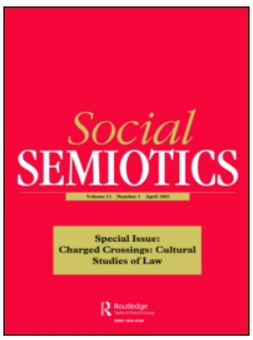

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Cutting the Surface of the Water: Butoh as Traumatic Awakening

PAULA MARIE ORLANDO

In this paper, I examine Robert Jay Lifton's belief that 'imagery, symbolization, and meaning are in a life-death model or paradigm' and that traumatic experience, in particular as a death-equivalent, 'sever[s the mind] from its own psychic forms, [and] impair[s] the symbolization process itself'. Lifton believes that, for survivors of Hiroshima and for other survivors of trauma, this 'shattering of prior forms' leads to new insights and 'new dimension[s] of experience' that not only reconstitute and re-integrate the traumatized self but, more accurately, mirror the human condition. I examine this thesis within the context of a comparison and contrast between post-war Japanese poetry and the postmodern Japanese dance form called Butoh (originally Ankoku Butoh*, meaning 'dark dance of the soul'). I argue that Butoh, in drawing upon traditional Japanese forms, and by displacing, extending, and exploding them, more successfully re-figures prior imagery and reintegrates the traumatized Japanese culture in ways that some post-war poetry, which relies on language and, especially, traditional Western models of language, cannot. I also consider the materiality of the body versus the materiality of language, and consider how dance, which emanates from the phenomenological body, has a materiality that escapes language and carries greater tropological power. Finally, I consider how Butoh, in troping on the Hiroshima disaster, displaces 'phallogocentric' semiotic structures and comes closer to realizing Julia Kristeva's notion of a pre-Oedipal symbolic order.*

> We shake hands with the dead, who send us encouragement from beyond our body: this is the unlimited power of Butoh ... Something is hiding in our subconscious, collected in our unconscious body, which will appear in each detail of our expression. Here, we can rediscover time with an elasticity, sent by the dead. We can find Butoh in the same way we can touch our hidden reality. Something can be born, can appear, living and dying in a moment.
>
> When you encounter such experiences, things will emerge from your body naturally. I've often said in the past that we don't have time to 'express' and 'represent'.
>
> (Tatsumi Hijikata, founder of Butoh)

In an interview with Cathy Caruth (1995), Robert Jay Lifton says that 'imagery,

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symbolization, and meaning are in a life-death model or paradigm' and that traumatic experience, in particular as a death-equivalent, 'sever[s the mind] from its own psychic forms, [and] impair[s] the symbolization process itself' (134). He goes on to say, however, that for survivors of Hiroshima and for other survivors of trauma, this 'shattering of prior forms' leads to new insights and 'new dimension[s] of experience' that not only reconstitute and re-integrate the traumatized self, but more accurately mirror the human condition (Caruth 1995: 134–135).

In this article, I would like to examine Lifton's thesis within the context of a comparison/contrast between post-war Japanese poetry and the postmodern Japanese dance form called Butoh (originally *Ankoku Butoh*, meaning 'dark dance of the soul'). I will argue that Butoh, in drawing upon traditional Japanese forms, and by displacing, extending, and exploding them, more successfully re-figures prior imagery and re-integrates the traumatized Japanese culture in ways that some post-war poetry, which relies on language and, especially, traditional Western models of language, cannot. I will also consider the materiality of the body versus the materiality of language, and consider how dance, which emanates from the phenomenological body, has a materiality that escapes language and carries greater tropological power. in summary, I will consider how Butoh, in troping on the Hiroshima disaster, displaces 'phallogocentric' semiotic structures and comes closer to realizing Julia Kristeva's notion of a pre-Oedipal symbolic order.

According to Lifton, the death equivalent or trauma is a kind of psychic displacement—a point at which the psyche falls out of meaning and context. Thus, the trauma itself is not experienced within the symbolic order and, as suggested by Caruth in her article 'Traumatic Awakenings', the 'real' trauma occurs at the point of awakening or the point of articulation. This symbolic 'dead zone' is a function of what Lifton calls 'psychic numbing' (Lifton 1967: 32–34). And this point of awakening from the trauma is the point at which imagery from the disaster must be reconstituted from prior imagery and find its way into dreams, memories, and mytho-poetic narratives.

But narrative, as the foundation of both psycho-analytic and historical inquiry, relies upon a language that contains its own 'dead zone'. In other words, how can a language that is itself a mask for death articulate traumatic experience, or what Lifton calls death-equivalence? Maurice Blanchot, in his essay 'Literature and the Right to Death', expresses the paradoxical nature of the problem:

> I say my name, and it is as though I were chanting my own dirge: I separate myself from myself, I am no longer either my presence or my reality, but an objective, impersonal presence, the presence of my name, which goes beyond me and whose stone-like immobility performs exactly the same function for me as a tombstone weighing on the void … Language can only begin with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself. Negation is tied to language. (1981: 43)

The 'negation' of which Blanchot speaks as inherent in language is the negation of the Foucaultian negativity/madness that, according to Jacques Derrida in his essay

'Cogito and the History of Madness', would need to be excluded from discourse in order for discourse to function according to the 'rational' ideal. This impossibility rests upon the paradoxical dualism of reason and madness. And, as Foucault points out in his *History of Madness* but, according to Derrida, fails to recognize in his own work, the writer (historian, narrator) using a language that has sprung from this duality must deal with this essential problem. One cannot 'write madness' without invoking this division. And, if all which is chthonic, erotic, and traumatic is included under this umbrella of negation/madness, then how can these forces become manifest within the symbolic order, and in what forms of expression might they be realized?

Blanchot says that language lacks a 'fullness' and a 'certainty'. But, by asserting this 'lack', he is also asserting a 'potential' fullness and certainty that Derrida would discount completely, recognizing that one cannot separate the properties of language from its contents. Would Lifton and Kristeva, in different ways, argue that this 'fullness' or 'certainty' is an element of experience and can be reached through the symbolic order? And if so, how? Through the body? Through dance? Can dance do something that language cannot?

Early Butoh was strongly influenced by Antonin Artaud's conceptual 'theater of cruelty', which privileged gesture over language. Metaphor became literalized by a body that trusts the intelligence of its own visceral impulses rather than an intellect that relies on the linearity (and the socio-political heritage) of its language. The Japanese language, contaminated by imperialism and brutal warfare, must confront this brutality through the flesh, rather than tautologically through the language that contains it. Artaud's various manifestos describe the process. In his First Manifesto called 'The Theater of Cruelty' from his 1938 work *The Theater of the Double*, Artaud speaks of 'an altogether Oriental means of expression' which 'abandon[s] Occidental usages of speech':

> But this tangible, objective theatre language captivates and bewitches our senses by using a truly Oriental concept of expression. It runs through our sensibility. Abandoning our Western ideas of speech, it turns words into incantation. It expands the voice. It uses vocal vibrations and qualities, wildly trampling them underfoot. It pile-drives sounds. It aims to exalt, to benumb, to bewitch, to arrest our sensibility. It liberates a new lyricism of gestures which because it is distilled and spatially amplified ends by surpassing the lyricism of words. Finally it breaks away from language's intellectual subjugation by conveying the sense of a new, deeper intellectualism hidden under these gestures and signs and raised to the dignity of special exorcism. (1974: 69)

But, at the same time, in 'Manifesto in Plain Terms', Artaud suggests that once the signification becomes ritualized (i.e. through dance) or ordered, as in language, it loses the very thing it wishes to represent:

> It is order, intellect, the meaning of chaos. But it does not accept this chaos just as it is. It interprets it and by so doing, loses it. It is the logic of illogic. (1974: 167)

And in 'All Writing is Garbage' (variously translated as 'All Writing is Pigshit' and 'Writing is All Trash'), he describes this exorcism as 'a kind of incomprehensible stopping place in the mind, right in the middle of everything':

> And do not expect me to name this everything, to tell you how many parts it is divided into, don't expect me to tell you its weight, don't think that you can get me to discuss it and that while discussing I will forget myself and that I will thus begin, without realizing it, to THINK … (quoted in Rothenberg & Joris 1995: 515)

Artaud, responding to the social disruptions and displacements of modernism, and ushering in postmodernism, was seeking a form of expression that might transcend the language or, at the very least, lay bare its inadequacies. Similarly, 30 years later, Japan's *avant-garde* dancers would attempt to find a 'pure form' that would 'transcend … its own history, born of the dark postnuclear years of a devastated Japan [and] with an echo of Artaud's primal scream … knock down the door of all safely packaged, over-mediated art' (Holborn 1987: 15).

What was needed in response to the post-war trauma was a 'primitive' or 'primal' signification. Dance has historically been a cultural signifier, and its range of expression has marked its various levels of societal containment and transgression. In its most attenuated forms, as in classical ballet, it represents a movement upward—a transcendence of the body through the disciplined restraint of passion. But, in its most ritualistic forms, it is frenzied, spasmodic, and orgiastiac, and its chthonian or earth-bound movements mark planned (i.e. ceremonial) or unplanned ruptures in the social order. Here, dance is closer to the Foucaultian 'madness' that resists articulation and marks the transcendence of reason. Haven O'More, in her psychoanalytic reading of Butoh, notes its resistance to a logos that is ultimately destructive and fascist:

> Now what about the properly organized, clean, wholesome, completely 'rational' believing-completely-in-this-or-that-mind? Such a mind is poisoned. Such a mind breeds pestilence. In fact, this mind gives life over to pestilence. Such a mind sets up false gods; it makes merciless war on all creation. Butoh is hard on such a mind. (quoted in Holborn 1987: 129)

Such a mind and such a resistant 'madness' is most clearly illustrated in Euripides' *TheBacchae* (trans. Grene and Lattimore 1959) in which the orgiastic dance of the maenads counters Pentheus' 'phal-logical' and aggressive movements—Pentheus must be feminized by Dionysus before he can escape the constraints of his own shortsighted symbolic order. The transformative power of the play's cathartic quality reaches its climax in the *sparagmos* scene. In *Sexual Personae,* Camille Paglia defines sparagmos as 'the violent principle of Dionysian cult … which in Greek means "a rending, tearing, mangling" and secondly "a convulsion, spasm". The body of the god, or a human or animal substitute, is torn to pieces, which are eaten or scattered like seed' (1990: 95). The sacrifice of Pentheus, his "rending, tearing and mangling", and the annihilation of the royal family all intend "through pity and fear" to achieve "the purgation (catharsis) of such emotions" (Aristotle 1989: Chapter VI).

For Aristotle, action precedes character—what we are is a function of what we do—but in the world of *The Bacchae*, action seems inevitable—the god will have his terrible justice and, in Nietzschian terms, as destroyer, he will simultaneously be a renewer of life. If the message here is one that would later be adopted by Christianity (along with other Eleusinian rites and mysteries), that even god's evil is good because it is god's evil (in other words, because it is for a good end), then we have a paradoxical god that poses real problems in terms of representation. Language itself breaks down, because terms such as 'good' and 'evil' no longer describe discrete, objective categories. The contrasted ethical models of Pentheus and the Theban maenads represent the tension between the religious/passionate aspect of the Greek culture (made manifest in feminine Dionysian rite) and the restrained, detached logic of Greek culture manifested in the exclusively male philosophical dialectic. In the end, however, Pentheus recognizes the god through the body—through his ritual enactment—and not through language. Dionysus is one of the chthonian gods, along with Demeter, Hecate, Hermes, Pluto, and Persephone, and all of them, in at least part of their aspect, were associated with the life-giving/life-destroying force and, in Nietzschian terms, symbolized 'the affirmation of life with all its suffering and terror' (Nietzsche 1967: 203, Editorial Introduction).

The dance of the maenads, like post-war Japanese Butoh dance, is a 'dark dance of the soul' and finds its mythological counterpart in Japan's ancient, animistic Shinto religion. Mark Holborn, in his book *Tatsumi Hijikata and The Origins of Butoh*, describes how the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu 'retreated into a cave and plunged the world into darkness' when her brother the storm god trampled her fields with his horses: 'In the cold and darkness of her absence, the other spirits, or kami, gathered outside the cave and performed wild and bawdy dances. They also placed a mirror in the branches of a tree overlooking the cave' (1987: 8). This mirror, like Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, perched in the branches of a tree above the revels, becomes a source of societal restoration when the sun goddess catches her own reflection in it and reappears. According to Holborn 'The stomping of Butoh [and of its ancestor Noh] has its mythical parallels in the revelry of the spirits in a darkened world' (1987: 8). And this mythical darkened world of barren rice fields corresponds to the reality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is clear that Butoh dance, although influenced by German expressionism and Artaud's 'theater of cruelty', is deeply rooted in Japanese cultural history, incorporating elements of Shintoism and Zen Buddhism, and images of Japanese agricultural life. And although it is never openly mentioned, it is Japan's metaphor for the A-bomb experience.

The image of the Butoh figure is the image of the Hiroshima survivor, but that image is continually displaced and re-figured as the dancer, like Freud's 'wolfman', imagines the primal scene and recollects it by traumatizing what has already happened. The classic Butoh dancer appears disturbingly vulnerable on stage—often near naked but for a loincloth, or wrapped in shroud-like rags and linens, and covered with ash-white body paint—the head shaven or topped with a fright wig. Often androgynous, dancers seem interchangeable, without identities or personal histories. Within a starkly illuminated and minimalist set, the performer engages in painstakingly slow, nascent movements that form a series of still-life poses. These

minute gestures are sometimes referred to as 'invisible movements', and, within the context of the performance, create a sense of timelessness. By contrast, gestures are sometimes spasmodic and the face contorted with exaggerated expressions of terror or laughter. Sometimes the figure seems embryonic or that of an infant coming into awareness, and, at other times, it seems highly eroticized and even orgiastic. Always the movement is toward the earth—the pull is always downward towards a vertiginous 'fall', in contrast with the upward movements of classical Western dance. According to Holborn:

> Butoh has a primordial quality. It is dark. It is generated somewhere in the lower strata of the subconscious, in the murky areas of personal prehistory. Memory is its source. Its etymology refers specifically to dance through the character *bu*. *Buyoh* is the neutral word for dance, but it has a sense of jumping or leaping, whereas *toh* implies a stomping. *Buyoh* is in the ascendant, like the vertical ascent of Vaslav Nijinsky or Isadora Duncan's leap toward the source of light. *Butoh* is a descent. (1987: 8)

Movements suggest the stooped posture of a worker in a rice-field or the blinded Hiroshima burn victim with outstretched arms. The ash-white body paint suggests burnt, melting flesh and/or decomposed corpses. Some dancers, borrowing from the Noh tradition, use masks or garish make-up, and their movements are highly sensual. Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of Butoh, would sometimes dance with an exaggerated and embellished phallus strapped to his groin. Both Thanatos and Eros are expressed in Butoh just as Freud links Eros and Thanatos with one another in his formulations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In Butoh, as in Freud, it is the erotic principle, or that desire which causes the self to recognize its alterity, that points it towards its own awareness of mortality—its own 'fall' into temporality.

Further parallels can be drawn between Butoh's conceptual framework and the formulations of Freud and, later, Jacques Lacan. Hijikata, in an article called 'Kazedaruma' in Holborn's text, relates the story of a monk named Kyokai who dreamed of his own burning body:

> He piled up firewood for his funeral pyre and cremated his own body. His spirit stood and watched over his own body being cremated but the spirit wasn't scathed by the flames as he had expected … [so] he skewered and flipped his body back and forth to help it burn, instructing those who were there for the cremation to do likewise. Gradually, the bones and joints and limbs of his skull were all burned and fell to pieces. At that point, Kyokai's spirit made, first, a sound, and then a scream. The man next to him didn't seem to hear … 'Ahh, my screams can't be heard because a dead man's spirit has no voice', Kyokai concluded, and recorded his thoughts. But wait a minute; isn't that a little odd? This sentence Kyokai wrote is not something he said while he was watching the dream; it was what he recorded after he awakened. (1987: 124)

Hijikata uses this story to illustrate the 'silent scream' that, as the metaphoric center of all Butoh dance, signifies the post-war 'rational' awakening to the trauma of

Hiroshima. But, more importantly, Hijikata recognizes that the monk could not articulate the experience of his own inarticulation until he had awakened from the dream.

Cathy Caruth discusses the significance of a similar dream in her article 'Traumatic Awakenings (Freud, Lacan, and the Ethics of Memory)'. She cites Freud's description in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of a father's nightmare about his son's burning corpse. The parallels between this dream and the monk's are striking:

> After a few hours sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle … the words spoken by the child must have been made up of words which he had actually spoken in his lifetime. (quoted in Caruth 1995: 93)

Freud goes on to point out that the dream occurred just at the moment 'when the most rapid possible awakening was called for', suggesting the problematic nature of the line between the sleeping and the awake, and the living and the dead. Just as the monk's dream points toward the survival of the spirit, the father's dream, Freud suggests, points toward the survival of the boy within the father's unconscious. Lacan's meta-analysis, says Caruth, takes this even further by suggesting that 'the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded in, the death that he survives. What the father cannot grasp in the death of his child … becomes the foundation of his very identity as father' (1995: 92). Similarly, the trauma that Hiroshima survivors cannot psychologically grasp becomes the foundation of the post-war identity and the foundation of the Butoh figure. Thus, the monk's dream is a source of creative inspiration for Hijikata, and the blurriness of the line between the living and the dead becomes the symbolic focus of the dance.

Hijikata's reference to the 'oddness' of the monk's post-awakening awareness of the silent scream is also paralleled in Freud's analysis of the father's dream of the burning corpse, in which he points out that 'it is thus not so much that the father simply "doesn't see" the burning corpse … but rather that he cannot see it and be awake at the same time' (Caruth 1995: 95). Again, according to Caruth, Lacan takes this further by suggesting that the father's 'awakening to death is … a paradoxical attempt to respond, in awakening, to a call that can only be heard within sleep' (1995: 99). Likewise, the monk's awakening to a 'silent' scream ('hearing' the scream only when he is awake) is a symbolic attempt to respond to what Lifton would call the 'psychic numbing' of the traumatic experience. The monk's own body is the body of the Hiroshima burn victim, and the silent scream is the scream of both the victim and the observer, who cannot articulate his horror until he is awake, when he re-creates the trauma. To quote Caruth: 'Awakening, in Lacan's reading of the dream, is itself the site of a trauma, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death' (1995: 100). Hijikata, as founder of Butoh, responds, if incompletely, to the Hiroshima experience by re-figuring it in the dance. If Lacan

'reads the story of the father as a survival inherently and constitutively bound up with the address of a dead child' (Caruth 1995: 102), the story of the monk is a survival bound up with the acknowledgement of the silent scream. Thus, Butoh, in living/dancing the 'silent' scream tropologically, acknowledges the 'impossibility' of responding to the Hiroshima tragedy.

In Claire Nouvet's article 'An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus', she argues that the 'refusal to respond' (Narcissus' refusal to respond to Echo) is an 'impossibility' to respond, and this impossibility is a function of a language that is inhabited by an 'echo', resonating from the hole at the center of an awareness/knowledge that it cannot grasp, by a 'lateral sliding into contingent meanings' (1991: 107), by a diffraction that destabilizes the notion of Self, and thus the notion of Self and Other. The spoken word stands for (represents) the 'I' that is not there and the Other becomes a screen that prevents us from seeing the alterity of our own language—there is no 'self'—just a process of alteration, a rhizomatic assemblage, a 'body without organs'. Narcissus' self-containment is an illusion revealed through the echo of language and the fluidity of the image (self/other, self as other) that he can never grasp. The subject/object dichotomy, which is a function of language itself, is collapsed. Narcissus must learn to differentiate between the representation (image) and what it elusively/deceptively represents as diffraction. Butoh attempts, by literalizing this diffraction or displacement and by recreating the primal scene, to, in Haven O'More's words, put 'the creative subconscious … on view before an audience' (Holborn 1987: 128). Hijikata describes this as 'cutting the surface of the water' and recalls his own Narcissus story. He tells of how, as a child, he would stare at his reflection in a barrel of water, and how one day he slashed through his reflection with a sickle 'to penetrate the surface'. Holborn says that this later became:

> the essential image of his art. The sickle and slash reappear throughout his work, and he would repeatedly use the phrase 'cutting the surface of the water', which was the barrier between the external world and the other world of the imagination. (1987: 9)

But 'cutting through the surface of the water' is more than an attempt to reach 'the other world of the imagination'; it is an attempt to tropologically respond to the call of the traumatized self. Lifton considers Freud's key gambit to be 'transforming death anxiety and the fear of disintegration into the idea of narcissm' (Caruth 1995: 130).

The trope that turns toward the impossibility of responding turns toward the awakening to not only 'the very difference between life and death' (Caruth 1995: 106), but the otherness of the victim and, ultimately, the self's otherness to the self. This awakening is actualized by the Butoh dancer who, on stage, gestures like an infant discovering his own body. This movement is described by dancer Yoko Ashikawa who says, 'When I trained to dance like a baby, the one thing that was most important to me was to explore and find the light' (quoted in Holborn 1987: 128). In performance, the near-naked dancer, with head shaven, lies on the floor of the stage and cranes her neck tentatively like an infant developing sight. Butoh's

founder Hijikata describes how he was influenced by the gestures of children and their dissociation from their own bodies:

> Everyone went out to work in the fields. There was no one in the neighboring houses. Children three or four years old were tied to large pillars in every home. I would sneak over to take a peek at those little kids. They made strange movements; one fed food to his own hand—what an odd thing to do! Of course he was not old enough to be conscious of his self … the child was treating his hand as if it weren't a part of himself … from time to time he would try to twist off his ears and all sorts of other things. Although this is a really absurd story, in it are the original movements that greatly influenced me later on in my dance. (quoted in Holborn 1987: 125)

This natural alterity of the child who has not yet formed a 'self' becomes a trope for the divided self of trauma. This metonymy is a displacement that reveals both the pre-Oedipal alterity and the primal scene. The awakening is not only an awakening to the light, but an awakening to the (m)other. Butoh dancer Kazlo Ohno said, 'The world of Butoh must be that of the mother's womb'. Holborn describes watching him practice:

> After dancing in the studio for nearly two hours … he began a new piece with different makeup. Pointing to the white flower he was holding, he said, 'My mother'. Then pointing to the only other prop, a small red table, 'My mother', he repeated. (1987: 15)

The (m)otherness of all things is central to Butoh figuration, as is the awakening to mortality and human suffering. Hijikata, again borrowing images from Japanese agricultural life, describes how mothers working in the rice fields would pile their babies into huge straw baskets and leave them where their cries could not be heard above the wind: 'From the very beginning the child was placed in the middle of the contraption so that his cries wouldn't be heard. He has to learn to amuse himself with his own body as a toy and to learn to tear and consume the darkness' (quoted in Holborn 1987: 127). This image is a nihilistic metaphor for the post-Fall human condition.

Within this context, Butoh is pre-Hiroshima or, more precisely, meta-Hiroshima—universal. The narrative told by the dance is without beginnings, and such pure gesture, as a form of articulation, seems uncontaminated by socio-historical realities. Or, at the very least, such signification seems to subvert and transgress socio-historical realities and, in Deleuzian terms, de-territorialize itself. Similarly, according to Julie Kristeva in her article 'Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science', such pre-Oedipal, pre-phallocentric signification is semiotic 'dream-work' (a term borrowed from Freud) that falls outside the Marxian exchange-value cycle:

> On the level of manifestation it is a hieroglyph, while on a latent level it is a dream-thought. 'Dream-work' becomes a theoretical concept that triggers off a new research, one that touches on pre-representative production,

> and the development of thinking before thought ... the dream-work 'does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form'. (1994: 279)

But despite its transgression of socio-historical realities, Butoh's semiotic dream-work, by 'giving things a new form', helps heal the cultural psychosis precipitated by the historical reality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Liftonian terms, it is the 'shattering of prior forms' that leads to the re-integration of the traumatized self. The 'prior forms' that Butoh tropes upon and then shatters are traditional Japanese Noh dance and classical Western dance—a possible response to both Japanese and Western imperialism. The 'new forms' developed by Butoh stem from the Japanese collective psyche and its imaginal memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In his book *Imaginal Memory and the Place of Hiroshima*, Michael Perlman (1988) draws upon Lifton's thesis that 'in recreating experience, we need some prior imagery to do that work'. Considering Lifton's asssertion that 'there was precious little prior imagery that could enable people to take in the Hiroshima experience' (Caruth 1995: 135), Perlman examines the ways that Hiroshima has survived in Japanese collective memory. Although Perlman fails to discuss Butoh dance specifically, he does take a close look at the cultural imagery that has helped Hiroshima survivors cope with their experience and/or has surfaced in their dream-work. I would like to examine the parallels between this dream-work imagery and the imagery of the dance.

Perlman believes that (in Jungian terms) the collective unconscious has gathered a series of images associated with Hiroshima and uses them as mnemonic devices, in the same way that Greek rhetoricians practiced the 'Art of Memory' as described by Francis Yates:

> The art of memory involves the formation of remembered places in the imagination, such as the distinct features and rooms of a house. In these places mnemonic images are deposited that remind one of associated information through their 'striking and unusual ... beautiful or hideous, comic or obscene' character. (quoted in Perlman 1988: vii)

These images are roughly analogous to Jungian archetypes of the imagination, and Perlman employs the term 'imaginal memory' to define 'that aspect of memory that involves some kind of imagining' (ix) (or imaging) on an individual, cultural, or universal basis. Holborn comments that Butoh dancers have always allow[ed] movements to emerge from [the] body, rather than applying them as with Western dance, and that this 'process involve[s] evoking the memory' (1988: 9). Similarly, O'More says that 'When Hijikata speaks of "dying again" and making "gestures of the dead" he is speaking of memory and the real necessity of going into memory to make contact with the dead—both within and without' (Holborn, 1987: 129).

Perlman also believes that images associated with Hiroshima may be 'read' literally within the context of socio-historical realities or figuratively within the context of individual and cultural psychoanalysis—the examination of personal and cultural mythopoetic narratives:

> The images revealing essential psychic significances appear in the 'death' of the densely literal perspective with which life is usually viewed. (1988: x–xi)

This 'densely literal perspective' is protected by an imaginal figure that Perlman calls 'Strong-Armed Ego'. Strong-Armed Ego, he says, is a 'dangerous figure', because he represents the 'avoidance of imagination and death as crucial realities of the soul' (1988: 16). He is the Pentheus/Herakles figure who avoids the oneiric and, according to Lifton, literalizes rather than symbolizes death (quoted in Perlman 1988: 16). Hijikata and other commentators on Butoh do not describe any performances that employ the image/figure of Strong-Armed Ego, nor have I observed any. But a contemporary visual artist named Kenji Yanobe sculpts elaborate, mechanistic body-armors and sensory deprivation tanks. One piece, made of steel and rubber, called 'Soul of Bubble King' is described as 'An anti-personal intimidation protection suit … when an invader approaches, it threatens by swelling up its body and the passenger is protected as well as being pressurized'. Other pieces include the 'Paranoia Fortress', the 'Survival System Train', the 'Grand Seed Orga' ('an erect self-burying device'), and the 'Yellow Suit'—'radiation protective gear covered with steel plates and lead' (gallery notes). Art critics, struck by the whimsical and even 'Kafkaesque' nature of these works, fail to see their solemness. The Yellow Suit recalls Samurai warrior armor, and the prototype for the 'Tanking Machine', a sensory-deprivation tank, is a sarcophugus-like metal chamber featuring an eerie Noh-mask where an Egyptian death-mask would be. Critics also fail to link these works with post-Hiroshima Japanese imaginal memory and the impulse towards a 'Strong-Armed Ego'. These works are essentially literalizations of the 'psychic numbing' referred to by Lifton and, according to him, even a form of 'death guilt' by Hiroshima survivors or *hibakusha:*

> Recalling Elie Weisel's phrase, 'In every stiffened corpse I saw myself', we may say that each survivor simultaneously feels himself to be that 'stiffened corpse', condemns himself for not being it, and condemns himself even more for feeling relieved that it is the other person's and not his own. (quoted in Perlman, 1988: 21)

Images of disfiguration and dismemberment are also literalizations of trauma. Within this context, Perlman cites the 'vision' of a third-century alchemist that resonates with Hijikata's dream of the burning monk and Freud's dream of the burning boy. In Perlman's dream, the central figure is a priest whose body is dismembered and consumed by fire. And as he is transformed into spirit, he says, 'that is my unendurable torment'. Perlman notes that 'despite his being rendered as spirit, the torment does not go away, but remains simultaneously present' (1988: 88). Perlman also makes reference to Pentheus' dismemberment in *The Bacchae* and notes that dismemberment, according to Jung, 'refers to a psychological process that requires a *body metaphor*' (quoted in Perlman 1988: 88). Gesture, and dance itself, is a 'body metaphor' actualized. The minute gestures of the Butoh dancer are what Perlman describes as 'the moving yet "motionless" images arising from the place of Hiroshima' (1988: 77).

Other imaginal figures include 'Mask Woman', 'Grave-Man' and 'Walking-Ghost-With-No-Hair' (Perlman 1988: 131). Mask Woman is an imaginal relative of the Hiroshima burn victim, who walks slowly and with outstretched arms. Her face 'disfigured by burns … resembles a "comic mask" ' (1988: 99). Both the careful movements of the burn victim and the distorted mask-like expression are actualized

in Butoh. Grave Man is a hunched, middle-aged figure who slowly makes his way to the cemetery wrapped in a white sheet (1988: 112). 'Whiteness' is an important element of Butoh; dancers often appear covered with white body paint and/or wrapped in shroud-like linens. The Butoh dancer is sometimes referred to as a 'white shadow', a term that denotes an ambiguous ontological status. Is the dancer a figure or the trace of a figure? And does a white shadow outline an inarticulable darkness or the whiteness of a figure that will not retreat into the darkness? Perlman notes the significance of the 'white shadow' in imaginal memory:

> The *white shadow*, or *shadow of white* is a phenomenon all its own … Remember the forbidding whiteness of Moby Dick with which Ahab struggled. Another, more overtly ghostly, remembering of white is found in one woman habakusha's recollections: 'When I was evacuated at the time of the bomb, people had white medicine on their faces, and these white faces have sometimes appeared in my dreams'. (1988: 113)

For Hijikata, the ghostliness of the white figure appears in the form of the *kazedaruma*s or 'wind darumas'. Hijikata remembers the image he had as a child of the rice field workers making their way toward his home. Walking on the paths between the fields, they would appear legless like the 'darumas', which are traditional Japanese legless dolls. Their shouts to each other could not be heard above the strong wind and snow, and their movements, buffeted by the wind, were slow and arduous. He says that these men appeared like ' "tumblers in the wind" and he felt "a vague sense of dread" at their arrival' (1987: 124). One can see the traces of these figures from Hijikata's imaginal memory in the dance itself—the silent screams of the mask-like contorted face, the 'moving yet motionless' gestures, and the ghostly whiteness of the body paint—all these elements stem from Japanese agricultural life but can also be recognized in the figures that Perlman finds in post-Hiroshima Japan's imaginal memory.

Post-World War II Japanese poetry also deals with the inarticulable legacy of Hiroshima and, lacking the 'body metaphor' of the dance moves towards literalization in the language itself, which is sometimes bare and concrete. As Paul Engle and Hualing Nieh Engle point out in the foreward to *The Poetry of Postwar Japan:* 'The shock of war seems to have shaped these poems into the shock of language. Words snarl, vivify, slash, cut, draw blood' (1975: vi). The question remains, however, if such literalization is effective and if language lacking that Blanchotian 'fullness and certainty' can effectively 'embody' such experience.

Post-war experimental Japanese poetry was written out of a void. Kijima Hajime, the editor of *The Poetry of Postwar Japan*, describes how wartime poetry was influenced by nationalism and how traditional lyric forms like the syllabic tanka were used by soldiers to write death poems (1975: xii).

Hajime implies that the sentimental lyricism of tanka lent itself to propaganda and notes that Japanese poets should have criticized this element. But at least one experimental movement called *Arechi* (The Waste Land) sprang up during the war and was recognized for its break with traditional forms (Hajime 1975: xiii–xiv). This break, however, seemed imbued with a Western consciousness, because post-war

poets were influenced by Western literary movements, as were pre-war experimental poets (1975: xv). So it seems that post-war poets were faced with articulating a singularly Japanese experience, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, through the filter of Western literary aesthetics.

Nonetheless, Japanese poetry differs from Western poetry in one very important way. The poems are written using Chinese ideograms that have a much closer connection to their corresponding images than do words constructed from a phonetic alphabet. According to Hajime, poets use these particular ideograms precisely because they are striving for a concrete, highly imagistic poetry, and that much of this imagistic power is lost when the poems are read out loud or translated into English (1975: xxv). So, unfortunately, when examining Japanese poetry through the lens of English translation, one has an inherent handicap, and I acknowledge this limitation. Roy Andrew Miller, in the article 'The Naked Language of Postwar Japanese Poetry' in the introduction to the aforementioned collection, points out that it is impossible for English translations to capture the way that post-war Japanese poetry breaks with the language and stylistic conventions of traditional Japanese court forms such as *haiku* and *tanka* (1975: xxiv). In Deleuzian terms, this 'break' represents a de-territorialization of Japanese cultural forms. Miller says:

> To say that the language of these poems represents a departure from the traditions of Japanese poetic diction is simply to cloud the issue with indirection; better to think of it as a violent stripping away of all protective covering, a hurried, compulsive urge to display as prominently as possible everything that is normally kept hidden in layers of involute linguistic devices; in a word, it is *hadaka no gengo*, 'naked language'. (1975: xxix)

This 'hurried nakedness' seems to parallel that emotional nakedness that Perlman tracks and that Butoh dancers display on stage. So, keeping the disclaimer about translation in mind, I would like to examine some post-war poems within the context of the articulation of trauma.

Some poems seem to highlight the connection to early twentieth-century experimental movements such as Surrealism, Objectivism, and Expressionism. The following excerpt, from 'My Burial Song' by Hasegawa Ryusei, has the same in-your-face shock value and despair of some of Artaud's later works including the 'Theater of Cruelty'. Like a *Zen koan*, it points at the failure of logic, knows the dangers of representation, and trusts the instincts of the body:

> I scratched a tiny wound on my chest
> which began to fester
> and pulled out maggots and viscera
> smeared with a scab's pus,
> the place for burial is already prepared
> and I must drag my remains
> before the prime minister
> and the chief of police
> of the terrible species formica sanguinaria
> so my remains begin walking

This poem highlights the awareness of the phenomenological body as it relates to suffering and trauma. But what is odd is that the voice in this poem, like the voice in many of Emily Dickinson's death poems and the voice in the father's dream of his burning child, is a voice from beyond the grave. And it seems to suggest that it cannot be laid to rest until someone bears witness to its scars. Like the boy who says 'Father, don't you see I'm burning', the corpse in this poem calls upon the living to respond by retaining its image in the collective unconscious. And like Hijikata's monk, it cannot be fully rendered to spirit until someone hears its scream.

The following poem, 'Blinded City', is by Anzai Hitoshi:

> It's like a photo of Picasso when he was old
> Sucking tongue-halibut bones,
> From whose wrinkled profile
> Just thick bald eyeballs.
>
> Before I knew it
> This poster was stripped
> From hotel-subway
> And wet-street walls.
>
> Those eyeballs; where have they gone?
> Those softly burning bison-like eyeballs:
> When they were ripped
> From this zinc-roofed capital city sky?
>
> There's the blue skull of Nikolai Cathedral.
> The stinking river runs like a soul.
> Only the eyeballs are missing,
> And people comb their tree-leaved hair
> Incessantly with a blind man's hands.

This piece seems influenced by Expressionism, which creates zones of shifting intensity through its compressed imagery and tension. It re-territorializes language by concentrating on its effects—its rhythms, its pictorial shocks and disturbing imagery, its syntactic tension—rather than its semantic content. At a time when meaning itself was in question, the associative, connotative value of the word became more important. The 'stinking river' that 'runs like a soul' quite literally suggests the rivers that Hiroshima victims 'jumped into [to] escape heat and fire' (Lifton 1967: 25). And this skull-like Picasso image that meshes with the skull of the cathedral again problematizes the distinction between the living and the dead and resonates with Lifton's observations about the atmosphere of Hiroshima after the explosion: 'There was a widespread sense that life and death were out of phase with one another, no longer properly distiguishable—which lent an aura of weirdness and unreality to the entire city' (1967: 23).

In 'The Hand of Velocity' by Kijima Hajime (1975), the speaker seems dissociated from his own hand, or the hand that writes the poem:

> Can you see an embryo exhausted by singing
> in each texture of the ruins?

After feeling destruction beyond the reach of words,
your cyclone like writing,
which intrudes upon an unexplored self-universe,
opens you pliantly and lets you touch anew,
giving you the freedom to grasp and control everything.
Line drawings of velocity don't show how they were made,
but call me, a sentinal,
but invite me to perform.

Ostensibly, this is a poem about post-Holocaust writing, about being able to continue to make poems after the Holocaust. But the 'you' in the poem seems to be the 'self', and I am reminded of Hijikata's story of the children who play with their own bodies to amuse themselves. This poem implies a neurotic self-schism that hopes to be resolved by the writing itself, but I feel that the writing too literally approaches its subject to be effective.

The attempt to deal with Hiroshima in a literal way, through language, ultimately fails. Like newsreel footage of the Holocaust, it documents pain without offering a symbolic redemption, as one might find at the end of a film like *Schindler's List*, for example. This excerpt from a poem called 'The Pursuer' by Hasegawa Ryusei demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such literalization:

Survivors of Hiroshima
It is pointless to grieve, exhibiting
Your wounds to no one.
Let's find the criminals.
Let's get down to the core.
Who were they all?
However we're killed, tortured,
The history of hunting does not stop.
The numbers of pursuers grows as history
Continues. The pursuers grow
Sharper, they stand out, they
Preside over the Last Judgement.

Fifty-one years after Hiroshima, such polemic rings flat.

A poem such as 'Decalcomania II' by Nako Taro is a bit more subtle, as demonstrated in this excerpt:

poetry and death are codes:
the eye and the bud decode them

poetry and death are pollen:
the bud and the eye carry them away.

(Note: The words 'poetry' and 'death' are both pronounced *shi* in Japanese, and 'eye' and 'bud' are both pronounced *me*)

This poem, relying on the strength of the Japanese homophones, seems at least to

recognize the limitations of its own language: the 'eye' and the 'bud' that decodes 'poetry' and 'death' also carries them away—they are lost once they are grasped.

In the poem 'Like Underground Water' by Ooka Makoto, the pull of the body to the earth and to the chthonian is reasserted:

> A young hand stretches itself in the mud.
> I shake hands with the earth.
> After years of futility
> I stand
> under the blaze of a burning forest.
>
> Even sorrow adds to my bones' sharp glitter.
> Pain makes my flesh smell sweet from within.
> Nothing is without its use.

The speaker here, again, is obsessed with death imagery. The hand that stretches out of the earth is a hand from out of the grave; again, reminding the speaker to bear witness to the tragedy, to remember, and to respond. But by the second stanza, the speaker, reduced to bones and deteriorating flesh, seems to become the corpse. Survivor-guilt becomes a death-wish and, again, the voice is from the grave saying 'Nothing is without its use'—the trauma once re-figured and displaced becomes a vehicle for self-awareness.

But 'dis-placement', as a trope, perhaps cannot be reached through language and can only be reached through the phenomonological body that is the locus of 'place'. Perlman talks about the importance of place in relation to imaginal memory:

> As Edward Casey observes, 'it is by bodily movement that I find my way in place and take up habitation there. My body not only takes me into places; it habituates me to their peculiarities and helps me to remember them vividly.' The body remembers a place in its own way, responding to the place through its position and movements, so that the place becomes embodied. (1988: 94)

Perlman goes on to trace how image becomes 'movement of bodily imagination' and how, once enacted, it 'gains a separate place in the soul while very much present in the body' (1988: 95). Therein lies the importance of gesture and the cathartic quality of some of the earliest mytho-poetic narratives that were enacted—ancient Greek tragedies. We cannot analyze ourselves as we might analyze a microbe, because in saying something about ourselves (as we do when we write literature) we have already changed ourselves; we are a moving target. Or, in other words, it is impossible to be the one who sees and the one who is seen at the same time. This is where the play or the dance has a special role: by letting us see ourselves there on the stage, and this is part of its cathartic effect. In Eastern culture, due to the influence of Buddhism, mind–body awareness/union becomes more personal in the form of meditation, martial arts, archery, and brush painting and consequently becomes a key to self-knowledge and enlightenment. Francisco Varela *et al.* (1991), in the book *The Embodied Mind*, cites the early work of Martin Heidegger and Hans Gadamer in relation to the importance of gesture. They say:

> In general, Continental philosophers, even when they explicitly contest many of the assumptions underlying hermeneutics, have continued to produce detailed discussions that show how knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history—in short, from our *embodiment.* (1991: 149; original emphasis)

In summary, I feel that post-war Japanese poetry, like much of Artaud's written work and the poetry of early twentieth-century modernist/experimental movements, does not age well. The limitations of language, exemplified in the difficulties of translation, shine through in poems that incompletely express the desperation and survival guilt of Hiroshima victims and survivors. Attempts by some writers to convey nakedly and concretely this experience are the most problematic and ineffective. The universal elements of the Hiroshima experience, the awakening to trauma in our personal histories, cannot be realized through a language that, in philosophical terms, is tied to negation (Blanchot 1981: 43) and in socio-historical terms is phallogocentric. Dance, on the contrary, particularly a dance like Butoh that displaces and extends conventional and traditional modes, can, through the embodiment of our socio-historical and linguistic frameworks, 'cut the surface of the water' and, hopefully, transcend these modes.

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