Butoh

"Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty, and Mad"

Bonnie Sue Stein

The spotlight settles on a flamboyant figure perched on the edge of an orchestra seat. A 79-year-old man—face and hands painted white, lips bright red—wears an old-fashioned black velvet dress, a crumpled pink hat, and high-heeled shoes. He adjusts his hat, dabs his face, lowers his eyes and flutters his eyelids. With mincing arms, he becomes the grotesque shadow of a young coquette. He drapes himself across the edge of the stage in the serpentine curves of traditional femininity, then kicks his foot high like a carefree young lover. To the slow koto music, he skips, flutters, and poses. Finally he smiles, drops one shoulder and tilts his chin like a scared and puzzled child, curtseys, and tiptoes away.

Pierrot at the big top? An old 42nd Street transvestite? No. To the audience at New York's Joyce Theater he is a revelation. To Japan he is a pioneer of contemporary dance. To the world he is Kazuo Ohno, one of the founders of butoh (plates 1 & 2).

Hanging upside down by ropes tied around their ankles, Sankai Juku's shaven, white-powdered bodies are lowered from the roof of the Los Angeles Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. In September 1985, one dancer fell to his death during such an outdoor performance in Seattle. Sankai Juku (plate 3), which means "the school of mountain and sea," is the most widely produced butoh company.

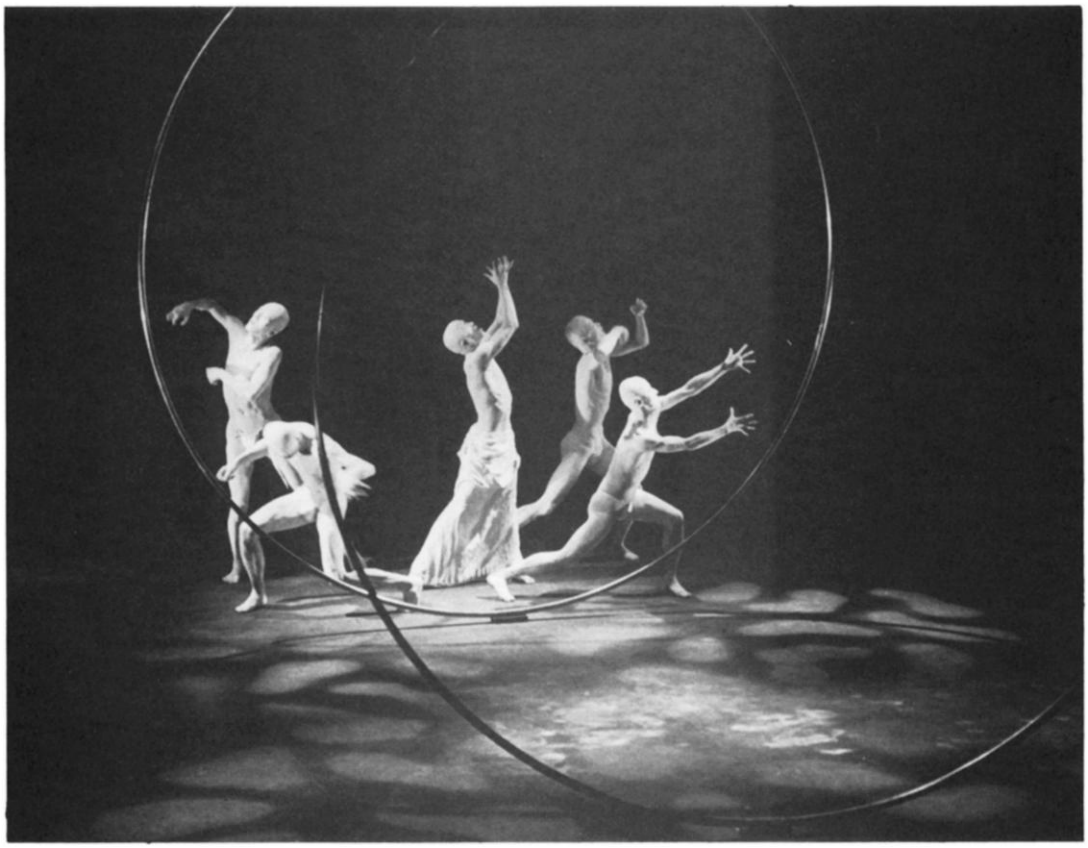
With arms outstretched, 15 to 20 men and women walk across the large proscenium stage, their muscles tensed and vibrating as if carrying a heavy load. Their semi-nude, white-painted bodies are partially covered by open kimonos worn backward. A stocky man with a heavy wooden armoire strapped to his back runs huffing and grunting around the stage, searching for a place to rest his burden. He is a cross between a Keystone cop and a Shakespearean fool. Akaji Maro's group, Dai Rakuda-kan, performed at the 1982 American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C. They were the first large butoh company to be seen in the United States (plates 4 & 5).

A young woman is barely visible in the back corner of the dimly lit stage at New York's Asia Society. She sways gently backward before taking each small, brave step. She advances, imperceptibly, until she

1 & 2. Kazuo Ohno in his tribute to the dancer, La Argentina, Admiring La Argentina *(1977), performed at the Joyce Theater in November 1985. (Photo 1 by Linda Vartoogian, photo 2 by Jack Vartoogian)*

3. In Jomon Sho *(1982), Sankai Juku dances with two rings, symbolizing the sun and the moon. (Photo by Jack Vartoogian)*

4 & 5. Dai Rakuda-kan in Sea Dappled Horse *(1980) at the American Dance Festival, Durham, N.C., 1982. (Photo by Jay Anderson)*



6. Her movements barely visible, Natsu Nakajima of Muteki-sha carries a sheaf of wheat in Niwa *(1982). (Photo courtesy of The Asia Society)*

reaches center stage and is encircled in a pool of light. The tall sheaf of wheat she carries vibrates with her body. Natsu Nakajima of Muteki-sha is delicately, silently inching her way through *Niwa* (1982), her "garden" (plate 6).

Naked except for the bandage wrapped around his penis, Min Tanaka leans against a rusty steel wall sculpture. The sunlight streaks across his face, painting a white stripe on the earth-brown makeup. It seems like an eternity before he moves. Ever so slowly, eyes closed, he slides around the edge of the steel, absorbed by the metal, and disappears on the other side. He is improvising with the environment, his trademark (plate 7).

Kazuo Ohno, Sankai Juku, Dai Rakuda-kan, Muteki-sha, Min Tanaka, Tatsumi Hijikata, Yoko Ashikawa, Eiko and Koma, Ariadon, and at least 40 other soloists and companies comprise butoh, the dance genre that emerged during the late 1950s and early '60s from Japan's contemporary dance scene.

Butoh is:

shocking
provocative
physical
spiritual
erotic
grotesque
violent
cosmic
nihilistic
cathartic
mysterious

In the 1860s, *butoh* was used to define dance in general; later it applied exclusively to "ancient dance." The term was also used to describe Western-style ballroom dancing. Butoh was first used in its current sense in the early '60s by Tatsumi Hijikata to describe his rebellious, syncretic

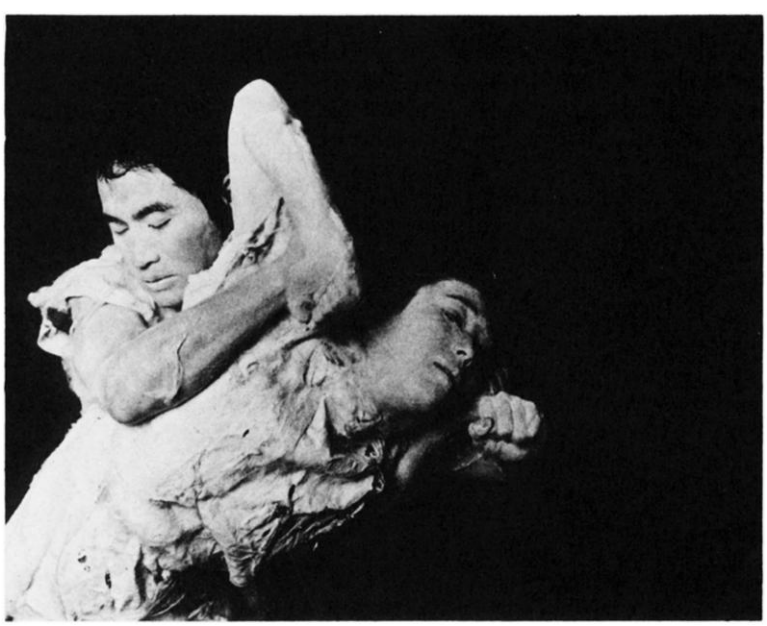
7. Min Tanaka in Shadow Traffic *(1983), improvising with the given environment. (Photo by Charles Steiner)*

performance style. Hijikata first called the style *anokoku butoh*, or "dance of darkness or gloom."[1] the word "butoh" is comprised of two Japanese characters—"bu," meaning dance, and "to," which literally means step. Today, butoh is used to describe both solo and group dances that seem to be taking very different but parallel directions.

There are many elements of butoh that link it to noh and kabuki, as well as to the other traditional arts of Japan. Most of these links, however, are superficial. Butoh is an anti-traditional tradition seeking to erase the heavy imprint of Japan's strict society and offering unprecedented freedom of artistic expression. After World War II, Japanese artists turned away from the traditional forms—as well as from the West—and asked, "What is contemporary Japanese dance?" There are some visible similarities to noh and kabuki—the white body paint, also used in kabuki, and the extremely slow noh-like movement. But these traditional forms were viewed as archaic, their codified choreography useless to the early butoh improvisers. Zeami, the great noh master, said that facial expression was cheap. Butoh artists disagreed, emphasizing their faces.

Nakajima said, "We found that we were making the same discoveries as noh actors made, using some of the same terminology, but we had never learned those forms."[2] New York-based dancers Eiko and Koma have said that often they are incorrectly compared to noh and kabuki dancers by Western critics, even though they never studied either form. Their most revered teacher is the German Manja Chmiel, a student of Mary Wigman, who Eiko and Koma studied with in the mid-1970s (plate 8).

Since Dai Rakuda-kan's 1982 appearance in Durham, N. C., Tanaka's 1981 New York performances and workshops, and the inclusion of Sankai Juku in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival, butoh has become popular with American art world audiences. Butoh's success can be explained partly by understanding trends in postmodern American dance and by appreciating the general "Asian boom" in the West. Japan has



8. Eiko (right) and Koma in their three-part Trilogy *(1979-81), breaking out of a self-imposed cocoon. (Photo by Marcus Leatherdale)*

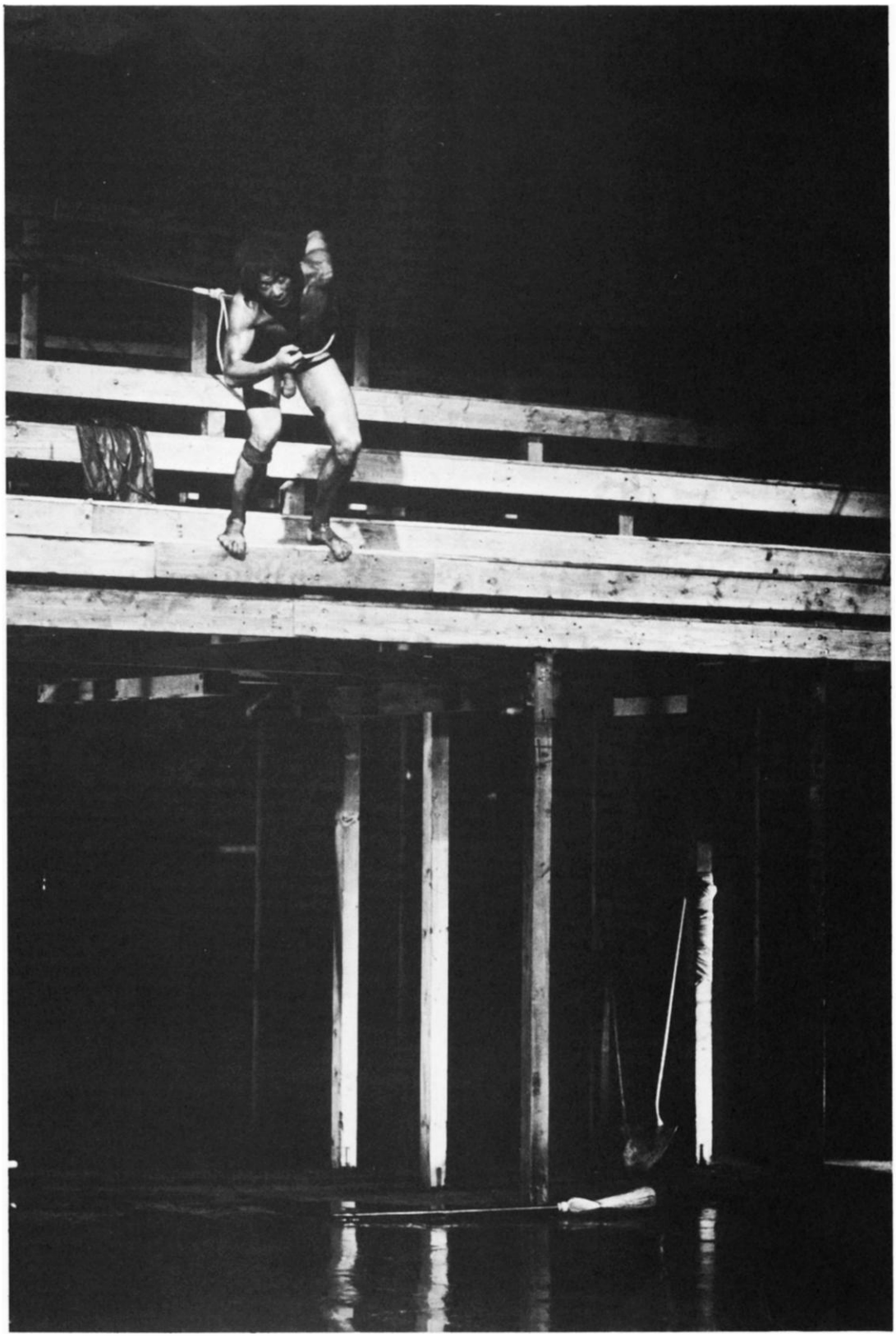
9. Min Tanaka in Form of the Sky *(1985) at La Mama E.T.C., December 1985. (Photo by Charles Steiner)*

long been a great influence on the experimental dance and theater of the West. From Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Mabou Mines to Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Laura Dean, and Lucinda Childs, Japanese elements have been used in sets, mise-en-scenes, staging, movement and vocalization. In the marketplace, department stores like Bloomingdales build extravagant ad campaigns around their "exotic" imports from the East. In the performing arts, American audiences have begun to show an interest in the Japanese forms of kabuki, noh, kyogen, bugaku, and now butoh.

There is great variety in the imagery of the butoh dancers, but it is always haunting and of a lasting impression. One does not generally go away from a butoh performance with an ambiguous feeling—you either love it or hate it. Susan Sontag attended Min Tanaka's *Form of the Sky* (1985) at La Mama E.T.C. in December 1985 (plate 9). In Tokyo, she had been very excited about his *Emotion* (1985) (plate 10) but was confused by *Form of the Sky*. According to Tanaka, "she was thinking of my last performance, keeping it in her head. She couldn't throw that one away." Sontag returned to see *Form of the Sky* again. Afterward, she spoke to Tanaka at length. "I think she understands it now," he said. What is this butoh imagery about, and why does it have such an impact on Western audiences of the '80s?

10. Min Tanaka in the 1983 addition to his ongoing work, Emotion*: his body painted brown, his penis wrapped in a rag. (Photo by Charles Steiner)*

The work of these Japanese artists is so thorough and so "Japanese" that Westerners sense a searing honesty. People rarely question the validity of butoh; they accept both the grotesque and the lyrical images. Because butoh is so obviously demanding, spectators who may not like it—who may even feel uncomfortable confronting such intensity—still respect the experimentation and the performance skills required.



Artists who devote their lives to butoh are not unlike noh performers: their lives are rooted in their art. And it is this passionate, focused attention that Westerners respond to. Audiences are drawn in by the direct and raw emotions. I have seen spectators staring with wide eyes, and I have seen them sleeping—which I consider an escape from the spectacle rather than boredom. In Japan, especially at noh drama, a hypnogogic "dozing" is an acceptable way of taking in the performance. This state is a version of "attention" usually not found in the West.

Awake or not, prior to the Tokyo Butoh Festival of February 1985, relatively few Japanese had seen butoh. In Japan, the form suffers from what is called *gyaku-yunyu*, or "go out and come back." Until an artist gains recognition abroad, s/he is unlikely to win approval in Japan.

Kazuko Kuniyoshi says of the Western reaction to butoh:

> Western theater and dance has not reached beyond technique and expression as means of communication. The cosmic elements of butoh, its violence and nonsense, eroticism and metamorphic qualities, are welcomed by Western artists because they are forced to use their imaginations when confronted with mystery. Butoh acts as a kind of code to something deeper, something beyond themselves. What is crucial to this code is its nonverbal nature (1985:6).

The New York Times chief dance critic, Anna Kisselgoff, compared American and butoh choreographers:

> Whether they acknowledge it or not, American dancers and choreographers are still using Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, the Judson Dance Theater of the 1960s and other major figures as reference points. They may extend the ideas or idioms of these choreographers, or rebel against them. But they are still working in their shadow.[. . .] Movement for movement's sake has been the overriding principle for choreographers seeking new directions.[. . .] They have increasingly borrowed ideas from the minimalist esthetic in the visual arts and in music.[. . .] Postmodern dance is actually an extension of a general formalist esthetic. Form was content in American dance (1985:H14).

In contrast, she said butoh uses "natural movement and stylized gestures to convey emotional content or human relationships." In other words, butoh's emphasis is on emotional expression. But a swing toward overt content and representation is in the air and part of the reason is butoh.

In the workshop given by Nakajima at The Asia Society in September 1985, the instructor said that "in America dance became too abstract, so now dancers want to add daily activity. I can understand why. They want to recover what dance is." She felt that most of the dance she had seen in America was mechanical and, therefore, not interesting. Butoh is a "bridge between action and narrative with dance movement or choreography."

Tatsumi Hijikata

Lizzie Slater, a historian who recently lectured in Oxford, England on ankoku butoh, has written:

> After Hiroshima the young generation of Japan, mauled by the War and the shattering of the past, needed to shriek out. Okamoto Taro returned from Manchuria and urged his fellow visual artists in 1948 "to destroy everything with monstrous energy like Picasso's in order to reconstruct the Japanese art world" and Okamoto went on to state that art must not be beautiful, technically skillful, or "comfortable." Instead, it should be "disagreeable," disregarding easy beauty and known forms of art. The post-war period in Japan was based on the destruction of old values (1985:1-2).

In the art world, the rebellion was made manifest in the work of people like author Yukio Mishima, theatrical experimenters like Shuji Terayama, and dancer/choreographer Hijikata. They explored the dark truths that hid beneath the Japanese social mask. Hijikata wanted to uncover the ignored aspects of Japanese society such as deformity and insanity. These were difficult subjects for performance and led to a great deal of controversy regarding the work he presented:

> The aim of Hijikata was a direct assault on the nervous system. The Japanese features in art ceased to be reticent and understated and became arrogant and antagonistic. Hijikata began collaborating with Kazuo Ohno in the mid-'50s, but the most significant performance Hijikata staged was *Kinjiki* ("Forbidden Colors," 1959) based on a work by Mishima. This piece was presented as part of a series of performances organized by the All-Japan Art Dance Association in 1959. It was a violent spasm of anti-dance: a young man clutches a live chicken between his thighs, in the midst of a brutalizing act of buggery. In the darkness the audience perceives the advancing footsteps of another man, Hijikata advances on the younger man (Yoshito Ohno, the son of Kazuo). There was no music, the effect was shattering. Several members of the Association were so appalled that they threatened to resign. Instead, Hijikata left, followed by others, including Kazuo Ohno. This represented the break from the modern dance world (Slater 1985:2).

Another famous Hijikata production was the 1968 *Nikutai no Hanran* ("Rebellion of the flesh"). In this performance Hijikata killed chickens on stage. Dancer Ko Murobushi saw this work and decided at once to join Hijikata's studio.

> "I went to the hall alone, in a bit of a rush. I came across a horse in front of the entrance, then a number of objects in the foyer by Takigushi [the surrealist who was a very influential avant-garde figure, organizing many exhibitions at the time], Kano, and by Nakanishi [the primary designer for ankoku butoh in 1965, still an important butoh collaborator]. The performance began with a flying model aircraft which crashed into a huge metal sheet at the back of the stage after circling over the audience, screeching with noise. Hijikata appeared, making slow progress through the audience from the back of the hall, as if he were to be crowned. He was muttering, groaning, singing — in some way dancing. In a later scene, he was suspended from the ceiling like a moth, as if trapped in a spider's web. This was not elegant or

> aesthetic, but wild, vivid, delicate, the intensity overwhelmed me. No one can show, be NOW, as radically as Hijikata. He became dance itself, the Poet of Darkness" (Slater 1985:4).

Mishima is said to have wept at this performance, saying, "It's terrifying, this is time dancing."

Postwar Japan was a time for breeding a new code of ethics. To rebel against a failed society was not surprising. The atmosphere was exciting: very unorganized and messy, the kind of confusion that tends to breed either more confusion or acute creativity. Like surrealism, early butoh used distortions of nature, and like dada, it used chance as a principle of composition. In another early work which Hijikata called *Dance Experience* (1960), he provoked the audience, often creating a dialog with them, confronting them directly from the stage. Improvisation was used by Hijikata, Ohno, Kasai Akira, and others of this early avant-garde. Chance and improvisation contrasted with Japan's balance and order.

Emotional expressionism entered the dances as well. A people humiliated by losing the war, Japanese artists searched for a way to express themselves. If the rest of life were full of hiding, at least the dance should be free. And so the chaos grew. Every convention was dropped. They danced naked, provoked the audience, played deafeningly loud music. Among others, Takaya Eguchi, Ohno's teacher from 1936 until 1947, had traveled to Germany in 1922 to study with Mary Wigman. He and some of his peers later used elements of this German *neue tanz* such as loud music and dramatic emotional expressions. Ohno and Hijikata followed suit. Other German dancers such as Harald Kreutzberg had visited Japan around 1939 and left their expressionistic mark. Hijikata integrated eroticism, nudity, provocation, and social criticism with other elements of Japanese culture: classical dance, Japanese body postures, pre-war vulgar entertainment, medieval grotesque paintings. From European culture he took inspiration from the paintings of Bosch, Breugel, and Goya, from surrealism, dada, and later, 1960s Pop Art.

Most Japanese art forms require a sensitivity to the action continued beyond its limits, to the state of the artist as s/he overcomes self-imposed boundaries. Working beyond one's threshold of endurance increases human potential, thereby increasing emotional and physical strength—and reaching *satori*. Studying kendo (Japanese fencing) in Japan from 1975-76, I experienced this samurai attitude. In kendo, one is expected to participate in the practice long after the body has tired. To continue means to really "learn" something about kendo. The body and mind are exhausted, self-control is abandoned, and there is nothing to interfere with spontaneous learning. I often felt this happening to me. I would become so involved in the practice that I did not notice my tired body. The room—and time—would disappear. There was a great deal of elation following this feeling, and somehow it seemed the only place for growth. This is a key to butoh: working beyond self-imposed boundaries, passing through the gates of limitation into undiscovered territory. Whether the gestures are slow and deliberate as with Muteki-sha, or wild and self-effacing as with Tanaka, the artists share a common driving dedication to the work. The strength of their commitment is an extension of the samurai/never-give-up spirit that has reasserted itself so powerfully in contemporary Japan, evident in the business world as well as the arts.

Hijikata did not perform in public for at least the last ten years of his life. He choreographed several works for Ohno and Yoko Ashikawa, a

woman who is said to have had all her teeth pulled in the early days of butoh in order to create more varied and extreme facial expressions. Koma remembers seeing her dance around 1970. He was so moved by her performance that he decided to quit the university and study with Hijikata. When Hijikata, after years of improvising, began to choreograph for Ashikawa, three principles governed his work (Kuniyoshi 1985:3). First, in contrast to Western dance, he emphasized discontinuity, imbalance, and entropy instead of rhythm, balance, and the flow of kinetic energy. Second, he used traditional Japanese sources for inspiration. Third, he developed the lower body; Japanese proportions are different from Westerners', and Hijikata wanted to create movement specifically for the Japanese body. This has been extremely liberating for Japanese dancers, whose bodies are not suited to Western modern dance. Ashikawa continues to perform Hijikata's choreography and will travel to Berlin in 1986 with Tanaka and Ohno.

In 1984, Hijikata choreographed a dance for Tanaka. Tanaka had always worked independently of both Hijikata and Ohno and, unlike most butoh dancers, had never studied with either of the founding fathers. The success of the collaboration weighed heavily on him. Tanaka and Hijikata worked continuously for two months preparing Tanaka's Tokyo performance. They called the dance *Ren-Ai Butoh-ha* ("Love Butoh Sect," 1984), a name which stood for any work they did together. In the program essay for the December 1985 performance of *Form of the Sky*, Tanaka wrote:

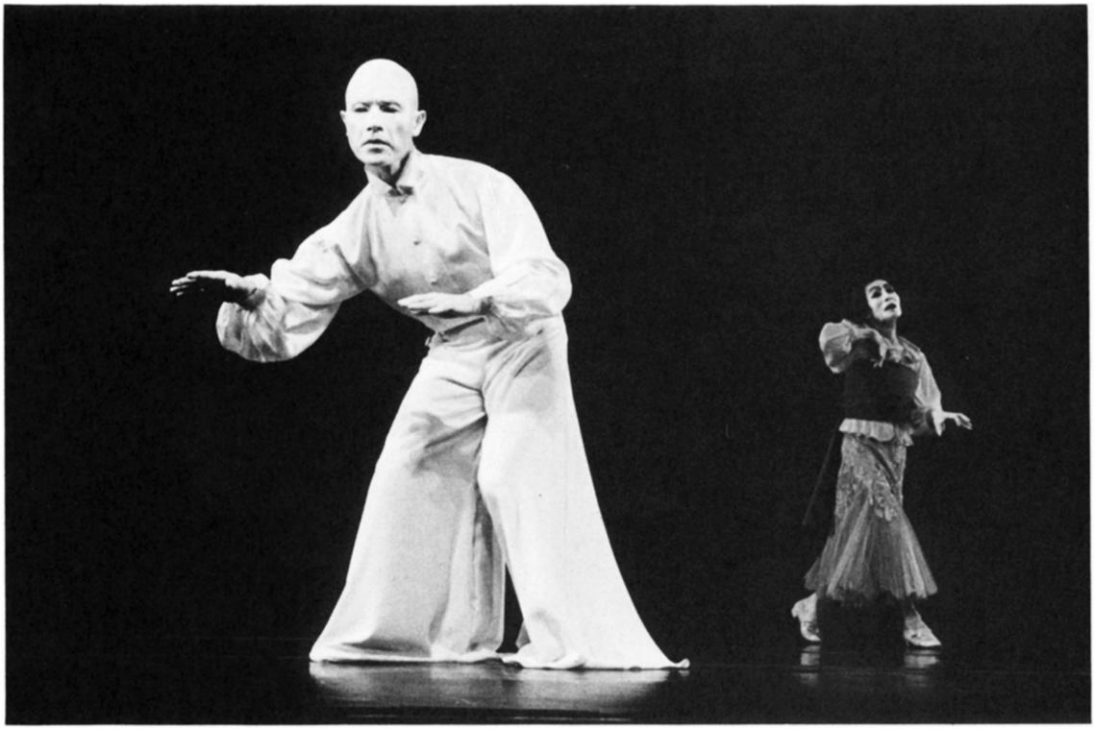
> Since Hijikata stung my eyes, I became his son. [. . .] Hijikata constantly whispers strategy into my ears, and I would like to introduce him to all of you, hardly standing on enfeebled legs (see pp. 153–156).

Hijikata continued to teach and choreograph in Tokyo until his death in January 1986 (see inset on p. 126). He was planning his first tour abroad—he had always refused to get a passport because he felt that it was not necessary to leave Japan. He resisted any commercial development of butoh and opened his workshops to the public, training anyone who wanted to learn.

Kazuo Ohno

Ohno lifts his skirts slightly above his shapely calf. He takes a small leap forward and lands in a "new world." Arms outstretched, wrists limp, he tilts his head and pliés like a child in ballet class. Later he returns to the stage in a purple fringed scarf and white bloomers. A Cabbage Patch doll is pinned to the scarf, and a large flower is in his hair. He goes into the audience and offers candy to a man, then tosses candies into the air. He exits, and his son enters, looking like a monk in a long, white high-collared silk robe. In contrast to his father, Yoshito Ohno's movements are extremely slow. I am certain that I saw his ears move as he approached the soft blue light (plate 11).

Ohno has an immense wardrobe boasting an array of gowns for all occasions. During a recent trip to New York, he purchased an exquisite off-white satin beauty, circa 1890, with puffed sleeves, a high collar, and a four-foot train. At home, he tried on the dress and immediately began to dance. He looked like an old bride whose groom left her waiting at the altar (plate 12).



11. At the Joyce Theater, Yoshito Ohno performs in The Dead Sea *(1985) with his father, Kazuo Ohno. (Photo by Linda Vartoogian)*

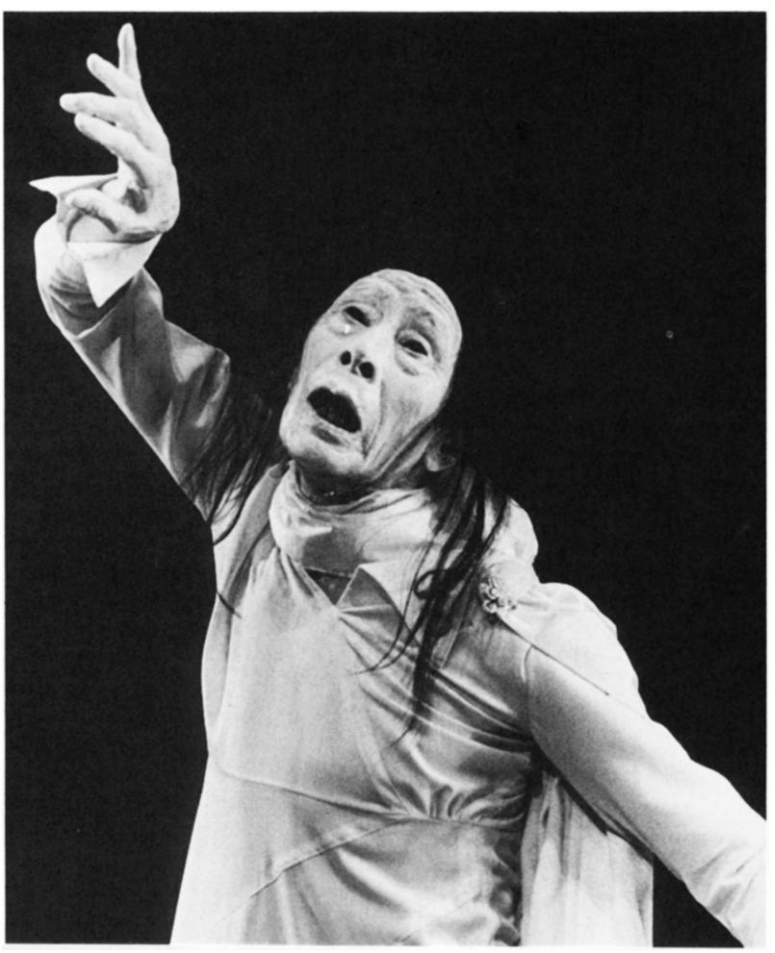
12. Trying on new costumes, Ohno improvises—he is like a bride left waiting at the altar. (Photo by Marilyn McLaren)

Ohno's peers and former students refer to him as a god. He exists for his dance and constant research. Ohno is a philosopher and loves to talk about dance and his past and to describe his previous performances, both analytically and physically. He writes every day, composing essays with such titles as, "What is a Lesson," "A Rehearsal Scene," "The Encounter with Argentina," and "The Will" (see pp. 157–162).

At home, Ohno teaches two days a week in his Yokohama studio. But most of the time he is on tour, dancing and distributing his essays. *Admiring La Argentina* (1977), his most famous work, has been performed in Europe, Israel, North and South America, and Asia. When performing this dance, Ohno feels that he is La Argentina, the famous Spanish dancer he first saw in 1929. In *My Mother* (1981), he becomes his mother, the other great woman who has influenced his work. Other major influences cited by Ohno are his teacher Takaya Eguchi, collaborations with Hijikata, the Japanese avant-garde experimentation of the 1960s, and his deep Christian beliefs.

In *My Mother*, Ohno skips, jumps, lays down. His metamorphic face and body display a multitude of emotional expressions. There is a lyrical yet pitiful quality to his "mother," as he dances the dance of a tragic clown. Marcia B. Siegel described her reaction to his 1985 appearance at New York's Joyce Theater:

> The 79-year-old performer is waging an intense physical competition, a wrestling match where he gets so intimate with death that he sometimes acquires his adversary's face (1985:114) (plate 13).



13. The Dead Sea *(1985). Marcia B. Siegel describes Ohno: "he gets so intimate with death that he sometimes acquires his adversary's face." (Photo by Jack Vartoogian)*

Ohno's performances are structured improvisations. Although he never does exactly the same movements twice, he works from the same inspiration. He does not feel that there is a separation between life and dance. As Eiko said, Ohno "does not commute." (see pp. 163–169.)

Ohno wrote about improvisation:

> The empty stage, the bare stage you appear on, without any preparation, does not mean that it contains nothing. [. . .] The vacant space is gradually being filled and in the end, something is realized there. [. . .] It may be the kind of thing that takes a lifetime to learn—in my case I instantaneously knew the fact that the empty space actually was filled and I danced in joy and excitement (1984:10).

Ohno feels that he is blessed, fortunate to be able to dance.

Min Tanaka

Tanaka is also an improviser, never performing the same way twice (see pp. 142–151). "Min," as his students and friends call him, the "farmer/dancer," dedicates his life to pushing his body beyond its limits. Recently he acquired a working farm, complete with chickens, vegetables, and rice fields. An heir of the alternative lifestyle of the '60s, he wants to create a self-sufficient economy. The farm will provide jobs, food, and a creative environment for his company, Manijuku, and for his students.

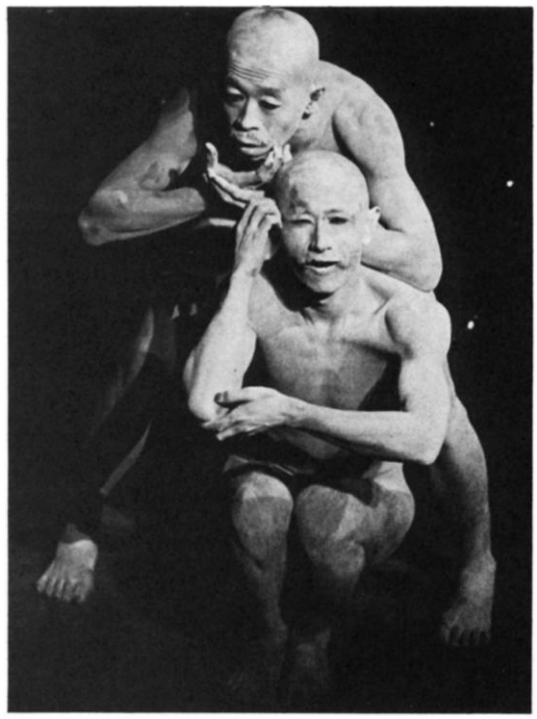
Sankai Juku

For Ohno, every dance is a celebration of life, even when the images are dark and he is gazing fearlessly into the eyes of death. Sankai Juku, the controversial five-man group, stares into the face of death each time they perform *Jomon Sho* ("Homage to Prehistory," 1982), an ongoing work that opens with the dancers descending from the stage rafters as they hang upside down from thick jute ropes. In one of their outdoor pieces, in which the men use ropes to scale multiple-story buildings, the death imagery that informs this work—and so much of butoh—became a reality on 10 September 1985 when one of the dancers fell to his death. For some who witnessed the Seattle performance, the event was a mystical experience; for others, Yoshiyuki Takada's death was an avoidable tragedy.

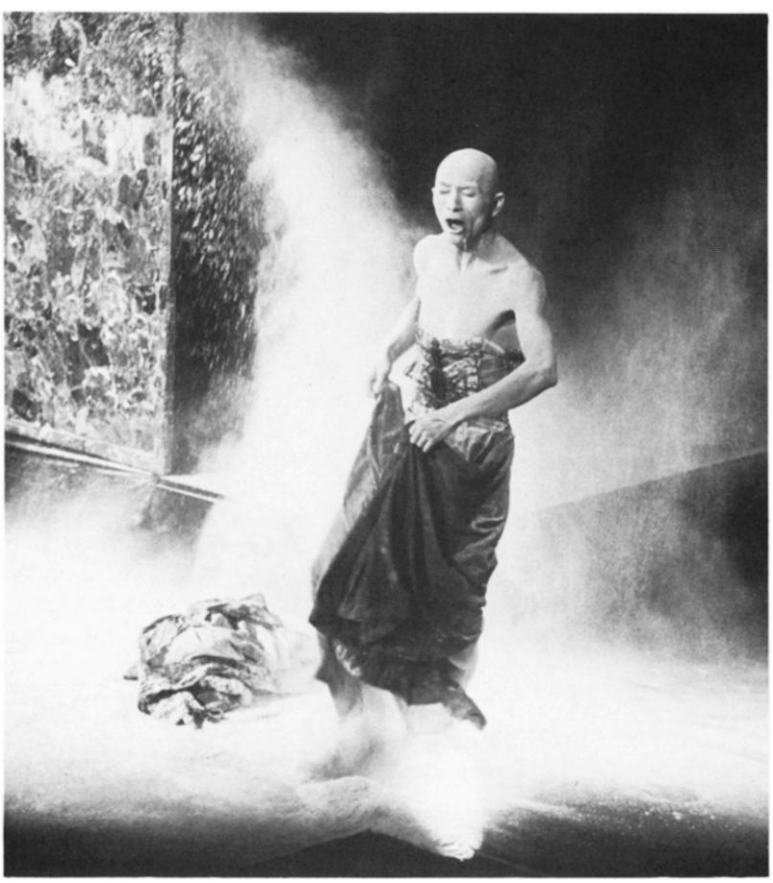
Sankai Juku has had the most commercial success of all the butoh groups. Since its beginning in 1977, the Paris-based group has made films, toured internationally, and performed at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival. The work of Sankai Juku has always been spectacular. Their version of butoh is erotic, shocking, mystical, and grotesque. They either use masks or perform mask-like facial expressions (plates 14 & 15). Their highly developed, muscular bodies are powdered white and often covered only by a loin cloth or long skirts.

Dai Rakuda-kan

Sankai Juku works under the direction of Ushio Amagatsa (plate 16), formerly a member of the group Dai Rakuda-kan ("great camel battleship"). Unlike most butoh dance, Dai Rakuda-kan's work is strictly chor-



14 & 15. Sankai Juku uses masks and mask-like facial expressions in the 1984 City Center performance of Kinkan Shonen *("The Kumquat Seed," 1984). (Photo by Jack Vartoogian)*



16. Ushio Amagatsu, the leader of Sankai Juku, screams soundlessly in Kinkan Shonen. *(Photo by Jack Vartoogian)*

eographed and tends to be illustrative rather than abstract or imagistic. The pieces involve many performers and elaborate stage scenery. The group was formed in 1972 by Akaji Maro, a performer whose career up until that time had been in conventional and experimental theater. Maro's company was the first in Japan to appropriate elements from nightclub and cabaret performance.

Natsu Nakajima

The work of Nakajima is more emotionally than theatrically spectacular. She is one of the few female butoh choreographers, although there are other female dancers, including an all-woman Paris-based group called Ariadon ("Ariadne"). Before forming her own group, Muteki-sha, in 1969, Nakajima studied and performed with Hijikata and his company. In her 1985 performance of *Niwa* ("The Garden") Nakajima stunned New York audiences. Gradually and delicately aging, she traced a woman's life passing through her garden. It is a profoundly personal, introspective performance, physically demanding in its shuddering restraint. Although much of the work shown at the Asia Society performance was quiet and minimal in its movement, other pieces were mocking and humorous—one was done to tango music—and included larger, more aggressive movement.

Poppo Shiraeshi

Tokyo is the center for most of today's butoh, although there are groups in Kyoto and in northern Japan. New York-based Poppo Shiraeshi has developed his own style from his butoh roots. A student of butoh dancer Kunisuke Kamiryoh, Poppo has been living and performing in New York City since 1979. At the 1981 New York City Survival Art Show on Ninth Street and Avenue B, Poppo danced solo to the live synthesizer music of his partner Miko. He climbed on top of cars and repeatedly crashed into—and eventually destroyed—a sculpture constructed of several wooden cylinders.

For this performance, Poppo wore a white dress and had his long hair in a ponytail. Since then he has shaven his head and painted his body gold, tipped his spiked mohawk hairdo bright orange, and painted his body with the characteristic butoh white powder. In *Arctic Hysteria* (1984) at the East Village club 8BC, Poppo posed atop the corner speaker then danced down the length of the bar. On stage, his group—the Go-Go Boys—danced on top of huge blocks of ice, their bodies sprayed metallic gold. The Go-Go Boys increased in number and included Japanese and Western men and women for the indoor/outdoor piece called *Eternal Performance "hear nothing, see nothing, say nothing"* (1985) at 8BC. Performers were painted gold or powdered white, flailing, undulating, and twisting to the deafening music. The spectacle involved live chickens, splattering watermelons, and life-sized rag dummies (plates 17, 18, and 19).

"Now We Have a Passport"

Nearly all of the butoh artists working in Japan have small studios that also serve as performance spaces. Generally the larger groups do not like to perform in their studios, but because Japan has no government funding for artists, they are often forced to do so. Because few cities are interested

17. Poppo in Eternal Performance *(1985), a piece that moved from club 8BC to a nearby vacant lot. (Photo by Daniel Falgerho)*

in contemporary dance, many groups are limited to performing in Tokyo. Most companies and choreographers teach in their studios to earn money and prepare for their annual performance. Or, they may tour internationally for a year or more and not perform at home.

Butoh consists of groups with names like Dance Love Machine, Biyakko-sha, Harubin-ha, Tohoyaso-kai, Butoh-ha Sebi, and soloists/choreographers like Akira Kasai, Yoshito Ohno, Maruyama, Murobushi, Osada, Ikezawa, Saita, Goto, and Goi. Some of the groups are spin-offs of the companies mentioned here. Others have sprung up under the direction of former students of Hijikata or Ohno. The traditional Japanese relationship between teacher and student is still maintained in the butoh world, tying the student to the teacher in a number of ways. From cleaning the studio to shopping and cooking, students are obliged to take part in every aspect of their teacher's life. As in the traditional art forms, they are often required to sell tickets to their teacher's performances.

The first large butoh festival in Japan was held in February 1985. National Television (NHK) televised the two weeks of sold-out Tokyo performances. Among the performers were Ohno (directed by Hijikata), Kunishi Kamiryo, Tanaka with his group, Maijuku, Dai Rakuda-kan, Dance Love Machine, Teru Goi, and Biyakko-sha.

Hijikata's words of warning to Nakajima prior to her 1984 European tour appeared in her program notes:

> We are surrounded by a mass of tricky symbols and systems. [. . .] 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 our body, history is hidden . . . and will appear in each detail of our expressions. In butoh we can find, touch, our hidden reality—something can be born, can appear, living and dying at the same moment. The character and basis of butoh is a hidden violence. It is a filthy child who has the special ability for butoh—because he knows how to create beautiful patterns. Butoh should be viewed as enigmatic as life itself. I am not sure in the end whether it is a trap or a secret correspondence with something (Hijikata 1984).

18 & 19. Poppo and the Go-Go Boys at 8BC, dancing with watermelons and life-sized rag dummies in Eternal Performance *(1985). (Photo by Daniel Falgerho)*

Butoh has progressed in a variety of directions since Hijikata and his peers began experimenting in the 1950s. At a September 1985 butoh workshop at The Asia Society, Nakajima said, "Twenty years ago we were described as crazy, dirty, and mad—and now we have a passport."

Notes

1. The source for much of my historical data is Kazuko Kuniyoshi, 1985, *An Overview of the Contemporary Japanese Dance Scene.* Tokyo: The Japan Foundation.
2. All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from interviews conducted by the author in 1985.

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Tatsumi Hijikata (1929–1986)

On 21 January 1986 Tatsumi Hijikata died of liver cancer in Tokyo. He was 57 years old. A founder of butoh, a term he began to use in 1963, Hijikata touched every butoh dancer/choreographer in some way. He was the "charismatic center, the artistic force, the inspiration" for butoh, said historian Lizzie Slater.

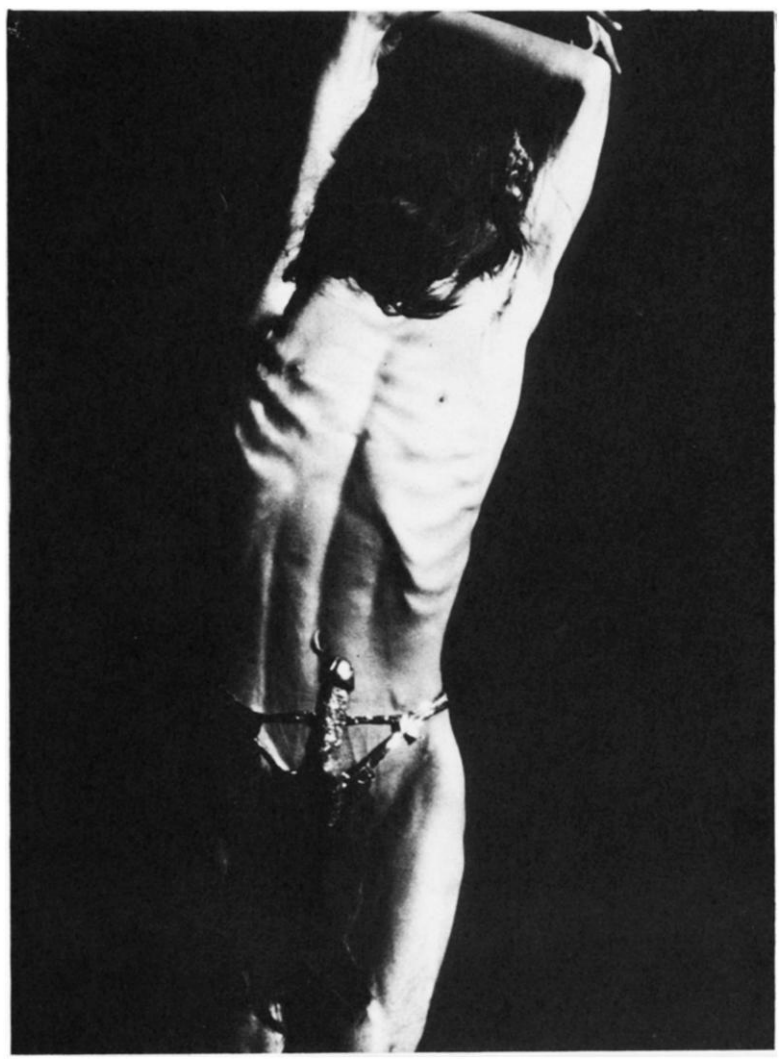
"A big loss, big loss," said Ellen Stewart, who had planned to bring him to America for his first visit in 1986.

Among the dancers/choreographers who acknowledge Hijikata as *Sensei* (master/dancer) are: Ushio Amagatsu of Sankai Juku, Akaji Maro of Dai Rakuda-kan, Natsu Nakajima of Muteki-sha, Min Tanaka, Yoko Ashikawa, and, although more than 20 years his senior, Kazuo Ohno, who depended on him to refine every work he created.

Hijikata provoked and manipulated his students, pushing them to be individuals and find their own personal expression.

Tanaka said, "Kazuo Ohno is a god and Hijikata is the devil."

Bonnie Sue Stein



Tatsumi Hijikata in Nikutai No Hanran *("Rebellion of the Flesh") in 1968. (Photo courtesy of ASBESTE, Japan)*