

Recovering the Body and Expanding the Boundaries of Self in Japanese Butoh: Hijikata Tatsumi, Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud

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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, which were followed by the profound humiliation of American occupation. Note that Hijikata was a teenager during this time; he was born in March 1928 and died in January 1986.
3. Hijikata rebelled against the orthodoxy of the Shingeki establishment. This new theatre was a movement away from the decadence, grotesqueness and fantasy of traditional Kabuki, which offered close interaction with the audience and a manifold sensuality.
4. In the late nineteenth century, constraints were imposed on androgyny and cross-dressing in traditional Kabuki and Noh theatre, with the importation of western influence and Japan's shift to a modern nation state. Theatre was recognised as one of the most spectacular sites to display its new status in the world and to educate its modern subject. Naturalised and secure gender identities were required by this ideological project, and the performative understanding of gender that existed on and off stage gradually diminished.

Ankoku Butoh (the Dance of Utter Darkness),¹ a revolutionary dance form created by Hijikata Tatsumi in the late 1950s, emerged in the new Tokyo that developed out of the dark, post-nuclear war years.² Implicit in Hijikata's work was a powerful critique of the cultural hegemony, rationality and increasing individualism that were the outcomes of intensifying western influence. In his dance, Hijikata allowed alternative narratives to emerge, freeing the subject to take up new positions that would destabilise notions of separation, individual personality and coherent identity. He ironically incorporated elements from a pre-modern Japanese sensibility and appealed to those western artists and thinkers who preferred the Gnostic principles of darkness as potent alternatives to the privileging of clarity and light within their own traditions. In performance he created a surreal and unpredictable world that resonated with mystical and illusory elements present beneath the surface of the Japanese imagination, far removed from contemporary existence.

Against a background of New Theatre (*Shingeki*), created early in the twentieth century and inspired by western realism,³ Hijikata's performance offered a radical corporealism, a body naked and *in extremis* - one that was both released and constrained. The performing body, which had become mired in western discourses and presumptions,⁴ was given primacy, reconfigured and multi-defined, as transformation became the essence of Hijikata's dance. He staged the body in all its immanence, in ecstasy, as a site of pleasures and in pain, disturbed by abjection and

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cruelty. On the other hand, he allowed for the possibility of transcendence, an opening to an encounter with states of consciousness that lie beyond notions of fixed and stable self, denied in modern society. In the process he returned his dance to the status of a sacred ritual.

Hijikata was indebted to the work of the artists Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud, and his dance resonates with their theoretical concepts.⁵ The starting point for Artaud and Bataille was always already the body. Their aesthetic expressed a fascination with the shocking and repulsive, and celebrated the taboos of death and eroticism, as they ritualised the agony and ecstasy of existence, creating contorted anatomies steeped in desire. The immediacy of the sacrificial body and the vulnerability of the flesh were portrayed, while the body was exposed and articulated in its extremes. Each contested the notion of individuality, choosing instead to embrace encounters that would radically open the limits of one's being. Bataille's work interrogated traditional attitudes about the nature of the self, individuality and collectivity, as part of his politics of resistance and quest for the rapturous and mystical experience. Artaud, too, desired intense relationship and connection, as expressed through his writings, drug taking and interest in aspects of other cultures.⁶ Both artists created a variety of positions in their work, opening the way to new ideas of subjectivity as manifold, heterogeneous and incomplete. Hijikata's work encompassed many of their ideas. He rebelled against an imposed reality of rationalism, replacing it with an indistinct world of the grotesque and mutilated, while revelling in the sensual, sublime and profane.

In this article I will be highlighting some of the many points of contact between Hijikata, Bataille and Artaud as a dialectical approach to their various aesthetics and theoretical concepts. I will not be asserting any direct or precise influence and my intention is not an analysis or a critical discussion of Hijikata's reading of these artists' work. Rather, I will use the work of Bataille and Artaud as a window through which to view Hijikata's aesthetic vision and deconstruct his performances that will, I hope, pose different ways of seeing Butoh dance. In this process, I will resist any sense of closure that might imply an innate or transcendental meaning in Hijikata's work as this would be intrinsically foreign to the spirit of his creative expression.

Butoh Performance

In the spring of 1959, the first Butoh dance choreographed by Hijikata, *Forbidden Colours* (*Kinjiki*), was performed in a darkened Tokyo theatre⁷ and examined the theme of homoeroticism, which had never before been portrayed on a Japanese stage. It opens with the appearance of two men, one older (Hijikata Tatsumi), whose face and chest are greased in black, in stark contrast to the teenage boy's white youthful flesh. In the shadowy setting only the sounds of breathing and heavy sighing can be heard, as the older man rolls on top of the other and cries *je t'aime* a couple of times, suggesting the forbidden union of an illicit intimate encounter. Later there are sounds of footsteps, the boy escaping and the man pursuing. The performance culminates in what appeared to be the slaughtering of a live chicken on stage. Sending shock waves throughout the dance world, *Ankoku Butoh*, the Dance of Utter Darkness, had begun.⁸

5. Many academics have made reference to Bataille's influence, including Odette Aslan in 'Du Butoh Masculin au Feminin', in Odette Aslan and Béatrice Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s): Etudes* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002), p. 63, who refers to an article written by Mishima Yukio that was dedicated to Bataille and which caught Hijikata's attention. Artaud's dramaturgical concepts were of great interest to the new avant-garde artists and theatre practitioners in Japan, Hijikata included, especially after the translation of his *Theatre and its Double* in 1965. Stephen Barber states, 'Butoh is Artaud's voice at the end of his life' (Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* [London and Boston: Faber, 1993], p. 5).
6. Artaud was fascinated by the culture and mythology of several ancient civilisations, especially those of the East.
7. Note that this dance was adapted from Mishima Yukio's novel, which was written in 1952. It must also be noted that this performance is reconstituted mainly through visual images contained in Takashi Morishita ed., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh: Surrealism of the Flesh, Ontology of the 'Body'* (Tokyo: Research Centre for the Arts and Art Administration at Keio University, 2004), pp. 34–5. This source, with additional photographs published in other books, will form the basis of the descriptions of all the dances described in this article.
8. 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', *Tokyo Journal*, 206 (August 1998), p. 31.

Hijikata's work took a different direction almost a decade later, in the autumn of 1968, with the performance entitled *Revolt of the Flesh* (*Nikutai no Hanran*), which marked a watershed in his career and an assertion of his own definitive style of dance.⁹ In this dance, a series of caricatured and contrasting images are played out in varied intensities of rhythm and texture. First, Hijikata appears in a bridal kimono worn back to front and there follows a major shift in the dynamics of the piece when Hijikata reveals a large gold phallus strapped to his naked body, while overhead a dead chicken is hanging, strung up 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. Later he casts himself in a series of strange and extravagant outfits, including an overly ruched satin ball gown, as he repeatedly smashes himself against steel plates that hang from the ceiling, the edges of which become like blades, as if to slash his skin. The piece culminates with Hijikata suspended from ropes and being raised upside down, his near-naked body draped in white cloth knotted loosely about his loins. 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.

A few years later, in 1972, a markedly different style of movement is revealed in the dance *A Story of Chickenpox* (*Hosotan*).¹⁰ Hijikata passes through a series of configurations, transforming the balance and architecture of his form, at times standing tall, seeming open, loose and puppet-like, at others, stiffened and deformed.¹¹ In an excruciatingly dramatic final scene, he wears a ragged loincloth, revealing blistery patches formed through the viscous white paint that covers his skin. His body is entangled in cobweb-like threads, heavy to the floor with limbs and head painfully raised. The integrity of the human form appears ruptured, as his agonised figure is seen as if in its final spasms, conveying an intense communication with the audience that is direct and focused. The erratic 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.

Through such images of the visceral, sensual and sordid, Hijikata struggled to articulate the meaning of post-war society. His work expressed a transgressive energy, irony and playfulness, and powerfully challenged the complacency, rationality and rigid classification of the bodies of the modernisation process. Through his dance he advocated flaunting the body's 'aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society'¹² 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'.¹³ His stage became the site of difference, as he and the co-founder of Butoh, Ohno Kazuo, cast themselves in exaggerated attitudes and burlesque poses, creating shifting, incongruous identities and the caricatured feminine. He unveiled the phallic body, offering it as the site of a spectacle of excess and sadomasochistic acts. Exploring the body's diffuse potentialities, power relations and raw sexual energies, he enacted

9. This dance was also called the 'Japanese and Hijikata Tatsumi' (*Hijikata Tatsumi to nibonjin*). Although there is very little accessible film coverage of Hijikata's Butoh, there are fragments filmed in black and white by a hand-held camera, which belong to the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives of Keio University in Tokyo. Photographs are depicted in Morishita ed., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh*, pp. 94–103.

10. This performance was part of the series of 1972, *27 Nights for Four Seasons* [*Shiki no tame no nijushichiban*].

11. See Morishita ed., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh*, pp. 13, 64, 109 and 141, and Aslan and Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s)*, p. 270.

12. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'To Prison', *The Drama Review (TDR)*, 44.1 (Spring 2000), 42–48 (p. 44).

13. *Ibid.*

14. Nanako Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 12–28 (p. 25).
15. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 56–59 (p. 56).
16. Tatsumi, 'To Prison', p. 48.
17. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 49–55 (p. 52).
18. Tatsumi, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', p. 59.
19. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'Fragments of Glass: A Conversation between Hijikata Tatsumi and Suzuki Tadashi', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 62–70 (p. 64).
20. Note that in the body of this text Japanese surnames will be placed first. Mishima Yukio (1925–1970), internationally renowned novelist and playwright.
21. Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, scholar, writer of erotic literature and translator of the works of the Marquis de Sade, Georges Bataille and Jean Genet.
22. Takiguchi Shuzo was an art critic and Surrealist poet.
23. This was in what now constitutes central Tokyo and was named *Asbestos-kan*.
24. See, for example, David G. Goodman, *Angura: Posters of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), introduction, pp. 1–2. These artists and intellectuals all sought to find lost cultural identities and radically assert new aesthetics and concepts of Japan's tradition. They revolted against the increased materialisation and de-eroticisation of everyday reality, while often ironically incorporating elements of western culture.
25. Kageyama Yuri, in his article 'Dai Rakuda Kan: Butoh Spectacle', *Japan Times Weekly*, 24 January 1987, notes the influence of some of these artists, especially Artaud and Bataille. See also Kurihara, 'Hijikata Tatsumi', p. 18.

his male body as submissive, narcissistic, and exposed, highlighting areas of contradiction and incoherence implicit within masculinity. In so doing he revealed the hypocrisy and repression at the heart of Japan's prevailing sexual culture, one that had essentialised sexual identity and distanced itself from a past in which gender had been construed very differently. His stage became 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.

His was a paradoxical beauty, expressed in contortion, ugliness and decay. Describing the body as 'the remotest thing in the universe',¹⁴ he pointed to its ambiguous nature, that most enduring presence in our lives which is continually absent from our awareness. The materiality of 'skin and bone'¹⁵ emerged, 'a dance made flesh and blood',¹⁶ a Butoh body, emaciated 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.'¹⁷ 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',¹⁸ and 'I demand a sense of crisis.'¹⁹ It was also a body in critical contradiction, limbs inverted, legs bowed and mouths open. Through these severe postures and syncopated movements, the dancer was forced into a deep inner encounter, which acted in a powerful way on the physical sensibility of many who watched.

The status of the body, sexuality, selfhood and the sacred were among the most important and contentious issues of Hijikata's day. His Butoh was conceived during an intensely creative period when Japanese artists were questioning western attitudes, and metaphysics and its social and political dominance, while creating new concepts that would contribute to the construction of a distinct modernity. A range of these artists guided Hijikata's unique vision as he collaborated closely with some of the greatest thinkers, writers and artists of his time, including Mishima Yukio,²⁰ Shibusawa Tatsuhiko²¹ and Takiguchi Shuzo,²² with whom he shared a marginal and oppositional relationship to the norms of society. He met regularly with them in his training venue,²³ engaging in lively interdisciplinary exchanges, while sharing with them an interest in native and foreign cultures.²⁴ They avidly read and discussed the sometimes obscene and erotic writings of Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, the Marquis de Sade, Comte de Lautréamont and Rimbaud, among others.²⁵ Hijikata's work was situated at the confluence of these radical dialogues, and his work was an intercultural and intracultural activity, in which he brought aspects from disparate traditions and distant realities into a dynamic relationship. Probing the innovative potential within these eclectic sources, he discovered new impulses and a sense of alterity for his own artistic output.

26. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'Inner Material/Material', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 36–42 (p. 40).
27. As part of Japan's efforts to build a coherent sense of itself as a subject-nation and re-enter the international community, it sought to exclude risqué and diverse elements which threatened its culturally constructed boundaries. Natural processes, for example, such as those of birth and death, became institutionalised and increasingly removed from sight.
28. 'L'économie à la mesure de l'univers', in Georges Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes VII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 15.
29. See Georges Bataille, *La Part Maudite* (Paris: Minuit Editions, 1967), pp. 57–60 and 133.
30. The intensely disruptive forces of this *dépense* are a central issue to which Bataille continually returns, as an unlimited and ecstatic expenditure. They form the basis for his alternative ethics, which emphasises 'loss' and serves as an impulse to sacrifice all in a violent annihilation of self-consciousness. See Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, ed. by Allan Stoekle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 116–30.
31. See Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (New York and London: Penguin, 2001), p. 22: 'sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being'.
32. Bataille was described as an 'excremental philosopher' by the founder of the Surrealist movement, André Breton, in the Second Manifesto. It is not my intention in this article to assess Bataille's work or to develop Breton's or other critics' arguments; instead, I will describe Bataille's theories on the body, eroticism and transgression in the light of any traces that can be detected within Hijikata's dance.
33. Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 11.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Hijikata, Artaud and Bataille

In the increasingly prosperous Tokyo, Hijikata railed against the commodification of human lives and desires, as he asserted in declamatory style, 'a lethargic generation arrogant with fat and I vomit on its lotioned and powdered, pale effeminate skin'.²⁶ He reasserted an alternative aesthetics that incorporated subversion, fracture and liminality, which had become alienated and suppressed.²⁷ The birth of capitalism and its emphasis on profit and industrious activity was also a major preoccupation and source of disgust for Georges Bataille, who declared, 'The world [...] is sick with wealth.'²⁸ As part of his alternative ethics he stated that in such a 'homogenous' bourgeois social order - dependent as it is on commodities - unproductive activity and 'useless values' are suppressed.²⁹ He believed it was the use made of a society's non-accumulating expenditure, and in turn its surplus waste, which determined its form and man's relationship to the sacred domain.³⁰ The collective realm was given emphasis, as in, for example, the orgiastic, mythical and artistic, where such 'excess' is spent and the ultimate meaning of existence is experienced. Madness, mutilation, mystical trances and obscenity were also taken up in his writings as transgressive and sacred experiences in which individuation was discarded and a larger economy opened, through personal loss, waste and destruction.³¹ He looked to the desiring and excessive impulses of the body to create new communicative relationships and possibilities.³²

Bataille's work is constantly concerned with eroticism, those abundant, forbidden and usually obscene moments in his writings which are offered as examples of 'sovereign' moments of intense expenditure. In the introduction to his work entitled *Eroticism*, he begins by stating the paradox: 'Of eroticism, one can say that it is the approval of life even to the point of death.'³³ Its irruptive forces culminate in that moment of surrender and the outpouring of pleasure, when taboos are broken and individual and separate existence is fused with that of another: 'The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives,'³⁴ as he describes the dissipation of being when the barriers of the ego are surpassed and transcended. The naked body is ever present throughout his work, about which he comments, 'Nakedness 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.'³⁵ It is interesting that Hijikata quotes this passage in his text 'To Prison', to which he gives further emphasis: 'the naked body and death are inseparably joined'.³⁶ In another piece of writing on the same theme, Hijikata describes 'the shadow of a naked body sobbing on the edge of the abyss',³⁷ expressing the intimacy of nakedness and the final demise.

Rapturous pleasures and their connection with death are present in Hijikata's performances. 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 and dreams, or the *petite mort* of orgasm, are described, in defiance of the economics of measured exchange. Hijikata's work stages ecstasy in all its pure effusiveness, loss

35. Ibid.
36. Hijikata, 'To Prison', p. 45.
37. Hijikata, 'From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein', p. 58.
38. For example, as was described earlier in *Forbidden Colours* (*Kimjiki*), a chicken is killed in the context of a homoerotic scene.
39. See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism, Vols. II and III*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 16.
40. See Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 46.
41. In the performance *Revolt of the Flesh*, Hijikata performs a trance-like, wild phallic dance. His hysteria and frenzy are so extreme they appear to border on a loss of consciousness, like that which the call to shamanism demands. Such 'primitive' overtones are enhanced by the presence of a rabbit and pig beside Hijikata as he is carried onto the stage, while a cockerel is seen later hanging by its claws.
42. Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', p. 39. Donald Richie, describing the performance *Forbidden Colours*, noted how 'all the movements expressed pain' (*Japan Times*, 7 March 1987).
43. A word commonly used in Bataille's works, as in, for example, his 'Sacrifices', in *Visions of Excess*, p. 130.
44. See Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 25–6, and Bataille, 'Formless', in *Visions of Excess*, p. 31.
45. For example, the pop artist and graphic designer Yokoo Tadanori was commissioned to create the poster advertising Hijikata's *The Rose-Coloured Dance*, for which he abstracted the two female characters from the renowned painting *Gabrielle d'Estrée and Her Sister* – of the Fontainebleau

and anguish, violates taboos of nudity and redefines the sacred, as the erotic union 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.³⁸ For both artists, eroticism distorts the reproductive purpose of sexuality, as it serves no usefulness but offers instead a radical negativity.³⁹ In a society which had come to deny the subversive aspects of sexuality while promoting those that relate to procreation, Hijikata's work offered a rejection of the social regulation of sensual desire and epitomised the principle of transgression, a central concept in Bataille's writings.

Bataille extols 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 sensual 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 whose meaning lies outside that of prosaic existence. A non-linear, mythic time is opened, in contrast to the rational time of mechanised modernity.⁴⁰ Hijikata's performance contains such festive and ritualistic imagery that reverberates with excess and ruin, portraying it as a return to a primal and shamanic reality removed from that of consumerism and accumulation.⁴¹ His surrendering body becomes 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.'⁴² Hijikata often stages himself and his dancers in situations of physical danger as their bodies are given full shock potential, punctured and hung from ropes, in what would amount to a dramatic 'laceration',⁴³ when the limits of the human form and of the self are violated, expressing a primitive impulse and a useless expenditure consonant with Bataille's ideals.

With the irrational, enigmatic and often bizarre effects created in performance, Hijikata revels in the labyrinthine reality of the *informe*,⁴⁴ one of Bataille's key terms, which denotes the shapeless and imperfect. Mimesis and representation are defaced by its workings as it resists the tendency to arrest and interpret meaning or to impose a rigid structure. Instead it acts as a movement of difference, erasure and pure flux, and its operations involve a return to the material, to the body and to that which is base. Just as ambiguous arrangements and juxtapositions of words are created in Bataille's works, the process is reflected in Hijikata's writings and performances which embraced the kitsch and distasteful.⁴⁵ He interweaves an abundance of dissonant items and places them in unpredictable relationships, creating a complexity of signs and indeterminacies.⁴⁶ In his often chaotic arrangements, Hijikata violates representation, as such objects refer back only to themselves and revel in their own 'objectness', their incompleteness rendering them irreducible to sense or purpose.

Ugliness, degradation and the abject also feature in both Bataille's and Hijikata's creative works, which celebrate the body's propensity to be simultaneously sordid and sublime. The body is transformed and staged in intense postures, creating anomalous forms that question and perplex

- School. In the centre of Tadanori's lurid collage, one of the women is squeezing the other's nipple and liquid spurts out. 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.
46. Twigs, sticks and other disparate man-made objects like parasols and chopsticks are innovatively assembled to create stage props, headdresses and masks. These can be seen in the series of *27 Nights for Four Seasons*, in which Hijikata fuses a variety of elements which are combined with tattered, crudely dyed rags and threadbare outfits.
47. In the writings of Julia Kristeva, the abject implies 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite', kept within the individuated and self-contained body for fear that it might seep outside the borders and therefore 'disturb individual identity, system, order' (Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez [New York and Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1982], p. 4).
48. For example, in the dance *Note on Little Genet (O-June sho)* (1968), one of the dancers has his face cut with a razor blade and blood trickles out, offering a display of the ruptured body transformed into a sacrificial object. See Odette Aslan, 'Du Butoh Masculin au Feminin', in Aslan and Picon-Vallin, *Butoh(s)*, p. 58.
49. The body is even set in reversal; for example, in Hijikata's *Corpse Vine on Osa Famine Ridge* (1970), a woman with her arms and legs back to front is displayed (Tadao Nakatani, *World of Tatsumi Hijikata* [Tokyo: Shinsensha, 2003], p. 42).
50. Bataille, 'The "Old Mole"' and the Prefix Sur', in *Visions of Excess*, p. 35.
51. Bataille, 'The Mouth', in *Visions of Excess*, p. 59.
- notions of ideal physical beauty. Pushing the frontiers of the revolting, Hijikata incorporated 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.⁴⁷ Bataille continually returned to the subject of the 'heterogeneous', that excluded 'absolute other', and was fascinated with extreme elements of detritus and the spillage of the human body, which evoke fascination and revulsion. Such obscene materials as blood, sweat and spittle are suggested or actually trickle onto the Butoh stage, and the body's apertures and orifices are revealed and left gaping, as eyes roll upwards, tongues spew and legs are splayed. In performance the body is opened in ritualistic ways, as the skin is cut and inscribed in a communication of pain and loss.⁴⁸ 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.
- Both artists disrupt and reverse hierarchical readings of the body, disorientating its symmetry. In Butoh dance the body is placed in constant interplay between extension and contraction, while emphasis is given to the lower parts.⁴⁹ In Bataille's writings, the high and low are also constantly inverted and destabilised, subverting the established philosophical oppositions between 'the impurity of earth where bodies rot and the purity of lofty space'.⁵⁰ There are numerous references to the 'architecture'⁵¹ of the body contained in his work. It is continually envisaged on the horizontal and vertical axes, while the oppositions between them are constantly interrupted and reversed, as one moves into or returns to the other and 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.⁵² At the same time, he constantly reminds the reader of his capacity for squatting and walking on all fours, those grounded early states to which we are all disposed. Both artists employ the act of crawling, but towards different ends; Bataille states, 'je rampe afin de n'être plus'⁵³ (I crawl in order no longer to be), while Hijikata declares, 'I am an avant-garde who crawls the earth, a corpse trying desperately to become life,'⁵⁴ as he continually returned to the soil, asserting, 'I gravitate to mud.'⁵⁵ Acutely aware of society's eagerness to disguise that which is regarded as base and inferior in a desire for some abstract normativity, he attempted to retrieve its connection with nature by appealing to his rural childhood in north-eastern Japan.⁵⁶
- The coherent form of the body is fractured and parodied in Bataille's novels, and he frequently describes its secret parts. Its form is transmuted, as the organs are torn out and disconnected from their usual functions, to be reintroduced into contexts which are radically different.⁵⁷ 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. Through the use of evocative imagery in Hijikata's performance and writings, the body is transfigured; as no longer a stable entity, it is revealed in a state of fragmentation. In *The Rose-Coloured Dance (À La*

52. Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix Sur', p. 34.
53. Georges Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 91.
54. Mark Holborn and Ethan Hoffman, *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul* (Hong Kong: Saden/Aperture, 1987), p. 64.
55. Hijikata Tatsumi, 'Wind Daruma', *TDR* (Spring 2000), 71-9 (p. 74). Hijikata also stated that the Japanese 'walk as if stealing their own footprints' (ibid., p. 73), drawing on the corporeality of Japanese farmers and their way of sinking the lower part of the body towards the floor.
56. He constantly made reference to 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' (Hijikata, 'Plucking off the Darkness of the Flesh', p. 50).
57. See, for example, Georges Bataille, *The Story of the Eye* (trans. by Joachim Neugroschel [London and Boston: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1979], p. 35), 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. 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.
58. See Morishita ed., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh*, p. 48, for pictures.
59. This fractured image can be seen as either subscribing to a fetishised femininity or, alternatively, as offering a shrewd deconstruction intended to give new meaning. There are many interpretations that can be offered; however, these are beyond the scope of this article.
60. Holborn and Hoffman, *Butoh*, p. 14.

Maison de M. Civeçawa [Barairo Dansu] (1965),⁵⁸ the female genitalia is shockingly exposed, painted on the back of one of the male dancers, in dissected and exaggerated form.⁵⁹ Bodily parts are also conjured, as 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',⁶⁰ in order to disrupt their corporeal relationship and explore inner and outer configuration.

The viscera are laid bare in Bataille's photographs of the 'Chinese torture victim' of 1905 and displayed in *The Tears of Eros*.⁶¹ In these a young man is seen tied to a stake as the executor performs his slow dismemberment. The closed form of the individual is visibly torn open and meticulously hacked to pieces, as the victim is released from the limited sense of self in Bataillean terms. He described these haunting pictures as a 'life in death' and maintained a long-standing preoccupation with and, indeed, fascination for them.⁶² This image reveals a measureless loss without return or benefit and a sacred ruination when the victim appears rapturous in the moment of death. The juxtaposition with the violence of the scene produced a complex and profound effect for Bataille: 'I was so stunned that I reached the point of ecstasy.'⁶³ Hijikata was also intrigued and fascinated by this state of suspension at the extreme edge of existence, 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',⁶⁴ 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',⁶⁵ a state which contained a powerful and compelling sense of immediacy.

Antonin Artaud's images resonate with such excess, like that of the actor being burnt at the stake,⁶⁶ as he sought to restore a sense of danger and urgency to the theatre.⁶⁷ In his writings, Artaud continually aspired to giving the body radical presence as he interrogated its substance and created potent physical images. His dramaturgy conveyed a direct and raw intensity as he demanded an inner connection, a theatre that would 'cut into the flesh'⁶⁸ and 'seek to reach the mind by way of the organs, of all the organs'.⁶⁹ His 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.⁷⁰ Artaud's theatre, like that of Hijikata, was attuned to obscurity: 'The poetry it uses is dark; or if resplendent, it is even darker, even more opaque.'⁷¹ Like Hijikata, he aspired to a theatre which lay 'half-way between reality and dreams',⁷² producing work which opened onto an interface between the known realm and that of an imagined metaphysical order. Both have become renowned for the singular and heterodox nature of their work, which include undercurrents of eroticism, frequently combined with amorphous and incongruous images. Seeking out what was most repugnant and abject, Artaud expressed the Bataillean notion of the heterogeneous, transgressing the boundaries and rupturing the integrity of the human form itself.

Artaud's profoundly subversive lifestyle and work have been well documented. He shared Hijikata's bohemian impulse and looked

61. Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. by Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights, 1989).
62. He conveys the profound effect this rupturing experience had on him: 'This photograph had a decisive role in my life. I never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, at once ecstatic, and intolerable' (ibid., p. 206).
63. Ibid., pp. 206–07.
64. Hijikata, 'To Prison', p. 46.
65. Ibid.
66. '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' (Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre and Culture', in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, trans. by Victor Corti [London: Calder and Boyars, 1974], p. 6, and *Œuvres Complètes IV* [Paris: Gallimard, 1964], p. 18).
67. 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. One translation of this sign is 'A Mirror for a Great Dance of Burning Sacrifice', which was also the title of his early dance troupe.
68. Antonin Artaud, 'A Letter to André Rolland de Renéville', in *Artaud on Theatre*, ed. by Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 86, and *Œuvres Complètes V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 157.
69. Artaud, 'To André Gide', in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 78.
70. His theatre was intended to 'stir up shadows' (Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double - Theatre and Culture', in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 5, and *Œuvres Complètes IV*, p. 17).
71. Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre is First Ritualistic and Magical [...]', in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 138.
72. Antonin Artaud, "'A Dream Play'" by

towards the liminal elements of society.⁷³ His own fractured subjectivity was constantly in the process of dissolution and reinvention, radically calling into question the notion of a singular self and identity constituted according to cultural mores, systems and constraints.⁷⁴ His work displays an obsession with alterities and, sensing himself as doubled and having the presence of the 'Other' within, he sought liberation from the confines of his own mind and body.⁷⁵ This is reflected in his enigmatic and seminal writing, *The Theatre of Cruelty*, in which he moves beyond the representation of character and individual psychology, disrupting its unity and displacing its centre. The primary metaphor for this theatre, the plague, aims for the breakdown of self-control and self-containment in order to provoke an extreme and radical transformation.

Cruelty and chaos, so central to Artaud's theatrical vision, are intended to reveal the malign potential present in society. As the merciless but necessary crisis of the plague cleanses and cures the accumulated cultural violence, his theatre would offer a stream of disparate images that would be 'unafraid of exploring the limits of our nervous sensibility'.⁷⁶ Extremely volatile in nature, this rampant contagion defies all borders, deeply affecting every part of the body, from the skin to the organs, and striking terror in the minds of those who perceive it. Both he and Hijikata wanted to return their performance to such an unmediated experience, bringing pain and trauma to the surface, as if to resonate in and through the body of the spectators. The shocking and reverberative power of their physical language with its extreme visceral violence was intended as dangerous, therapeutic and cathartic. Like Artaud, the depiction of suffering on the Butoh stage is undertaken as an act of potency. As Hijikata asserts, 'Both the "Rose-Coloured Dance" and the "dance of darkness" must "spout blood in the name of the experience of evil,"'⁷⁷ posing a defiant and extreme counter-challenge.

Artaud's theatrical ideas explored the body's infinite capacity for transmutation, as he wanted a multiplicity to be relentlessly created and affirmed, in intense moments of crisis, reflecting his own corporeality that was constantly in the process of being unravelled, disassembled and reborn.⁷⁸ Like Hijikata, who sought to return to the simple, natural, 'pre-inscribed' body and to 'its being stripped of things',⁷⁹ so that dancers could 'scrutinise their own bodies',⁸⁰ Artaud used all the means at his disposal to interrogate its substance, including his theatre, film and dance. He pared it down to the most basic elements, its marrow, sinew, flesh and flaying nerves, and proposed a new anatomical order forged from the material of abject fragmentation. Towards the end of his life he called for a 'revolution of the whole body',⁸¹ one that was metamorphosed and reconstituted to remain, as he had hoped early in his career, 'eternally incomplete'.⁸²

In his first collection of poems, *Umbilical Limbo*, Artaud explores the body as if in a state prior to the symbolic, the imago in dissolution and 'images of threadlike, cotton wool limbs, images of limbs that are displaced and distanced'.⁸³ Such images are resonant of Hijikata's disentangling figure in the performance that was described earlier, *A Story of Chickenpox (Hosotan)*,⁸⁴ in which it appears defeated, as if clawing itself back to life with every thread of muscle. Artaud continually

- Strindberg', in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 42.
73. Hijikata's gender nonconformity and fractured social existence placed him at the cultural margins, as, frequently wearing women's attire, he embodied the heresy, anarchy and effeminacy that were present within his creative work.
74. Indeed, his 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.
75. 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.
76. Artaud, 'The Theatre and its Double', in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 122.
77. Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', p. 39.
78. His was always a traumatised body that screamed in an agony intensified by his drug intoxication and acute psychosis.
79. Hijikata, 'Fragments of Glass', p. 63.
80. Makoto Ooka, 'Tatsumi Hijikata's Philosophy of Butoh', in Nario Goda, *Body on the Edge of Crisis: Photographs of Butoh Dance Performance and Stages by Tatsumi Hijikata*, trans. by Janine Beichman, John Turrent and Tetsuo Kinoshita (Tokyo: Parco, 1987), p. 10.
81. Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre and Science', in *Anthology*, trans. by Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965), p. 173. In this, the body image is dismantled and multiple combinations of anatomical parts are created.
82. Antonin Artaud, 'Six Characters in Search of an Author', in *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 8.
83. Antonin Artaud, 'Umbilical Limbo-Description of a Physical State', in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, trans. by Victor Corti (London: John Calder, 1978),

reoriented the anatomical structure in a series of multi-layered and volatile writings, mostly in the form of poetic fragments, inverting the physical form and stressing movement towards the lower parts.⁸⁵ Bodily organs, orifices and their processes are also continually conjured in his late poems *Here Lies* and *Artaud Le Momo*, in terms such as ejaculation, testicles, sperm and blood, as he recasts and transforms his relationship with his own physical being.⁸⁶ In a piece he wrote towards the end of his life, having visited an exhibition of the work of Van Gogh in 1947, he refers repeatedly to the inner sphere of the body, asking the reader to imagine 'the pharynx, oesophagus, urethra and the anus',⁸⁷ directing attention, as do Hijikata and Bataille, towards an unfamiliar orientation.

This endeavour for transformation goes further, as he rearranges the received forms of the body in his drawings, producing 'unformed' or 'laval images'⁸⁸ of human and half-human figures that are aberrant, misshapen and fantastical. Challenging the ordered, enclosed bodily form that behaves in accordance with society's or divine rules, he defiantly reorganises its bones and musculature, and redirects its fluids from their prerequisite functions, as the body secretes and spurts, while its skeleton is crushed and shattered. Moving beyond anatomy, a 'body without organs'⁸⁹ is created as a space for a decentred subject, whose mirror image is dissolved and transfigured into an anarchic set of riotous signifiers. On the Butoh stage, a body with skin, muscle and ligaments emerges, which is then redefined, as Hijikata too disrupts the human form, creating entities on stage that are anomalous, interstitial and hybrid. His aesthetic offers an open-endedness, deconstruction and incompleteness that at times shatters the anthropomorphic image and poses resistant forms of identity which play with the notion of the real.⁹⁰

Artaud intended that every myriad aspect of the actor's body would be included and perpetually in process, just as he employed every part of the anatomy to interrogate the suffering at the core of his own being.⁹¹ Through a highly trained physicality the actor would become totally immersed in his actions, which involved a studied concentration brought to every movement, gesture and facial expression.⁹² This would be supported by an understanding of the musculature and pressure points,⁹³ so that the actor could connect with specific sites of the spectator's body, '[t]o reforge the links, the [magical] chain'.⁹⁴ Most important were the rhythms of the breath,⁹⁵ so that the performer would connect with hidden layers of emotion and sensation. These internal dynamics were stressed, which required the actor's complete mastery over his impulses. 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 radical deconstruction and transcendence. This would involve a sense of physical urgency with the actors pushed to the limits of self-experience in radical and ceremonial stagings where their bodies are laid bare, aflame, coiled and in crisis.

Butoh's emphasis on metamorphosis has a source in Artaud's endeavour for transformation, as Hijikata sought to create a new body culture in performance. He too awakens the breaths of the body and responded to Artaud's principal challenge, to the necessity of gesture and consciousness,⁹⁶ in an immediate event that would be experienced

- p. 55, and *Œuvres Complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 61.
84. A similar tormented figure appears in the dance *Calm House* (*Shizukana ie*) in the following year, 1973.
85. In one of his texts, for example (*Henchmen and Torturings* of 1946), he poses the question, 'et la bouche de l'actuelle race humaine n'est-elle pas, suivant le cadastre anatomique du corps présent ce trou d'être situé juste à la sortie des hémorroïdes du cu d'Artaud?' [isn't the mouth of the current human race, following the anatomical survey of the present human body this hole of being situated just at the outlet of the haemorrhoids of Artaud's ass?] (Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes XIV* [Paris: Gallimard, 1978], p. 153).
86. He also constantly asserts his own self-abjection: 'It is certainly abject to be created and live' (Artaud, 'Cup and Ball - On Suicide', in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 158).
87. Artaud, 'Preface à Van Gogh', in *Œuvres Complètes XIII*, p. 156.
88. Artaud, 'Nerve Scales - Fragments from a Diary in Hell', in *Collected Works, Vol. I*, p. 84, and *Anthology*, p. 44.
89. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'body without organs' is based on Artaud's dream of a body that 'needs no organs' (*Œuvres Complètes XIII*, pp. 287-8). There was an assertion of the notion of interconnectedness. 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' (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi [London: Athlone Press, 1988], p. 153).
90. In a scene from a performance of 1974, for example, one of his

directly by the audience. 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. 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. 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. This dynamic relationship between opposing impulses created a highly charged atmosphere, and reached a level beyond the ego, towards another register that is enigmatic and indefinable.

Conclusion

Hijikata sought to bring the body - which is so often characterised by absence, difference and deferrals and so continually outside itself - to the present, through a process of interweaving outer methods and internal states, visible appearances and invisible processes. He was attracted by those western artists and thinkers who preferred the principle of darkness in opposition to their own cultural traditions. These included the theatre artist Artaud, who reached into the mind's invisible cruelty, confronting its shadowy impulses. Hijikata appealed to the 'Artaudian' body that is a raw, base, unformed materiality, one that is open to disintegration and reinvention. This direct corporeal relationship was also conveyed in Bataille's pornographic writings, where a utopic body of unfettered desire and multiple transgressions was created, as they performed ecstasy and celebrated the values of abjection. These resonated with Hijikata's aesthetic, as each allowed rapturous and searing flesh to open, confronting and deeply disturbing the spectator and moving beyond the boundaries which define inside/outside, self/other and subject/object dualities.

Entering into this extreme and profound bodily encounter, Hijikata allowed the possibility for a more inclusive sense of spirit, describing his dance as 'a medium between a spirit and an impulse to a secret ritual'.⁹⁷ This ritual involved a connection between death and the erotic, violence and the sacred, leading ultimately to provocative 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.'⁹⁸ 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

- dancers is half-dressed in a fish-like outfit. See Morishita ed., *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh*, p. 125.
91. His proposals for acting were intricately linked to the anatomy of the performer; as in the text 'An Affective 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 attentiveness.
 92. His proposed theatre would have affinities with the controlled rhythms and intense somatic awareness of the Balinese performance which he attended at the Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes of 1931. He saw this collective event as an example of 'pure' and 'total' theatre that contained a profusion of signs and obscurities.
 93. He was fascinated by the energetics of the body and made reference to acupuncture points.
 94. Antonin Artaud, 'An Affective Athleticism', in *Collected Works, Vol. IV*, p. 106; *The Theatre and its Double: Essays by Artaud Antonin* (Montreuil, London and New York: Calder Press, 1999), p. 95; and *Œuvres Complètes IV*, p. 163.
 95. Artaud, 'An Affective Athleticism', pp. 102–04, and *The Theatre and its Double*, pp. 89–91.
 96. Artaud stressed the notion of intentional action that was crucial for the arousal of 'cruelty': 'There is no cruelty without consciousness, without a kind of applied consciousness' (Artaud, 'Letters of Cruelty' [first letter, 1932: 'To J.P.'], in *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 80).
 97. Hijikata, 'To Prison', p. 47. The Japanese term for 'spirit' employed here is *rei*, which has connotations of mysticism and the religious.
 98. Hijikata, 'Inner Material/Material', 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.

though left suffering and still unappeased. At the same time, Hijikata's 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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