours* and *Revolt of the Flesh*. In his later works this unknown space is explored more fully through the androgynous bodies of his dancers, in which gender roles are re-imagined along a more expanded continuum. In a play of difference, the site of the body is opened up to a multiplicity of possible genders and meanings, and the unmapped territory between bipolar identities and homo/heterosexuality, becomes the site for free play. The junction between past and present-day reality, ugliness/beauty, erotic/repulsive, other/self and the sacred/profane, are also taken up in this process. In the universe he creates on stage, these aspects are continually interwoven, to merge and repeat themselves in cyclical patterns.

An example of this seen in Bataille's work, is his concept of pink and black, implicit in which is an oscillation, the complicity of one colour in the other.[402] The rose, that 'ideal beauty' and symbol of love, Bataille reminds us is 'risen from the stench of the manure pile' and withers to return to that state of squalor.[403] The colour 'rose' is present too in the title, *The Rose-Coloured Dance*,[404] in which the darker side of existence is acknowledged within the *ankoku* 'utter darkness' of his performance. Hijikata describing these two colours asserts, '(b)oth Rose-Coloured Dance and Ankoku must splash blood into the air in the name of evil experience.'[405] This forms part of his paradoxical philosophy, where one aspect, here the pure or impure, is complicit with its reversal. Further emphasis is given to this contradictory, but non-oppositional thinking by the words of Nakanishi Natsuyuki, a set designer, artist and friend of Hijikata's, when together in discussion he stated, '(p)ink and light green are visually different, but the same if

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[402] Bataille uses the metaphorical equivalent for Simone's sexual parts - her 'pink and black flesh', which is an allusion to a famous verse by Baudelaire about Lola de Valence who was depicted in one of Manet's paintings. This verse employs a less shocking metaphor of a 'pink and black jewel' in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard: Harvester Press, 1982, p. 180.

[403] Bataille, 'The Language of Flowers', *VE*, p. 12.

[404] Note that implicit in the title of Mishima's novel *Forbidden Colours* is a reference to the constraints placed on homosexuality.

[405] Ibid, Sumi Yoichi et al. p.7.

vision is replaced by the sense of touch or the sense of taste,' [406] describing the diagrams and poster he had painted in pastel shades, for the production of the above mentioned performance.

Conclusion

Bataille privileges the physical, as he strips the body bare and bores deeply into the human flesh. This direct corporeal relationship is conveyed in his pornographic writings, where he creates a utopic body of pleasure, unfettered desire and multiple transgressions. His writings are scandalously provocative, as he confronts the base and obscene realities of the human subconscious and the violent nature of desire and seduction. He celebrates the debased, ugly and deformed, the decrepitude of old age and the repellence of bodily waste. The body is staged for the festive, ceremonial and ritualistic, as ecstatic and communal experiences when transgressive and primitive drives are sanctioned and given free play. In this chapter, I have examined how Hijikata's dance takes up many of these ideas, especially those of eroticism, violence, sacrifice and the breaking of taboos. For example, just as they are depicted in Bataille's novels, I have argued that erotic situations are linked with obscenity, cruelty, excess and loss on the Butoh stage and redefined within a sense of the sacred. Just as Bataille had done, Hijikata presents and celebrates images that reverberate with excess, ambiguity and crisis. With the irrational, enigmatic and often bizarre effects created in performance, he revels in the labyrinthine reality of Bataille's formlessness. He interweaves an abundance of heterogeneous elements on the stage, creating a surreal and aberrant world while reaching for an immediate and poignant experience, far removed from everyday contemporary existence. In performance the body is opened in ritualistic ways, as the skin is pierced and cut, letting blood flow. This forces the attention of the spectators and opens to a communication of pain and loss that is without meaning, which invokes a sense of the sacred in a materialist world of accumulation. Hijikata and Bataille both rebel against an imposed reality of rationalism, replace it with an indistinct world

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[406] See ibid, Takaaki Miyama, p. 164.

of the grotesque and mutilated, while celebrating the sensual, anarchic, sacred and profane.

CHAPTER IV

The Influences of Antonin Artaud

Introduction

A 16 minute recording exists of the dance *A Story of Chickenpox, Hosotan*, that is one part of the 1972 series of *27 Nights for Four Seasons* (*Shiki no tame no nijushichiban*).[407] Hijikata appears lying on his back, limbs and head raised, in an excruciatingly dramatic scene. Extreme physical torment is displayed, as he strains with every muscle of his being, expressing material reality at its most sordid.[408] Patches are formed through the viscous white paint covering his skin, like raw blisters and abscesses. The fragility of his atrophied body is revealed as if laid out on the dissection table, its vein and superficial tissue prominent and stretched like thin gauze over the surface of his bone. The integrity of the human form appears ruptured, as his convulsing and agonised figure is seen taking its final spasms, having been deeply broken in life, it struggles with every thread of muscle to claw its way back, as Artaud had done. This disentangling figure set in confrontation with itself, conveyed an intense communication with the audience that was direct and focussed.

In Antonin Artaud's first collection of poems *Umbilical Limbo*, he explores the body as if in a state akin to this, prior to the Symbolic, the imago in dissolution and, 'images of threadlike, cotton wool limbs, images of limbs that are displaced and distanced.'[409] Every part of the anatomy he employed to describe and

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[407] This was comprised of five pieces, which represented different seasons that were performed over twenty-seven nights; *A Story of Chickenpox* (*Hosotan), Ball as Plaything (Susame-dama), Study of Insulator (Gaishi-ko), Melting Candy (Nadare-ame) and Gibasan.* I refer here to the film - a 16 minute recording of *Hosotan*, by the director Keiya Ouchida and to photographs of the five parts contained in the books by Takashi Morishita et al. eds., (pp. 142-7) and Tadao Nakatani, (pp. 55-62).

[408] See figures 34-35. Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 13, 64, 109 and 141, and ibid.Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 270.

[409] Artaud, 'Umbilical Limbo- Description of a Physical State' in Collected *Works, Vol. I*, p. 55 and *Œuvres Complètes I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 61.

interrogate the suffering at the core of his own being. With relentless passion he attempted to gain mastery over his anguish and impending paralysis and to subdue the malicious influence inhabiting his spirit. He also intended that his actors use every nerve and fibre, opening themselves fully, in radical and ceremonial stagings where their bodies are laid bare, aflame, coiled and in crisis.

> And if there is still one truly infernal and damned thing left today, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like those tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames[410]

> True theatre has always seemed to me the exercise of a dangerous and terrible act where the idea of theatre and spectacle is done away with as well as the idea of all science, all religion and all art. The act I'm talking about aims for a true organic and physical transformation of the human body... Because theatre is... but a crucible of fire and real meat in which anatomically by the crushing of bones, of limbs and syllables, bodies are renewed, and where the mythical act of creating a body is shown physically and plainly[411]

Hijikata was greatly inspired by the work of this theorist and innovator of modern theatre, whose work found no place in the Shingeki theatre movement.[412] Artaud's poetics of cruelty came to fruition in Hijikata's dance, as his aesthetics

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[410] Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre and Culture' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* trans. Corti Victor, London: Calder and Boyars, 1974, p. 6 and Les *Œuvres Complètes IV*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p.18. Also, 'Theatre and Culture' in Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton, eds., *Artaud on Theatre*, London: Methuen, 2001, p. 145 and ibid, *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, pp. 19-20.

[411] 'Theatre and Science' in *Antonin Artaud: Anthology*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965, p. 169 and in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 216.

[412] Note that Odette Aslan in 'Du Butoh Masculin au Feminin' in ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes*, p. 62, describes how Hijikata collaborated with the theatre group *House of Artau (Arutoh-kan)* and wrote an essay entitled *Artaud's Slipper, Arutoh no surippa*. In this he praises Artaud's theatre of the flesh, in which the body is presented in its original state and pushed to the most extreme point of suffering, just as his words were strained to convey this. See also 'Du Chair et du Pensée: Le Butoh et le Surréalisme' in ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 47.

were applied to the Butoh stage, indeed Stephen Barber states, 'Butoh is Artaud's voice at the end of his life.'[413] Artaud's vision of theatre was that of an immediate event, which pushed the limits of representation to their most extreme, as he deplored the 'shadowless' theatre of realism that reflects and imitates. His *Theatre of Cruelty* was a radical attempt to replace the authority of the text and was offered as a rejection of traditional aesthetic values and a disembodied theatre which appealed only to the eye. Both he and Hijikata have become renowned for the singular and heterodox nature of their work, which include undercurrents of eroticism, frequently combined with amorphous and incongruous images. Their vision was of a true theatre/dance that contained intense and conflicting forces pushed to the limits, as a movement away from singular narrative and the aesthetic play of forms. Their performance ideals incorporated intense agony, ecstasy, paroxysm and delirium, sought through improvisatory approaches that were underscored by discipline and rigour. Seeking out what was most horrible, repugnant and abject, Artaud, like Hijikata, expressed the heterogeneous in Bataillean terms, transgressing the boundaries and rupturing the integrity of the human form itself.

The reality of the human body was linked directly to Artaud's creative ideas to become the medium of his dramaturgy, the nexus of the violent/erotic, the visceral/spiritual and the senses/intellect. He vehemently condemned what he believed was an enervated theatrical tradition, one which was founded on Cartesian dualism and called for a 'culture based on... the mind steeped in all the organs.'[414] He aspired to a purely physical theatre of dance, gesture and screams, brought into the present moment through the breath and involving the whole actor in communication. In a theatre that confronted chaos and becoming, he wanted a multiplicity of bodies to be relentlessly created and affirmed, in intense moments of pain and crisis, reflecting his own corporeality that was constantly in the process of being disassembled, reforged and reborn. His

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[413] Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, London and Boston: Faber, 1993, p. 5.
[414] Artaud, 'Theatre and the Gods' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p.149.

images resonated with excess, as for example like that of the actor being burnt at the stake, as he sought to restore a sense of danger and urgency to the theatre. This is reflected in the sacrificial body present in Butoh and in the banner that was hung in the training venue declaring *Hangi Daito-kan,* which describes his dance as a model for the burning, sacrificial renunciation of the body.[415] The sense of emergency involved in a body taken to the edge of crisis, are described as the 'starting point' for Butoh by Hijikata's close associate Shibusawa Tatsuhiko.[416] Daring and often perilous feats which required great physical control were frequently performed in his dance, as for example with his being hoisted on ropes above the audience, in the closing scene of *Revolt of the Flesh*, as if about to be torn apart. These symbolic and ritualistic performances would act directly upon the senses of the audience, as Artaud wanted, in a visceral and immediate way.[417]

Both artists' works contained a radical critique of their own contemporary society. Artaud compulsively railed against the social taboos of his time, not only attacking theatrical ideals but those of the family, religion and the body. He rejected the demarcation between spiritual and physical existence, while directing his most passionate revolt against the 'Creator'. This 'God' was for him an alien presence within the body, the cruelty of whose creation and judgment he repudiated, as a critical positionality which struck at the very foundation of Western metaphysics. His life and works reveal an intense and gnostic attraction for an indeterminate reality that lies behind superficial appearances, which challenged the limits of reality and the representable. At the same time he appealed to the occult and a variety of Eastern teachings as alternatives to Western culture and in a quest for his own physical and mental integrity.

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[415] One translation of this sign is *A Mirror for a Great Dance of Burning Sacrifice.* The calligraphy was by Yukio Mishima. This was also the title of his early dance troupe.

[416] Ibid, Nario Goda, preface, p. 5.

[417] Artaud proposed a theatre that would, ' ...appeal to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind' in 'The Theatre and its Double-Production and Metaphysics' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 26 and *OC,* IV, p. 46.

Ataud's dramaturgy was highly interdisciplinary, as he looked to profoundly unfamiliar sources, especially to an Orient that existed within his imagination, just as Hijikata had been attracted to other forms of knowledge that lay outside his cultural sphere. Both shared a deep interest in the revolutionary French writers Lautréamont, Baudelaire, the Marquis de Sade and Rimbaud among many others, who rejected bourgeois values and asserted obscene, erotic and anarchic impulses. Like Bataille, Artaud was for a time involved with the Surrealist group and was well acquainted with its founder André Breton.[418] Artaud like Bataille split from the movement because of what he considered to be the absolutism of its principles, even though his language and concepts continued to resonate with its ideals. He aspired to a theatre which lay 'half-way, between reality and dreams,'[419] producing work, as did Hijikata, which opened onto an interface between the known realm and that of an imagined metaphysical order. Surreal traces are evoked in the juxtaposition of metaphors present throughout Butoh performance, revealing its imaginative, experimental and subversive inclinations.

Artaud made a considerable impact on the intellectual and artistic life of his period, using a variety of means including, texts, letters, recordings, film and dance.[420] His aesthetic innovations and ideas have become far-reaching and his challenges have been refracted through the creative arts, influencing a range of future generation writers, artists and directors.[421] He clearly failed however as a practitioner, unable to carry through his formulations and proposals in the performance space.[422] Hijikata's dance resonates with the precedents he outlined and in this chapter I will describe some of the parallels between their

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[418] During the period 1924-6 he was an official member of the movement and publicly broke up with Breton in 1929, because of his desire to ally the group with the Communists.

[419] Artaud, '"A Dream Play" by Strindberg' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 42.

[420] Artaud's most important texts relating to his Theatre of Cruelty were written between 1931 and 1937, which were published together as *The Theatre and its Double* in 1938.

[421] Among these were Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski. The new avant-garde theatre practitioners in Japan, Hijikata included, became very interested in Artaud's dramaturgical concepts, especially after the translation of his *Theatre and its Double* in 1965.

[422] Most of his technical innovations were never actually realised, as during his lifetime his visionary theory was generally regarded as unrealisable and chaotic, lacking in practical method and application.

works. As the content of Artaud's writing is often inconsistent and contradictory, taking as it does many detours, I will not attempt to impose an order on its content, or reduce it to a set chronology. I do not intend this as an analysis of Hijikata's reading of Artaud, instead it will take the form of a reading of one through the other and my hope is that these ideas will serve as a point of departure for ways of looking more deeply into Hijikata's performances. The first section will concentrate on certain aspects of Artaud's life and work that will be compared with those of Hijikata in more depth, later in the chapter.

Lifestyle, Physical Language and Poetry

Artaud's lifestyle and work have been well documented. Like Hijikata, he was profoundly subversive as he stridently contested social mores, articulating his own inner chaos and that which he witnessed around him. Both artists' very ways of being represented an assault on bourgeois cultural standards and values. Ignoring the distinction between performance and the everyday, Artaud carried out his psychic, physical and linguistic experiments beyond the stage and into the way he lived his life. His life was deeply troubled and controversial, afflicted by drug addiction, protracted bouts of sickness, paranoia, psychoses and almost nine years of incarceration in mental asylums.[423]

Beyond the restrictions inflicted on him, Artaud sought also to transcend the constraints posed by words and emotions and to liberate theatre from psychological meaning. Like Hijikata, he attempted to wrench language from

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[423] Nevertheless he craved communication and strove to convey the inner torments he suffered to friends and associates. Misunderstood and even reviled, Artaud's non-conformist behaviour caused him to become subjected to the scrutiny of the psychiatric institutions, as after years of self-imposed cruelty, he became the victim of radical and risky therapeutic acts within the asylum. The electro-shock and detoxification treatments he endured resulted in extreme distress, violent spasms, depressions and even physical spinal damage. These treatments began in June 1943, soon after his transfer to the Rodez asylum. During the many years of such incarceration, he continuously and unsuccessfully pleaded against the diagnosis of insanity imposed upon him and for his own freedom.

discursive rationality, asserting, 'writing is all trash'[424] favouring, 'the realm of the obscure,'[425] in which he was unable to, 'adorn it [thinking] with a host of words, polished meanings, all different and clearly able to bring to light all the attitudes and shades of very sensitive and penetrating thought.'[426] This intense mistrust of language and his despair at the delimiting nature of the written word, were at odds with the substantial oeuvre he produced, as paradoxically he worked through the very medium of language, always remaining dependent upon it. These complex and diverse outpourings resulted in an impressive opus of theatre texts and manifestos,[427] art and film reviews, essays, letters, poems and screenplays. Writing for him became an obsession to which he devoted his whole life. In these often fragmentary and incomplete texts, Artaud drove language to the edge of meaning, inventing his own vocabulary, the impact of words having more import than their content and consequently, as with those of Hijikata, they were often deemed abstruse and scarcely translatable.

His later writing[428] became increasingly unstructured, dense, chaotic, seemingly obscure and more aggressively visceral, replete with obscenities, blasphemy and violence. He freed the forms it might take, with an irregular and erratic placement of lines on the page, frequent underlining, capitalising letters and varying their height, drawing attention to the linguistic code itself, while creating a striking visual and emotive impact on the reader. This extremely original writing lacks coherence and unity, questions rational thinking and radically dismantles the representational process. The evocative language he used was always deeply physically rooted, as he interrogated what he considered as the 'infinite potential' of the constantly transforming body. He wrote with his whole being, expelling

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[424] 'Nerve Scales-Writing is all Trash' in *Artaud, Collected Works: Volume I*, trans. Victor Corti, London: John Calder, 1978, p. 75 and *OC,* I, p. 95. Note that Hijikata's close associate Shibusawa translated some of the poems from this collection 'Nerve Scales' in 1959.

[425] Ibid.

[426] Ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 76 and *OC,* I, p. 96.

[427] It is for his theatre manifestos, especially *Theatre and its Double* published in 1938, that Artaud has become so celebrated in twentieth century arts culture.

[428] Especially that produced after his release from incarceration in an asylum in Rodez, Southern France, which was from 1943 until 1946.

words, like missives that thunder, detonate then bombard the reader. Most importantly these are words that acted with an urgency that would make of his theatre the exercise of a dangerous and extreme act.

Although language was present in his theatre, it did not dominate the performance. He sought to formulate a new aesthetic and in an effort to restore performativity to language, he attempted to situate words within the body. The material reality of his stage required a new language, in which words became like objects, filling up the space as concretely as the gestures, costume, lighting and all other stage elements. These words would create their own music and, '...an undercurrent of impressions, connections and affinities beneath language.'[429] In his theatre he also reverted to a 'state prior to language,'[430] expressed through a vocabulary of intensities and intonations intended to penetrate the nervous system of the spectator. He wanted this 'language' to flow through the organs of the body like a contagion, as he probed the vibrational qualities of sound through a range of human noises; cries, whispers and groans, thereby restoring to words their magical incantatory power. Allowing theatre its own primordial language, he stated,

> [f]or me the question we are faced with is of allowing theatre to rediscover its true language, a spatial language, a language of gestures, a language of cries and onomatopoeia, an acoustic language, where all the objective elements will end up as either visual or aural signs, but which have as much intellectual weight and palpable meaning as the language of words.[431]

This stage language would be a concrete and 'physical poetry' that had immediate impact on the audience, as they were intimately implicated and acted

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[429] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Production and Metaphysics' in ibid, Collected *Works, Vol. IV,* p. 26 and *OC*, IV, pp. 46.

[430] Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-On the Balinese Theatre' in ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 45 and *OC*, IV, p. 74.

[431] Artaud, 'The Theatre I'm About to Set up' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 73 and *OC,* IV, p. 17.

upon until they were 'made to cry out.'[432] This visceral and ultimately silent scream would give expression to the void at the core of existence, which Artaud would explore with the most extreme intensity through the entirety of his work.

The Body in Performance

Just as he found himself confined within language, Artaud also found himself still enclosed and imprisoned within his mind and body,[433] however, '(b)ut finding an impasse in the spoken word, it (the theatre) returns spontaneously to gesture'[434] He set about writing the corporeal, giving it primacy throughout the course of his life, in his writings, recordings and images. During his early surrealistic period he wrote the powerful and evocative *Fragments from a Journal of Hell*, a work of intense physical imagery, 'I am man by virtue of my hands and feet, my belly, my heart of flesh and blood, my stomach whose knots unite me with life's decomposition,'[435] asserting the materiality of his masculine being. At the same time he had misgivings about his own immanence, rejecting it and paradoxically struggling to convey the fear of its loss. Like Hijikata, using all the means at his disposal, including his theatre, film and dance, he interrogated the body's substance, pared it down to the most basic elements, its marrow, sinew, flesh, flaying nerves and created a new 'anatomical order'. Towards the end of his life he called for a 'revolution of the whole body,'[436] one that was interrogated and metamorphosed then reconstituted to remain, as he had hoped early in his career, 'eternally incomplete'.[437]

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[432] Artaud, 'The Alfred Jarry Theatre (First Year, 1926-1927 Season)' in *Collected Works: Volume II*, London: Calder and Boyars, 1971, p. 19 and *Œuvres Complètes II*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 16. Artaud also stated, '(i)n Europe no-one knows how to scream any more, particularly actors... ' see 'An Affective Athleticism' in ibid, *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, p. 95.

[433] In 'Cup and Ball-Letter to the Buddhist Schools' in ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 181, Artaud declares, '(y)ou who are not imprisoned in the flesh.'

[434] Ibid, and Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes* V, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, pp. 105-9.

[435] Ibid, Artaud, 'Nerve Scales-Fragments from a Diary in Hell' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 84 and *OC,* I, p. 110.

[436] Ibid, Artaud, 'Theatre and Science' in *Anthology*, p. 173.

[437] Artaud, 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 8.

His was always a traumatised body that screamed in all its implicit agony, as is evident throughout his writing and especially in the final years of his life, 'the presence of the pain in my body, the threatening, never tiring presence of my body.'[438] This enduring pain defined his very being and he ceaselessly alluded to such intense experiences, through which an interpretation of the world was offered, as he continually attempted to collect himself and to reach a state of unity and clarity.[439] This body had been subjected to and determined by the scientific discourses of psychiatry, aetiology, diagnosis and pathology.[440] In his resistance to such taxonomies and mechanisms of control,[441] he summoned the whole physique in his writings, its disgusting and abject material, as like Hijikata, he aspired to stripping away social and cultural influences, allowing a more authentic body to emerge. He was also intent on performing his suffering, as a potent challenge to these disciplining systems, as for example, after a lecture he enacted at the Sorbonne, he prided himself on the impact he had 'stirred up' within the audience, which he conjectured was in reaction to his perceived 'monstrosity, an abject phenomenon of nature.'[442]

His own body then, became not only the site for medical research through the electro-shock treatments he endured, but also the location at which to

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[438] Artaud, 'The Question Arises of ...' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 225 and *Œuvres Complètes* XIII, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, pp. 95-6.

[439] He continually interrogated the torment caused by his drug use and described in the most poetic terms, the physical unravelling and numbness it caused, as in another portrayal, '[a] sharp, burning sensation in my limbs, muscles knotted, as if raw, feeling like glass, brittle, fear, cringing at movement or noise.' Artaud, 'Umbilical Limbo-Description of Physical State' in ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. I*, pp. 54-5. This brutal imagery portrays the effects of opium and morphine which set him in excruciating confrontation with his own body.

[440] The physical effects of this mental torment can clearly be seen in photographs taken before and after his incarceration, in the psychiatric institutions that depict the shocking entropy of his body. These pictures reflect not just the effects of the metaphysical struggle taking place, but the outer physical results of his situation. Early photographs show a striking, bright-eyed young man, however after just nine years the effects are etched into his flesh, as bore down to skin and bone he is prematurely grown old, eyes deadened and opaque, his face deeply wrinkled, ravaged and toothless. See *Antonin Artaud: Oeuvres sur papier*, Musées de Marseilles, 1995, pp. 14, 17 and 21, for pictures taken in December 1946.

[441] See for example, Artaud, 'Van Gogh the man Suicided by Society' in ibid, *Anthology*, p. 136, where he describes medicine as 'a stale and useless corpse' and in *OC,* XIII, p. 167, he declares, '... the murderous scalpel of a doctor.'

[442] Artaud, 'A André Rolland de Renéville' 8th Avril 1933, in *OC,* V, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 206.

demonstrate his own dramaturgy. Artaud and Hijikata shared a desire for a complete performance, which would involve an extreme physicalisation and express the most complete potential of the human flesh. His theatrical ideas explored the body's infinite capacity for redefinition and self-transformation. As will be described in more detail in the next chapter, he wanted every myriad aspect of the actor's being to be involved in a performance. The internal dynamics of the actor were stressed, which required his full consciousness and complete mastery over his impulses. This would be supported by an awareness of pressure points on the body and most importantly, the rhythms of the breath,[443] so that the performer would connect with hidden layers of emotion and sensation. The skilled actor would be able to articulate intricate physical states and have an introspective awareness of vibrations within the body from which emotions arise. It was not only his breath, but his voice, gestures and movements that were to become as physical signs set in motion, to form the basis of all theatre. In the process of becoming intensely sensitised and responsive, the performer would create an active presence on stage, to be driven to the limits of risk, in order to express the exigency of a body in crisis. Like manifestations from another world, the actors' compelling presence would be capable of reawakening the physical sensibilities of the spectator, 'like those tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames,'[444] and would demand an immediate response.

It is interesting that Artaud was deeply impressed by a form of Eastern Theatre, the Balinese performance that he attended at the Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes of 1931.[445] He saw it as an example of 'pure' and 'total' theatre that

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[443] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, pp. 102-4 and *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, pp. 89- 91.

[444] As quoted at the beginning of this chapter. See 'The Theatre and its Double-The Theatre and Culture' in ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 6 and *OC*, IV, p.18.

[445] This has been well documented. Artaud had also been inspired by a Cambodian dance troupe he saw at the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition in June 1922. It is interesting that apart from a letter to Max Jacob of October 1921, in which he states, '(t)he Japanese are our masters,' (*Œuvres Complètes III*, Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 118), there is little to suggest that Artaud was influenced by Noh or Japanese Kabuki theatre, even though he was introduced to the latter while working with Charles Dullin in 1921. This might be due to his general feelings towards the Japanese nation, which he described as 'the fascists of the Far East' due to their invasions of

contained a profusion of signs and obscurities. He described its esoteric aspects, '...which takes the struggle of a soul as prey to the spectres and phantoms of the Other World to be the basis for its civic festivals'[446] and commended it as a disciplined and communal ritual.[447] With its multi-layered arrangement, its masks, evocative gestures and elaborate costumes, he saw this performative event as ideographic, suggestive of and resonant with the supernatural, that spectral dimension which he felt current theatre had forgotten.[448] He understood each precise movement and gesture as symbolic, as they participated in this eternal mythical dimension. The performers' motions, sounds and expressions, he believed, acted as an 'intensive liberation of signs,'[449] pointing to this other reality and 'a state prior to language.'[450] He described the sculptural qualities of the performers as 'true, living, moving hieroglyphs,'[451] with their stylised, minimal movements and undulating patterns. The emphasis given to their shape and orientation intrigued him, as the actor attended to and incorporated the space around him, imbuing the entire stage space with a sense of the sacred.

China. See Mari Sakahara, 'Artaud et le Japon', in *Antonin Artaud: Artaud et les avant-gardes théâtrales*, ed. Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, Paris-Caen, 2005, p. 159.

[446] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-On the Balinese Theatre' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 40.

[447] Artaud expressed an explicit 'orientalism', as he was attracted to Eastern thought and spirituality, with which he engaged selectively. His orient was an imaginary one, idealised and extremely over-simplified as it was not associated with any specific geographical or cultural context. He generally misread Balinese performance, but he appropriated it because it offered a different perspective and a conceptual point of departure. It served as the antithesis of European theatre and as the exotic and ontological 'Other' through which he could examine his own culture and theatrical heritage.

It might be noted that other Western avant-garde theatre practitioners such as Brecht, Meyerhold and Barba, were interested in aspects of theatre from the Far East. For them the 'Oriental' actor embodied the most ideal qualities and spiritual dimensions of performance. The Asian body they described, however, was devoid of any socio-cultural or historical context and those performers who fell outside of this generalised description were not acknowledged.

[448] Artaud misunderstood these aspects of the performance, as rather than pointing to a magical realm, such gestures were generally concrete signifiers, situated in a pre-existing context that was understood by the Balinese audience.

[449] Ibid, 'The Theatre and its Double-On the Balinese Theatre' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 44; *OC,* IV, p. 73 and *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, p. 43.

[450] Ibid.

[451] Ibid.

Although deeply enthralled by the performance, he did not devote any significant amount of time to an adequate understanding of these signs. Nor did he attempt to fully appreciate the cultural context in which they were derived and received. He aspired, however, to the creation of such a complex weave of gestures to fill up his own stage, which was ever changing, constantly interacting and in the process of producing new combinations. He wanted to create a similar hypnotic effect and to reinstate theatre's transformative and spiritual power, generated through its own mythical theatrical language. This theatre would act as a collective and binding rite, with its own reverberations and presences that called for a return to the pre-rational sphere. Exaggerated and heightened emotions and tensions could be enacted on stage, to be deeply and communally experienced by the audience. This vision of theatre approached that of a sacrificial ceremony, which would provoke intoxication and ecstasy in the spectator.

The Cruelty of his Theatre

Just as Hijikata had brought suffering to the surface in his performance, revealing the anguish hidden in contemporary society, Artaud advocated a restoration of the latent state of 'cruelty' residing in humanity. He went to great pains to define this central concept in his dramaturgy, fearful that it could be interpreted as gratuitous bloodshed, sadism or violence.[452] He replaced its literal meaning with the notion of rigour, determination and urgency necessary to reveal, act upon and transgress the continual workings of the evil in the world, 'I employ the word cruelty in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigour, an implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness... '[453] Although there were depictions of blood in his writings,[454] it was to this metaphysical dimension that he alluded, as he was more concerned with non-

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[452] See for example, 'Letters of Cruelty (first letter, 1932), To J.P.' in ibid *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, pp. 79-80.

[453] Ibid, Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*, p. 102.

[454] As for example in ibid, 'Umbilical Limbo-The Spurt of Blood' in *Artaud Antonin, Collected Works, Vol. I*, pp. 62. In a Letter to Roger Blin, September 1945, he asserts, 'I must have actors who are first of all beings, that is to say, who on stage are not afraid of the true sensation of the touch of a knife...'

literal, decontextualised instances of cruelty than any direct representation on stage. These would act as allusions to other cruelties and lay bare man's potential for violence.

He stressed the notion of intentional action that was crucial for the arousal of this 'cruelty',

> (n)o cruelty without consciousness, without a kind of applied consciousness. It is consciousness which gives to the exercise of every action in life its colour of blood, its cruel touch, since it must be understood that to live is always through the death of someone else.[455]

He therefore emphasised the need for determination and concentration, as well as the close relationship between living and dying. In this conception of theatre, he used a multiplicity of images, primarily that of the plague, which was intended as a force identical with the destructive spirit and the 'slaughter' that is the violence and brutality of creation.[456] This rampant contagion violates the boundaries which contain the body, causing the insides of its victims, to spill out, as it '...is made to drain abscesses.'[457] Extremely volatile in nature, it defies all borders, deeply affecting and dismantling every part of the body, from the skin to the organs, petrifying them, while striking fear and terror in the minds of those who perceive it. At the same time, it acts as a liberating and purgative event which is resolved by death.

His theatre, just like the plague, was intended to evoke an extreme physical and mental reaction, deeply disturbing the spectator on a subconscious level, while radically transforming the human body. As the cruel but necessary crisis of the plague cleanses and cures the accumulated cultural violence, his theatre would

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[455] Ibid, Artaud, 'Letters of Cruelty (first letter, 1932), To J.P.' in *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, p. 80.
[456] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Theatre and the Plague' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV* p. 20 and in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 130.
[457] Ibid.

offer a stream of horrific images, apparitions, screams and symbols. A riot of signifiers was intended on stage, an anarchical excess of disparate images and a vibratory, sonorous language, that would be, 'unafraid of exploring the limits of our nervous sensibility.'[458] He declares that his theatre will portray 'the mind's obscure, hidden and unrevealed aspects, by a sort of real, physical projection'[459] and that, '(e)verything which stems from the mind's fertile delusions... with the stench and the excreta of unadulterated cruelty, just as they appear to the mind...'[460] indeed all that emanates from man's unconscious, including the erotic, sadistic, criminal and revolting, would be present on his stage. The shocking and reverberative power of his physical language with its extreme visceral violence, aimed to provoke extreme dread and delirium, jolting the spectator into a deepened awareness. This total theatrical experience was intended as dangerous, therapeutic and cathartic, as having forced them to face the repressed drives, desires and anxieties in the psyche, this latent violence was then expelled collectively as a ritual exorcism.[461]

The audience was to be further implicated in the somatic communication with the performers, through the unorthodox use of space and seating arrangement that would remove the divide between the actor and spectator and allow a fluidity of viewpoints which resonates with Hijikata's stage designs.[462] He appeals for a theatre that would,

> (f)irst of all (it) should stop making the show something seen, unfolding in front of the audience and replace it with something

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[458] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double' in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 122.

[459] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Alfred Jarry Theatre -Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre' in *Collected Works, Vol. II*, p. 23.

[460] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Alfred Jarry Theatre {1928 season}' p. 26 and in *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 38.

[461] Artaud was unable to fully realise his Theatre of Cruelty. His production of *The Cenci* of 1935, in which he acted the role of Count Cenci, included extreme elements of cruelty, sexual violation and incest. It lasted for only seventeen performances however and Artaud declared it was not yet the true theatre he was preparing.

[462] Artaud proposed innovative spatial arrangements, including central seating area, chairs which could be turned and walkways, so that different viewing points could be achieved. Performances were to be housed within highly unconventional venues such as a barn or hangar.

> acted, revolving around the audience and engulfing it in its waves, its lights, its acoustics, its reflections,[463]

It would act as a movement beyond mere visual display towards a provocation and indeed liberation of the deepest states lying beneath illusory surfaces. In creating this atmosphere, light was also crucial to his *mise en scène.* Just as sound was sought for all its vibrations and tonalities, a complexity of illumination with 'fineness, density and opacity factors' would be created for the stage, to produce a variety of sensations in the body.[464] This would be at times oscillating, abrupt, intermittent and unexpected, while at others, incessant, sustained and strobed, in order to project an atmosphere of shock, darkness and horror. His intention was a movement away from the ritual of the image, as rather than an 'appeal to the eyes,' he stated, '(w)hat we would like to see sparkle and triumph on stage is whatever is a part of the mystery and magnetic fascination of dreams, the dark layers of consciousness... '[465] Despite the emphasis on the visual in his own theatre and film, he proposed that all aspects of stage phenomena be employed, mime, sounds, music, colour tones, masks and dance. These would be no longer subservient to the script, but radically altered to produce dissonant, violent and chaotic images, which would have a powerful physical and metaphysical effect on the spectators and open them to other ways of seeing.

Gnostic, Dark and Primitive Influences

As with that of Hijikata, this vision was attuned to darkness and obscurity. The cruelty proposed for Artaud's performances was intended to release the hidden brutality and 'engulf the darkness'[466] of the destructive potential immanent in humanity. It aimed for a return to a transcendent 'pure' state of consciousness, beyond the pretences of the intellect. He asserted,

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[463] Artaud, 'To Natalie Clifford Barney' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, pp. 88-9.

[464] Artaud, 'The Theatre of Cruelty - First Manifesto: Subjects' in ibid, *Collected Works, Vol. IV* p. 73 and in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 115.

[465] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Alfred Jarry Theatre -Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre' in *Collected Works, Vol. II*, p. 23 and in *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 35.

[466] Artaud, 'To J.P. (Paris, 14th November 1932)' in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 119 and ibid, 'The Theatre and its Double-Theatre and the Plague' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 20.

> (f)or theatre, just as for culture, the problem remains to designate and direct shadows. And theatre, not confined to any fixed language or form, destroys false shadows because of this and prepares the way for another shadowed birth, uniting the true spectacle of life around it.[467]

His theatre 'stirs up shadows,'[468] and looks to those cast outside the mirror of representation, to an invisible and mystical presence behind the dramatic event, '(t)he poetry it uses is dark; or if resplendent, it is even darker, even more opaque.'[469] He continuously stressed the primordial forces of darkness and light that are locked within all matter, including the body and which are constantly set in metaphysical opposition. In his theatre, forms would be set in constant flux and transformation, pointing to forces that lay beyond the framework of ordinary time, as his extraordinary imagination allowed him to penetrate into hidden stratum of existence. These seemingly contrary forces that intersect, collide and converge were to be released in the alchemical and psychic process of his theatre.

The influence of Gnosticism can be seen throughout Artaud's work, one that is attuned to anarchy, negativity, destruction and far removed from the solipsistic aspects of meditation.[470] Its doctrines attribute the appearance of the created world to the evil work of a Demiurge who is compulsive, tyrannical and impulsive. Birth is seen as the original violence and this controlling power is understood to overwhelm the physical and psychic reality of the individual, emptying and stealing its presence. It resonates with the Japanese understanding of the fundamental relationship between the microcosm and macrocosm, the interpenetration of personal self and universe, in which present actions point to a shadowy, hidden region. He believed the primary purpose of theatre's

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[467] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Theatre and Culture' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 5 and *OC,* IV, p. 17.

[468] Ibid.

[469] Artaud, 'Theatre is First Ritualistic and Magical ...' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 138.

[470] In his writings there is no specific reference made to Gnosticism and although he clearly gives Gnostic interpretations to the esoteric literatures he read, he rejected any systematic, principled belief system. Jane Goodall explores the connections with Gnosticism in Artaud's writing, while acknowledging the lack of clear evidence for definitive analogies to be made, in her study *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, USA and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

presentation of cruelty and horror onstage, was to exorcise this repressed dark side of existence.

Hijikata, as described in the previous chapter, appealed to primitive aspects within his own cultural history. Artaud looked without to more 'primitive cultures', which he saw as being in closer relationship with mystical experiences that had become lost in Western civilisation. One such influence on his dramatic theories was ancient Mexico, as he believed its Indian culture to be powerfully attuned to the most natural forces. He was also fascinated by the culture and mythology of other ancient civilisations, especially those of the East and studied various aspects of Chinese philosophy, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Bhagavad Gita, Indian and Balinese rituals and tantrist yoga.[471] He explored the spiritual and secretive teachings encoded within the occult, numerology, astrology, the Kabala and tarot, among others. These esoteric systems he fervently believed reveal the double, the mysterious power that inhabits and animates every area of humanity, the theatre and indeed, his own life. He wanted a magical and revelatory theatre that would include this ghostly hidden region and looked to the exorcistic rites of such 'primitive' societies, in which the individual is purified and transformed through the expulsion of these malign forces.[472] The six 'arcana' divisions of breathing and the combinations of male, female and androgynous principles in the Kabala which induce trance states were of particular interest to him. So too were the Yin and Yang concepts of Chinese philosophy, which denote emptiness

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[471] Artaud's interest in the these civilisations and other theatrical traditions has been criticised as being exploitative, as he abstracted signs from their cultural origins, assimilated aspects and adapted them for his dramaturgy. Susan Sontag, however, in 'Approaching Artaud' in *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed., Edward Scheer, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 92, believes that they are taken not for the sake of understanding 'other' cultures but, 'as stimulants to the imagination' and not as a source of historical knowledge. Her opinion is supported by Brian Singleton, who believes, 'Artaud looked to the East, not to borrow, colonise or appropriate, but for cultural models by means of which he might reform European theatre practice.' His was a 'hybridisation of an imaginary orient'. See Brian Singleton, 'Artaud East and West' in *Artaud: The Theatre et son double*, Grant and Cutler, 1998, pp. xxxvi and xxxv respectively.

[472] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works IV*, p. 101. He describes the actor as, 'an eternal ghost radiating affective powers... a supple never-ending apparition.'

and fullness, one containing the seed of the other, concepts far removed from the binarised duality of Western philosophy.[473]

The Erotic

Hijikata's and Artaud's work reveal a complex and often extreme sexual dynamic. Present in Artaud's writings is a preoccupation with the erotic, while on a conscious level he rejected the sexualised body, often speaking of it as base and as a force that was castrating, corrupting and even demonic, '(a)nd mankind, in reproducing itself through the vile act of copulation, have broken the law of God and made themselves the slaves of Antichrist and Satan'[474] He viewed sexuality as a divisive force, '(l)ove binds Humans together, Sexuality drives them apart'[475] and as being contrary to love and even sinful, '(s)in means sex and the flesh.'[476] He refused to accept his own body at times, condemned its abjection and its basic functions while becoming increasingly scatological, with persistent references from 1934 to defecation and abject fluids. A confused viewpoint is revealed, while expressing a desire for the feminine, 'I am man woman'[477] and '(t)he two are in me,'[478] he also asserts the masculine principle, 'I give my vaginal soul to my daughters with a little phallus, I keep the big phallus for myself with a shadow vagina, the hollow of my thighs.'[479] This latter quotation conveys a

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[473] It must be noted that his appreciation of these complex processes reveals a careful selection procedure. Also, much has been said by scholars about his misinterpretation of these ancient systems. His understanding would seem to be limited, dehistoricised and decontextualised, as he adapted and modified these concepts for his own purposes. This can be seen for example, in his description of acupuncture, where he describes the connections of points with emotions, as if in some direct, correlative fashion. It is true that the emotional landscape of the individual is of extreme importance in this healing system, but there are other factors that are taken into consideration, as individual emotions are not taken in isolation. Instead, subtleties of the emotions and intricate interrelationships are acknowledged, according to, for example, the system of the Five Elements, together with other extremely complex theories that underpin the various systems included in this healing art.

[474] Artaud, 'Au Docteur Jacques Latrémoliere, 1943, 5th Avril' in *Œuvres Complètes X*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p. 34.

[475] Artaud, 'To Anne Mason' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 177. Note that this is a profound difference in viewpoint from Bataille, who saw sexuality as an extremely binding force.

[476] Artaud, 'To Frédéric Delanglade', July 1943, in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 180.

[477] Written in 1945, see Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes XVIII*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, p. 93.

[478] Ibid, p. 20.

[479] Ibid.

misogynous impulse, while he remained constantly antagonistic towards patriarchal power. These contradictions are repeatedly revealed in many of his writings, as for example, in an essay *The Personal Automaton,* woman is described as sexually insatiable and intimidating, while several dispassionate descriptions are offered of the male sexual organ, which is deposed and displaced, as a metal device, as suspended by cords and as a piece of uprooted flesh.[480]

Just as Hijikata's performances often reveal an ambivalent concept of the 'feminine', Artaud's feelings towards women were confused and constantly shifting. He was strongly attracted to them, yet also reacted towards them with sexual aversion and repulsion. He suffered intense sexual turmoil, as his frequent hysterical allusions to them would reveal.[481] He believed sexuality to be a sordid force, '[o]nly the Man and the Woman who are able to come together above and beyond all sexuality are strong... ' And ' ...your everyday, bodily, physical and sensual life is of no interest to me whatsoever... ' as he looked instead to what he termed a Higher Self.[482] As with Hijikata's later performances, his writings reveal a fascination with a state of androgyny, a symmetrical masculine/feminine synthesis within the self, as can be seen in his study of Heliogabalus,[483] reflecting the constant anguish of the extremes within his own personality and his desire for wholeness. The protagonist, who became Roman Emperor at age fourteen, was both divine and human and portrayed the physical traits of both man and woman. Androgynous and bisexual, he also had an incestuous relationship with his mother, while throughout his reign he prostituted himself, offering himself to be sodomised, in extravagant court rituals that closely bind the erotic to the

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[480] Ibid, Artaud, 'Nerve Scales-The Personal Automaton' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, pp. 108-111.

[481] Indeed his romantic liaisons were usually total and extreme, bordering on the religious, rendering them impossible and usually as failures.

[482] Ibid, Artaud, 'To Anne Mason' in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 177.

[483] *Heliogabalus* or the *Anarchist Crowned*, is one of Artaud's most radical and complex texts and is a reworking of historical accounts of the legendary Heliogabalus.

sacred.[484] Artaud found the ideal reconciling of the masculine and feminine in Mexico in the peyote ritual of the Tarahumara, 'they cultivate a transcendental principle of nature which is Male and Female, as it should be,' which he believed indicated a lack of sexuality, or asexuality, also noting the hermaphroditic roots of the peyote which reflect both the male and female principle.

Disruption of the Body and the Abject

As described in previous chapters, in *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge* 1970, a woman's body with her arms and legs in reverse is displayed.[485] Hijikata plays with the body's alignment and architecture, as it is set in constant interplay between extension and contraction, lowered towards the ground and even in reversal.

Artaud rejected all forms of religiosity towards the end of his life, in an emphatic and extreme form. No longer bound to a belief in traditional conception,[486] the body Artaud described in his later writings responded and was given renewed expression, as he explored its infinite potential. In a series of multi-layered and volatile writings, mostly in the form of poetic fragments, he continually recreated and reoriented the anatomical structure, inverting it and stressed movement towards the lower parts, in deliberate contempt of God. In one of his first texts after being released from Rodez, *Henchmen and Torturings*, of 1946 he poses the question, ' ...isn't the mouth of the current human race, following the anatomical survey of the present human body, this hole of being situated just as

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[484] Heliogabalus unsettles the masculine principle by corrupting the role of the pre-eminent organ, while at the same time phallic symbolism abounds, as in for example, the sacred phallic stone of his temple and its phallic towers. A description of his procession through Rome is given, which is led by a giant phallus and by Heliogabalus 'with his member dipped in gold, plated in gold, fixed, rigid ... ' See 'Héliogabale' in *Œuvres Complètes VII*, Paris: Gallimard, 1967, p. 96. This image of the golden phallus resonates with that of Hijikata in his performance, *Revolt of the Flesh* and is noted by Kurihara Nanako in 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh', *TDR* spring 2000, p. 20.

[485] Ibid, Tadao Nakatani, p. 42.

[486] For example, in his late poem *Here Lies* he asserts his own auto creation, of having given birth to himself, 'I, Antonin Artaud am my son, my father, my mother and myself.' *Œuvres Complètes XII*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, p.77 and in *Anthology*, p. 238.

the outlet of the haemorrhoids of Artaud's ass.'[487] This was a body that was reversed, dispersed and decentred, both open and closed, one that was set in process of dancing upside down, back to front and inside out. The head, the most elevated and most highly valued part of the body, as the seat of consciousness, was displaced, even decapitated leaving the body unidentifiable. In an experimental poem, *Theatre and Science*, a 'total physiological revolution' is described, as the body image is dismantled and multiple combinations of anatomical parts are created.

Just as the most base and abject materials are present on his Butoh stage, bodily organs, orifices and their processes are also continually conjured in terms such as, ejaculation, testicles, sperm, blood, arsehole, in his late poems, *Here Lies* and *Artaud Le Momo,* as he recasts and transforms his relationship with his own physical being. In a piece he wrote towards the end of his life, having visited an exhibition of the work of Van Gogh in 1947, for example, he refers repeatedly to the inner sphere of the body, asking the reader to imagine 'the pharynx, oesophagus, urethra and the anus.'[488] In this inversion of inner and outer, he is directing attention towards an unfamiliar orientation. The objective and detached scientific gaze is thwarted and an altered perception is presented, in keeping with the effects of a Van Gogh painting, which radically reshapes the appearance of physical existence and alludes to another dimension hidden behind its surface.

He constantly asserts his own self-abjection, 'It is certainly abject to be created and live... '[489] emphasising bodily orifices and fluids, as for example with his metaphor of having to shit blood through his navel.[490] His evocation of the unclean and impure, liminal discharge and the scar that marks the point of creation through the umbilical cord, challenges the body as a bounded entity. The abject as marginal, situates itself on the borders and attests to the impossibility of

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[487] Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes XIV*, Paris: Gallimard, 1978, p. 153.
[488] Artaud, 'Preface à Van Gogh' in *OC,* XIII, p. 156.
[489] Artaud, 'Cup and Ball-On Suicide' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 158.
[490] Artaud, in the postscript to 'Theatre and Science' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 220.

clear divisions between the proper and improper, suggesting an outside of the domain of rationality. The surface of the skin is incomplete, creating an awareness of the inner/outer from which the subject/object dichotomy is formed, suggesting Artaud's own struggle to connect inner/outer reality. His own acute psychosis and drug intoxication led to a sense of the skin/self border rupturing, with the result being an inability to perceive where his own body ended and the outside world began.

In Artaud's first volume of poems *Umbilical Limbo* (1925), he transgresses every societal constraint in works that convey total crisis. In *The Spurt of Blood,* he seeks out the most horrific and abhorrent, including incest, eroticism, nakedness, interfamilial murder, dismemberment, the biting of the hand of God and the violent spewing of blood. This brief play starts with a surrealistic scene of the 'sky gone mad,' a montage of colliding astral bodies and a falling to earth of human legs, hands, flesh, hair, masks along with, columns, porticos, frogs and scarab beetles. It ends with a shocking scene of the pregnant nurse pulling up her skirts to reveal her vagina that is swarming with scorpions, as no longer a receptive organ, it is castrating, threatening and violent. Her large breasts are emphasised, as is her sex that is illuminated like the sun, as an allusion to the provocative and erotic.[491] In other texts he aspires to a pure body, which negates the abject, as in *The Daughters of Lot,* he conjures a body without basic functions, reflecting a perpetual dilemma for Artaud, as he was also aware that the constitution of the *corps propre* is dependent on abjection, finding its meaning in opposition to it.[492]

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[491] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Spurt of Blood' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, pp. 62-5.

[492] His references to eroticism and the abject increased from 1934, the year the biography Heliogabalus was published. It contains scenes of ritual castration, assassination, human butchery, debauchery. The erotic is aligned with the dirty, and resonates with subversion, liminality, anarchy and excess.

His Final Years

The final two years of Artaud's life became an intensely creative period,[493] as he produced crammed notebooks of writings that were supplemented by drawings.[494] Several of these drawings depict the most abject and elemental bodily processes. In often large and colourful compositions, using leaded pencil and chalks he filled up the space with faces, bodies, geometrical shapes, weapons, machines and a disparate array of shapes and objects. These are heavily accentuated with hatchings and dark shadowing, as he chiselled into the paper, with dots, smears, splatters and he often reworked the paintings to create dramatic intensity. The subject is generally without clearly defined contours, as physical organs and parts are dispersed across the page, such as bones, fluids, joints and muscle, creating monstrously estranged anatomies. Images of castration, birthing, decomposition, excretion and coitus are juxtaposed, to form chaotic landscapes that contain seeping joints, mutilated genitalia, distorted limbs, trunkless physiques, dismembered breasts and jagged metallic forms. His writings also became increasingly fragmented and dispersed, but more preoccupied with the body, his final and lasting possession. They centre on his own physical rearticulation and transformation, '(m)odern man festers and stinks because his anatomy is bad, and his sex organs are badly placed in relation to the brain in the squaring of his two feet.'[495] In a later piece he declares that the body 'needs no organs'[496] and calls for, 'a new and thrilling *furtive* anatomy... a new skeletal body'[497] to be created through theatre.

Artaud's final performance of his essays took the form of a radio appearance towards the end of 1947. The resulting recording named *To Put an End to the*

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[493] Living in Paris, under the limited supervision of the asylum at Ivry, he experienced more personal freedoms than he had for the previous years at Rodez.

[494] Many of the pages in his notebook from his time in Rodez (1943-1946), show his poetry and writing interspersed with scribbles and drawings, of strange geometric and often phallic shapes.

[495] Artaud, 'Theatre and Anatomy' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 191.

[496] Preparatory text for 'To Put an End to the Judgment of God' and the poem 'The Theatre of Cruelty' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 193.

[497] Artaud, 'Deranging the Actor' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 213.

Judgment of God contains a synopsis of his ideas, as he rails against God, religion, American culture, militarism, scientific materialism and modern society. In this, Artaud's most dangerous, volatile and subversive verbal assault, he urges the necessity for extreme action in order to live cruelly, which includes the searing of flesh and the letting of blood. Finally the spoken word is set aside, as he gives voice to violent shouts, physical screams and noises. Artaud accentuates this vocal improvisation by marking out each beat through striking percussive instruments, to intensify the rhythms of the performance and add immediacy to his poetic images. In one section named *Search for Fecality*, the meat, excrement and bone of one's physical being are affirmed over the 'infinitesimal within', that is the spiritual and ethereal. Full impact is given to the final statement, in which he describes a utopic 'Body without Organs,' one that is dismantled, reconstituted and dehierarchised. Its energies, fluids, muscles and bones are redistributed and opened to new assemblages in order for the soul to be restored, beyond the judgment and control of a Higher Being. This recording, in which he believed he had come closest to the essence of his Theatre of Cruelty, was banned because of its 'obscene' and blasphemous' content and not broadcast until twenty five years later. A few months later in a letter to Paule Thévenin (24th February), he wrote about his devotion to a theatre ' ...of blood, a theatre which ensures at each performance that something is gained bodily, something no less by those who play than by those who come to watch.' One week later he died of cancer and was never to witness the broadcast of his recording.

Mark Holborn in *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, describes this tape as one of Hijikata's 'most precious possessions' and in 1984, Hijikata choreographed Tanaka Min in a performance named *Love Butoh,* which was accompanied by the sounds of this recording.[498] Ashikawa remembers him drumming a beat to

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[498] Ibid, Holborn, p. 14.

accompany his verbal imagery in training sessions, just as Artaud had done in this and his final appearances.[499]

Influences on Butoh

The presence of Artaud's influences can be easily discerned in Hijikata's performance, indeed I would concur with Stephen Barber that many of Artaud's theatrical precedents are brought to realisation and transformed on the Butoh stage. Both these artists attempted to destroy the complacency of contemporary theatre, by disrupting its dependency on the Word and instituting a theatre wholly occupied by the flesh. Artaud, like Hijikata, sought to realise his poetry in his theatre, constantly returning to the physical, giving each movement and gesture symbolic meaning and allowing dream and reality to merge. At the same time both these artists aspired to act on the deep sensibilities of the spectator and to arouse a sense of mystery, awe and wonder.

Artaud's work reveals the workings of a mind experiencing, pushing and testing reason and representation to their limits. In his writing the sense-making process is undone, as he moves beyond meaning and used words outside their standard definitions. Hijikata's dance 'stirs up shadows'[500] as Artaud proposed, shatters the illusions of representational theatre and rejects its mimetic function. His writing similarly tests the limits of rationality, as he also experiments with onomatopoeic sound effects[501] and creates multiple layers of imagery, which estrange his own language and reject interpretation. In both these artists' writings, language is fused with the body, as they explore the infinite possibilities of somatic experience, movement and gesture. They intended a performance of breath, signs and alternations between movement and stasis that went beyond the spoken word, to resonate with and strike the sensibilities of the spectator.

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[499] Ibid, p. 16. Kurihara Nanako also notes Waguri Yukio's description of this process in ibid. Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 278.

[500] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Theatre and Culture' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 5 and *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 144.

[501] See ibid, Nanako Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 15, for a discussion of Hijikata's use of such linguistic devices.

Artaud's belief that theatre had forgotten how to scream[502] is addressed in Butoh performance, as with mouths gaping, but without vocal movement, the performers emit silent but visceral screams that would give intense expression to Artaud's belief in the instance of birth as the primordial rupture.

Just as Artaud had placed 'cruelty' at the centre of his theatre, to reveal the dark potential present in society, Hijikata placed the term 'utter darkness', *ankoku,* as his stage at times projected an atmosphere of shock and fear. His dance returns to an unmediated experience, expressing a direct physicality that brings pain and trauma to the surface, as if to reverberate in and through the body of the spectators. Like Artaud this depiction of suffering on stage is undertaken as a transgressive and extreme challenge, as an act of potency rather than disempowerment. Hijikata asserts, '(b)oth the 'Rose-Coloured Dance' and the 'dance of darkness' must 'spout blood in the name of the experience of evil.'[503] Abject images are presented, which act as a reminder that living, physical bodies are subject to disease, dissolution, death and decay.

Butoh's emphasis on metamorphosis has a source in Artaud's endeavour for transformation. Artaud rearranges the received forms of the body, as in his drawings he produces 'unformed' or 'laval images'[504] of human and half-human figures that are aberrant, off balance and fantastical. Moving away from the judgment of God the Creator, his drawings disrupt anatomical form, as he disarticulates the grammar of the body. Waste matter, sexual impulses and expulsions are continuously referenced, as a challenge to the ordered, enclosed bodily form that behaves in accordance with society's or divine rules. In an act of defiance, he rearranges its bones and musculature, redirects its fluids from their prerequisite functions, as the body secretes and spurts, while its skeleton is

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[502] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV,* p. 106 and in *Artaud on Theatre,* p. 141.

[503] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 39

[504] Ibid, Artaud, 'Nerve Scales-Fragments from a Diary in Hell' in *Artaud Antonin, Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 84 and *Anthology*, p. 44.

crushed and shattered. Hijikata too disarticulates the human body, as he creates entities on stage that are fragmented, hybrid, interstitial and multiple, as will again be described in some detail in the next chapter. Through the use of evocative imagery in his performance and writings, he too awakens the breaths and gestures of the body, which is metamorphosed and transfigured, as no longer a stable entity, it is revealed in a state of dissolution and disintegration. In training he encouraged his dancers to imagine a meal, 'in which their bodily organs were served up to them on a plate and they would have to pick up their livers, hearts and lungs and examine them,'[505] in order to disrupt their corporeal relationship further and explore inner and outer form.

Artaud's proposed stage elements contain concepts to which Hijikata's aspired, including his use of non-conventional, small performance spaces and unusual seating arrangements.[506] Sounds and lighting effects, as I have described, were of vital importance in all their variations, to create a sense of spectacle and produce hallucinatory images of the absurd and irrational on stage. Artaud wanted the total involvement of the spectator, bringing him into a close physical association with the action on stage through his dramatic visual and aural innovations. These features would be unified to create a sense of immersion in the stage action, in a 'total' theatrical experience. Hijikata's sparse lighting and use of repetitive, syncopated rhythms and incantatory drum beats, added to the often chilling effect on stage, as a direct assault on the spectators' senses. The powerful impact achieved by such elements as a single light, seemed to underscore the phantasmagorical quality created, with the frequently whitened bodies of the performers. In conversation with Suzuki Tadashi he admitted his attraction to light and the illumination it offered, but like Artaud his inclination was for reflections which 'direct[ing] you to forget more and more'[507] and encourage a

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[505] Ibid, Holborn, pp. 14 and 16.

[506] As for example in *The Masseur*, where a temporary stage was covered with *tatami* mats and the audience was seated facing each other.

[507] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Fragments of Glass; A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 66.

quest for presence, '...if you reduce the use of lights, the audience will search and see... So it's better to go to such a place for even one light like that, a light demanded by the body.'[508] In this he reveals his preference for the effects of subdued and nuanced lighting over the glare of full brightness.

Artaud was interested in creating works that contained montage and non-realistic scenic effects that were lacking in developmental structure and identifiable goal. Not bound within the limits of verisimilitude or linear time, they would flow in cyclical and sacred dimensions. His performances would convey different interpretations of space, form and perspective, offering fragmented, imperfectly described images and illusions within illusions. As described in this chapter, he was intrigued by other, ancient cultures and was mesmerised by Balinese theatre that was for him a sacred ceremony, in which the performer and spectator would undergo a metaphysical transformation. Deriving from this the most important concepts for his own Theatre of Cruelty, his theatrical vision was of a stage imbued with a timeless quality and mythical power, revealed through a phantom-like world beyond human imagination. The actors would fill up the theatrical space with their presences, precise gestures and controlled body language that would produce strange and contorted shapes. Like manifestations from beyond, these figures would usher a whole new dimension into being. They would arouse dread, wonder and anxiety in the audience, in order to stimulate the deepest recesses of the imagination. He wanted this ritualistic event to act as a cathartic experience that would lead to a communal purifying and healing process.

In the shadowy spaces, the half tones and the unstable locations of the subject in space, Hijikata's performance also generates alternative visions. Multiple shades of meaning and obscurities crisscross the stage, expressing an uncertainty and irrationality. His dance offers uncertain identities and indistinct forms, shifting boundaries and transitory presences. His vision leaps beyond the realm of mundane experience, bringing the expansive dark borders of the unconscious

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[508] Ibid.

into full play and creating a connection with the mystical and other-worldly, the irrational elements still present in the national psyche.[509] He appeals to the order of night, when the boundaries between the world of dream and reality are dissolved and the spirits free to wander. They are summoned to in his dance, as the Dionysian night of sensuousness, delirium and chaos is evoked. Just as Artaud had intended, Hijikata's stage becomes the site of difference, one that privileges the illusory, while liberating the ghosts that haunted Japanese culture and the latent darkness that hovered beneath its civilised facade.[510]

In Butoh performances the dancers appear like emaciated and genderless spectres, while their almost naked bodies and ultra-slow movements displace the spectator's sense of reality, suggesting an altered realm.[511] These dancers with their arms outstretched, like ghosts covered with ashen residue and summoned from the ruins, move silently, leaving powdery traces which inscribe an absence, creating a space for that which can never be fully visualised, represented or

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[509] The Meiji Restoration announced the arrival of major technological advances to Japan, which undermined the existent diversity of folk beliefs, rituals and religious practices. The superiority of the present was asserted over the past, as these 'superstitions' were seen to be at odds with the quest for enlightenment and modernity. The exclusive logic of rationalist knowledge sought to control these 'feudal' mentalities, which were seen as obstacles in the trajectory towards creating a unified 'modern' nation. Its scientific dualistic thinking had profound effects on the Japanese way of life, curtailing the imaginative potential that lay within diverse cultural experiences. A manifest deity was conceded however, in the form of the emperor who was constituted as an outlet for channelling the 'pre-modern' imagination. The sacred that had traditionally been expressed through the profane and the natural, which had been seen as continuous with the spiritual, were curtailed by boundaries, hierarchical distinctions and the demarcations of progress. David G. Goodman in his book, *Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods*, London: East Gate, 1988, gives a full account of the trans-historical liberation of the 'gods' and the pre-modern imagination within post-Shingeki theatre.

[510] There was abundant belief in ghosts and supernatural creatures in Japan up until the early Meiji era. This rich tradition contained a diverse array of the grotesque, which included magical animals, demons, monsters, devils and semi-humans that were both humorous and morbid. They have been represented in Japanese art at least since the Heian period. In the extremely varied paintings of the celebrated artist Hokusai (1760-1849) for example, such depictions are graphic and brutal. In his heavily shaded illustrations, limbs appear thread-like, bodies taper and features are anguished and distorted. They are sometimes without eyes, or possess a single eyeball, arms are out raised and the fingers are left to droop downwards. Such depictions were discarded when more Western academic themes appeared.

[511] Hijikata's slow and controlled movement can clearly be seen in the video coverage of *Story of Chickenpox, (Hosotan),* described at the beginning of this chapter.

grieved.[512] The spectatorial eye recedes into the darkness, away from the surface on the stage to be forever pulled back to the texture of the skin, a play of depth and surface and an echo of that need to return to the depths, at the disjuncture in life when its surface had been so disfigured. These nightmare refugees spill out onto the stage, diffusing it with an atmosphere of surreality, the poignant and hideous, as a reminder of the gloomy depths of Japanese history. Despite the often spectacular and sensational allure of his corporeal display, Artaud's like Hijikata's performance reaches deep within the body where the spectators' eyes can neither find nor devour it, pointing to a deeper invisible realm while stripping the body to its essence.

Both artists transgress social and cultural limits, pointing to a sphere where the dangerous, ugly and scandalous lie, in contrast to a vision of modernity. Hijikata's multidimensional stage space became the background for corpse-like figures, the refuse and abject which society was so eager to disguise in a desire for some abstract normativity, while his often fractured lifestyle offered a distorting but fascinating mirror in which to reflect the disparate faces and hybrid elements of 'Japaneseness'. Just as Artaud aspired to a theatre that would evoke a sense of the mythological, primordial and transcendental, Hijikata aspired to a revelation of the profoundly unfamiliar. He looked to the eclectic sources not only from without, but also from within his own tradition, for once familiar modes which had become lost and discarded, historically distant but culturally known. His dance reflects nostalgia for the countryside and his hometown as previously noted, as he continuously evoked his childhood memories of the Tohoku countryside, a utopic landscape inhabited by demons and spirits, a magical place of escape and

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[512] I am referring here to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Pictures recording the destructive effects of the Atom bombs and the human suffering caused were kept from public view by the American and Japanese ruling authorities. Photographs were only published after the occupation ended in 1952, when their status had shifted from documentation, as they were removed from their historical context to that of 'commemoration'. Discussion surrounding them was banned in the media. See Mikiso Hane, *Eastern Phoenix: Japan Since 1945*, USA, Westwood Press, 1996, pp. 23-4.

difference.[513] These spirits are summoned during the festivals, the *matsuri*, when human behaviour is given license to rebel against the order of the day. These aesthetics belonged to a liminal zone, which set the background for his extraordinary creations that offered a return to a more pre-modern imagination.

Artaud was attracted to alternative forms of healing and declared, '(m)edicine is born of evil'[514] as his painful body had been scrutinised, diagnosed and controlled through allopathic discourses, notably psychiatry with its aetiologies and pathologies. Aware that scientific thought and philosophy had been emptied of sensuality and sacrality, he looked towards the alternative healing arts, including acupuncture, yoga and homeopathic medicine. He was fascinated by the energetics of the body and made reference to acupuncture points and their connection with the 'soul'.[515] In *The Theatre and its Double,* he summons an 'organic' and 'profound' notion of culture, 'based on the mind connected to the organs,' conveying some understanding of the intimate relation of the mind, emotions and senses with the functioning of the twelve viscera in Chinese Medicine.[516] His shattering of the corporeal form especially in his final years, acted as a movement away from the body's scientifically organised definitions and formulations.

In Hijikata's Japan, the body had become increasingly influenced by Christianity, subject to scrutiny under a new medical regime and suppressed by layers of Western rationalism. Its primary form of science, that of medicine, was an agent in the drive towards increasing modernisation[517] In one performance, *The Rose-*

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[513] This region was evoked in the series of performances *27 Nights for 4 Seasons*, which was also called *Tohoku Kabuki.* Its bitterly cold climate and a variety of rural elements are alluded to on the stage, including the animals, insects and objects indigenous to that area.

[514] Ibid, Artaud, 'Van Gogh the Man Suicided by Society' in *Anthology*, p. 144.

[515] He was well acquainted with the authority on Chinese medicine and transmitter of acupuncture to the West, Soulié de Morant. See ibid, Artaud, *Collected Works, Vol. I*, pp. 208-14, for the letters he wrote to de Morant.

[516] Ibid, Artaud, 'Theatre and the Gods' in *Artaud on Theatre,* pp. 148-9.

[517] *Ranpo,* literally 'the Dutch Way' (Western medicine), was gradually introduced to Japan. It was the main form of Western science to arrive in Japan, starting in the 16th century with the

Coloured Dance, a chart created as a backdrop, features an amorphous, flaccid body, typical of that in traditional *kanpo* medicine[518] with a portrayal of the face-reading of traditional fortune-telling.[519] This contrasts strongly with anatomical drawings of Western medical science derived from ancient Greece, with their emphasis on strict contours and the strenuously exercised muscle of the sublimated body of formal perfection.[520] In these pictures the minutest physical details are portrayed as objects for visual scrutiny, to be dissected and objectified in order to discover the truth hidden beneath the outer appearance. A diagram featured on the invitation text accompanying the programme for Hijikata's above-mentioned performance, portrays such a realistic depiction.[521] In intricate detail a pelvis and pair of legs are delineated, the flesh torn back, exposing successive layers of muscle, bone, tendons, as if to welcome the penetrating gaze.

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importation of books from the Portuguese and Dutch traders. A modern health regime was established from the 1870s, which became increasingly scientific and empirical, as it drew on new developments within Western medical practices. For example, wartime policies of physical examination and the National Eugenic Law (1940) for the youth were replaced after the war by new health and sanitation measures, which included vaccination programmes and the extensive use of DDT. See Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 65-72.

[518] Meaning, Chinese Medicine from where it derives, literally *kan* signifies 'the Chinese Han Dynasty' and *po* signifies 'the method'. Traditional Chinese medicine originates at least from the Han period of China (206BC-220AD).

[519] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al eds., p. 77 and see figure 8.
Chinese medicine was officially incorporated in Japan during the sixth century and the practice evolved over time within this different cultural context, while still retaining much of its original Chinese nature. There were other forms of popular religious healers in Japan, who still practice today. For some of these, an examination of the physiognomy of a patient's face, *ninso*, can reveal the physical inner state, or alternatively give information about the person's future. Methods of activating the *ki* energy originated from ascetic practices, including breath cultivation and an early form of callisthenic exercise, *Tai Chi*. An intimate awareness and insight was sought through these practices which transformed one's sense of self. It is interesting that silk texts found in Mawangdui, Northeast China in the 1970s and dating to about 168 BC, contain a detailed description of the process of sexual massage. The euphemisms used to describe locations of the body are very closely related to acupuncture point names still in use today. We can conclude that the basis of this medical system involved knowledge of the internal landscape of the body and one's own feelings, with all its complexities, continually changing inclinations and sensual desires.

[520] This fascination with the sinewy, strong, muscular body is portrayed in engravings, paintings and sculpture. That which is seen from the outside was thought to mirror that which anatomically lies underneath the skin. This concern with muscle denotes an emphasis placed on outer discipline, strength, action, intention and the concept of self as agent.

[521] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al eds., p. 76.

Japan's traditional cultural concepts, beliefs and behaviours concerning everyday health care, illness and its treatment, reflected an alternative vision of the body and vital self. The body was and continues to be, perceived, sensed and thus understood very distinctively by the *kanpo* practitioner.[522] Diagnosis involves all five senses and close interaction with the patient, a way of looking which involves a receptive circumspect attitude, an open gaze, rather than a narrowed intentionality.[523] This traditional practice enables the patient to convey ill health not just through words, but through a language that is amenable to the practitioner's sense of touch, smell and hearing. Palpation of the radial pulse and abdomen[524] is an important part of diagnosis and massage one of its therapeutic techniques, often performed by a blind practitioner.[525] Its primary therapies are herbal medicine and acupuncture, while others include moxibustion,[526] dietary advice and meditation exercise to correct imbalance and restore equilibrium. It is a medical system that gives prime importance to change and process, to the patterning of events involved in sickness, as opposed to the isolation of discrete and fixed disease factors.

A world of relativity and continuum is conjured, far removed from that made up of discrete and fixed opposites. The body is observed in its wholeness, in contrast to modern medicine that seeks to divide the body into dispersed systems and

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[522] There is a complex range and composite of medical practice still in use in contemporary Japan. In addition to Western and Chinese-style medicines, during the 1950s and 60s, female shamans, Shinto and Buddhist priests gave diagnoses and acted as intermediaries in cases of perceived spirit possession.

[523] The sound of the voice, odour and the predominant emotional state of the patient are an important part of traditional diagnosis, as is the overall colour of the face. This hue is not connected with skin colour and requires a very different way of seeing, that derives from a different intellectual and cultural positioning from that employed by Western science.

[524] In *Kanpo*, one of the areas palpated is the abdomen, but the pulses taken at the radial artery are the primary diagnostic tool. This pulse is approached and felt differently to that taken by Western medical practitioners, because it is understood differently. These pulses are not primarily connected to the activities of the heart, but to each of the twelve meridians and the whole system. The traditional practitioner is able to sense the most nuanced qualities such as depth and rhythm, qualities which cannot be precisely defined in Western medicine.

[525] Note Hijikata's performance of 1963 was named *The (Blind) Masseur,* in which he took the role of a traditional masseur dressed in white.

[526] Moxibustion is the application of heat through the burning of a dried herb (mugwort), directly on the skin or acupuncture needle.

parts. This traditional form of medicine is strongly influenced by ideas stemming from Shinto, Chinese Taoist and Confucian thought concerning the position of the individual within the environment. The mind and body are intrinsically related through the life force *ki*, the vital substance responsible for maintaining and organising the human body, which is seen as the micro-cosmos of the vaster cosmos.[527] This energy is contacted and affected through acupuncture, which consists of needling specific points on the meridians/pathways through which the *ki* is channelled. Since the modern West considers the body as a mechanism existing in distinction from spirit or mind, consequently it assumes that its processes could be discovered through autopsies. In Japan there had been little anatomy or surgery prior to 1948, such radical alteration of the body had been seen as contrary to Confucian and Shinto beliefs.[528] Medical research was concentrated on the mind-body complexes of living subjects embedded in the world and was more closely related to issues concerning practical wisdom than abstract knowledge.

The language of its classical theory contains insights gathered over centuries of practice. It is richly allegorical and cryptic, a recognition of words partial shadowings and limitations. Its concepts are flexible, interweaving, open to multiple perspectives, appearing obtuse and ambiguous to the eyes of Western practitioners. Even though these theoretical tenets were empirically recognised,

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[527] *Ki* as it is called in Japan (or *Ch'i* in China), has no precise definition. Its connotations and nuances have varied over time and within different cultural spheres. In traditional Chinese and Japanese medicine all physical processes are regarded as changes in this *ki* energy. It constitutes the basis for the heart/mind, emotions and intelligence and operates as a mediating system between the mind and body, spirit and matter. The term is used in a wide range of Japanese metaphoric expressions, as it forms multiple compounds that are used to describe everyday emotions and mental states. The most common of these is *genki,* which means cheerful, optimistic. See Brian J. McVeigh, *Spirit, Selves and Subjectivity in Japanese New Religion: The Cultural Belief in Sukyo Mahikar (Studies in Asian Thought and Religion)*, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997, p. 194.

[528] There were other reasons for the lack of anatomy and surgery in Japan. The Japanese also generally held strict taboos against dissection of the human body and although autopsies did take place for a time, the practice was discontinued. After death, the mind-body relationship was considered severed and the remaining latent body radically altered. Cadavers were scarce and surgery was undertaken without anaesthetic. Dates differ as to when the first human dissection took place; one record puts it as 1754, another as 1774.

because they could not be categorically proven by the positivist methods of the natural sciences, this traditional medical system was seen as unhygienic, parochial and barbaric by the Allied forces shortly after World War II and targeted for eradication.[529]

The numbering of the *gozo roppu*, (five organs and six viscera) depicted on Hijikata's poster, note an organ system defined in terms of functional relationships rather than one of discrete entities. It does not correspond with the fixed system of Western medicine, but prefers a 'body without organs,'[530] not anatomically conceived or strictly arranged but one in the process of ceaseless change. This metaphor implies a dismantling of any notion of central consciousness or unified subjectivity that exists behind a desire for control. Artaud's deconstruction of such notions of subjectivity and himself as subject-always-in-process will be taken up in the final chapter.

Conclusion

The complex relationship between Artaud's dramaturgical ideas and Butoh dance has been examined in this chapter, as Artaud's theatrical precedents are unmistakably incorporated and transformed in the body of Hijikata's work.

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[529] In 1875 the Japanese government, in an attempt to westernise medical practice, enforced biomedicine as an important component of medical training. Shortly after World War II, all traditional therapeutic practices were targeted by the occupation forces, including moxibustion, massage and bone setting. Although at the institutional level biomedicine is the dominant system, *kanpo* and its other indigenous practices continue to be practised.

[530] One of the purposes of anatomy is the differentiation of discrete, separate organs, around which the body is organised. These are hierarchically structured, with the heart/lungs in positions of control. In traditional Japanese medicine, this strict process of delineation barely exists, instead sophisticated definitions of relations and functions are used to describe the body.
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'body without organs' (BwO) is based on Artaud's dream of a body that 'needs no organs' (*OC*, XIII, pp. 287-8). Theirs was an assertion of the notion of interconnectedness, a body before it has been organised and demarcated into distinct parts and areas. Binary categories such as lack/presence, inside/outside, subject/object become meaningless and are replaced by notions of multiplicity, fragmentation and the destruction of boundaries; a body based on 'waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients...'*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London, The Athlone Press, 1988, pp. 153. These views were introduced in their work, *Anti-Oedipus* and further developed in their descriptions of the desiring machines of *A Thousand Plateaus*. In these writings the subject is deconstructed and the liberation and constant flow of sexual desire is emphasised.

Attention has been paid to Artaud's lifestyle, as both artists mocked and rejected the bourgeois order and existing aesthetic values, seeking instead an alternative, if somewhat marginalised existence. They lived life to the extremes, as they tried on and performed multiple identities. They intended a unique and physical language to be created for performance through a variety of stage innovations.

Central to their performative ideals, was the materiality of the body that was given exposure throughout their works. Artaud's determination to re-form language, the body and its gestures was shared by Hijikata, as both desired the creation of a new physical language for their transgressive and enigmatic visions. The actor is physically trained to move with tension and enormous variations in form and timing, as both relentlessly experimented with new ways of using the actor's body. The psychophysical became the site for experimentation that required concentration, control, combined with an emphasis on breathing. Cruelty and darkness are pervasive themes in their work, which contain an anarchistic impulse, while revelling in the debased and irrational. Such spectacles of cruelty were intended to arouse the basic fears of the audience, 'engulfing' their sensibilities and forcing them to react and participate in the performance.

Crucial to their quest was a search for the foreign, in order to create a sense of alterity for a performance that mediated between dream and reality, just as the surrealists had and other, contemporary European and Japanese artists. Aspects of their own tradition and memories were also incorporated into their works; however, references to original contexts were ignored, as it was not their intention to produce any definitive meaning but to expand the spectator's understanding by reaching towards other associations. Their dramaturgies contain a layered complexity, of evocative and dramatic images, which involve a manifold dialogue, to unify disparate elements and create a new awareness. Their works play with the notion of reality and certainty, and point to an alternative mysticism, in protest at the values of Western orthodoxy and metaphysics. Multiple metamorphoses and images are evoked in performance,

which include flamboyant, vulgar and contradictory posturings that contrast with figures that appear like insubstantial apparitions. Pain and violence are linked with the erotic, obscene and sensual. A body with skin, muscle, ligaments, fluids and matter emerges, which is then rearranged and reinvented. Moving beyond anatomy, a 'body without organs' is created and a space for a decentred subject, whose mirror image is dissolved and transformed into an anarchic set of riotous signifiers.

CHAPTER V

Modern Japan: Recovering the Body and Expanding the Boundaries of Self in Butoh

Introduction

The dance, *A Story of Chickenpox* starts extremely slowly, as Hijikata standing alone and tall, begins to move, the tranquility broken by sharp movements of the head and the background soundscape of cacking birds and swirling wind. The discord of the scene is intensified by the wearing of a quilted male kimono with female obi, tied back to front and bouffanted hair and light beard. [531] The sleeves of his costume become like wings, as Hijikata lowers the centre of gravity which contrasts with the lightness and alacrity of his movements. In the foreground the heads of the first row of the audience can just be discerned, a little lower than the almost bare and darkened stage. Hijikata starts to lift his toes, then slowly steps across the boards, remains still for a moment before turning and continues lifting his foot cautiously then stalls again. The various breaks and progressions are now accompanied by traditional Japanese music. Such oscillation continues as he moves his head right and left, swings his arms, and then lifts his lower leg, at a right angle from the thigh, his knee and ankle protruding. He passes through a series of configurations, transforming the balance and architecture of his form, at times seeming open, loose, and puppet-like, at others deformed and stiffened. He is later seen kneeling, swaying his shoulders, then alternating stepping with toes and ball of the foot, all facets of movement precisely controlled. Later, as a photo reveals, Hijikata is bent over, in foetal position, hands like claws scraping at the floor, his head lowered and looking to the side.[532] After dancing alone for the first ten minutes, a group of eight performers file onto the stage, semi-naked, crouching low and huddled close together, slowly stepping and bobbing gently, followed by quick turns. Each strike with their bare feet makes the boards

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[531] Ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 140-1 and ibid.Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, pp. 264-5.

[532] Ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 284.

resound more loudly as their presence grows bolder. Other compositions of dancers appear with faces painted white, in kimono and *geta*, the cracking sound of these wooden clogs in contact with the stage. One such group of seated women lift their right legs high, revealing their crotch, all with grimacing faces and wearing bouffant-styled hair.

The final scene (described in detail at the beginning the last chapter), depicts a base and tortured body, heavy to the floor, inwardly closing, as if to probe the depths of itself.[533] Hijikata is sitting, wearing a ragged loincloth; a filmy substance covers the surface of his skin like the silk strands of a spider's web. He extends his left leg and right arm out to the side, turns and folds insect-like, to the sound of a French folklore song.[534] His right arm extends to the ceiling while his legs are folded, then allowing the floor to embrace his weight he lies down, head and legs painfully lifted as he struggles with the forces of gravity. Pushed to excess, he moves in sharp convulsions, his obscene and faltering body appears to collapse. He unfolds cautiously, his legs searching to shift his weight to sitting position but failing falls head first, as if finding difficulty unifying his upper and lower body. His buttocks are raised, arms stretched, a moment of dissonance and ecstasy in this harrowing exertion. The erratic and disordered movements reveal an apparent incompleteness in his dance, yet they are the result of a careful choreography and precise timing. A deliberate and conscious effort is involved, as he rebels against habitual and socially restrained movement, through a discipline to which his highly trained and muscular body attests.

Exposing the Body

Hijikata described the body as 'the remotest thing in the universe,'[535] thus pointing to its paradoxical and ambiguous nature, that most enduring presence in

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[533] Ibid, Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 270.

[534] The song is *Bailero* from the collection entitled *Chants d'Auvergne*. The Auvergne is a mountainous region of France that shares many similarities with Tohoku, including its unfavourable climate and lively folk tradition. See ibid, Kurihara Nanako in ibid.Odette Aslan, Béatrice Picon-Vallin, p. 276.

[535] Ibid, Nanako Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 25.

our lives which is continually absent from our awareness. The body had been denied and neglected in Japanese theatre, hidden beneath numerous folds of silk,[536] and in the case of the female body, excluded entirely,[537] then subjected to the authority of the textually based and western influenced *Shingeki* Theatre. In his dance Hijikata sought to radically bring the body to our attention, constricting the temporal sphere and pulling it back to the here and now. At the same time the body is reconfigured and multi-defined, exposed as unpredictable, permeable and allowed to react to the social and historical pressures that produce, inscribe and bind it. His performance offers a radical corporealism, a body naked and *in extremis*, one that is both released and constrained. On the one hand he stages it in all its immanence, in ecstasy, as site of desires and also as in pain, disturbed and afflicted by violence and cruelty. On the other hand, he allows for the possibility of transcendence, an opening to an encounter with the mystical, the ineffable denied in contemporary society, which involves states of consciousness that lie beyond notions of fixed and stable self. In the process he returns his dance to that of a sacred ritual.

Hijikata's work powerfully challenges modern Japanese society, its complacency, rationality and rigid classification of bodies. His dance advocates flaunting the body's 'aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society'[538] because, 'civilised morality, hand in hand with the capitalist economic system... is utterly opposed to using the body simply for the purpose, means, or tool of pleasure.'[539] He unveils the phallic body, offering it as the site of a spectacle of excess and

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[536] In Kabuki, costumes consisted of layers of kimono that became increasingly sumptuous. Hijikata described it as a dance, 'puffed up with silk wadding' that is, 'completely cut off from the sacred domain.' Ibid, Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 50. Indeed representations of the naked human body are seldom seen in Japanese art, which can be taken as a reflection of cultural attitudes towards the human body. Most notably, during the Heian period (794-1185), the body was completely covered with layers of clothing that were regarded as a symbol of a woman's social standing.

[537] In 1891, the 1629 ban on women acting was rescinded. As previously noted, actresses were gradually reintroduced onto the stage with Shimpa theatre, that is the 'New School of Drama' that came into being towards the end of the nineteenth century.

[538] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 44.

[539] Ibid.

sadomasochistic acts. Foucault saw such intense homosexual pleasure as potentially shattering to personal identity, decentring the subject in order to allow for the possibility of transformation and self-invention.[540] Hijikata explores such diffuse potentialities, the body's desires, power relations and raw sexual energies, enacts his male body as submissive, penetrating, narcissistic, exposed, highlighting areas of contradiction and incoherence implicit within masculinity. In so doing he reveals the hypocrisy and repression at the heart of Japan's modern sexual culture, one that had essentialised sexual identity and distanced itself from a past in which gender had been construed very differently. Indeed, as was described in the first chapter of this thesis, at least from the middle ages male homoerotic desire had been seen as a sacred force, responsible for spiritual awakenings inspired by youthful beauty.

Hijikata's sacrificial body became the heart of his dance, 'sacrifice is the source of the work... Because they bear that obligation, all dancers must first of all be pilloried.'[541] The disruptive presence and intensity of risk and sensory pain in his dance, constricts and demands the immediate attention of both actor and spectator.[542] Hijikata often stages himself and his dancers in situations of physical danger, as their bodies are given full shock potential, punctured,

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[540] Foucault viewed the self as relativist and as a continuous construction, rejecting the notion of its *a priori* substance or essence. He conceived of practices of self-cultivation that are not centred on the ego, as processes through which facets of oneself are explored, to create new styles of personal life that allow one to resist social conditioning and expectation. This process of self-invention and experimentation allows one to transcend limited notions of oneself. The body is given major significance in Foucault's theories, as it is interwoven with systems of power and meaning that are circulated through varied and complex, socially dominant groups and channels. At the same time he recognised that the body is not totally determined, but can offer resistance to these systems and orders of power. He asserted a cultivation and creative use of pleasure, siting sado-masochism as an example of a practice that opens the way for radical transformation and new corporeal possibilities. This intense sexual pleasure allows the body diffuse potentialities that can lead to a shattering of identity, dissolution of the subject and an intense experience of death. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. II: The Use of Pleasure*, Penguin, London, 1987, p. 25.

[541] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 39.

[542] Donald Richie describing the performance *Forbidden Colours*, noted how '...all the movements expressed pain.' The Japan Times, March 7th, 1987.

lacerated and hung from ropes.[543] The white body make-up, which was originally made up of plaster and glue and encrusted onto the skin, caused irritation, hives, cramps, restricted breathing which contracted the consciousness of the dancer.[544] In performance, he starves, cuts, inscribes and metamorphoses the body, fragmenting it, in an act of shattering that mask of seemingly unified identity, the child's misrecognised self-mirror-image in Lacanian discourse.[545] At the same time blood, sweat and spittle seep through the body's surface, rupturing the borders that define the distinction between self and the Other. This abjection that is so threatening to subjectivity within the Symbolic realm is present in performance.[546] Hijikata's work points to the fragility of the Symbolic order and therefore the self, by exposing the flesh's vulnerability, in scenes that portray or suggest a variety of abject fluids that disturb ego identity as they expose it as variable and unstable. The body ceases to be the site of a transcendent subjectivity, as it becomes objectified, physicalised by sensation and subject to suffering. The audience, too, is made to share and engage in this process, inflicting a gaze on the dancer's body that is painful, physical and sexual. Comparing his dance to a striptease, Hijikata wrote, '(d)ance is not about

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[543] The existential presence of explicit pain on stage (rather than its representation), has a ritualistic quality. It offers a way of altering identity and affecting consciousness, as it concentrates energy within the body and focuses awareness. Through visceral images, the audience perceives the reality of suffering as it is experienced directly in the body of the actor.

[544] The paste often appears clotted and has the appearance of open sores that may reference the lacerated skin and keloidal burns of the A bomb victims, as suggested in the last chapter.

[545] In Lacanian terms, the child first meets its subject, seeing its full body image in the mirror and enters into the realm of the Symbolic. The child continues to enhance his/her own individual ego while maturing into a social and cultural being, affecting and being affected by those other bodies around him, which act as mirrors that reflects images for the development of his own identity. See ibid, Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp. 2-4. It is interesting that actual Mirrors or reflective metal surfaces feature in several of Hijikata's performances, however they were all but absent in his training studio, the emphasis being on an inner sense of the body rather than on outer appearance. The only example was a distorted mirror, hung in his 'Asbestos Hall' training studio as it was named, in 1965. Molten at the edges, tactile and clouded as if with accumulations of the past, it can be seen as mocking the Lacanian imaginary understanding of a complete and fixed sense of the 'I' based upon the coherent specular image beheld in the glass. Its constant presence reflected the disorder inherent in the body and the fractured reality of existence, in a society where corporeal images were under the strict regulation of others. See figure 42.

[546] This is because it demonstrates the impossibility of clearly defined borders between the pure/impure and fully constituted/partially formed subject.

showing - but being watched, rubbed, licked and whacked'[547] offering a play of subject/object as the dancer internalises the gaze, objectifying himself, at the same time as becoming fully, subjectively present through the intensity and immediacy of physical sensation.[548]

Hijikata struggled to articulate the meaning of post-war Japan through images of the visceral, sensual and sordid. His is a paradoxical beauty, expressed in contortion, ugliness and decay. The body's materiality, that of 'skin and bone'[549] emerges, 'a dance made flesh and blood,' a Butoh body, emaciated, tensed and disfigured, upright and outstretched or corpse-like in foetal posture. He created a dance language which disturbed, teased the body and its living, moving physicality, 'I think that what's important are the kinds of movements which come from joints being displaced, then from walking disjointedly for a couple of steps, with one leg striving to reach the other.'[550] This was a crippled body, impaired, as if ravaged with age, awkward and ungraceful in the extreme, 'I want to become and be a body with its eyes just open wide, one tensed to the snapping point'[551] and 'I demand a sense of crisis.'[552] It was also a body in critical contradiction, limbs inverted, legs bowed, mouths open, tongues spewing forwards and eyes upturned exposing their whites. Through these extreme postures and syncopated movements, the dancer was forced into a deep inner

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[547] Nanako Kurihara, *The Most Remote Thing in the Universe: Critical Analysis of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh Dance*, PhD. Dissertation, New York University, 1996, p. 43.

[548] Mention must be given here of phenomenological philosophy, especially that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the attention he gave to the body, as the medium through which the world comes into being. At the centre of his work is the corporeal and lived experience, as he posits the embodied subject as inextricably situated in the world. He investigates various dimensions of human reality and the 'givenness' of the world as it is immediately lived through the body, rather than as it is abstracted and conceptualised. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, London, 2002.

[549] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 56.

[550] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 52.

[551] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 59.

[552] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Fragments of Glass; A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 64.

encounter, which acted on the physical sensibility of many who watched, in a powerful way.[553]

The Post-war Period and Western Ideals of Individualistic Autonomy

As noted earlier, Butoh developed out of the dark, post-nuclear war years, a time of severe economic hardship and social chaos, accompanied by the profound humiliation of military defeat. This followed a period of intense occupation of its surrounding Asian neighbours, on whose territory the Japanese army had reproduced Western colonial logic of aggression and subjugation.[554] Japan identified itself with a liminal position, outside the binary opposites of East and West, which helped transcend and erase memories of its conflicts with the USA and aggressions against its former Asian colonies.[555] This was an intensely reflexive period, when new narratives of redefinition and reinvention resounded,

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[553] This tension is frequently increased by the congruent and incongruent rhythms of music that accompanied the dance.

[554] Japan had been forced to sign commercial treaties in the 1850s and 1860s with the USA, Britain, France, the Netherlands and Russia. With the opening of the country, Japan moved from a position of isolationism to militarism and indeed imperialist expansion abroad. Determined to save itself from the colonialist ambitions of France, Britain and Russia, and from the threat of naval dominance in the Pacific posed by the USA, the Japanese command quickly built up a military and naval capability. Their success in war with China in 1894-1895 was followed by another with Russia in 1904-1905. By 1910 Korea had been annexed and from 1931 to 1932, Manchuria was conquered. With these victories came a growing nationalism and sense of invincibility and destiny. Japan continued to be in a virtual state of war, thereafter, extending into Southeast Asia and the western Pacific and considered itself to be on a par with other world powers.

[555] Ibid, Yoshikuni Igarashi, pp. 86 and 130. Also see Carol Gluck ed., *Postwar Japan as History*, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 83-5.
Japan was faced with the dilemma of how to create its own modern identity, while negotiating relations with the outside and casting off the objectivist and patronising category of the 'Oriental Other'. The term *toyo* (translated as the Orient) was employed, as a connection with the civilisations of the East and their values, and was used to contain and unify the disparate aspects and tendencies in Japan. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient; Rendering Pasts into History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 107-114.
The past was revised and history redefined in this comprehensive ideological process, through idealised notions of the orient, in order to create a sense of cultural continuity and national identity. At the same time Japan accepted new, scientific conceptions of knowledge from the West to construct a sense of modernity, (central to which was the human subject, as source and origin of all meaning). It however, also sought to retain its own distinctiveness from both the West and its Asian neighbours. A geo-cultural distinction between itself and Asia was asserted, especially between China and the USA /Europe. This difference would eventually contribute to the war with the USA, which commenced with the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. Japan's own sense of self-identity was intensely discussed, while assuming its cultural and intellectual authority over other countries in Asia whom it regarded as unchanging and undeveloped.

sought through a discourse of science and rationality. One of the continuing and defining problems was how to synthesise various elements of European philosophy with traditional modes of Japanese thought. It was a discourse that unsettled traditional Confucian influenced ideals that had prescribed disciplined attitudes for the body and espoused the relational self bound up within a larger collective identity.[556]

Following the unprecedented crisis of the war, most of Japan's cities were destroyed and with them the traditional social organisation had begun to disintegrate.[557] The collapse of formal structures of meaning resulted in a widespread sense of alienation, loss of national purpose and general confusion. After the defeat, the bankruptcy of traditional authority was brutally exposed, especially with the demise of the divine aura of the Emperor (resulting from his proclamation of human status) and the dismantling of national institutions such as State Shinto.[558] Old frames of reference and models of behaviour that were felt to be responsible for the catastrophic and shameful dénouement were now seen as irrelevant and consequently discredited. These included ultra-nationalism and abstract ideologies that had advocated the sacrifice of individual ideals for those of the greater nation. With the aftermath of surrender and near-economic collapse came such social realities as physical hardship, poverty, occupation and the return of traumatised veterans, which exposed the futile sacrifices made

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[556] Within the many different strands of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, one of the most powerful motifs is that of the self as interpersonal and connected to the family, state, community and cosmos. The tradition emphasises the importance of self-knowledge and cultivation, through engaging in ritual practices and traditions. It is believed that disciplining the movements and postures of the body refines the sensitivities and potential of the individual, an attitude that is maintained within different forms of Buddhism.

[557] In the first mass firebombing of Tokyo by American B29s, the city was reduced to a scorched desert. An estimated 100,000 people died and over sixty further industrial cities were destroyed. There was devastating loss of history and communal memory, with the destruction of great architecture, museums, artefacts and paintings, in addition to films, historical documents, personal belongings, heirlooms and records.

[558] Since the beginning of the reign of Emperor Hirohito (1927), State Shinto was propagated through educational institutions. It emphasised the unquestioning divine status of the emperor and thus became a politicised and nationalistic ideology. According to its mythology, the emperor was the ancestor of the sun-goddess Amaterasu. There was also a call to the prehistoric origins of Japanese culture in an attempt to arouse and mobilise the people, asserting the sense that their national character was unique and exceptional.

during the war and aroused a deep sense of absurdity. Along with these general emotions there was a renewed call for renunciation, to rebuild the country while submitting to foreign presence.

There were ambivalent and contradictory responses moreover, towards increasing modernisation and Westernisation. These included widespread excitement about the potential of new technologies, while the 'West' provided the creative material for artists and an imaginary space for the projection of fantasies. At the same time, the spectacle of mass culture provoked anxieties concerning the commodification of everyday life and the standardisation of values, perceptions and individual identities. The reshuffling of the existing class system saw the status of the individual increasingly determined by such factors as education and financial status, which created greater opportunity along with considerable social disruption. In the immediate post-war years, American ideals of individuality and democracy were superficially incorporated into Japanese society and selected elements of classical and European philosophy were synthesised with traditional modes of Japanese thought.[559] A growing antagonism towards the superpowers developed, however and a widespread desire for a new cultural order that was free from Western social control.[560]

Within the artistic and literary community, physical and individual identity became the most compelling issue of the day, as the body was laid bare and its desires exposed, in order to discover new understandings of the self. These had to be rethought and reconstituted, as did the legitimacy of the active, thinking individual, on the premise that these potentials had been lacking in pre-war Japan. The

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[559] While fundamental modern Western values were being debated and contested by students and intellectuals, they were reading among others, Bataille and Foucault. The works of Nietzsche, with his critique of Eurocentric rationalistic thinking were of intense interest. In theatre it was Antonin Artaud, Bertholt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Jerzy Grotowski, who were avidly read and discussed.

[560] The USA and USSR were held directly responsible for the threat of imminent nuclear war. With American occupation, it became clear that a powerful military government was in charge and that it exercised far-reaching censorship, in spite of the democratic reforms that were made. There was the question of whether the tenets of democracy and individualism institutionalised by the new constitution, were universally preferable to the communal loyalties they were to replace.

need for individual autonomy that was capable of state intervention, crucial to prevent future national calamities, was stressed. These post-war themes demanded a new genre of literature also. The focus shifted to the immediate reality of day-to-day existence, experienced through the materiality of the (male) body and was expressed in a 'literature of the flesh' *nikutai bungaku,* which also gave voice to extreme sexualised and carnal freedoms that had formally been suppressed.[561]

The new constitution of 1947 brought sweeping changes, as the occupation offered enhanced civil rights and the promise of increased personal and artistic autonomy. Emperor-worship, right-wing imperialism and militarism were dismantled and their orthodoxies eradicated.[562] There was a shift to the right, however, with the outbreak of the Korean conflict and the beginnings of the Cold War, which precipitated a purge of the far-left by the conservative Japanese government in collaboration with the American forces.[563] The intensified penetration of Western influence into social, cultural, industrial and political arenas gave rise to a sense of identity crisis and growing resentment towards the occupation. Nostalgia for an idealised pre-war communal life was aroused, as

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[561] It must be noted that sexual partners in the stories were commonly mistresses or prostitutes. These women were linked with over-emotionality, the base and irrational, attributes therefore charged with negative associations. At the same time the sexual humiliation of the emasculated Japanese was also expressed in this literature, as the dominance of the occupiers was expressed through their sexual exploits with Japanese women. Such conduct was condoned by a form of military-controlled prostitution, through which the Japanese male population sought to protect the chastity of 'their women'. Moreover, sexualised and gendered tropes were frequently used, to express the sense of inferiority and subordination felt by Japan in the post-war world order. See ibid, Lisa Yoneyama, p. 190.

[562] The nation was transformed into a parliamentary democracy following a new constitution and a 30-article Bill of Rights, which guaranteed basic human freedoms and outlawed many forms of social discrimination. The USA became responsible for defence, the country was demilitarised and the Emperor was reduced to a constitutional monarch. Women became new national subjects, as other changes included their enfranchisement and the extension to them of basic legal rights such as equality with their husbands, (note that in 1925 universal manhood suffrage had been adopted). At the same time, however, Koreans, Taiwanese and other former colonial subjects who had previously been resident in Japan, were all categorised as non-Japanese aliens and deprived of voting rights.

[563] This was further exacerbated by strategic US operations in the Pacific, which led to Japan's military build-up and the perception among Japanese that this was to be the bastion in the cold war.

leftist intellectuals and artists responded to these events through a process of recuperating and reinterpreting Japan's cultural identity by pursuing its pre-modern legacy. Their desire was to radically create new concepts of Japan's tradition, out of which unique modernist art forms could be created, which would have international and universal status.[564]

The Experimental Counterculture

An intensely creative period followed and the ideas of the early avant-garde were passionately adopted as the foundation for the arts of the late 1950s and 60s. An acute concern with the physical accompanied their project, as the new democracy was articulated through new sets of corporeal images. Bodies that were subjugated to an American-influenced medical discourse and surveillance replaced those that had been regulated by the wartime regime. As described in chapter one, a variety of techniques that included eugenics and sexology, aimed at categorising and disciplining bodies were introduced by the Japanese government. These sought their 'normalisation', sanitation and docility as imperative for Japan's status as an advanced nation and its re-entry into the international community. In response, artists gave priority to the body and with flagrant disregard for any cultural or social orthodoxy, they sought to construct bold new idioms and create a unique counterculture. They incorporated elements from within their own indigenous tradition into their visual, literary and performance art, while intensively engaging with the realities of contemporary Japan. A model of modernism with Japanese cultural and aesthetic sensibilities was therefore offered, as an alternative to that of the West. The political underpinnings that had been so crucial to the work of groups of earlier artists, however, were largely absent.[565] With the failure of the organised politics of the

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[564] The surrealist critic and associate of Hijikata, Takiguchi Shuzo was at the forefront of this movement.

[565] It is interesting to note that a counterculture of artists involved in Futurist, Constructivist, Dadaist and Surrealist trends had started to evolve throughout the 1920s. They were passionately allied to the political aspirations of socialism and the destruction of traditional established social conventions, championing democracy, individual rights and freedoms. Throughout the 1930s and until the end of the Second World War, the totalitarian police crushed the Communists and the allied art movements by arresting, incarcerating and silencing avant-

'Old Left', their work was seen not as an agent for political change as had that of their pre-war predecessors; instead it embraced the quest for self-identity and individual expression.[566]

One such avant-garde group, the expressionist Gutai Art Association (meaning 'concreteness'), emerged in 1954 and staged a number of performances up until the early 1970s. Primary significance was given to the body, as members physically interacted with a variety of materials, for example, dancing in mud or painting with their bodies, which involved sometimes daring and violent gestures in 'Happening-like' events.[567] The materiality of the media used was given priority over symbolism or figurative meaning. This was a concept shared by another experimental group of artists known as 'Mono-ha' or 'School of things' which formed in the late 1960s and continued into the early 1970s. These artists presented ordinary objects as works of art in themselves, unmediated and bare, allowing them to relate to their location and surrounding space. Their installations portrayed a range of materials, including rocks, rusted iron objects, pieces of wood and allowed for reflection on the mediation of the subject within its immediate environment. Phenomenological issues such as those of perception, cognition, representation, presence and subjectivity/objectivity were integral to their work, as was their interrogation of such notions as modernism, Westernisation and 'Japaneseness'. These multidimensional projects invited such critical examination, as the artists themselves were steeped in ideas deriving from European theorists who included Nietzsche, Heidegger, and

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garde liberals, so that their potential for revolutionising Japanese society was never realised. Takiguchi Shuzo (the surrealist poet, critic and friend of Hijikata) and Murayama Tomoyoshi were two of the artists to be arrested, Murayama in 1930 (and subsequently imprisoned twice) and Takiguchi for several months in 1941, because of their perceived connections with international Communism. In a further incident that revealed the brutal consequences of such so called 'political subversion', one of Murayama's colleagues was murdered while in custody in 1933.

[566] Reflecting the immense ruin left after the devastation of war and the dismemberment of the cultural framework, their work often incorporated found pieces of junk material and discarded debris which became known as 'Anti-Art' (*Han geijutsu*).

[567] See ibid, Alexandra Monroe, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, New York, Tokyo: Nissha Printing Company Ltd., 1994, pp. 90-8 and Paul Schimmel and Kristine Stiles, *Out of Action: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Thames and Hudson, 1998, pp. 25-33.

Merleau-Ponty and were to exert an extensive influence on Japanese art over the coming decades.

As described earlier, throughout the 1960s there were continual demonstrations by Japanese students and artists, in opposition to the renewal of the security treaty drawn up with the US in 1951.[568] Through this treaty, Japan had allied itself formally with the US and agreed to set up and operate military bases on Japanese territory. These bitter protests represented a general challenge to increasing cultural changes and American influence and were accompanied by a sense of powerlessness and impotence experienced as a result of the failure of the struggle. A new generation of theatre practitioners during this period attempted to break this paralysis. Their productions were as subversive as the artists described, as they were also engaged in a process of pushing the boundaries of their art forms. This explosion of experimental and confrontational theatrical energy, involved a return to the body as the site of drama, away from the fictionalised characterisation of contemporary theatre. Their work represented a radical departure from the bureaucracy, hierarchy and staid realism of the established Shingeki theatre.[569] The major directors and their companies included; Kara Juro and his 'Situation Theatre', Suzuki Tadashi and the 'Waseda Little Theatre', Ota Shogo and the 'Theatre of Transformation', who emerged from the student theatre societies of the major Tokyo universities.[570] Alternative and improvised venues were sought for their performances, such as cafés, cinemas, shrines, pitched tents and public squares.[571] Their performances

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[568] The treaty allowed the right to station 10,000 American troops on Japanese soil, with the objective of defending Eastern Asia from Communist interference given the unstable situations in China in 1949, the Soviet's expansion of power in central Europe and Korea's growing Communist offensive in 1950. On the eve of the Security Treaty's ratification, one of the artists of the 'Neo-Dada Organisers', Yoshimura Masunobu, strapped a large paper phallus to himself in protest.

[569] By the late 1960s and 70s, Shingeki had become a multi-million dollar business, as struggling troupes had grown into large bureaucracies.

[570] Hijikata's work exerted a great influence on some of these young theatre practitioners, especially Kara Juro and Suzuki Tadashi.

[571] See John K. Gillespie and Robert T. Rolf, eds., *Alternative Japanese Drama; Ten Plays*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1992, pp. 4-5.

problematised modern humanistic concepts such as those of rationality, individual freedom, imagination and the ego.[572]

Principal among these was the 'Situation' troupe formed in 1963 by Meiji University graduates under the charismatic leadership of Kara Juro. This vanguard group creatively used outside spaces as background for productions, including the busy streets of central Tokyo, train stations and even a public toilet.[573] As a movement away from psychological, textually based theatre, Kara's work closely interacted with the external political, social and physical environment. Reminders of Japanese traditions were juxtaposed with futuristic settings within the metropolis and contributed to a fundamental reappraisal of modernisation and current urbanisation trends. The performances attracted the attention of prominent intellectuals and artists in the contemporary pop culture, for example, the scholar Shibusawa Tatsuhiko and graphic designer Tadanori Yokoo,[574] both close associates of Hijikata, while one of its performers, Maro Akaji, worked with Hijikata and established the successful Butoh group, Dairakudakan in 1972.

Two artists very familiar with Hijikata's work were Akasegawa Genpei and Nakanishi Natsuyuki,[575] who helped form the group 'Hi Red Centre' in 1963 and both were at the forefront of the Yomiuri Indépendant exhibitions (1958-1964), which acted as a showcase for emerging artists who were not affiliated to any official academic school or salon.[576] They brought their satirical and absurdist

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[572] This revolutionary performance culture reflected and encompassed the emerging urban change, including its sexual dynamic and experimentation, as entire districts of Tokyo experienced an intensive sexual upheaval, with some containing bars and clubs. The creative energy in performance reflected the mixing of multiple cultures, sexuality, protest, art and commerce.

[573] See Brian Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre: A Century of Change and Continuity*, University of Oxford, 2002, pp. 178-9.

[574] Note that Tadanori had produced the poster for the performance *The Rose-Coloured Dance*.

[575] See ibid, Takaaki Miyama, p. 7. Nakanishi created stage sets, posters and costumes for Hijikata's dance.

[576] The artist Tomio Miki referred to in chapter three of this thesis, also exhibited there. See ibid, Alexandra Monroe, pp. 149-50.

action events to the streets, trains and public spaces of Tokyo, as a protest against the increasing of mass consumer society.[577] These are just some of the many groups of artists and theatre innovators who evolved in the early twentieth century, whose work ran counter to official values. Their influences on the work of Hijikata are easy to discern. Just as these artists created precedents for future generations, contesting the boundaries of art itself, Hijikata's performance inestimably contributed to expanding the perimeters of dance and theatre.

A naturalist literature also emerged, in which a personal notion of the self was given free expression, the 'I-novel', (*watakushi shosetsu* or simply *shishosetsu*).[578] This was a confessional genre as the author put himself into the work, a famous example of which is Mishima's earliest full-length novel, *Confessions of a Mask*.[579] Its first-person narrative style fits well with the prevailing popularity of this literary mode. The human psyche is scrutinised, as Mishima inquires into the status of individual subjectivity and explores such notions as intentionality, the split between mind and body, ego-boundaries and personal autonomy. In its exploration of the relationship between masks and the self, his novel details the narrator's childhood and adolescence, presenting with exceptional directness, a number of obsessive fantasies and ego identities, which increasingly contain cruelty and homoerotic sensuality. The book finally supports the reinstatement of the emperor and imperial institutions, therefore upholding a sense of national identity based on the ancient Japanese spirit.[580] There is

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[577] After one radical event in which Akasegawa used one-sided, bank-like notes as invitations and wrapped them around common objects, he was accused of counterfeiting money and indicted in 1965. There followed a series of trials and two appeals, which became notorious throughout Japan and in 1970 Akasegawa was pronounced guilty by the Supreme Courts. See Nam June Paik, 'To Catch Up or Not to Catch Up with the West: Hijikata and HI Red Centre' in ibid, Alexandra Monroe, pp. 80-1.

[578] This genre of writing was most popular from 1915 to the 1920s.

[579] Yukio Mishima, *Confessions of a Mask*, trans. Meredith Weatherby, New York, New Directions, 1958.

[580] Mishima as referred to earlier committed ritual suicide, *seppuku*, which had been a common practice of the samurai class from the late twelfth to the nineteenth century. A strict code of conduct developed around this warrior class based on absolute loyalty to one's lord, central to which was the notion of non-attachment to life and death. Through Zen practice (which emphasises the erasure of the ego), the aim was to overcome both in one's lifetime.

ambiguity and contradiction surrounding the issue of identity that followed through into his own life-style, as can be seen in the multi-faceted personalities he portrayed and through his narcissistic obsession with the body. With the extravagant posturings and photo-shoots in which he engaged, Mishima seemed intent on inventing a series of selves and personalities for himself, which were underlined by a sense of patriotic excess.

Mention must be made of *Nihonjin*[581] literature that came to prominence in the 1970s and centres on Japanese culture. This movement focussed on descriptions of distinct patterns of Japanese behaviour and thought, and was promulgated by the thinking elite, to promote international understanding. Still present today, this literature places great emphasis on Japanese homogeneity, racial unity, tending towards an idealised ethnocentrism that has provided the material for a popular national discourse. The Japanese sense of self is portrayed as bound up with nature, as outwardly oriented and as the sum of its interactions with others. Japanese social structure is described as being characterised by close personal and familial bonds of kinship and loyalty, qualities that are attributed to a changeless Confucian essence. These concepts link with pre-war writing and debate, and have helped to affirm the myth of the uniqueness of Japanese culture, delineating its boundaries in terms of both Asia and the West. At the same time this literature represents an appeal for the reinvention and regeneration of national cultural identity, adapted to the requirements of progress, while simultaneously retaining a distinctiveness. Its ahistorical nature has resulted in oversimplified, totalising and essentialised understandings of Japanese identity and that of the 'Other', as the West is also imagined as an abstraction and conceptualised in fixed images and generalised terms.[582]

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[581] This translates as the 'theory of Japaneseness'.

[582] This process paradoxically mirrors the same abstract Orientalist manner in which the West has perceived Japan, one that has intensified the sense of self by dramatising the difference from the 'Other'. Oriental culture is idealised and exoticised in a process, which is always accompanied by ethnocentric biases and ideological underpinnings. This positing of exotic and romantic difference in Oriental culture is discussed in the work of Edward Said, (*Orientalism,* New York and

Many Western scholars and commentators have also reinforced these prevailing images. For them, Japanese culture exhibits crucial differences when compared with the West.[583] Even those who are aware of the growing alienation within contemporary society, for example, continue to view the Japanese ego ideal as embedded within interpersonal relationships and respectful of traditionally defined social etiquette. While Japanese conceptions of self are seen as an open system, they are also viewed as intrinsically connected to a diverse hierarchical network of family, community and nation.[584] There has been a great deal of research detailing and mapping the web of relations involved in various Japanese contexts and situations, where commitment, discipline and obligation are seen as defining constituents. Some of these studies have tended to emphasise an idealised and undifferentiated Eastern character, which is characterised by gentleness, harmony and communalism. This is posited in binarised relation with Western modern society, which is perceived as fragmentary, particularistic and

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London: Routledge, 1978), who explored the ideological underpinnings of Western views of the Near and Middle East. He argues that Orientalism is the master narrative of Western imperialism, which constructs and controls its subjugated 'Other'. Said draws on Foucault's understanding of discourse and power dynamics, which offers detailed authoritative knowledge of the 'Orient', thereby producing and promoting the binarised categories of 'familiar' and 'other'. It must be noted that Said's critique has been problematised by theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bharba. They question the dualistic assertions within his theory, arguing for a more complex and historically variable approach. This would give space for multifarious difference, such as that based on gender and class, which would then allow the possibility of subversion and resistance.

[583] One of the first of such studies was Ruth Benedict's seminal work published in 1946, (*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword; Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company), which has remained influential in Japanese studies. It was the result of an American government initiative to understand the motives behind Japanese military action. In this she details and indeed generalises personality traits and patterns. She characterises Japanese culture as an integrated system, defined in terms of a network of obligations within hierarchical organisations. Her approach is one of cultural relativism and although she avoids making value judgments about race, she does take a deeply ahistorical view of the country.

[584] Dorinne K. Kondo in *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace,* Chicago Press, 1990 takes an open, pluralistic and self-reflexive approach to her study. She gives examples of Japanese people who challenge the persistent tropes by which they are constituted in the West. An essentialised collection of fixed identities is not presented, instead she portrays 'subject-positions' as multiple and variable in different contexts, as being constantly created while interacting with others and their environments. The complexity of people's lives is portrayed along with the disciplines that craft their different selves. The Japanese self emerges as neither entirely collective nor individualistic, but as constantly shifting in relation to the demands of the socio-cultural world.

atomistic.[585] The West is seen as giving pre-eminent status to ideas of self as stable, autonomous and individualistic, notions which are understood as having been rooted in the post-Enlightenment and strongly orientated towards rationalism.[586]

Conclusion to this Section

Since its earlier opening to the West in 1868, Japan had looked nervously for signs of its own identity into the mirror of the West, a process that continued with increasing intensity throughout the twentieth century and increasingly in response to post-war American occupation. In the rapidly changing world, with its shifting social relations, perceptions and ideologies, Japan continually undertook to reinvent itself. The Japanese imported ideas surrounding individualism, in a historical process that had begun in the late nineteenth century and continued with renewed debate after the end of World War II. The post-war years saw the remaking of Japan in the image of Western democracy. The increasing prosperity and materialism of the late 1950s and 60s, subsumed all difference under a blanket of homogeneity and rationality, while Japanese culture found itself caught between diverse cultural crosscurrents with its identity compromised. The process of Japan becoming a modern nation state excluded certain myriad possibilities, to which the artistic community eagerly responded. The form and

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[585] It must also be noted that in the West, Japanese people are often portrayed in opposition to Western ideal selves, as intuitive rather than rational, along with such tropes as sensitivity, immediacy and spontaneity. These essentialist conclusions have often persisted among Western-trained scholars of Japan, since the earliest studies of Japanese culture. While accepting that it is possible to speak of culturally specific values, worldviews, moralities, etc., it is imperative that cultural complexity, contradiction and diversity are foregrounded. This would act as a movement away from simplistic binarised thinking, which might be understood as a product of power and discursive production in the Foucauldian sense.

[586] Foucault stated that man 'is a quite recent creature' that did not exist prior to the eighteenth century, (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Tavistock, 1970, p. 308). The understanding of personal self and subject is an epistemological product of both the Classical Age and the Enlightenment. With the advent of the Cartesian subject (René Descartes 1596-1650), the idea of the rational, autonomous and consistent subject became central. Western philosophy has been characterised by two definitions of physical reality; the notion that it is comprised of, 1) the subjectivity of the individual ego and, 2) the belief in the objective external world. This Cartesian duality of subject-object relationship is based on the notion of disembodied observer and objectified field and has dominated Western cultural thought and philosophical tradition.

content of their work differed widely as they posed varied and complex questions, offering refreshing new perspectives while maintaining a dynamism and receptiveness to change. They opened up spaces within which alternative narratives, histories, subjectivities and cultural formations could resonate. These challenged assumptions surrounding Japanese homogeneity and its singular narratives, projects in which the body almost always took centre stage. Hijikata, too, was involved in this process, radically exposing the body while freeing the subject of his performance to take up new positions.

The Body in Butoh Performance

Hijikata's dance presents multiple images that challenge notions surrounding the ideal body, while experimenting with alternative possibilities and forms of being. The compositions of his performances are often characterised by discord, with the staging of half-light, asymmetries, decentred poses, muted colours and the use of non-sequential time and space that creates evocative and paradoxical impressions. A continuously changing subject field is revealed, as the dancer's body moves through different states of metamorphosis, 'I love it when a human being almost becomes a thing or part of a human completely turns into a thing, for example, an artificial leg.'[587] A multiplicity of posturings and shapes are offered, in which the naturalistic body is abandoned and replaced with the fragmented and unstable. He creates configurations of sometimes ghost-like figures and weird, hybridised creatures, which shatter the anthropomorphic image and pose resistant forms of identity that play with the notion of the real.[588] He writes, '(i)nside this one body, there are various mythic things that are still sleeping intact'[589] and his performances awaken and privilege such imaginary states of being - illusory, irrational and ambivalent identities - as an overt challenge to the fixed categories that defined the cultural body.

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[587] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 53.

[588] In a scene of a 1974 performance, for example, Ashikawa is dressed in a fish-like outfit. See ibid, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 123.

[589] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Fragments of Glass; A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 68.

His constantly shifting performances involve the unravelling of the bodily form, as boundaries between human and inhuman are crossed, while reality/fiction become indistinguishable,

> I have transformed myself into an empty chest of drawers and a gasping willow trunk. I have also seen ghosts doing sumo (wrestling) in a parlour and have been able any number of times to create a baby who picks up their bones and bleeds at the nose.[590]

In a similar way to his writings, which contain a grammar of fragments, breaks and discontinuity, the visual ambiguity of the images produced in his performance produce a highly complex, contradictory and compelling dynamic. Watching Hijikata's works, is to engage in a process of negation, in which meanings and references emerge, only to implode and be emptied out, opening the pathway to intensities of experience that exceed interpretation.

As was described in earlier chapters, in *Revolt of the Flesh,* Hijikata's stages himself in a variety of costumes, which create a series of identifications that are constructed, dismantled then dissolved. These caricatured images are played out in varied intensities of rhythm and texture. A shifting soundscape adds to the increasing volatility of the piece, as Hijikata is seen disrobing, his form flickering against tall reflective metal sheets that cut the field of vision. This pastiche masquerade is played out with a mixture of parody and irony, revealing identity as no more than a combination of masks, roles and as unstable and incomplete. The audience watches through the glare of a single light that casts its shadows, allowing the viewer a partial body offered in a number of perspectives, at times appearing solid, then vaporous, a shadow play of appearances, moods and textures. The continual visual shifts between feminine/masculine throughout the dance play with the notion of the real, challenging the phallic symbol of absolute truth and certainty with the indeterminate and illogical. At the same time the concept of the Self as performative, improvisational and discontinuous, is revealed, placing in crisis notions of pure and consistent identity.

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[590] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 59.

As has been discussed, Hijikata's work sought to confound and overturn orthodox images of sexual identity. He thereby subverted given conceptions and assumptions on which ideological notions of selfhood are built. In the first Butoh dance, *Forbidden Colours*, in 1959, two men appear on a semi-darkened stage. Their crisscross shadows create an image that lacks substantial solidity and coherence, as a reminder of the mutability and ever-changing nature of sexual desire and identity, while suggesting the nebulous, subliminal impulses of Japanese culture. His stage becomes a site to explore gender ambiguity, to deconstruct sexual signifiers and reconstruct androgynous identities. Ashikawa's ambivalent gender acts, distort and challenge established representations of the female body. Her performances undo culturally sanctioned fictions of 'woman', by moving beyond the perspective of the female as having a coherent gender identity defined by an ideology of sexual difference. Her depictions of feminine physicality act as an open text that is always evolving, open and incomplete, while offering multiple subject positions for the spectator. She takes up marginal positionalities as her ephemeral body resonates at the in-between of corporeality, visuality and sexual difference. The instability and fragmentation of her performance express a subjectivity that is uncertain, emptied of substance and uninscribed within a dominant ideology that asserted 'woman' as an expression of patriarchal expectations.

Subjectivity is further challenged in the performance *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, in which the complex dynamic around issues of individuation, separation and symbiotic union is portrayed. In one scene, two men wrestle with one another, connected by a long tube as they struggle to engage and disengage, breaking down the barriers between self and other.[591] This image of a doubled body expresses a confusion and anxiety around physical demarcations, while the corporeal boundaries of containment are extended through the breathing apparatus, as if to emphasise interconnection and interdependence. This

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[591] This description is based on photographs in the previously noted publication by Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 50.

contestation of physical limits is repeated throughout his performances, as in *A Story of Chickenpox*, where Hijikata is portrayed as on the verge of collapse, as lying supine, his haggard flesh flayed, resembling a decaying corpse. In the scene, this liminal figure portrays the ultimate abjection and transgression of identity, that of death as a violation of personal integrity.[592] Abject fluids that pass through the borders of the skin, such as blood, spittle, pus and urine, which mark the distinction between self and other, are also present or referred to in dance and writings. These contaminating fluids threaten corporeal thresholds and the stability of the Symbolic order, creating a sense of uncertainty and crisis. This blurring, deconstruction and dispossession of the subject in performance, is continuously evoked in Butoh dance, as it celebrates the slippage of formal boundaries and the breakdown of the Cartesian duality of inside/outside. Furthermore, the frequent non-wearing of costume by performers suggests a natural animal-like state, whose unusual posturings and movement belongs to an alien world of beast-like creatures that trouble the cultural boundaries that maintain 'appropriate' bodies. This play of identities also extends to Hijikata's belief that his older sister lived inside him, as an incorporating of and identifying with the Other, which points to a complete breakdown of margins and the radical transformation of the self.[593]

It was not just Hijikata's stage that became the site of difference, privileging the illusory and irrational, but also his lifestyle, as already described. His constant reinvention's and often shocking, sensuous and bizarre behaviour constituted a threat to the overly oppressive present-day reality, suggesting it to be never entirely knowable but subject to alterity.[594] In numerous outfits and disguises, he delighted in the presence of ambiguity, frequently cross-dressing and impersonating gender roles. He sometimes wore women's kimono, his hair long

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[592] Ibid, p. 109.
[593] See ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 58.
[594] See for example, Takashi Morishita et al. eds., p. 109.

and matted, speaking in women's language,[595] thus reconfiguring the 'truth' of the body, while parodying and disrupting the borders that marked conventional gender roles.[596]

Hijikata was fascinated by the pre-Symbolic world of children and their physical learning processes.[597] He spent some time observing their movements, entering vicariously into their pre-conceptual consciousness.[598] Not yet fully integrated into the community and its cultural conditioning, their antics inspired him, as he described how they, '...treated their hands as if they were not their own hands. Their bodies were their own but their hands they treated like things. That's why they probably felt themselves to be 'other'. Ashikawa remembered his instructions, 'to be more like a child, with less concern for self-identification' in order to explore and experience the body more deeply.[599] He admitted that children's movements had a 'far-reaching effect on my Butoh... What I learned from these toddlers has greatly influenced my body.'[600] He described the secret and 'roots of Butoh'[601] as lying within, 'the feeling somewhere inside your body that your arm is not really your arm,'[602] which emphasises the body's role as a thing, as a paradoxical union of both object and subject, removed from itself and made strange. He continued describing and positing a body that is defamiliarised, extended and placed in various positions of identification/misidentification, thus open to further transformation.

He also criticised dance techniques that were intent on 'taming' the body,

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595 See ibid, Nanako Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh', *TDR, spring 2*000, p. 20.
596 See figure 5.
597 That is in Lacanian terms, the pre-mirror-stage world of the Subject.
598 There are frequent references made to children in Hijikata's writings. He described his fascination with the movements of the toddlers left behind while their parents worked in the rice fields and how he, 'would go and sneak a look at these kids.' See ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 74.
599 Ibid, Holborn and Ethan Hoffman eds., p. 16.
600 Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 75. Also see ibid, Nario Goda, p. 51.
601 Ibid.
602 Ibid.

> (o)ther kinds of dance, such as classical ballet or flamenco, (which) apply a uniform method of movement from the exterior and then train the dancer, taming and domesticating the body. My way is the exact opposite. I always use all my power to focus on my lost wandering self.[603]

Then not respecting any 'natural' way of moving, he offered a deformation, through a series of disarticulations,

> (o)nly when, despite having a normal, healthy body, you come to wish that you were disabled or had been born disabled, do you take your first step in Butoh. A person who dances Butoh has just such a fervent desire, much like a child's longing to be crippled.[604]

He expressed desires which were central to his dance, 'I just need to dislocate my joints'[605] emphasising the body's jointedness as noted earlier in this chapter and to, '[r]un with the mind of a blind person."[606] These ways of moving lead to an extreme sense of displacement and a paradoxical freedom, this is developed through an intense level of discipline of the body and its behaviour.[607]

The Modernisation Process and its Effects on the Body

With the post-war economic recovery came wide sweeping changes, which affected the most intimate level of people's everyday lives, including the life of the body.[608] In the years that followed, there was an intense desire to move decisively beyond the negativity of the past. There was rapid transformation, a

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[603] Ibid.

[604] Ibid, Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 56.

[605] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 76.

[606] Ibid.

[607] This displacement of the body could reference the farm workers, especially those who worked the rice fields in the damp soil, which caused physical deformity.

[608] Elizabeth Grosz explores the connection between the self and culture and argues that both are defined through the body. In return they define it and its boundaries, as she states, '(t)he body is, so to speak, organically/biologically/naturally "incomplete"; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities which require social triggering, ordering... ' She describes the city as having an important role in the body's social constitution, 'the place where the body is representationally re-explored, transformed, contested, reinscribed' and indeed, regulated. See 'Bodies-Cities' in *Sexuality and Space*, Beatriz Colomina ed., Princeton Papers on Architecture, 1992, pp. 243 and 249.

period of intense prosperity when Japan turned an envious gaze towards the material wealth of American society.[609] In the rapid reconstruction, rational, streamlined buildings, stark tower blocks and large-scale housing projects replaced the rubble left after the destruction of the war and helped to create vast urban landscapes.[610] In the 1960s, Tokyo became a showcase of innovation, an urban jungle of steel and concrete, a city of wide streets, strung with bright lights and neon. There was massive migration from the rural areas into the cities and the surrounding dormitory suburbs, which constituted a movement from the horizontal spatial plane of the countryside to the verticality of skyscraper living.[611] The new multi-stories were often arranged in uniform rows of dull angular blocks that starkly contrasted with the more traditional low housing and its narrow, intricate, alleyways.[612] This concentration of the urban population and the constraints of apartment life, contributed to the breakdown of the rural extended family and traditional social networks. At the same time these changes created one of the main characteristics of modern city life, anonymity and hence increased freedom of the individual.

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[609] The economic recovery in the mid 1950s (assisted by the Korean War, as Japan was called on to supply the allied forces) brought increased industrialisation, the creation of millions of jobs and an expansion in the number of Japanese cities. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics symbolised Japan's economic growth and helped create a positive image of the country abroad. There was increasing optimism especially among the wealthy middle class due to the visible progress in technology and the abundance of goods. Little of the prosperity however, reached the working classes, a factor that together with crowded urban living conditions, led to widespread feelings of discontent. See Robert N. Bellah, *Imagining Japan; The Japanese Tradition and its Modern Interpretation*, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 53-5 and Roman Cybriwsky, *Tokyo: The Changing Profile of an Urban Giant*, London: Belhaven Press, 1991, pp. 84-93.

[610] The Meiji government's unrelenting pursuit of Westernisation led to an increased interest in Western-style city planning and architecture, with the introduction of Western theories, building materials and methods. Western technology also had a huge influence on interior design. See Gideon S. Goany, Hanaki Keisuke and Osamu Koide, *Japanese Urban Environment*, UK: Pergamon Press, 1998, pp. 63-9.

[611] Following the war with the repatriation of troops from abroad and migration from the countryside, the housing shortage became so desperate that various state-guided initiatives were set up, with the intention of providing a dwelling for each household in the country. See André Sorensen, *The Making of Urban Japan: Cities and Planning from Edo to the Twenty First Century,* New York and London: Routledge, 2002, p. 185 and Maly L. Hanneman, *Japan Faces the World, 1925-1952*, UK: Pearson, 2001, pp. 103-5.

[612] The transformation of the city's spatial arrangement, with its new boundaries, communication networks and place names, led to the loss of certain landmarks and most of the old architecture. This break with historical symbols and links with the past contributed to a sense of dislocation and a fading of the pre-war collective memory.

In the high-density cities, the household was physically restructured and traditional materials were replaced with those from the West.[613] There were transformations in the use and arrangement of the domestic living space, which traditionally had been separated by sliding paper partitions, *fusuma/shoji*, allowing adjoining areas to spill into each other while remaining quite distinct.[614] Rooms and apartments were more strictly divided by permanent walls and daily activities became privatised and concealed. The interface between the 'natural' and 'social body' now had to be negotiated differently as new ways of relating were required, which demanded different cultural codes, manners and conduct. Habitual, everyday patterns of movement were also in a process of change, in keeping with new cultural realities and social behaviours. Western forms of gadgetry and machinery were introduced to the home as everyday life became increasingly mechanised. By the 1960s industrial mass production increased supplies and lowered costs, so that cars, TVs, refrigerators, washing machines and many other electric appliances, which once were considered luxury were now essentials.[615] With contemporary furnishings such as chairs, tables and beds raised from the floor, the dream-life of 'convenience' and 'comfort' could be attained.[616]

Hijikata referred to this changed reality, describing the 'madly busy'[617] people of Tokyo as having 'overly soft lives.' [618] He mocked these values, describing the people he knew in the city, 'inhabitants of the transparent, mechanical "world",'

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[613] Changes to interior design that sought to improve and democratise behaviour in the home had begun in the early Taisho era (1912-1926).

[614] These partitions also allowed continuity between the internal and external space, opening into the courtyard, which was often shared.

[615] See John W. Dower, 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict' in *Postwar Japan as History*, Carol Gluck ed., University of California Press, 1993, p. 17.

[616] See Susan B. Hanley, *Everyday Things in Pre-modern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture,* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997, p. 196. As a result of these transformations, anxieties arose that included nostalgia for an idealised pre-modern collective life and a romantic evocation of the past, when the Japanese were in closer relationship with nature, the family and community.

[617] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 72.

[618] Ibid.

without any ties to bleeding nature and even without smell' and continued to describe them as corpses.[619] Once a nation that sat primarily on the floor and lived close to the ground, new postures now had to be taken up in response to structural changes. There were transformations in people's experience of themselves moving and being in the world. The body and its alignments, orientations and kinaesthetic abilities had to accommodate and negotiate these new spatial, material and cultural environments.

Hijikata set out to recover the immediate experience of the body's materiality that had somehow become lost in the contemporary world,

> (o)ne skin is that of the body approved by society. The other skin is that which has lost its identity. So, they need to be sewn together, but this... only forms a shadow. I admire our ancestors who took good care of the feeling in the soles of their feet.[620]

He continually returned to the earth as the supporting base for his dance movements, asserting, 'I gravitate to mud'[621] and stated that the Japanese, 'walk as if stealing their own footprints.'[622] In this he is redefining the Japanese physique, through drawing on the corporeality of Japanese farmers and their way of sinking the lower part of the body towards the floor, in order to balance posture. Acutely aware of society's increasing alienation from nature, he attempted to retrieve its connection by appealing to his rural childhood in Tohoku. As was discussed earlier, his own provincial roots remained extremely significant throughout his dance career, as he believed that one's cultural surroundings mark and trace the body in a subconscious but powerful way.[623]

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[619] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 43.
[620] Ibid.
[621] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 74.
[622] Ibid, p. 73.
[623] As described earlier, Hijikata constantly made reference to the influence on him of Tohoku, his birth-region, 'living in the freezing north country of Tohoku, where it was so cold that when you bent a finger it made a cracking sound. That's the kind of place, those are the things that made me what I am.' Ibid, Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 50.

Indeed he understood that this cultural character of the body determines the way one gestures and behaves, as habitual patterns of movement are developed through interacting with the environment.[624] At the same time, through intense and repetitive training, he sought to move beyond these deep patterns, in order to return to the simple, natural 'pre-inscripted' body and to, 'its being stripped of things.'[625] He called for a rejection of automatic ways of behaving, conditionings and mannerisms, so that dancers could, 'scrutinise their own bodies'[626] and create a new body culture in performance. He attempted to undo the imprints of daily life within his dancers' bodies, erasing habits, in order to recreate and reconstruct postures.

Submerged just below the sleek surface of this new consumer culture lay the cruel contradictions and inequalities of capitalism. In the commodity driven and disembodied lifestyle of the rapidly changing Tokyo, natural processes which were seen as central to human life, such as those of birth and death, became institutionalised and increasingly removed from sight. The new cityscapes created their own social rules and expectations, placing undesirable elements at a safe distance outside its peripheries, thereby creating deviant social identities. This 'other' that was lost through the economic fissures, yet still lurked in the shadows of Japanese society, was represented as aberrant and threatening to its coherence and 'civilised' morality. Those who deviated from the criteria of 'normal', or resisted the call to be consuming subjects, were regulated by those various discourses and all pervasive operations of power, which have been so extensively detailed in the work of Foucault.[627]

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[624] Hijikata disapproved not only of cultural conditioning, as Tanaka Min described how he, 'was always angry about how our bodies are controlled historically.' See ibid, 'Min Tanaka, Farmer/Dancer or Dancer/Farmer: An interview by Bonnie Sue Stein', *TDR*, summer 1986, p. 146.

[625] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Fragments of Glass; A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 63.

[626] Makoto Ooka, 'Tatsumi Hijikata's Philosophy of Butoh' in *Body on the Edge of Crisis,* Nario Goda ed., p. 10.

[627] Foucault's most radical argument was that the individual is always already constituted by discursive technologies and theories, which are intertwined with power. His interest in the constitution of subjectivity and selfhood can be most clearly seen in his final work, *The History of Sexuality.* This continues his historical inquiry into insanity, criminality and sexuality, in which he

Hijikata sought to remind spectators of this abjected realm, returns to these marginal spaces and rips open the sutures which had helped camouflage them. In his *Dance of Darkness*, he shocked audiences with graphic visceral images, making them confront the grotesque and violated bodies concealed, but not fully forgotten, behind the veneer of modern society, stating, 'light, in general, sometimes seems indecent to me,' pointing to the primal substrate of Dionysian darkness where lies the possibility of boundaries being violently breached.[628] In the liminal, in-between space of the theatre itself, he stages these bodies and makes their silent presence audible, immediate, reminding us of the chaos of the human condition.

Artaud whose writing, as has been evident had greatly influenced Hijikata, similarly had advocated an appreciation of and return to, the latent state of 'cruelty' residing in humanity, at an historical juncture when the overcoming of the abhorrent and abject in society, seemed possible. He was the principle victim in his own theatre of cruelty, suffering the intense anguish of a hallucinatory psychosis that he often expressed publicly through delirious outbursts. Just as he did not respect the distinction between the stage and life, Hijikata too carried his

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investigates the effects of various techniques of regulation used by social institutions of correction and training that include juvenile homes, prisons, hospitals and psychiatric institutions. The body he believed is made amenable to power and is indelibly marked by inscriptions that occur as a result of such coercive and corrective institutions. This genealogical critique is concerned with technologies of power and domination, through which the individual has been objectified, constrained and supervised. He traces the web of discourses, especially those on sexuality that have inscribed and manipulated the body. These he asserts have proliferated over the last two centuries through the state and various institutions, especially through the writings of doctors, psychoanalysts and many other 'specialists' who attempt to attain objectivity through their scientific approaches. These systems of sexual knowledge share the premise that one's defining personality is characterised by sexual practices and desires, while seeking to 'normalise' and regulate deviant behaviour such as that of male-male eroticism. He goes on to delineate the dynamics of social control, an issue that is extremely complex, as not all forces of subjection are simply imposed on the self from the 'outside'. He stresses 'techniques of the self', through which the power relations are applied by individual selves, as they become the accomplices of power by 'subjecting' themselves to its regulation. Also see ibid, Yoshikuni Igarashi, pp. 151-3, who describes the increased regulation, visibility and police surveillance within Tokyo.

[628] Dionysus, the God of intoxication, wine, delirium and dance, enacts different roles and wears masks that annul personal identity. Its disruptive and excessive drive is associated with the immediacy of entering into an altered nature, in which one's individuality is surrendered.

performance over into the everyday. Like Artaud's, his very existence was seen as unconventional and different, as he did not fit socially into the dominant ideology. He was acutely aware of his outsider status in urbane Tokyo, coming as he did from a rural, extreme region of Japan. He courted alienation through eccentric and antisocial behaviour, inhabited the ambiguous, hybrid spaces, living on the edge of the underworld, socialising with criminals, transvestites, prostitutes and in his writings there are implicit references to drug use[629] and criminality, 'I grew up always sniffing out criminals... '[630] His dance too shared, ' ...a common basis with crime, male homosexuality, festivals, and rituals... '[631] He developed a cult-like group of students around him who embraced his lowly status. Isolated from the rest of the world, he made them embrace mundane and sometimes demeaning work and activities such as cabaret dancing. At the same time he ascetically deprived them of basics like sleep, food and drink, inflicting pain and making them practice relentlessly, physically and mentally for weeks, acts conducive to producing altered states of consciousness in which individual identity is broken down.[632]

Enacting exaggerated and freakish images, wearing a kimono, his hair long, he projected an open-ended subjectivity, parodying and confusing the borders that marked acceptable gender roles. Both he and his disciples looked like strange and threatening underground creatures, which recalled the belief of performer as societal outcast, whose purpose was reintegration with the spirits, a world far distant from the effects of reason. He referred to his open subjectivity as that which, 'wavers in mixing and confusing the imaginative process and the real-life process.'[633] He broke down the barriers between his art and life, just as Antonin

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[629] See ibid, Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 38.

[630] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 43.

[631] Ibid, p. 44.

[632] One of Hijikata's early students Yamada Ippei, recalls how he and his fellow dancers were allowed only three hours sleep. Returning from a cabaret or nightclub performance at 1am, they continued training until dawn. He went on to form the troupe *Hoppoh Butoh-ha*. See ibid, Mayumi Saito, p. 29 and Don Kenny, 'Dancer Hijikata Appears for First Time in Four Years' in *The Japan Times*, November 11, 1972.

[633] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 45.

Artaud did, carrying over his theatrical and philosophical inquiries - his experimentation on mind and body, his constant reinvention and his use of drugs - into the way in which he lived his life, as an alternative mode of resistance. In different ways each assumed and empowered marginal positionalities and profoundly challenged male normative subjectivity and its privileges.

Conclusion

Hijikata's Butoh was created during a time of rapid capitalist development accompanied by intensified penetration of Western influence into the social, cultural and political arenas. This gave rise to a profound sense of identity crisis, both on the individual and national level. There was growing antagonism towards American occupation and the commodification of everyday life, but at the same time there was enormous creative energy and artistic ferment. This was also a period when theatre practitioners and performance artists were struggling with the question of how to radically create new concepts of Japanese performance, which included issues around actor training, audience/actor/director relationships, strategies of stage presentation and alternative performance spaces. Hijikata's dance is situated at the intersection of several artistic, philosophical and political debates, which included a re-evaluation of the body, sexuality, selfhood/subjectivity and the rationalising principles of Western metaphysics. He created a unique dance form, which challenged those systems that regulated Japanese society and controlled individual desires and passions.

He presented multiple images and subject positions on stage, which destabilised and confounded coherent identity, while challenging the notion of the physical ideal. Hybridised creatures and contradictory, illusory identities were displayed, in which the corporeal form was unravelled and radically transformed. The body was recovered in his dance, as he reasserted the physical, creating it in peril, degraded and naked, offering it not as a sign that should mean anything, but as a play of multiplicity. At the same time, he allowed the presence of the lost subjectivities, those border identities in contemporary society, to reverberate.

Stripping the body of habitual ways of behaving, he attempted to liberate it from Western cultural influence, restoring its traditional uses that had been robbed in the process of modernisation. The notion of stable and abiding gender was undermined in his performance, of provocative and at times outrageous images, eroticism and homosexuality in excess. At the same time, he exposed the concept of essential and individual self as an historical and social product, rejecting it in favour of that produced in performance. In a process of self-invention, he constructed other forms of pleasures and relationships and inflicted pain on himself and his dancers, as if to communicate intensely with the audience, while revealing the hidden violence that underscored Japanese history and culture. He allowed his ecstatic and searing flesh to open onto and to mirror those surrounding bodies, confronting and disturbing the spectator on a deep level, moving beyond the boundaries which define inside/outside, self/other and subject/object dualities.

CHAPTER VI

The Erasure of Self and the Sacred

Introduction

Coloured pictures taken of a scene from the performance *Lion and Christ, Gibasan* of 1972,[634] (Figure 32) reveal a bearded Hijikata wearing only a loincloth, his head adorned by a broken colourful fan, its red tones echoing the bloodstains that sully his white powdered face. His emaciated and exhausted body is elevated on ropes and attached to a crude wooden structure, isolated and abandoned. The corporeality of the scene is emphasised, as Hijikata appears defeated, tormented and pushed to the extreme. This undignified anguish reveals a man dispossessed and thrust into ultimate abjection, a Christ-like figure, its boundaries shattered, in a process of unravelling and destined for ruin.

Having explored the changing definitions of individuality, self and the body in modernising Japan, this chapter will now critique the radical questioning of notions of individual self, contained within Bataille's and Artaud's work, before turning again to Hijikata's Butoh. Hijikata's strategy of self-stylisation links him with these two writers, whose work as has been evident deeply inspired him and in this chapter both their life-styles will again be briefly discussed. All of these artists offered an appraisal of what they considered sterile bourgeois society and embraced the rejected, profane world, while exposing the shocking and revolting residing at the extremes. Bataille rebelled against the notion of separateness, choosing instead to embrace erotic and sacrificial encounters that would radically open the limits of one's being, while bridging the gap with the external 'Other'. Encounters with horror, violence, the disgusting and extreme states of divine rapture fascinated him, as he believed they revealed, 'a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self.'[635] Artaud, too, desired intense

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[634] See Takashi Morishita et al. eds., pp. 118-119.
[635] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 17.

communicative relationships and possibilities, expressed through his writings, drug taking and experimentation with esoteric belief systems. His life and dramaturgy reveal a commitment to the negation of a subjectivity constituted by socially acceptable norms, as he pushed the frontiers of the acceptable, expressed through his personal crises. He continually asserted himself as a subject-in-process, assuming fictional lives and personalities, in an endeavour for personal re-invention. At the same time, he attempted to confront his own fragmented inner state and to unify his splintering mind and body. Each artist created a variety of positions in their work, which have opened the way to new ideas of subjectivity as multiple, heterogeneous and incomplete. In different ways, each tested their ontological boundaries through entering into and living within, an immediate present, while in the process staging themselves as a sacred force.

Bataille's interrogation of Individuality and Collectivity

The humanistic notion of the integrated, unitary, autonomous individual is continually contested and decentred in Bataille's work, through the erotic or within the sacrificial and mystical experience. The paradox of the sacred expressed in eroticism and the connection between death and sexual excitement, are constant themes in his texts. A continual return to the body is made, as a reminder of man's 'carnal birth'[636] and his connection to nature, filth and all that is animal. Great emphasis is placed on the social sphere within the framework of his 'general economy', in which the self is constructed and lost, as opportunity is given for intense communion with others. The realms of the ritual, festival and artistic he believed, unleash the possibilities of excess, abandon and intoxicating states such as drunkenness, anguish, laughter, in which identity is ruptured and the sacred emerges. Furthermore, it was the concept of a life 'lived from within, lived to the point of a terror,'[637] that increasingly interested him, which involved a profound meditation, self-questioning and ultimately, self-renouncement.

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[636] Ibid, Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vols. II and III,* pp. 91-2.

[637] Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 9 and *OC*, V, p. 21.

For Bataille the sacrifice of the rational, Cartesian subject, takes place primarily within the direct experience of the erotic union. In this fusion of individual identities, one's limited sense of self is negated and the integrity of bodies is violated. Reason flounders and the 'discontinuous beings'[638] that we are, experience the pleasure involved in the ending of separate existence. Object/subject dualities are dissolved in the ecstatic moment and the self is stripped bare, which contains a sense of anguish and loss but also a plenitude beyond one's limited experience. The 'little death' of orgasm represents a laceration and disintegration, as in the introduction of his of most important work *Eroticism* he opens with, '(o)f eroticism it is possible to say that it is assenting to life up to the point of death,'[639] and in obscenity and nakedness, 'the self is dispossessed.'[640] He goes further and asserts that the transgressive aspects of sexuality allow for, 'a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of self,'[641] beyond mere possession and the goal of reproduction.[642] In one account he describes 'the thunderbolt that ecstasy causes,' which leads to the loss of self, 'I've stopped being ME.'[643] The shattering intensity of such states of crisis resists all efforts of description, questions the limits of the known and language itself, as every certainty is contested. The logos is reduced to silence and unexpected physical reactions such as cries, tears and laughter, result in the sovereign moment when the inadequacy of discursive thought is realised and concepts of presence, meaning and knowledge are annulled.

The unlimited *dépense* involved in the act of sacrifice continuously fascinated Bataille, about which he said,

> ...if we did not know how to dramatise, we would never move beyond our immediate selves. We would live isolated yet suffering

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[638] Ibid, Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 20.
[639] Ibid, p. 11.
[640] Ibid, p. 18.
[641] Ibid, p. 17. Hijikata paraphrases this quotation in ibid, 'To Prison' *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 45.
[642] Bataille's concern is with an eroticism 'which cannot serve any purpose'. *The Accursed Share, Vols. II and III,* p. 16.
[643] Ibid, Fred Botting and Scot Wilson, p. 34

> lives. But a sort of rapture, caused by anguish, leaves us at the frontier of tears; thus we lose ourselves, we forget who we are and communicate with an unreachable beyond.[644]

The individual is projected outside himself and ultimate freedom is reached as everything is risked to the point of death, 'the moral summit consists of putting oneself into question - the suspension of being beyond oneself at the limit of nothingness.'[645] He continually returned to photographs of the Chinese torture victim, which depict an individual in an extreme sacrifice and state of measureless expenditure. The horror and fascination he held towards this profoundly violent scene was for him proof of the 'infinite capacity for reversal,'[646] and the, 'fundamental connection between religious ecstasy and eroticism - and in particular sadism,'[647] as he expresses the intimate relationship between the power of the sacred and that of profanation. For him the suffering of this individual who teeters at the extreme edge of life, had a profound and transformative effect, 'I was so stunned that I reached the point of ecstasy... '[648] He describes this effusive state, the lightning flash of insight that he experienced, several times as in his journal *Guilty,* in which he contemplates,

> (t)he idea that my body and my head were no more than a monstrous, naked, and blood-swollen penis seemed so absurd to me that I thought I would collapse in laughter. Then I thought that such a stiff erection could only end in ejaculation: the comic situation became literally intolerable. Moreover, I could not laugh because the tension in my body was so strong. Like the tortured man I must have had my eyes rolled up and my head was thrown back. In this state, the cruel representation of the torture, of the ecstatic look, of the bloody, open ribcage, gave me a rending convulsion, and from the

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[644] Michèle H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille: Beyond the Gift*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 72 and *OC,* V, p. 23.
[645] Ibid, Fred Botting and Scot Wilson, *Christ*, p. 34 and *OC*, VI, p. 44.
[646] Ibid, Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vols. II and III*, pp. 57.
[647] Ibid, Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, p. 206.
[648] Ibid, pp. 206-7.

> bottom to the top of my head a burst of light passed - as voluptuous as the passage of semen through the penis.[649]

Here sacred and physical pleasures are synonymous, as sexual orgasm and discharge are linked with a primordial and intensely spiritual release. Throughout his works, repeated attempts are made to describe the intensity of such luminous climaxes of silence, 'that full awakening... to fever point'[650] which result in a profound surrender and loss. In the opening to the novel *The Blue of Noon,* he describes such a radical release of energy as the opening of the pineal eye at the top of the head, '...at the moment when the flash blinds me I am splintering brilliance of a shattered life, and this life - agony and vertigo - opening onto an infinite void, bursts and exhausts itself all at once in this void,'[651] as an emptiness in which the limit of the self is violated.

Bataille liberates light from its transcendental position, turns to the Gnostic in seeking for a truth not defined by reason, but by passion, myth and the nocturnal, 'if the luminous intensity of Good did not give the night of Evil its blackness, Evil would lose its appeal'[652] as a reminder of the shadow of the other, the base and profane which are inseparable from the highest, idealist extreme. He faces dark and ineffable forces at the threshold of such inner experiences,

> (t)he way goes through a haunted region, which is however haunted (with ghosts of delight and fear). Beyond: are a blind man's motions, eyes wide open, arms stretching out staring at the sun, and inside he's turning to light.

He continues, describing a profound breakthrough into a shattering brightness,

> (t)here's a bursting into flame that's so sudden the idea of substance seems empty; place, exteriority, and image become so many empty

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649 Ibid, Denis Hollier, p. 85 and *OC*, V, p. 517.
650 *OC*, XI, p. 205.
651 Ibid, Bataille, 'The Blue of Noon' in *Inner Experience*, p. 77 and *OC*, V, p. 92.
652 *OC*, IX, p. 257.

> words, and the words that have least shifted, fusion and light - are by nature incomprehensible[653]

as he reaches a state that 'depend[s] on no object'[654] and lies beyond the language of mere words, in a 'silent, elusive ungraspable part'[655] of ourselves. Invoking these ineffable states, Bataille redefined the sacred as a mystical experience that belies any notion of a transcendent deity.[656] Like the shaman, he put his own subjectivity at risk, while exploring altered states and the deepest recesses of consciousness. These experiences were not always induced through formal practices, but through his resolve to live directly in the present, where he was given, 'the freedom to live at the edge of the limits.'[657] In his work *Inner Experience* he expresses this intent, '...the will for the extreme limit stops at nothing.'[658] This 'inner experience' takes place at the boundaries of the self, a breaking through its fragile borders to a radical unknown. The closed form of the individual is ruptured, in this confrontation that is akin to the death experience. These extreme events are an expression of a profound liberation that is excessive, unpredictable and radically sovereign. He writes that, 'heterogeneous reality is that of a force or a shock,'[659] a 'charge' in which the unmediated instant is entered into, but not fully comprehended, one that ultimately defies intellection, meaning and representation. This destruction of the known and knowing self through a heightened experience, 'in which man contests himself in his entirety,'[660] takes him to the extreme limit of possibility, to a moment of totality

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[653] Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, New York and London: Routledge, 1994, p. 114 and ibid, *Guilty*, p. 29.
[654] Ibid, Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 14.
[655] Ibid, p. 15.
[656] While disassociating himself from the religiosity of the Christian mystics, Bataille nevertheless made repeated allusions to these subversives, (as they were in their own time). In an attempt to communicate the spiritual experience, he used their terminology and framed his experiences with concepts taken from their writings. At the same time he sought to go beyond them.
[657] Ibid, Bataille, *The Impossible,* p. 40.
[658] Ibid, Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 50.
[659] Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', *VE*, p. 143.
[660] Ibid, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, p. 139.

unimagined in Western philosophical and theoretical terms.[661] In place of the all-seeing, probing eyes of intellectual thought, those in Bataille's writings are ecstatically turned upwards, folding back into a dark interior, to confront the absent core of an emptied subject, 'the shadow'[662] that he finds himself to be.

Bataille's work then, radically interrogates traditional attitudes about the nature of self, the body, individuality and collectivity, as part of his politics of resistance and his quest for ecstatic and mystical experiences, thematics which Hijikata weaves into his work. He was keenly aware of the meaninglessness of both writing and sacrifice, as they both expend without profit and aspire to express the inexpressible. At the same time both somehow participate in that ineffable and mystical 'Other' and Hijikata's work echoes this profound and distinctive insight. The delusive unities of individual, separate self and nation, which had become so revered in Hijikata's native Japan, are replaced by values of loss, fragmentation and contingency in his performance, and redefined within a sense of this sacred. He was also deeply influenced by Artaud as we has been described, whose lifestyle and theatrical ideals opened the way for new expressions of subjectivity, as incoherent, heterogeneous and as a movement away from those constituted according to cultural mores, systems and constraints.

Artaud's rupturing of the Self

By the 1960s, Shingeki Theatre had become the orthodoxy in Japan. As stated earlier, this was a theatre that was closely associated with European naturalistic models, one that examined psychological subjectivity and the representation of the individual in society. It was a movement away from the manifold sensuality of Kabuki, with its close interaction with the audience. Other, Western styles of theatre, such as that conceived by Artaud, which challenged the illusion of

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[661] In ibid, *Inner Experience,* p. 93, Bataille describes his spiritual progress, ' ... the states described by the mystics had ceased to be closed to me... I reached excessive, nauseating clearness.'

[662] Ibid, p. 82 and Ibid, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, p. 32.

definable character, were given no place in this scheme.[663] He sought to undermine and destroy a theatrical tradition grounded in Western metaphysics and rejected realistic acting, creating instead a purely physical theatre that demanded immediate contact and acted as a communal experience. His 'Theatre of Cruelty' implied a complex relationship between the unsettling presence of the body on stage and the corporeality of the spectator as active participant. He wanted a cacophony of rhythms, discords, lights, gestures and imagery, as a continued assault on the viewer. This excess of images and signifiers would allow few obvious spaces, yet would create an aperture that opened onto a hidden, inexpressible realm. This was a sacred and profane dramaturgy, aimed not just at the breakdown of the boundaries of theatre, but as a transformative force against the strictures of ordered society.

His own fractured and at times perverse subjectivity was constantly in the process of dissolution and reinvention, radically calling into question the notion of a singular, unitary self. As actor, director, poet, mystic, anarchist, heretic, drug addict, he relentlessly assumed a series of positionings, at times active and dynamic, at others as agonised and dispossessed. While enduring the harsh shock treatments at the asylum in Rodez, he actively strove to distance himself by retreating into a doubled existence and adopting a series of personalities. Theatricalising different identities, he played them out to an absolute limit of acceptability, remaking himself in the process. He continually tried on various alter egos including, Jesus Christ crucified,[664] Solomon and different saints, and identified with a number of artists and writers including Van Gogh and

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[663] The repertoire and dramatic theory of Shingeki theatre was dominated by realism and psychological interpretation in the late 1940s and 50s. In the 1920s and 30s there had been a good deal of experimentation in acting methods that included expressionist performance and Meyerhold's Biomechanics. Little or no attention was paid thereafter to the works of such theatrical innovators however, or to the legacy of the surrealists and the expressionists. Textually based theatre, which focused around Stanislavski's concepts of acting came to dominate, however, little attention was focused on physical training. The actor's task was to identify psychologically and emotionally with the character in order to express some inner truth. See ibid, David Goodman, 1982, pp. 8-9.

[664] This was described in several of his letters from Rodez, including one of December 1945 to Henri Parisot in which describes in rich detail being nailed to the cross.

Lautréamont. During the early 1940s, he believed that he had ceased to exist and that another man, Antonin Nalpas (his mother's maiden name), inhabited his body, while often referring to himself as 'Antonin Artaud' in the third person.[665] This desire for alterity also involved a traumatic sense of abandonment after the departure of the divine, the self-begotten God, who held the possibility of self-presence. It also implied a metaphysical anguish concerning the loss of ego and identity. His fear of this infinite inner void of nothingness was exacerbated by his drug addiction and circumscribed by intense physical pain.

As described in the last chapter Artaud's nervous condition became proof for him of his own possession by an amorphous and imperfect mentality, one that denied fullness and self-presence.[666] He felt himself as having a doubled consciousness, as invaded by an estranged 'Other' within, an adversarial influence that separated him from himself. His struggle with the inner demons that tormented him, offered the revelation of a direct and immediate experience that affected him physically and even led to a growing obsession with ideas of self-destruction.[667] He took on the role of his own anti-self in order to rid God's influence and judgment, to exorcise the transgressive difference within and thereby gain potency and a sense of his own autonomy. Furthermore the drastic and often dangerous psychiatric treatment he endured, created an ontological division, as in some of the electro-shock sessions he saw himself detach from his body, in an encounter with death and mortality itself.[668] He described the extreme experience as an outside observer, '[f]or the dead man has only one thought, that

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[665] Note that Hijikata similarly believed that another conscience, in his case that of his older sister, occupied his body.

[666] See ibid, Jane Goodall, pp. 8-11, for a discussion of the Gnostic experience of self-incompletion, lack and the alienated human condition.

[667] The central hypothesis of his dramaturgy, the double, became for Artaud a perceived presence. His extreme inner turbulence and seemingly inexorable drive towards chaos and dissolution were proof for him of his own possession by an adversarial will. He recognised himself as two entities, one directed by this Gnostic demiurge and the other connected to the realm of the spirit. He vacillated between these dualities, while remaining always at the intersection of both.

[668] This occurred during his incarceration in the asylum at Rodez, where he believed he had died and become 'a body detaching itself from consciousness'. See 'Electroshock [Fragments]' in ibid, *Anthology*, p. 188.

is to return to his corpse, to pick it up and go on. But it is always the corpse which picks you up... '[669] With his ego-defensive boundaries dissolved, he believed himself to be a ghost, an alien, estranged and looking back at his own live being, a self that had ceased to be. As a counter strategy, he strove for physical transformation and counter creation, a doubling of self in order to undo the cruelty of his design. His response was to remake the body-self, through continuous experimentation with his breathing, voice and movement, testing them to the extreme. His own body became then not only the site for medical research, but also the location for the demonstration of his dramaturgy.

He examined the ego and its shifting levels of conscience, its projections and altered perceptions, 'this crippled and trailing ego, this virtual impossible ego... '[670] As with Bataille, he relentlessly sought to contest himself in his entirety, however, Artaud's endeavour was perhaps more volatile and erratic, but it was experienced directly through the suffering caused by his recurrent psychosis. He attempted to reach through to his very essence, to a 'pure self' through a phenomenological process, lived in the intimacy of his own body. He was committed to experiencing shifting levels of conscience, taking the 'inner experience' to the extreme limit offered through psychedelic drugs. These sometimes involved heightened states, as he was able to achieve a clarity and 'crystallisation of thought',[671]

> Now the body has a breath and a scream by which it can act on the decomposed lowest depths of the organism and visibly transport itself up to those high brilliantly lighted planes where the Superior Body is already waiting for it.[672]

This brought him beyond the limits of ordinary perception and therefore to more profound levels and to a deeper access of 'Self'.

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669 Artaud, 'To Peter Watson,' July 1946, in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 195.
670 Artaud, *OC*, I, p. 21.
671 Ibid, Artaud, 'Umbilical Limbo-Doctor ' in *Collected Works, Vol. I,* p. 51.
672 Ibid, Artaud, 'Theatre and Science' in *Anthology*, p. 172

Artaud's 'Athletic' Actor

As discussed in the last chapter, the body held central position throughout the entirety of Artaud's work, his writings, productions, drawings and his theatrical concepts, 'I do not worship my ego but the flesh... Nothing concerns me or interests me save what is addressed *directly* to my flesh.'[673] At the same time he remained at the '(c)rossroads of awareness of my flesh, abandoned by my body.'[674] He insisted on the body's material aliveness as images were relentlessly created in his performance, in pain and disintegration, reflecting his own corporeality that was constantly in a process of being disassembled and reforged. His drew multiple images, which explored his abject and afflicted appearance, sometimes depicted as youthful and handsome, then grown old after Rodez. For example, one of his last finished drawings, a self-portrait of 1948, which he reworked over several months, depicts a body in decay; increasingly bore down to its skin and bone. As has been evident in the previous chapter, his final drawings shattered the body's wholeness and scattered its parts over the page. In his final reading *To Put an End to the Judgment of God*, it became one without organs, as a space for a decentred subject. Through his writings and drawings he explored the extremes of the rupturing self, while describing and portraying the abject, that which disturbs identity and the Symbolic order, through images of bodily wastes, corpses and death. He examined the boundary experience of the subject and the bodily fluids that threaten culturally constituted notions of the whole and proper.

As noted earlier, Artaud was deeply impressed with Balinese theatre, which he saw as an example of a metaphysical and 'total' theatre.[675] He recognised the

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[673] Ibid, Artaud, 'Nerve Scales-Fragments of a Journal in Hell' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 83.

[674] Ibid.

[675] As noted earlier, Artaud was attracted to Eastern thought and spirituality, which he simplified and engaging with selectively. He generally misread Balinese performance, but he appropriated it because it opened new forms of bodily expression and more theatrical forms of spectacle. Most importantly it offered different perspectives, as the antithesis of European theatre and as the exotic and ontological 'Other' through which he could examine his own culture and theatrical heritage. Kabuki acting was also an area that intrigued him, about which he wrote after training at Charles Dullin's Atelier in 1921.

tradition's mystical qualities which derive from the measured and controlled rhythms, the intense somatic awareness and concentration, which he maintained would free the actor, enabling him to reach ecstatic states and in turn have an ability to affect a dream-like state in the audience. Artaud called for a performance event that would break down the divides that were so fundamental to traditional Western theatre, those between the performer/spectator, stage/auditorium and director/actor. His dramaturgy conveyed a direct and raw intensity as he demanded an immediate and inner connection, a theatre that would, 'cut into the flesh,'[676] and, 'seek to reach the mind by way of the organs, of all the organs... '[677]

His proposals for acting were intricately linked to the anatomy of the performer, as in the text *An Emotional Athleticism*, first published in 1935, he outlined the craft of the actor, who like an athlete in control of his body, would aim for immediacy and extreme awareness. The actor through disciplined practice would become totally immersed in his actions, which involved a studied concentration brought to every movement, gesture and facial expression.[678] This would be supported by an understanding of the musculature and pressure points, so that the actor could connect with specific points of the spectator's body, 'to reforge the links, the (magical) chain.'[679] The performance would resonate through the bodies of the spectators, who could fully enter into the event, 'breath by breath and beat by beat.'[680] The skilled actor would be able to articulate intense and intricate states, involving his entire sensibility and physicality, 'at the extreme cutting edge of the crest, at the final and most extreme section of the parietal

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[676] Ibid, Artaud, 'A letter to André Rolland de Renéville' September 1932 in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 86, *OC*, V, p. 157.
[677] Artaud, 'To André Gide', August 1932, in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 78.
[678] It is interesting to note that Artaud started his theatrical career with Charles Dullin (the founder of the Theatre de L'Atelier) in 1921, whose training methods also involved a highly disciplined regime of physical and verbal gymnastics, 'to think out the movements of his soul instead of representing them... '
[679] Ibid, Artaud, 'An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 106; *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Antonin Artaud*, p. 95 and *OC*, IV, p. 163.
[680] Ibid.

paroxysm of its effort.'[681] The actor must physicalise his emotions and express these passions through every fibre of his muscles, limbs and skeleton.

Most important for Artaud were the secrets of the breath, which allowed the actor to connect deeply within himself and with powerful and mysterious forces. He developed a system so that each physical gesture and every emotion could be expressed with a corresponding breath. His theory was based on the teaching of the Kabala, which divided the breath into six physical components, including masculine, feminine and neuter and combined it with the voice.[682] It also involved an awareness of how specific emotions connect with different muscle groups. It was this consciousness and rigour that were at the heart of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, connecting the chaos of his proposed performance with the order and discipline necessary for transformation and transcendence. This resulted in a form of complete and radical acting, which involved the actor's whole potential. In this critical encounter, with the actor pushed to the limits of self-experience, Artaud's theatre could speak to the irrational elements present within the deepest unconscious in a, '...deep drama, mystery deeper than souls, the lacerating conflict between souls where gesture is merely a course,'[683] one which would bypass the intellect and discursive mind.

The nervous system of the spectator would be 'touched' by the actor, who would know which parts of the body to strike in order to evoke specific emotional responses. The spectator would also be confronted in performance through visceral and aural assaults, formed by explosive outbursts, violent interruptions, explosive laughter, torrents of sounds and thunderous images. This physical language was far removed from the individuating powers of speech, as Artaud bemoaned the fact that actors had lost the use of their throats and urged that

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[681] Ibid, Artaud, 'Deranging the Actor' in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 213.
[682] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, pp. 104-6 and *OC*, IV, p. 162-4.
[683] 'Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Two Notes: Around a Mother' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 110 and *OC*, IV, p. 171.

they remember how to cry out and scream.[684] These passionate invocations were intended to reverberate through every facet of the spectator's body, to destabilise and unleash the subconscious and incite a deepened awareness.

In his response to the negative reaction of the audience present at his reading of *The Theatre and the Plague* in April 1933, he stated, 'I want to give them the experience itself, the plague itself, so they will be terrified and awaken. I want to awaken them. They do not realise *they are dead.*' [685] The theatre of cruelty he proposed would be final, dangerous, threatening to the identities and the physical integrity of the spectators and participants. His scenic experimentations were intended to shock, with incantational sounds, syncopated music and effects, which would shatter aesthetic distance in order to overwhelm the audience. His theatre offered a return to origins, where the masks would fall[686] and the spectator would begin to see into his true state, in all its alterity. Its cathartic power would act as a radical cultural force, aimed not just at the transformation of Western conventional theatre, but of bourgeois society. He wanted however, that his theatre act at an even more profound level, to probe the interior spaces of those present as, 'a work in which one feels one's whole nervous system illuminated as if by an endoscope with vibrations,' that opens into a, 'strange and dazzling Epiphany,'[687] alluding to the mystical state associated with religious ecstasy and the realm of the sacred.

He aspired to move beyond the enclosure of the flesh, as in a *Letter to the Buddhist Schools,* he praises the Buddhist ability for an inner perception that was beyond reason, '(y)ou know how we turn back into our thoughts, how the mind

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[684] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-An Affective Athleticism' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 106 and *OC*, IV, p. 163.
[685] Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 63 and Gunter Stuhlmann, *The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol. 1 (1931-34)*, New York: Harvest Books, 1994, p. 192.
[686] Ibid, Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double-Theatre and the Plague' in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 20.
[687] Artaud, 'To Wladimir Porché, Director of Broadcasting' in ibid, *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 229.

saves itself from itself.'[688] He interrogated and probed not just his physical body but also 'the intellectual projection'[689] of his mind, in search of a complete knowledge that is, ' ...secreted in the nervous energy within our bones... Above all, there is the completeness of the nerves. Completeness which contains all consciousness and the magic ways of the mind through the flesh.'[690] He grappled with terms to describe states of mind, such as 'highest intellectuality' and '...intuition, that is direct knowledge, inverted communications enlightened from within...'[691] in a battle he waged until the end of his life.

Artaud's extreme dilemma involved his desire for individual identity and completeness, while at the same time he attempted to move beyond the gross matter of his body, to break through to the soul. Aspiring to merge with the spiritual, he searched deeply within himself and throughout his life, pushed his performers and spectators to physical and psychical extremes. The entirety of his life reveals a commitment to an exploration of gnostic light and darkness, while rejecting organised religion and transcendental theology. Although the sight of his agonised body in his final years, disclosed little trace of any discovered light, he did express insights into more exalted states of mind, as he declared in a moment of clarity and vision, 'I am finally able to see the light through myself only by means of an utter renunciation of my intelligence and feeling.'[692] His brutal rejection of anything spiritual later in his life however, would indicate that these were merely fleeting glimpses of a realm he failed to obtain for any sustained amount of time, yet for which he so dearly and desperately yearned.[693]

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[688] Ibid, Artaud, 'Cup and Ball-Letter to the Buddhist Schools' in *Collected Works, Vol. I,* p. 181.
[689] Artaud, 'Cup and Ball-The Situation of the Flesh' in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 164.
[690] Ibid, p. 165.
[691] Ibid, p. 166.
[692] Ibid, Artaud, 'Fragments of a Journal in Hell' in *Anthology*, p. 42.
[693] Artaud's cosmological and religious beliefs were constantly shifting and endlessly reinvented, as he went through various phases of devotion and outright rejection. His interest in Eastern mysticism and primitive mythologies started around 1933 when he denounced the Catholic faith, returning fanatically to it in the late 1930s. In 1946, after being released from Rodez, he damned Catholicism and the Eastern religions he had so revered also became part of this renunciation, as he returned to a total preoccupation with the physical.

Hijikata like Artaud aspired to a non-naturalistic, non-textual, abstract performance event, which sought a deep connection with the audience. He pushed the self-experience of the performer and the spectator to new limits and presented multiple perspectives of the physical body's presence. Just as Artaud looked to an 'ancient' Occidental and so-called 'primordial' Oriental theatre, Hijikata invoked the pre-modern and pre-rational as a mythological world, beyond the baseness and hypocrisy of the everyday. An immense and metaphysical aspect was recovered, as a sacred, immediate experience, which acted as a transformative force, opening possibilities for explorations of the 'Other' within the self.

Absorption and Concentration in Butoh

Hijikata gave the corporeal radical presence in performance, as Artaud had wanted, aspiring to 'total' and unmediated actions that articulate the body at its limits,

> A criminal on death row made to walk to the guillotine is already a dead person even as he clings, to the very end of life... This very condition is the original form of dance and it is my task to create such a condition on stage.[694]

In the live Butoh performance, movements were rooted and integrated, while the physical and mental were dynamically balanced. Energy originated from the centre, directed down towards the floor, informed by Japanese notions of the unified body as it is internally connected through the 'ki' system of energy.[695] The

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[694] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 46.

[695] Many physical theatre practitioners (for example those of the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais method) maintain that the pelvic area is the source of physical energy, as it constitutes the region of the main muscles of the body. Movement and gesture are more efficient and fluid when initiated from this area, as they gradually emanate outwards to involve the whole body. This movement is thought able to convey more emotional complexity and creative sensibility than that which derives from the extremities. There is very little research about how consciousness is structured by the body, but an expansion of corporeal choices may increase cognitive possibilities, as different manipulations, movements and bodily orientations, modify connections between neural pathways. George Lakoff argues that bodily activities form the basis of our reasoning and conceptualisation, as they are the sources for the metaphors we use to perceive and structure the world. The body is therefore crucial because it grounds our mental

direct experience of nature, evoked through memories of Hijikata's rural childhood, was reflected in the dancers' poses, their backs stooped low and bent towards the ground. His dances spurned the expansive movements of Western dance styles and the 'ideal' form and balance structure of classical ballet.[696] The actor embodied total absorption and concentration, letting go of all actions and forms that have generic meaning, suggesting, but not revealing, enticing the audience to refill the gestures and poses.

Through intense preparation and inner-directed practice, Hijikata's dancers were able to continuously deepen their relationship with the dance. These students were trained physically and mentally for long periods, in order to slowly distil movements into internal patterns of energy. In his teaching Hijikata attempted to articulate the more nuanced aspects of performance, through poetic images that were rich with visual associations. He also suggested physical shapes to inspire the dancers' imaginative and creative powers, so that their bodies could flow into such configurations. Through constantly repeated practice and use of such techniques, extraordinary skill was achieved so that each movement could be performed spontaneously and without conscious effort. Every muscle of the dancer's physique was incorporated in training, which aimed to push the body to an extreme, even to the point of disjointedness, about which he describes, 'dislocated from the confines of thinking with my head.'[697] Not wholly dependent on the gaze by which he might be received as in conventional performance, the dancer was able to move beyond simple representation and the need to express. This led to fluidity in performance, as the actors moved around the stage with a

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images and metaphor system. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books, 1999.

[696] The abdomen, known as the *hara,* is an area of the body that holds prime importance in Japanese culture. The samurai warriors of the Edo period sought to cultivate this part of the body, through meditative exercise in preparation for action. It was believed to be the sources of all emotion and the term is still used in combination with others to denote different emotional states, for example, *hara no okii* literally '*hara* is big', meaning 'to be generous'.

[697] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 76.

grace and spatial poetry arising from a deep reserve of expertise, which could be felt as an active experience by the spectator.[698]

Butoh performances sometimes included a paring down to basics, which involved an almost bare stage, near-naked bodies, shaven head and eyebrows, white make-up and lack of definable facial expressions; a stripped body, without the signifiers of culture and gender.[699] The dance involved holding excruciating positions and an awareness of the breath. A phenomenological precision was given to each of the movements that were at times extremely protracted, allowing the dancer to inhabit every motion and sensation. Frequent pauses were also involved, following the Japanese philosophical and aesthetic concept of openness in space and time, the *ma,* which allows for the quieting of the mind and in the Japanese arts has profound meaning.[700] Within a theatrical event a stillness emerges in which the atmosphere of the performance lingers after the action, music or words have ceased. In this silence and interval offered, traces of objects, movements and sound are allowed to reverberate. This concept, therefore, does not denote a mere pause, break or interruption in the flow of action, nor is it a practice opposite to speech, language or the rational. It reflects a metaphysical aesthetic that is not concerned with making fullness and expansion the focus of attention; instead it inverts the spatial hierarchy of presence over absence.[701] It might be translated as a state of 'betweenness', a

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[698] This could be described as a state of 'flow' in which the performer is fully participating and concentrated, aware of his actions but not of the act of mindfulness itself. This state involves complete mastery of the body and leads to control of the thought processes. This cultivation of self-discipline is essential for the martial arts, the art of the tea ceremony, *chado* or *chanoyu* and other aesthetic practices, in which outer perfection is paramount. All physical actions are made to conform to a definite concrete form and with constant repetition the movement occurs effortlessly. During the Tokugawa period the samurai swordsman cultivated these skills to the highest degree. Zen had a tremendous influence on the martial arts, which were based on its fundamental tenet of emptiness. With meditative practice, the swordsman was able to negate any sense of a dualistic, object-subject perspective and attain realisation of 'selflessness'.

[699] In Noh theatre the white face make-up is applied as a negation of the actor's personality.

[700] The *kanji* character used for *ma* is *kan*, which depicts a doorway with the sun inside, thus alluding to an illuminated opening.

[701] In a Japanese monochrome ink wash painting, *sumi*-e, it is the white space to which supreme value is given, while in a Noh play it is the frozen movement, the *mie*, because they are both perceived to express a potential openness and unfolding.

transition or border, where space and time hover at the edge and everything is held in the balance. Hijikata attempted to describe and interpret this state, 'I call it "rotting ma"'[702] when, 'there is no longer any distinction between time and space.'[703] This state of suspension has a tremulous quality and is full of a sense of potentiality, for it adds to the emotional intensity of the drama, enabling the audience to contemplate that which lies behind mere visible appearance.

One of the Zeami's - the co-founder of Noh Theatre - principal creative concepts was the rhythmic principle of *jo-ha-kyu*, which denotes a structure consisting respectively of, effortless introduction, dramatic development and rapid finale.[704] He believed that this rhythm is present in all living phenomena; in fact the smallest single gesture and the whole duration of a play could be infused with its dynamic qualities. These temporal components disrupt expectations of the relationship between movement and stillness and can be isolated and used in a variety of combinations to create a sense of organic unity. An awareness of these modulations can be seen in Hijikata's dance, which incorporated intervals of sound and silence, allowing the performance to build and accumulate. Its rhythm and pace were carefully designed and often so slow that they could unsettle the spectators' sense of time and space. This latency of the performance with its ritualistic rhythm, was often contrasted with dynamic scenes in which the dancers performed audacious movements and configurations, as for example in *The Masseur* (1963), where in an intertwined convolution, two dancers were spun at intense and dizzying speed, completely inhabiting the stage. The varying intensity of events spatially, temporally and kinaesthetically, was carefully managed and an unresolved tension was allowed to exist within the creative space.

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[702] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 76 and Nario Goda, p. 51.

[703] Ibid.

[704] Zeami was the co-founder of Noh Theatre as described in the first chapter. See Tatsuro Ishii, 'Zeami's Mature Thoughts on Acting' in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 12, No 2, pp. 121-3, for a discussion of Zeami's development of this ordering system.

Through concentrated practice, an unconventional pattern of deformities, imbalances and tonalities was created within the Butoh dancer's body. The dancer found his way to the extreme of the posture, where he appears poised and counterpoised, in an ambiguous 'between' state of precariousness and imbalance. This dynamic relationship between opposing impulses, created a highly charged atmosphere, in which the restrained energy invigorates the body with tensions. For example, in the scene of the 1972 performance already described, *A Story of Chickenpox,* Hijikata is shown lying on his back with his limbs raised.[705] He reveals himself as a fragile structure suspended in a state of gravitational counter tension that exists on the borderline between stability and fragility, centeredness and decentredness, in which the effort involved is not outwardly perceived.

The 'Eyes', Vision and the Visionary in Butoh

Such oppositional tensions can be seen in the *beshimi* facial expression, the hallmark of Butoh, which involved the tongue projected forwards and eyes rolled upwards revealing their whites, a technique perfected by one of Hijikata's principal students, Ashikawa Yoko. Those of other dancers were often non-focused, half-closed or crossed, enclosing awareness and attention. At the same time, they could see and embrace each and every member of the audience, in ways that were outside the frame of normal seeing. This accords with Zeami's advice to the Noh actor that he must always be aware and respond to the mood of the spectator, to see himself as the audience sees him and adjust his performance accordingly. These eyes can be interpreted in many different ways, as casting fear, or being lost with blind abandon and in the throes of ecstasy. Furthermore, they recall the Kabuki *mie* climactic poses, with eye postures like those of the temple guardian sculptures, intended to ward off evil intruders.[706] This focused gaze points to a vision beyond normal seeing, which leads the

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[705] See figures 34-35.

[706] The frozen and contorted facial expressions of the *mie* that reveal a state of heightened emotion in the Kabuki actor, owe something to the cult of Fudo. This is a Buddhist deity and guardian of hell, whose cross-eyed, snarling face appears in most temples throughout Japan.

spectator to aspire to a plane of reality that lies outside the ordinary senses. With such visionary potential, it also evokes the contemplative disciplines and philosophical traditions of Japan's cultural past, one of priests and shamans.[707]

In Hijikata's *Butofu*, or notation system, Hijikata attempted to express and physical images through words,[708] using language which would act on the body in an immediate way. He set word and meaning in a tense and refractive relationship, which he further enhanced with pictures. As was described earlier, his words defy any sense of logic as he refused to subject them to meaning, allowing them instead to resonate freely, as a play of allusions, metaphors and ambiguities. A great deal of attention was given to the eyes in this word play, which point to a different style of visual skill and motility, through such metaphors and unexpected associations as, 'eyeballs of glass' and descriptions such as 'an eye attached to the forehead', 'eyeballs behind where they are now', or the 'pulling up the eyeballs'.[709] These attempted to erase the normal eye expressions and allowed for the suspension of everyday empirical sight, so that they would become 'unseeing', yet focussed inwardly. This heightened consciousness of the eyes added to a phenomenological immediacy, in which the senses were drawn inwards, shifted away from the visual, to another register.

Noh Theatre and the Sacred

As previously described, Hijikata inherited something of the inner physical sensibility gained through rigorous discipline, from his native Noh theatrical tradition. The 'distancing view' is one of its fundamental principles, whereby the Noh actor becomes totally engaged in a process that allows him to simultaneously maintain perspectives of both subjectivity and objectivity. The

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[707] The mountains and volcanic landscape of the Tohoku region where Hijikata was born were well known for the (often blind) female shamans, *fujo,* who resided there and were able to summon the spirits of the dead.

[708] Ibid, Yukio Waguri, p. 1. Hijikata developed this system from the early 1970s, especially when he gave up dancing and started to focus on choreography and training his dancers.

[709] See Lee Chee Keng, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ankoku Butoh: A Body Perspective*, B.Sc. Thesis, Singapore University, 1998, p.26.

performer holds his own viewpoint while being able to see himself as seen by the spectators, thereby entwining self and other.[710] In this acutely attuned way, a multiplicity of meaning flows back and forth between the actor and audience, giving immediacy to the performance. This intense mutual communication constitutes the heart of Noh and involves an exorcistic quality to which Hijikata aspired, in order to impact deeply on every member of the audience.

This interactive relationship is expressed through the crucial concept *hana*, (the flower) which describes the effect that inspires feelings of curiosity, freshness and absorption in the audience, as described in the treatises of Zeami.[711] The perfect flower occurs when the actor moves beyond mere imitation of his role, through to the interior essence.[712] He borrowed from Buddhist and native spiritual ideas, adapting them for his theatre and laid out the basic principles of the art in intensely practical texts.[713] These insights vary from the purely metaphysical and aesthetic to precise analytical and technical devices and comments for the training of actors.

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[710] The Noh actor is trained to act according to this outer expression rather than his inner psychological feelings. This approach differs profoundly from Western realism, which claims to examine the inner human self. It is known as 'distanced view' (*riken no ken*), so termed by Zeami. This concept is the better known of his later ideas and translates as, 'the sight of remote sight' or 'to see with eyes at a distance' that is, from the viewpoint of the audience. See Tatsuro Ishii, 'Zeami's Mature Thoughts on Acting' in Theatre Research International, Vol. 12, No 2, pp. 117-8, also, Frank Hoff, 'Seeing and Being Seen: The Mirror of Performance' in *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*, James H. Sanford, William R. La Fleur and Masatoshi Nagotomi eds., Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 131-48.

[711] See Masaru Sekine, *Zeami and his Theories of Noh Drama*, London: British Library, 1985, pp. 143-155.

[712] Although imitation was one of Zeami's most basic principles, it was in order to move beyond mere outer resemblance to the most inner nature. Masakazu Yamazaki quotes Zeami's maxim, 'what is felt by the heart is ten, what appears in movement seven' to describe this. See 'The Aesthetics of Ambiguity: The Artistic Theories of Zeami' in *On the Art of the Noh Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. Rimer J. Thomas and Yamazaki Masakazu, Princeton, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, 1984, p. 87.

[713] It must be stated that there are difficulties in discerning precise Buddhist meaning present in Noh theatre and its theoretical base. There are clear traces of various religious inputs such as Zen and other Buddhist perspectives, including Shingon, Tendai and Esoteric, which are syncretic and not clearly discrete sects. Most importantly however, aesthetic standards of the period in which Noh emerged, were strongly dictated by the Zen creed, so that it was imperative that Zeami and Noh actors worked in accordance with this popular taste. See Royall Tyler, '"The Path of My Mountain": Buddhism in Noh' in ibid, James H. Sanford et al., 1992, pp. 149-155.

In these discourses, Zeami gives preference to a beauty that is imperfect, tranquil and austere over that which is rich and transcendent. A performance that lacks ostentation and pretension is valued more highly than one that offers spectacular effects. He applies *yugen*, an abstract concept referring to this mysterious and elusive beauty, to all aesthetic aspects of the stage and performance.[714] With its connotations of the profound and mystical, suggestion is respected over convincing realism. The primary concern is with inner feeling and not with characterisation, as the actor endeavours to appropriate outer form in order to embody the essence of a role.[715] Verisimilitude is further diminished as the performance is totally stylised; patterns of movement are employed to symbolise the substance of human experience.[716] A performance that reaches this level of beauty penetrates and absorbs all the senses and subsumes within itself the ostentatious and outwardly focussed.

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[714] The term *yugen* is difficult to define and reflects the highest level of aesthetic sensibility. It was frequently employed in the twelfth century to describe the poetical, ideal beauty that is remote and suggested, rather than obviously stated. It also means 'elegance' and Zeami defined it by referring to the sophisticated manners and appearance of the aristocracy. It therefore differs from conventional notions of beauty, pointing instead to a resonant and atmospheric quality, one that lies beyond outer appearances. In Zeami's works, *yugen* becomes tinged with sadness and takes on 'dark' or 'obscure' overtones, while the poetical ideal has remained its prevailing meaning. The second component of the compound, *gen*, points to a dark and mysterious sphere, while its first, *yu*, connotes faintness and insubstantiality.
This reticent beauty is the highest level of performance for Zeami; the lowest level is that which emerges through sight and a sumptuous, obvious beauty. In his 'Nine Stages' treatise, four major levels can be distinguished, of which the ultimate stage occurs when all recognisable forms become shrouded in darkness and then suddenly are transformed into a boundless, dazzling light. This state opens up new epistemological dimensions, as it lies beyond the rational sphere and its subject-object duality. See Donald Keene, *Noh and Bunraku: Two Forms of Japanese Theatre*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 22-6 and Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*, The Hague, Boston and London, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981, pp. 32-4.

[715] Just prior to performance, a Noh actor will prostrate in front of the mask before putting it on and then contemplate his reflection in a large mirror. During this meditative practice, he endeavours to empty himself so as to completely take on the figure he is about to portray. All expressions and individual features are disguised by the mask, allowing him to become at one with the reflection.

[716] *Monomane* in Noh is something close to imitation, realism or mimicry, but with important differences, as the intention is to create the defining features of basic types of characters, rather than the full complexity of individual personalities. Outward appearance is closely imitated, so as to penetrate through to the emotional qualities and spiritual force that underline and define the character. The actor is then able to enter into the figure portrayed.

In the Noh performance, abstract movements are performed with a pace that is deliberate and sustained, expressing a solemnity and gravity that are normally the reserve of ritual processes. Each gesture is carefully delineated and many have referential meaning, while others are employed for the beauty of their forms. The actor concentrates his energies, directing them inwards and allows them to penetrate every part of the body. Habitual, daily movements are substituted for incongruent postures in performance, which creates an oppositional internal energy and tension.[717] A level of experience beyond that of the human and physical is evoked in performance through these varied techniques and disciplines. The often densely textured performances of chanting, music and dancing, resonate with numinous events, as possession and divine contact are frequently central features. The unseen protagonist of the play, a deity, spirit or departed soul, communicates through the medium of a Buddhist priest, via a world of dreams and symbols.[718] In this way Noh inherits something of the sacred quality of it antecedents, the shamanic rituals in which the female medium's primary quest was to communicate with the spirit world and appease the dissatisfied and revengeful spirits, the *onryo*.[719]

Through life-long rigour and dedication, the inner core of the role evolves, as the performer becomes totally immersed and is able to reach an effortless, and for the audience, an ineffable performance. This involves a process of shedding idiosyncratic elements and established patterns of behaviour.[720] Freed of all self-

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[717] For example, the actor walks by sliding his feet along the ground without lifting them and holds the pelvis in one plane, which is counter to the 'natural' way of walking.

[718] See Makoto Ueda, 'Zeami on the Art of the Noh Drama: Imitation, Yugen and Sublimity' in *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, Nancy C. Hume ed., State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 187-8.

[719] Japanese theatre has sacred and religious roots and links with agricultural rites. The earliest performances which were prior to the arrival of Buddhism and structured Shinto in Japan, were those of shamanistic rituals, during which the female shamanic medium, *miko* would connect with the spirit world. Noh plays retain something of a lofty ritualistic quality, as they are often performed in shrine areas and maintain a serious, reverent tone. See Naohiko Umewaka, 'The Inner World of the Noh' in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 1, Part 2, 1994, p. 37.

[720] This process is far removed from that involved in realistic theatre training in which the emphasis is placed on self-expression, (based on the assumption that there is a coherent self that can be evoked through such methods as the Stanislavski technique). It requires a rigorous

awareness, the highly accomplished actor is brought to perfect fluency and to a profound intuitive versatility and creativity. Modes of practice become permanently inscribed in the body-consciousness, to be used unthinkingly and naturally executed with ease.[721] Just as in the meditative arts, there is nothing except each present moment of action, the mind empty of thought, alert and physically grounded, when, as Benito Ortolani in *Japanese Theatre*, describes, 'it is no longer the individual, self-conscious, distinction and judgment-making mind, but the instinctive, spontaneous, free-flowing mind of the master actor that has reached unity with the mu (nothingness) and ku (emptiness)'[722] similar to that aspired to in Zen, which entails a freedom from personal ego.[723] The performer is thus able to transcend mere technique, total mastery of his art is attained and the perfect flower, *hana* is achieved. The actor/spectator physical/conscious, visible/invisible, inner/ outer movement, converge, while the true power and beauty of Noh is conveyed in the elusive spaces between. The embodied and energised living form of the performer is made manifest for the audience, creating a 'power of presence', not limited to the ego, pointing beyond itself and making room for other forms of cognition.

Hijikata aspired to such presence and emptiness in his dance. As in Noh performance, he moved beyond the limitations of mere physical-technical aspects of training to an 'invisible' dimension and towards a less tangible experience. Mental discipline involved the suspension of interpretative processes, as inwardly focused the dancer was able to attend to each performative moment with a sense of alertness. This had a releasing effect, giving a sensitivity to even

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training similar to that of a religious apprenticeship, focusing on physical ability and spiritual development.

[721] *Kata* denotes a movement pattern or form that is strictly defined for a particular role in Noh and Kabuki theatre. With constant repetition, the actor aims to move beyond form and achieve an effortless, yet controlled spontaneity. At this point the physical and the conscious merge and the performance reaches the most superior level.

[722] Benito Ortolani in *Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*, Leiden: E Brill, 1990, p. 124.

[723] See Tatsuri Ishii, 'Zeami on Performance' in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 8, No. 3, autumn 1983, pp. 203-6, for an in-depth description of the attainment of this highest level of performance.

the most minute variations of movement, allowing the performance to be opened to fresh possibilities. Concentration as well as meticulous bodily articulation revealed a degree of artistry that made possible an objectified 'becoming'. Describing his body as an 'empty box', he recommended performers to, 'try drinking from the wells within' and to, 'drop a ladder into their own bodies and climb down into it,'[724] suggesting entering fully into that emptiness, letting the movement unfold from within and allowing the possibility of deeper transformation.

The Post-structuralist Response and its Relation with Buddhist Concepts

As the basis and impetus for this thesis has been post-structuralist critical models, it is important that the privileging of 'presence' and unmediated actuality, as described in both Noh and Butoh performance, are opened for examination. These concepts have been given problematic status by post-structuralist thinkers, such as those referred to in this thesis, who have questioned coherent notions of self and therefore the concept of living theatrical 'presence'. The possibility of the body's unique presence together with notions of self and subjectivity have been challenged and stripped of their transcendental status. Derrida's theory, for example, allows us to approach this notion of original experience through the play of *différance* in which signs merely allude to other signs in an endless and unstable chain of signification. His critique challenges the possibility of becoming fully present to oneself in the immediate instant, the Now, because such presence is constantly being displaced, its completeness and purity always contaminated by the trace. He states, '(p)resence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated.'[725] Self-coincidence is constantly deferred while the body-in-performance is divided within itself and therefore not able to be present to itself.

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[724] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 51.

[725] This he stated in relation to Artaud's aspiration for a pure theatre. See Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' in *Writing and Différence*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, London and Melbourne, 1978, p. 249.

The internal space known as 'the subject' is thus emptied of essence and exposed as a social, historical and cultural construction, opening possibilities of a sense of self as multi-defined, diffuse and protean. Representation, which is so central to performance, is revealed as based on absence, as there is always something missing in this process of delay or deferment and that which visibly makes itself present is always incomplete.[726]

This deconstruction consequently has a particular meaning when read from a Japanese point of view, steeped in its philosophical systems, especially that of Buddhism.[727] Derrida's insights correspond closely with its single, most important concept, that of *anatta*, or the ultimate truth of no-self, the denial of any notion of its reality, continuity and permanence.[728] There are fundamental differences however, as he still retains one essential dimension, that of object/subject, because while trying to avoid the vocabulary of subjectivity he still remains within and dependent on it.[729] In Buddhist philosophy all phenomena including the perceiving mind, are illusory, insubstantial and lack inherent existence, subjectivity included. To know emptiness, *shunyata,* is its ultimate goal, in which all binaries including that of subject-object, become untenable and

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[726] Artaud's aspiration for a pure presence and immediacy, and his vision of a 'total' theatre that would deny mediation and representation, were critiqued by Derrida as illusory and unattainable ideals in the above article written in 1967. See ibid, Derrida, *Writing and Différence*, pp. 232-250.

[727] I make comparisons here with Buddhism because its presence is felt at every level of Japanese society, where this syncretic belief system is more attitudinal than doctrinal and is largely sectarian. It must be noted that Japanese Buddhism is not a unitary phenomenon but contains a variety of sects and within these a range of thought and practice. See Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingham eds., *Companion Encyclopaedia of Asian Philosophy*, New York and London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 715-6. The Tokugawa period is seen as the flourishing of Buddhism, which retained centrality for many intellectuals and philosophers, in spite of a political shift towards Confucianism. There developed a synthesis of these two traditions, mainly neo-Confucianism and Zen. Although it was established as the state religion, Shinto has also continued to command powerful popular support.

[728] See Gereon Kopf, *Beyond Personal Identity; Dogen, Nishida, and a Phenomenology of No-Self*, Surrey, London: Curzon Press, 2001, pp. xi and 113-117.

[729] Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote about this binary structure of everyday awareness based on notions of absolute objectivity and absolute subjectivity. He directed attention away from the abstract conception of the world offered objectively through the scientific gaze, to the world as it discloses itself to the perceiving subject. Perception is emphasised as a physical process in which the body is subject and not mere object.

deconstruct themselves.[730] It challenges many language-based religions and philosophies, whose beliefs, doctrines and metaphysics hold little importance, as this realisation happens through a disciplined practice that involves rigorous mental and physical control.

The Buddhist experience is one born of and through the body, in which correct manners, movements and gestures are emphasised as in the exacting propriety of a ritual process. Primacy is given to the practice of meditation, for which importance is placed on perfect sitting posture so that the body can become stilled and the mind fully focussed.[731] Awareness is centred and brought to the process of breathing and the demands of the present moment. In a fuller than usual sphere of present experience, the contents of the mind reveal themselves until the fluctuations of thought can be calmed and attention brought to a place of one-pointed and sustained concentration. Free of all conceptual content, this core emptiness can be experienced as a witness and is revealed as an ever-present background to our cognitive functioning. This space of clear awareness, witnesses the contents and processes of consciousness in any moment. Attention is diverted from the 'mind's' habitual way of perceiving the world, which includes mental conditioning, desires, preconceived ideas, established beliefs and speculations; that plethora of thinking usually present in perception. The reflecting subject is bracketed, as the aim is not to identify with, reflect upon, or analyse the chattering thoughts that pass through consciousness, but is instead to move away from the interpretive processes of the rational mind.

This experience can reach different levels and intensities as gradually tension builds. Certain arousal patterns in the brain and impressive neurophysiological

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[730] *Shunyata* denotes the ultimate Buddhist truth of emptiness. It posits the material world as illusory, formless and devoid of essence, as its subjects and objects are empty of any reality.

[731] Zen Buddhism places great emphasis on somatic practice over intellectual training. Intense sitting meditation practice, *zazen*, was emphasised by Dogen (1200-1253), one of the greatest Zen masters and founder of the Soto school, through which he believed mastery of the mind and total enlightenment, *satori*, could be achieved. See Diané Collinson and Robert Wilkinson, *Thirty-five Oriental Philosophers*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 165 and 176-7.

changes are involved, such as the eyeballs rolling back in their sockets and a sense of the spine being pulled upwards. In this climactic event, the mental darkness of having the eyes half-closed in meditation becomes transformed into a dazzling light, as the metaphor of illumination is often used to describe the euphoric dénouement reported with such an extraordinary and expansive experience.[732] This altered state of consciousness is invariably referred to as rapture, ecstasy, and the mystical, one that is described as 'spiritual' because it affords access to the nonordinary, sacred dimension of reality. It culminates in a dramatic breaking open of the 'boundless self', shattering the illusion of separation, while subjectivity as individualised experience is replaced by a direct realisation of interconnection. This state is part of the journey to the ultimate, enlightenment experience of *satori*, ('enlightenment' or 'no-self'), as it is described in Zen Buddhist philosophy. It is an event that cannot be formulated in conventional language, as it is one that exists prior to linguistic ascription and discursive meaning. Representation has no place in this immediate encounter, which can only be lived and directly apprehended, as its point of reference is not outside itself.[733]

The meditative state of 'becoming present' therefore requires both mind and body, it resides in the conjunction between, on the liminal edge of in/exhalation and objective/subjective self. Its implications destabilise the structure of the binary oppositions dominating Cartesian thought, as it involves taking a border position,

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[732] This experience is well known in most religious and spiritual traditions from shamanism to tantrism. See for example, Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York and London: Routledge and Pantheon Books, 1964, p.x. It is often referred to as an opening of the 'third eye' or the pineal eye, a part of the anatomy about which Bataille wrote. It is interesting to compare this experience with that of Bataille's as described earlier in this chapter. He asserted that, '(w)e live on the verge of a burst of light, of a suffocated illumination before the unknown immensity which pours from us in every direction... states which escape the classical givens of religion.' "Le Mysticisme" in *OC*, XIII, p. 183.

[733] This state can also arise through other means, for example, through contemplation on the koan, which is an irresolvable paradoxical question, in which logic is used to expose logic. See Yoel Hoffmann, *Sound of One Hand: 281 Zen Koans with Answers*, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975. The Rinzai Zen sect lays special stress on this rhetorical convention as a focus of meditation, which is used to jolt the practitioner to a higher, alternative state of consciousness. This revelationary experience can also occur after an intense trauma, when rational thought processes and normal perception are instantaneously and forcibly set aside.

before making the transition from the everyday world through to another register that transcends the rational structure of the mind. This bodily, direct and non-interpretive experience offers no spatial interval for thought to identify itself, therefore the self as conscious subjectivity is set aside. To intuit its 'presence' is to radically expand the boundaries of our ordinary sense of self-identity, to transcend the subject-object structure and open the way into higher levels of consciousness, to the *myo*, that is the perfect, sublime and inexplicable.[734] It is this understanding, which underlies Japanese traditional and religious concepts of selfhood that Hijikata alludes to in his dance.[735]

Conclusion

Reference has again been made in this chapter to the life and work of Artaud and Bataille, who greatly influenced Hijikata, and whose writings and ideas were imbued with the body. Artaud's life reveals a preoccupation with personal re-invention in order to break free from conventional modes of self and subjectivity, and gain control of his splintering mind and ego. His work displays an obsession with doubles, alterities that shadow the self, the body and the known world. His sense of inner fragmentation was proof for him of the estranged Other within and his life became a struggle for self-creation, to create an authentic subjectivity. Through the use of opium and psychophysical experimentation, he experienced intense states of awareness and gained insight into a more mystical domain beyond the material. Bataille looked to the body as a powerful source of subversive energy, a space where excessive impulses could create new

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[734] Benito Ortolani describes this as the highest level of attainment, the indescribable, 'supreme peak of performance' in which the actor enters into a spiritual trance and is beyond all duality, totally integrated with his acting and at one with the audience. In this supreme state, 'the actor becomes a medium between temporal individualism in the audience and eternal, universal Permanence.' Ibid, *The Japanese Theatre,* p. 119.

[735] This experience lies at the limits of Western metaphysics. Indeed an epistemology has not been formulated that can incorporate this transformative process, which draws on areas of the mind other than the rational intellect and involves the complete breakdown of cognitive processing. This would require a phenomenological approach that takes consciousness as its focus of investigation. There are conceptual similarities between the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Zen however, but he remains in the realm of the purely worldly, empirical and non-mystical. Spiritual and meditation practice, which aims for such mind-body unity and higher forms of cognition, is ignored in his theoretical approach.

communicative relationships and possibilities. Transgression for him opened up the larger economy of the sacred, as it forms the basis of the most profound spiritual insight. Rebelling against the notion of individual separateness, the erotic experience exemplified a sacred moment of surrender, when physical limits are dissolved and the subject is fused with the Other, in the little death experience. The extreme ritual sacrifice, in which the rupture of one's being borders on death, also has a sacramental character as a profound continuity and community are revealed. He attempted to dismantle the ego, to root out the bourgeois within himself and to awaken to a continuation of being that lay beyond isolated experience. Seeking a level of transcendence through the visceral, he opened himself to heightened awareness and intensities that exceed cognition and referentiality. This became for him identifiable with a mystical experience, in which the sacred and profane, the sexual and spiritual would be radically redefined.

Hijikata, too, was involved in the process of freeing the subject in his performance to take up new positions that would destabilise notions of integrated personality and coherent identity. He sought to bring the body which is so often characterised by absence, difference, deferments and so continually outside itself, to the present, through a process of interweaving outer methods and internal states, visible appearances and invisible processes. This presence that is always pointing back to the other, that fertile empty space, persistently draws the spectator also to search for it. Entering into this extreme and profound bodily encounter he allowed the possibility for a more inclusive sense of spirit, '(w)hen I think about spirit exalted to physiology, my taste remains unperturbed, remorselessly smashing even the shadow of a naked body sobbing on the edge of the abyss.'[736] while describing his dance as, 'a medium between a spirit and an impulse to a secret ritual'[737] This ritual involved a connection between death and the erotic, violence and the sacred, leading ultimately to provocative

[736] Ibid, 'Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 58.

[737] Ibid, Hijikata, 'To Prison', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 47. The Japanese term for 'spirit' employed here is *rei*, which has connotations of mysticism and the religious.

remappings of selfhood, interconnection, physicality, sexuality and spirituality. 'This dance experience... has been for me a marvellous spiritual journey. There is, I always feel an unfathomable ocean before my body.'[738] It is towards this boundless ocean that Butoh points, suggesting other levels of consciousness and transpersonal stages which destabilise notions of separateness.

In the shadowy darkness of the performing space, wafts of white body powder shed like layers of ghost-like images, otherworldly, haunting impressions, which possess however, a strange, harrowing solidity, as though left suffering and still unappeased. At the same time, his near naked body is rendered corpse-like, signifying its erasure and the death of the 'I', a dissolution of the self that allows for reintegration into a realm, which lies beyond the rational sphere and in the process, makes room for other, more expanded ontologies.

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[738] Ibid, Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR*, spring 2000, p. 41. The Japanese term used here for the word 'spiritual', *seishin,* has connotations that differ from the English equivalent as it signifies that which is not physical or real, but is 'Other' to the body.

CONCLUSION

In his dance, Hijikata sought to radically bring the body to the spectator's attention, as the physicality of the actor was given primacy, reconfigured and multi-defined. He struggled to articulate the meaning of post-war Japan through images of the visceral, sensual and homoerotic that expressed a transgressive and contradictory energy, irony and playfulness. His performance contained a heretical spirit and disregard for cultural authority, as he staged his outrage through defiant posturings, images of physical deformation, grotesqueness and violence. It revealed a preoccupation with the aberrant forms of human nature and the marginal elements within Japanese culture, which had been once so central to its essential character. This heterodox work, expressed a complex attraction towards primal forces, the mystical, other-worldly and illusory elements present beneath the surface of the Japanese imagination. He was a seminal force, who set the stage for entirely different dance forms that helped to substantively redefine the possibilities of live performance in Japan and throughout the world.

Hijikata ritualised the pain and agony of existence, in disturbing performances where the body appeared afflicted by cruelty, impaired and marked by age. Creating contorted anatomies and bodies steeped in desire, his dance expressed a fascination with the shocking and repulsive, as he celebrated the taboos of death and eroticism. His performances embraced the kitsch and revolting and resonated with the ambivalences and fractured elements that lay behind social reality. He created dreamscapes of the absurd and fantastic that reflected a savage and squalid impulse. The immediacy of the sacrificial body and the vulnerability of the flesh were also portrayed, as the body was radically exposed and articulated at its extreme limits. A new vocabulary of actions and gestures was offered, in contrast to that contained within modern Western dance, as grounded and earthbound, the performers danced into their body, without objective or aspiration yet opening into the possibility of transcendence.

Hijikata's *Dance of Utter Darkness* emerged during a period of increasing modernisation which came with American occupation. With its bright images of progress and infinite supply of commodities, this contemporary culture embraced the notion of reason and a tradition primed to the eye. His work challenged notions of rationality and its representational model of thought. His at times ritualistic dance was a subversive critique of technological modernisation, the hypocrisy of post-war democracy and the hegemony of ideologies of absolute knowledge and progress. In performance, he allowed the body, which had become so mired in these discourses, to react to the social and historical pressures that ordered, inscribed and regulated it.

The Butoh stage then, allowed different images and visions to emerge, emanating from an aesthetics rooted within the Japanese psyche. At the same time, he appealed to those Western artists and thinkers who preferred the principle of darkness in opposition to their own cultural traditions. These included the visionary artist Artaud, who stressed the deep layers of the consciousness and man's birth in a primordial violence and rupture. He reached into the mind's invisible cruelty, confronting its shadowy impulses, as central to his vision of theatre was chaos and counter-cruelty. Bringing these elements into play, he presented a raw, stimulating quality that acted directly on the senses of the spectator. These resonated with Butoh's aesthetic, which revealed the obscure and hidden aspects of the human consciousness, as did those present within the work of Bataille, who also exerted an obvious and critical influence on his performance. Bataille, too, plunged into the darkness, as his writings celebrated man's most primal drives and the values of abjection. His aesthetic embraced all that is 'base' in the human condition, including the scatological and morbid which he insisted must be revealed to advance man's self-knowledge as they were recognised as inseparable from the highest, most ideal extreme.

Hijikata's unique dance form involved a complex negotiation of pre-modern, modern, native and foreign sources. A synthesis was developed at this creative

intersection between distant realities and cultures, which transcended the constraints of both modern and traditional Japanese dance, while freeing performance from its commitment to dominant Western forms. Hijikata's Butoh mocked the respectability of traditional Japanese theatre while revoking the darkness of the Noh stage, which was an indispensable part of its beauty. At the same time he rebelled against the stale orthodoxy of the Shingeki establishment and the classical dance world. He allied himself to a tradition of misunderstood Western artists that in addition to Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille included, Jean Genet, De Sade, Lautréamont and Rimbaud. These artists transgressed cultural laws and prohibitions, at the same time, he was part of a culture of dissent within Japanese society, as he was close to a group of Japanese artists and intellectuals whose work consistently probed and questioned Western social and political dominance. In this thesis, I have attempted to uncover the influences inherent in Hijikata's work, in order to contribute to its broader interpretation and understanding. My intention has been to open up new perspectives, rather than form conclusions or express ideas about the artist's intentions. Towards this end, I have employed a variety of arguments found within post-structuralist theories, including queer and feminist approaches. In addition to the fragments left of his performance, I have looked to his writings to support the recurring themes that are addressed.

Hijikata's dance resonated with the diverse practice of sexuality that existed in the pre-modern era. There was a continuous historical shifting in attitudes towards male-male desires and 'acceptable' sexual practices in Japan, up to and beyond the arrival of Western influences. This more complex sexual etiquette of the pre-modern era was radically suppressed with the advent of foreign scientific theories, discourse and subsequent legislature. Homosexuality became increasingly classed as deviant and was eventually disavowed, while constraints were imposed on male androgyny and cross-dressing in performance. Hijikata's work continued the process of creating precedents for diverse gender roles, as an expanded continuum of sexuality was explored in his dance. His early Butoh

performances were often decadent, obscene and transgressive in the contemporary cultural context, as they portrayed the male body as the site of homoeroticism. These sometimes included violent acts associated with sensual and sexual arousal, as a subversion of dominant social taboos. Hijikata went beyond the limits of representation, by exposing the cultural construction of the homosexual body as a controlled object and replacing it with the subjective performer.

The gender and sexual dynamics of his dance evolved over the course of his lifetime, as his work gradually moved beyond the strictly male domain. He increasingly incorporated the female and androgynous body into his dance and opened possibilities for exploring the nature of sexuality outside the strict gender dichotomy. His work encouraged multiplicity and difference, as his dancers portrayed ambiguous qualities and hovered at an indefinite gender threshold. In performance Hijikata and the co-founder of Butoh, Ohno Kazuo, cast themselves in extravagant outfits and burlesque poses, creating shifting, incongruous identities and the caricatured feminine. This parodic style continued into the performances of his principal female dancer Ashikawa, who expressed an undentifiable sexuality that eschewed wholeness for excess and challenged Japanese representations of essentialised femininity.

Eroticism and sexuality were pervasive themes in the work of the writers and thinkers who influenced Hijikata. Bataille forged a new and innovative language in which he created networks of evocative images, to describe the extreme, ecstatic and obscene moments that peppered his writings. A continuous movement is present in his work, between the impossible positions of pure subjective experience and that of pure objective description. In place of dispassionate and detached observation, he sought to express the most deeply felt experiences, aware that this was a futile task and that the altered states which he thought so vital to human existence, are inexpressible. The most

'essential' human drives of obscenity, destructive tendencies, madness, auto mutilation and mystical trances were nevertheless taken up in his writings.

Ambiguous arrangements and juxtapositions of words were created, a process that is reflected in Hijikata's writings and performances, which contain heterogeneous and incongruous elements. The often, fragmented items present on the Butoh stage, resonated with Bataille's concept of the formless and incomplete. Ugliness and degradation also feature in both their creative works, which celebrate the body's propensity to be simultaneously grotesque and sublime. It is metamorphosed and transformed, staged in extreme postures, creating anomalous forms that question and perplex notions of ideal, physical beauty. Pushing the frontiers of the revolting and exposing that which is conventionally hidden in contemporary society, Hijikata incorporated abjection in his work, that spectre which continually haunts the boundaries of social propriety and disrupts the order and continuity of the body image.

A direct corporeal relationship was conveyed in Bataille's obscene writings, in which violation and eroticism were continually associated, as the body was degraded, constrained and transfigured into a sacrificial object. Ecstasy, mutilation and torture were continuously described, as intense transgressions that dissolve the body's unity and open a way beyond form. He looked to the desiring and excessive impulses of the body to create new communicative relationships and possibilities. Searching deeply within himself, he investigated the intensities of his sensations and stirred up the repressed emotions, desires and nightmares within his subconscious. At times he placed his own subjectivity at risk, within a quest for an extreme inner experience that opened onto the mysterious. In these ways, he redefined the sacred, invoked ineffable states and the extreme limit of human possibilities.

Just as the ritualistic is constantly evoked in Bataille's work, violent and sacrificial imagery was also performed in Butoh, as the shamanic experience and festive

spirit were evoked in Hijikata's dance. His own body was restrained and staged in moments of crisis, in what in Bataillean terms would amount to a dramatic 'laceration', when the limits of the human form and that of the self are violated and the excess released. This expressed a primitive impulse and a 'useless' expenditure consonant with Bataille's ideals. The transgressive aspects of sexuality, ecstatic pleasures and their connection with death, which were so central to Bataille's work, were present in Hijikata's performances. He staged ecstasy in scenes that portrayed pain, abandon and violation. Human existence was thus considered from the underside, from the basest materialism to the heights of the spiritual. A communion of the sacred and profane was at the centre of both their thinking, in which one was not valorised over the other, but both were elided and treated in dialectical relationship.

Artaud, too, was committed to the overthrow of subjectivity and the rupturing of self. His life, dramaturgy and indeed his own fragmented being, revealed a radical questioning of identity constituted according to cultural mores, systems and constraints. He shared Hijikata's anarchistic and bohemian impulse, living an alternative life of frequent solitude and alienation. He mocked and rejected the bourgeois order, while denying existing social and aesthetic values. His own subjectivity was always in a process of deconstruction, not only through the mind-expanding experiences of hallucinogenic drugs, but also through actively seeking a number of different character roles in which to redefine himself. Sensing himself as doubled and having the presence of the 'Other' within, he sought liberation from the confines of his own mind and body. In his enigmatic and seminal work, *The Theatre of Cruelty*, he moved beyond the representation of character and individual psychology, as he disrupted its unity and displaced its centre. The primary metaphor for this theatre, the plague, aimed for the breakdown of self-control and self-containment.

In his writings and dramaturgy, Artaud continuously aspired to giving the body radical presence as he interrogated its substance and created potent corporeal

images. He aspired to a new body, an anatomical reconstruction forged from the material of abject fragmentation. As the basis of all performance, he wanted gesture, movement and endless permutations of postures and combinations. He proposed a theatre in which every myriad aspect of the actor's body would be included and perpetually in process, working at the limits of real danger and risk. This would involve a sense of urgent and physical crisis, necessary to allow his whole sensibility and anatomy to resonate with an immediate awareness.

He intended a unique and physical language to be created through a variety of innovations that included, exaggerated gestural styles, explorative spatial arrangements, new musical instruments and a range of discords, silences, symbols, like those he found within Balinese theatre. With the immediacy of this sensory violence he proposed to jolt his audience into a deep metaphysical awareness. In the alchemical process of this foreign theatre, Artaud observed forms that were constantly in flux and transformation, pointing to forces that lay beyond the framework of temporal time. His proposed theatre would have affinities with such disciplined and ceremonial performances, provoking intoxication, terror and ecstasy. These collective performative events would be akin to forms of spiritual exorcism, which lay beyond the metaphysical pretensions of Western modernism.

Traces of Artaud's vision can be clearly seen in Hijikata's work. His Butoh was conceived during an intensely creative period when Japanese artists were experimenting with the erotic and expressive potential of the body. They questioned issues around modern subjectivity and were involved in opening renewed possibilities for agency and identity. Hijikata's dance continued this process, as he radically created new concepts of Japan's tradition that would contribute to the construction of its own distinct modernity. Eschewing a sense of wholeness and totality, his aesthetic offered an open-endedness, deconstruction and incompletion as an antidote to the overly rational organisation of society.

On stage, he presented a continually changing subject field of multiple images, which destabilised and confounded coherent identity while challenging the notion of the body ideal. He displayed hybridised creatures, contradictory, irrational identities, in which the bodily form was unravelled and radically transformed. Looking towards the liminal elements of society, he glorified the debased while assuming his own marginalised positionality. Multiple meanings, distortions and obscurities criss-crossed the stage, which expressed an uncertainty more playful and liberating than a belief in fixed and absolute notions. In performance, he enacted violence against his own body and those of his dancers, cutting and slashing the skin as if in an attempt to erase the body. These created compelling and potent images of its dissolution and the extreme limits of human possibilities, which reflect Artaud's aesthetic of cruelty. Hijikata's physical poetry was intended to shock and disturb the spectator at the deepest level, while challenging a modernity that aspired to a notion of clear and total seeing.

Hijikata responded to Artaud's central challenge, to the necessity of gesture and consciousness, in an immediate event that would be experienced directly by the audience. In the live Butoh performance, movement was deliberate, restrained, through an inner concentration of energy. An inner physical sensibility was created through rigorous training and mental discipline, in which a movement took place away from the discursive processes of the mind towards awareness to the breath. The actor contained and concentrated his energies, directing them inwards and allowing them to penetrate every part of the body. A range of physical qualities were employed, states of counter tension and oppositional internal energies, differing rhythms and pace, and the ultra slow, painful execution of movement through space. These created a powerful presence and reached a level beyond the ego, towards another register that is enigmatic and indefinable.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I have alluded to post-structuralist theorists, especially Derrida, who has questioned the concept of theatrical presence and

notions of coherent subjectivity. The metaphysics of presence is perceived as an indefinite play of signs that is always infiltrated by the trace. These concepts correspond closely with those of Buddhism, *shunyata*, emptiness and *anatta*, no self, in which no place is given for a coherent, definitive, autonomous entity or an all-powerful absolute being. Finally, I argue that Butoh inherited something of these religious tenets and in Hijikata's work the metaphysical and incomprehensible was recovered, through a rupturing of the boundaries of the known, which lead to different and more expanded understandings of the known self.

Postscript

The *Dance of Utter Darkness* emerged in the new Tokyo after the country had risen from the ashes of defeat and experienced a profound and traumatic rupture with its past. The ghost of war had become overshadowed by glittering images of progress, the light offered by a period of modernisation built on Western models, too bright to permit any nuancing of shadow. Hijikata rebelled against its imposed reality of rationalism and replaced it with a world of misprisions, refractions and phantoms, revelling in their formlessness and offering solidity to their ephemerality. His dance delighted in the myriad possibilities of form and the myriad forms of reality. In the process he appealed to those Western artists and thinkers who preferred the Gnostic principles of darkness, as potent alternatives to the ontological privileging of clarity and light within their own traditions. His writings made contact with the play of light and shade, out of which he let his words emerge. Then his stage became the place where language collapsed and fell in on itself. In the dim half-light of performance he replaced the word shadows with silence, creating a mute and alternative reality of unpredictability and irrationality, in which he registered his body more concretely than any trace. Indeed in a world where only fragments and traces of the past remained to tell their truth, his work allowed different ways of seeing to emerge, beyond the pretensions of an imposed metaphysics and an alien cultural tradition that valorised representational modes of thought. In the faint, frail luminescence of the

stage, he allowed nocturnal spaces to open and announced the logic of darkness, before looking to other possibilities concealed in the splinters of light. In the meantime, Hijikata's dance celebrated and rejoiced in the secrets of this ghostly indistinct world of reflections that exists on the threshold of a vision, which is anarchic and erotic, sacred and profane.

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APPENDICES

CHRONOLOGY: Performances and Events quoted throughout the Thesis

1928, March, Hijikata was born Yoneyama Kunio in Akita Prefecture, Tohoku, North East Japan. After graduating from technical school, pursues modern dance lessons with Masumura Katsuko, disciple of Ishii Baku.
1949, moves to Tokyo and is impressed by a recital by Ohno Kazuo, then a modern dancer. Returns to Akita.
1952, moves again to Tokyo and continues his dance. Meets Ohno Kazuo.
1953, takes classes with the Ando Mitsuko Dance Institute.
1954, dances in an Ando Mitsuko dance recital with Ohno Kazuo.
1958, makes several appearances with other dancers in Tokyo theatres. Adopts the stage name Hijikata Tatsumi.
1959, meets Mishima Yukio.
May, choreographs and performs in *Forbidden Colours* (*Kinjiki)* with Ohno Kazuo's son Yoshito.
1963, November, choreographs and performs in *The Masseur: A Story that Supports Passion* (*Anma: aiyoku o sasaeru gekijo no hanashi*).
1965, November, choreographs and performs in *The Rose-Coloured Dance* (*A La Maison de M. Civeçawa, [Barairo Dansu]*). The first generation of Butoh dancers, including Ohno Kazuo and his son Yoshito appear in this.
1967, July, choreographs and performs in *Emotion in Metaphysics* (*Keijijo-gaku)* for the female dancer Takai Tomiko.
August, returns to Akita for photograph collection (*Kamaitachi*) with Hosoe Eikoh.
1968, June, choreographs and performs in *Note on Little Genet* (*O-June sho*).
August, choreographs the first performance of Ashikawa Yoko.
September, choreographs and performs in *Mandala Mansion* (*Mandara Yashiki).*

October, choreographs and performs in *Revolt of the Flesh*, (*The Japanese and Hijikata Tatsumi, Hijikata Tatsumi to nihonjin)*. This announces a new direction for his *Dance of Darkness*, *Ankoku Butoh.*

1970, October, choreographs and performs in *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge* (*Honegami Toge Hotokekazura*).

1972, September, choreographs *Fin Whale* (*Nagasu kujira*).

October-November, choreographs and performs in the series of *27 Nights for Four Seasons* (*Shiki no tame no nijushichiban*) comprised of four pieces, *A Story of Chickenpox* (*Hosotan), Ball as Plaything (Susame-dama), Study of Insulator (Gaishi-ko), Melting Candy (Nadare-ame) and Gibasan*. This was the first *Tohoku Kabuki* performance.

1973, September, choreographs and performs in *Calm House* (*Shizukana ie*) - the last performance in the *Ankoku Butoh* collection. Continues choreographing, directing, teaching and writing until:

1986, January, died in Tokyo Women's Medical College Hospital at the age of 57, with cirrhosis and cancer of the liver.