

It is often perceived that Butoh dancers are moving very slowly, but why? One of Yoshito Ohno's answers was that it is "Because we are trying to touch the moon." As I stitch together fragments from personal writing and interviews, the global Butoh community mourns the passing of Yoshito, who now dances between worlds. As we mourn, we share, write, and dance our pain into beauty. All of us are dancing in-between, becoming the moon and stars from which we fell.

We are now in 2020. At this moment, I sit at the computer, at the library in Kottbusser Tor. I listen to 'Sleepstep' by Dasha Rush as I write. Messages come flying at me via; Facebook, Instagram, E-mails, and Tindr. I am open to receiving and answering these messages, but there is a ring of violence around my heart. It protects the feelings I have there, allows me to continue my expansion process, and edit this text into a cohesive piece of writing.

Before I share some interviews and reflective writing on Butoh, I want to put it into perspective with Ballet and Contemporary dance, as they are more commonly practiced and understood. Ballet's economic system and physical practice all speak to its imperialist patriarchal beginnings as court dance used by King Louis XIV. He used it as propaganda to show his power as the 'Sun King', in which all other members of the official court dance around him, like planets orbit the sun in our galaxy. As described to me once by my teacher in Australia, Becky Hilton, in Ballet; the head represents the King, the arms which frame it are the surrounding courtiers, and the feet which do most of the hard labour, the peasants. Contemporary dance by contrast is more democratic- any body part can be 'elected for government' and become the central focus of a movement. When Butoh is compared in this way to Ballet and Contemporary dance, it is Anarchistic. Body parts are not elected, they take over and express themselves chaotically to be free from cultural and social conditioning. For this reason, Butoh has been associated with tribal, ecstatic and trance rituals, as well as the highly formalised Japanese traditions of Noh and Kabuki. How to find and maintain a contemporary Butoh practice that encompasses both order and chaos is a daily question with personal and national context for self-identified Butoh artists everywhere.

I come from the context of Ballet, which is both virtuosic, as well as highly constrained in its sexual and gender expression. Butoh has helped me to discover my own Transgender identity, and to transform and Transcend my binary classical training. (See my article 'The Black Swan' on my website for more on this process of discovery). This text, written for 'Delving into Dance' is by no means a definitive text on the history of 'Butoh in Berlin'. It is a personal investigation into the field, via my connections to other Butoh practitioners both here and elsewhere. I am still grappling with my personal identity and expression, looking within and without for answers after moving to Berlin as Tsuki in October 2018.

To begin my reflection, I am very grateful to share fragments of an interview I made with Motoya Kondo over a Facebook call. He was calling from India where he was embarking on a six-week meditation retreat. He told me that he was in bed, under the blanket to not disturb the others sleeping. Motoya Kondo told me that being Transgender is part of the universality of all existence and that my experience as a transgendered dancer can be a doorway to reveal some hidden universal reality also of others. He believes that there is a misconception that Butoh is a therapy and it is in danger of becoming a place just to 'vomit out feelings and feel lighter'. He explains that, "to transform our personal experience into a poem, the body needs to be prepared. We are not just

putting raw bodies and emotions on the stage. We are recreating. We must transform the body into an objective object. Furthermore, it is essential to keep clear awareness of the personal experience of body and mind as if sitting in the audience, or as if looking from the sky above, not drowning in the ocean of it," Motoya told me that he was 'kidnapped by Butoh' in 2007. He googled Kazuo Ohno who was dancing into his 90s, and found classes given by his son, Yoshito Ohno at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio in Tokyo. Deeply inspired, Motoya would go on to be Yoshito's student and assistant within the next five years. Motimaru Dance Company was born during this time with Co-Director Tiziana Longo from Sicily, who

was also studying at Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio and assisting Yoshito Ohno. Motoya and Tiziana moved from Tokyo to Berlin in 2010, because they wanted to put themselves into a wider artistic context than living in Japan would allow them. "I had to get out of Butoh, to throw it away, in order to understand it," Motoya explains. What is Butoh? This is a common question asked by experienced practitioners and novices alike. Motoya emphasizes the fact that it was born in a time when many artists, writers and philosophers were together in the post-war period of Japan, widely digesting both Western and Japanese art context in search of creating new authentic art. He feels that it is more essential to question "What is the reality of life?" rather than questioning only "What is Butoh?". The fathers of Butoh, Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata, were both trained in German Expressionism Dance; Tatsumi Hijikata in classical ballet, jazz and Spanish Dance and Kazuo Ohno in modern dance and tango. They were influenced by art, philosophy and the methodology of their time; Russian Theatre Director, Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavski, visual artists such as Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon, Henri Michaux and Hans Bellmer, French Philosopher Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille. Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata developed vastly different approaches to Butoh, as they lived vastly different lifestyles. Where Hijikata Tatsumi believed that "Form goes first, life follows," Kazuo Ohno felt that, "Soul goes first, form follows". From these pioneers, students evolved and developed new methodologies so that Butoh continued to expand and evolve with every generation.

Motoya finishes our time together by recalling a memory of being at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio, when all students were given wet towels and asked to squeeze the water out. While they did this, Yoshito played a vocal recording of Tatsumi Hijikata moaning as if in deep anguish. As the recording ends, once all the towels were squeezed dry, Hijikata charmingly says, "Omoshirokattadesho? - That was nice one, wasn't it?". This story brings me back to my question of how to transmit and transcend personal experience into universal art. For answers, I look to performances by some of Berlin's most established and influential Butoh performers.

I saw 'WO!MAN MADE' performed at Dock11 by Yuko Kaseki, Teo Vlad, and Valerie Reney twice. And now as I sit and write, I see it a third time in fragments. I first saw it in 2018, before I knew her. Before she became my friend and collaborator.

A tower of curves and spikes, swaying in the hanging light of an old whisky bar. Turning on her plinth, shoes squeaking, floor creaking, ready to tumble, ready to rumble. For a mountain to become a woman it takes a slow reveal. First of the material which assembles her and later, the body. The woman herself. From the opening sequence of 'WO!MAN MADE', we see that to make yourself is to undo yourself. The only way to fuck the patriarchy is to fuck with yourself. And she fucks slow. We

are on her time. We exist in her universe. We've purchased our tickets to forget ourselves and become another. Another who is towering, who is crumbling, who is revealing, who is giving birth to one shoe after another.

I first saw Minako Seiki perform at the same theatre in 2015. It was her 30-year anniversary in Berlin. There she Transformed and Transcended through minute robotic articulations to sweeping tumbles, finally ending with an ode to La Argentina (created by Kazuo Ohno in 1977) with tears streaming down her face. I recently had the privilege of witnessing her perform with Yumiko Yoshioka in 'TWO' also presented at Dock11.

Two heads. Two Herstories. Two Iconic Women in the History of Butoh. Of Butoh in Berlin. Two masks hold one another up, together and apart in succession. Eyes flicker into the audience with personal methodologies of mockery used in self-defence. Between perfect postures of tea ceremony, characters emerge; talkative, robotic, humorous, twitching. Each shift from perfection brings a subtle surprise. In this repetitive metronome, ghosts pass through; family, friends, and teachers from Japan, interspersed with the chatter from the U Bahn in Berlin. In a more lucid scene, they are moved by great torrents of water. At times they peacefully surrender to its onslaught, at others drowning in a mere puddle. They develop gills to cope with

their new habitat. They save one another with the aid of life rafts, which were previously hanging from the ceiling. We glimpse a metaphor for the act of collaboration. It is akin to survival. It's saying "fuck you" to the pre-flight safety message of securing your own oxygen mask before helping another.

I sat and spoke with Leisa Prowd, my friend and collaborator about her experience of the seventh and final EX...IT International Butoh Festival last year. She tells me, "I was drawn to work with Atsushi (Takenouchi) because he seemed to embody all he imparted to us in his workshops – a deep sense of self in relation to others and the universe. There seemed to be no separation between the man and the practice. It was this aspect about Atsushi that drew me to choose to work with him for the final week at eX...it! Although the group piece focussed around what I found to be images of endurance through violent circumstances, the provocation of 'Body Revolution' and the idea of there be something beyond the self within the self that drives one towards triumph in brokenness, was one that resonated with me deeply." says Leisa Prowd, who attended 'eX...it!' in 2019. "As we worked together as a group, the imagery moved beyond acting and became a gateway towards finding authenticity within yourself. Atsushi encouraged us to observe our bodies as if from above while being deeply present inside the experience simultaneously. I find it impossible to recall the moment this happened to me. I simply knew I was there, no longer concerned about what it looked like externally, which is something I tend to have a preoccupation with, but deeply present within and without.", she tells me.

She continues on her reflection of the 'eX...it' Festival, "I was also fascinated by the process in the workshop with Felix Ruckert. He asked us to find a place within where we would experience discomfort or would make the audience uncomfortable to witness the process. I took a dress from the selection of props he brought, along with a large suitcase. The dress was too big for me which somehow seemed important. I experimented with different ways of getting in and out of it, and of being seen by others in various stages of dressing; sometimes even half naked. This was not enough to push myself

beyond my comfort levels. I was used to life modelling; posing naked in front of a room of strangers, so this was nothing new. I put on the dress completely and called on my body's memory of being in a similar situation, where I have tried on beautiful dresses, I would love to be seen in but the dresses no longer looked beautiful on my out-of-proportion body. Suddenly the dress was not too big. I was too small. I felt the shame of being not the right size. In tears I rolled up the sleeves, only making them look bulky and awkward. The dress hung off my shoulders like rags. Felix approached me from behind and whispered in my ear deep and long, "Ha ha ha!". This was the one response I didn't want to hear as I hear it in everyday life all too often. I retreated inside the old suitcase and stayed there for the remainder of the exercise."

Ken Mai has been practicing Butoh for almost 30 years. He has studied a founder of Butoh "Kazuo Ohno" and has also studied with a member of Byakkosha Butoh Company in Kyoto, Japan. And the same time he was also a member of well-known "Eguchi & Sumiko Modern Dance Company (German Expressionist Dance) in Osaka, Japan. Ken Mai learned German Expressionist dance from Otoy Eguchi. He is the younger brother of Takaya Eguchi, who studied with Mary Wigman in Berlin in the beginning of 30s and spread this German dance (Neue Tanz) to Japan. Ken Mai is now based in Helsinki, though travels the world teaching workshops and performing solo and collaborative performances. I naively asked Ken Mai over Facebook messenger, "What is Butoh?", and he responded swiftly and generously...

"How many dozens have asked these questions since I started Butoh? Conversely, what I want to ask the questioner is what is Butoh? Anyway, this is the memory I answered. The dance of Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of Butoh. It is the root of the flower. The shadow part of the body. Life. Universe. Ritual. One piece of flower (root and flower), etc. But I won't say these answers because they are already known to the public. Don't say anything boring. The history of Butoh can be found on the Internet or in books, so I will refrain from doing it here. I am not interested in the name of Butoh. Hijikata had previously called Darkness dance (Ankoku Buyoh). However, while he was looking for a shorter name, Akira Kasai, a student, first used it in his

solo work with Butoh, and Hijikata began calling it the name of Butoh. Butoh is a name that already existed in China and Japan, meaning social dance. Or a ball is a dance party. So, it would be better not to stick to the name itself. Here I would like to mention the essence of Butoh. Butoh, which I now understand, is a way of understanding the whole universe through the body that is part of the universe. Not only Butoh, but Martial arts, Ancient yoga, Native dance, etc., are deeply involved in the body and soul, and I feel that they understand nature's providence and the cosmic providence. There is truth and I feel that there is purity. What that means is that there is no separation. Good and Bad, Heaven and Hell, Beauty and Ugly so on. Everything is pure and one. The education we

have received, a religion, is a world of sensibility, far from the truth, and capitalism predominantly leads to increased competition, battle, jealousy, and stress. All we have a soul or heart. I am convinced that love is the destination of our dance of Butoh."

I was fortunate to see two of the four performances of the series, the second XHAIN & BERG and fourth ASSEMBLAGE by Valentin Tszin at ACUD Theatre in 2018. This is what I perceived and remembered...

A figure moving in micro on a chair in the light. Face downward, internal focus. As the gaze rises, the fragments reveal fragmented emotions, a whole spectrum. It's like looking through a kaleidoscope aimed at the soul. Standing by a floating wall, a figure and their shadow. It moves forward. Each step a tentative journey into the unknown. The black swan bubbles beneath a plastic surface. It glides, and struggles. Its form in metamorphosis, shaped by sound, text, thumping, but mostly by the imagination of the audience. An arm pierces through for air, and the entire swan can be seen. Still more unfeathered flesh comes up for air, and the figure can be seen in total, swan, man, alien, not even the subject knows which. Like a black swimming pool, the figure circles, tests the water with toe and fingertip. Repeated many times until it is safe to enter. When the dome is enough inflated, the figure enters by making a tear in the water's surface.

Another metamorphosis, this time of swimming pool into bed. They slide beneath its white sheets, remove their suit. Fear becomes ecstasy, joy, pleasure, orgasm, silent scream. After the catharsis of carrying and realising time, music plays; melancholic Russian pop. Exhausted, the figure sits on a chair in the light, by the closed entrance of the theatre. Microphone in hand, they speak with muffled words. So much to say, no need to say it. Enough to feel the intention of speaking. Can we listen deeply while we speak? This moment came close to answering this question. The virtuosic moment came from supine, near the light. By letting shoulders, head, and feet a few inches from the ground, the figure was able to lift themselves off the ground and slam back into it. Several times were impressive; a few more and it became borderline masochistic; beyond that, one could sync into belief and trust again.

While this was a repetitive virtuosity, the second I saw two nights later contained its opposite; exploring every possible pathway available within a preconceived movement structure. If Butoh had virtuosity, like Ballet has the coda of a Grand Pas de Deux, then this would be its moment. Again, a reference to the opening sequence of XHAIN & BERG, now expanded to take the body into various shapes which reference dance. One notable form of Nijinsky as faun appeared, snickered, and vanished into an array of twitches. I start to perceive an interpretation of techno, in those two virtuosic moments, of repetition and abundance. Similarly, the heart beats a continuous rhythm, but feels infinite possibilities, combinations of being. I remember you saying that Butoh is the act of Becoming and Failing. I remember my Body Becoming the Moon.