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Butoh's subversive somatics

ABSTRACT

Once relatively unknown outside of Japan, today butoh is gaining recognition as a movement training and performance genre. In English-language literature it is frequently characterized as 'somatic'. What kind of somatics does butoh propose? To answer this question, this article places butoh within a larger historical framework of dance and western somatics, noting shared values and points of conflict. The research draws from the author's co-taught community class in San Francisco to identify several aspects of what the author calls 'butoh-based somatics': practice as self-training, choreographic forces and performance attention. The article concludes by posing that to understand butoh's subversive appeal for dancers and others seeking social change, the practice must be adapted and kept in dialogue with specific locations and contexts.

KEYWORDS

butoh
somatics
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INTRODUCTION

Once relatively unknown outside of Japan, today butoh is gaining recognition as a movement training and performance genre. Initially developed by Tatsumi Hijikata in the 1960s and the 1970s along with co-founder Kazuo Ohno, butoh has spread to the United States and Europe through migrations of next-generation practitioners. Ohno's touring in the 1980s and a wave of workshops by visiting senior butoh teachers in the 1990s have now been joined by local classes in major cities such as New York, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, London, Paris and Berlin. Essays chronicling various training approaches are also becoming available (see Hijikata and Yamamoto [1976] 2015; Ohno and Ohno 2004; Buckwalter 2010; Candelario 2010; SU-EN and Kennedy 2003; Alishina 2015; Fuller 2014). In English-language texts,

butoh is frequently characterized as somatic, and indeed it does exhibit many similar features (Duchane in Eddy 2016; Eddy 2009; Fraleigh 2010; Kurihara 2000; Nakamura 2007). Much butoh employs imagery and improvisation to access internal states and motivate qualitative movement transformations, often as a critique of engrained social patterning or in resistance to codified ways of moving. Many butoh practitioners also draw on Noguchi Taiso, a gymnastic approach that conceives the body as a water sac as a way to relieve muscular effort. However, while these characteristics resonate with the field of western somatics, butoh methods also differ in significant ways. Instead of promoting ease in the body system as a way to address 'a traumatized social body' (Johnson 1995: xiv) or as a 'restful' balance to dance's 'culture of rigor' (Batson and Schwartz 2007), butoh frequently utilizes tension, overwhelming sensations, discomfort, exhaustion and dark subject matter as important aspects of its methodology.[1] While somatic approaches often work to navigate first- and third-person perceptions through a self-regulating, self-sensing body that at the same time recognizes objective views of external structures and situations (Hanna in Johnson 1995: 346; Eddy 2016: 8), butoh training scrambles these first- and third-person distinctions by posing multiple perspectives of authority or surrender from which to move. Further, in contrast to many somatic approaches, butoh imagery is more imaginative than functional, guiding a body to become a plant, mineral or corpse.[2] Finally, while somatic embodiment is often linked to social justice (Eddy 2000; Generative Somatics 2016), butoh at times disregards certain human social values to instead create an alternate reality from which to operate. How can butoh – a practice that promotes intentional difficulty, tension and self-distancing – be reconciled alongside other somatic modalities employed by dancers in their education?

The term 'somatics' is credited to Thomas Hanna, who in the 1970s united related body-mind modalities under this name. Referring to the Greek word 'soma', or living, conscious body engaged in ongoing processes of change, somatic education seeks to improve health and vitality by generating greater mobility and expression. There is a social critique embedded in current somatics as well: by increasing efficiency, people can counter traumas inflicted by modern social systems and lifestyle, which can cause tension, pain or fatigue (Eddy 2016: 8). These are also the reasons why somatic approaches are useful in dance education, with its technical demands and repeated patterning. Common somatic resources for dancers today include functional approaches such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and Body-Mind Centering and movement arts such as Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, Ideokinesis, Authentic Movement and others (see Brodie and Lobel 2004; Batson and Schwartz 2007; Knaster 1996).

Butoh was part of the mid-century turn to earlier twentieth-century physical education culture and outpouring of new developments that led to Hanna's umbrella term 'somatics'. In the 1960s and the early 1970s, educators and artists sought physical expressions, creative methods, performance aesthetics and sites of political and artistic resistance.[3] Somatic approaches at this time were understood as artistic, pedagogic and political, with goals to self-educate and resist codified techniques such as modern dance. In the United States, members of the Judson Dance Theater employed Kinetic Awareness, aikido and everyday movement as ways to subvert spectacle, align with community values and support civil rights issues. In Japan, Hijikata and his circle engaged in critiques of Japan's cultural and historical performance traditions such as

1. For discussions of Hijikata's approach, see Baird (2012); Kurihara (1996). For a range of contemporary approaches, see Fraleigh (2010). I also refer to my own training in support of these statements.

2. Imagery is a functional component in many somatic approaches, including Ideokinesis, Skinner Releasing and Gaga. Skinner employs specific linguistic phrases such as 'gossamer wings' to support an upward direction in the spine and lightness while butoh uses darker images in phrases such as 'wet rug' (see Kurihara 2000), which favour the downward pull of gravity. Gaga is somewhat similar to butoh in that phrases such as 'simmering water' that comes to boiling evoke energetic state changes. In butoh, movers are also asked to not only change qualities but also embody and actually become the image.

3. Martha Eddy notes that the field of somatic education now includes three branches: somatic bodywork, somatic psychology and somatic movement. The latter developed in direct dialogue with dance education and is linked to the work of Margaret H'Doubler, Martha Myers, Anna Halprin and Elaine Summers in the United States and Francois Delsarte, Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman and others in Europe (Eddy 2016: 8–9). Many mid-century artists such as Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton in the United States, and the Gutai Group and Tatsumi Hijikata in Japan, drew on new approaches to dance education in their creative work. Today, artists

Noh by posing inefficient movements that exaggerated the pull of gravity. These efforts also served to critique Japan's adoption of western modernism and its standards. Herein lies a key to butoh's particular somatics. While artists in the United States turned to Asian philosophies such as Zen to bypass what they saw as ego-driven creative methods, Japanese artists created avant-garde practices that both participated in western art-world conversations while also critiquing them. Unlike postmodern dance artists in the United States such as Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton whose work sought spontaneity and flow in the face of challenge, artists such as Hijikata called forth tension and conflict without intent towards resolution, wholeness or full-body integration.

It is important to note that like the fields of somatics and postmodern dance in which it is also included (Banes 1994; Duchane in Eddy 2016: 95–96; Fraleigh 2010), butoh is not a unified approach. Just as it is difficult to generalize about somatics, butoh's collection of physical methodologies, choreographic practices and consciousness-altering propositions has resisted classification since its inception. Many even reject the term butoh as a codification of principles that should not be solidified (see Candelario 2016: 97–98 on Eiko and Koma; Marshall 2006: 55 on Min Tanaka). Yet, 'butoh' and 'somatics' are often necessary shorthand markers. The problem comes when discussions do not go further into specificity.[4] Isabelle Ginot makes another important point about somatics that might also be said of butoh when she notes that their discourses

> […] must be read as performative discourses, studied in a precise context and targeting thereby an equally precise efficacy. […] Their value is not universal but isolated, and their validity can only be measured by the effect they produce on a given subject, in his/her encounter with a given context.
>
> (Ginot 2010: 18)

Ginot challenges the generalizing and essentialist ideologies of somatics, noting that our sensations themselves are culturally determined rather than natural. She aptly notes, '*Somatics itself is a technique of fabricating a body*' (Ginot 2010: 24, original emphasis). Critical in this observation is that the notions of body and self upon which much somatic language relies differ in western and Asian cultures, even as there has been much cross-cultural exchange. While both Asian and western approaches each seek to dismantle dualisms such as mind/body or self/other, Asian movement arts popular in today's dance education for addressing these issues, such as yoga, qigong or aikido, have much longer traditions and different delivery methods, based in particular cultural understanding of self, body and consciousness.[5]

I pose the term 'butoh-based somatics' as a way to honour Japanese culture and tradition while addressing the cultural differences of today's butoh artists, many of whom are western. Butoh-based somatics refers to the aspect of butoh's various applications (in practice, movement training, choreography and performance) that creates a new body and way of moving in the world that simultaneously supports and challenges western dance education – as has been the case since its inception. My perspective is informed by 25 years as a modern and butoh student, performer, choreographer and scholar. While my questions and investigation are informed by this history, a primary motivation for this discussion is a weekly community butoh class that I co-teach with Molly Barrons, Deborah Butler and Shoshana Green in San Francisco. As educators, somatic therapists and dance artists, collectively we continue to

such as RoseAnne Spradlin and Paula Josa-Jones employ somatic practices to generate choreography. Campbell Edinborough (2012) makes the point that in such work (he references contact improvisation), there is a different performer-audience relation where the dancer is a subject rather than aesthetic marker.

4. I find Fraleigh's understanding of further pluralism of movement within somatics useful. She recognizes four general categories of movement: aesthetic, educational, interactive and therapeutic. These arise from different modes: (a) movement and dance designed for conscious learning, (b) re-patterning of dysfunctional movement, (c) explorations of self-awareness through movement, (d) methods to improve performance, (e) exercises in extending imagination, (f) sitting and moving meditations for self-development and well-being, (g) informally presented dance events to promote community, (h) dance and movement experiences in relation to natural and architectural environments and on camera, (i) interaction with others through dance movement and (j) integrative bodywork (Fraleigh in Williamson et al 2014: 254). Our class approach touches on most of these modes, but to different degrees.

5. What constitutes a 'self' remains one of the most complex philosophical questions. Self in Asian perspectives is conceived less as individual than as being in connection with others, which

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ask: how can we define and guide something called 'butoh' and what does it offer our specific community by way of somatics? In the sections that follow, I explore these questions. I first introduce the peculiar somatics of Hijikata's butoh. I then discuss three aspects of our class that have helped me formulate an understanding of 'butoh-based somatics' and its relevance to dancers: (1) practice as self-training, (2) choreographic forces and (3) performance attention. I conclude by returning to the notion of social critique, asking to what extent butoh-based somatics, or any training, can productively resist codification or universal application to instead speak to the specifics of place and context, as was Hijikata's intent.

A SOMATICS OF DIS-EASE

The somatic realm lies under the surface of our verbal and acculturated consciousness (Hanna [1979] 1993: xii). It is often described as how we feel rather than how we are perceived by others (Brodie and Lobel 2012: 6). However, as Ginot's earlier point indicates, different bodies arise depending on context. Internal states should thus not always be privileged when considering a response body in an environment.[6] Stimulus-response patterns arise from internal responses to external provocations, and yet they also derive from internal incitements based on memory, prior knowledge and interpretation that then manifest in choices for outward action (McHose and Frank 2006: xvii). Culture further conditions these movement impulses by dictating which sensations become recognized as significant.[7] Often this social choreography is so engrained that we do not recognize that there are choices. However, by exposing the subaltern realm to investigation, new sensorial feedback can arise that in turn changes how we relate to our own body concept. These different bodies with their accompanying capabilities, if attended to, can go on to challenge normalizing power structures, a view that further facilitates an understanding of what butoh-based somatics may offers to dancers and audiences seeking new experiences.

Like other artists working in the 1960s, Hijikata used his own body as a research site for exploring the effects of gravity, duration and efficiency. Hijikata's work *Anma* ('The Masseur', 1963) precedes Steve Paxton's similar piece *Magnesium* (1972) by nearly ten years. Both experimented with the physics of bodies in motion and the politics of spontaneous thinking using somatic approaches. While Paxton drew on aikido in developing contact improvisation, Hijikata encountered the work of dancer and physical education instructor Michizo Noguchi, who at times taught workshops at Hijikata's Asbestos studio. His gymnastic exercises, called Noguchi Taiso, abandon the musculoskeletal concept of movement and notion that the human body is concrete, instead conceiving the body as liquid where bones, muscles and viscera float (Kasai 2011). Scholar Bruce Baird compares Noguchi's approach to body mechanics through imagery to Ideokinesis, the somatic practice developed by Mabel Todd and Lulu Sweigard in the early mid- twentieth century (Baird 2012: 171–73). However, unlike Paxton's use of aikido in contact improvisation to test instinctive body intelligence through a moving point of contact, Hijikata's employment of Noguchi Taiso in *ankoku butoh*, or 'dance of utter darkness', posed different kinds of challenges to a dancer than better body functioning. Rather than economical actions, Hijikata developed movement that was intentionally inefficient and disorganized, layering extreme corporeality with mental challenge to test duration and endurance. He

can lend a spiritual component at times lacking or undiscussed in western practices (see Williamson et al., who call for recognition of the spiritual aspects of somatics, 2014: xxv–xxxiii). For a discussion of differing concepts of the western and Asian body, see Kuriyama 1999; for a discussion of the use of Asian practices in western training, see Sellers-Young 1998. For further discussions of self, body, action and consciousness in Japanese contexts, see Kasulis (1981); Kuriyama 1999; Nagatomo (1992); Yuasa (1987). For discussions on western notions of self, see Mansfield (2000); Schrag (1997). For discussions of cross-cultural influences in somatics, see Duchane (2016); Eddy (2016: 129–48). In terms of movement education, Eddy notes that traditional Asian movement arts are generally transmitted by a Sensei or a guru who is authoritative, rather than in western somatics, where the role is that of a guide or a facilitator (Eddy 2016: 139).

6. Alexander referred to faulty internal sensory awareness as 'debauched kinesthesia'; see Rosenberg (2008).

7. For further discussions of culture, behaviour and human agency see Mauss ([1934] 1992); Noland (2009).

employed hunched postures and distorted forms to address his darker, subconscious subject matter and bring it to the forefront. Asking his dancers to go without sleep, stand for long periods of time and cover their bodies in plaster that caused great discomfort when it dried, his approach pushed the body beyond limit points to challenge the mind (see Kurihara 1996). Thus, while Paxton's contact improvisation and Hijikata's butoh are similarly anti-modern, anti-capitalist dance pedagogies that reject product-driven approaches to training and performance, their somatic methods and aesthetics are quite distinct.

The work of scholar and dance educator Sondra Fraleigh has been instrumental in bringing butoh into a somatic framework. Her approach, which she calls 'Shin Somatics', bridges Asian and western perspectives. She understands somatics as a way to be with our experience so that we can learn from it and change (Fraleigh in Williamson et al. 2014: 258), and she refers to butoh's particular transformative power as 'metamorphosis'. Fraleigh further understands butoh's 'somatic resonance' as an empathetic exchange between performers and audiences through a shedding of self, a process that she views as shamanist in that it moves between conscious and unconscious worlds, specifically life and death (Fraleigh 2010: 49). This exchange between performers and audiences for Fraleigh suggests therapeutic and healing potentials beyond the scope of western modern dance and its focus on self-expression and aesthetic presentation (Fraleigh 2010: 12). Most significant in Fraleigh's formulation of the somatic differences between butoh and modern dance education is the acceptance or denial of pain. While in her estimation western dance training tends to work despite injury, she sees butoh's approach as accepting and working with discomfort when it arises, acknowledging that there are multiple options and movement solutions (Fraleigh 2010: 50).

Sensations, including pain, can take many forms based in perception and belief systems of a particular time. For instance, Martha Graham's deep contraction not only espoused female empowerment, but it also defined western dance modernism. Isadora Duncan's earlier grounded body approach and formless movement flow were not only felt responses to ballet's rigid codification; they were also a physical manifestation of American nationalist ideologies of freedom and individual expression. Yvonne Rainer's postmodern task-based pedestrian movement valued ease and efficiency as embodied refusals to spectacle, singular authorship, inequalities within society and governmental limits on civil liberties. Each of these examples links an internal felt sense with larger social issues of a particular moment, manifesting in a performance aesthetic. However, taken out of context and moulded into a codified movement technique, many of the sentiments embedded in the forms become lost. With this disconnection, pain or other sensations lose their historical context and can cause suffering in the present.

If butoh is to be understood as a somatic practice, and if our community class is to align with butoh principles, it is important to understand why Hijikata pushed certain thresholds, and the relevance of challenging these same boundaries today. Many of Hijikata's tactics seem severe in our present context, and our community class does not subscribe to his extremes. However, we do similarly seek to challenge certain limits and counter capitalist productivity by questioning where efficacy lies and to what purpose. We create situations for our mixed-level, mixed-age population to work individually while also having the support of the group, moving deeply into the body's tissues and expanding our capacity to be with discomfort without responding with

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8. Ben Spatz counters the popular culture notions of competition, representation and hierarchical evaluation by understanding technique as knowledge that structures practice. In his work on dancer and actor training, which brings together western and Asian approaches, he advocates for embodied practice as the ways in which knowledge is produced and circulated within societies; see Spatz (2015).

Figure 1: Shoshana Green. Photo: Erick Schied.

fight, flight or freeze. The instructor rotates each week between the four of us, but we strive to create a consistent container. We have found that how we enter into greater challenge is key to the educational process, as is sharing our previous knowledge by citing sources while also experimenting with new ideas. What follows are some entry points that have been useful for our explorations.

PRACTICE AS SELF-TRAINING

'Self-training' refers to the ways in which we work to undermine singular willed action so as to re-organize and act in the moment. We do so in our classes through sensation, concentration and challenge. Before exploring the self in relation to movement, some understanding of Japanese perspectives is needed. Training for western practitioners usually means the transmission of certain skills, while practice indicates the repetition of actions as a form of knowledge, often geared towards improvement – each of which can build ego as well as dissolve it.[8] Authors Thomas P. Kasulis and Tomi Hahn articulate for English readers how Japanese meditation, martial arts practices and traditional performance forms such as *Noh* and *Nihon-buyo* conceive self as capable of change through action. Kasulis notes that people arrive to situations with an accumulation of past experiences that often dictate subsequent movements. However, by practicing certain proficiency skills, we can 'break down our dependence on categories that interfere with the directness and immediacy of experience' so that the present moment can act on the person, rather than the person merely relying on past habit (Kasulis 1981: 58). The approach is to expand choice by recognizing that we are more than the sum of our past and that the skills themselves have no other agenda than their own activity in the moment (Kasulis 1981: 42). Hahn's approach to learning through direct sensation in the traditional Japanese dance *Nihon-buyo* is similar when she

writes, 'sensational knowledge moves the dancer. It is the art, indistinguishable from the practice' (Hahn 2007: 59). Sensation then becomes the feedback in the present that allows for both noticing the element of Non-being in every action (Kasulis 1981: 48) and allowing for transmission through the body, and from body to body in teaching and performance.

As noted earlier, our ability to recognize sensation is as much cultural as universal. Questioning the hierarchies of sensation is thus a primary somatic entry point for our class. As teacher Shoshana Green notes, in contrast to her modern dance training, with butoh 'I actually had time to feel my body moving' (Green 2016), an observation that suggests a different temporality for the learning process than the more immediate feedback of visual information. In our community classes, we challenge vision's dominance by disrupting its orienting function so that bodies find anchors elsewhere. We might focus on internal felt experiences and allow these to be foregrounded while keeping the eyes open to promote other ways of 'seeing', or we might instruct to close the eyes to isolate and find support from other senses such as hearing or proprioception. Another approach is to draw attention to an anatomical location in the body, particularly a more hidden area such as under the arm or behind the knee, and use this area to generate movement. Or we might suggest an image or condition and make it actual, such as walking in mud or floating in the sea. The face is another important area often not exercised in western dance training beyond its capacity for human emotion. Yet if taken as just another body part rather than as a marker of identity, new sensations and expressions can pass through its musculature. As teacher Molly Barrons notes, if the face is distorted, layers of imagery can escape from it that are expressive but not necessarily narrative (2016).

Concentration is an aspect that is particularly relevant in today's technology-driven, fast-paced and multi-tasking existence. We work to challenge our capacity to handle the pace of daily life in the city by providing tools to address states of both boredom and overwhelm. We either increase stimuli or slow it down by posing images to hold in the imagination, tasks that require coordination to maintain or sustained dyad interactions. These propositions can also be layered and accumulated to increase difficulty. Sustaining and maintaining certain conditions exercises physical attunement and mental endurance, which can give rise to spiritual sentiments as well in that by moving beyond immediate, singular struggles of will, or by surrendering to difficulty, movers find new sources of support. Props and music are also helpful tools for supporting continued attention because they move tasks out of the control of individual bodies and instead towards relations. An overarching sentiment in this work is finding points of connection to other objects or people so that in the face of difficulty, one is not responsible for a challenge alone.

Challenge is what brings sensation and concentration into dialogue. Teacher Deborah Butler, who draws on her experience as a somatic psychotherapist, refers to the 'growing edge' as a boundary or a limit approached or just surpassed where integration is still possible (Butler 2016). This edge may be physical, mental, psychological or all three, and working along it tests practitioners while allowing discoveries to be incorporated into their artistry. Some butoh training can push people beyond their capacity to usefully integrate experiences, and so attending to where challenge lies is important. While limits are different for every individual, we aim to provide structures that allow for modification in either direction. Exhausting the muscular body, or testing mental or emotional thresholds, can be deeply beneficial to releasing holding

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Figure 2: Megan Nicely. Photo: Yana Kraeva.

patterns, and yet taken to extremes can cause injury or trauma. We approach physical edges through conditioning exercises that require endurance, stamina and coordination. Physical exercises pose a mental challenge as well, to which further directives are layered and accumulated to build complexity. Psychological edges can be less easily navigated. While two of our teachers are somatic psychotherapists, the class is not a therapeutic process per se. When emotions and memories stored in the body come up, we work to both make space for and contain them within the collective experience.

CHOREOGRAPHIC FORCES

Choreography means the writing of dance and historically referred to the documentation of steps and movement pathways then used for dance instruction. In dance education today, it describes both the creative process of generating steps and the final sequence of steps that, when repeated and danced, comprise a performance work. The term 'choreography' also at times indicates highly planned and scripted events that do not involve dance at all, such as the movements of a politician. Irrespective of whether inspiration or directive, the choreographic process creates a vocabulary, logic and way of operating, either in the world of the piece or the world at large – or both as was Hijikata's social proposition. As discussed, I conceive choreography as a creative practice that manifests a new body, and I consider all somatic practices in this respect. Questioned in our class is how patterns change course to subvert certain hierarchies, even if the final outcome is familiar. Exercises reveal how cultural norms are imposed on the body and the agency we might have within

these systems. While somatic practices generally conceive mental, physical and social levels as pertaining to a human body, in butoh there is an important non-human component that I find more accessible via Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of a Body without Organs (BwO, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 149–66). In their philosophy, via Spinoza, a body is an open system based on its ability to connect and assemble temporarily with other bodies of all sorts, both human and non-human.

Here I examine three areas of choreographic prompting towards the project of creating new bodies and movements: the interplay between form and formlessness, micromovement and directives and perspectives. Each concerns actions that arise from stimulus and response patterns and their temporal unfolding. In terms of form, butoh exercises are often characterized as improvisational in that shapes either arise in the context of moving or are given as empty containers then filled with content. However, unless temporarily solidified these forms quickly evaporate and do not register. Alternately, familiar forms run the risk of becoming merely representational. Therefore, a play between emergent and dissolving forms must weave throughout the process. A way we work with this symbiosis in classes is to take a common action such as walking and impose a condition that alters its energetic quality. We might vary speed or pose a certain posture and then ask this new form to embark on a series of activities. Doing so allows bodies to find alternate logics and sequencing. To further open up new possibilities for bodily movement, training exercises themselves must constantly change or risk once again reinstating known choreographed patterns, devoid of life. For this reason, we generally avoid stereotypical postures adopted from Hijikata's work in our teaching, such as the hunched back and bow-legged stance, or gnarled fingers and bent arms, unless these forms arise within the context of certain prompts.

We also attend to micromovements – the small adjustments perhaps imperceptible to an outside eye, yet felt. Micromovements can disrupt common initiation points or pathways from thought to action, and by drawing attention to smaller muscles, nervous system responses and uncontrollable fast-twitch movements, students can also start to divide gesture and time differently. Microscopic motion can subvert larger muscular control and redirect assumed outcomes. For example, working with the nervous or fluid system can yield other movement qualities or achieve the same result in a profoundly different way. Like many somatic trainings, the space between action and reaction is a space of possibility. In our training, we also use micromovement to inhibit response for long periods of time or ask students to find solutions to problems within different timescales. The opposite can also happen. A physical form may arrive quickly while the mind takes more time to catch up and acclimate to this new shape. As Marjory Barlow puts it in terms of the Alexander Technique, 'This practice of inhibiting habitual reactions creates a space for a little bit of freedom, […] the only freedom we'll ever have in this world […]' (Barlow in Johnson 1995: 87).

A third choreographic concept is the relationship between directives and perspectives. This point recalls the earlier discussion of internal and external, or first- and third-person perspectives, but here I focus on how these relate to spoken language. It is common in butoh to work with imagination to create internal and external landscapes. These environments are continually reinforced by a teacher's verbal suggestions, which populate and collaborate with the mover's process. By allowing external verbal directives to sink in and become operative in the body, a mover holds both inside and outside

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Figure 3: Molly Barrons. Photo: Doug Slater Photography.

perspectives and becomes more aware of their own responses. It is as if an outside eye or a third person infuses the mover's first-person experience. This explains the paradoxical sense of self and other, or familiar and unfamiliar, in much butoh, which works to undermine a resolved sense of wholeness often linked to somatic education. Hijikata's method of working choreographically in this way is called *butoh-fu*, which are unlikely linguistic juxtapositions that when read create images then manifest by dancers. Hijikata's language was surreal, poetic and illogical, and invoked new forms and movement qualities. As Barrons notes, working with Hijikata's *fu* gives some sense of his perspective, which is a useful embodiment tool. However, we must also recognize that his *fu* does not capture our perspective or cultural experience (Barrons 2016). In Barrons's class we at times write our own *fu* that we then perform. In this case, words take on a more direct meaning and intimacy since they are abstracted from our own experiences. This suggests to me that words are not set standpoints but rather change in relational proximity to us.

PERFORMANCE ATTENTION

Butoh's stage events often create compelling imagery, express complex identities, evoke code switching and ultimately share processes of transformation with audiences. What are the after effects of these events and can they suggest social alternatives? Can their 'somatic resonance', as Fraleigh calls it, extend beyond the studio or theater? The field of performance studies provides a useful lens for considering butoh's impact beyond proscenium events. In the words of theatre and performance studies scholar Richard Schechner, everyday activities, behaviours and rituals also perform in that they 'do' or act in the world (see Schechner 2013: 25). They have agency beyond the individuals who may perform them, as Ginot's earlier quote also supports. Some do find butoh ritual-like in that there is a fine-tuned awareness to each gesture and sequence, and communication and interaction with other forces. However, ritual need not be of a particular tradition for participants to access

spiritual sentiments. Ritual can also manifest as particular qualities, inflections or moods (Schechner 2013: 25–27). Butoh's somatics provides a particular container for these experiences. I consider butoh's somatics as a mode of attention or being-with.

Our class uses several awareness approaches to create a condition of shared attention. First, we often perform and witness each other as an act of sharing and a point of instruction. Much dance training is form-based, and outward presentation can discount and even hide internal sensation. For work based in sensation, there is the opposite tendency to go inward and isolate individual experience. Exposing internal sensations to others takes courage and vulnerability, and remaining present is a practice of compassion and even devotion on the part of both movers and witnesses. As movers, attending to our first-hand experience, a third-person awareness of the larger environment, and tracking an additional outside third-person perspective of an audience is an important part of butoh's performance attention, and a significant way that butoh complicates how somatic practices relate to dance techniques. Challenging habitual judgements with mutual curiosity, and valuing the journey over the destination, places further pressure on the product-driven economies of much dance training and performance.

Two additional performance principles support the kind of attention in our classes: foreground and background, and remaining in question with others. As noted earlier, there are many layers of mind-body-spirit interaction. One tool for navigating multiplicity is allowing certain qualities to occupy the foreground of our consciousness while others temporarily recede into the background. These elements may be emotional tones, sensations or thoughts. Shifting how much space these aspects occupy in one's internal landscape can allow one to remain with the unknown for longer periods of time, and for unexpected movement to arise. Another important element to performance is remaining in question with others. I prefer this phrase to the word 'presence'

Figure 4: Deborah Butler. Photo: Joy Madden.

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because while ontology suggests something sustained, attention can be variable, as is the knowledge continually produced and destabilized in this work. I often refer to dance artist Deborah Hay's performance practice of asking unanswerable questions in this context. Koan-like in their function, her verbal 'what if?' prompts serve to re-set dancers back to the same level of not knowing as a group so that together we can begin again to move by considering the body as a process (Hay 2000). I also employ her phrase 'inviting being seen' as a strategy for subverting self-consciousness. With the invitation of being seen, we are not alone in our experience but rather with others.

BUTOH-BASED SOMATICS AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

While the tension and contorted forms of Hijikata's methods, accompanied by images and references to rural Japan (Hijikata 2000), must be taken as particular responses to his historical moment, they also speak more broadly to global capitalism and its effects on urban environments. From this perspective, our class aligns with Hijikata's critique of modern society. Yet could Hijikata's initial critiques be further refined within the specific context of our class? In Australia, artists are using butoh to address Aboriginal and colonial histories. Many European butoh workshops take place for extended periods of time in the natural world as a way to challenge human temporal structures and relations. In the United States, while there are outdoor workshops, it is more common for training to occur in urban settings such as ours, and yet offering a weekly 'drop-in' class is challenging amidst the plethora of offerings, busy schedules and beautiful weather in the Bay Area. The weekly class provides a container for sustained commitment to working together, but it is fragile. In the past twenty years I have seen butoh communities form and disperse in major cities on both coasts.

On reflection, our community class meetings seem less about escaping our city environment with its gentrification and fast pace than they are about learning to live and move differently with and within it. One way to understand the subversive impact of butoh-based somatics specific to our context may then be in its adaptability. Humans, both individually and collectively, acclimate to a wide range of both resilient and oppressive forces, often as a means of survival (see Generative Somatics 2016). Notably, while butoh-based somatics adapts and transforms bodies through classes such as ours, it also participates in fields that are already understood as somatic, such as somatic psychotherapy and dance training. Butoh-based somatics places pressure on universalizing beliefs and specialized techniques in these settings, including those that promote wholeness, ease and integration. I suggest that butoh-based somatics is thus a practice that acclimates to certain environments, where it then temporarily disrupts the acquired expertise of teachers, dancers, therapists and students in those locations.

I posed at the beginning of this article that butoh, like somatics, must be understood in relation to particular people, places and contexts to evoke social change. A first step is recognizing current modes of embodiment, both in dance education and more broadly, and questioning how and why certain somatic methods are adopted. Earlier, I asked how butoh's intentional difficulty and self-distancing could be reconciled alongside other somatic modalities employed for dance training, and what it might offer to dancers. As discussed, butoh shares many principles and values with the broader field of somatic education. The practice recognizes self as capable of change and

promotes ways of releasing aspects of past training that no longer serve us so as to move skillfully in the present. Participants also work along their own 'growing edge' of productive challenge and integration towards embodied transformation, which develops a dancer's expressive range. Utilizing tension, calling up overwhelming situations and complicating first- and third-person perspectives counter much dance education, but practicing concentration in the midst of discomfort so as to transform, and refining awareness tools at different scales and temporalities, enhance both performer and audience experiences. Most importantly, butoh-based somatics takes a critical stance on dance training and performance presentations themselves. By asking practitioners to examine underlying choreographies of the known body and its movements, butoh challenges performance economies that underlie training and stage presentation. In this questioning process, a different body and world can arise. These too are contingent. Butoh-based somatics might be a means to resist codified dance forms, but only if its methods and approach are continually renewed. It is thus required that its principles and methods be kept in ongoing tension and productive dialogue with the people and places that utilize, develop and share them.

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