The Dance of Utter Darkness: Pedagogy for the Outsider

by

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Abstract

The rationale of this study is to explore the connections between body-being, morality and transformative learning by examining particular contexts of butoh dance. By approaching the phenomenon of butoh through the lens of art, aesthetics and ethics, as well as incorporating a socio-political-historical perspective, I aim to understand this form for the transgressive and thus, regenerative powers it contributes to art and life. Transgressive art does not attempt to deny the structure of civilized social life but rather re-orders it by highlighting excluded, often taboo behaviors and provoking us to accept life whole-heartedly as a paradox, without firm ideas of right and wrong.

I am intrigued by the idea of butoh/dance as a non-coercive, non-verbal tool for communication; not simply as an aesthetic or artistic expression but potentially as a highly dismantling framework through which to question social norms. Butoh dance seeks to rupture the safe, intact and socially defined boundaries which normally encompass cultures specifically through language, and it asks what relation language has to the experiential knowledge of the flesh, a very post-modern concern. Butoh, when framed within the context of modern dance-itself a harbinger for the radical post-modern wave, represents a still subversive form of art in 2019. This is partly because it challenges epistemologies based on the superiority of linguistic representation.

Butoh is integrally associated with ritual and is most often defined by the aesthetic qualities of darkness and depth. It is considered a philosophy, a spiritual practice, and even a way of life. This form provides an unmatched profundity, often by way of the dark subconscious and shadow sides of life because butoh draws deeply from the collective unconscious, questing for self-knowing through depth, breadth, emptiness and crisis. The pedagogical implications of this subversive art form are massive, for butoh offers entrance to those at the outer edges of the social structure; butoh offers a dwelling place to the marginalized.

Keywords: Butoh Dance; embodiment; dark/transgressive art; subversive somatics; ambiguity; paradox; trickster; pedagogy for the digital body.
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Butoh: The Dance of ‘Utter Darkness’
Photographer: Andrew Dodd Clippingdale
Chapter 1. Presentation of Study

Figure 1. Dancing in ‘Unchosen’
Photographer: Andrew Dodd Clippingdale

1.1. Introduction

The art of butoh seeks to heal the rift between the highly integrated, civilized and repressed social / cultural self, and the genuine, ‘natural’ self, by creating ritualistic acts of transgression in a performance setting. I am intrigued by the idea of butoh/ dance as a non-coercive, non-verbal tool for communication; not simply as an aesthetic or artistic expression but potentially as a highly dismantling framework through which to question social norms. By approaching the phenomenon of butoh through the lens of art, aesthetics and ethics, as well as incorporating a socio-political-historical perspective, I aim to understand this form for the transgressive and thus, regenerative powers it contributes to art and life. What I am particularly interested in understanding and revealing are the ways that butoh dance can be explored cross- culturally, and specifically the ways that butoh, which originated in Japan, traverses into Indigenous practices and knowledge systems with such ease and fluidity. This feels important because I too am a hybrid of sorts- a Cree mother and English father; the colonized and colonizer together in this body, struggling continuously to find balance.
The pedagogical implications of this subversive art form are massive, for butoh offers entrance to those at the outer edges of the social structure; butoh offers a dwelling place to the marginalized. I feel that butoh dance, a form based around both silence/stillness and shock/spectacle as well as ugliness, rebellion and resistance is the perfect form to question and reverse lingering colonial damage, and to disrupt the status quo. *Ankoku butoh*, precisely because of its dark and transgressive themes, can directly and effectively address our personal pain as well as the collective trauma of our divided culture, particularly for those at the outer fringes. I assert that the discourse on crisis and suffering which has enveloped butoh from the beginning, can also be employed toward crisis resolution in other fields such as health and education.

I am specifically and personally interested in exploring the links between butoh as a transgressive and subversive art form and its potential through this very strategy to induce catharsis and healing through crisis and sacrifice. In butoh we can clearly see the tangible links between crisis, sacrifice, and catharsis as well as the healing effects of this triad. By promoting a moral and aesthetic scaffolding which requires bodies in crisis, of great significance in today’s haphazard cultures of decadence and hyper-comfort, I hope to provoke the notion that sacrificial pain or crisis underlies most creative work/art and is the fountain of healing in terms of its transformative powers. I am also looking at the role of sacrifice as one of the mystical ingredients that so many artists rely on to not only produce great works but even to feed the creative process.

Butoh reminds us to have reverence for the spirit of the contingent and to remember that those on the outer edges of the social equilibrium are often the creators of culture. Butoh is the ultimate outlier. In this way, butoh dance becomes the cultural embodiment of the trickster character, such as raven or coyote, found in so many Indigenous and shamanic stories. Since the normative positioning of ‘proper’ knowledge is grounded in rationalism and would necessarily limit dance knowledge, whose physical nature prevents literate (read normalized) discourse, we experience this as a disruption. It is at this ruptured and peripheral place where Trickster resides, the cultural hero of the thresh-hold, the one who is “the spirit of the doorway” and who often (re)creates culture not despite but *because* of this disruptive and transgressive nature. By embodying the mythical trickster character, a sublime representation of paradox, ambiguity and the ultimate outlier, butoh dance transgresses the binary thinking which underlies our (still) patriarchal culture.
Butoh represents an aesthetic of ambiguity, one that is comfortable with uncertainty, fragility and degeneration and this seems increasingly important (as well as subversive), in a post-truth world full of binary, black-and-white thinking and perfected optics. To address the ethical in art or life, it is not enough to simply cut off the contradictory or negative impulses and hope for the best; we must inquire into and face the darker possibilities through integration and dissolution, an alchemical process of metamorphosis. Certainly, we can never arrive at any true ethical clarity if we privilege either the victim or the tyrant. Moral complexity cannot be found in simple reversals, it requires a deep engagement with nuance. Any form that offers an entry point into this delicate, nuanced and enigmatic conversation around art and morality is worth engaging with. As a dance/ art steeped in opposition, paradox, contradictory tendencies, but also in deep mystery, beauty and depth, butoh dance allows us to penetrate this complexity with curiosity rather than fear.

Transgressive art does not attempt to deny the structure of civilized social life but rather re-orders it by highlighting excluded, often taboo behaviors and provoking us to accept life whole-heartedly as a paradox, without firm ideas of right and wrong. (Nietzsche would approve.) Subversive art is meant to assault our senses and wake us from our comforting slumbers - butoh performance /work does this with sublime grace and ease. Social disequilibrium can find expression through the contracted, at times perfectly still, and often grotesque gestures and themes inherent in this practice. Butoh retains its transgressive nature by expressing the non-beautiful possibilities of the body, and exploring crisis through themes like obsession, madness, trauma and deformity. When the gestures of a body can be fragmented and ruptured to these extremes, a new body can then emerge, interrogative of crisis, ecstasy and our inevitable human disintegration. A body without attachment to life...or death. A body seeking the uncertain, liminal crevices in between.

Butoh/ dance as an expression, brings us into communion with creative states of understanding and being outside of rational thought. The body in crisis is one at the brink of dissolution, ripe for confrontations with altered states of reality. Butoh, like many shamanic practices, is meant to provoke our deep unconscious, revealing habits and gestures to be transformed through creative, physical expression. The tendency of butoh as I understand it, involves extricating the pure life-force which is dormant in our bodies and moving it out as pure expression, continuously allowing the moment to release and
renew, motivating a qualitative change in both the dancer and the witness. Much like Wassily Kandinsky with his breakthrough series of paintings known as *Improvisations*, butoh dance/art attempts to express our spiritual-emotional-physical states and transformations, moment to moment as they occur. Butoh produces bodies in crisis and dancers at the edge of death, lingering in the silent, liminal spaces to create and experience states of transformed consciousness.

Dance as a form of art and expression has always carried a subversive spirit because of its ephemerality, its inability to be captured, and its association with the wild—both inner and outer. As butoh originator Tatsumi Hijikata once proclaimed: “Conquerors may have deprived their victims of their language, art, religion, kings and architecture, but dance, ever fertile, slipped past the conquering grasp.” (Munroe, 1994, p.192) All dance represents the ultimate rebellion from colonization, but especially so with a subversive form like butoh because of its relationship with shamanic consciousness. Butoh in particular is concerned with the direct touch—a sort of magical contagion or a metaphysics of the body, which not only produces transformation in the dancer but also in the observer. Both contagion and metamorphosis—the ontic signatures of butoh, rupture the consciousness which produces paradigmatic understanding, and this is paramount to reversing colonial brainwashing.

No new type of idea, art or human nature can be conceived of, or enacted without the physicalization of a particular approach and then its methodological transmission. I actually experience the implications of ‘me’ through the actions of my body, and somatic and/or dance practices help bring this into focus because they force the thinking mind to somatically translate. When an idea or concept can express itself without words, it allows the chance to perceive without immediate deference to our logical, linear, thinking mind, so much a part of our daily life habits. Dance and other somatic practices tend to be very effective for shutting off internal dialogue, an indication of the rational, (bifurcated) thinking mind at work. By stopping this eternal inner speech and thought, we are open and available to encounters with alternate realities, promoting inner transformation and growth. To perceive that which is beyond language has the capacity to alter our conscious awareness transformatively and permanently and this becomes increasingly important in a world that appears to be totally consumed by the ‘benefits of technology’.
The pedagogical devices of crisis and suffering of the body are already inherent in most (contemporary) dance training as a method, but butoh dance also incorporates a specifically dark and assaultive approach that gives it such a particular aesthetic and creates a sense of catharsis or release. With butoh, the pedagogical tool of discipline bordering on obsessiona
tional sacrifice found in dance training, collides with a Zen philosophy of suffering and emptiness as well as a shamanic approach to transformation. This produces a cosmic fertilization that allows for expressions of pain and explorations of the space of Mu, that liminal space of in-between; a space Japanese and other Asian cultures have inhabited seamlessly for many centuries, quite likely due in large part to the structure of their language systems.

Historically and in the spirit of resistance, butoh has often eluded definition in terms of style but despite this non-cohesiveness, there is something distinctly unique about this form which is sometimes referred to as butoh-sei, the butoh attitude or quality, its ineffability. There is a specific dance consciousness that gets even more specific with butoh because the sacred element of Japanese ancient/folk dance is tacitly inserted into its philosophy and discourse. In butoh there is a sometimes unspoken but very present link to the sacred, to the depths of the body as a divine vessel, to something energetically profound and more akin to ritualistic forms than purely expressive modern dance, as performed in Western theatre settings. The more I started to research and uncover in the history and esoteric philosophy grounding butoh’s dance approach, the murkier its definition became. Butoh, as a sometimes provocative, often banal dance art penetrates boundaries, transgressing the limits of comfort, pleasure and entertainment, even the limits of art, entering the liminal zone.

Liminality has recently become a hot topic in academia, provoking many to try to articulate the idea of the third space between or before subject-object splitting. However, the idea of liminality has probably always existed at some level in human thought and consciousness. In the preface to the English translation of The Incarnate Subject, author Jacques Taminiaux points out that the French philosopher Maine de Biran had grasped and anticipated more than one hundred years before Merleau-Ponty, the structures and themes of The Phenomenology of Perception published in 1945.

In confronting the problem of the union of the soul and the body, Biran, like Merleau-Ponty after him, tried to stake a ‘new territory’ between empiricism and rationalism, a third philosophy, a third position, a third solution as it
were, at once more dialectical and integrative, resolving the antimonies between mind and body, subject and world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.19-20)

The potential of a liminal space or threshold to illuminate the tangled webs we weave has long been of major concern in performance work; in fact, in Western terms, the concept of liminality potentially arose in this domain. Peggy Phelan, the dance scholar reminds us that “performance's only life is in the present” and that performance, “like the ontology of subjectivity, becomes itself through disappearance.” (Jones, 2014, p.53) Kuniichi Uno, the Japanese philosopher asserts that the gestures of a dancer can slip us into another dimension, a liminal space which, “questions all the conditions that define the habitual reality of the human body.” (Uno, McMahon and Greiner, 2014, p.53) It is this universe of liminality and fragmentation which butoh seeks to articulate, and for certain this space is informed by crisis and suffering.

Yukio Mishima, the Japanese author reminds us “there is no doubt that almost every form of art has an awareness of crisis at its root.” Without suffering, there is no forward movement and butoh recognizes this with a profound depth of awareness. Butoh dance is like the Buddhist meditation practice of making our demons part of the spiritual path; befriending that which horrifies us, accepting all. Butoh is a tool to open to our deepest layers, our subconscious layers which memory cannot access, and which hold unrivaled balms for healing our personal and collective traumas. Butoh seeks to penetrate the universal themes of death, decay and rebirth (in that order) allowing the emotional landscape of the dark psyche to express something deeply human and universal within us. Courageous and often outrageous, butoh dancers confront their innermost, dark impulses as if it were not only inescapable, but indeed an honorable task. The butoh dancer attempts to reveal an inner world, a glimpse behind the curtain of consciousness, presenting both the erotic and ascetic dimensions, thereby revealing the depths of compassion and perversity that we each carry.

Our position as both artist and viewer, teacher and student, subject and object is temporary and circumstantial; nothing is definite and yet we spend inordinate amounts of time and energy defending our positions. The experience of relating in a foreign and unusual way to our own selves as well as to others, has a profound potential to move us out of our habitual patterning. By participating in or even witnessing a process of somatic release as well as acknowledgement of our myriad aspects of self, it is possible to incur
greater degrees of self-awareness, surely of moral significance in a society seemingly becoming devoid of this critical tool. As we become more aware of our own mind-bodies we can be more creative, more helpful, more loving. Butoh as an art form is a paradigm for right action and wholeness- being fully present as a dancer allows me to trust my steps and then let them disappear. My intention is for this piece of work to move us beyond our regular positioning and to consider the potential of butoh dance, an embodied art of darkness, to heal some part of our collective (post)-colonial trauma. I wish to offer a glimpse into how the force of suffering is ultimately transformed into one of healing, redemption and liberation so long as it gets moved.

1.2. Personal Profile and Key Inciting Incidents

\textbf{Para} (goes against) \textbf{Doxa} (received opinion)

I feel very fortunate to have stumbled into a \textit{Kokoro Dance} (company) butoh class one rainy Vancouver morning nearly 20 years ago, only to have my world blown apart. Before butoh entered my life, I had been seriously engaged with studying yoga-both the physical and philosophical/spiritual principles, even living at an ashram (on and off) for several years, deeply immersed in daily practices of meditation, mantra, asana and Vedic scriptures (raja yoga.) When I discovered butoh, I was already training and performing in both theatre and contemporary dance, eventually completing diploma programs at conservatory schools in both fields as well as a (non-recognized) diploma from clown school. I have worked as a professional dancer and actor, yoga teacher and somatic counsellor, and I’ve also done much of this work for free. I was able to train in butoh alongside my other performance work and it complemented my other performance art and teaching/ healing practices. Butoh encouraged me to approach my body with full presence no matter which methodology I was presented with. Butoh essentially tied everything together for me; it was a spiritual form of creative dance-art that I could embrace utterly, especially the dark, yin aspect that keeps butoh so grounded.

As a (butoh) dance artist, I think of the body as a kind of sculpture within the world, engaging with various objects, forces and people all day long, affecting us, moving us, changing us moment to moment. My own artistic practice and teaching focuses on dance/ theatre as a healing modality and weaves in my own identity as a Metis-Cree artist by integrating an Indigenous worldview that acknowledges unseen
forces and powers which invisibly shape us, including our ancestors. I work both in the studio and on the land, always incorporating elements of nature and ritual into my performances and workshops. When I dance with a butoh attitude, I feel I can access many layers of my consciousness, including contact with all the pain of my ancestors and this helps me feel authentic in the form. I have certainly been given feedback over the years that I do indeed exhibit raw emotion and an ethereal presence when I perform butoh.

When I tell any story of artistic process even if I am specifically referring to the creative/analytical process involved in this dissertation, it must still include all parts of me already operating in the world, on different levels, in different domains. This thesis therefore incorporates perspectives from my mixed parentage, my upbringing- which included the extreme ends of both poverty and wealth, as well as my own particularly nomadic existence (I have never lived in any city, town or place longer than three years in my whole life and I have travelled much of the world solo, beginning at age 15.) These experiences have created certain contingencies in me, certain directional forces which serve me and hinder me too, but which nevertheless continue to construct my perspective, my worldview and especially, my body.

I have long felt that I too carry the spirit of the trickster, a being of the in-between, one who belongs to the threshold, and many people over the course of my life have described me as ‘feral’ or wild. It’s strange and awe-inspiring what children will do to cope with difficulty: As a small child I was forced to make a choice between living with my mother and father- both of whom abused me in different but equally cruel ways. I learned how to be an expert at integration. In order to accept and live with an unjust and forced choice, I had to see the paradox inherent in the human condition at a very early age. People were not all good nor all bad, I recognized. Despite the metaphor that a half rotten onion is still rotten, people can and do often inhabit many realms- both dark and light as well as the liminal spaces in between, a great paradox within our collective humanity.

I improvise all the time, in my home, in the studio, on the land but there are very few occasions where I call what I do butoh- for it requires a particular mind state: It need(s) to be danced in a spirit of offering, uncluttered, open to the dead ancestors within me, and filled with deep gratitude. This creates a particular and striking aesthetic,
both as a dancer, feeling from the inside, and from the outside looking in, as audience. This aesthetic and attitude results in a hybridized art form that allows for expressions of pain and suffering, ultimately leading to healing and transformation. This is what gives butoh dance its extraordinary power- its ability to express something deeply human within us, the paradox, the place of yes and no, the sublime line that separates beauty from terror. Butoh beckons the witness into an emotional space through its descension into the dark parts of the soul. It empties a place in our bodies for spiritual recognition and redemption, for eros, death and decay, ultimately leading to rebirth and/or transformation.

I have come to associate my (past) trauma and pain so intimately with the creative process, that I wonder at times if I purposely create the chaos and heartbreak, in order to feed the gods of art- a sacrifice if you will. I was in fact, initially drawn to butoh because of its dark themes, a chance to exorcise some of my own demons. I have faced my own darkest corners with courage and resilience and it was in no small part thanks to my dedicated, if at times derailed, butoh dance practice. Butoh became a method for me to release the pent-up contents of my being in a real and somatically informed way, one that sitting meditation and other forms of ‘quiet’ contemplation could simply not provide. I hope to inspire this courage and curiosity in others- to face and integrate our shadow sides at this time in history when we are absorbing such a collective trauma, and to address the darkness inside each of us with compassion rather than fear.

1.3. Research Methods

In this thesis I look at butoh mainly through a sociological and pedagogical lens while also acknowledging my ‘insider’ stance as both a contemporary and a butoh dancer. Because I have primarily relied on my many years of physical training and performance in butoh to inform my present dissertation, my methodology could also be considered auto-ethnographic. However, in this dissertation, I am weaving and braiding in many perspectives and ideas for the purpose of creating not only a sound theoretical thesis but also one that is aesthetically pleasing. As an artist and consistent with emergent methodologies, I believe I should be free to weave in many perspectives, epistemologies and methodologies. This serves in part to break down the barriers found between knowledge systems or even between disciplines and faculties (as seen at many universities.) For instance, the arts within academia have always been particularly
shunned and falsely separated— at the low end of the hierarchy within the faculty of education for instance sits arts education and at the furthest end of that sits dance education. These separations which form hierarchal thinking only serve to reinforce patterns of patriarchal domination. We also know that many qualitative or artistic approaches lend themselves less facilely to strict data gathering and analysis— which itself is a method entirely dependant on visible or ‘provable’ knowledge. Dance, and particularly improvisational approaches like butoh involve thinking-in movement, which can essentially be translated as not “thinking” at all. Rather, dance and somatic work often involves absorption, contagion, intuition, affectation and feeling— terms we don’t normally associate with ‘rational thinking’ or ‘research’.

I was inspired by the word and concept of ‘entanglements’. In literary terms, the word ‘entanglement’ generally denotes a state of emotional or affective over-burden, of being perceptually overtaken or overpowered by another person; it usually denotes a system of power relations. ‘Entanglement’ is also a mysterious process known in theoretical physics whereby particular entities seem to get stirred up, affected and roused by other entities nowhere in the ‘near’ vicinity. The particles are considered entangled due to their simultaneous reactions rather than their proximity— a process that resembles synchronicity or contagion to the outside eye. Entanglements furthermore suggest enmeshment, a weaving together of topics and ideas through proximity and affinity but also through opposition and partition. We perform entanglements when we move between contexts, subjects and realms to produce unexpected notions, often triggering crisis. A new possibility is often rendered from a strange and unanticipated juxtaposition.

This process of entanglement can also be said to represent the (current?) post-modern era whereby the relationship among and between things is increasingly coming to the fore as a major ontological and epistemological concern. This is in direct opposition to the previous paradigm of separating knowledge systems, denoting specialized domains of knowledge with particular language and power relations. As Bruno Latour suggests, once these knowledge systems or ideas become enmeshed or entangled, the very sense they made in isolation becomes disrupted. One consequence of this is that we can begin to dissolve the firm boundaries and walls of containment, erasing the strongly maintained, classificatory and definite epistemic boundaries that exist especially in academic settings and elsewhere. In this way we can begin to
appreciate and normalize the many types of sentient intelligence and consciousness alive on our planet. Finally, the Chinese character for entanglement is the same as that for Buddhist meditation, a rather perfect synchronicity.

Because butoh dance is such an accurate way of approaching embodiment and because embodiment is primarily meant as a concept of synthesis, it makes sense to inform my work through methodologies (yes more than one) which lend themselves to this concept of synthesis. This thesis is situated within a cross section of auto-ethnography and sociological discourse, examining some historical, artistic and ethical contexts of butoh dance. I revealed in this work what I believe to be interesting and important about this art form. The cyclical nature of (butoh) dance is diametrically opposed to dualistic tendencies in traditional Western philosophy and consequently can be taken up and interpreted by Eastern philosophical systems, Indigenous ways of knowing and feminist approaches alike, creating a trans-epistemological tapestry and weaving in a personal narrative about healing from colonial damage. This work will therefore be one of conceptual analysis, spiritual-emotional inquiry as well as personal (artistic) expression.

There is currently a preoccupation in academia with methods and methodologies, what Snaza and Weaver (2015) outline as ‘methodocentrism’, sometimes to the point of obfuscating and over-taking the actual work. There is currently such a plethora of experimental and emergent research methods within many academic faculties, that one could argue it is possible to defend one’s ideas in multiple ways, with multiple methodological foundations. For instance, we are finally now incorporating relational and experiential knowledge as data within the field of education; this is a very important pedagogical move because as Springgay and Truman (2018) contend:

“If the intent of inquiry is to create a different world, to ask what kinds of futures are imaginable, then (in)tensions need attend to the immersion, friction, strain, and quivering unease of doing research differently.” (Springgay and Truman, 2018, p.203)

My perspective is primarily informed by nearly two decades of ‘field work’ in terms of studying, practicing, teaching and performing butoh with many renowned artists in the discipline, both in Canada and internationally. My knowledge, understanding and perspective on butoh dance is also built upon preceding and concurrent practices of physically training my body in contemporary dance, yoga, and various physical-theatre
practices such as bouffon and ‘baby clown’ work, Meisner technique, voice training, scene study (actor’s training) and comedy improv, for ‘all’ of my adult life. I am also an educator in the performing arts field, combining several theatre and dance methods to provoke kinesthetic awareness in my students, which I believe can lead to internal/external transformation. This vast experience in the performing arts as well as several years prior to that focussed obsessively on the 8 branches of yoga, has directed the flow of this dissertation, for it has revealed avenues according to my spiritual and artistic inclinations.

To convey this bodily knowledge through language and writing is already to undergo a difficult translation; this kind of intelligence does not easily translate into rational, left-brained analyses such as writing a dissertation. Dance disappears in the very act of materializing, leaving us no physical research data; even if we use photo or video technology, it does not capture the essential kinetic information that dance imparts. Often much of this body /dance knowledge is not directly translatable into words, sentences or ideas which make sense as writing, and yet it still exists as a specialized knowledge in my trained body. For instance, this training, teaching and performance experience has given me direct, practical and very helpful bodily intelligence in terms of spatial and structural awareness; attentiveness to my anatomy including internal organs and their specific modulations and sensations; increased intuition and ability to sense how others are feeling (empathy); confidence on stage and in front of others; flexibility, strength and greater fast-twitch reflexes among many other benefits.

As I continue to practice as both a theatre and dance artist, in both professional and amateur settings, under-taking phenomenological field-work and research in performance studies for over 3 decades, I recognize that butoh is uniquely situated to provoke debate in several realms. Themes such as inter-cultural embodiment, liminal spaces, subversive somatics, deceleration and ephemerality as praxis, intentional ugliness and as well as what it means to be related to one’s landscape through the ritual of dance are all relevant to the ethos of butoh dance. I will identify and develop important concepts found in both the historical development of this dance form as well as its current international quasi-celebrity status and the ramifications of its global spread. I have composed a narrative that speaks to colonial damage, the possibility of butoh dance to repair some of the consequences of this system of control and domination, and
to heal some part of our lingering collective wounds. Butoh has remained subversive since its inception in 1959 until now (2019) despite being a globally recognized and practiced form, and I will explore some reasons why in this thesis.

1.4. Philosophical Framework and Inquiry Entrance Points

I began the work by identifying the major themes found in the research regarding butoh dance and eventually I separated the chapters according to these major tropes. The main focus of my thesis is to reveal some of the ways that subversive or transgressive art can provoke transformative learning and so I begin by asking: What makes art subversive or transgressive? Particularly what makes this dance form- butoh subversive in an age when we are inundated and saturated with so many images of depravity, violence and sexual cruelty within a click. When the value of shock no longer holds sway in this cauldron of darkness, how do we define art that moves us beyond our regular positioning, takes us out of our comfort zone and delivers us to freedom by reaching past the bonds of our containment?

In chapter 2, I place butoh within the context of a ritualistic and/or spiritual form by exploring it as a shamanic practice. Butoh engages both the dancer and the witness in a particular way, quite differently than most (Western) contemporary dance training or performance. I entered this chapter by asking: What is ritual? Ritual tends to bring people into relationship with themselves and consequently closer to others who may be participating or watching. The inner willingness to transform, grow and know oneself allows rituals to come alive. Butoh is a powerful form of ritual because it brings people into communion with themselves by seeking and releasing an archetypal, ancestral and animal memory which pre-dates our separation from nature. I am specifically examining the power of this ritual/dance form as it pertains to crisis, sacrifice and catharsis as pedagogical tools for self-cognizance and expansion. I investigate the connections between butoh dance, sacrifice and trickster, the mythical embodiment of the ultimate outlier and boundary crosser. I am also revealing some shamanic aspects of butoh as shown through the methodology of my mentor and main butoh teacher, Diego Pinon; I will attempt to show how altered or enlightened states of being are transmitted to dancers with concrete examples from the various workshops and performances I’ve participated in with him over the past 18 years. I will show how crisis, a type of inner sacrifice, is transmitted, expressed and ultimately transformed through catharsis.
In this chapter, I will expand on the philosophy of place and show how it has always included an enduring connection to the body, ritual and thus to the creation of dance as an art form. To look at the philosophy of place as the grounding conceptual framework by which to feed through some of the constructs of butoh dance makes perfect sense, firstly because butoh is so hard to define in terms of style and seems to vary in direct accordance with the various places it is disseminated from. Secondly, because place has been largely ignored by Western history and philosophy, much in the same way women, mystery, the body and dance have been ignored. I specifically explore the ways butoh (and all dance) remains close to the land and to Indigenous forms of ritual. I will show how the philosophy of place, (which includes intrinsically protective, Indigenous value systems regarding treatment of the land) collides with Zen notions of *absolute nothingness* and shamanic approaches to transformation, in order to illuminate the deep philosophy and practice of butoh dance. Places offer us guidance and sensory wisdom, including receptiveness to particular forces in nature, something butoh as a shamanic practice relies on. Butoh dance as I’ve received it, has always been intimately connected with and informed by land, place, and nature. I hope to provoke the idea that it is place that constructs our body-beings, and often it is through crisis and suffering.

In chapter 3, I situate butoh within the field and context of (post) modern dance, itself an outlier in the broader arts world. I am exploring early modern dance as the harbinger of the (feminist) post-modern wave; I’m examining the potential of dance as a form to disrupt because of its ephemeral nature, and its inability to be captured- in other words, precisely because of its non-linguistic aspects. For instance, dance brings us an interesting perspective around the concept of dualistic thinking which is primarily set up linguistically, because we ‘think’ through dance non-verbally with our bodily intelligence systems including the lymph, blood and nervous systems, among others. This is quite at odds with the dominant linguistic systems of communication at work for millennia, where it is commonly assumed that thinking is directly linked with language; indeed, that thinking can only happen through linguistic interpretation, which of course implies that thinking is a solely rational activity. This denies the possibility of ‘thinking’ through movement- something every dancer knows to be not only possible, but crucial and essential in learning to dance. In this chapter I also look at the extra-corporeal body or aura as an affective state, what Barba and others have called ‘stage presence’. I look at
the historical precursors to both modern dance and butoh which I feel originated in the Dada and Expressionist movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both of these artistic movements explored the relationship between verbal and/or other symbolic forms of language and consciousness and representation.

In chapter 4, I situate butoh within a Japanese context, looking at some of the ways that the social, political and historical climate of Japan (where butoh was born) affected and nurtured this dance form. I place butoh as a historical/cultural artifact with specific influences and ideations. Perhaps more than any other dance/art form, butoh eludes a definite description which consequently relegates it to a particular time in history in many ways. However, butoh is not limited by this historical context—exemplified by its enormous and continuing global popularity, but it likely would not have developed in a vacuum. Certainly, when Hijikata, used the term *Ankoku Butoh*—usually translated as “the dance of utter darkness”, to describe his new dance ‘experience’, he was responding to various forces alive at the time: The complete annihilation of his home country, Japan; the gradual immersion of the arts and the world into the post-modern era, the incredible rise of protest culture—seen all over the world by the 1960’s, but in direct reaction to the American occupation, as early as the 1940’s in Japan; the explosion of European intellectual and artistic movements which heavily influenced butoh, such as Dada, Expressionism and early modern dance; as well as influence from (especially) French existentialist philosophers such as Sartre and Artaud.

Because butoh eludes definition so easily, I am specifically curious about whether this form actually even exists at this time, or if it is now simply a piece of history, like the Dada movement for example. In many ways, butoh has become a historical art document, named and created at a particular time in history with various influences—simply because it cannot easily be defined or confined in terms of style. Butoh’s two creators had vastly different ideas about how to dance this form into being, and those creators have both now passed on, with many disciples still disseminating the practice globally, each choosing a vastly different approach to teaching and performing. Butoh has in fact survived the test of time and continues to be a powerful, subversive, globally recognized and prospering post-modern dance form today. In this chapter, I’m also considering some non-dualistic concepts found in Japanese Zen, as well as some eastern philosophical approaches to the body which butoh has certainly been affected by, and which I feel gives butoh dance its profound aesthetic and depth. I’m particularly
interested in the subterranean ways that these non-dualistic tendencies affect the basis of butoh, grounding it in a ritualistic and contemplative way that most western modern dance is not. To inquire into how and when the form was born and named, what the socio-political back-drop looked like at that time in history, and how the two co-founders approached butoh, is to understand the basic mechanics and building blocks of this form as it has progressed from inception until today, an important concern.

In **chapter 5**, I address the aesthetic elements of butoh. I note that butoh dance is often considered ugly and full of suffering, sometimes even as an expression of cruelty or pain. I look at the politics of ugliness, the politics of control based on (Western) beauty standards, and intentional expressions of ugliness as a transgressive statement—particularly in this age of air-brushed, perfected optics and extremely unrealistic beauty standards. It is these aspects of ‘ugliness’ that supply butoh with its dark, assaultive aesthetic. Visually, butoh is at the far end of the spectrum, opposite that of contemporary ‘modern’ dance which usually values harmony, symmetry and reconciliatory gestures which all nurture a sense of achievement. Butoh develops movements and gestures which can be inefficient, intentionally disorganized or chaotic and physically uncomfortable or even painful. Butoh often incorporates tension, exhaustion, extreme positioning or duration, and increased sensation as fundamental to its methodology.

In this chapter, I also explore the connections between catharsis and spectacle—both of which are heavily associated with butoh, as well as the form’s ontic identity which revolves around *the body that becomes*—a body in states of transformation, metamorphosis, and continuous change. Alongside this, butoh is fiercely dedicated to resisting co-optation into mainstream culture and it does so by refusing to be defined in terms of style, codified method or steps or even genre of art. It is this commitment to constant adaptation and renewal which has at least partially allowed butoh to avoid absorption into a mainstream culture which prefers an aesthetic of dull edges, sameness, the ordinary; works endorsed by habit. In this chapter, I also look at Japanese aesthetics which embrace and celebrate imperfectio,n ambiguity and uncertainty such as wabi-sabi.

In **chapter 6**, I am examining the pedagogical implications of butoh as a physical/imaginative/expressive/healing art. I assert that the discourse concerning suffering and crisis— which has ‘defined’ butoh from its original inception until now, can also be
employed toward crisis resolution in the (intersecting) fields of mental health and education. I investigate the pedagogical implications of subversive art, especially as a way to work with trauma, as I have personally been doing and teaching. I note the 4 supporting characteristics which make butoh both an excellent pedagogical/educational tool as well as a healing modality; namely that butoh is contemplative, non-linguistic, not beautiful or graceful, and there is no ‘correct’ way to approach the form because it defies definition. Butoh does not require extensive skills or training, there is no complex choreography, no code, no butoh form. This becomes very significant for educators who are dealing with multi-lingual/cultural classrooms and multiple skill levels within those rooms. I note too that educators are often the ones doing direct triage for the multiple forms of trauma now showing up in the classroom and it is time for an “all-hands-on-deck” approach.

In the first section, *Movement Matters*, I look at some scientific studies which show dancing in particular as one of the most effective forms of exercise for cognitive health, as well as mood and behaviour regulation. Dance is now being used to treat everything from eating disorders to Parkinson’s disease and I unpack some of the intriguing aspects of dance as a pedagogical tool for educators and therapists both. I note that any activity that gets people away from their screens is worth engaging with as I believe this is a major contributor the rise in, especially anxiety, that we see in classrooms and communities around the globe today. I note that there is often a firm, delineated line between art and healing- or between healing and education and butoh seeks to penetrate these established, set boundaries.

In the next section on *Butoh and Healing*, I look at Peter Levine’s work around Somatic Experiencing- a method I have personally studied. He has designed this healing modality based on his research on animal behaviour in the wild as well as through psycho-therapeutic sessions with clients. He notes that animals always shake, tremble, shudder and perspire when they escape danger and he relays that biologists feel this is integral to the animals’ health, and even for their life to continue; Levine was told by several animal experts that if these ‘traumatized’ animals don’t go through this release process, they will usually die. I note that for those people who are holding (extreme) trauma, relaxation practices such as sitting meditation can actually provoke more anxiety and an intensification of painful feelings without a release valve. I connect this with butoh as a contemplative yet (sometimes) highly physical and cathartic practice. In the next
section *Pedagogy for the Spirit* address the idea that butoh uses suffering and trauma as a heroic, transformative and regenerative strategy and look further at some Buddhist as well as shamanic ideas and practices that butoh dance is associated with. In the final section I explore how dance can still be used as an act of resistance.

### 1.5. Limitations, Notes and Contribution

This dissertation does not profess to cover the subject of butoh in its entirety and it is primarily meant to be read as a reflection of my psychic journey and my personal absorption into this art form. I have nothing specific I’m trying to prove. I have merely offered personal experience, tangential connections to other subjects and themes, some analysis of the possible social and therapeutic potentials of butoh as well as its historical context. In this way, I am able to integrate many strands of interest with relatively little worry of needing to ‘prove’ anything or form any kind of empirical ‘truth’ about butoh. The ability to go much deeper into a subject or theory through books rather than articles also beckoned me into this process. I have almost entirely used books in the research of this thesis except in the section on Diego Pinon where I am relying on fieldwork in the form of workshops and performances with his *Butoh Ritual Mexicano* company/school, based in Mexico, over the course of the past 18 years. However, in the first section of the final chapter called Pedagogy for the Digital Body, journal articles are the primary source.

This thesis has woven together several disparate strands and as such, includes a number of authors from different subject areas and disciplines. The limitation in this approach is that there is a comparatively limited amount of research dedicated to each strand of the weave but the potential to make new and intriguing connections by bringing together so many strands, proved too difficult to resist. This process reminded me of what ecofeminist writer Gloria Feman Orenstein calls ‘the methodology of the marvelous’- a state of synchronicity where one gathers and attracts- as if by magic, the next vital or interesting piece of information, but very often it is not directly related to the last piece.

**Note:** I have chosen to go with the Westernized version of naming rather than the Japanese, in that the surname will follow the given name. There are a few reasons for this: firstly, it helps provide clarity and consistency throughout the dissertation. Due to the fact that both Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata for instance, are internationally
known butoh ‘stars’ and that so much research has been conducted by North American and European authors who do not follow the Japanese style of naming, they are more often than not referred to in the Western manner in the literature. As well, there is Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshito which can become confusing if only using surnames. Not to mention that most dancers that I’ve worked with will refer to these well-known Japanese butoh artists by their given names. Lastly, I mostly refer to Japanese authors and scholars by their last name anyway. I have also come across more than one way of spelling butoh (buto or Butoh for instance) and again, because I encountered the dance form 18 years ago through people I consider to be masters, I have simply spelled butoh the way it has always been presented to me.

**Contribution of this study:**

I see (butoh) dance as the ultimate feminine expression, a way of questioning and de-stabilizing the hierarchy and domination associated with linguistic representation; as a strategy of resistance against sterilized aesthetics and definitions of beauty; and as an eco-feminist approach to art because dance creation generally leaves behind no trace and requires no material object to create with. Embodied, experiential and subjective understanding allows us to view butoh/dance as a particular kind of feminist expression, one linked to the womb and to Indigenous/earth cycles which don’t rely solely on logic and language as the conveyers of ‘truth.’ I feel that dance represents a lost form of communication- one that is holistic, synergistic and complete -and grounded in a non-dualistic approach to the body/mind. Non-duality as seen in both Indigenous and Asian traditions, as well as many somatic-based practices, addresses the subject-object split which has occupied so many (Western) philosophers for centuries. In this dissertation I have positioned the body, and butoh in particular, as subversive in a culture that has historically split the mind from the body, consequently or tangentially creating a rift between man and woman and between humans and nature. This has subsequently led to further domination through strategies such as colonialism, imperialism, fascism and today, virulent and insidious capitalism.

In pedagogical terms, the concept of ‘outsider’ art is particularly potent as we face increasing levels of mental health disturbance, creating ever larger numbers of people who live outside of the margins. In the case of butoh dance, not only are we faced with a marginal art form but also one that is predicated on opposition and paradox.
Any child who has been abused becomes familiar with the paradox of our human condition: we all hold the dark and the light and it becomes a much less daunting world when there are outlets to express this. Butoh is not trying to make a statement against anything specific, it just asks us to recognize the messiness, the uncertainty, the infinite possibilities. Butoh purposely infiltrates into opposition, asking us to embrace both the dark and the light, a noble request. A pedagogy which welcomes the outsider is crucial today, perhaps the most important work, as we see phenomena like loneliness and alienation skyrocket.

My perspective as a person with Cree and British heritage, as someone who can straddle many worlds and offer a middle path, a way of integration, dissolution and acceptance is needed in our divided culture(s). A dance form which holds oppositions comfortably, without needing firm ideas of right and wrong is subversive in a society that prefers black and white. Butoh is subversive in our age of post-truth and divisionary politics; it requires us to notice the margins. We seem to be losing our ability as a society to deal with nuance, a different point of view or even particular words, so a pedagogy that not only beckons darkness but also ambiguity becomes a powerful form of resistance and healing. Today this is a pedagogy desperately needed as our cultural values seem to be dividing into two distinct sides rather than allowing for multiple visions. In this thesis I have offered a perspective on butoh dance which includes my personal experience with the art form, historical understanding, shamanic, land-based and non-rational understandings as well as a sociological viewpoint. My aim is to bring together many diverse possibilities, to create entanglements, to find the third space.
Blackfoot songs have no words.

Words are a new thing, they come from the Sioux

-Orlando Calling Last-

Blood Reservation, AB.

2.1. Trickster’s Sacrifice: A Separate Reality

Over the many years (18) of training and performing with Diego Pinon and his Butoh Ritual Mexicano (BRM) company/school, I have sought to understand the historical and ideological concerns of a form originating in Japan and then translated through a specifically Indigenous line of teachings loosely known as shamanism. The life force inherent in butoh ignites a sharp and charged perceptive state, alive with possibility; it is this state of consciousness which most often gets butoh dance aligned with shamanic practices and tendencies. Butoh has long been compared to shamanic
practices and I hope to show this link by focusing on the power of place, trickster, sacrifice, crisis and catharsis, and ultimately the metamorphic and transformative power of all dance and movement as a practice.

As a contemporary dancer and performance artist who has also practised the post-modern form of butoh for many years, I've often seen it as a sort of trickster, a shamanic healing presence or force of liberation which, at the darkest hour, allows us a sublime moment of witnessing and experiencing beauty mixed with terror. The spirit of Trickster definitely feels at home when dancing butoh, in fact, it was made for them. The butoh dancer, always poised on the brink of discovery and danger, mirrors the mythic embodiment of ambiguity, duplicity and contradiction, and like trickster she nearly always crosses the line. Butoh, like trickster, is polytropic or having many-ways, derived from aporos, connoting irreconcilable difference or paradox. Just as trickster does, butoh offers us a way to perceive and accept the paradoxes of life.

Trickster is always a boundary crosser and because of this, he is always an agent of change and transformation. Tricksters do not reside near the hearth but rather lives at the edge of town, on the road, most alive at the twilight hour. Tricksters are known to be travellers of the in-between lands and as Lewis Hyde reminds us in his book *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, (2010) “if the ritual setting is missing, trickster is missing.” (p.13) Trickster is sometimes thought of as the personification of the body and he is often used as a symbol for sacrifice. Trickster reminds us not to become too simplistic in our dualistic thinking, for it is precisely his contradictory nature that upholds the universe. Butoh uses this contradiction to express what is most deeply human about us, our oppositions and sameness.

Those who align trickster with the devil/evil or darkness have failed to notice his great ambivalence and expression of amorality rather than immorality. We rely on the disruptors of culture to keep us flexible, open to change, not cemented. We are continuously trying to distinguish good from evil, sacred from profane, male from female, right from wrong and trickster will always appear in these contexts, happy to disrupt and confuse the narrative, simply by residing at the threshold or boundary and not entering the ring. Today we need this moral viewpoint more than ever which both trickster and butoh represent, that of the middle path, the path of paradox:
Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the grey-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. When someone's sense of honorable behavior has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong and will get life going again (Hyde, 2010:7)

A well-known trickster figure is Coyote - who always seems to be getting into trouble because of his appetites - it is sex, hunger and a desire for mischief that usually leads Coyote to his death or to places and situations of heightened uncertainty. Hyde (2010) summarizes this process as follows: “The plot is typical: the trickster is given something valuable with a condition set on its use, time passes and before too long, trickster’s hunger leads him to violate the condition” (p.28.) The transcendent ideal is devoured by earthly appetites and trickster comes out empty handed. The rub for Coyote is that he must learn to limit his appetite or limited food will be forced upon him. It is this very hunger which leads Coyote time and again into mischievous situations, a force he seemingly cannot refuse. There is a direct relationship between hunger and art here: Trickster seems to derive his creative intelligence through his appetite; when he sacrifices his appetite - or that sacrifice is forced upon on him, he learns new cunning and creative ways to feed himself.

Many Indigenous creation tales deal with appetite and sacrifice by telling about the unending hunger of both Raven and/or Coyote - the two trickster characters most often connected to the Divine. (see Bouchard and Kennedy, 2008; Datlow and Windling, 2007; Mandeville, 2009; Radin, 1972) Several disparate groups of Indigenous peoples have a creation story about an animal - often a raven or coyote, but not always - who can not stop eating or lusting and must eventually be exiled from the village so that the rest of the people will not be harmed. Here we see one of the possible origins of sacrifice, as well as intentional or inflicted sacrifice used as a way to alter appetite. The underlying message of these stories asks why a being of considerable power cannot restrain his appetite and whether this voracious appetite will rule him and thus bring ruin to the community. The sub-text being that so long as one doesn’t get greedy, or fully succumb to one’s appetite, there will be food forever. We can certainly make a connection between greed and the importance of sacrifice, especially in cultures where everyone in the group relies on each other for basic survival. And we can certainly also now see the consequences of an unrestrained appetite for power, wealth and material acquisition.
In butoh we can see the tangible links between crisis, sacrifice and catharsis exemplified with ease, in the contracted, impulsive and grotesque, sometimes violent gestures and gesticulations often seen in the dance. In most forms of contemporary dance, particularly ballet, the idea of sacrificing time and/or the body for the art is absolutely ingrained in its philosophy and pedagogy and I would argue, is of extraordinary educational value, in terms of discipline, focus and building passion. Hijikata himself reminds us: “Sacrifice is the source of all work and every dancer is an illegitimate child set free to experience that very quality.” (Hijikata, 2000, p.39) To withhold pleasure or even comfort from the body for extended periods - during rehearsal or training for example, produces a kind of inner panic, a restless inability to stay still and the paradox here is that it is most often the fastest way to slow down a racing, discontented mind; it’s a move towards emptiness, something butoh relies on.

The etymological roots of the word sacrifice come from the 13th century, where it referred to an offering (to a deity) as an act of propitiation or homage: *Facere* – to do or perform, *sacra*, sacred. Later, in the early 17th century, and translated into English, the word came to be linked with the act of giving one thing up for the sake of another. It then came to be associated with more intemperate words such as immolate, victim, atonement, oppression. Today, for the committed artist, the meaning of the word would be more closely connected with the former meaning: To produce something worthy enough to be considered great art, one must make some kind of selfless, perhaps divine sacrifice; a sacred act of offering if approached in the right way. There is the notion associated with art or creativity in general- that to produce or create art one must give up the ‘normal’ or comfortable life and this is certainly true of butoh, an art based around crisis, and an art which takes pride in its outsider-ness.

Many choreographers and dancers are known for their extreme training when preparing for a performance- days with minimal food for example, is quite a normal and regular sacrifice in the dance world. For example, I was once the personal stage-hand for a well-known American butoh dancer during the Vancouver International Dance Festival; this artist told me that she fasted on nothing but lemon water for the entire week before her performances- every time. I asked her why she did this, secretly assuming (with judgement) that because she performed nude, she was merely being vain, slimming herself to the point of starvation for aesthetic reasons. In contrast, she told me
that sacrificing food gave her more energy, focus and discipline. She had in fact come to believe that this starving ritual was essential for a good, authentic butoh performance.

Despite these kinds of sacrifices which are physical in nature, the kind of sacrifice seen most often in butoh is the of shedding one’s ego. Butoh dance is relational rather than presentational, and in this way, there is a direct challenge and opportunity for the dancer to shed the performative desire to present one’s individuality on stage (and of course art spills into life.) There are no technical feats to accomplish with butoh, no ‘chops’ to show off and neither is it presenting a narrative; in fact, several butoh performances that I have seen were largely based in total stillness. Many contemporary (modern) choreographers and much research I came across describe butoh as somehow amateur, a form that does not require discipline and training in the ways that other dance forms demand. In butoh the discipline is internal, it depends on a willingness to surrender, to look into the abyss, face the darkness and to provoke and challenge the body/mind into states of crisis.

In many ways, butoh’s success has come from its ability to adapt, its ability to find the fluidity which keeps the dance ever in flux, ever evading a locked down definition. Butoh, as it migrates around the globe, embraces and adapts to its various conditions and places of being, much like coyote. For instance, butoh dance is not always macabre- there can often be exceptionally witty or even hilarious moments in a butoh performance and the veteran butoh dancer or witness enters this form without expectations for congruity or certainty. The Coyote road after all, is the road to a wild, unpredictable and transformative destiny. It is neither comfortable nor safe. The call of Trickster is a call to protect both beauty and deep mystery and often in a spirit of mischief and humour. For me, butoh seeks to assimilate the archetypal human experiences of shaman/priestess, cheated victim, rebel, martyr and wounded child, all symbols of the Trickster, all part of the human experience, all transformative in nature. Like the Hindu god Siva, trickster is both creator and destroyer and holds neither in a position of superiority.

Here is a little anecdote from another trickster-shaman, the mythical or perhaps true character in Carlos Castaneda's tales of adventure and learning with Don Juan:
“I’m going to utter perhaps the greatest piece of knowledge anyone can voice” [Don Juan] said.

“Let me see what you can do with it.

Do you know that at this very moment you are surrounded by eternity? And do you know that you can use that eternity if you so desire...?

“There! Eternity is there!” he said pointing to the horizon. Then he pointed to the zenith. “Or there, or perhaps we can say that eternity is like this.” He extended both arms to point to the east and west...

“Do you know that you can extend yourself forever in any of the directions I have pointed to? Do you know that any one moment can be eternity?

This is not a riddle; it's a fact, but only if you mount that moment and use it to take the totality of yourself forever in any one direction.”

He stared at me. “You didn't have this knowledge before” he said smiling.

“Now you do. I have revealed it to you, but it doesn't make a bit of difference, because you don't have enough personal power to utilize my revelation.

Yet if you did have enough power, my words alone would serve as a means for you to round up the totality of yourself, and to get the crucial part of it out of the boundaries in which it is contained.” (Castaneda, 1974, p.8-9)

### 2.2. Diego Pinon: A Shaman’s Approach

Early in my exploration of butoh, I encountered one of the most fascinating humans I’ve ever met: Indigenous-Mexican butoh dancer, choreographer, teacher and shaman: Diego Pinon. He comes from the Purepecha culture, connected with the Tarascan people who are based in the Michocan region of Mexico. These people actively resisted Spanish colonization to a large extent, even retaining their original language and they have stayed very much connected to their traditional culture, including their dances which Pinon was exposed to as a child. Pinon was trained in both contemporary dance and in his regional traditional dances so butoh was a natural...
gravitation. Pinon eventually studied with both Hijikata’s main disciple, Min Tanaka as well as Kazuo Ohno but he has fused his approach to teaching butoh with techniques he learned from his studies in both local indigenous dance as well as a path considered within the context of shamanism known as Energetic Movement. Pinon has been one of my main and lasting influences in this form and is one of the big reasons I continue to dance butoh.

Pinon teaches in the most unusual way and has a command of space unlike anyone I’ve ever encountered. From what I’ve witnessed, in terms of his ability to control the energetics of space and thereby produce transformation in others and for others, I am led to believe that he is, indeed, a shaman with remarkable abilities. Pinon asserts that he uses aspects of butoh dance as a portal through which to enter alternate dimensions (in the mind)- something akin to satori or enlightenment in the Zen Buddhist conception. Pinon approaches butoh as a source of transformation and relies on the regenerative possibilities within the body itself to achieve this. Pinon’s methodology relies on his own acute sensory awareness, as well as making use of heightened emotional states through physical and sometimes mental duress. His has become a ritualistic method, one that combines the sacred and avant-garde sensibilities of this postmodern Japanese dance form with the ritual structure and energetic consciousness of indigenous traditions of the Michocan region of Mexico.

Butoh dance affects us through the skin, the nervous system and the fluid systems by way of its energetic porosity, a concept loosely located in the historical development of the dance form. The art of butoh is a visually and energetically distinct example of a dance or physical theatre practice “where the porous body is the sine qua non of its performative practice.” (James, 2010, p.114) This approach is certainly present when transmitted through Pinon, as he teaches and performs butoh in the context of shamanism. Using knowledge from his training in this shamanic context for instance, Pinon makes use of particular pressure points on the body as well as places in the body which hold energy in a certain way, creating potential for major cathartic release. What gives Diego’s approach to butoh such a rich tapestry is his combinational use of crisis and offering; in this way both the dancer and the witness are released through cathartic strategies. Shakina Nayfack, who has studied with and written about Pinon quite extensively asserts,
“what separates Butoh Mexicano from other forms of meditative or introspective practice is that its focus moves beyond the initial accumulation of these complex human energies and insists upon a conscious offering in both staged performance as well as manner of living.” (Nayfack, 2009, p.152)

During my first workshop with Diego (Vancouver 2002), having just stumbled into butoh through a roommate, I was positively awestruck by his energy levels; he demonstrated this by having all of us 12 dancers pile on top of him with instructions to move away quickly when he hit the floor with his palm. Pinon is not a large man- 5’5” at most and very petite so even 3 people’s weight on top of him would have been heavy but he was able to hold the weight of all 12 of us. In a very dramatic moment, Diego smacked the floor, all 12 dancers quickly scrambled off him and he then leapt up and did a sort of parkour move, running all the way up the wall, nearly to the ceiling while everyone’s jaws literally fell open. It was quite a moment.

In another workshop (San Francisco, 2003) we spent hours whipping oversized grapefruits at each others’ spines, locating and stimulating a particular ‘energy centre’ at the upper mid-back between the shoulder blades, in order to access a specific force to create with. The energy in the studio that day was totally bizarre- people were breaking down into tears, leaving the room in a rage; confrontation was lurking everywhere. Later in the same workshop, he had the dancers bind our wrists and ankles tightly with cellophane wrap and then perform a dance towards freedom by releasing ourselves from these external bonds. Another petite woman and I were the last two to break free and as a way to ‘support’ us, Pinon had the rest of the dancers chant/scream “CRAZY... LAZY” as they circled around us, until we were both sobbing and struggling with forces and memories powerful enough for chaos to ensue. Just as we released the binds, Diego clapped loudly and shouted, “now we dance!”; by encouraging us to work with this potent, emotional and chaotic energy, each of us created incredible, ecstatic dances that day.

Butoh affects us through exaggeration and often shock, important features of its communicative and ritual power. I once performed with his company (Butoh Ritual Mexicano/ BRM) in New York (2004) and even in that city that never sleeps, our outlandish, half naked, white bodies contorted into various grotesque shapes and dripping with raw egg were enough to make people get up and leave. (It was a proud moment as a local friend related that it was hard to actually bother New Yorkers.) This
ability butoh has to make viewers uncomfortable often comes by way of the dancer genuinely expressing something—often painful, rather than ‘performing.’ The shock often comes through by way of authentic expression, despite the overt ugliness or spectacle.

In another workshop in New York (2005), Pinon had the dancers move towards someone they felt attracted to and then, in opposition, move away from someone they felt repulsed by. He used these words—attraction and repulsion to describe the exercise. When it came time to explore repulsion, every single dancer in the room moved away from one particular person, for no apparent reason, but of course this was upsetting for her. Rather than diffusing the situation, as many teachers would have done, Diego encouraged it to continue, asking the dancers to really show our disgust for this person, until she left the studio sobbing, and the rest of the dancers felt extremely uncomfortable and confused. She never finished that workshop, but I ran into her the following summer at another butoh event and I had to take a second look—her appearance had completely transformed, and she looked a million years lighter. She told me that the workshop in New York had changed her life, and most certainly for the better.

At a more recent workshop in Portland (2014), Diego invited a local dance company Wobbly to participate in a mixed abilities workshop. This is part of Wobbly’s mission statement on their Facebook page:

“Wobbly’s mission starts with the belief that to present a disabled body onstage is a radical act capable of stitch by stitch transformation of the cultural fabric of our community. [W]e believe that by using our bodies in performance we coax audience members into a broader definition of art, beauty, and the lived human experience of people with and without disabilities.”

Diego began the workshop by simply asking each of us to create a dance, using some of the objects (such as roses or potatoes) offered in the opening prayer ritual, if desired. He also asked us to show our weakness or vulnerability by dancing with our ‘handicap’. He never apologized for this wording or made any kind of extra comment or concession for the 3 people who were in wheel chairs, the 2 who required other support to walk, or the 3 with fairly severe mental disabilities; it was just understood by everyone that all dancers did in fact, have some kind of ‘handicap’ and that all presentations would be honored.
The two artistic directors of Wobbly Dance- Eric and Yulia- created a duet that was mesmerizing and utterly moving, with Eric leaving his wheelchair to become helpless as a paralyzed person on the floor, affecting the audience by creating intense levels of emotional transmission. Pinon often speaks about the importance of putting the body into various, altered (crisis) states in order to access the soul of dance. The final performance which included about 14 dancers was described as a “total spectacle” and carnival-esque in a grotesque and freakish way. As a participating dancer, I can say that it was totally exhilarating, hilarious and immensely surprising with improvisational scores never dominated by the able-bodied dancers; in fact, quite the opposite- with disabled dancers using the butoh attitude to make a complete spectacle of their less than perfect bodies. Butoh dance can thus be viewed as an ideological intervention in this context. It was a thrilling and sublime piece of art.

Pinon very much incorporates into his teaching of ritual-dance, the living landscapes of the places he teaches from, especially in his home town of Tlapuajahua, Mexico. This is where his school is based and where most of his ritual dance methodology focuses on using some aspect of the local landscape such as the old, central church, the abandoned mine- which had originally made the town rich or the remnants of the eventual landslide which destroyed most of its original inhabitants. For example, he would have the dancers perform particular daily exercises here, such as offering a gift to an unknown, local person or intuitively finding a good spot to contemplate by wandering, without direction, through the surrounding mountains, then encouraging the feelings of the land to show up through our dance offerings throughout the day.

One of Pinon’s repeated exercises in Tlapuajahua, is to take the dancers on a blind-folded walk through the surrounding countryside for up to 3 hours, enabling us to really gather information from our other senses besides visual, and particularly from the beings and spirits (Devas) occupying those places. Diego encourages his dancers to look for the special forces contained in certain places and to use that energy to activate our own internal energies, in order to create a potent, revealing and transformative dance- for both the dancer and the witness. True to his Indigenous roots, Diego always acknowledges the land, the earth, as the very means to access this possibility with our sacred bodies. The land here is always honoured and included as an actual ancestor.
2.3. Land Spirits: *Tao of Butoh*

Many if not all Indigenous spiritual/knowledge systems are based on knowing that there is a residual power in the land itself which is capable of producing religious mythologies and sentiment. In other words, it is the geographical location itself which produces a spiritual or religious experience. Vine Deloria, an Indigenous scholar reiterates this idea of the land holding intrinsically powerful or spiritual energies in the book *God is Red; a Native View of Religion* (1994): “Land must somehow have an unsuspected spiritual energy or identity that shapes and directs human activities” (p.148) Deloria continues: “Sacred places are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives.” (p.281) There is certainly the possibility that particular lands or places project a specific religious or spiritual imprint which then shapes and defines the types of spiritual and religious beliefs arising on them. Deloria notes that the places where spiritual, revelatory experiences took place were honored and remembered as locations where, “through rituals and ceremonial practices, the people could once again communicate with the spirits.” (p. 67) Revelations were said to come from specific landscapes, as a continuous process of adjustment to what the land is revealing rather than an ingrained written truth, forevermore.

Basso (1996) notes that “relationships to places may also find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art...” (57.) Myths, like dances and prayers are forged from the bones and dirt of each land’s geography. As Brenda Farnell (2012) notes, acknowledging and engaging forces and powers of the land “seems to lie at the heart of many Indigenous American ceremonial practices where we find power, movement, knowledge and action inextricably linked.” (p.1) Place, the landscape and its people, become not simply a ‘backdrop’ for creation and creativity, but an integral part of the process of building and creating. Dance becomes a way of sacralising the land, and the land then becomes a site for multiple spatial and perceptual meanings which feed the creative process of the dance. The power of the land and the symbolism inherent in the dance are thus able to transform consciousness.

The validity of many Western religious traditions lies in their ability to explain the cosmos rather than their potential “to provide a wide range of spiritual experiences.” (Deloria, 1994, p.66) Nor do many Western religious traditions consider religion to be
what Deloria (1994) describes as “a force of undetermined intensity and unsuspected origin that may break in on them.” (p.284) Most Indigenous cultures would place practice above preaching when it comes to religious or ceremonial communion, and dances have always held an integral link to religious and/or ritual practices all over North America. Dance has always existed as a ritual, both community-based as well as in shamanic capacities; a way to commune with the land, the ground and the spirits. As Lisa Doolittle and Heather Elton write in a piece called Medicine of the Brave: A Look at the Changing Role of Dance in Native Culture from the Buffalo Days to the Modern Powwow: “No other form of communication with the spirit world was as adequate or complete.” (Doolittle and Elton, 2001, p.119)

Doolittle and Elton (2001) note for instance, that when High Plains’ culture came to a sudden end in the late1880’s, their dances changed as a result. They assert for example, that the ghost dance, “a passionate, ritualistic dance to bring the return of the buffalo” (p.114) was not merely a dance but a spiritual movement meant to represent a culture in despair; a culture brutally colonized and suppressed by another culture with a wholly different structure of morality and very different values. In the end, this dance was so feared and despised that it led to the execution of Sitting Bull and the Sioux massacre at Wounded Knee. The sun dance was another powerful dance ritual which was also suppressed and outlawed by the (Canadian) Indian Act of 1885, and that law was not changed until 1951. None the less, dance today- particularly on the Powwow circuit- is flourishing in Indigenous cultures all over the U.S and Canada and it continues to represent a powerful determination to preserve and honor cultural identity.

The philosophical origins of butoh very much focused on the connection between dance, the transfiguration of the body and that of the land. Tatsumi Hijikata, widely considered the originator of butoh, certainly drew from this idea when he first developed butoh: His original vision was not to merely transfigure his own physical body, a reflection of the transformation of the land from which he grew, but also by proxy, to actually transform Japan itself through his body. Hijikata used specific choreographic choices and gestures in an attempt to build a new Japan, one “not corrupted into rotting urban flesh and bloated decadence but rather corrupted by poverty and the ravages of nature and of radiation” (Bruhm, 2013, p.28) Hijikata knew very early that we had come to mistake comfort for culture, and this could only be cured by means of metamorphic
transformation, a task well-suited to the emotional structure as well as the physicality and cathartic potentials of butoh dance.

From the beginning, butoh sought to rupture what Bonnie Stein calls “the heavy imprint of Japan’s strict society.” (Stein, 2001, p.376) We also know that butoh was heavily influenced by Shinto, a form of animism widely practiced in the north of Japan where Hijikata was born, and which recognizes an inherent spirit, always residing in and interacting with, both animate and non-animate matter. Hijikata who apparently never regarded ankoku butoh as specifically Japanese in conception, wished to re-create Japan with his body, reinventing a Japan imbued with wind *darumas* and thousands of cherry blossoms, a Japan close to its natural place in history, lost to the rest of the world for more than 2000 years. The name Hijikata itself is a pseudonym meaning ‘from the earth’ and he often spoke of the invention of butoh as arising from his early somatic associations with wind and mud. Certainly, butoh takes a cue from Shintoism in terms of its reverence and worship of nature and natural forces; indeed, butoh uses these natural forces implicitly in its creation process. Both Shintoism as well as Zen have infused and informed Japanese aesthetics in general and butoh in particular, to a massive degree.

Hijikata came to believe that the origins of Japanese folk dance were rooted in the hard and bleak lifestyle that the local peasants had endured for centuries. The ‘butoh body’ which he first drew upon to codify his dance steps for this form was from an image of the bow-legged, stooped rice paddy farmers from his childhood home in the north. (Laage, 1993) The *ganimata* is now the most recognized, and codified stance of the butoh dancer: A semi-crouch, with feet supinated, pelvis low, torso leaning forward, shoulders slumped, hands extended horizontally but still limp, face usually contracted or stretched to the extreme. Hijikata could see in the posture of the people from the north, and from Japan in general, a way to seek out and then solidify identity. In a piece called *As Witness to Postwar Japanese Art*, Arata Isozaki agrees with this sentiment writing, One can see a posture by which the Japanese community has consistently sought out its own identity- its belief in a self-sameness, nurtured for more than ten centuries, to face the incessant intrusion of the modern as a product of Western enlightened reason. (Isozaki, 1994, p.27)

Joan Laage, (whom I have performed butoh with in Seattle with *Ruta de Memoria*, a butoh company from Chile) has argued that butoh was developed especially for the Japanese body, for instance because of their “elongated torsos” (Laage, 1993,
of special significance to Hijikata was the north of Japan, where he was born. When he performed *Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese: Rebellion of the Body* in Tokyo, 1968, he had already begun to dedicate significant amounts of his creative process to addressing his physical identity as a native of the northern region of Tohoku, which is considered primarily a region of Indigenous culture in Japan. (Barrett and Ohno, 2004)

At this time, he began to experiment with incorporating some gestures from the Tohoku folk traditions into his performances and choreographic works. From this point onwards, Hijikata’s work focused almost exclusively on his “growing awareness of how one’s body is constructed and defined by the region where one is born— in his case the forbidding and remote Tohoku.” (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.141)

The north is often considered the symbolic and geographical birthplace of archetypal shamanism for it teaches endurance and solitude; it is not enough to be smart or clever, the north demands practical knowledge and irrational wisdom. As Linda Hogan asserts: “The best hunters in the far north still find the location of their prey by dreaming” (Hogan, 1995, p.82-83) Shamans from traditional cultures world-wide believe that certain parts of the land are imbued with power and if one enters these areas in the right state of mind, that power can enter the psyche, ”opening up previously untapped levels of feeling, perception and creativity.” (Tucker, 1992, p.130) Michael Tucker tells us in his book *Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in 20th century Art and Culture* (1992) that the call of the shaman often involves a “sever shock to the conditioning of so-called normal everyday consciousness.” (p.82) Shamans are often expected to go through some kind of crisis or physical duress (sacrifice) in order to pass through the initiatory stages of suffering and solitude. This is in preparation for the breakthroughs which create prophetic knowledge and healing. Like Trickster, shamans experience rootlessness or homelessness as a path to freedom, a ‘deepening condition’ or healthy impulse to walk away from ordinary reality.
Butoh dance has long been connected with shamanic consciousness because it freely mixes “animism and androgyny, sexuality and spirituality in a manner which is at times highly reminiscent of shamanism” (Tucker, 1992, p. 416.) Butoh challenges us to release ordinary judgements and habitual reactions and to allow the emergence of a more authentic and eternal self, one that includes all human qualities both attractive and repulsive, one that allows us “to touch, if only for a moment, our inexplicable matter-the human soul” (Nayfack, 2009, p.152) Dancing butoh is not ordinary living and does not produce ordinary perception; in fact, these spaces of heightened uncertainty produce a certain extra perception which I have always likened to sharp intuition, part of the shaman’s medicine cabinet. To understand the shamanic spirit in life, we must accept the wholeness of existence and our complete interdependence with all beings and creatures of the earth. Like trickster (and butoh), the archetypal path of the shaman is one of suffering and freedom merging together.

The call of a shaman is a call to visionary wisdom and what is this calling if not to develop one’s sense of the miracle, the deep mystery, the ineffable magic that we don’t want a rational explanation for? Black Elk speaks about the role of wonder and awe in the shamanic imagination. (Brown, 1953); and Mircea Eliade considers the practice of shamanism to be a technique for ecstasy. (Eliade, 1957) Today the average modern human only sees objects in place of the “presences and hierophanies of their ancestors.” (Tucker, 1992, p.77) The existential possibilities of a spiritual experience develop not on the linear, mundane plane of history but rather in an utterly distinct dimension, one which can only be accessed with a particularly open perception and awareness. This is what Kitaro Nishida meant when he said that “one who discusses religion must experience to some extent at least, religious sentiment as an event of his own soul.” (Nishida, 1987, p.49)

Today our societal hunger for the ‘real’ or ‘reality’ is occupying more and more of the space where imagination used to live. As Suzi Gablik (2002) points out in The Re-enchantment of Art: “without a magical sense of perception, we do not live in a magical world” (p.42) Gablik speaks of the remythologizing of consciousness as being in the “multi-sensory phase of evolution”, which represents a fundamental shift in how we, as modern selves perceive who we truly are. Gablik notes that when we are able to reach way back and connect with “much vaster realities than the present-day consumer system of our addicted industrial societies,” (p.57) we are actually able to feel our truly
human selves and ultimately very much feel ourselves connected to the natural world. Gablick talks about the artist as bridge builder, the one to bring worlds together and the one who can merge the masculine and feminine sides of the psyche. In that way the artist invokes a shamanistic spirit in order to communicate on different planes, and for their ability to move us beyond everyday dimensions of perception.

2.4. Philosophy of Self-in-Place

People often ask me what exactly butoh is - my ideas and concepts have been formulated over the many years of my practice, from various teachers that I have trained and performed with, and from the many places that I've danced in. Each landscape offered me new and specific wisdom which only that particular place and time could offer; each teacher or performer having a completely unique style and way of transmitting the 'butoh quality' based on their country of origin or habitation. Place as a philosophical inquiry, sets up a perfect aperture through which to view the noetic and noematic contexts of art and morality in a form that was born in Japan but immediately attained a global recognition and status. Dancing butoh in India compared to Vancouver could not be more different and yet the butoh quality always comes through by way of its depth and profundity, as well as its spectacle and ugliness; all aspects of its sacred ritual. Because each teacher’s transmitted butoh pedagogy is so unique, it remains difficult to pinpoint butoh in terms of style, so place then becomes the common denominator and the difference.

Our sense of self and identity- both personal and collective grows from and reflects the places we come from, traverse and end up. Culture is created by bodies in places; humans cannot live in empty space, so place becomes the phenomenal articulation of being in the world. Place is not merely a position or location in space but a highly dialectical and integral part of our consciousness, impossible to eliminate its trace, and entirely connected to our embodiment. We are human, dependant on our landscapes for survival, and therefore our sense of place is clearly more than a mere point in physical space. Embodiment gains its meaning only in its wider relationships within the cosmos- relations with human and non- human entities including deities, practices and ways within a community, as well as perceptions about world mythologies and history. In short, our belief systems which create and cement our identities,
ontologies and eventually, epistemologies and aesthetics are all created and formed by our conception of place, and more specifically, home.

Embodiment, place and the body’s lived experience have been intertwined since the beginning of human perception, although as history progressed, place was eventually eclipsed by time and space in both western philosophy and metaphysics, leaving it with little universal meaning. Ancients like Heraclitus and particularly Archytas of Tarentum, (428-347 bc) (who dedicated an entire treatise to the philosophy of place), have both addressed the importance of place as a philosophical concern. According to Edward Casey (2009) who has written prolifically on the philosophy of place in the Western hemisphere, Archytas asserted: “Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place, it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place.” (p.14) Despite this, there is a big chunk missing in the history of Western philosophy, that is, an inquiry into “the ways in which citizens of the earth constitute their landscapes and take themselves to be connected to them.” (Casey, 1996, p.54)

Casey emphasizes the way time and space have completely overshadowed place as the referential loci for philosophical debate. Casey duly gives acknowledgement to his forefathers such as Heidegger, Bachelard, and even to more recent scholars such as Sartre and Yi-Fu Tuan, who have all tried to give place some degree of importance. However, his introduction to Getting Back Into Place (2009) reminds us: “By the later twentieth century, it had become virtual dogma in philosophy that time precedes space—with place being a mere sector of space.” (p. xxii) Casey also confirms the deep sense of significance that place holds in the book Senses of Place by noting: “The phenomenological fact of the matter is that space and time come together in place.” (Casey,1996, p.36)

Aristotle recognized that the relationship to place was intricately woven with our relationship to our body’s identification and sense of direction. It seems likely that we could not even conceive of a sense of border or differentiation of place without the critical distinctions of up and down or near and far; it is our somatic sense that creates distinctions in this way. Our (human) sense of front, behind, up, down etc. and what we perceive as ‘near’ or ‘far’ is only relative to our own bodies in space. I don’t feel my own foot to be farther away than my shoulder for example- there is a sense of immediacy and
instantaneous time in relation to the sense of my own body. I only experience near and far in relation to other beings and objects in the world.

The perceptive body is therefore a desiring body because when we experience ourselves as near or far from things, “a factor of attraction or repulsion is almost always involved.” (Casey, 2009, p.59) We also create much language and linguistic meaning around this somatic sense, for example ‘up’ takes us into space both in direction, as well as emotionally and morally, as does down. Phrases such as ‘take the high road’, ‘rise above it’ ‘upwards and onwards’ as well as concepts like transcendence and heaven all suggest for instance, that we believe in something higher or better than our present earth home as a means to redemption and liberation.

Places are never static, they pulse and vibrate with the people, animals, plants, even the air they are containing; they are constantly shifting and reforming like dunes in the desert, blown anew with each passing breeze. Place has absorptive qualities and we see that the specificity of a place “has everything to do with how a global pandemic is absorbed and reflected there.” (Casey, 2009, p.xxix) The phrase ‘specific uptake’ has come to refer to how identity gets exhibited and presented in particular locales. Similarly, Casey notes that places and specifically regions, are defined by their ‘material essence’, that is, the “quality or set of qualities that gives to the region its distinctive character and that helps to make it this region and not another” (p.xxxi.) Place and depth intertwine and relate only in so far as our lived bodies actively inject themselves into places.

Basso (1996) notes that for the western Apache as for other Indigenous people, “places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed” (p.55.) In many Indigenous cultures, the flora, fauna and landforms are actually part of the culture. In fact, the identification with the earth is so strong as to be virtually inseparable among most Indigenous people. For instance, the Navajo people cannot say when their ancestors first appeared, but they can say where. Vine Deloria asserts: “American Indians hold their lands-places as having the highest possible meaning and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind” (Deloria, 1994, p.62) Although the language is dated, the sentiment remains true for many disparate and geographically distant Indigenous groups.
In recent years, we have witnessed both in academic circles as well as grass roots organizations, a move towards topophilia and an emergence of ecologically minded scholars in every field. There have been many calls for a 'strengthening of place', for its obvious relationship to globalized cooperation in the name of environmental sustainability. As the wilderness, the wild, disappears from around us, it gets driven deeper inside the human mind and the result is a profound spiritual fragmentation alongside the ecological destruction. Although we can acknowledge the suffering prompted by collective or personal displacement, as Casey (2009) notes, “we tend not to trace it back to the loss of a vital connection with place itself.” (p. xiv.) Topology must triumph over atopia because anomie (lack of social norms) stems as a direct result of being placeless.

Place represents the potential to be or not be our home, an essential survival need for humans. With increased mobility comes increased risk, above all, the risk of having no proper or lasting place to call home. There is such an unbridled terror found in placeless-ness that we come to rely on notions of land, territoriality and the stabilizing effect of having a 'homeland'. The sense of being without place, unheimlickeit or 'not feeling at home', sets off a sense of panic whereby we continually suffer from a feeling of separation or rootlessness. It is obvious that we are experiencing this rootlessness and homesickness, collectively at the global level, as our earth continues to be drilled, mined, pillaged and destroyed at alarming rates.

It is not difficult to see the significant connection between the denial and suppression of place as a viable category for philosophical inquiry and the birth of the alienated modern subject. Extreme examples of this alienation are seen in the Japanese phenomenon of hikikomori, where hundreds of thousands of Japanese (mostly men) have defiantly and actively withdrawn from all social life, refusing to work or go to school, even refusing the outside world altogether. They have become more enchanted with the virtual world than with the world outside their doors, often engaging in virtual relationships with made up characters and living almost exclusively within imaginary realms. This can be seen to a similar degree here in North America where the development of 'neet' is significantly on the rise. Neet refers to a person who is "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" and many young people find themselves in this forced or chosen predicament today, relying on parental financial support and often spending inordinate amounts of time lurking indoors on the internet.
There has recently been a major paradigm shift wherein the old framework of defining place as territory and having solidity in terms of it being land-based, is slowly melting away. Castells (1989) argued 30 years ago that the 'space of place' was receding into the background of various societies as the advancement of globalization encroached. It is being replaced with a fluidity of technology which enables “people, objects, money and images to flow instantaneously beyond the limits of regions or 'societies'.“ (Yoshihara and Sato, 2010, p.30) The transition from the metaphor of place as territory or region to one comprising fluidity is “simultaneously a transition from one of 'structure' to that of 'network.'” (Ibid) Civil societies previously organized and developed around the typical stances of the nation state and/or notions lingering from the colonial era are being rapidly replaced by societies formed and mediated by computers, global corporations and social media.

As we are pulled deeper into a globalized and virtual world, place becomes a complicated praxis of identity making. Today we are seeing an ever-increasing mobility and range among humans world-wide, both actively and virtually. New virtual worlds and their uses have created at least a partial impetus for the rise in global migration. For the first time, a person in Sub-Saharan Africa for example, who might not have access to (clean) water, probably does have access to the internet, and to a vast, visual smorgasbord of grotesque displays of wealth beyond anything this person could have conceived or imagined before.

As images and computer-based communication increases and we become more placeless globally, it is easy to understand why people would regard territory or land as the basis for unproblematic identity formation. However, this view tends to lack the delicate understanding or analysis of the complexity surrounding ideas about our new world order, because globalization has left society with “mutually incompatible allegiances and incommensurable obligations and made its position as a ‘territory’ untenable.” (Zukin,1993, p.54) The creep of globalization represents a new paradigm of domination and control, from the colonial to the post-colonial era, with multi-national corporations taking over and monopolizing to the point of one single world order where the market becomes synonymous with democracy and/or freedom.

Globalization has simply shifted our allegiances- from nation-states to corporations. Slaves have simply shifted locales- and skin color; they are most often
found today in factories, mines and farms- often in Asia but not always, excessively labouring for those luxury items that wealthier nations and peoples “can’t live without”, such as phones and new sneakers. According to Sassen (1991) global cities are first and foremost cities in which a high concentration of huge multi-national corporate headquarters is found, and the signs of economic re-structuring are creating further gaps in income equality. These global cities provide the prototype for hierarchical stratification and they are governed by and planned for maximum profit.

Although butoh is an internationally recognized and practiced art form, the signifier ‘global’ does not invoke what Steven Bruhm postulates in the book Globalgothic (2013) as “the worrisome spectre” of hegemonic, Western (usually U.S.) ideological imperialism, nor its associated rampant, economic corruption alive around the globe. He suggests that butoh uses its global popularity “to resist rather than fall prey to the mechanics of globalization.” (p.26-29) Butoh has always enjoyed a global, borderless and ambiguous reputation as it was specifically born to resist hegemonic ideas around purity of race or culture. In the butoh philosophy, the concept of ‘global’ appears at the corporeal rather than the geographical site. Because of these approaches, butoh has consequently rarely been involved in conversations around cultural appropriation. For me it has always been fascinating that butoh eludes difficult conversations and inquiries around cultural appropriation and I believe this is because butoh has adeptly integrated liminal space and hybridity.

Today we are facing crisis on a global scale, with the potential annihilation of earth, our collective home looming in the near future, as we continue to face alarming rates of destruction and extinction. We hear the buzz-words like ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’, ‘mass extinction’ but we have become numb to the fact that it is our human greed- nothing more- which has created this situation. We have created a system whereby our very comforts and pleasures are killing us, (and other species.) Already so many species have been obliterated because of our addictive, unmanageable and out-of-control consumption habits.

Here in Canada we are both cursed and blessed with our incredible natural surroundings: Blessed because we are some of the last citizens living so close to such a great expanse of wilderness, relatively untouched and uncontaminated by human activity; cursed because we are also witnessing first-hand, in living color, the devastating
effects of industry and human behaviour on the changing landscape. I have been so fortunate to have experienced time in many of the last wild places left on earth and I feel their disappearance like the loss of a loved one. I know I’m not alone- there are many people like me, who notice and feel the disappearance of the natural world as a devastating loss, as a state of grief which creates pure and complete heart-ache. There are also those born in mega cities like Tokyo, Shanghai, New York- even Toronto for example, who have never made contact with the natural world- certainly not with any truly wild places, so any sense of connection, duty or care for this wild, non-human world is non-existent. The consciousness of care for the wild is actually very rare.

We feel estrangement and disconnection to the land as deep collective and personal wounds and this suffering is masterfully covered up, suppressed or enabled by our continuous consumption. Part of the reason we are seeing such a manifestation of anxiety, stress and madness is that nature did not intend us to live this way- capitalism has run completely amok. The belief that ‘economic growth’ and ‘more jobs’ is the highest possible achievement in life is massively subsuming many societies and cultures around the world, eclipsing any other possibility for meaning in life, and it’s destroying our planet, our home. A subtle Darwinian fact: As we and other creatures adapt to the world, so the world adapts to us. Linda Hogan, in her beautiful book of prose Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World (1994) says it more pointedly: “Here is a lesson: what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing” (p.89)

We have been wounded by a dominant culture that fears the natural world and feels entitled to use it, conquer it and destroy it without the least thought of our inherent and mandatory interdependence. Angela Davis was crucial in reminding us that all violence in the form of domination and control is inherently systemic. She notes that myriad forms of oppression- such as race, class and sex- must always be considered together, and that neither woman nor man (and certainly not creature) is free from the constraints of some of the most violent systems of control currently in place, including capitalism. (Davis, 1981) The earth, women, the body, as well as Indigenous and/or people of color and their non-dualistic approaches to living and thinking, represent a threat to these systems of control. Consequently, they are actively erased or subdued, often violently.
Capitalism as a particular system of domination, has harnessed the power to manipulate large populations by controlling our desires, and today this is almost entirely accomplished via corporate power structures, without ever having to resort to overt violence in the public sphere. For instance, the power to assert control over big groups of people is manifested through mechanisms of dominance such as the media and advertising, addictive and toxic substances being placed in our food and water supply, the beauty myth, the recursive nature of fashion, planned obsolescence and crucially, inequality. Today we are facing this on a world-wide scale, with the potential destruction of earth, *our collective home* as we face alarming rates of annihilation.

Commerce and in particular, corporations, now mostly control governments around the world and these economic entities have their own particular trappings of domination in our cultural systems. These structures of control and their manifestations are held in place almost entirely by way of corporate power, money and of course greed. This system, which depends deeply on our primal hunger for love and belonging, uses this vulnerability as a powerful weapon of control. Those (children) laboring at the very bottom of the workforce ladder, those in the sweat factories around the world, are facing a particular kind of violence only experienced in abject poverty. This poverty-violence reflects the existential crisis of what it means to be alive; going to work for no other reason than to survive long enough to repeat the recursive pattern seemingly until death overtakes, never being able to enjoy the fruits of one’s labour, those “good things” in life which John Locke referred to. An existence without any access to those good things is more like a non-existence. That is how robots live.

The alienation, over-consumption and depersonalization that we are experiencing today closely resembles what traditional cultures would have called ‘soul loss’. Fundamentally we have lost connection with our source or to the larger part of our eternal Self- this is what makes us so driven to consume. It is as if the lonely addict in us, who is bitter and fearful from having lost her best friend/ parent/ god, or reason for being all at once, cannot cope with the trauma, so turns to drugs/ drink/ shopping/ travel/ the rational/scientific; some form of bondage to keep us from feeling the pain of that loss. These wounds create an endless hunger that becomes harmful to the greater community. When we connect to that source-force, to the larger part of our eternal Self, we can recognize our enormous power as creators and destroyers - the ability resides in all of us to create (and destroy) worlds.
It may appear a coincidence that diminished attention to the body as well as to experienced/lived place occurs simultaneously but in fact their respective destinies have converged in one singular form of domination: Colonization! Of the body, of woman, of Indigenous peoples and finally, of the earth. The special quality of ephemerality found only in dance art, can be used as a tool to fight the lasting vestiges of colonialism with precise aim. All dance represents the ultimate rebellion from colonization, but especially so with a subversive form like butoh because of its relationship with shamanic consciousness.
A dancer is an angel who is corrupted and stands apart from everyday life. The dancer does not choose to dance as one alternative in life but is rather chosen.

Akira Kasai, butoh dancer and teacher.

3.1. Dance as a Communication Strategy

Informed by an authentic, magnificent and perverted spirit, dance has always been the most powerful and dangerous medium known to us. Abraham Maslow considered dance to be a true peak experience and conversely, many religious movements and sects have long sought to ban all forms of dance, presumably because of the perceived connection to Eros and the wild. In order to fully grasp the contribution butoh dance has made to post-modernism and its artistic off-shoots, we must first of all frame this peculiar art form within the context of modern dance, itself a dismissed outlier in the world of the arts, only recently becoming a respected art form in its own right. Contemporary, post-modern dance forms such as butoh do not follow a linear path, they
are the meeting place for several interconnected concepts, images and mediums and
could be a representation of the feminine seen in this way, and certainly define post-
modernism to a large degree. Butoh, framed within the context of modern dance- itself a
harbinger for the radical post-modern wave, represents a still subversive form of art in
2019, in part by challenging epistemologies based on the hierarchy of linguistic
representation.

Dance representation can be seen as disrupting and dismantling to the social
hierarchy via its direct challenge to current epistemological assumptions about language
held dear in the context of history. Modern dance began in earnest by challenging the
male-dominated status quo of the past, which elevated and triumphed reason and
empirical evidence via the written word, above other meaning-making practices derived
primarily through bodily knowledge. Modern dance served as a symbol of emancipation
for women in the early years of the 20th century because it was one of the few genres
where women could be both athletic and emotionally expressive; early modern dance
allowed many women to poke glass ceilings. From the beginning, modern dance and
then post-modern butoh have been concerned with transcending the conventions
of perception and using the body and flesh to puncture and shatter language, and even
thought itself. Dance, and particularly butoh dance, challenges us to pay attention to the
means of dissemination (language) as a form of indoctrination and coercion.

Dance is a deeply ancient, world-wide human artifact, integral to cultures both
modern and old, albeit one which has lost much significance because it does not enjoy
the firm stability of the written word, and neither can it be captured accurately as an
image. Dance is translated and passed on through direct bodily knowledge, often without
words and it relies on non-dualistic approaches to mind, body and consciousness to
translate its essential information. Dance as a language, a way of thinking and
perceiving is an excellent window through which to examine the phenomenon of splitting
the body-mind in two. Dance as an experience, whether improvised or choreographed,
provides a clear window into the liminal, non-dualistic state of mind, precisely because of
its very lack of words or language. Words have no inherent independent reality, they are
dependant on other words to form concepts, and this is then meant to reflect our
experience of lived reality accurately. In fact, if we live solely in the rational-verbal world,
we only end up lacking connection with realities outside of language. As a system of
communication or knowledge, dance shows us that body and mind are not two separate things but two different ways of describing the same phenomena.

Dance, having its own kind of restraints, openings and ideological concerns, has been largely ignored by both history and philosophy, despite the fact that (folk) dance pre-dates both history and religion. However even though dance does not enjoy a prominent place in recent history as a discourse or even as a respected art form, we know that the Platonic Greeks (representing a polytheistic, non-transcendent, mytho-religious system) saw the untethered arts - those which don't require outside materials for their creation (such as dance), to be far superior. Notwithstanding its ubiquity in cultures world-wide, supposedly since the dawn of time, there is nothing which unifies dance as a medium except perhaps the expression of pure gesture, something of a non-bifurcated experience. Dance has always been associated with the idea of ‘pure experience’ where action is considered the opposite of duality, the moment before bifurcation into subject and object. As Sondra Fraleigh, a major contributor to the scholarship on butoh dance, and a dancer herself notes: “when the dancer succeeds, neither body nor mind is held at a distance; they are the same in action.” (Fraleigh, 1987, p.11) There has always existed the notion that dance is the manifested unification of the body, mind and soul.

Today, dance is a major contributor to theories surrounding autonomy in art, but any performance art truly only becomes art when it enters into the intersubjective field of performer vs. audience, necessarily creating, displaying and penetrating that liminal third space between subject and object, witness and performer. This act of intersubjectivity which dance performance elicits, defines not only the third space it also precisely outlines embodiment, an idea of synthesis between the mind and body. As a non-verbal, non-dualistic form of expression and communication, dance can heal the rift and disrupt the separation of mind from body, due in part to its all-consuming, non-verbal relation to embodiment. In this way, dance holds a key to the notion of a third position; it represents the actual and metaphoric synthesis of body to mind through somatic, emotional, and wholistic expressive practice.

Although Merleau-Ponty did much to return the Western mind towards a philosophy of the body, towards integration and the lived experience, he overlooked the potential mining of dance itself as a source of rich philosophical inquiry, often referring to it merely as a motor habit. This is a curious statement because if the purpose of
(philosophical) inquiry is to deepen one’s understanding of a subject, it seems logical to start with an amplification or expansion possibility, rather than a diminishment. Dance is very much an expansive activity, it amplifies rather than constricts our understanding of the body, and it highlights the complexities of our kinetic-kinesthetic experience. In the West, we have primarily examined and discovered the processes of the human body-including all of its moving systems (for example, blood flow, nerves, hormones and even kinetic-motor systems) through a non-living corpse, i.e.: medical training.

Dance as an expression brings us into communion with alternate states of understanding and being outside of rational thought but within our actual bodies. For instance, although there is a major difference between front and back or up and down, we are rarely aware of these spatial, temporal or directional dynamics in everyday pedestrian life. However, dancers invariably are, it’s a requirement of their profession. Even more subtle knowledge is intimately known to a dancer, such as the dynamic relationship between intention, tension and extension; or the expressive potential of bones vs. fluids or muscles. This is not common awareness or knowledge; it’s the specialty training of a dancer that acquires this perception. However, rarely has kin/aesthetic knowledge been perceived as legitimate knowledge, its very nature prohibiting discourse, and as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu notes in Knowledge in Motion: Perspectives of Artistic and Scientific Research in Dance (2007) “rarely has a dancer ascended to the ranks of ‘authorized spokespersons’, artists recognized and acknowledged by society, like artists in other disciplines.” (Gehm, Husemann and Wlicke, 2007, p. 28) There remains the stubborn notion that contemporary art is made by visual artists, and that dance’s only function is to provide beauty, grace and flawless bodies.

When the concept of fine arts was originally being formulated in the 16th century for example, dance was not commonly included on that list. Contemporary and/or improvisational dance is still an often misunderstood and generally devalued art form even in today’s modern culture. If we are to look at funding institutions like Canada Council for the Arts and others like it internationally, we see that dance as a medium, including ballet, receives a small percentage of what other arts receive. Many artists in Canada rely on grants from these institutions to proceed with their creative process and the amount of funding or lack thereof signifies the degree to which that particular art form
is considered viable in our society. Dance has always been at the bottom of the funding ladder.

Many people unfamiliar with contemporary dance will be confused and often disappointed by a dance performance because of the expectation that dance is like theatre, that it will follow a logical, plot-driven line and that there will be concise meaning, but this is neither how dance is made, nor its purpose as an art form. Many dance artists, myself included, understand both cognitively and experientially that dance as a language, represents the liminal space between the corporeal and non-corporeal, a chance to release the rational mind and kinaesthetically become sensate. Likewise, many respected choreographers and dance makers would agree that watching or making dance entails being open to whatever images arise, *feeling* the piece as much as seeing it and attempting not to interpret the meaning too quickly.

There is a persistent idea that *feeling* is somehow less objective or ‘truthful’ than conceptual/rational knowledge, however feelings are simply a more subtle and complex form of consciousness; they are still in need of understanding, translation and training but feelings are not less informative than rational knowledge, indeed the two forms of knowing are inter-dependent and inseparable. The affective feeling of a sensitive artist surely can’t be *less than* the specialized and rational logic of a trained scientist for example, at least in terms of capacity to produce works or ideas. Feeling and its own way of knowledge simply lends itself less facilely to language and/or data collection. Most scholars today still rely on mathematical symbols and signs (data) rather than direct bodily experience, and “there is hardly a whiff of doubt about whether the translation from observation to paper or to symbols on a blackboard, adequately captures the richness of the immediate.” (Carter, 1989, p.19-20)

Dance performance and practice encompasses so much of the human experience that it appears to have been purposely neglected and silenced throughout history, not unlike the fate of the female subject. The neglect of dance aesthetics in his/story is often attributed to two main notions: One, that (artistic/performative) dance was and always will be a female art, representative of the frivolity of women and therefore holding no intrinsic value as a subject for philosophical inquiry; and second, that Puritanism, which underlies the moral basis of the U.S even today, was notoriously hostile towards dance because it was too closely associated with eroticism and
‘primitive’ cultures. I feel that dance has been purposely and specifically neglected as a philosophy and discourse because of its ultimately feminine, wild and uncontrollable nature, especially in terms of its ability to circumvent systems of domination, particularly capitalism, perhaps the most violent system thus far.

Dance appears threatening to the rational thinker and as a discourse, it seems to represent the antithesis of notions based on transcendence or leaving the body behind in search of ultimate truth or reality. Many dance performers today would agree that the act of a (dance) performance is both an impassioned confrontation with the immanence of the world, as well as a critical distance found in the notion of transcendence. As dancers, we are not looking to escape the reality of the body, but rather to absorb and delight in the red-hot, confrontational immanence and ineffability that it provides. However, in the act of performance, as an expression of oneself in front of an audience or witness, there is certainly a feeling a transcendence, of becoming other. In this way, dance as a modality inhabits the third, liminal space between subject and object.

Throughout history, certain cultural artifacts have been capable of resisting co-optation and dance has always retained the ability to resist control, indoctrination, and domination. This is possible because of a special knowledge which is only known through this embodied art, which unites the body with the mind in a very precise way. The narrative described by dance is without beginnings, story lines or plot and the articulation of such pure gesture can slip past the contamination of historical or social realities, transgressing the outline of any given set of circumstances that define our reality. Dance survives on images that constantly shift and reappear, and as such, its ability to resist capture or co-optation is significant. Dance serves to ultimately provide immaculate escape from severe forms of domination such as capitalism.

3.2. Return to the Body as Unified

In the past several years, the body as a topic has received a lion’s share of attention in the academic world, spreading among the humanities, psychology and recently into neuroscience as it relates to social construction. The school of phenomenology which is credited to founder Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and others after him, had much to do with the return of the body as a site for philosophical inquiry and interrogation. The deconstruction of the body
as a site of discourse, whose focus is primarily on the felt experience of the lived body, has likewise informed much of the philosophy surrounding butoh dance.

Certainly, it’s also clear that the feminist movement has done much to usher in new ontological debate, epistemological challenges to existing theories as well as introducing embodied methodologies into the halls of the Academy, a place renowned for apprehending the mind as separate from the body. For instance, corporeality enabled early feminists to shift focus, representing the female body as a natural and biological counterpart to man’s, with not enough significant difference to justify women’s public subordination and restriction of movement. This dearth of deconstructionist theory, particularly much feminist theory, has significantly increased and elevated the status of the body—both within the academy as well as our larger society. Also influential in feminist theory is the notion of embodiment used as a site of interrogation to challenge historical, dualistic notions of nature/culture, action/form and subject/object.

These oppositional ideas are merely propagated by adversarial stances within the Western logic traditions and have nothing to do with truth. Fuelling the patriarchy, these systems of separation create more hierarchy (read imbalance) between man and nature, man and woman, and human races. Divisions and hierarchies are established around cultural preferences, customs, traditions and even between inherently equal forces such as darkness and light all via the mechanism of linguistic communication strategies. This tendency towards dualism for the industrial human, which can also be viewed as the ultimate power position to assert domination, has steadily crept into the very fabric of Western culture and once there, like the little termite, can wreak much havoc from that one false, long neglected belief. The placid acceptance of the subject/object split and by extension the nature/culture divide both linguistically and through behaviour, has at least partially provoked the hierarchy between men and women, humans and the earth as well as between mind and body.

The physical body is clearly a necessary precondition for embodiment including thinking, speech and action and yet we have spent centuries separating the mind from the body, establishing a hierarchal relationship between that which thinks and that which acts. This is not unlike the patterns in the labour force of course, nor those wrought between men and women and by extension the earth, over the centuries. That which has been associated with the male has been buoyed to positions of power while the
other is historically situated below on the metaphorical chain of command. Physical labor as well as the messy things of life such as sex, decay, death and dance consistently become aligned with the earth/female/body/nature, while the honed intellect and its cult of transcendence is seen as being more at home in the male mind.

Western institutional approaches generally still place the mind in a morally superior position and see the body as a mere vehicle to house the ever-thinking, ever expanding mind and/or consciousness; something to maintain and keep healthy, like an automobile, but not valid in its own right. Several philosophers have tried to address the importance of the body and yet still tend to view these bodily experiences through the lens of rationality. They are not inclined to see rational thought itself as a coping mechanism for the unpredictable, emotional bodies that we are, groping through the uncertainty of life. For the modern industrial human to achieve full participation in culture, subjectivity and language (all identified with the male in phallocentric discourse), “a matricide is cast as necessary for the human subject to leave the mess of Nature and bodily dependency behind.” (Nelson, 2011, p.168) The body itself gets feminized against the normalcy of the mind which is portrayed at ease in the rational male person. Further, our fundamental precariousness as human bodies, dependent on the earth and each other for survival has also been feminized (vulnerability=weakness.) The individuated self, so praised and so high on the list of Western psychological accomplishments, is always a rupture or break from the collective realms of reality, and from networks of community.

It seems likely that the Western dualistic tendency to separate mind and body arose as a parallel separation of the soul from the place where evil resides, somewhere in the guts and blood of the physical body. If the mind contained the (rational) power to reach beyond the evil (read sexual) tendencies of the body, it would naturally and easily get promoted to an elevated position in the hierarchy of mind versus body. If the body was evil and only the soul was good, then man could and must be freed from the evil capacities of the body through transcendence which appears as the major tenet of all Judaeo-Christian traditions and even shows up in many Eastern (male/patriarchal) philosophical and religious systems. When we really examine this, we can see a tendency to encourage leaving the body behind in search of the eternal (soul) or even in search of intellectual pursuit (mind). It’s easy to see that this metaphysics of transcendence has had major implications for women and nature; the inference being
that living on earth and having a body to create life with is somehow not the ultimate situation. The miracle of the body, the manifestation of life on earth gets overshadowed and demoted in favour of the soul seeking its eternal home in the afterlife—some plane of existence that nobody has actually lived or experienced.

Merleau-Ponty speaks of the Malebranchian (referring to French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche, who lived from 1638-1715) view that separation of body from soul is congruent with Christian theological ideas of the fall from grace, or original sin: “Adamic nature was characterized by the harmonious union of soul and body but in fallen human nature, the union has been reduced to dependence of soul on body” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p.18). The “fall from paradise” referred to in the Bible was in fact, a fall from consciousness whereby the hubris of man separated him from all the other inhabitants of the earth including woman, and then ultimately, nature.

Hannah Arendt, one of the great philosophers of the 20th century, born into a Jewish-German family, she was the first person to publish a full treatise on the Third Reich, explains the deep historical significance of this separation:

The philosopher’s hostility to the body is well known and a matter of record since Plato at least...it is usual to blame this hostility on the Christian antagonism toward the flesh. Not only is it much older; one could even argue that one of the crucial Christian dogmas, the resurrection of the flesh, as distinguished from older speculations about the immortality of the soul, stood in sharp contrast not only to common Gnostic beliefs but also to the common notions of classical philosophy. (Arendt, 1978, p.34-35)

This divide between the body and the mind only grew wider and deeper as humans developed more industrialized societies. The German philosopher Max Weber who wrote The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism in 1904-05, providing us with an in-depth sociological analysis of how a religiously motivated ethic of discipline towards the body provided a template for the (ir)rational work ethic driving much of the present world’s economy and culture. Weber also offered us the term ‘iron cage’, coined to define the increased rationalization inherent in capitalistic societies and which has certainly only gotten more ingrained since his time, burrowing and settling into even more cultures around the world.
John Dewey in his influential book *Art as Experience* offers us his perspective as part of the school of Pragmatists, and like his contemporary William James, they were interested in the idea of pure experience, where the world is experienced as a stream of consciousness prior to the bifurcation into subject and object: “Oppositions of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all have their origin, fundamentally, in the fear of what life may-bring forth. They are marks of contraction and withdrawal” (Dewey, 2005, p. 23.) It is thought which relies on and solidifies language in order to create the bifurcation; this split or division creates a boundary and boundaries make us feel safe. Action, especially intensely involved action such as dance, allows us to move into this non-bifurcated, liminal space between subject and object and this can be very challenging to the rational mind.

Despite the traction that embodiment theories have made, the Cartesian mind-body separation and hierarchy still remains intact in many stubborn ways. Speaking of the hold this divided consciousness still has within psychological theories, Overton asserts: “This splitting, this disembodiment, has remained a basic metatheoretical background assumption for many areas of psychology to the present day.” (Overton, 2008, p.2) In other words, disembodiment stubbornly continues to inform our approaches to the mechanisms of consciousness, including reductionistic biological assumptions about how the brain works, i.e.: telling the rest of the body what to do. Even in relatively new realms like neuro-phenomenology, the brain remains the boss.

Embodiment is a theory of synthesis and dance is a practice of this synthesis between body and mind as indivisible elements of a whole being. The communicative function of performance links it inextricably with embodiment and instills it with social significance. Embodiment in and of itself only becomes relevant as a vehicle for performance by encompassing the everyday gestures, speech acts, physical movements and even physiological processes which constitute the human experience of living in the world and engaging as a socially integrated human being. Embodiment gains its meaning only in its wider relationships within the cosmos as well as perceptual acceptances about world mythologies and history. In short, our belief systems create and cement our identities, ontologies and eventually, epistemologies and aesthetics. This is how history comes into being.
Dance provides a direct and exacting cultural disruption by integrally demonstrating embodiment and challenging the mind-body separation, a notion many philosophers and areas of discipline still concern themselves with. By repairing and healing the false belief that we are somehow embodying two opposing selves, the subject and the object, or the body and the mind, dancers are able to create and experience the perceptual knowledge of liminality. Dance provides a new language that articulates the third space, the liminal place between subject and object. Dance offers us the language of kinesthetic and proprioceptive awareness. Literacies like dance which can’t be easily co-opted or captured remain a threat to hegemonic systems of power which seek to dominate through separation, division and hierarchy, using language as a perfect mechanism for control and coercion.

3.3. Movement as Prime Mover

Brenda Farnell (2012) refers to a series of intellectual/artistic developments that represent a ‘corporeal turn’ in the social sciences, a paradigm shift that she divides into two phases: The first somatic turn led to a new focus on the body, an explosion of literature, whose focus was primarily on the body and/or the first person felt experience of the lived body inspired by phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Husserl before him; this first turn also includes theories about the body as a social object a la Foucault. The second somatic turn positions the primacy of movement as the centrepiece of embodied social theories. We have recently seen an even greater ontological shift towards synergistic philosophy with the introduction of neuro-phenomenology. This second turn towards movement as the ontological basis for our existence provokes my notion that kinaesthetic understanding, especially through improvisational or choreographic dance practices and techniques, strongly enables transcendental or transformative learning.

Our consciousness as human beings is intimately linked to our corporeality and to movement. First and foremost, we are animate beings and we fundamentally require animation for our life processes. All of terrestrial life is impelled to move: Gravity makes things fall, sunlight makes things grow, moisture makes things decay and rot, the earth spins and revolves. It is movement or motion, not matter, that appears to lie at the heart of the universe. When we consider our evolutionary beginnings with this in mind, there can be no doubt that Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2011) is right when she says,
“movement is the mother of all cognition.” (p.128) Our neonatal capacity to make sense of ourselves and our world (reality) is first and foremost kinetically informed; it is our original knowledge and is therefore the beginning of cognition. Shawn Gallagher (2005) asserts that there is “good evidence” to suggest that humans develop proprioceptive awareness prenatally and that this is the “first kind of consciousness to develop in the nervous system.” (p.105) Our earliest ability to make sense of ourselves and our surroundings was undeniably tactile, kinetic, proprioceptive and kinesthetic, not visual.

Sheets-Johnstone (2011) contends that thinking in both an ontogenetic and phylogenetic sense, is modelled on the body, specifically on the “tactile-kinesthetic body.” (p.26) She traces our ‘evolution’ from proprioception (knowledge of one’s own location in space; specifically, the inner knowing of where one’s limbs are in space) into tactility (the felt sense of touch) into kinesthesia - what she defines as “internally mediated systems of corporeal awareness” (p.63), leading us directly into our current “kinaesthetically-tethered corporeal consciousness.” (p.xxi) She contends that the Socratic imperative to “know thyself” is literally built into animate life as corporeal awareness. In fact, as humans we are mostly attuned to our kinetic, kinaesthetically-based awareness of self; it is through this awareness that we relate to time, space and form, and it seems obvious that it was our original sense for making sense of our world. Movement gives us agency as humans, indeed movement is the very root of our sense of agency and its way of knowing is both invaluable and vanishing.

Historically, there has been a radical emphasis on the visual sense and there has also been an extreme privileging of the linguistic over those forms of awareness based in kinetic, tactile and kinesthetic experience. Although ironically, our current epistemological (privileged) theories in science are based on sub-atomic principles, or invisible physical worlds that are billions if not trillions of times more populous than us (bacteria, viruses, yeasts) and/or chemical (gas) elements, and that are not detectable by any of our senses. These theories are meant to cover much, if not all of our understanding regarding our universal make up. It is not that different from old religion where only a few priests or bishops (men) held knowledge, to be dispersed at their discretion; today there are a very limited number of minds that have access to the depths of theoretical physics, keeping company with the likes of Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein, and most of us can only really navigate and orient according to our own felt experience of the world.
We reify thinking in an exclusively linguistic context and then perpetuate a metaphysics that devalues the body as well as experience. The significance of this is that the distinctions we have made between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ forms of life are based entirely on the idea of ‘consciousness’ only existing in these ‘higher’ forms of life. It assumes a value approach based on hierarchy and we can easily see the implications this has had for our ecological systems which rely on inter-dependence and lateral networking. The tethering of our ‘special’ human consciousness to language is antiquated and has certainly allowed us to create a hierarchy in which humans dominate all other forms of life, essentially separating us from nature (as if that were possible.) The prevailing idea that consciousness is based in the mind, in the human mind particularly, is the basis for setting humans apart from and above other animate forms. Consciousness arises in all living, organic, animate forms, and is not peculiar to humans, especially if we (re)-conceive the world as ontologically arising from movement and thus inherently, from change.

The long-standing tendency to devalue movement as a primary ontological tool underscores the ubiquity of the mind/body, subject/object split. This includes the more recent neurophysiological concepts of the brain- within the school of Functionalism, which analyses humans as informational systems. These approaches look at human consciousness as mostly in our brains and/or as solely computational: The brain as the master computer/system ‘in charge’ of the rest of the body. These are really only extensions of the lingering Cartesian mind-body split. In this sense, even the term and/or concept of embodiment fails to do justice to animate form, it fails to deliver the primacy of movement to its rightful place as the single universal correlate of our creaturely beingness.

The term embodiment and its variations are often used to affirm the fact that we live in bodies, so they must count for something. However, by using the term embodiment or other, similar terms such as ‘lived body’ or ‘embodied mind’, we still denote the divide between mind and body, and we are in fact, still perpetuating the split, perpetuating what Sheets-Johnstone calls in her book *The Primacy of Movement* (2011) a “schizoid metaphysics.” (p.311) Sheets-Johnstone alleges that embodiment alludes to our modern predilection for ‘packaged culture’- all the products we consume, our gender, our mind and body get packaged by the terms of embodiment. Originally the term embodiment was meant to sew up the mind-body divide, encompass the body and the
mind in one unit, finally defining us as whole beings, yet the word and its variations still implies the feeling of separation. What is embodied? How? Because of our deeply entrenched assumption of the subject-object divide, the word only gains its meaning on the basis of dichotomy, the leftovers from a 300 year-old Cartesian imprint.

Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana are credited with originating the theory of ‘autopoiesis’, a biologically based system of cellular organization that is self-referred, that is, one where the nervous system is capable of generating its own conditions of reference. Varela who is both a biologist and a philosopher became curious about the epistemological assumptions inherent in the field of biology and delivered autopoiesis as his magnus opus, a proposal on the idea that no personal creation happens without context, including and predominantly for him, within biological systems. This theory has also gained prominence and status way beyond biology, venturing into distant fields and areas of knowledge, revealing a huge paradigmatic tremor. Varela (2009) also refers to this paradigm shift as an ‘ontological turn’, that is, “a progressive mutation of thought” which ends the longstanding dominance of ‘Cartesianism’. This new ontology recognizes that “knowing, doing and living are not separate things and that reality and our transitory identity are partners in a constructive dance.” (Varela, 2009, p.74)

Aristotle was perhaps the first to initiate a philosophical premise on the idea of movement as the original universal- he understood movement to be the essential principle of nature. Similarly, Husserl stressed animation as the originating impulse for knowledge. Following Husserl, we can say that it is through movement that all creatures accumulate reality. The primal, originary animation or movement that defines being-ness is implicit in the term ‘animate organism.’ Requiring no previous education, all creatures know an animate creature to be that which moves and the inanimate one to be that which does not self-propel; it is kinetic spontaneity that defines our aliveness. In this case ‘movement’ refers not only to muscular-skeletal motion, but also to the fact that all animate beings have an internal system that is in constant flux: blood, breath, hormones traveling to synapses, nervous systems, cellular renewal- all of our liquid systems, everything inside is in constant motion, which is true for all creatures. Consciousness arises in all animate organisms in this sense.

It is interesting to note the etymological root for the word (kin) aesthetic originates in the Greek aistheta meaning perceptible things, only later going through a German
transition to become the word we associate with taste, art and beauty today. Add to it the Greek *kinein*, to put in motion and we have kinaesthetic: To put in motion perceptible things. Bodily motion is closely tied with cognition, perception and especially emotion. If we begin to look at human and the rest of animate matter as inter-dependant, we can see that movement is our common language, a way of communicating in non-hierarchal terms. Our commonality with all creatures is indeed *wordless* and movement is the mother tongue for us all. We make our way through the world initially in ways that are non-linguistic; in fact, our kinesthetic sense and ability to gesture is still very much entwined with speech and communication, accounting for more than half of our ‘signaling’ or ability to communicate speech. This is quickly evidenced by anyone who uses email or text messaging - the absence of body language and gesture allows for many instances of mis-understanding. This implies that speech is essentially a gestural rather than acoustic act, linking language with movement as well.

### 3.4. Language vs. Presence

Historically, Western thought and the ensuing dominance via its permeating promulgation of logic and rationalism has created a certain type of thinking: Libraries full of words and data that have no feeling, no guts, no spiritual force. In the West, the shape of the philosophical tradition has maintained adherence to the basic stance of empiricism with strict reliance on facts - measurable, a priori principles and has rejected with equal force, principles or methods based on experience, Eros or emotion. Eventually this gave way to atheist, anti-metaphysical, and insular ideas within the logic traditions. Philosophies based on empiricism both assume the role of the self while ignoring it at the same time, which if/when taken literally, become the basis of theories which maintain that all knowledge is based in the mind and which designate the body as a lower form of knowledge and apparatus of understanding.

We start to view the world in particular and narrow ways as incessant linguistic repetition creates atrophy of other faculties. It is true that the supremacy of (verbal and written) language is likely due to its relentless and continuous repetition, a genuine cohesive affect. Linguistic representation can be interpreted as a form of violence to the immanent world, often compelling us to analyse and explain the ineffable. The systemic constraints of language, the menacing elements of control and domination asserted through repetition, create ideological and epistemological impulses which aim to make
sense of everyday life. However just as language is inadequate, so too is silence for the danger in silence is that the non-articulated gets presented. Movement, dance or expressive gesture can become the third space, the liminal region universal to all animate life.

There is a common (though certainly not universal) assumption in the Western traditions that language is adequate to describe our reality and that it could somehow do this “objectively” or “truthfully”. This perspective is seen as inherently flawed in the Eastern traditions, where language is often apprehended with suspicion, and to be sure, “virtually the entire mystical tradition in the West has doubted the adequacy of language in expressing experiential truth.” (Carter, 1989, p. 20) Kunichi Uno notes that “language is the enemy of a genuine creation that consists in opening up to the brute force of life” (Uno et. al, 2014, p. 67) As the Tao te Ching reminds us:

The way that can be spoken of is not the eternal way.
The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.

Language forces the objects of the world to be understood without their specificity; everything becomes a generalization. Only objects or ideas with the same general meaning enter in to relation with one another- for example numbers with numbers or musical tones with other tones. Dualistic and thus hierarchal systems of linguistics and signs have come to replace whole/holistic/ synergistic systems such as dance, likely detonated by the continuing development of language systems, a repetitious procession of naming and ordering continuing right into present day. Concepts and phenomenon with originally more neutral or ambiguous associations, were levelled and ranked within an ordered system of labels.

Pairings of words and viewpoints which had hitherto no direct relation became meaningful only in the context of their hierarchal value within the symbolism of their pairing. ‘Opposite’ notions were given to concepts which had previously existed in circular or reciprocal relationships; once complimenting and completing each other, these concepts were now standing in opposition. Complete systems of meaning such as male/female, sun/moon, nature/culture, passive/active and dark/light had their inherent equality of meaning disrupted to subtly produce a cultural sensation of the male/rational
/mind systems of understanding as being somehow superior to the falsely separated and labelled female, emotional, and otherwise bodily systems of knowledge.

A quick look from Liddel’s English-Greek lexicon, at the many activities that *Logos* includes: collecting, tale-telling and relating, counting and giving account, arguing, speaking, saying, thinking, reasoning, uttering and then finally, writing. Thus, came a multitude of meanings which conveyed rationality through the vehicle of speech. The logos became *ratio* as it passed through early Roman translations, which of course becomes directly connected to words like *rational* and its opposite- *irrational*, a word often representative of female behaviour and inclination. The ancient philosopher Heraclitus, many years before Aristotle and Socrates, proposed that “it belongs to all men to know themselves and to be sound-minded” and “to be sound-minded is the greatest excellence and wisdom.” (Brann, 2011, p. 25) The implication that rational thinking was far superior to any other kind of knowledge goes way back in his/ story. The process of de-tangling from this naming procession is involved in the transformative shifts that occur in shamanic practices, which butoh dance is very much concerned with.

We spend inordinate amounts of time speaking, writing- including texting, analysing, listening to and generally interpreting language. To partake in the creation or even witnessing of a kinaesthetically based piece of art is to quite literally be moved in a new way. Exploration of abstract themes like control, obsession, love and abandon can often be expressed and portrayed more effectively through dance/movement because their experience originates and progresses *in the body*. In 1682, Claude Menestrier published his treatise *Des Ballets Anciens et Modernes* where he asserted that “the motions of the body were capable of depicting inner feelings that could be made known in no other way” (Cohen, 1974, p.38) How we conceive of and manage our bodies as tools for communication is a highly ignored form of intelligence, one that is slowly being erased by our ever-increasing encroachment into the virtual world.

The attainment of such knowledge in bodily movement and self-arrangement requires imagination and intelligence as well as rigorous discipline; an education of the whole body. As Joseph Roach notes in his foreword to *The Body Can Speak*: “To be educated in this sense, to be drawn out, means to experience a transition- a movement, an evolution, a change- between states, between positions.” (Mertz, 2002, p.xii) We feel an actor or dancer is at the height of their vocation when they engage the audience in an
act of sincerity and Jerzy Grotowski tells us “when this act of extreme sincerity is modelled in a living organism, it impulses a way of breathing, a rhythm of thought and the circulation of blood” (Grotowski, 2004, p.64) When these new movement patterns are developed and are far enough away from the daily patterns, we call this performance because the dancer or performer is showing us another body. All codified performance forms but especially contemporary dance operates on the principle that moving in space or dancing is only a deformation of walking and is simply showing the witness an alteration in balance. (Barba, 1995)

Each body expresses myriads of information through its unusual or habitual movement patterns, conscious or not. How clearly the body can articulate will determine how clearly the language of dance or any other performance medium gets communicated and received by the witness or audience. By acquiring particular training and finding new ways of gesturing, moving and vocalizing, as well as oppositional bodily tensions, performers are opened and moved into a heightened state of awareness which thereby creates the “presence” so obvious to the spectator. Theatre anthropologist and scholar Eugenio Barba postulated that there exists, independently of any traditional culture, a ‘trans-cultural physiology’, which through practice and specific training can be acquired and used to access the ‘secret energy’ that accomplished performers from many different cultures have referenced, known commonly as stage presence. According to Barba, in discovering this ineffable ‘presence’ or essence, performers have accessed universal principles of ‘pre-expressive’ behaviour. (See Barba, 1995; Watson, 1993)

Antonin Artaud recognized a sort of ‘emotional musculature’ that was required of actors and he felt it could be located at particular physical places on the body. This was a radical idea within the modern philosophical view which not only separated mind from body but elevated the brain/head above all other organs and body parts. The function that Artaud provided for the theatre was to notice and address the split between language and flesh, exposing the raw impulses which originate in the nervous system. In a piece on Artaud called “He Wasn't Entirely Himself”, Jerzy Growtowski (1933-1999), a major practitioner and innovator in modern acting techniques and another seminal figure in performance studies writes:
“When we propose to the actor that he should transform himself before the spectator's eyes using only his inner impulse, his body, when we state that the magic of the theatre consists in this transformation as it comes to birth, we once more raise the question: did Artaud ever suggest any other kind of magic?” (Grotowski, 2004. p. 60)

Butoh dance is based on rigorous philosophical understanding and conspicuous use of visualisation more than any physical/somatic training required for other athletic/dance arts. This sets butoh as a modern dance form quite apart from other emergent dance forms coming out around the globe. For example, Jay Hirabayashi, one of the two artistic directors of Kokoro Dance currently based in Vancouver, Canada who was influenced by Kazuo Ohno and other butoh masters from Japan, often asks his dancers to imagine specific imagery. Somatically related images like the belly as a swamp, all heavy and thick; the legs as fields of farmers working diligently in the hot sun; the chest as a beautifully scented flower; or the insides becoming full of crawling bugs, all create a particular and striking aesthetic. This is all while remembering simple yet complex choreography, which transforms the psychic-kinetic liminal space between audience and performer; this is true both as a dancer, feeling from the inside, and from the outside looking in, as audience. This imagery, usually unsettling, is a big part of the butoh paradigm and it is used to create and project an ‘inner world’.

Locating and accessing particular energies and forces living in the body or the outside world and then releasing the contents became a major focus for Hijikata’s original ankoku butoh and significantly, this idea is still addressed by other butoh dancers teaching and performing today. Butoh seeks to include in its offering, all elements and creatures of earth; each force has a particular movement pattern and by seeking to embody it, we can perhaps illuminate the secrets of the cosmos. The emergent presence that we receive from the butoh body, as a state of porosity, cannot be conceived well through cognitive (mind) intelligence but rather must be received through the equally porous psychic and nervous systems, both kinetic in nature.

3.5. Expressionism and Dada: Seeds of Butoh

It is easy to connect butoh to early entries in the post-modern epoch, including the Dada art movement as well as expressionist dancers such as Mary Wigman and other early modern dance pioneers like Dorris Humphrey, Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan. All of these dance leaders and icons were seeking to bring attention back to the
body as a unique and obvious channel for certain corporeal and even metaphysical truths, which included emotionality, and its opposite, pure form in motion. Pure bodily expression and body knowledge were seen as harbingers of the post-modern transformation; this represented a transition from previously sanctioned knowledge only obtained through (male) reason, a triumph of its own during the enlightenment era but completely disrupted by these new rules. The body as a unique source of information and expression, assumed a lead role in the new era of post-modernism.

The paradigmatic shift to re-focus on the body through emergent (post) modern dance forms, used as an ontological tool, would most definitely be viewed as the extreme of other, and therefore an accurate representation for the new zeitgeist that encompasses and defines postmodernism. Seen in this context, certain dance or body knowledge and its expression as a pedagogy within modernity, both in the West and East, could be viewed as the most radical form of anti-establishment art and therefore a sort of gateway to or pinnacle of post-modernism. Beginning with early expressionists and culminating in the emergent and post-modern form of butoh, the body, and by association dance-with its own unique system of knowledge, forms a legitimate source of defiant public discourse.

Intellectual and cultural temperament at the end of the 19th century in Europe faced its own sort of cultural revolution as the old guard released its stiff clutch of the proprietary norms of the previous Victorian era and gave birth to the avant-garde art movement. This new era was represented not only by the birth of Dada but also by feminism and the death of the grand narrative, and by extension, the slow relinquishing of colonialism and nationalism. In a very similar way to how Thomas Kuhn (1970) described the paradigmatic shifts inherently responsible for scientific revolutions, so too do these same alterations operate within the sociological content of our lived experience. This includes the effects of our changing world views and classifications of aesthetic preference. For example, many new art forms such as Dada, jazz music, or improvisational dance all represent the consequence of strict aesthetic codes which came to be dominant at the end of the 19th century and which thereby necessitated the autonomy associated with these new “free” forms. The energy of containment is precisely what allows the illicit entry.
Modern dance was birthed at the beginning of the 20th century and was essentially defined by its departure from the codified ballet style. Expressionism as a tendency in dance leaned away from the strict movement vocabulary inherent within the balletic structure and formed its kinetic knowledge directly from the body, without reference to specific movement notation or even music. In this sense it was a very personally expressionistic style at odds with the highly choreographed, formal and strict aesthetic of ballet and other bourgeois styles of popular dance current in Europe and America at the time. However, dance as an aesthetic has somehow lagged behind, and even today, contemporary dance is synonymous with modern dance in the academy and most dance training institutions never make reference to post-modern dance.

Both Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata (considered the two co-founders of butoh dance) had trained and studied with many of the Western modern dance icons and/or their protegées coming to Japan and both men were inspired early in their dance careers by the German expressionists and the 'Austruckstanz', a form of dance in which the full body is engaged. Mary Wigman (1886-1973), who is often considered the zenith of German expressionism was a major, although indirect, influence on especially Ohno but also Hijikata. In Wigman’s own creative explorations and later through the pedagogy at her school in Germany, she sought to rupture the harmony of the body, creating “elegant deformations” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p.xiv) and to negate the need for music, instead encouraging her students to listen to their own internal rhythms. Dance critic Margaret Lloyd, writing about Mary Wigman in 1933 describes her dances as “largely an ecstasy of gloom, stressing the demonic and macabre, as if to exorcise through movement, the secret evils in man's nature.” (Cohen, 1974, p.149) We can certainly see how butoh seized on and developed this corporeal concept.

Wigman had been a student of Rudolph von Laban, often credited as the father of modern (German) dance. He was considered somewhat of an iconoclast himself and a major player in the formation of modern contemporary dance at the fin-de-siecle; he was part of an artistic movement that provided the ideas and structures for a fundamentally new and historically different style of dance in Europe. Laban also gave instruction in a kind of ‘freedance’ which neither relied on nor illustrated music, and nor did it tell a story but like Wigman’s style, also engaged the dancer's inner rhythm. “This is the German Erlebnis that was privileged above all else at the Labanschule, the lived and experienced body that I am as opposed to the objective body that I have.” (Jones, 2014,
p.64) Laban saw this as a way to change societal values. Both Wigman’s and Laban’s work were deeply rooted in ritual- also one of the defining features of butoh.

Note: Although it’s an important point out that Laban is known to have worked with the Third Reich to establish a specifically German style of dance, one particularly suited to the German body/ spirit which the Nazis then employed with mastery in their propaganda outreach, that is not the focus of and is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Both of these highly influential contributors to the modern dance movement that was beginning to take shape at the opening of the 20th century in Europe, also took part in the Dada art experiment, most readily traced back to Zurich in 1916 when Hugo Ball and his wife Emmy Hennings opened The Cabaret Voltaire to become the hotbed of avant-garde performance art in Europe. Hennings, a dancer, performer and artist, is generally not credited in any significant way within the Dada movement but she certainly had as much to do with its commencement as Hugo Ball did. “Nothing if not the body assumed priority when the Expressionist cabaret dancer took to the stage in 1916.” (Kamenish, 2015, p.53) It was the performative aspects, associated with the body and in fact coming to be known in the art world through the female body and through dance, which got the Dadaists noticed.

This new dance-performance-art contained a noticeable expressionist polemic as well as fragments of disjointed poetry which has created the distinctive overlap in Dadaist art that still confounds art historians today on their search to define this peculiar movement in terms of style:

“Style is something that the reader routinely struggles with in any conventional approach to Dada. In formal terms, style is simply not present- that is, style as a signal of unity, completion and identity, the means by which artists are grouped together into united movements.” (Jones, 2014, p.7)

This also becomes an important link to later post-modern butoh artists-many of whom intensely oppose any rendering of their artistic practice into formally notated technical approaches or codified appearances. As the years progressed, the practice and teaching of butoh divided, with some choreographers using codified structures and others using loose improvisation; some choosing minimal affectation, others using total
spectacle; some relying on emotional catharsis, others searching for deep metaphysical expression; arbitrariness versus meaning, it all became butoh. Today the form is still encapsulated by an eclectic array of styles, making it very hard to define, another measure of its success. This is one method employed to prevent the market or otherwise mainstream forces from co-opting the butoh movement which essentially began with and wishes to remain in an attitude of defiance.

There were many factions of Dada happening within different mediums and with different intentions all over Europe, a representation of its multi-layered and complex dissemination process. The Italian Futurists for instance, often considered the original seed-bed for Dada, were particularly concerned with the transparency of language and set out to discombobulate the syntax and expose radical typography, which would in turn reveal the act of simplification represented by standardized and normal print. (Jones, 2014; Kamenish, 2015; Richter, 1965.) The Futurists sought to reveal the relationship between language and thought and/or language and the actual; further exposing the limits of verbal and especially written structures filled with subjectivity. This same trend can be seen in the practices of the avant-garde, post-war artists, sometimes known as the neo-dadaists of the 1960's in Japan. There was a transference of concern about language, the structures of subjectivity and the limits of verbal/ written words onto the body and flesh:

“There is a strong and specific resonance between the particular kinds of inquiries that took place in the realm of language (poetry, manifestos) in the 1920s-1930s, and their legacies in the reinvention in the work of performance and ‘post-shengeki’ theatre [in Japan]”. (Sas, 2011, p.x)

Walter Benjamin wrote at length about his dismay regarding the ability of the new representation to negate the authenticity of art works, because by the year 1900, all known works of art could be reproduced. Benjamin also wrote about the Dada movement in his 1935 treatise titled The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility and provided the live philosophical context into which Dada grew. He once declared: “Dadaist manifestations actually guaranteed a quite vehement distraction by making artworks the centre of scandal. One requirement was paramount: to outrage the public” (Benjamin, 2008, p.39) He also once remarked that the “revolutionary strength of Dadaism consisted in testing art for its authenticity” (Jones, 2014, p.41) Later, butoh works became intensely concerned with both outrage as well as
authenticity; indeed, they are potentially the two most definitive ideas associated with butoh dance in Western performance culture. As well, questions surrounding the epistemological relationship between lived body experience and representation, explored by these early surrealists and expressionists has become a focal point in many butoh teachings.

The anti-establishment, anti-art, and at times, anti-war set of happenings which began during the First World War called Dada, was committed to the destruction of what were then considered lethal cultural trends; as a group of artists, they sought to shock and engage audiences out of their passive, complacent-receptive state. “It is true that without the attitude of revolt against rising materialism and against the bourgeois values the war represented, there would have been no spark to ignite the Dada movement” (Kamenish, 2015, p.4) Similarly, one of the key issues for theatre practitioners in the post-war era of Japan centred on the idea of the ‘encounter’ (deai). This idea of encounter anticipated audience participation in some way and could be used to dissolve boundaries between life and art and to challenge the power structures inherent between audience and performer. (Sas, 2011) The encounter could be viewed as an act of mutual penetration and thus could displace sustained hierarchies between performer and audience.

All art that expresses radical discontent demonstrates the danger of becoming too relevant and is therefore drained of its power to disrupt. We see this throughout history in various artistic movements: The moment that art is co-opted by the very forces it seeks to negate or question, is the turning of the epoch. In this way, political art always appears as reactive. And certainly, unless these oppositional stances are used in more ways than simple dissent and refusal, they will succumb to the same ontological forces that keep the opposition also in place. Hugo Ball is said to have had an instinctive revulsion toward Dada just as the press and public were beginning to take notice; he consequently distanced himself and effectively collapsed the structure of Dada in many ways. Hijikata also went into seclusion, curtailing all public performances for more than a decade, just as the international press was beginning to receive him with curiosity and awe.
The Yellow Emperor went wandering
To the north of the Red Water. To the Kwan Lun mountain.

He looked around Over the edge of the world.

On the way home, he lost his night-colored pearl.

    He sent out to Science to seek his pearl and got nothing.
    He sent Analysis to look for his pearl and got nothing
    He sent out Logic to seek his pearl and got nothing.

Then he asked Nothingness and Nothingness had it!

    The Yellow Emperor said: “Strange, indeed!

Nothingness

Who was not sent, who did not find it,

Had the night-colored pearl.

-The Way of Chuang Tzu
4.1. Japan -as- Hybrid: Birth of Post-Modernism

By the end of the 19th century, more than three quarters of the planet had been colonized by a small handful of Western powers. Historically, Japan had fought tirelessly to keep Western influence out, was considered a champion on this issue throughout all of Asia after succeeding in abolishing the 'unequal treaties' by 1895. The world's opinion grew in line with Japan's perceived ability to resist and counter European and then American hegemonic imperialism. However, despite the best efforts to keep certain Western ideals and tendencies out of Japan, the explosion of intellectual and artistic pursuits in Europe eventually made their way into Japanese cultural milieus as the 20th century drifted into view. Much of Japan's supposed early success came as a consequence of the Meiji Restoration whereby a new emperor slithered into power in 1868, restoring all practical abilities and governmental powers to himself. A series of reforms aimed at completely disrupting the previous 250-year-old, feudal status quo were then enacted, triggering enormous political and social changes.

It is this volcanic change in Japanese ideology and power dynamics as well as its extremely sudden industrialization and modernization which is primarily responsible for creating the image of Japan as the first modern nation by the early 20th century. Thomas Kasulis, who has written extensively on Eastern philosophy, reminds us in the introduction to *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, that Japan represents the crossroads of the great intellectual traditions and that “Japan foreshadows the future of all societies.” (Yuasa, 1987, p.12) Torn between supposed ‘progress’ on Western terms or retreating into nostalgia, Japan proceeded to merge, adapt and select from aspects of its own traditional culture as well as from European and North American societies to create a post-modern identity that can only be described as hybrid.

The unique strategies of absorption, adaptation and high-level cherry picking remained defiantly Japanese, yet there also existed a profound sense of identity crisis: Japanese men and women who were cast out from the structure of traditional society and obliged to adjust to this new world of the Meiji, which rewarded the assimilation of European culture, felt fin-de-siecle pessimism deeply. Everything true to Japanese hearts had been ravaged, incinerated and crushed. The sense of tragedy featured in literary and other art works during this period in history comes from “the feeling of profound confusion that could neither be overcome nor resolved. Modernization could
not be accepted but neither could it be fought. It could only be laughed at on stage.” (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 1988, p.11) Japanese people now developed an even stronger bond to art as it was comforting -it addressed their oceanic identity crisis- and performance art in particular, became a means for catharsis.

It seems the West has long been fascinated with Japan and art historians have long recognized the important influence of the Japanese aesthetic or Japonisme, a way of making art that the West had not conceived of yet. In this context, Japanese prints were magnificent and astonishing and were quickly appropriated by French painters. Jan Hokenson who wrote Japan, France and East-West Aesthetics (2004), notes that supposedly around 1856 some Hokusai prints were discovered and then shown to the French artists Manet, Degas and Pissaro, “the painters who were to form the avant-garde of the next decades.” (p.13) Japonisme arrived at a time of crisis in Western painting, where the formal aesthetics conceived according to neo-classical assumptions of beauty based on symmetry, order and unification were making way for realism, surrealism and eventually cubism, dada and expressionism.

French writers also used Japonisme to invoke an “anti-Cartesian aesthetic context” (Hokenson, 2004, p.19) and the post-modern approach to convey anti-occidental tendencies, looking to Japan as a source of solution. Japonisme is seen today to represent the “end of Eurocentric illusionism and the beginnings of a new, modern way of seeing and recording the world.” (p.17) It was the first of many radical encounters with aesthetics, the differences between East and West, which then began to rupture the protective layer of assumption surrounding Western metaphysics and philosophy. This discovery of the relativity of artistic and social norms contributed greatly to the rupture of Copernican proportions in Western thinking, which came to be called ‘post-modernism’. Post-modernism, as a discourse? Artistic movement? Practice? Heralded the (beginning of the) end of Eurocentrism, the rejection of every principle of authority and as such, it remains a powerful reminder of the collapse of the hegemonic ideologies of imperial and/or colonial powers.

Japanese culture is still often considered the pinnacle of the avant-garde but Japanese artists had been forging this road much longer than their U.S and European counter-parts. Artists in Japan were long ago creating deliberate collaborations within multiple types of media and preparing the road for true interdisciplinary art, a significant
signal of the post-modernist art movement. This is also the backdrop for the creation of not only butoh dance but many edgy and unique contemporary art practices which were subsequently developed later in Japan. Butoh was not originally conceived of as ‘modern dance’ but as an attitude, a disposition, an aesthetic quality which could be applied in many disparate arts practices and it was definitely subsumed into many artistic practices of 1960’s Japan, most strikingly with film and photography.

Kazuhiro Ishii wrote an editorial for the Japan Architect in 1981, explaining his perception that modernism, within the historical and epochal spectrum, was in fact foreign to the natural inclination of the Japanese people and therefore must be considered imported, culturally speaking. Post-modernism however, felt so at home in Japan, a nation of the hybrid, that it could potentially claim to be its birth place. He asserted: “Hodgepodge and clamorousness that characterize postmodernism, had developed not recently, but as a central element of our tradition from long ago.” (Teasley, 2011, p.247) In fact, “synthetic eclecticism is basic to an understanding of Japanese art since the Asuka period (538-645)” (Munroe, 1994, p.21) This hybridity and its celebration lends well to the idea that Japan was ensconced in the methods and ideals of ‘post-modernism’ long before the West got wind of this notion.

Post-modernism makes no claims to definitiveness and this meshes well with the aesthetics of ambiguity so fondly embedded in Japanese philosophy. Post-modernism remained with the arts in Japan, at the periphery, where it was meant to stay. In the West, we see the post-modernist view has become a new paradigm; it has moved into the centre, spilling over into ethics and a new philosophy of relating to the world in a way which dismisses the grand, (traditional) narrative. We must keep in mind however what Paul Greenhalgh said: “postmodernism stands in relation to our own moment as the Steam Age did to its own oil-powered future.” (Antonelli, 2011, p.10) In terms of style, the post-modern discourse most definitely celebrates hybridity, replacing truth, or the need for it with an attitude of potential and possibility.

Japan fought so hard to reject what it saw as the superficial, greedy and virulently consumerist values of the West and yet today, their highly advanced information and commodity cultures have come to epitomize the post-modern condition, “whereby the real, the referent, no longer exists, and all is simulation and pastiche.” (Munroe, 1994, p.21) According to Zukin (1993), the (new) zeitgeist referred to as post-
modernism can be conceived of as a 'space of liminality' which is in turn, “a landscape in which public and private, culture and economy and place and market are harshly scrambled, and in each case, the former is gradually being replaced by the latter.” (p.46) Japan today appears almost entirely dominated by virulent capitalism and yet there still exists in the heart of the Japanese people, a very strong relationship to traditional values based on simplicity, quality and longevity, a oneness with nature.

Japan had already been exposed to waves of Chinese and Indian influence over the millennia, and each new wave was sublimated and distilled until it became distinctly Japanese. What survived the past and adapted to the future in Japan was the spirit of paradox and opposition. Certainly, it can be argued that Japan has always celebrated hybridity, likely as a direct result of Zen and other cultural ontologies focusing on non-dualism and the spirit of (non)-opposition. Today, Japan’s hyper-capitalist culture existing alongside ancient rituals like the tea ceremony or aesthetic concepts like wabi-sabi shows us this paradox in full color.

4.2. War, Protest and Return to Zero

Butoh dance emerged from the bleak and ruined post-war landscape as a provocative and subversive form of social criticism and protest. This dance of utter darkness was meant to mirror the darkness that had consumed humanity, which had manifested in the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan, effectively ending the second world war with a significant note of finality. The Japanese kanji for butoh is usually translated as 'elaborate dance of the hands' plus a 'penetration of the earth'; sometimes also as 'strong stamping of the earth'. Ankoku or 'utter darkness' is generally left off as a descriptor these days. This dance form arose as if to shake people out of their complacent politeness and scream 'nuclear bombs have been dropped, what is happening to humanity'? Butoh dance challenged the status quo of the time and continues to do so today.

Butoh originated in Japan as an underground, modern dance form in the aftermath of the second World War, in response to a nation in crisis, and the Japanese people were facing a double bind: accept the West or face complete economic instability. Defeat in this war had also created a seven-year American occupation- (not dissimilar to current U.S foreign policy) whereby American values, especially the
vehement and dedicated pursuit of capitalistic gains, slowly seeped into, and reformed the Japanese psyche forever. The modernization and abject consumerism of the new post-war, global but especially American zeitgeist represented everything Japan had striven for years to block out. Both Ohno and Hijikata had been intimately affected by the war although in differing ways and this became a driving force for their creativity and for the emergence of butoh dance. Consequently, it has also been noted that any consideration of butoh as an art form, “either geographically border-less or spiritually healing- must first locate it in Japan's archive of images of violence, protest and the riven body.” (Bruhm, 2013, p.26-27)

A culture of virulent protest formed the backdrop in the emergence of ankoku butoh and there existed a kind of seamlessness between destruction, protest and experimental art at the time in Japan. As early as the 1950’s, in the spirit of protest, students were forming communal theatre collectives in the nightclubs and sex bars of the seediest areas of Tokyo where new trends flourished in all mediums, but particularly in experimental dance. Butoh dance was described and treated as an avant-garde art movement in post war Japan, combining and using many mediums, often rejecting codified choreography, and embracing darkness and crisis. Hijikata insisted on calling butoh performances “dance experiences” and he cherished the notion that he resided at the peripheries of the arts culture remarking:

“To a production-oriented society, the aimless use of the body, which I call dance, is a deadly enemy which must be taboo. I… say that my dance shares a common basis with crime, male homosexuality, festivals and rituals because it is behavior which explicitly flaunts its aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society.” (Barber, 2010, p.22-23)

At the time of butoh’s emergence, Japan was at the height of this experimentation on the world stage. Hijikata intuitively knew the power that dance has as an art form to challenge capitalistic tendencies in society as well as facing the inherent rebellion of the body, through its main constitutive element: ephemerality.

The destruction of the war had created a longing in Japan and elsewhere for a “return to zero”, essentially the return to absolute nature and natural forces, a turn away from the virulent consumerism over-taking Japan and the rest of the world. In the years just following Tokyo’s defeat, there was short supply of coal, firewood and gasoline so the clear skies in Tokyo were noticeable and striking, reminding the Japanese of a time
gone by. This natural beauty helped induce the feeling of nostalgia for a time before bombs and industry and pollution, a longing for a ‘return to zero’. Japanese people were also uncomfortably aware that the vast and glorious city of Tokyo had not only been ravaged and reduced to ashes within their lifetime, but that it had also transformed into a vertical megalopolis in a very short amount of time after the war ended. Tokyo at the time of butoh’s entrance, was teeming with both extreme wealth and a complex and sophisticated web of crime and corruption.

During this time in Japan, most people were intimately aware of the very real potential of corporeal vanishing so dance as the ultimate ghost or spirit medium was the perfect vehicle to express the temporally vast yet momentary structures that make up our subjective experience. The Japanese recognized that the obsessive Western focus on the individual, his concerns and needs and his individual freedoms, had eclipsed all else in the quest for absolute happiness. As Alexandra Munroe writes in *Japanese Art after 1945* (1994): “As so often happens in Japanese culture, nature and nothingness are what artists finally turn to.” (p.24)

In Japan the collective outweighs the individual and this ontological system is deep within the Japanese consciousness. As Shaner and Duval (2014) assert, this worldview implies “no vestige of a Platonic ontological hierarchy of existence.” (Shaner and Duval, 2014, p.304) As well, they note that in many Japanese traditions, “eco-centrism and self cultivation represent two threads that weave a seamless ethical fabric characterized by developing one’s sensitivity to others and nature.” (p.291) Since the beginning of recorded history, the Japanese character and spirit has been infused by a pre-reflective, direct and devotional relationship with the natural world. Although Western scholars have sometimes tried to characterize this direct and omnipresent relationship with nature in the Japanese tradition as a consequence of some kind of remainder from a previous ‘archaic’ or ‘primitive’ worldview, it remains defiantly and fiercely a part of the Japanese psyche.

Eco-centrism, much like biophilia is about developing an intimate relationship with nature, with one’s surroundings separate from one’s ego. It requires sublimating individual needs and entitlements and focusing on the world with a feeling of oneness. Certainly, both Hijikata and Ohno were immensely driven to keep their dance close to the wild, close to natural forces; there would be no butoh for either of them if not for the
inclusion of spirits, ancestors and nature. Butoh as I’ve received it has almost always been performed outdoors. Butoh continues today to be connected to a kind of ecological feminism, particularly manifested through dance because of its ephemeral ‘no trace’ qualities, and it continues to exemplify a non-harming approach to the earth and its inhabitants. The structure of our morality develops in conjunction with the destruction of our environment, our home. Dance becomes the perfect vehicle to express the ephemerality and uncertainty of our vastly overstuffed world, a way to leave no trace.

Another key feature of this idea of ‘return to zero’ included gender malleability and nudity—more representations of the natural world or a return to nature. Butoh began in a culture with no context for the body as the centre of an aesthetic preoccupation. For example, artists were regularly arrested during this time for dancing naked in Japan, for daring to be closer to the disappearing natural world and for choosing to express and show a nude body without it becoming sexualized, objectified and commodified. Even today nudity or partial nudity in most butoh performance still aims to show this connection to the vanishing animal world and can still be shocking to some audience members, depending on their frame of reference.

Another method used to return to the simplicity of zero was the employment of pain, crisis, and catharsis as a means to express the collective horror at the destruction of the natural world. There was no impetus for beauty at the time of butoh’s development because the need to release trauma was so intense and explosive. Butoh became a sublime vehicle for this expression because it not only encouraged cathartic release of inner contents to force a reaction in the audience but also subtle, solitary, empty and sometimes vast gestures that seem to represent the deep Asian spirit and understanding of the Tao, the way. Part of this path involves understanding the yin/yang concept which shows us that there is opposition always; the ball of darkness resides in the light and there is also a little ball of light always within the dark. It has to be this way to support existence.

The experiences of deep suffering and grief alongside those of ecstatic joy and even high enlightened states allow a non-dualistic understanding that life and death live together in this body. The practice of butoh uses this opposition to create tension and beauty, potentially revealing the dancer’s capacity to disintegrate through catharsis. Still today, many butoh practitioners would connect their practice to these esoteric and
sacred practices based in opposition but also to the vehement dismissal of mainstream culture, a hard thing to pull off in our world which can access anything at any time. This initial impetus of rebellion and protest, the dismissal of main-stream.market forces as well as union with the spirit of nature has always remained part of the butoh psyche and character.

4.3. Hijikata and Ohno as Iconoclasts

At the moment when butoh entered the Japanese reality, “the history of Japan had ended: the human body had been consumed into ashes at the close of the first half of the 20th century and that history then rebuilt itself as though nothing had happened when everything (my emphasis) had changed.” (Barber, 2010, p.7) It was into this temporal and geographic milieu that two vibrant, iconoclastic and visionary dancers named Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) and Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986) glided, to usher in the new post-modern interpretations of art and philosophy that were (re)centred on the body as a site of inquiry. Their dance form continues to challenge the ontological dualism which valorized first the spoken and then primarily the written word over and above other meaning-making practices which are primarily experienced in and of the body.

Although both Hijikata and Ohno are considered accomplished dancer-choreographers, (each having his own particular bent and milieu), both men were also considered philosophers of a certain kind. Butoh as a form and method is often described and experienced as a philosophy/practice or at least as a dance form with a philosophical approach. Both Ohno and Hijikata have openly cited several French philosophers (Artaud, Sartre, de Beauvoir, de Sade, Genet, Baudelaire) as inspiration for butoh and they certainly weren't alone in this passion: “almost the entirety of Tokyo's experimental art at the beginning of the 1960's was closely engaged with French culture” (Barber, 2010, p.28) This was used primarily as a means to disregard American influence. They came to know many of these French philosophers through their friend Kunichi Uno, himself a well-known scholar and translator of French to Japanese, and who was also Gilles Deleuz's doctoral student. Uno regarded Hijikata and his ankoku butoh as a 'philosophy of the body'.
Butoh dance was first defined in 1959, when Hijikata twitched and contorted onto the stage to perform *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colours), a corporeal interpretation of Japanese author Yukio Mishima’s book of the same title. Hijikata has long credited Mishima as having a seminal role in the launch of butoh dance. *Kinjiki* supposedly explored homosexuality and paedophilia, ending with a live chicken being killed but this has since been refuted by the still-living Yoshito Onho, son of Kazuo, who also danced in *Kinjiki* as a young man. This piece outraged Japanese audiences and resulted in Hijikata nearly being banned (instead he decided to leave) from the Modern Dance Association of Japan and established him as an iconoclast.

The Japanese dance establishment always continued to view Hijikata, (while he was still alive) as a violent provocateur rather than an experimental innovator and he remained on the fringes of the dance and arts scene in Tokyo for the rest of his career. (Posthumously however, he has practically been sainted in Japan.) This suited him perfectly as his performance was a reaction against the Western modern dance scene entering Japan at that time which he saw as too superficial. Hijikata, “part shaman, part deconstructor groped toward a new dance form that would bridge popular and esoteric art worlds as he lamented the death of Japan.” (Fraleigh, 1999, p.12)

Hijikata—who was particularly obsessed with death, often used it as his most pressing yet uncertain muse. Stephen Barber, who has written a biography on Hijikata, has collected a large series of statements and interviews from the artist including the following from tour notes in 1983:

“Modern people are aware of the dark uneasiness in front of their eyes...but we shake hands with the dead, who send us encouragement from beyond the body. This is the unlimited power of butoh ...In butoh we can find, touch, our hidden reality—something can be born, can appear living and dying at the same moment.”

Hijikata saw Kazuo Ohno (twenty years his senior) dance once, was immediately transfixed and thus ensued a lifelong collaboration and the birth of butoh dance. Ohno’s encounter with Hijikata would forever change how he approached dance. Previously, Ohno had been very influenced by early expressionist dance like that of Mary Wigman and her students in Japan; after his collaboration with Hijikata developed, he became much more reflective about death, also using it as one of his main creative influences in his dance-making. Ohno’s son Yoshito writes “Considering the human condition from the
viewpoint of the departed provoked this crucial turnabout in Kazuo’s attitude to both life and dance.” (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.134) Kazuo felt that we are all very much inhabited by the dead, by the many generations of ancestors who have brought us here today. As he once professed in a workshop:

We’re not the fountainhead of our creative powers. Down through the ages our ancestors’ emotions and ideas have accrued and ingrained themselves in the imaginations of each successive generation. (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.254)

Hijikata had become aware by the 1980’s- both from his dancers who travelled to Europe and from the visitors to Japan becoming increasingly hungry for this particular style of dance-performance, that the title had now become abbreviated from ankoku butoh to simply butoh, stripping it of its defining darkness. He wrote a short program note for his European audiences in 1984 when his Asbestos Hall dancers (without him) travelled to Europe to perform; at this time, he introduced his philosophical preoccupations on butoh dance to his European audiences. His essential concern was to highlight the negation inherent in this dance of utter blackness, its need to provoke the body to points of crisis, thereby overturning stasis and honoring its primary position as a dance of refusal:

"Ankoku Butoh is born from the realization of a grave crisis. It’s a form of regression into the shadows, a refusal of light. And more importantly than that, Ankoku Butoh always says 'no'; it prefers negative forms, and its dancers confront their bodies without the fear of witnessing the disintegration of the body.” (Barber, 2010, p.101)

Speaking about Hijikata’s style of dance some 30 years later, Nam June Paik reveals his impression that it was “quite original, fresh and touched on the dark source of the deep Asian soul.” (Paik, 1994, p.78) However sometimes Hijikata (and butoh) could be exceptionally comedic, often experimenting with widening the definition of dance by including such activities as “eating cake, photographing the audience and shaving heads” (Baird, 2011, p.207) Nakajima Natsu, one of Hijikata’s early students asserted that Hijikata didn’t really teach anything dance related, with the exception of some classical ballet, in fact “mostly he held long lecture sessions in which they drank sake and talked about art long into the morning hours” (Calamoneri, 2012, p.9) Hijikata’s later years were spent entirely choreographing for others and he liked to invite ballerinas, boxers, and martial artists into his studio in order to show his butoh dancers how other
types of trained bodies moved. After more than a decade of a free-form, improvisational approach, Hijikata turned to deeply structured choreographic choices and gestures, even specifying particular mental imagery that he expected his dancers to project in order to affect the quality of the performance- a tool still used today by many butoh practitioners.

Hijikata lived his life at full throttle, dying at 57 of comprehensive liver failure from alcoholism. He was a dancer until the very last breath, with his last ankoku butoh offering on his death bed using gestures so universal and haunting that everyone surrounding him recognized the gestural, butoh act he indicated as he transitioned to the next realm. He allegedly crumpled up an imaginary piece of paper into a ball, rolled the ball on his chest and then placed it delicately under his chin, “sending human bodies into intricate contortions with those fingers” (Barber, 2010, p.9). Hijikata shared the same obituary page in the NYTimes in 1986 with artist Joseph Beuys and despite Hijikata never visiting the U.S. he was also given a three-column write-up. Paik writes that “Beuys and Hijikata shared the same characteristics- each kind of a watchdog of the Siberian night at the two ends of the steppe.” (Paik, 1994, p.77)

Kazuo Ohno was still performing and teaching in Japan only two years before his death at 103 years; His very presence was said to be an artistic fact. Yoshito, also one of the original butoh dancers has said of his father’s dancing: “his dance is beyond modern, beyond butoh. His dance cannot be called Japanese aging beauty or wabi sabi, he has to be modaan.” (sic) (Fraleigh and Nakamura, 2006, p.36) Kazuo Ohno continued to teach throughout his entire life, garnering a sizeable international following. In fact, he was a teacher or sensei to many of the butoh practitioners that I have danced and studied with including Jay Hirabayashi, Denise Fujiwara and Diego Pinon.

Although I have never met Kazuo, I always felt that I knew him, and I sometimes have even felt him nearby when I dance butoh. In this way butoh has always for me, remained connected to death and mystery as well as madness; this comes from Kazuo and his extraordinary approach to dance and to life. Although Kazuo was meticulous in his process in terms of writing about and exploring his sub-conscious in various ways before any improvised butoh dance performance, he maintained that “when it comes to dancing, he ought, as far as possible, to set aside all he has thought about, spoken of, and written on the subject.” (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.191) He felt, and I agree that a dancer must reach a high level of physiological awareness where her movements are
not deliberate, when the dance actually engulfs the dancer and releases her habitual gestures and patterns, a way of emptying. This is what captivates an audience.

Yoshito said that his father’s love was not warm nor tender but rather that Kazuo epitomized the kind of love that “pierces the public’s heart”. Kazuo regularly held workshops where many attendees would have no interest in butoh or dance per se but had come to hear some imparted wisdom from this master performer such as:

Your movements are not just an expression of your life’s superficial facets. Rather, they must clearly indicate how you’re connected with your inner life force. So, whether you use a fingernail, raise your small finger, or move any part of your body, harness that energy at all times. (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.127-128)

Ohno’s philosophy was grounded in the belief that if we do not venture beneath the surface of our lives, we cannot call what we do dance. As he once said, “it is the body that is the costume for the soul.” (Hoffman, Hijikata, Mishima and Holburn, 1987, p.129) Kazuo placed the utmost importance on the spiritual aspect of dance, depending entirely upon a spiritual presence in order to inhabit his ethereal movements with such fullness. He seemed to attain a level of consciousness when he danced that allowed him to release his own self and thus make an exceptional offering to his audiences. Kazuo Ohno, more than anything appeared to channel particular characters when he danced, always improvising, longing to embody their suffering. His performances drew enormous emotional response from the audiences as his body was so accurate at portraying universal gestures and emotions, and with such beauty.

In essence, Kazuo’s approach to butoh was to integrate his metaphysical ideas into his physicality and this takes a large degree of technical acuity, especially for it to hit the audience with such force as it always did with Ohno. Kazuo was able to build a perceptible link within his body for these universal metaphysical ideas to read as believable and this is because he approached butoh and performed it as a matter of life and death; his performances were therefore able to confront the audience members with their own mortality and provoke a deeply emotional response. No performer is capable of this simply by skillful, stylized steps or memorized lines. Kazuo consistently stressed the importance of “expanding our physical awareness beyond the limits of our deeply ingrained human sensibility.” (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.87) His son Yoshito has said of his father’s dance:
Kazuo is unrivaled in the way he creates the tension necessary to produce a totally credible illusion of reality on stage. With practice anybody can learn the steps of a folk dance but becoming a butoh performer demands a lot more than that. (Barrett and Ohno, 2004, p.21-24)

Hijikata never left Japan and rarely even left Tokyo beginning with his arrival from the north in 1952 until his death in 1986, while Ohno continued to extensively travel, teach and perform internationally past his 100th year, garnering a significant international following. Hijikata’s dance was mostly confrontational, much like his personality; his body trained and taut to the extreme. Ohno’s dance style was flamboyant, gender-bending and often delicate; together they created an experimental, avant-garde dance form “so closely tied to basic human emotions and sensations that it bridged cultures” (Fraleigh, 2004, p.178)

Both Hijikata and Ohno, though entirely opposite in their personalities, their approach to life and even to dance, taught butoh as a way of life, a way of being present in the body and of ultimately being receptive to the forces of mystery and nature that shape us, especially that of death. Each man offering a seemingly oppositional approach to this cathartic dance and yet these themes interwoven as such, offer us a template of the whole of life; not simply the transcendent ideals of beauty, pleasure and goodness but also the rot and excrement, the mystery that awaits us when we depart this mortal coil, the things that are quite obviously part of our human cycle, those ones we usually try to avoid looking at.

4.4. The Influence of Antonin Artaud

The main philosophical influence on butoh dance cited by both originators of the form is Antonin Artaud (1895-1948), a French surrealist, poet, playwright and mystic, who also significantly suffered most of his life from paranoid schizophrenia. Susan Sontag reminds us in her introduction to Selected Writings of Antonin Artaud, that today there are very few situations in our global, secular society that would be sufficiently extreme enough to be considered subversive and retain the ability to evade co-optation: “madness is one, what surpasses the limit of suffering (like the Holocaust) is another.” (Sontag 1976, p.xliv) Definitions of sanity are cultural and arbitrary and in the largest sense political. Artaud, who spent much of his life in an out of insane asylums, (often against his will) was also a major influence on the explosion of post-structuralist thinkers
coming out of France in the early 20th century. Artaud is considered the foremost destabilizing force in the context of the Western theatrical tradition, and his manifestos on the Theatre of Cruelty have become seminal works in performance studies. In fact, he made such a profound impression on the art of theatre, that Sontag (1976) asserts “all serious theatre in western Europe and the Americas can be said to divide into two periods- before Artaud and after Artaud.” (p.xxxviii)

Artaud was intensely driven and focused on detecting and then forcing the breakdown between art and life, audience and performer, and he believed this rupture to be most complete and accurate when marked by violence or cruelty. Artaud felt that art, particularly performance art, must be brutal to be authentic and he asserted this could only be achieved through cruelty. Artaud called for a theatre form in which the verbally oriented, trained-in-the-West actor would be re-trained as an ‘athlete’ of the heart. According to Sontag (1976), this insight shows his “inveterate taste for spiritual and physical effort and for art as an ordeal.” (p.xxxii)

Artaud conceived of theatre as the 'total act', or gersamtwerk, (a la Wagner) and he was a profound thinker in terms of the connections he made between theatre, its propensity for ritual and a metaphysics of the flesh. Artaud believed the audience should never leave the theatre intact. He felt that theatre should be based on spectacle above all else and the criterion for that spectacle be not beauty or enchantment but rather, sensory violence. In The Theatre and its Double he notes,

without an element of cruelty at the foundation of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In the state of degeneracy in which we live, it is through the skin that metaphysics will be made to re-enter our minds.” (Artaud, 1976, p.250-51)

Friedrich Nietzsche, (1844-1900) often considered the dancer’s philosopher, was perhaps the first to propose that we look at cruelty or ‘evil’ from a different angle; he saw it juxtaposed to the hypocritical and false morality of the Christian culture he was immersed in at the time. For both Artaud and Nietzsche, cruelty and specifically evil, represented freedom from the false confines of especially Christian morality structures; in this sense, ‘evil’ or more accurately, darkness became synonymous with nature, natural forces and the opposite of civilization. Nietzsche relates in On the Genealogy of Morality, originally published in 1887, that he had contemplated the origins of good and evil as young as 13 and devoted his first philosophical treatise to this question at that
age. Soon this developed into the question “under what conditions did man invent those value judgements good and evil? And what value do they themselves have?” (Nietzsche, 1998, p.2) He expressed what he characterized as the moral breakdown in the Western psyche and sought to find understanding and solution by confronting our innate evil capacities as humans. Nietzsche reminded us to look at morality as a system, a rope with so many strands that it could no longer possibly hold one concise meaning; instead morality at this stage in our cultural ‘evolution’, represents an entire synthesis of meanings, impossible to separate one from the other strands.) He put forth the idea of a ‘trans-valuation of values’, which of course helped set the stage for post-modernism to be birthed in the West. Way ahead of his time, Nietzsche understood that morality changes as histories and cultures change and in fact, there is nothing inherently immoral about our being because we come from nature. (Nietzsche, 1887/1998)

Nietzsche, like Artaud after him, saw human ‘darkness’ as a necessary pit-stop on the way to expanding beyond the poles of good and evil and he hoped that by acknowledging our myriad forces and personality archetypes, we could thus embrace and celebrate the full spectrum of our humanity. Both men recognized that Western culture mostly only supressed the shadow or dark side, that the full spectrum of human potential had been eliminated by decisively Christian moral tendencies and systems of moral structure based on transcendence. This was markedly different from the morality structure of the ancient Greeks for example, who believed that by inviting Dionysus, the god of wine, chaos, and ritual madness to dance, human reality could then be accurately reflected and revealed. Nietzsche communicated this when he declared in the final words of his de facto autobiography *Ecce Homo*: “Have you understood me? Dionysus vs. Christ.” Nietzsche, who carried the amoral spirit of Dionysus and the trickster, was looking towards a middle ground for Western thought by exploring the very outer edges of the psyche.

Nietzsche sought to articulate what Carl Jung (1875-1961) would later describe as the integration of the animus/anima. Artaud, Nietzsche and Jung all agreed that modern society and consciousness suffered from a lack of shadows and/or acknowledgement of the darker forces. All three men felt that by confronting and then inviting our shadow sides to dance, the self could safely grow toward the optimal condition of psychic health; what Jung called individuation, what Nietzsche called ‘the will to power’ and what Artaud articulated through his Theatre of Cruelty. It seems
relevant to mention that none of these men lived to see the massive circulation of images which represent the 20th and then 21st centuries; neither man lived in an age of snuff films, casual be-headings on Youtube, the ability to view child pornography images with one click, or any of the other visual atrocities we live so casually with today.

Today we are forced to wonder if cruelty is a worthwhile topic to explore; particularly in our sea of simulation. We are still asking how to reduce violence, hatred and cruelty in the world, and it seems that looking back through history has not given us many clues. That meaningful, transforming suffering for one person can look like brutal, preventable violence to another seems to indicate that the experience of suffering is not always universal, and in fact the experience of suffering is entirely subjective, depending on life experience, support systems, length of time enduring etc. Does contemplating cruelty move us in that direction as Thich Nact Hahn suggests? Will spending time with cruelty in the mind alone sow the seeds of aggression and hate? Cruelty in many ways has now become ubiquitous. The compulsive occurrence of our real-world crises is at such a degree today, that cruelty or violence in art is not only redundant, but defeatist and unimportant. Shock, especially through violence or cruelty, has become cliché. Today art certainly holds more value if its creator and ultimate message are enveloped into the benevolent or at the very least, critical of cruelty because as Maggie Nelson reminds us, “cruelty bears an intimate relationship to stupidity as well as intelligence.” (Nelson, 2011, p.10)

Artaud saw western theatre and indeed western culture as entirely petrified and deadened by the written word, what Sontag describes as a ‘domestication of agony’ through the repetition of words and language. For Artaud, cruelty, thought and language were intimately linked; for instance, thinking and speaking are invariably always accompanied by certain forms of power and violence. As well, we can see that thoughts use language, but language actually solidifies and defines thought. For Artaud, linguistic repetition was dishonest, and it summarized negativity; Artaud saw that “the truth” had come to represent only that which could be infinitely repeated (as in scientific methodology) and as Jacques Derrida (2004) said, “the menace of repetition is nowhere else as well organized as in the theatre.” (p.42) According to Derrida, Artaud felt that repetition “separates force, presence and life from themselves” (Derrida, 2004, p. 41-42) For Artaud, the repetition involved in the theatrical rehearsal process killed the creative, pre-cognitive spark that gives performers their presence on stage.
Artaud insisted on the value of force over form and approached all his theatrical works with this value at the forefront. Artaud’s main pre-occupation with performance was his wish to eliminate this repetition and to challenge both the performer and the audience with what he described as a “metaphysics of action” or a “physics of absolute gesture.” (Artaud, 1976, p.237) Artaud showed a deep philosophical grasp on the importance of body knowledge and its counterpart in expression. His essential concern, which has very much influenced present day theatre training methodologies including butoh, was to find the necessity of any given gesture, to expose its urgency and therefore to transform consciousness. Hijikata and Ohno became engaged with Artaud’s philosophy via similar ideas surrounding “formulations of corporeal gesture as an act of anatomical refusal or transformation.” (Barber, 2010, p.33)

Hijikata and Ohno developed the notion put forth by Artaud of a great cathartic release, a transgression beyond acceptable conventions, what Growtowski called “a purification by violence and cruelty.” (Growtowski, 2004, p.63) The theme of cruelty necessarily implies an act with or upon another being, however butoh dance explores transgression through internal crisis, a way of facing duress and disintegration—both physical and mental, within the self. Butoh seeks out the place of terror, a shocking encounter which often provokes a liminal experience, but I have never experienced anything that I would call cruelty or deprived suffering on any level. Artaud aligned transgression with ‘pure cruelty’ because it signified for him “rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination.” (Nelson, 2011, p.6) Cruelty for Artaud, must furthermore always be authentic. He recognized that artistic boundaries are always crossed at the same ratio as people are reviled; it is the integration of that revulsion which creates a new (artistic) movement. Cruelty then becomes an intensification of consciousness; it is a generative type of violence or disruption, capable of moving us beyond our regular perception and understanding.

In many ways, agony supplies a vast amount of energy, capable of catapulting us beyond our regular positioning because of its very intensity. There is no way to escape the burning anguish of agony, so cruelty then comes to embody and articulate the third or liminal space, the place of no escape. For Artaud, this was a place of mindfulness and if not tranquillity, then certainly of profound acceptance. Artaud felt that the nervous system contained much information and Hijikata certainly heightened and emphasized this idea, particularly in his own performances. Butoh aims to directly assault the body
through the fluid systems including the nerves, lymph, blood, synovial and as well as through the organs and glands. Growtowski, Hijikata, Ohno and Artaud all understood the catalyzing force lying dormant within restriction. This sense of holding back is also a basic guiding principle for many butoh practitioners today and it creates not only a striking and intense aesthetic but also, a tangible presence, a force felt within and between audience and performer.

Artaud, as well as Hijikata and Ohno (among other master butoh dancers) worked at the extreme edges of the psyche as well as the extremes of gesture and movement in order to provoke what Miryam Sas describes as “something more primal than meaning, something intimately linked with pain.” (Sas, 2011, p.171) Many present-day butoh practitioners, teachers and choreographers continue to use this methodology to drive the dancer to reach a certain point of crisis internally either physically or mentally. Butoh definitely uses a brutal sense of bodily crisis to tap into its authenticity, however, Hijikata and Ohno translated the idea of ‘pure cruelty’ into emptiness, more akin to the state of satori in the Zen tradition, and ‘purification by violence and cruelty’ is translated through the body as physical duress, nothing new to a dancer. I have certainly experienced the extreme edges of physical endurance—particularly when training and performing with Kokoro Dance but there was a feeling of relief and redemption so that it never felt like something to endure.

4.5. Non-Dualism, the Heart of Butoh Dance

Despite its global spread, continued evolvement and transmutation, some still consider butoh to be a Japanese art, in part because it was born in Japan and because it employs a non-dualistic approach to teaching and performing, one that is ingrained in the Asian psyche but still quite unfamiliar to the Western mind/body. Several Asian traditions and philosophies seemed to grasp the idea of unnatural dualism long before the West and embraced liminal reality, paradox and the grey zones of life fluidly and with little conceptual difficulty. Butoh dance is sometimes expressed as a manifestation of the mystical feminine (yin) aspect that makes up the underlying cosmology of many Asian spiritual traditions. Grounded-ness and transcendence are both equally explored in butoh, a dance where both sexuality and death are considered very fertile sources of creativity. From an Eastern perspective, it is seen as uniquely and ignorantly Western to separate the opposing forces of the universe when everything and all are part of the
same. The kernel of light resides within the darkness and vice versa. The tyranny of dualism has not existed in the East until more recently, only due to strong influences from the West. In Eastern metaphysics, the inherent (Western) assumption about the superiority of rational intelligence is seriously questioned. Likewise, all (butoh) dancers employ the notion that language is only one way to communicate and is not necessarily the most effective because it always creates bifurcations into subject and object, as least in the English language.

Non-duality in Japanese traditions addresses the subject-object divergence, which has confounded so many Western philosophers, as there is no major split between the mind and body in Japanese thinking as well as no major difference between ‘I’ and “we” in the Japanese language. In Japanese, the word for person is *ningen* which is two characters- one defines person and the other is the ‘space between’ which connotes the continuous inter-relatedness which we can never escape, and which provides humanity with social meaning. Also, *karada* is the word for body in Japanese and it is intimately linked with *kara*, the word for emptiness. According to Japan’s most celebrated philosopher, Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945), we are both bodies that see (subjects) as well as bodies which are seen (objects.) This is also how Merleau-Ponty endeavoured to define consciousness: “le voyant et le visible” but Nishida pre-supposed the existence of others in the life space and story that we each occupy.

Nishida, seeking a synthesis between Eastern and Western approaches in the field of philosophical inquiry, gives us a glimpse into the differing characters of the Eastern and Western minds and thus the potential differences in perceptual abilities. In the preface to his book, *From the Actor to the Seer* (1927) he states:

> It goes without saying that there are many things to be esteemed and learned in the brilliant development of Western culture, which regards form as being and formation as the good. However, at the basis of Asian culture, which has fostered our ancestors for over several thousand years, lies something that can be called seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless. Our minds are compelled to seek for this. (Nishida, 1990, p. x)

In his life-time, Nishida set about achieving an unprecedented intellectual pursuit, that is, he sought to articulate certain Zen concepts and insights within the terms and framework of the Western philosophical tradition. (Carter, 1989; Nakagawa, 2000; Wargo 2005; Wilkinson 2009.) Nishida’s writing on the intersection between Western
logic and empiricism and that of Japanese Zen, established him as a top-notch philosopher of the twentieth century. Nishida struggled with the great philosophical questions of his time, namely how to reconcile the juxtaposition of western science and technology with traditional Japanese values as well as the more universal philosophical problem of what is compared to what ought to be, that is, the difference between fact and value. Thomas Kasulis, a well-known American scholar on all subjects Eastern, reminds us in the foreword to *The Nothingness Beyond God*:

“If Japanese values were to co-exist alongside Western empiricism, there would have to be a common philosophical structure embracing and grounding the two. Otherwise Japan would intellectually at least, suffer cultural schizophrenia” (Carter, 1989, p.xii)

Nishida had a hard time reconciling what he considered to be a great blind spot in Western empiricism- namely that the observer is to be eliminated for the proper assimilation of objective knowledge. If we can so easily eliminate the role of the observer, then it suggests rather profoundly, that the observer's role can be ignored or is perhaps not even necessary. “The philosophic 'assurance' of many in the several Western philosophic traditions has been the desirability of objectivity and the primacy of the grammatical subject in logic” (Carter,1989, p.16) In the Cartesian idea of res extensa, the body becomes merely an aspect of spatial awareness- understood to be that *object* closest to self, which is how we arrive at the Western epistemology which opposes subject and object. Here the essence of the self disappears “in the rarified atmosphere of a logic that disregards the body.” (Yuasa, 1987, p.59) For Nishida, the behaving or acting self can never be viewed as an object for the self as activity will forever elude us with its changes. For Nishida, who spent time at a Zen monastery in practise, action symbolized and became the factuality of experience.

Nishida considered Aristotle to be the grandfather of the Western empirical tradition and he felt it was at this place in the history of philosophy that Western thinking first gave legitimacy to linguistic matters over those of sensation. Nishida early in his career was very fond of the work of William James and specifically his notions on “pure experience”- later developed by John Dewey and others, to articulate the experience of unity which Nishida felt was “mental activity devoid of the bifurcations into subject and object.” (Kasulis, 1981, p.62) In this framework, pure experience is ontologically prior to the split between noesis and noema. In this sense, thought is merely a break in the
origination of experience as unity within the body. This coincides with theories in Zen
Buddhism, whose ideal achievement of a pre-verbal, non-intellectual state of
experiential purity (satori) runs rather close in definition to what Nishida called
“intellectual intuition”. It’s also the blueprint for how to dance fluidly.

The noetic and noematic comprise the entirety of existential consciousness,
however, Nishida employed ideas around to the unity of opposites to convey that we live
in a paradoxical world. He writes: “We see in the world there is neither absolute truth,
beauty and good, nor absolute falsehood, ugliness and evil.” (Nishida, 1990, p.143)
Also, “through the aperture of consciousness which is the logical subject/object,
noetic/noematic mode, reality appears as a contradiction and not as a synthesis” (Carter,
1989, p.62) Nishida understood that truly personal awareness can only arise from “an
active intuition of one’s own contradictory embodiment of individual historical existence”
(Nishida, 1987, p.5) If we express the world as a series of individual acts and each act
represents our unique position as self-forming, we can use this to transcend inwardly to
the depths of noesis. Nishida confirms that basic Buddhist principles align the self with
the universe: “To know reality is not to know something external to the self but to know
the self itself.” (Nishida, 1990, p.143)

Eastern philosophies which include somatic practice, generally treat the body-
mind connection as an achievement rather than merely an essential relation; the wisdom
that comes from meditation for example must be integrated both physically and mentally.
If Western philosophy does envisage a mind-body connection, it is essentially formulated
as a solid, unchanging part of the body like the pineal gland or some other specific part
of the brain. The relationship between mind and body in Western methodologies
appears constant rather than developing. In Eastern traditions and philosophies, one can
in fact seek for a perfected human state through discipline and personal cultivation,
through training of both mind and body, and it is an ever-changing position.

The central question in Eastern metaphysics concerns “the practical problem of
personality development rather than cosmology.” (Yuasa, 1987, p.79) Early Chinese
pragmatists who helped shape Buddhism as it migrated to Japan, tended to focus on
questions of how rather than why, as why questions, like those often probed in the West,
tended to lead to “theories and logic which are inescapably verbal and inevitably yield
hopeless paradox” (Carter, 1989, p.19) The how questions on the other hand tend to
address the fact that we live in societies, are shaped by them and are therefore historical beings. If we see our social relationships as inter-dependant and inevitable, we might treat each other differently, perhaps better.

Central to the doctrine of (Zen) Buddhism is the notion that every individual contains an ultimate seer, a buddha nature and that the extraordinary experience of enlightenment or satori- which is an achievement of nothingness, emptiness, the void or *mu*, is available to everyone but usually only under the auspices of disciplined training and study. The experience of satori is beyond language and all semantic utterances are ultimately only an expression, that is, an incomplete portion of the whole and thus, cannot be said to represent truth. Zen maintains that intellectual and rational beliefs are not only unnecessary, but in fact a hindrance on the search for ultimate truth or reality. In Zen, the body must take the lead precisely because of its sensory intelligence, for “when this is accomplished, the self-conscious self drops away and the bright, self-reflective consciousness yields to a deeper unity of body and mind.” (Yuasa, 1987, p.82)

It is the body, not the analytical brain that begins to decipher the subconscious.

As we try to get closer to the essence of butoh, we find a strong link to Asian traditions which view somatic practices as a path to enlightened thinking, such as martial arts and certain Zen methods. For example, butoh emulates the master/disciple or sensai/student relationship so fondly embedded in Japanese Zen philosophy /religion and also seen in many martial arts practices. Butoh is certainly also a performance art- I recently saw a production of Paradise (2017) by Japan's foremost and longest running butoh dance company- *Dairakudakan* and it was a spectacular exposition of talent and showmanship that you would expect from a performance at one of Vancouver's premiere theatres. Yet there is something distinctly and aesthetically different about butoh dance than other modern dance performances- it affected me at a different level and the imagery has stayed with me much longer than with other contemporary dance pieces I've seen. It reached my nervous system.

In many ways, butoh was aligning its philosophy of a constrictive, spasmodic and alternately, intensely silent dance practice with some fundamental principles inherent in (Zen) Buddhism. These include notions around suffering; the law of opposition which has the tendency to manifest itself in another esoteric practice of non-attachment, climaxing in a non-attachment to life itself. Other Zen concepts that butoh has adopted
include ‘beginner’s mind’ and ‘absolute emptiness’, both esoteric practices which are not easily explained via cognitive approaches. Both Kazuo and his son Yoshito Ohno - who is still teaching today, often use the word mushin to describe their approach to butoh performance; it’s a combination of the kanji for nothingness (mu) and mind (shin) and it is best translated as ‘intentionless’ or ‘intuitive’. In Buddhist discourse mushin often describes a person who is free from mundane desires and attachments, such as an innocent child or an insane person.

Both butoh and the Zen ideal incorporate the existential concept of ‘beginner’s mind’. (Fraleigh, 1999) and encourage practitioners to be receptive to spontaneity without first objectifying it, as a means to define oneself. Any practice can become rigid and mechanical and most serious practitioners know to guard against this by continually approaching the practice with fresh eyes; this is the heart of the Zen concept of ‘beginner’s mind.’ Butoh teachers work with this concept by asking dancers to do impossible tasks like “disperse into nothingness.” These activities are meant to turn the thinking mind off- quite like the Zen koan. In a workshop I took with Denise Fujiwara in Toronto (2012) for example, we spent 4 full days “becoming water.” - exercises which encouraged several hours of practice in the same position or mind-state. In a more recent workshop with Mari Osanai in Portland (2017) the practice was ‘melting’ towards the floor for over an hour, feeling each creak in the bones, each strain on the ligaments; or moving ecstatically until the sensation of exhaustion is so compelling and overwhelming that it becomes hard to focus on anything else, including thoughts.

There have been many comparisons to disruptive art like Dadaism, and butoh was certainly influenced by early expressionist experiments like Neutanz Theatre, Theatre of the Absurd, Surrealist art and poetry, as well as the formalist choreography of American modern dance. The true origins of butoh however, sought to recover nature, to reunite with early Japanese folk roots, sharing a deep connection with both Zen Buddhism and Shintoism. Sondra Fraleigh (2010) writes: “Butoh looks metaphysically inward, leveling desire and dissolving materialism. In this respect, its psychological core and healing alchemy is Buddhist. (p.5) Butoh remains today deeply connected to nature and natural forces and uses the ephemerality of dance to connect to this power. Butoh fosters depth and personal growth by way of its profundity.
Chapter 5. *Butoh Dance as Ugly Art*

![Image of a dancer in a white dress with arms outstretched]

**Figure 5.** Ugliness Awakens True Beauty  
Photographer Andrew Dodd Clippingdale

“Tantalus is mankind and every man alive is a menagerie of vampires”

-Antonin Artaud-

### 5.1. The Politics of Ugly

As I continue to train and perform in modern/contemporary dance alongside my training in butoh, I’m often struck by the vast difference between these two forms of ‘modern’ or post-modern dance. The butoh body is not refined but instead awkward, ungraceful and non-conforming, a deliberate choice made by Hijikata when he developed this dance form, based on the hindrances of his own body. He had injured himself as a child, thus always having one leg shorter than the other, thereby preventing him from entering the strictly coded world of the ballet, but it did not hinder his stubborn decision to become a dancer. His rejection from the codified, ‘beautiful’ world of ballet fueled an intense drive to discover and express sensations and gestures at the opposite end of that spectrum or dialectic. Butoh retains its transgressive nature by expressing
the non-beautiful possibilities of the body, exploring crisis through themes like obsession, madness, trauma and deformity.

Many dancers and choreographers I know have expressed extreme aversion to butoh as a dance form, using words like “hate” and ‘detest” to describe their experience of seeing butoh performed. When I was training to dance in a professional setting for example, I heard from many colleagues and dancers who said they were sometimes unable to even look at me while I was performing butoh; they related that it simply made them too uncomfortable. Interestingly these same colleagues– trained and immersed in dance, were unable to articulate what they did not like, or the precise elements that made it uncomfortable to watch, but I believe they simply found butoh ugly. I think that is also amazing at this point in history, when we are saturated with so many disturbing and unwanted images every day, when we can find all manner of sexual and violent depravity with one click. ‘Ugliness’ in the dance world then becomes a domain which retains subversive strategies, even today.

Should dance not remain as the last bastion of classical beauty and be protected from ugly choreographic choices? Many contemporary choreographers and indeed audience members feel strongly that dance should be only beautiful, that it should be protected as a domain to express the fluid, expressive joy and beauty of a free and moving body. I met a professional (butoh) dancer who had reached her limit with this form when some semi-famous choreographer asked her to roll around naked in pig-shit and she got urinated on by a horse. For her, this kind of activity no longer represented the beauty of dance and she longed to go back to the ballet style where she had begun her dance career. Butoh purposely infiltrates into ugly, contracted and disturbing places, a signification of its attitude and purpose, because butoh understands that artistic boundaries are crossed at precisely the same rate as people are revolted and reviled. Butoh seeks to portray an ugliness which disturbs beauty because of its potency and universality. Butoh also shows us that it is often this ugly body that rouses true beauty.

There is perhaps no other domain where hegemonic assumptions are so firmly in place as they are in the ideologies of beauty and desire. Beauty, and particularly sexual desirability, is a major mechanism of regulation and domination and has been used in racist/colonial systems to implement control for centuries. We can certainly see that dominant (white) notions of beauty are still very much adhered to in this age of the
ubiquitous and constant image but this mechanism of control began centuries ago. In order to assert hegemonic control in this domain and in order for this mechanism to work efficiently, beauty must be pitted against ugliness; a dialectic rooted in dualistic thinking, and in the subject object split so ingrained in Western thinking. In this way both beauty and ugliness become evaluative judgements within an aesthetic category and are fundamentally only properties of the visual, of seeing.

The term ‘aesthetics’ arrived in 1750 via Alexander Baumgarten, as an essentially post-Cartesian discourse concerned with self; this was concomitant with the rise of the rational (male) subject as ‘supreme knower’. Aesthetics was also concerned with the subject-object divide and there was little distinction made between object and other. As Laura Kipnis asserts in *Ecstasy Unlimited*, the post-Cartesian aesthetic discourse is paramount to “the constitution of subject positions from which first-world domination is effected and reproduced.” She notes that modern aesthetics was essentially “an episode of the bourgeois ego.” (Kipnis, 1993, p.210-211) Art historian Nina Athanassogly-Kallmyer (2018) asserts in her piece simply titled “Ugliness” that the dialectic of beauty and ugliness and its aesthetic structure has always been concerned with “issues of hierarchy, value and power.” (p. 33) She notes that historically, ugliness was intimately connected with evil and was linked to “marginality, the politically, economically and socially disenfranchised, the racially other (blacks and Jews, among others.)” (ibid) Aesthetics continue to play a crucial role in the operations of colonization, power dynamics and hegemonic control even today.

In the aesthetic context, the dialectic of beauty and ugliness appears to arise as an attributive or descriptive function rather than as an insidious process of coercion and control. Aesthetic judgement however, is a fundamental and vital site of dissemination and control precisely because it is evaluative in its function. A position of judgement, (read superiority) is specifically what is necessary to dominate another culture and therefore aesthetic judgement is perfectly structured to disseminate and produce colonial ideologies. We know for instance, that beauty and goodness have long been intimately associated with whiteness while conversely, the other, racialized body often gets associated with “ugliness and moral failing.” (Przybylo and Rodrigues, 2018, p.10) Historically, ugliness was considered to be an indication of moral deficiency and was seen as an affront to reason and classical ideas surrounding beauty and harmony. Firm
ideas about what constitutes beauty and ugliness are essentially perfect for controlling populations through standards of desire.

Beauty but especially ugliness historically served to instill cultural control and enforce assimilation through mechanisms like the ugly laws which had become widespread in the U.S and Europe by the late 19th century. These ugly laws were used as a tool of the state to exclude certain people from the public sphere based on the notion that their bodies were capable of producing aversion and extreme discomfort in others. As Susan Schweik (2009) notes in *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, these ‘unsightly’ bodies were seen as polluting to the public space because they were somehow disabled, deformed, sickly, smelly or ‘unsightly.’ These ugly laws then operated as a major link between racism, classism, ableism and settler colonial mentality. (Schweik, 2009) Rodrigues and Przybylo assert in the introduction to *On the Politics of Ugliness* (2018) that the ugly laws also functioned as a reflection of the importance of (public) appearance, particularly how one appears to “those with the power to see.” (p.1)

These laws are still leveraged today to uphold notions of worth, entitlement and social standing. For example, loitering and/or panhandling laws as well as more recent immigration laws, the reservation system and eugenics (very much still practiced around the world, as well as right here at home) all function as an instrument of social control by aesthetically or visually identifying those who present what Mary Unger refers to as “a social or cultural danger to the nation.” (Unger, 2013, p.125) These laws and the codes of conduct they engender are specifically deployed to keep other-bodied individuals subjugated and publicly controlled. Heather Laine Talley asserts in *Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance*, (2014) that ugliness like fascism, both involve a pattern of bias which “systematically disadvantages those whose appearance is at odds with dominant conventions of attractiveness.” (p.14) Ugliness operates as a means of social control by inhabiting a shared category which “demarcates one’s rights and access to social, cultural and political spaces.” (Rodrigues and Przybylo, 2018, p.1) In this sense, the manufacture of ugliness leaves the aesthetic realm and becomes entirely political.

The conscious manipulation of populations through their habits, opinions and fears is an important and insidious feature of 21st century capitalism. Those who
manipulate these mechanisms of control hold ultimate power, and they are almost always invisible men that we have never met. Political parties and their representatives are not part of this invisible system of control for example, but the beauty industry most certainly is. The ideal capitalist market is one where the goods are besides the point. In this capacity, the beauty industry functions beautifully in a capitalist model because it is entirely based on fear. Capitalism and its systematic hierarchy is predicated on the idea of a scarcity of goods; this concept is adeptly employed in the beauty industry where the ‘scarcity’ of standardized beauty is signified by the limited amount of (white) representations supposedly depicting ultimate beauty. This provokes an intense hunger to conform through a host of products and continuously revolving fashions and ‘looks’.

Ugliness and beauty as a dialectic is a deeply political framework with far-reaching tentacles of influence and control. The production of ugliness thus becomes “dependant on disciplinary codes of appearance and conduct” just like the production of beauty. (Rodrigues and Przybylo, 2018, p.8) The beauty industry- including products, fashion and ways of looking aesthetically, is all systematically designed to prey upon insecurity and it feeds on people’s sense of their own deformity. We can observe that the unreasonable/impossible to achieve beauty standards have been almost entirely directed at women using this strategy of control and coercion. Today however, due to advertising and the capitalist system run amok, we can see that controlling populations via standards of desire is now shifting to include (white) men- evidenced by the rise of the metro-sexual man who now has equal access to product endorsement and is concerned with fashion, man-scaping, and body image.

This sense of difference or deformity has of course been internalized by the colonized races most dramatically because of their (manufactured) otherness. The hegemonic installation of power requires non-whites to believe in their inherent deformity and then conform to the standardized dictates of Westernized beauty. The global paradigm of beauty continues to promote a Euro-centric or Caucasian ‘look’ which has been internalized negatively by especially, non-white races. This is indicated by the multi-billion-dollar industry of consumer products such as skin -whiteners, hair-straighteners and other such ‘whitening’ products created for and directed at Africans, Asians- including Indians, and other non- white races, to subtly coerce an abeyance to these supremacist ideals.
Tafari-Ama, writing about specific manifestations of these supremacist beauty standards in Jamaica, speaks about conforming to (white) ideas of beauty enhancement as a form of social and personal psychosis. The performance of this racialized embodiment demonstrates personal and cultural psychosis because of an unexamined belief that white is better, more beautiful. The body itself thus becomes central to the discourse of superiority/inferiority, as well as sexist and racist ideals set by hard-to-achieve, coercive and irrational beauty standards. Tafari-Ama considers the lengths that Jamaican women will go to, including the use of very toxic, harmful chemicals and products designed to strip pigment, in order to achieve this white idea of beauty, as a form of insanity or psychosis because it is literally harmful to one’s skin, body and overall health. (Tafari- Ama, 2016) This behavior and conforming to white ideas of beauty in general is not unique to Jamaican women but is rather quite universal at this stage in history.

Talley asserts that rather than attempting to make a person beautiful, myriad regulatory devices and procedures are actually aimed at making one ‘not ugly.’ She writes: “Girls dream of being beautiful—but perhaps equally important, girls fear being ugly.” (Talley, 2014, p.4) She notes that this desire to ‘not be ugly’ is deeply imbedded in the fear of bodily variance and a conforming desire to appear as normal. This desire is, at the most fundamental level, “a desire to live outside of the stigma of ugliness.” (p.105) Talley asserts that most hetero-normative, especially women, fear being ugly above all else, thus creating a huge industry around this fear. Talley also notes that the fear of ugliness is essentially a fear of the future at its core, “as if a good life is exclusively determined by what we look like.” (p.4) Rodrigues (2018) asserts that the dialectic of beauty and ugliness still functions today as a “key determinant in what kind of life we can expect to live.” (Rodrigues et al, 2018 p.1) In terms of upward mobility, success and high achievement in the work force, beautiful people still open the most doors.

The word ugly comes from *ugga*, an old Norse word denoting aggression; it’s this initial sense of violence that is disturbing when we witness a phenomenon we would describe as ugly. Beauty is predictable and sedative rather than challenging and there is much more variety and surprise in ugliness. Julia Kristeva notes that ugliness or what she refers to as ‘abjection’ disturbs the order of the system, not for a “lack of cleanliness or health” but because ugliness or abjection does not respect “borders, positions, rules”, instead representing “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” (Kristeva, 1982,
Nina Athanassogly-Kallmyer describes ugliness as an “all-purpose repository” for everything that doesn’t fit neatly into the social mold. (Athanassogly-Kallmyer, 2018, p.31) Consequently there are a wide variety of similar, sometimes overlapping, yet distinct terms to describe this phenomenon, for example everything from ‘plain’ to ‘monstrous’ or ‘evil’ can describe ugliness. In this way, ugliness represents a strategy of resistance by residing in the domain of ambiguity.

The ‘ugly body’ today continues to be indicative of margins and social boundaries. However, the utilization of ugliness as a method of oppression and social control ultimately works against even the most privileged, dominant classes because everyone will eventually succumb to the ‘ugliness’ of old age, sickness and disability in one way or another. Ugliness works as a tool of separation and degradation and we can certainly see the application of this in our societal treatment of the sick and elderly; we generally keep them out of sight. Ugliness like old age or sickness can also be considered a process of de-sexualization or a process where one is rendered undesirable and therefor unwanted, disposable, disregarded.

Ugliness like beauty is a feeling, an affect; we intuitively know which category we belong to. Breanne Fahs relates in her piece Imagining Ugliness: Shame and Disgust Written onto the ‘Other’ Body, that many studies show a strong correlation between emotions and how (women) relate to or accept their own bodies. These studies suggest that “negative emotions are a key factor in the construction and maintenance of body image and ideas about the relationship between bodies and social identities.” (Fahs, 2018, p.250) The limited standards of beauty and the lies predicated on these standards consciously manipulate women and men through feelings of inferiority and lack. This technique can be just as easily applied to bodies even very close to the ‘perfected’ beauty standard because everyone will one day get old; this is also what keeps the emphasis on youth so firmly in place.

Butoh dance often presents the body as the opposite of conventional beauty - using ‘less than perfect bodies’ and choreography which specifically makes use of the imperfect impulses originating within this ugly body. Butoh uses these themes of ‘ugliness’ as a strategy of resistance; in a world of air-brushed and flawless beauty standards perpetuated by the dominant (racist) discourses around notions of desirability, choosing ‘ugliness’ can indeed be considered subversive. To make a deliberate choice
to portray the ‘ugly body’ in a world of modified and extreme beauty is a bold and rebellious choice, one sorely needed to fight the current and lingering hegemonic/colonial assumptions about aesthetics and their manifestations in this world of optics.

Although some may see this dance on the spectrum of beauty and ugliness, butoh in fact seeks to remove itself entirely from this dialectic. Butoh purposefully infiltrates the liminal spaces full of ambiguity and uncertainty, erasing the firm lines of binary opposition and dialectic, finding a place at whichever end of the spectrum feels right in the moment. This hybridization and ambiguity in butoh does not lessen or neutralize the transgressive power of ugliness within/upon the social order, but rather affirms and heightens it by refusing to be placed in the ugly/beautiful dialectic at all. The mixing and mingling of elements normally associated as opposite and therefore incompatible, unsettles and disturbs fixed notions of binaryism. Butoh continues to enjoy a reputation as a ritualistic as well as performative art form today; it draws people in because this dance allows the waters of beauty and ugliness to co-mingle, alchemizing a new kind of consciousness through, in, and of the body, one not disturbed by paradox.

5.2. Aesthetics of Butoh: Art of Uncertainty

Japanese aesthetics, both traditional as well as modern, show us that the airbrushed, youth-based and perfection-based beauty found in Western cultures is not necessarily revered in Japan. For instance, many people in Japan share the attitude that old age provides its own kind of beauty, what Yoshito Ohno calls “the beauty of withering away.” (Barrett and Ohno, 2011, p.92) This decrepitude, a representation of the liminal space between life and death, is a beauty that a young dancer could never accurately portray with authenticity. This is why it is acceptable in butoh to dance well into ‘old’ age and we see a significant number of older dancers around the butoh diaspora. In Japan they have special dances for the elderly- in which Kazuo Ohno was regularly honored. Despite his faltering, withering body, Kazuo continued to perform past the age of 100, engaging with what he called his “chair dances” near the very end of his life. In contrast, with ballet for example, dancers often retire by the age of 30 because their bodies have endured so much wear and tear and are no longer representational of the youthful, ethereal beauty so revered in the ballet world.
In the West, we set beauty up as the opposite of ugliness, something to cling to while the ugly things in life remain abhorrent, to be avoided at all costs. Conversely, *Wabi sabi* and many other aesthetic notions popular in Japan, cherish and celebrate ambiguity, impermanence and the fragility of life. The Japanese aesthetic realm often remains a completely foreign concept to Westerners, in part because the terms are so profoundly specific and often have no direct translation. For example, the concept of *yugen* represents the profundity of a suggestion rather than a revelation; this relates to *shizen*, a celebration of the lack of pretence or artificiality, also in line with the Japanese, ‘less-is-more’ minimalist aesthetic; and *shibui* which is often translated as beauty with inner implications. These and other aesthetic values, shaped by ancient ideals are an integral part of every aspect of life in Japan. These poetic values express the cycle of life as a dynamic whole rather than the falsely separated binary of beauty pitted against ugliness that we see here in the West.

*Wabi sabi* began as an aesthetic movement in the 15th century Japan as a reaction against the lavishness, ornamentation and extravagance current in aristocratic circles of the time. It is broadly defined as everything commercial Western beauty *isn’t*. It is not the sleek, mass-produced, shiny beauty that captures the Western eye so easily, but rather reflects an understated, raw and fleeting beauty, one that can never last. It is also sometimes expressed as the simultaneity of beauty and ugliness. *Wabi sabi* celebrates the entirety of nature’s cycle- including decay, rot and death; it appreciates and celebrates cracks, crevices, earthiness, imperfection and especially, the marks of time. “To discover wabi-sabi is to see the singular beauty in something that may first look decrepit and ugly.” (Lawrence, 2001) Wabi Sabi arose from and continues to be connected to the ancient Tea Ceremony which most (all?) Japanese people take very seriously. As Okakura asserts in his *Book of Tea*, tea is “a religion of the art of life”, tea is an excuse for “the worship of purity and refinement” and tea also celebrates “the utmost beatitude of the mundane.” (Okakura, 2006, p.25)

One could also say that tea is the *Tao* in disguise. Aesthetics and spirituality are woven into the fabric of everyday living in Japan, so there is no separation of life from art. As Okakura (2006) notes, the Tao is “the Passage rather than the Path” (p.28) Chinese historians speak of Taoism as “the art of being in the world.” (Okakura, 2006, p.32) This ‘art of life’ requires constant re-adjustment to our surroundings, a way of staying entirely present to our daily lives. In fact, Taoism is often considered the main
contribution to Japanese aesthetics, as it tries to find beauty in the mundane, the terrible and the bleak; the wholeness of life, and again this corresponds dynamically with the tastes of wabi sabi. As Taoism met with Zen Buddhism in Japan, the basis for these aesthetic ideals was made practical and liveable through Zen practices. Okakura says; “Art, to be fully appreciated, must be true to contemporaneous life.” (p.47) Butoh, being born in Japan would certainly have been influenced by these aesthetic concepts running through the Japanese psyche for so many centuries.

Butoh is an art which seeks to heal the rift between the highly integrated, civilized and repressed social - cultural self, and the genuine ‘natural’ self, by creating ritualistic acts of transgression in a performance setting. It is acceptable in butoh to experiment and tap into personal states of mind (and body); a very post-modern approach in an art form concerned with transformation. Butoh seeks to disrupt patterns of habit by questioning the meaning of beauty, ugliness and what it truly means to be human. Key features of this idea include gender malleability; pushing the body to points of pain and crisis- through both stillness and cathartic gestures; nudity- a representation of the return to nature, and finally death and decay. Butoh’s aesthetics value decay, disintegration, catharsis and chaos as well as perversity, deformity, addiction and crisis. Such expressions of darkness, the urges of an untamed (Japanese) psyche, veering away from standardized versions of beauty, represent a form of subversive protest art that is not easily coopted, even today.

Butoh is not trying to purify its movement as in forms such as ballet, but rather intends to get muddy, dark and haunting. While the formalist, disinterested choreography of the ballet offers its movements to the heavens seeking transcendence, butoh makes an offering into the earth with stomping feet, bent knees and a low centre of gravity, ever seeking continuity and rebirth. Butoh usually involves grotesque imagery, extreme or taboo topics and is typically performed with the dancer mostly naked and painted in white makeup (this is sometimes seen as symbolizing the falling ash from the nuclear explosions, however white is also the representational colour of death in Japan.) In butoh there is no set style; it may be purely conceptual with no movement at all, with or without music, and often in places that suggest the extremes of the human condition, such as deserts, caves, cemeteries and places crawling with urban poverty and crime. The ‘uncalled-for moment’, an aesthetic of the ‘awkward body’ or ‘primal body’ is the basis for this form that seeks to “uncover and at the same time, dramatize nature.”
(Fraleigh, 2004, p.105-106) Despite this, butoh performances are stunning, captivating and seem to represent the modern and cherished Japanese aesthetic of *busu-iki*, the simultaneity of beauty and ugliness, or loosely translated as ‘ugly-chic.’

Butoh asked Japan and the international community to re-define modern dance. Butoh is in fact a hybrid kind of dance; Hijikata took the name ‘butoh’ which means ‘ancient dance’ or sometimes loosely translated as ‘folk dance’ and wedded it with ankoku, ‘utter darkness’ to describe a cultural feeling, a sensation in the air which called for this reflection of darkness. It was also this gesture towards darkness that aligned this form with both modern art and modern dance as well as ritual, another kind of hybridization. Hijikata understood and used this sense of darkness when he created butoh to address and perturb the repressive side of the (Japanese) psyche, intentionally using surprise and at times revulsion to engage and often shock the audience. Japan, which previously had a long history of socially ‘saving face’ and repressing any unflattering display of emotion, was particularly ripe for new dance/art form which encouraged grotesque, ugly and contracted choreographic choices as well as overt catharsis and emotionality at times. Despite the emotional repression, an acceptance of the dark aspect of human nature is perfectly suited to a non-dualistic language and thus a non-dualistic mindset.

Butoh is also sometimes considered among the first artistic movements to give form to a “post-westernized, neo-nostalgic Japanese culture.” (Munroe, 1994, p.192) Although butoh is defined and encompassed by an aesthetic that is distinctively Japanese in some ways, it remains unbound by territorial or racial lines. The butoh aesthetic in fact starts in Japan with much influence from the West and loops back and forth several times, evolving and effecting its aesthetic to become what dance scholar Katherine Mezur calls ‘trans-corporeal’. (Fraleigh, 2010) Butoh has created a powerful disintegration of cultural and gender differences, celebrating the erasure of notions around ‘purity’ by so quickly becoming such a global phenomenon. In fact, by becoming such a global sensation, appealing to so many in disparate cultures, experimental art like butoh reframes the notion of *nibonjinron* - a rhetoric focusing on Japanese uniqueness, by taking the emphasis away from identity politics and moving it towards the universal experiences of Eros and death.
The aesthetics of butoh have less to do with notions surrounding cultural identity and more to do with its ineffable quality (*butoh-sei*) becoming apparent through certain transgressive themes. When interviewed in 1968 by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, Hijikata was asked if butoh’s subsumption into so many art forms of 1960’s Japan—such as visual and sculptural arts, theatre, film, photography and then digital media, meant that butoh could essentially be considered anything. Hijikata asserted that this was indeed true stating: “Lots of people are now calling for an end to genres but if they would just apply the idea of ‘butoh quality’ (*butoh-sei*) to everything, the problem would be totally resolved” (Hijikata, 2012, p.103) Rather than attempting to achieve a particular aesthetic, the butoh dancer endeavors to reveal her humanity in all its boring banality and ugliness and to expose both the suffering and joy that make up the human condition.

Early butoh offered unprecedented artistic freedom to Japan and to the world by including, honoring and offering its very Japanese-ness while at the same time rejecting any notion of butoh as a representation or form of Japanese nationalism. Right from the beginning, Hijikata allowed his dance to be penetrated and affected by both Japanese culture as well as wider global forces, insisting that butoh had nothing to do with (local) notions about purity. Sondra Fraleigh who is perhaps the most prolific scholar on butoh concedes: “In producing a novel fusion of world cut fragments, Butoh may be the most intercultural post-modern art we have.” (Fraleigh, 1999, p. 8) and that its “morphology also rests on globalizing elements in dance throughout the twentieth century.” (Fraleigh, 2010, p.33) Butoh continues to be a bridge for the East ad West even as it remains skeptical of Western terms of ‘progress.’

Sondra Fraleigh acknowledges that butoh is “fast becoming a borderless art for a borderless century.” (Fraleigh, 2010, p.1) She further asserts that *Ma*, the space between, is the “global connective tissue of butoh.” (Fraleigh, 2010, p.73) She has also observed and that today, butoh can be seen as “linking physical and spiritual cultures from around the world.” (p.11) Fraleigh notes that dance scholar Megan Nicely also sees butoh as a “migratory process” which is not “nation-specific.” (Fraleigh, 2010, p.6) Bruhm (2013) considers the butoh body as a “global constellation of disintegrated parts.” (p.32) Fraleigh (2010) also notes: “The butoh politic stems from communal memory and from the desire to salvage the significance of the body in a technocratic contemporary world.” (p.73) In the East, morality and education are not separated.
When butoh dance was developing, Japanese dancers were signaling a concern for introspective reflection, a dance conscience and a metaphysics of movement, while American choreographers of the time like Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham continued to concentrate on ‘objective’ movement, divorcing their creative process from overt emotionality or mysticism. Scholars and dance historians have generally credited this particularity or difference to the fact that butoh, being born in Japan, retains a certain “Japanese-ness” that displays its distinct flavour and aesthetic, and that early theatre forms such as kabuki and noh have retained a great influence on this emergent post-modern form.

Butoh certainly does seem to appropriate some themes of Japanese noh and kabuki theatre- including the white makeup as well as symbolic representations of the dark and repressed sides of social life. However, Hijikata indignantly made it known that his new dance method had nothing to do with these earlier bourgeois forms that represented so much anesthesia to him. He rather saw his dance form as “human rehabilitation”, a “purposeless non-product” in protest to the rise of capitalist production in Japan. (Fraleigh and Nakamura, 2006, p.2) Butoh still continues to stand against the empty progress exemplified in our hyper consumerist cultures.

Butoh aims to mend the rift between body, mind and soul, in part by embracing Eros and sexuality, a strong link. As an embodied artifact, dance is wholly entwined with our sexuality, the creative force within us. Kazuo Ohno stressed that the origins of life were in the body, in the erotic, and that we stay linked to the feminine, yin, earth forces in this way. The erotic is equally as valid as the male, yang, and ascetic qualities found in philosophies based on transcendence. However, despite the ubiquity of sexual images in this age of information, we are still told that actual, real sexuality should be ‘private’ not public while it is aggressively shoved into our faces every day by multiple forms of media, provoking and promoting an almost constant state of sexual arousal. Dance provides a cathartic release from this continuous and stressful bodily repression.

5.3. Catharsis and Spectacle

Katharos = Pure
Butoh is sometimes interpreted as a post-atomic spectacle art (Sas, 2011) as was much art in post-war Japan, (keeping in mind that all writing about the atomic catastrophe was banned for many years and performance culture was also under the oppressive weight of extreme censorship.) Not to mention that much post-war Japanese art often gets reduced to atomic trauma narratives, a type of fetishization of the a-bomb. However, this would be too simplistic and would not convey the subtle political and global influence this form has had both internationally and within the country of its origins.

As butoh was developing, there were many calls in Europe and elsewhere to reject the aesthetics of beauty, instead embracing art which was ugly and could be used as a representation of the (present) state of the world. This had its beginning with the Dadaists and other avant -garde artists during the first- world-war and continued into the post -second -world -war period. Many European avant- garde artists were likewise attracted to a “carnal darkness at the foundation of the Japanese psyche: images of physical deformity, self obliteration and spiritual violence.” (Munroe, 1994, p.189) This ‘carnal darkness’ is certainly what early butoh imagery focused on. This expression of the darker human impulses, especially through ‘shock and awe’ strategies, was considered a form of subversive protest against the dominant social systems of the time and still is today.

Many 20th century art movements have concerned themselves with diagnosing injustice and oppression and then incurring a kind of forced intervention through art or theatrical performance, to ‘cure’ the audience of these presumed evils. Australian film-maker Michael Haneke describes this method crassly as “raping the viewer into independence.” This method presumes to know what the audience is feeling, what their life-experience-perspective is, and what their reaction should be to a given piece of art. This is problematic on many levels. We can never assume as artists, that the intention behind a particular piece of work will produce the desired effect and land on the audience in the “correct” way. Conversely, as audience members, we might be affected by a piece, it might remind us or trigger certain memories, but we cannot assume to know what the artist or dancer/ choreographer intended unless we hear from them.

These are not particularly new ideas – during the avant- garde art movement growing up around Dada for instance, there was a recognized commitment to the idea of
‘shock and awe’ presentations of art which included violence and/or cruelty; presented in hopes that they might deliver the audience in some way, to a better way of life. The manifesto written by F.T. Martinetti of the Italian Futurists for example, declared that art could be nothing except violence. There was a repulsion towards the presumed evil complicity of spectatorship during the rise of the avant garde movement, aligning this perceived passivity with being somehow brainwashed. This continues to remain a somewhat relevant topic in performance studies, for instance, Jacques Ranciere and the ‘emancipated spectator.’ However, in this age we receive such a daily pummeling of information and images which speak to actual, real-world violence, that notions surrounding the complicity of spectatorship seem irrelevant and somewhat privileged in this present-day context.

In butoh, dancers are sometimes encouraged to use their own trauma and pain for inspiration; they are guided to explore particular imagery—often unpleasant, their own dark emotional realms, physical discomfort (which very often could be translated as outright pain) and impulses which originate particularly in the nervous system. This could all produce an aesthetic of catharsis-as-spectacle, and sometimes it does, giving amateur butoh performances a clownish, inauthentic air of spectacle-as-art. My old acting teacher Christianne Hirt would describe this as simply masturbating (a fully self-absorbed activity) for the audience. It is also entirely uninteresting to watch a performer fake it, particularly in butoh which absolutely relies on a combination of subtlety or its opposite—complete release but with full authenticity—and an incredibly active inner life. It is also never pleasing or aesthetically interesting in theatre or dance (including butoh), to present on stage, a transgressive subject or tortured object simply to shock the audience, or even to question the meaning of the body.

From the audience’s perspective, it can be obvious when a butoh dancer is inauthentic—both for the spectacle aspect and/or for a lack of inner life. I once saw a young, pretty, white woman perform what she called butoh, and it absolutely fell flat, despite her having enormous talent as a contemporary, modern dancer. She was too perfect, too clean, too sheltered. Absolutely none of the butoh-sei came across in her performance and despite her strong chops as a trained contemporary dancer, her inner life was entirely vacant. Her performance therefore came across as forged and she appeared only to be going through some physical motions, mechanically displaying the
choreography. What makes butoh interesting is the internal struggle with dynamic, oppositional tendencies- this is what makes butoh ‘work’ for the audience.

In contrast, on his *Shadowbody Butoh Manual* page, Adam Koan- a current butoh dancer based in India, gives an example of a performer who appears to be full of presence and concentration, perhaps even captivating in her focus but who could be in fact, dreaming of the pizza she will eat later. He questions whether this should be considered fraudulent or authentic, particularly if it moves the audience in some way. This kind of ‘inauthentic’ expression is not acceptable in many butoh circles, and in fact, this form attracts heated opinions about whether someone is actually doing butoh, implying that there are false or inauthentic ways to perform it. Akira Kasai, one of the original butoh masters, was once heckled and called out at a butoh festival in San Francisco for “not doing butoh” and we wonder was he being too banal or too outrageous?

Koan writes about the phenomenon of “pseudo butoh” for he was also called out for writing about butoh in ways that were “not Japanese” and /or he was just doing “pseudo-butoh”; he speaks about this as a type of meta-marginalization. As an interesting analogy, we would not describe any other genre of dance or the performance of it as “pseudo”, rather we might regard the performer as amateur, untrained or simply not good at dancing, but ‘pseudo’ certainly implies ‘fraudulent’. Koan approaches this notion with an interesting perspective and method: For instance, he explores this possibility of fake or pseudo butoh both linguistically and through movement by marrying such concepts as forgery and authenticity into ‘fraudthentic’, or light and dark into ‘gluminous’. (from the Facebook page: Butoh Self-Research and Discovery/Adam Koan and [http://manual.shadowbody.com/essence-form-new-](http://manual.shadowbody.com/essence-form-new-)) Because of the underlying current within butoh to stay non-binary and non-dualistic with our minds and bodies is so strong, dancers are often asked to dance some particular oppositional forces, such as man/woman, strength/weakness or dark/light for example. This approach allows the dancer to explore the subtlety of the oppositional paradox, understanding that oppositions are an illusion.

The butoh body is not specifically presentational like Western forms of contemporary dance but is instead mostly relational, and as such it is not under pressure to entertain or amuse, even in a performance setting. Sometimes this lack of
‘performance ethic’ makes butoh performances very banal and boring, often putting audience members to sleep. This non-performative aesthetic also allows the audience to connect with inner worlds through their own process of catharsis or stillness; this can often provoke sleep, an unwillingness to stay present, or even revolt - I have seen many people leave butoh performances before the end of the show. Butoh, particularly as approached from my teacher Diego Pinon, encourages and even requires catharsis in order to achieve the metamorphic aesthetic; Pinon asks us not to turn away from the darkness but rather to face it with courage and excitement, allowing this force to infuse the body and inform the dance.

Butoh relies on eliciting the body’s subtle energies through states of pain and crisis, and then releasing these contents, most often through a process of catharsis. This might include extreme kinetic impulses such as kicks, jerks, spasms, tightening, lunges and seizure-esque activity. Conversely, many butoh practitioners approach this form only through precise stillness, with little or very subtle movements. Butoh can be used to provoke catharsis or release precisely because it’s both an extremely kinetic and also absolutely still, non-verbal form. The cathartic aesthetic combined with a Japanese Zen sense of timing or tempo allows for a wide range of inner exploration and expression.

5.4. Metamorphosis and Contagion

The body that becomes is the ontic signature of butoh dance, a form primarily concerned with metamorphosis. The butoh body, ever in a state of metamorphosis or continuous change, never arrives anywhere but remains "always in a process of integration and dissolution" (Fraleigh, 2004, p.29) Butoh dance endeavors to explore and comprehend the intelligence of the metamorphic, always-in-motion body, specifically through transgressive and ritualistic performance acts. Butoh dance presents the body as a metamorphic changeling and interacts with us as both an anti-utopian art as well as a deeply ritualistic form, one not bothered by mystery or magic. Unlike folk dance (from which forms like ballet arose,) butoh is based on the material body itself and it’s ever changing conditions, rather than on geometry or rhythm or specific goal-oriented choreography. The metamorphic aesthetic may be butoh’s one universal and definable feature: a process of constant shifting and re-shaping, an interstitial space which holds the potential for both explosion and vast silence. The butoh body deals with
fragmentation, contraction, disintegration and in this way, relocates terror from the political/geographical to the corporeal, and right to the heart of the matter.

Butoh as form, because of its subtle movements or non-movement, illuminates the phenomenological intricacies of dance itself, forcing us to ask what exactly defines dance as an art anyway? Like John Cage’s experiment, we cannot rely on music, rhythm or timing to inform the definition. Therefore when we approach any solid definition or descriptive analysis of dance, we must protect the totality of the form, not separate it into externally objectified units but return over and over to its brilliance and affect as a wholistic and synergistic practice. Butoh dance in particular, is concerned with the direct touch, a sort of magical contagion or metaphysics of the body; something unseen which occurs between audience and performer. Fraleigh (2010) notes that the transformational potential of butoh comes through “a bodily type of alchemy that is often healing”, what butoh dancer Akira Kasai calls the “community body”. (p.41) Both contagion and metamorphosis - the ontic signatures of butoh, rupture the consciousness which produces paradigmatic understanding, and this is tantamount to reversing colonial brainwashing. These forms of understanding involve phenomenon rather than nuemon.

Hijikata originally saw the development of butoh as a revolt of the body. He viewed his work as never complete; it demanded constant and concurrent death, resuscitation, erasure and metamorphosis, a dance of transformation from its inception to its core. Butoh dance produces bodies in crisis, dancers at the edge of death, exploring the space of Ma, that liminal space of in-between:

“And in the universe of the dancer's body, this fragmentation of self into ma is performed or passed through again and again. It renders butoh not a thing or a style but a way of seeing and relating, a convergence of bodies in crisis.” (Bruhm, 2013, p.33)

Japanese author Kazuko Kuniyoshi states that butoh is not only a performance art but also the embodiment of “one of the most precise critical spirits in the history of the consciousness of the body, with a strength of thought which impinges deeply on the history of the human spirit.” (Robbins, 2010, p.90) Kuniyoshi asserts that Western theatre has not yet reached beyond technique and expression as a means of communication and that the cosmic ethereality of butoh, “its violence and nonsense, eroticism and metamorphic qualities are intriguing to Western viewers because they are forced to use their imagination.” (Stein, 2001, p.377-78) The butoh body, continuously in
the act of becoming other, is substantially different and disengaged from the body of ordinary, pedestrian, social living and as such, it can commune with altered states and energetic situations not found in our daily routine state.

Hijikata once described *Ma* or the space where the spirit passes through, as a space of sheer terror and it was this liminal space around which he originally built butoh. He tells a story about watching his father violently beat his mother when he was a child, revealing that the real terror was not in the actual transgression but the measured and paced manner in which the father crossed the room to violate the mother. The crux of the terror was in the *impending act*, a notion which has come to embody the philosophy and methodology of butoh dance -manifested in the use of physical opposition and restriction. Ma is also an expansive state of mind: When the mind is free of thought it can more easily dwell in the liminal in-between, neither looking back nor forward, neither judging nor analyzing. This liminal place is like a state between life and death, but closer to death.

The body in crisis must not only actively suffer for itself but must also cause some suffering in the witness or audience through its spectacle. Catharsis requires a witness to reach its full healing potential and this is why the presentational aspect of butoh as a performance art is so effective. The witness or audience can porously receive some of the pain of the performer when the action is kinetic. This implies that butoh requires an audience or witness, however, it can be performed without a (human) audience, and this same process of affectation and contagion can then be accomplished with inanimate forces; for instance, releasing one’s gestures into the wind and having them be received.

This dance form, as a precise manifestation of bodily communication, has inter-corporeal powers, perhaps more than any other art form. These inter-corporeal powers arise because dance connects our tactile, kinetic and affective-emotional bodies, allowing inter-penetration and non-separation of being and doing. While it is true that dance is primarily kinetic rather than postural or positional, it is also proprio-*receptive* in that, as a form of creative expression it elicits kinetic reaction in the (receptive) witness or audience. Movement is simply and utterly a revelation of force and it compels the witness to react both internally (emotions) as well as inducing a visible, physical, kinetic reaction within the viewer.
Butoh dancers are dedicated to exploring movement beyond the everyday, pedestrian mechanisms in order to express something extra-ordinary, something beyond the bounds of expectation and habits. The extreme contractions or extreme stillness seen in butoh dance encourages the inherent sense of catharsis to relieve and release both dancer and witness or audience. Sensory violence and suffering then become a precise form of intelligence where extreme gestures can actually move and transform the witness/audience as well as the dancers. It is this specific transference of pain and suffering as an aesthetic onto the audience (or the wind) which envelops butoh as a ritual form, transcending the art of performance, entering that liminal region where art and ritual coalesce to create intense affectation.

Today, due to an acceleration of changes—most predominantly in technology, we are becoming ever more removed from our bodies and their signals. Dance performance and especially butoh with its dark, contracted and often pained aesthetic creates unfamiliar and profound territory in today’s digital culture which has us working our opposable thumbs on micro-machines with ever-shrinking font, all in the name of communication or distraction. As we are further consumed by technology, we require less and less effort to achieve the levels of hyper-comfort that we have become accustomed to. Ironically the applications and software—developed specifically to save us time—have seemingly created a sense of less time or even no time at all. As our youth and society merge with their devices into a two-dimensional universe mostly viewed on
a screen, we are witnessing a loss of some valuable movement repertory, while our human capacity for bodily awareness also appears to be diminishing. We are slowly and surely evolving into ‘homo sedentarious’.

As a movement educator, I am always struck by way institutions of all kinds, indeed, most every apparatus in our society, is set up for sitting still. When I was involved with teaching ‘art-in-schools’ programs around BC, I was constantly (only) offered rooms full of desks and chairs- despite advertising myself as a dance and movement teacher. It’s safe to say that very few North American children are getting enough exercise and any movement or physical practice is worth engaging with. Many long-time teachers that I have spoken to (in the field for over 20 years) agree that today’s students have much less ability with emotional self-regulation and much higher levels of stress and anxiety than students of the past. The increasing levels of mental disturbance can be viewed as a reflection of the escalating changes occurring in the world, particularly our subsumption into screen-viewing. We are becoming ever more dissociated from our bodies, their movements and even from our metabolic functioning.

The role of exercise and movement on self-regulation and behavioural management, as well as overall health and mood is very well established, with much new research focusing on dance and even specific kinds of dance as treatment options. For example, in one randomized control study conducted by Anna Duberg of the Swedish Research Council, 112 girls between 13-19 who had all reported anxiety or other mood- related disturbances to their school nurse were split into two groups. One group danced twice per week and the other group made no changes to their routines; the study conformed a definite increase in self esteem, with 91% of the dance study group reporting positive changes. (Duberg et al, 2013) Today dance is being used to treat everything from eating disorders to depression to psychosis, as well as more chronic illnesses such as Parkinson’s and Dementia. (For examples of these studies see Solly, 2018; Duberg et al, 2013; Akandere et.al, 2011; Verghese et.al, 2003)

The role of exercise and movement on brain health and cognition is also well documented, however new research suggests that dance has an even more beneficial and profound effect on health and behaviour than other forms of exercise. For instance, in a study published in the open access journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (2017) called “The Dancing Brain: Structural and Functional Signatures of Expert Dance
Training”, the authors noted that trained dancers literally had structural differences in their brains compared to non-dancers. (Burzynska et.al, 2017) Numerous other published studies have found that only dance (compared to a control groups doing endurance training or other types of exercise) could produce behavioural-physical changes like better balance, leading to the conclusion that dancing is the only (so far studied) exercise that can actually reverse the signs of aging in the brain. See also: Akandere and Demir, 2011; Anderson, 2018; Bailey et.al. 2018; Henley 2016.

Another study published in the New England Journal of Medicine (2003) confirms this stating: “Dancing was the only physical activity associated with a lower risk of dementia.” (Vergheze et.al, 2003) The essential conclusion in most of these studies was that because (learning choreographed) dance is physical but also requires social interaction and significant cognitive or mental effort, it has a more profound effect on brain fitness and on cognitive function. This supports my perception that kinaesthetic understanding, especially through certain dance practices and techniques, strongly enables transformative learning.

In a piece called why dance is just as important as math in school (Ideas.Ted.com, Mar.21, 2018) taken from his new book You, Your Child, and School: Navigate Your Way to the Best Education written with Lou Aronica, Sir Ken Robinson asserts that “the low status of dance in schools is derived in part from the high status of conventional academic work which associates intelligence mainly with verbal and mathematical reasoning.” Robinson continues to be a champion for the equity and education of the ‘whole child’, noting the well documented relationship between physical activity and academic achievement on several levels. For instance, he claims that in one evaluation, 95% of teachers reported that students’ abilities to cooperate and collaborate improved as a result of dancing. Learning and participating in dance classes shows a strong correlation with social-emotional intelligence and relationships. As Robinson writes, “Dance can help restore joy and stability in troubled lives and ease the tension in schools disrupted by violence and bullying.” He also notes-not surprisingly- that opportunities in the arts- particularly performing arts like dance and theatre are lowest for students in the areas of highest poverty.

Those unfamiliar with dance might view it as worthwhile for such benefits as exercise and physical fitness, coordination and balance, heightened self-awareness and
self-confidence, and the ability to cooperate and collaborate well with others. These benefits are significant and important, but they do not encapsulate the entirety of dance as a praxis, as a way of learning that is ‘just as’ challenging cognitively as traditional literacies. The physical advantages of dancing such as flexibility, strength and coordination are perhaps too obvious, eclipsing the more subtle, yet profound values of dance as an expressive, artistic and therapeutic form. One of these potent values is its universality in terms of language - movement is a wholly inclusive language, even for those with physical disabilities.

Learning to work with non-verbal language as a resource can prove to be exceptionally valuable for teachers in various domains; students with diverse abilities, levels of English understanding or mental health issues call all equally access movement, (to varying skills and degrees.) Donna Davenport (2017) notes in her piece called *Dance is Academic* that when a dancer -or any kind of mover- discovers how to articulate a complex idea through movement, “it is a rare thrill to feel understood without speaking words.” She also notes that a class of dance students can share a movement experience or performance without needing to reach the same answer, although she notes that when the “ongoing analysis of movement efficiency finally results in an effortless moment of full-bodied motion, you know it.” (p.34) Abstract ideas can land in the body at deeper levels of understanding when movement is incorporated.

We know that movement and expression can benefit every student, regardless of capacity and this is central to dance education as well as dance therapy. What is a dancing, moving body able to tell us? Although dance education has become increasingly concerned with and devoted to the notion of ‘dance as art’, there is certainly a cross-over between the methodologies and practices of dance education and dance therapy. For instance, Patricia Capello notes in her piece *How Culture Shapes Dance/movement Therapy Education: Unique Aspects throughout the World* (2015) that dance therapy can be defined as reflecting a strong conviction that “dance, improvisation and the creative process are the primary resources used.” (p.20) and this would clearly be a very similar definition and mandate used to describe dance education. Today we see teachers performing the roles of both educator and therapist as we deal with the massive rise in mental health issues and their manifestations. Dance, movement and particularly expressions of cathartic release such as butoh are exactly what educators
need in their toolboxes to manage trauma, anxiety, depression and other behavioural challenges in the classroom.

I have always been struck by the firm line delineating healing from education or healing from art - as if by mingling two expressions, one might dissolve the potential potency of both. Many professionals in the performing arts (dance and acting in particular) will go out of their way to point out that their practice is *art*, and definitely not therapy. This was certainly the case with my early experiences in butoh dance training. For example, when I was an apprentice with *Kokoro Dance* (Vancouver, Canada), one of the co-artistic directors, Barbara Bourget, steered me away from working with Diego Pinon, because she felt his approach to butoh was therapeutic rather than artistic. Bourget has quite a reputation in the contemporary dance world- she is known to be ruthless in some of her disciplinary and dance training methods, a run off from her days as a professional ballet dancer, but she is also known for her impeccable standards and incredible vision as an artist and choreographer.

Bourget seemed to feel that because I was immersing myself, under her care, in the world of professional modern dance, I should not even expose myself to Diego’s work which she referred to as the ‘therapy’, as though that were a bad thing. Bourget said to me on many occasions that “dance is not therapy”, with a contempt that suggested therapy was absolutely antithetical to art. I have felt this same obligation to separate the two approaches, particularly or only from the perspective of *artist* - this is the elite position; it is the artist, dedicated to making art for art’s sake who loathes the approach to art as a form of cathartic release or therapy.

I have been to countless movement and theatre workshops, many of which attract an equally blended mix of those seeking to ‘heal’ and those seeking to further their dance or theatre skills in a professional development aspect. I personally found some of the workshops (and participants) that were specifically focused on cathartic release and a ‘self-help’ or active approach to healing to be cliché, overwhelmingly loud and generally seemed to be *without* a serious art practice in their lives. The problem with making healing the focus is that we get enveloped by the illusion of progress. Am I getting better? Am I healing? The reality is that illness (mental, physical) and wellness are opposites on the continuum of a preoccupation with health and healing. If we continually notice if or how we are ‘healing’, then we also notice the states of dis-ease.
and unrest that are at the opposite end of the pendulum. When the focus is on art, the artistic aspect of presentation, removes one entirely from the dialectic of sickness/health or trauma stored/ trauma released.

I feel strongly that butoh is healing and rejuvenating precisely because it is both healing through somatic strategies, and also because of its expressive, performative aspects as an art-form. Interestingly, despite being initially attracted to somatic movement techniques like yoga for their potential to literally move (trauma) out of the body, I became fascinated by and dedicated to butoh precisely because it does not emphasize or promote its therapeutic potential. All art or creation makes a vibrational difference in our consciousness and this is usually inherently uplifting and restorative because it requires a certain kind of focus, commitment and passion.

Butoh seems to ride the line between art and therapy/ healing with little trouble- a mark of its incredible authenticity. Butoh works because it allows such a wide spectrum of possibility- being indefinable, being highly kinetic yet infinitely still, being relational as well as performative, being expressive as well as contemplative- one can explore the wide spectrum of human emotion and its related kinesthetic sensations. What makes butoh dance so effective as a healing modality is the very fact that it’s therapeutic potential is a side effect, a little gift, unexpected and profound. Butoh has become therapeutic without ever explicitly taking this on; this provides another liminal space to explore, one where art and healing can inter-relate and mingle.

6.2. Butoh and Healing: Pedagogy for Crisis

The discourse on crisis and suffering which has enveloped butoh from the beginning, can be employed toward crisis resolution in other fields such as health and education. Based on personal and anecdotal experience, butoh appears to be very effective at releasing and/or healing trauma, particularly when symptoms are manifesting in panic and anxiety. My personal struggles, stemming from generational and childhood trauma have been extensively healed through butoh dance/art practices more than any other healing modality, including traditional therapy/counselling. Although the curative capacity within butoh to heal trauma is not advertised, neither is it discouraged or frowned upon in any way; it is understood that butoh dancers will mine themselves for
the gold that creates an inner transformation, even if that becomes cathartic or therapeutic.

Specifically, I feel butoh can be transformative and effective for working with trauma because of four supporting characteristics: Firstly, butoh is a somatic, non-linguistic, performance art based in a non-coercive form of communication (movement not words); second, butoh is based in ritual, prayer and contemplation, retaining its sacred aspect, connected to the divinity of nature; thirdly butoh welcomes expressions of ugliness, death and decay as well as beauty, depth and profundity, allowing for a wide range of possibility in emotional and physical expression, and for a wide diversity of people including those who live at the outer edges. Fourth, there is no ‘right’ way to approach butoh for there is no universal definition of this form, therefore butoh is open to anybody willing to be seen. Butoh does not require extensive skills or training, there is no complex choreography, no code, no butoh form. This is significant for both practitioners and educators as we can only discover butoh through our unique personal story, an easy way to include and celebrate all.

Note: The topic of trauma is very broad and is well beyond the scope of this thesis in terms of an in-depth analysis. When I mention trauma here, I am referring to the growing list of mental disorders afflicting so many students today- anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, FAS, behavioural disturbances which lead to serious violence- the list goes on. I am recognizing trauma beyond the medical diagnostic criteria as a modern, cultural phenomenon as well the DSM definition. In this section, I will primarily refer to Peter Levine’s work centering on trauma release through somatic practices, particularly shaking methods; this approach recognizes the fact that trauma resides in the body.

Esteemed psycho-therapist and author Peter Levine (2008) defines trauma as the “often debilitating symptoms that many people suffer from in the aftermath of perceived life-threatening or overwhelming experiences.” (p.7) He notes that trauma does not have to be the result of a major catastrophe but can in fact occur slowly over time, with a series of seemingly minor incidents having a majorly damaging effect. Trauma can impact us for many years in subtle or obvious ways without us having the slightest idea of the continuing deleterious effects. Today we are witnessing ever-increasing levels of mental unease such that it’s possible to now say that everyone has
experienced some form of traumata in their lives. Although the stories and even levels of pain might differ among people, the emotional charge is very similar.

This is of fundamental importance for educators in a wide variety of domains because we are often the first responders, the ones doing triage on a daily basis by confronting the onslaught of anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges facing so many young people today and which often manifest as behavioural issues in the classroom. Much of the responsibility for dealing with these challenges has fallen onto the shoulders of educators (teachers both at schools and within the community at large), despite being untrained and in many cases unskilled in dealing with these psychological difficulties; after all, this was not meant to be part of the teacher job description, but it has become so. Teachers are likely facing the front lines of this trauma far more regularly and with ever growing numbers than even clinical psychologists, and yet they are given few if any tools to deal with the ever-present emotions experienced in educational settings.

Even psychologists are not fully equipped to deal with the onslaught of cultural trauma that we are all feeling, that is showing up in staggering numbers among children and youth, which is now breaking into our realities on a daily basis through personal devices. We are constantly being bombarded by terrible and depressing news and an almost constant influx of images, many of them unwanted and triggering. We could certainly define this moment in history as the age of optics, and most of us have experienced visual trauma at some point in our lives. In a very broad sense, anyone who is remotely sensitive should be expected to have a manifestation of trauma because we are also told on a daily basis that our planet is dying, that all the non-human consciousnesses that make earth what it is are also disappearing and that we don’t appear to be capable of turning it around. We would have to be sedated on some level not to be traumatized by this news.

I think most educators and therapists would agree that it is time for an ‘all hands-on-deck’ approach to dealing with the manifestations of trauma- much of which shows up as behavioural issues in the classroom or more tragically, as suicide epidemics-often in rural Indigenous communities/ reserves. We need a multi-layered approach, one that includes somatic, artistic and personal expression. Somatic practices, particularly a cathartic and expressive form like butoh dance, can re-train the mind, re-shape the body.
and re-align the heart. Butoh as a physically-based, contemplative, cathartic method can provide much healing and release. Somatic work or any method that includes a physical, moving aspect is particularly effective at healing or releasing trauma because it literally moves the lingering charge out of the body.

Relaxation techniques like sitting meditation can often be ineffective for moving trauma out of the body because they can induce what Levine calls ‘relaxation induced panic syndrome.’ Sitting still, especially for an inexperienced newcomer, can produce even more anxiety by creating a bottled-up sensation. These practices often fail to consider the fundamental role of bodily sensations and responses in the experience of any strong emotion, anxiety included. If there is acute physiological arousal, it remains very difficult to sit still. Levine says that ultimately, especially severe anxiety or trauma results from a failure to follow through on certain motor acts, thus any form of physical movement or somatic approach is bound to have some success. Panic, anxiety and even depression often require a rigorous physical approach for maximum benefit.

Maggie Benson (2011) reminds us that one of trauma’s “most troubling cruelties” is revealed by its tendency to reproduce itself (p.251), while Miryam Sas (2011) tells us trauma is defined precisely by the fact that it is “fully experienced only after (and by definition, precisely not at) the moment it occurs” (p.117) In other words, the original traumatic incident tends to replay itself over and over in the victim’s mind, creating a physical, sensate memory. ‘Talking it through’, as in traditional therapy or counselling very often does not move this kind of trauma out of the body for precisely this reason; even talking with a professional still only serves to reinforce the memory of the original incident. There is more and more evidence to suggest that the most effective therapeutic approaches work by combining the verbalization of feelings with other, primarily somatic techniques to create a wholistic, mind-body-centered methodology.

Levine works with a process called Somatic Experiencing which he designed around his observation that prey animals rarely (if ever?) hold on to their ‘traumas’, despite being routinely threatened in the wild. Early in his career, during a session with a client debilitated by anxiety and panic, and realizing that relaxation techniques were not working, Levine intuitively (and loudly) told his client to run from a tiger that was about to attack her. This provoked a phenomenal physical response whereby she not only sobbed and trembled with full body convulsions, she also recalled an incident from her
early childhood memory which was in fact objectively very traumatic. She left the session feeling well and like herself again, presumably because she was able to at least partially physically re-enact her trauma response, this time successfully beating/fleeing the threat. This session led Levine into new avenues of research on the effects of trauma on the body, deepening his understanding of the long-term, after-effects of this state that can take on so many negative forms, such as addiction, self-harm, poor decision making and suicide.

Levine was involved with brain research and from this research he found that when animals narrowly miss death or when they experience pain or injury, they tend to shake, convulse and/or tremble. This kinetic motor response seems to refresh and rejuvenate the animal in question and seems to be genetically built into their defence systems. Levine notes that the instinctive parts of human and animal brains are almost identical and thus our physiological or autonomic responses to threat, danger or pain are likely quite similar as well. Levine watched footage of animals in the wild and concluded, through mounting evidence that trauma is “primarily a biological process or bodily process often accompanied by psychological effects.” (Levine, 2008, p.26) This aligns with what Heller and Lapierre say in their book *Healing Developmental Trauma* (2012): “Biological distress lies at the foundation of psychological distress.” (p.133) They see trauma as essentially the collapse and dysregulation of the nervous system and their work is also centered on somatic awareness techniques.

The operations of the autonomic nervous system—supposedly regulated and controlled by the hypothalamus, such as the respiratory and heart rates, the digestive system, sexual arousal as well as urination and defecation, are of vital relevance to our subjective emotional experience. However, we are still so identified with the mind-body split and the privileging of the rational brain that we tend to ignore the role of “instinctive, bodily responses in orchestrating and propelling behaviour and consciousness.” (Levine, 2002, p.31) When the viscera are balanced and well, so then are one’s thoughts; therefore healing modalities which establish a connection to one’s body through particular somatic practices such as shaking, and trembling are often much more successful than those practices which have no somatic connection. (Levine, 2008)

Levine says that he has also observed this process of shaking and bodily convulsions in the practices of healing ‘trauma’ or what traditional cultures would call
‘soul loss’ in many geographically diverse shamanic healing rituals around the world. There is a ‘shamanic’ practice within traditional Chinese medicine which I have received called the ‘release of the 7 dragons’ which is traditionally considered a type of exorcism. It involves needles being poked into some very tender spots, acutely connected to the nerve channels which make the body constrict and contort, shake and jerk. This process is physiologically thought to release hormones and neuro-transmitters such as dopamine, adrenaline, cortisol, and serotonin and the release of these chemical messengers then jump-starts the body out of depression (or exorcises and evicts the demon in traditional lore.) Generally, there is always a physical component to healing in traditional cultures- both shamanic and otherwise.

In fact, many people also experience trembling or spontaneous and involuntary twitching- often intense, during sitting meditation practices. In a piece called Breaking through the Concrete in the book Being Bodies (1997), Linda Ruth Cutts recalls her involuntary movements during her Zen sitting practice as crashing "from one side of the zabuton to the other" with urges to pummel those on either side of her. (p.107) She believes the involuntary movements were an expression of the feelings she had blocked and numbed for so many years, finding their way to her consciousness through her body by ‘cracking the concrete.’ Sensation runs deeper than psychology- as we are able to get in touch with our bodies, intimately, we are available to multiple levels of information, much of which is non-rational or non-analytical.

The most immediate route to the spiritual dimension is through a regulated nervous system because thoughts affect our physiological processes and vice versa. This is certainly the under-lying concept in the ancient practice of yoga; the specific reason for practicing the asanas or physical postures is so that one might be able to meditate more deeply. The goal of the physical asana practice is to support the more esoteric, spiritual practices based in meditation. Many people form a split between their emotional and spiritual worlds unless they have learned to work with their shadow side or the ‘mud’ in their life. When we don’t acknowledge the sticky emotional side, we get further and further away from healing this split.

In almost every spiritual tradition alive today, suffering or trauma can be used as a portal to awakening, or states of enlightenment, specifically by engendering compassion and empathy. For instance, the third noble truth in Buddhism states that
suffering can be transformed and healed into helpful, heroic energy. Peter Levine, who has worked on healing trauma in people for more than 30 years says poignantly:

> The energies that are released when we heal from trauma are the wellspring of our creative, artistic and poetic sensibilities, and they can be summoned to propel us into the wholeness of our intelligence. (Levine, 2008, p.80)

In a piece called *Production of Reality or Hunger for the Impossible?* (2004) Umberto Artioli writes poetically:

> “In this universe of passion where only those who can charge themselves with the energy of suffering and the risk of being torn apart have the capacity for regeneration.” (Artioli, 2004, p.142)

### 6.3. Dancing Darkness: Pedagogy for the Spirit

Butoh as an art, grounded in a pedagogy of crisis, pain, and ugliness offers us suffering as a supreme gift, a way of witnessing and translating utter horror. One earns the right to speak or dance butoh through having suffered. Most butoh dancers seem to understand that darkness, it’s major trope, is not the corrupt, evil kind of darkness but is rather more like the subconscious body that, like in alchemy, needs to be distilled and sublimated for integration into the conscious body. In the context of butoh dance, trauma is used as a heroic force so that suffering becomes a force of healing. Suffering in butoh comes from the genuine labour of the conversion of thought and/or feeling through the vehicle of embodied performance. By giving attention to darkness, shadow and nightmare, the body is able to exorcise these impulses through the theatrical or somatic process. In this way, butoh welcomes suffering, encouraging the dancers to work with their own personal charges to kinetically relate to and move the audience. Suffering here is a force of regenerative, creative and fertile material.

Butoh’s power to initiate and encourage inner movement and transformation remains solid and dynamic. I have now been studying/training, dancing and performing butoh dance for the past 18 years regularly and often, albeit mixed in with entirely separate and necessary branches of living that have not been dance related. Even so, I continue to hold onto the self referential of *butoh dancer* because I feel authentic in this form. I feel entitled to claim space in butoh because I have certainly had a life of suffering, more than my fair share according to the many therapists I have told my ‘story’
to over the years. My childhood included an all-you-can-eat buffet of abuse and there have been 5 suicides in my immediate family, for-example.) Those who reside mostly in the light perhaps don’t need to dance butoh.

Many people refuse to spend a moment pondering the vast amount of time that humans have been repeating the habit of suffering- sorrow, violence, and pain, inflicted on both self and other, as far back into history as we can probe. In the movies and in hero’s tales we learn that suffering is only a test, one that always gets triumphed at the end of the story, and the hero goes home with a prize (or the girl). In today’s reality, the suffering seems to never end, the initiation continuing on for the entire tale. This aligns with what Bai and Cohen assert in *Zen and the Art of Story Telling*: “Suffering is about ontological insecurity based on disconnection of self from other, and a related felt sense of loss of meaning, purpose and connection.” (Bai and Cohen, 2014) Today, due to ‘advances’ in technology, which allow us to survey and view each other, but ultimately seem to be disconnecting us, we are witnessing suffering at increasing and even alarming levels.

In the West we tend to view suffering as the worst possibility that life has to offer, an aberration and sentence worse than death, so we spend most of our life force, and time trying to escape its influence. There is a popular cultural idea that we deserve only happiness in this life, that we should do anything in our power to avoid the aberrant state of suffering and that if we somehow ‘attract’ suffering, like iron to a magnet, we are fully and hopelessly responsible for it coming to us. In this context, suffering has quite a wide scope of possibility- not only violence, illness or injury but all the little inconveniences of modern life. In the East, the definition of suffering is much more fluid- another indication of the non-dualistic thinking found in many Asian cultures and philosophies. In Buddhism, for instance, consideration of suffering is essential in understanding the basic building blocks of life/reality. One of the main Buddhist tenets (the First noble Truth) states that *all life is suffering*, meant to imply that we must acknowledge and address suffering if we are to have any hope of relinquishing its hold.

In many Buddhist traditions, as in shamanic traditions, it’s important to work with and integrate the ‘mud’; to work with that dark part of ourselves which brought us in contact with the wisdom teachings in the first place. It is often or always a form of spiritual discontent with ordinary existence which brings people into contact with the
Dharma, loosely translated as the ‘wise teachings.’ It is usually this very muck and grit that turns us towards the religious or spiritual life. Nishida tells us the religious life or sentiment rarely arises from moral perfection but is rather usually realized when “the self’s very existence becomes problematic, when existence itself becomes problematic.” (Nishida, 1987, p.65) One of the oldest Buddhist texts, Shantideva’s Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, suggests that by acknowledging and internalizing the fundamental truth of suffering we can then use it as a catalyst for spiritual growth; in this way suffering can be seen only as beneficial on the path of growth.

Nietzsche, who tapped into many Eastern philosophical ideas, described suffering as a ‘metamorphosis of the self’, implying that it had the potential to heal and release, leaving us forever changed, and not in a stuck or bitter way. (Nietzsche, 1992) In The Gay Science, first published in 1882, he reiterates this idea in the preface as he describes what the title of the book means and how it relates to suffering as metamorphosis:

“Gay Science”: that signifies the saturnalia of a spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure- patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope-and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health and the intoxication of convalescence. (Nietzsche, 1974, p.32)

Nietzsche was considered an ‘immoralist’ by his colleagues and readers for this kind of thinking, so foreign to the ‘sickness as punishment for sin’ crowd of the time.

Pema Chodron, a well-known Buddhist nun and teacher notes that when things fall apart it is “a kind of testing and also a kind of healing.” (Chodron, 1997, p.8) It is a test for us to stay on the edge and not ‘concretize’ or harden, especially into bitterness or despair. Chodron, (1997) reminds us that life is never neatly tied up, all the loose ends trimmed to perfect length but instead she suggests: “The off-center, in-between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don’t get caught and we can open our hearts and minds beyond limit.” (p.8) Chodron says it is by staying with the broken heart, the vengeful or the fearful heart- “that is the path of true awakening.” (p.10) These places and feelings of discomfort tend to genuinely show us exactly where we are stuck. It is also often in the sticky, uncomfortable and intense process of suffering where compassion and empathy alight. The point is not to overcome our problems, because as
Chodron (1997) tells us, “the truth is that things don’t really get solved.” (p.8) Not running from the broken parts is the spiritual work or path.

The secret or overt hope of ‘enlightenment’ practices is that they might one day set us fully and finally free from our pain and suffering. The Dalia Lama says pointedly that one of the three levels of suffering, known as ‘obvious suffering’, is so universal that even animals want to get rid of it as quickly as possible, and the principal concern of all seekers is to “find out whether or not it is possible to attain liberation from suffering.” (Dalia Lama, 1997, p.38) The Western mind, with its bent toward progress and growth, makes an implicit assumption that this work is a one-time deal, that we should not have to return again and again to this mud, to this fertile shit-pile which not only contributes, but is a mandatory element of our spiritual growth and maturity. We repeat and repeat, integrate some and then simmer, endlessly throughout our lives.

To note that all life is suffering is also to understand the actual mechanisms of suffering; craving and aversion; that which attracts and repels us, as the precise cause of all our suffering. To find freedom from this cycle in the Buddhist traditions, one must practice non-attachment- a way of finding peace with our likes and dislikes, a way to stop grasping at the past or future, a way to reside in the space of ma, the relaxed place between craving and aversion. Finding this place is like fully stepping into the present tense and it is exhilarating as well as scary. However, this practice or concept of non-attachment is rarely if ever seen for its passivity and rather is usually triumphed as the fast path to freedom and enlightenment. For instance, if nothing is worth more than another thing, as in the ideal practice of non-attachment, desire then necessarily becomes limited by its own annulment. If we accept suffering as inevitable, or if we refuse to open a door simply because it’s already closed, do we not risk creating defeatist attitudes? Creating people too fearful or resigned to open the door merely because it’s already closed? Many people (particularly Western) would view the concept of non-attachment as a limitation to freedom.

Buddhist teacher Joan Iten Sutherland, writing in a book called Being Bodies: Buddhist Women on the Paradox of Embodiment (1997) refers to this idea of passive acceptance when she had to face a debilitating illness. She was eventually led to a traditional Lakota healer because she could not find the space to heal within her Zen
tradition. Later she integrated these Lakota teachings into a new-found Zen practice, 
hybridizing a new healing path for herself. She writes:

I was a little too ready to be okay with things as they were. Every practice 
has a shadow side, and I’ve come to see that this kind of Zen, at least the 
way I held it, had an aura of resignation about it. There is something noble 
about doing a hard thing gracefully, but there’s something equally noble 
about seeking transformation with a white-hot desire and a willingness to 
risk everything. (p.5)

She questions her willingness to risk everything for the possibility of 
‘transformative intervention’ with the help of a traditional healer, and she acknowledges 
that this threatens her ‘hard-won equanimity’ found through her Zen practice of non-
attachment. She wonders if this kind of risk-taking is the “very grasping and attachment 
that meditation practice is supposed to still?” (p.5) She wonders if she would feel even 
more threatened and discombobulated if she allowed herself to hope for health and then 
it did not materialize. The practice of non-attachment seems much safer in this context, 
although Sutherland comes to realize that acceptance and surrender can be dynamic, 
they can include “the possible as well as the actual.” (p.6) Trust is not the same as 
resignation.

Another Buddhist teacher, Michelle McDonald-Smith, writing in the same book as 
Sutherland notes that all her ‘deep experiences’ with Insight meditation, particularly 
when she was on long retreats, would result in feelings of extreme agony and suffering: 
“The self was disappearing, but it was agony; it was annihilation, everything you don’t 
read about.” (McDonald-Smith, 1997, p.174) The more access she had to the depths of 
her meditation practice, the closer she got to the overwhelming and consuming darkness 
and she notes: “There was a tremendous split between the wise part of me and the 
damaged child.” (p.175) She later became very distrustful of anyone who could “spout 
such clear Dharma while their life was a mess” (ibid) There is often an implicit 
expectation in many traditions for spiritual teachers, or those far along in their practice, 
to be sufficiently ‘advanced’ that they no longer even have unresolved difficulties. This of 
course encourages repression and hiding as well as a fundamental split between the 
body/ emotions and the ‘spirit’ or the practice. It is certainly true in most spiritual or 
wisdom traditions, that without the integration of our shadow side there is a noticeable 
lack of authenticity; this often reads as obvious to those seeking guidance and/or ‘truth’.
The original ideas around butoh challenged the materiality of the body by tapping into and refining a non-dualistic art form (dance) and working with extreme gestures and images as a way to welcome suffering and all aspects of the life cycle. Butoh dance is contemplative and internal, but also subtle and dark. There is always a crack, a liminal space open to interpretation here, an uncertainty, the moment of pause, aha, or flow. Butoh provides an excellent vehicle for making the mind-body connection and entering visceral-cerebral state of non-duality. Butoh dancers are encouraged to explore the space of Ma, that liminal space of in-between, in order to express a continuous stream of images through gestures or inner movement, providing a constant metamorphosis. Butoh dance, being based in the body offers us a third path, a way to integrate the Buddhist reality that all life is suffering with the amorality of the trickster, who comes along as if to say, “not every time my friend”, even to the Buddha.

6.4. Subversive Pedagogy as Resistance

It is well documented in a vast amount of literature that ‘the arts matter’; there are countless research studies which show the benefits of artistic practice and expression towards self esteem, communication, cooperation habits, creativity and innovative thinking, among others. There are even more studies dedicated to showing the instrumental contributions and benefits of the arts on other school subjects such as music for a greater understanding of math; dance for better physical fitness; painting and visual art for enhancing reading proficiency; drama for augmenting verbal skills etc. These are instrumentalist views which tend to assume the arts are only commendable if they serve some other ‘higher’ purpose, usually in service to other (STEM) subjects. This emphasis on ‘transferable skills’ tends to reduce arts education to a mere servant status.

The greatest commonality with all this literature is the feeling that the arts are somehow ‘second-class citizens’, that they don’t actually matter and that as artists and teachers, we are constantly being put in a position of having to vindicate the arts as viable and worthy in themselves, that they are valuable as practice and inquiry as is. This justification is a thinly veiled plea to keep arts subjects included in the core curriculum, a plea to recognize the valuable social, behavioural, and yes even academic proficiencies that education in the arts develops. Public debates around the role and function of the arts in education generally revolve around budget, accountability and policy; we often hear common refrains such as ‘what do the arts actually teach?’ or ‘how
will arts education help one enter the work-force?’ There seems to be a constant dismissal of the importance of arts education which is ironic and funny because the arts and their artists are truly North America’s biggest and best export.

For the most part, the majority of this literature tries to frame the arts as ‘transferable skills’ for the job market. This is not unlike the fate of other subjects in our current education system, but the arts have taken an extra hit because these subjects- and their teachers- must also justify themselves under the rules and methods of the scientific model, a discourse prevalently admired for its tidiness, its right/ wrong answers, rational concepts and ‘facts’. Unlike the rational, scientific model- which is also highly creative in its own way, art practices rely on messy experimentation, ambiguous answers, irrational feelings and wonder. These qualities do not align easily with standardized testing. The scientific discourse is much better-suited to universal outcomes and achievement scores which appear to be the top priority for administrators and officials- usually outside of the classrooms- making the decisions around and designing our educational policy.

Step by step, this discourse has essentially come to represent the modern educational reality. The ‘objective worth’ of particular knowledge (i.e.: STEM subjects) is generally taken for granted, as is the idea that education must first and foremost set up individuals for the job market. We know for instance, that one of the stated assertions in “Goals 2000: the Educate America Act” was to have U.S students rank “first in the world in science and math achievement.” The initial reasoning behind this push towards STEM subjects is mostly lost to history now, however it is prudent to remember that this policy was formulated and instrumented as a ‘cold war’ strategy, essentially set up to beat the Russians to space. Several decades later, these war strategies have integrated themselves firmly into the centre of our education system, into the core of our societal beliefs around how education should function and what kind of citizens it should produce. For this reason alone, it’s crucial for art to maintain its subversive status; the arts must continue to fight against the notion that ‘transferable skills’ is an achievement, it’s not.

One of the perplexing aspects of the arts that often arises in educational contexts, is that we often appeal to the arts to say what it is we are (ironically) unable to articulate with verbal language or rational understanding. We turn to the arts to help us
articulate our deepest emotional experiences in life—love, loss, celebration, sorrow and yet we make this turn instinctively knowing that a piece of art cannot resolve these experiences, nor can art firmly define our feelings; artistic process simply offers us a fresh possibility, a new way of approaching the old problem. None of this work or ‘methodology’ is neat, tidy or testable but it is certainly necessary, particularly today. We create significance in the world, as artists, as humans, not only through our actions but also through our projected qualities. For instance, vitality and sensitivity are not ready-made qualities but learned, honed and trained, often for an entire lifetime. We have ways of being through our actions in the world, and further, ways of disclosing our being, creating attraction or repulsion as we shuffle about our daily lives. Creative acts offer a container for our emotions and feelings and they often train us to become better people.

We are reminded of the tendency in education and in life to censor excitation, eroticism, emotion and return to composure as the basis of the status quo. For instance, from the moment a child enters the institution of school, she is constantly told to sit down, be quiet and ‘behave’ (read: be still) which directly implies that any other kind of behavior is not acceptable. Children instinctively know that loud, chaotic behavior is almost never acceptable in an institutional setting or elsewhere and although this may suit the accompanying adults, it’s clearly represents a strong indoctrination policy. Children begin very early to receive the indoctrination that our emotions should be controlled and levelled out. For instance, we have normalized the process of medicating young children, justifying this by invoking the spectre of supposed concentration-inhibiting syndromes like ADHD. By engaging us with movement or stillness, expression, intention, butoh and other somatically based practices help to direct some of that raw, unexpressed energy that accumulates in our sedentary children, and moves it out.

Subversive or marginal art especially, is meant to assault our senses and provoke us to define the categories and/or limits which demarcate it. The more one is absorbed into the realms of the ‘normal’ social order, the less one’s ability to question or critique said paradigm. It is only from outside the binaries of our social order, that critique of the dominant ideology can be accurately made. Butoh as a hybridized, ambiguous, ugly art has a vantage position for this analysis. Butoh represents otherness exquisitely and as such it has remained inherently free. The liminal space opened by butoh dance hovers between resistance and apathy, rejection and participation, ever remaining
elusive. However, even the ritualistic and sacred elements of butoh can get co-opted, with liminality then becoming a space of commodification, like any other product.

Subversive art becomes the norm as soon as it’s drawn into the market stream, where radical ideas quickly become commodified and thus ‘safe’. As ideas and forms pass from the ‘avant garde’, for instance to positions of proliferation, ie. mass culture, via channels of exploitation, appropriation and the cult of cool, we can see that the potentially disruptive momentum of the subculture becomes limited and/ or controlled. Then, the hegemony of mass culture is continually re/over- emphasized through the previously subversive forms of art, erasing and nullifying it’s transgressive potential. In order to maintain its transgressive effect, subversive art must therefore constantly renew itself to avoid co-optation. Dance lends itself well to this eternal renewal as it leaves behind no remnants- nothing to analyze, capture, or hang on the wall. Butoh lends itself especially well to this sense of renewal for its ontic signature is one of constant change, shape-shifting and metamorphosis.
Chapter 7. **Conclusion: All True Wisdom is Dark**

The conditions of a solitary bird are five:

The first, that it flies to the highest point

The second, that it does not suffer for company,

Not even of its own kind

The third, that it aims its beak to the skies

The fourth, that it does not have a definite color

The fifth, that it sings very softly.

-San Juan de la Cruz, *Dichos de Luz y Amor*

“To dance is to be out of yourself. Larger, more beautiful, more powerful… This is power, it is glory on earth, and it is yours for the taking.”

- Agnes De Mille-
“All creatures be they human, animal or other, come into this world mentally equipped to confront the various difficulties life will cast their way...Moreover we share our bodies with the secret voice that will heal whatever sufferings we endure. The human organism has gradually evolved in this way. If we acknowledge the universal spirit in us, our bodies in themselves have the ability to fulfill our mission in life. Thanks to the combined force of our various organs and limbs (the stomach and intestines, where our bones- and the blood flowing through the sanctuary located in the marrow-are formed), thanks to all of these we possess whatever strength we need to live a full life. But in the rational world where we now find ourselves, we become deranged because we spend too much on our brains...Rather than relying on our brains, we should concentrate on our stomachs and intestines. These are life’s primal forces, so cherish them dearly.”

-Kazuo Ohno-

Today we are experiencing a globalized capitalism run completely amok as one of the most domineering and dangerous ideologies of all time. This system of domination threatens to destroy more species, and faster, than any other control system yet installed. Today, our world is not only suffering from alienation but even more drastically, from too much. Concepts like surplus, supply and demand, value, commodity and planned obsolescence are saturating our minds and structuring our morality, dumping ever more useless and unwanted stuff onto our planet. Each one of us is deeply embedded-albeit to greater or lesser degrees, in the now globally accepted and endorsed practice of consumption as a supreme achievement. This capitalist structure is now completely ubiquitous to the modern industrial way of life and is based on hierarchy, dominance, power, desire, addiction and unconscious, often cruel human behaviour. It is one of the most enlightening places to look to understand the power structures at work in the world today.

Our collective psychosis is manifesting entirely through the capitalist structure, which has reached what Ray Kurzweil describes in *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005). Although he is specifically referring to human-designed systems of (self) control as originating in technology, the analogy can be applied splendidly to the capitalist system. The ‘singularity’ as Kurzweil describes it, reflects an idea within the law of accelerating returns: That exponential growth starts out virtually unnoticeable but then proceeds to explode beyond the knee of the curve, somewhat ‘unexpectedly.’ Kurzweil reminds us that even though evolutionary processes such as biology and technology tend to represent increases in complexity, this is not the
ultimate end product, because evolution should result in better, more practical solutions and answers, not necessarily more complicated ones; sometimes (often) the best solution is the simplest. (Kurzweil, 2005)

We can apply the theory of the singularity to many possibilities including the ability of the earth to properly contain all of us, and not only our bodies but all of our produced goods as well as the inevitability of those goods becoming waste products. Each generation of human is actually reproducing at the level of exponential growth, but this is still considering the rate at which we are excreting in terms of pollutants and garbage. We have certainly ‘evolved’ in terms of divergence as a culture distinctively away from the time and philosophy of Aristotle, where the full life was considered one of contemplation and for an elite few, involvement in political life. Today a full life would be characterized by one packed with material objects, representations of wealth and status—still precious in their own right— but essentially without meaning. It is no accident that focusing on the materiality of the body is such a pre-occupation for feminist discourse.

The capitalist ‘machine’ represents something we continue to nurture from one generation to the next, keeping it alive but also literally making it stronger and more self-reliant as a system unto itself with each passing year. In other words, the containment system is itself becoming addictive and needful of our dependence, as much as we are reliant on it. The system then becomes an entity in its own right. For instance, it is virtually impossible to live entirely outside of this capitalist system at this time in history and therefore we are almost entirely dependent on this same system to feed us both literally and figuratively. In this case, the capitalist ‘machine’ simply continues to get bigger as each generation of manufactured goods creates more disconnect from our animal, natural selves— enabling us to create a situation where we are now in the active process of destroying our planet, our home. There comes a point however, where the ‘system’ (moral, ideological, economic etc.) set up to protect elite, imperial powers begins to consume itself and its citizens.

Our identities have become so entwined with the essential workings of the capitalist system of entrapment that it can feel hard at times to define our uncertainty about why the world doesn’t feel quite right, why it appears so ignorant, contemptuous even, of other species’ needs, particularly as we depend on them for our ultimate survival. (If no other assertion can be made for the importance of the animal kingdom for
its own sake, beyond human needs, we do depend on animals for food sources!) We are so embedded in this ideological structure that we have become blind to the effects of our gluttony and addictive desires. In fact, we must become blind to the cause and effect nature of our historical and recursive tide of consumption in order to justify the world we have created. The alienation, over-consumption and depersonalization that we are experiencing today on a world scale closely resembles what traditional cultures would have called ‘soul loss’.

Today we are not only dealing with a climate catastrophe and news that we are currently in the middle of a mass extinction event, we are also dealing with an increasing excess of images, screens and radiation as well as even more profound disconnect from the natural, outside world. Dominant and oppressive ideologies invade our psychic space each and every time we turn to our devices for entertainment, news or information. We are literally being bombarded and we seem to be turning into a society of two-dimensional creatures. Although urban spaces, travel and now computer mediated realities create the possibility of spontaneous and exciting connections, events and meetings on one hand, this modernized lifestyle also seems to sever actual human relations as well as our moral structure on the other hand. It gives rise to a “conscience and a body that are standardized but constantly being dismantled, de-integrated, de-centralized and endlessly dispersed.” (Yoshihara and Sato, 2010, p.45)

Distinctions are massively blurred in this paradigm as we reach for a sense of identity but with each passing moment, we are provided only with more virtual connections and less and less physical interaction. This leaves place as a mere connotation, and in effect so leaves the body at the same destination. It becomes a fragmented and pulverized space/place and even our dependable Newtonian sense of time gets morphed in this virtual space. We are increasingly becoming “beings of the between, always on the move between places.” (Casey, 2009, p.xii) Thus, motion becomes highly integrated with our sense of place, even when ironically, our actual bodies are seemingly moving less and less. As we somatically adjust to the mechanism of ‘instantaneous time’ which in turn, re-orders our sense of duration, our bodies are losing a certain vital perceptive intelligence. Butoh explores and promotes deceleration, a way to functionally slow down the body’s sense of time, a subversive and important methodology in a world getting faster by the day.
We are losing an essential connection with our bodies and have become alienated from our own animal nature. The disconnect from the erotic, sexual forces in nature which keep us grounded and aware of our animal bodies also appears as a disconnect from our very real dependence on earth, the land and its creatures. Society is turning itself into a simulation zone and somatic dance practices like butoh provide an opportunity to be grounded in the physical reality of our bodies, and in the physical reality of the places we inhabit. Somatic practices are also a vastly useful tool for establishing philosophical connections to the body through non-verbal, pre-linguistic communication. To perceive that which is beyond language has the capacity to alter our conscious awareness transformatively and permanently and this increasingly important in a world that appears to be totally consumed by the ‘benefits of technology’.

To appreciate the profundity of butoh is to understand this form for the transgressive and thus, regenerative powers it contributes to art and to life. Butoh is a powerful non-dualistic form, inviting us to be comfortable with uncertainty, chaos and emptiness. Butoh dance as an expression, brings us into communion with alternate states of understanding and being outside of rational thought. By embodying the mythical trickster character, a sublime representation of paradox, ambiguity and the ultimate outlier, butoh dance transgresses the binary thinking which underlies our (still) patriarchal culture. In the East, morality and education are not separated. Non dualism, non-separation.

Today we must also wade into the morally complex swamp which declares being intolerant as the only way to protect tolerance, for instance the alarming disappearance of free speech at many University campuses, (if that speech does not fall in line with the politically correct, leftist views that currently prevail especially in academia, there continue to be dire consequences for professors and students alike.) Or the notion that we must be unkind and hateful to protect those we love, seen for instance in the rise of Islamophobia across Western nations; or the ability to carry guns, fully visible alongside the right to ‘stand your ground’ if anyone trespasses on your property. It’s a universal truth that we live only with degrees of paradox and we are constantly invited to accept wholeheartedly, the truth of uncertainty. Butoh helps with this uncertainty by providing unbridled precision and release into the world of liminality, the state between life and death, most easily accessed through, (especially) physical crisis.
Butoh dance represents an ethics of ambiguity and can provide a much-needed third view in a world and society fraught with divisiveness. Butoh is comfortable with uncertainty, fragility and degeneration and this seems increasingly important (as well as subversive), in our post-truth world full of binary, black-and-white thinking and perfected optics. However, as our world and technology develop and change at an increasingly accelerated pace, it seems we are becoming more unable to withstand the tortures of ambiguity as a society and although butoh provides a transgressive relief, it is not for everyone. Butoh dance specifically encourages a release of dark (sub) conscious contents, making allowance for Eros, uncertainty, and powerful subversive themes like death, decay, perversity, ghosts, and terror.

Today butoh has become a kind of global diaspora, representing several disparate choreographic methods- or lack thereof, as well as differing approaches to performer training and performance aesthetics. Although there is no particular choreographic method or aesthetic which holds it together as a style, butoh continues to flourish internationally. In many ways, butoh continues to be a force of resistance against the mainstream market forces by its very non-cohesiveness. As we become more consumed by virtual worlds and their devices, butoh dance remains an inherently rebellious yet somehow accessible form, particularly for those at the outer edges of the social equilibrium; butoh continues to offer entrance to the marginalized. Butoh reminds us to have reverence for the spirit of the contingent and to remember that those on the outer fringes of the social order are often the creators of culture, not despite this transgressive nature, but because of it.

Butoh retains its transgressive nature by expressing the non-beautiful possibilities of the body, exploring crisis through themes like obsession, madness, trauma and deformity- themes which most people tend to stay away from. Butoh uses its ‘ugly’ aesthetic as a form of rebellion from the dominant cultural forces who value extreme beauty, hyper-sameness and virulent capitalist ideologies; a culture moving ever closer to the heart of idiocracy. After all, order is essential for maintaining limitation. Butoh dance represents not merely a rebellious aesthetic statement, but a crucial ethos which disrupts accepted dogma around consumerism as a way of life; a way that is currently eclipsing all other forms of freedom or meaning-making globally. Today we need any and all methods and approaches that value fighting against this unremitting banality, these low-brow pleasure systems which compel us to keep consuming and
enable us to avoid focusing on the kind of reality we might actually like to create—both personally and socially—which might make the world a happier, safer place.

Ankoku butoh, precisely because of its dark and transgressive themes, can directly and effectively address personal pain as well as the collective trauma of our divided culture, particularly for those at the outer fringes. Every form of art has an awareness of crisis at its root. Without suffering there is no forward movement and butoh recognizes this with a profound depth of awareness. Butoh offers a vivid experience of impermanence and as such it aligns with healing principals; those which seek to create kinship and service, and this remains of primary importance for its pedagogy today. As we become more aware of our own mind-bodies we can be more creative, more helpful, more loving. When we do this from a deep place of offering or perhaps sacrifice, we are able to advance immense amounts of creative energy into our communities.

My journey with butoh has been profound, for I see it not only as a physical practice and creative art form, but also as a spiritual advisor, a place to seek wisdom and collective memory. Butoh gives me access to knowledge that is stored deep within the folds of my human cells; butoh helps me find that place. Butoh endeavours to help us find our own mind/body and then release its contents; all art attempts this and great art achieves it. As I investigated this further, I recognized butoh dance to be the superior healing balm for my deepest wounds, not despite but because of its dark themes. Butoh is like a force of liberation guiding the body toward states of conscience and abandon. I love butoh for daring to give access to an unknown murky world, full of uncertainty, fragmentation and the heroic force of suffering, and I have always been attracted to butoh for its ability to hold both the dark and the light.
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Appendix
Film: Unchosen

Creator/Director:
Blackbird (April Russell) and Andrew Dodd Clippingdale (Dodd's Eye Media)

Music: “East Hastings” by Godspeed You Black Emperor!

Description:
The film is complementary to this paper. It explores Butoh dance as it intersects with both film and music. The dance is about the choices we do and don't get to make.

It’s impossible to impart the kinetic information that (butoh) dance gives us through a dissertation but perhaps with a visual offering, the form becomes most clear.

Filename:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE9RNZ398As&list=PLa0YjeFvpl63oEjFVsoqt67obtEsequAu&index=4&t=0s