

text, and emphasized its spiritual dimensions in Chapter 2 (see especially, "Spiritual Darkness: Inside Ohno's Studio and *Konpaku*"). Inspiration for butoh can come from anywhere; we know that Christianity affected Ohno as much as Buddhism did, and Hijikata asserted that his dance did not come from religion, but from the mud. Students do not need to adopt a religious perspective to experience butoh. Butoh relates to the spirituality of the body itself, as something all humans possess. Darkness in butoh has nothing to do with evil, but refers to the spirituality that is mythically associated with feminine principles of softness, earth, and surrender of ego, as Nakajima makes clear in her speech and article on *Ankoku Butoh* and *Feminine Spirituality* (1997). For students interested in pursuing this perspective further, *Dancing Identity* provides an extended metaphysical revaluing of darkness (Fraleigh 2004).

NOTE ON COOKING

Ohno taught life/death/life cycles as the basis of butoh. We are reminded by butohist Endo Tadashi, who collaborated with Ohno Kazuo, that like cooking, butoh is not separate from life processes. Endo talks about selecting the best foods, looking for fresh ingredients, color, and interesting shapes for cooking, and how it is the same in dancing. Dancers themselves should be fresh, which doesn't have anything to do with age, he says, but with how the dancer approaches the dance (Daiwa International Butoh Festival in London UK, Symposium October 9, 2005). He also says that just as you would never serve poor food to guests, you want to give your best performances to audiences. Since 1992, Endo has been director of the Butoh-Centre MAMU in Göttingen, Germany. His butoh stems from *Ma*, a Japanese word that indicates being "in between." His workshops offer both the experience of Japanese Butoh and explorations of your own individual dance.

NOTE ON EMPTINESS AND EMERGENCE

Endo tells us to remember that there is nothing intentionally expressed in butoh; rather does the butoh dancer exist on the edges of time, holding a secret inside, emptiness, waiting to emerge (Endo's butoh workshop in London UK, October 2, 2005). Bear this in mind, and be prepared to surprise yourself, as you hear the *Workshop Words* and explore *DANCE EXPERIENCES* of several contemporary butohists in the following sections.

< Hijikata Tatsumi & Ohno Kazuo >

Sondra Fraleigh

NAKAJIMA NATSU: BECOMING NOTHING / -Routledge- BECOMING SOMETHING

Nakajima Natsu is an amazing female butohist who introduced her own choreographic visions in highly technical total theater events to multi-national audiences on several world tours. She still teaches and performs butoh, and uses it to work with handicapped people and in dance therapy settings. As one of the original students and associates of both Hijikata and Ohno, Nakajima explains that through butoh she "borrowed the field of the body" to go on a spiritual journey (Nakajima 1997: 3).

Nakajima's workshop words on Becoming Nothing

We begin with *Becoming Nothing/Becoming Something* through workshop words from Nakajima that originated in the approach of Hijikata. Sondra Fraleigh first experienced this meditative and metamorphic exploration through Nakajima's teaching in Toronto in 1988, and wrote extensively about it in her book on *Butoh, Zen, and Japan* (Fraleigh 1999: 87-96). She reconstructs it again here with added commentary from Nakajima.

DANCE EXPERIENCE

When she begins a class, Nakajima often warms-up the students in a short free form improvisation to music, encouraging students in the words of Hijikata to "shed the skin of the body that has been tamed and domesticated."

Warm up

- Improvise freely. Use music that has drive and rhythm, anything to get you moving, as you play with the feelings that arise and follow your intuition. Track down signs of habit in your body. How can you explore more of your potential to move freely?
- Let go of the look of your body, and become more aware of how your movement feels.
- Hijikata was "like a spy" Nakajima says - "tracking down all the signs of domestication of the body." Shedding the social body is essential to *Ankoku Butoh* and to "the body that becomes nothing."

Disappearance

- Start at one end of the studio and begin an extended moving meditation on disappearance (about 20 minutes). Use soft music



Figure 4.1 Nakajima Natsu in "Stone Play" from her full-length concert work – *Sleep and Reincarnation from Empty Land* (1989). Photograph by Nourit Masson-Sekine

of the Japanese harp-in the background or a Shakuhachi flute (traditional Japanese flute music). Lower your center of gravity and slightly bend your knees, as you walk toward the other end of the studio in the now famous butoh manner of *hokohtai* (the walking body). Sense your weight sinking through your feet and into the floor. Sense the spine lengthening, and allow there to be softness in the chest. Don't collapse it, nor push it out, just allow softness to be there.

- There is an amorphous form for this slow sinking walk of *hokohtai*, but it can vary according to your feeling at the moment. Allow your dance to unfold gently, smoothly by sliding your feet along the floor with steps no longer than the size of your own foot. You can make the stops slightly smaller, or maybe even a little larger if you need to for balance.
- Let your arms hang easily at your sides without dangling. Remember these are your arms; sense their ease, their aliveness. Do they float ever so slightly away from your body as you lower your center of gravity?
- Place an imaginary plate of water on your head as you lower your center, and move smoothly so as not to spill the water – or break the spell created by the walking. Let your eyes become soft also, as they move further into oblivion. Sense eyes around you, as part of you, all over you.
- If you are moving in a group, experience how you move as one, and individual egos disperse, palpably, into the atmosphere.
- Carry eternity with you, and your ancestors. Walk to the other side of the room as you ask your body to disappear. Eventually forget to ask, and just disappear. Nothing to think. Nothing to do. Become nothing.

Reappearance

- When you reach the other side of the room (about a 20 minute process of shedding your body), turn around simply, still in the same walking posture, moving forever on in your meditative gait (another 20 minutes, approximately). Continue the walking, gradually, sensing the return of your flesh and bones. Not "doing" anything, simply walking back over the same space as you return.
- Be patient. Take your time, and without trying, allow any change that wants to come from within your body to occur.

- Is there a secret waiting in you to emerge? If there is, let it take any shape it wants to. Let your consciousness move and melt as it will, and your body find where it wants to stop.

Preparing to Disappear and Reappear with butoh-fu and workshop words of Nakajima

- Before you take the butoh journey described above, you can prepare with *butoh-fu* from Hijikata that Nakajima sometimes uses in her workshops: "There is a third eye in the middle of your forehead ..." Nakajima says. I think of this as the third eye of yoga just between my eyes, also called "the blue pearl of bliss," and the seat of vision and consciousness. I let my own awareness develop peacefully by closing and relaxing my eyes before beginning the movement meditation. Nakajima would prompt you into that eye as you become nothing, and bit-by-bit begin to disappear.
- When she teaches, she quotes more *butoh-fu* metaphors from Hijikata, and spaces them out in the time of disappearing. If you want to prepare the DANCE EXPERIENCE of "Becoming Nothing" through *butoh-fu* inspired by Hijikata and quoted by Nakajima, use the following:

Butoh is the walk of smoke ... because Butoh is about disappearing, that is why a form is left behind ... The disappearing history of the flesh trails behind the metropolis of the flesh ... In our body, there is something that sometimes goes astray, and sometimes surfaces...

(Nakajima 1997: 7)

- Write this *butoh-fu* down before doing the exploration, and spend some time preparing your awareness with it as you also cultivate your third eye. Ohno uses a similar process, looking at pictures and reading his own *butoh-fu* to peak his awareness before dancing, then letting go of this preparation to allow spontaneity in performance, as we took up toward the end of Chapter 2.
- You can practice the slow smooth walk of *hokohtai* by balancing a light-weight bamboo stalk (pole) on your head as you lower your center of gravity by slightly bending the knees. It seems a little shaky at first, but you will be surprised how quickly you can learn this balance with a little practice.

Fraleigh's reflection

Becoming Nothing and Becoming Something is a profoundly spiritual and meditative exploration that exposes a basic tenet of butoh. Namely: that each person in his or her own way can assimilate DANCE EXPERIENCES. This one is about treading a lifeline to the meeting place of life and death as Ohno taught. Dancers often burst into tears and are cleansed by what Nakajima calls "the return to the original body." I remember this still when I'm walking sometimes with no place to go, and capture a short haiku:

Trailing my body
In amazement, I walk
Into stillness awake

Nakajima's reflection

The first step, toward spiritual awareness through butoh, Nakajima explains, is "to shed the things that are daily and social, to return to the original body." In Hijikata's words, to become "a body as a corpse." The original body belongs to all traditional Japanese performing arts, Nakajima emphasizes. Noh performers take ten years to achieve such an objective. Western dance techniques in contrast, emphasize the visual world of constructed appearance. "To return to the original body" is an invisible technique. This is essential so that dance may surge from the depths of the body (nature, spirit, and the unconscious). Nakajima puts it this way:

In Ankoku Butoh, "something moves, something dances"; it is not the individual human being who moves or dances.

This condition of *Becoming Nothing*, Nakajima says, is not really a condition of emptiness, but is actually a "filled emptiness" ready to morph to another dimension. She explains in terms of her own dancing:

When I dance . . . the movements germinate in the deep centre of my body, and my body *is moved*.

(Ibid. 8)

NOTE ON BUTOH-FU AND CHOREOGRAPHY

In the latter part of his life, Hijikata took up the challenge of trying to create form (*Something*) by creating a dance notation, his *butoh-fu*, as we

explained in Chapter 2. Nakajima provides a concrete example in the following. She sometimes teaches Hijikata's choreography for this *butoh-fu*, seeking, like an investigative detective or phenomenologist to explain the world of appearance – *Becoming Something*. Nakajima teaches the following *butoh-fu* as movements explicitly choreographed by Hijikata. Thus we understand that *butoh-fu* are not always improvised. They can be strictly choreographed in fine detail as Hijikata did, even as they also involve the dancer in metamorphic transformations. Through compelling, ever-changing landscapes of the human face, strange transitions (transmogrification) become important toward the end of Nakajima's dance. Here are Hijikata's *butoh-fu*:

long pipe
 combing
 resting chin on the table
 tying a knot in the string
 stretching the string
 carrying a cup
 weaving cherry blossom branches
 hair ornament
 lipstick
 stop!
 cutting the string with teeth
 stretching the string
 outline of your face
 loose hair
 big nose
 three streams of rain crossing in front of your face three times
 TOKIWA [a beautiful lady of legend in Japan]
 Ogress

Nakajima's rendition of this *butoh-fu* in her work *Niwa* (The Garden, premiered in Tokyo in 1982) demonstrates the power of Hijikata's storied world and shapeshifting, as she morphs from a young and beautiful woman to an old hag. Watching her, one sees that her condition is spiritually alive, especially in her face, and that her face might dissolve, its dance or reverse at any moment.

DANCE EXPERIENCE

Choreographic instructions by Sondra Fraleigh, inspired by Nakajima's *Niwa*

The face of deconstruction and transmogrification

I know "transmogrification" is a big word, but it's also very evocative, and refers to compelling, even grotesque, transformations (as noted above). When the face becomes the focus of attention in dance and theater, it can seem strangely other, like a mask that can move and morph. Let the fascinating strangeness of your face emerge in this exploration.

- Begin by making a list of about 18 words or word clusters that are as evocative (and mundane) as Hijikata's *butoh-fu* above, not concerning yourself with how they will connect. Make the last two words highly contrasting, or opposite. Choreograph a short dance phrase for each word or cluster and memorize it in detail. The phrases might begin with gestures of the face, hands, or feet, but let them resonate throughout the body.
- Now connect these memorized phrases, and see how your face enters into the dance of the whole. Let your face reflect the *butoh-fu* you have made for your choreography. This DANCE EXPERIENCE is not about making faces, but about allowing the dance of the face to emerge. The facial contours and feelings might be very large at times or so subtle as to barely be noticed. Memorize and practice the face along with the whole dance, but consider that it is constantly in transition and never held.
- Now deconstruct the dance by taking away everything but the echo of the words that have entered into the dance of your face. Keep the dance of your face alive, and be brave enough to let go of the hard work you put into making the gestures. Maybe you can save what you have learned in making the gestures and phrases for another dance – but for now, EXPERIENCE the pure dance of your face.
- Give your dance a name. Perform it for someone you trust not to judge it, someone who will enter into the spirit of the dance of your face with you. Or maybe you will perform it for an audience, as a work on its own, or a section of a dance work. It doesn't have to be called *butoh*. That can be your secret. Greg Hicks of the Royal Shakespeare Company uses *butoh* techniques for his performance of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, the secret of his standard-setting