

**Jonathan Marshall**

## Dancing the Elemental Body: Butoh and Body Weather:

Interviews with Tanaka Min and Yumi Umiumare<sup>[1]</sup>

### Introduction

The article below reproduces Tanaka Min's contemporary reflections on the Japanese avant-garde dance form of *butoh*, its development and Tanaka's career, providing an update on the influential 1985 interview conducted by Bonnie Sue Stein which was reproduced in *The Drama Review* in 1986. His comments provide an important addition to the primary documentation available on both the history of *butoh* and on Tanaka's own practice, particularly with respect to the relatively limited English language resources in the field. The interview was carried out in July 2001 when Tanaka visited Melbourne as a guest of the Australian International Workshop Festival, during which time Tanaka conducted a masterclass followed by a solo improvised performance at the Black Box theatre, Victorian Arts Centre. After providing an introduction in his own words, my questions were largely relayed via local dancer and translator Yumi Umiumare. Tanaka sometimes answered in English himself, or Umiumare would speak for him, relating his more involved Japanese language responses. This is indicated in the text below. Detailed references and commentary have also been provided in the endnotes.

### Butoh since 1959 and the founding of Tanaka's Body Weather laboratory

*Butoh* has evolved considerably since its emergence in works such as Tatsumi Hijikata's infamous, grotesquely transgressive dance performance of *Kinjiki (Forbidden Colours)* in 1959. By the time of Stein's interview with Tanaka, *butoh* had moved from being a marginal avant-garde phenomenon to an internationally recognised dance style reflecting a problematic and ambiguous national character. Hijikata and others variously associated with the Japanese avant-garde, such as Takechi Tetsuji, Hoseo Eikô and Yoshida Yoshie, all cited an essentialist model of the Japanese body as short, stocky and close to the ground—and hence associated with the dark emotions and grounded spiritual contexts which this proximity implied—as one of the chief motivations for the creation of *butoh* dance and its related forms. (Hijikata 2000) The

establishment of *butoh* certainly constituted a reaction to what Hijikata described as choreography originally designed with the "coherent body of the Occidental" in mind: namely the highly codified forms of classical ballet and Martha Graham's modern dance style, which were dominant in Japanese dance training institutions after World War Two. Nevertheless, *butoh*'s founders pillaged freely from both the Euro-American avant-garde performance (notably the German Expressionist *ausdrucksanz* of Mary Wigman and Rudolph von Laban as well as Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics, via Ishii Baku and Ôno Kazuo) and also from the aesthetic traditions which had become indigenous to Japan (*noh*, *kabuki*, *nihon buyoh*, and so on).

Particularly successful in promoting *butoh* overseas was Amagatsu Ushio's Sankai Juku company, which has had a contract to perform every two years at Paris' Théâtre de la Ville since 1982. The group imprinted upon the memory of many audiences the image of the *butoh-ka* as a visibly Asian dancer, partially nude, head shaved and covered in the white rice flour make-up of Japanese performance, enacting movements with a Zen-like "glacial pacing." (Sanders 1988) The "re-importation" of these and other *butoh* styles into Japan after such international triumphs, however, tended to exacerbate the trend to view *butoh* in Orientalist terms as an impenetrable, metaphysical and deeply exoticised form available to both the Occidental and the contemporary Japanese consumer alike. [2]

The successes of the 1980s nevertheless enabled the diversification and diffusion of *butoh* both inside and outside of Japan. The form had originally been spread primarily via the teachings of Hijikata, Tanaka and Ôno. By the 1980s, however, the company Dai Rakuda Kan (Great Camel Battleship, under the artistic direction of Maro Akaji) had become an important site for the development and dissemination of the style. The founding members of Dai Rakuda Kan in turn established several of the other large, more overtly theatrical companies such as were becoming known both in Japan and overseas, notably Sankai Juku (under Amagatsu), Byakko-Sha (Ohsuga Isamu), Hoppoh Butoh-Ha (Northern Butoh School, under Bishop Yamada), Butoh-Ha Sebi (under Murobushi Kô) and Dance Love Machine (Tamura Tetsuro). These developments, coupled with Hijikata's death, caused *butoh* to seem increasingly opaque or critically ambiguous, widely available and yet contested for both dancers and audiences. (Moodie) Tanaka himself distinguished between the semi-improvised, bodily- focused works of practitioners such as himself, as opposed to the productions staged by the sometime theatre actor Maro. In 1985, Tanaka commented that Dai Rakuda Kan staged, "Theater, not dance. They make good pictures .... Image without body, not dance." (Stein 1985) These disputes within the movement were also exhibited by Tanaka's description of himself in 1989 as the "Legitimate Son of Hijikata" and hence a worthy peer (if not rival) to former Hijikata acolyte Ashikawa Yoko in transferring and developing the heritage of *butoh*. (Miller and Wallace -Crabbe, Boyce-Wilkinson) As Daisan Erotica artistic director Kawamura Takeshi noted in 1991, Ashikawa's intensely slow, meditative and minimalistic version of *butoh* especially "has become religious ... it has achieved high artistic merit by closing itself from society." (Martin 2000)

The first *butoh* festival in Japan, *Butoh 85: Butoh dangerous shies—shikimic no kismets to shire* (*Collected Records of Butoh Confessions—Seven persons' seasons and castles*), was mounted in 1985 and the second in 1987. Despite the death of Hijikata in the intervening year, these events marked the beginning of a period of apparent stability, as many *butoh* artists thrived, while the content and meaning of *butoh* continued to evolve in directions not entirely consistent with Hijikata's original aesthetic. [3] The highly theorised, critical physical theatre of Gekidan Kaitaisha, for example, represented a particularly complex branch of *butoh*'s genealogy. Itoh Kim's fusion of postwar Euro-American choreography with *butoh* also represented a significant transformation of *butoh*'s formal heritage.

Tanaka's response to these developments was to continue to follow a career path whose general outlines echoed that of Hijikata. Having become known as a solo improviser, Tanaka moved out of Tokyo in 1985 to work with other dancers and so develop his own training methodology. This was to become Body Weather, a semi-intuitive technique initially carried out by the members of Mai-Juku, a company whose role in Tanaka's practice was in this sense equivalent to the dancers of Asusbesuto Kan (Asbestos Hall) and Hakutobô (White Peach Room) for Hijikata. As Tanaka explains:

The body is not a set entity. It constantly changes, like the weather. The body that measures the landscape, the body in intercourse with weather, the body kissing [the] mass of peat, the body in [a] love-death relation to the day. For me the dance has been a symbol of despair and courage. (Tanaka <http://bwl.jonapot.hu/>)

In 2000, Mai-Juku was succeeded by the Tokason *butoh* troupe, also based at Hakushu. Tanaka similarly continued the tradition of constructing *butoh* through an ambiguous engagement with ideas about Japanese cultural and physical identity. Echoing Suzuki Tadashi's move to the township of Toga, Toyama in 1976 and Hijikata's evocation of his rural birthplace in his *Tohoku kabuki keikaku* (*Tohoku Kabuki Project*) performances of the 1970s and 1980s, Tanaka took advantage of the decline of Japan's agricultural base by obtaining cheap property in the farming hinterland so frequently associated with ideas about the origins of Japanese identity such as indigenous peasant culture, the *furusato* (home village). (Fukutake 1980) This was the Body Weather laboratory and Dance Resources on Earth centre at Hakushu, Yamanashi Prefecture, otherwise known as Artcamp or the Hon-Mura Project organic farm. Although the formalisation of Body Weather in Hakushu was a late development in Tanaka's career, its origins can be traced back to his very earliest public works. In 1977, for example, Tanaka travelled from the north of Japan to the south, dancing at least once every day in different locales. He claimed that each of these solo improvisations constituted a response to the ground which he danced upon. "I do not dance in a place," he explained, "I dance the place." (Goldberg 1998)

Tanaka was one of the first *butoh* artists to come to Australia, his Mai-Juku company performing at the Sydney Biennale in 1982. Tanaka was also one of the few *butoh* practitioners to tour the Communist block countries (as a soloist) throughout the 1980s. (Tsuboike 1993) It was through such international exchanges that *butoh* came to

influence Australian performance, with local artists like Tess de Quincy visiting Japan to train with Tanaka. Former Dai Rakuda Kan member Yumi Umiumare has also played an important role in this respect after she emigrated to Victoria following the company's Melbourne International Festival performance of 1991. [4] Other individuals such as Tony Yap (originally a Grotowski-trained actor with IRAA Theatre company, Melbourne, prior to his extensive, ongoing collaborations with Umiumare), Lynne Santos (who has worked with de Quincy, Umiumare and Yap) and Zen Zen Zo physical theatre company (founded by Lynne Bradley and Simon Woods, who have trained in *butoh* and Suzuki technique) have also been influential. After some attempts during the early 1990s by inexperienced Australian artists to essentially recreate the aesthetic which they had seen in the Japanese tours, a more nuanced and adaptable model of *butoh* aesthetics became visible within Australian dance culture. Consequently "Australian *butoh*" is now more commonly manifest as a diffuse influence within various strategies for breaking up, confusing or complicating the languages of the body, rather than as an actual mode of production per se. [5] *Butoh*'s status as a dance form with no necessary attachment to a distinctive, virtuosic language of gesture or performance means that the form continues to act as one of the most radical elements within Australian choreography. [6]

The barely structured ambiguity which *butoh* reflects was demonstrated by Tanaka in the solo which he presented to Melbourne audiences on 11 July 2001. Coiling, writhing and folding his torso, hands a-tremble and eyes rolling back into his head, Tanaka offered a commanding demonstration of a body caught within a constant state of flux—an *anti-choreography*—defined as much by its lack of form or structure as by the nevertheless distinctive methodology of the *butoh-ka* embedded within the dance.

### **Elusive Discourse: Tanaka Min in conversation**

The interview below was conducted the day after Tanaka had performed his solo improvisation. He began by relating details of his biography.

**Jonathan Marshall:** Could you tell me a bit about how you came to dance and your early solo performances in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s?

**Tanaka Min:** I was born 10 March 1945, at the end of the Second World War, in Hachioji, Tokyo. It's a memorial day now. We had a big attack from the sky [the US fire-bombing of Tokyo]. 200,000 people or so died in that one attack. In that attack I was born. After that, in my year, we didn't have many babies born. From the next year—1946—we have lots of babies born, but from 1945, not so many.

Since when I was a child, I loved to dance, in traditional festivals and so on. I was kind of a crazy boy. I was weak when I was born. Then I started to join in sports like baseball and basketball. And I liked it! I wanted to be a good player. I wanted to be in an Olympic team. I was almost in it, but at the last minute, I was kicked off.

Then I was like in a black hole. I was looking for something. Then I found dance and I started to learn classical ballet, American modern dance and yoga. In Japan after the Second World War we had the American Occupation. We had an American cultural centre. Every year they sent a modern dance teacher to Japan. We always had American teachers. It was Graham style. I kept learning for eight years. But while I was learning, I always had some doubt about what is this thing, this feeling. It's different—even when I'm dancing, but I couldn't find something similar to my dance when I was dancing in a theatre.

I started to explore a lot of things. I eventually decided to stop training. I wanted to clarify my questions. Like, what is the costume? What is the audience? What is the music? What is the rhythm?—and so on. I started my solo performances in the late 1960s. At that time I had to do everything. I had to find the space to perform in, I made the fliers and then I sent them. I found somebody who I didn't need to pay for lighting and helpers for the entrance and so on. And I did it everywhere—*everywhere*! I liked to dance in actual venues, but in a public space all I needed to do was to get permission. I didn't need to publicise it because people were already there. I just called some friends.

From the beginning I found that I had to use *nothing*. No music, no costume, no stage, no seating for the audience—and no beginning, no ending. So I used to start suddenly to dance, and to finish just as suddenly. I danced for eight years like this: naked dancing. At that moment, from early 1970 through to 1977 I did over 200 performances every year.

That way I got a lot of audience. Not many from the dance world. Mainly from fine arts, musicians, actors, writers, philosophers. Lots of people helped to send me abroad. My first performance overseas was in Paris. Then one night in France, I became famous! When I went to New York three weeks later, I was already famous. It was amazing! I met all these very important people at that moment, like Maurice Bejart, Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, and so on—almost everybody. [7] They came to see the "Japanese naked dance."

**JM:** How long did you keep performing naked?

**TM:** I remained naked [except for a bandage wrapped around his penis] for eight years. But I am not a nudist. I chose nakedness as my costume. I am still ashamed when I need to appear naked. Yeah, I'm quite normal. It was my costume. So there was lots of discussion even in Japan about the nakedness. I think still it works, to discuss about nakedness. It's not nudity. Even though I have a costume now, when I'm dancing, I'm always trying to be naked.

**JM:** Could you tell me about your perception of Hijikata during this period.

**TM:** In the late 1950s Hijikata started dancing in his own way, not a style really. He worked to create pieces with general people, not professional dancers—like carpenters or workers from a factory. [8] Little by little other dancers started to join him. Like Mr Ôno Kazuo [from 1959]. He's still alive; he's ninety four (in 2001). But I heard he cannot dance in a standing position. He is sitting on a chair and dancing. I dunno, like this maybe [waves his arms]. He's the oldest *butoh* dancer.

But that period—the late 1950s until the 1960s—everywhere in the world had the same kind of thing: a kind of underground [*angura*], in the theatre, in the cinema. They were not related to each other but they were happening at almost the same moment, in the first fifteen years after the Second World War ended. The time was ripe, like a fruit.

Hijikata's activities involved choosing something not from the surface but from the back. So he loved [physically] handicapped people, "mind-programmed" people [mentally handicapped people], farmers [notably those from his birthplace, Akita, in the northern Honshu region of Tohoku] and especially old people. And he... not collected... he tried to be *like* those people. Not to imitate them or choose from their movement.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, *butoh* was "famous," but not many people went to see the performances. The biggest audience was two or three hundred. I was a student at that time. But it was something that I was proud of because I could be there. It had very strong vibrations for you, of something in the future.

**JM:** How did you come to work with Hijikata?

**TM:** From the beginning I knew about a dancer called Hijikata. From the end of 1950 he was really active and he called his dance a "darkness dance" [*ankoku butoh*] and many people from different art fields wanted to meet him. For many of the important artists in Japan who are sixty to seventy now, most of them were friends of Hijikata. He produced vibrations throughout the arts. I saw his dance and I wanted to learn from him, but he was too strong for me. Since my childhood, it was my habit: I always wanted to not be controlled by others. So even with Mr Hijikata, I wanted to not be wholly like him. There were so many people around him who spoke like him. They became *like* him. I decided not to go and work with him. I wanted to be ready *myself* for when I would meet him sometime in the future. Unconsciously I prepared to meet him since 1980. But I saw his work and I loved it.

Since 1973, he taught dancing for the stage. He did choreography for his company—an all- woman group called Hakutobô—in a small theatre [Asbestos Hall in Meguro, Tokyo]. He kept performing for three years, I think, every week, until 1976. And I kept watching. Then he closed down even these activities. He never appeared in public. He had decided he didn't want to work with anybody. I couldn't forget of course. At that time I was writing for a magazine for ordinary people every month. The magazine

was going to cease publication so I decided to write to him of my feelings of love. It was quite direct; quite cold but quite direct.

Luckily he read it. A month later he came to my performance. Since that time I became a student of his. I studied with him from 1982 for four years and in 1986 he died.

I still have lots of things to ask him. He died aged fifty seven. Too young. There are still so many things I can't understand. But next year in 2002 I'm going to be fifty seven. I need another life to understand him. So I have decided to keep alive for 20 years more. So maybe I can be a little bit like him. His way of working was really, really amazing—*always* informal, irregular. How should I say it? People could not continue to relate with him as they had before. For example, if you told him, "You said it was like this yesterday." He would say, "I have forgotten." So we had to discuss back to the original subject. It was quite interesting...

I was very influenced by him since 1983. Hijikata suggested to his students that they should form groups and he gave a name for each group. He and I decided to make a group in 1984. It was a laboratory dance company: a company just for the two of us. It was called Ren-ai Butoh-Ha Teiso Koen [Performance For the Establishment of the Love Butoh School]. [9]

He also suggested to me to wear clothes. So little by little I began wearing a costume. I started to wear a raincoat. It was an Italian army raincoat. It was brown, quite similar to a skin. The second costume was from my father: just a black suit. I have not many strong feelings about costuming... But even if I have one simple costume, I like to change my coat.

Sometimes people think if you change a costume, you are changing the character or the personality. I don't think so. It's just for a few seconds. The body hasn't changed.

**JM:** So how would you characterise your connection with *butoh* and its development? Do questions about what *butoh* is concern you today?

**TM:** In the late 1970s *butoh* dancers started to go abroad. I was not a *butoh* dancer at that moment. I met Hijikata in 1983. So I was kind of outside of the *butoh* field, outside of modern dance. I was just one. Then Mr Ôno and Sankai Juku went abroad, at almost exactly the same moment, in 1978 to 1980. They started from France. All the groups went to France to begin with. Then they started travelling to Europe, then America. Australia was really late, yeah [late 1980s], because it's an island, maybe?!

In the middle of the 1980s, one year before Hijikata's death, we had a big *butoh* festival in Japan. Many of the *butoh* dancers were on stage, big theatres were full, everywhere. The next year Hijikata died. Then it was finished, I think.

So there were many different directions amongst the *butoh* dancers and many people all over the world. Anybody can call themselves a *butoh* dancer, because there's no form, and nobody knows what *butoh* is. This provides a good opportunity for you to say, "I am a *butoh* dancer"! Anybody can call themselves a *butoh* dancer—which means *butoh* is something else; not on the surface. So for me *butoh* is a kind of spirit—a very important spirit. So I don't need to call myself a *butoh* dancer. I'm a dancer. I love dance, any kind of dance. But *butoh's* spirit is really important for me.

**JM:** What happened after Hijikata died?

**TM:** After his death I moved from Tokyo to the countryside. I started farming—it was my dream—and to study about dance. In Asia and Africa it's quite similar, most of the dance started from the ground, from agriculture. In *kabuki* and *noh*, the movement comes from farming. They are based on an agricultural body, which is related to a farmer's life.

Historically in Japan, people just decided to build a city, like in the desert or in the forest. People in the city did not have so many performances. So the farmers, after they had finished the busiest period, in the winter time they would carry their performances to the city and show them—in the beginning on the road, at the crossroads, on the street, at the corner. Then later in front of the gate to the big house. Some lucky people would be called into the courtyard and luckier people come into the room to show the performance. That is the history and all of those moments still exist in Japan. It's a kind of hierarchy of the art. I wanted to return to the original form or the primitive form and so I started to be a farmer. I'm still farming after seventeen years. I have fallen in love with planting. I'm planting crazy!

**JM:** I'm interested in the way you draw upon ideas about farming and the farming body. Why is being a farmer good?

**TM:** In farming work, you are using the body like this [Tanaka reproduces the *namba* movement discussed by Takechi, moving the limbs of the left side of the body forward in unison, and then the right side], not like this [he marches with the left leg and right arm swinging out together and then the right leg and leg arm]. So African dance is like this [crouches low and swings the whole of the left side of body up and out and then the right]. Japanese dance is like this also, and martial arts [adopts an aikido or karate style pose with the body side on, left arm and leg facing forward towards the imaginary opponent as the right side is kept back, defended]. It's very simple. *Kabuki* movement is mainly this side or that side, not like this [brings the left arm across the chest to the right side, twisting his torso].

That's very difficult.

After the country was opened up though, Japan needed lots of soldiers. Yes, to fight other countries. I think all over the world it was the same. A government needs lots of



people as soldiers. Then they trained the farmers in Japan. I know from Michel Foucault's writing that in France it was the same. [10] They drilled the soldiers to run, to walk, to make a good form as a group. But I read that in the beginning farmers could not walk like this [marching, swinging forward the right arm with the left leg]. They walked this way [shuffles a few paces by moving the left arm, left leg and left side of the body forward together, and then moving the whole of the right side of body forward with the second step]. They didn't want to make a line like this [stands upright at attention], they were like this [slouches on bent legs, shoulders rolled down and arms loose]. They had to run, but they would say, "Why?"—because they didn't feel the motivation to run. Of course sometimes they ran, but they never asked to run. This was a big change for the body. It represents a strong control over the body. I think all over the world, if somebody needs a soldier, somebody needs to control the body.

**JM:** Tell me about Body Weather.

**TM:** Since 1977 I started to call my concept about the body, "Body Weather." Its main concept is that sometimes I feel—even when we are talking—people take a position which is always inside of the body. It's like one is always expressing, "I am here, I am in the centre." But I thought, "Why don't we feel the centre lying in the dream, or somewhere else?" It's like the weather: centres are always moving. So if I have a chance to get stimulation from outside through my skin, I contain more than is inside of my clothing. That is Body Weather. It's omni- central, as if there are many eyes, many centres, moving.

I started to work with many different people from different areas, and this group called Body Weather developed. It started from 1977 and it has kept on until 1985, until we moved to the farm, where we established this laboratory. We still have lots of laboratories in Japan. They exist in many different places. Some laboratories are only for visual artists, some laboratories are attended by filmmakers. But we ourselves moved the performing group to the farm.

Through these activities at the Body Weather farm we found lots of ways of working with the body—always very physical and sensitive work—and we found lots of languages of the body. It's still continuing.

From 1981, I established these activities called Dance Resources, because I had too large a collection of videos, films, posters and books about dance. I want to build a museum of dance.

**JM:** What was it that you were particularly looking for when you began your investigations into the body through Body Weather?

**YU for TM:** He says that he was generally interested in Japanese dance itself, as well as in dance as it generally existed in the world. But basically what became clear to him is that what one is creating in dance is moving the whole body. It's obvious, but he was still very interested in that. But at the same time it's not *only* a moving body, but

something else, which is invisible. What is that? And he couldn't tell what that was. So that was the beginning of *Body Weather*. The basis of it was to find out what that was.

**JM:** The question that would seem to follow from that is what *is* this invisible thing? What you seem to be saying is that what you're interested in is reducing dance to its basic elements: namely the moving body plus something else. So what is that something else?

**YU/TM:** It's quite an individual interpretation. One must think about what individual skills one has; what sort of feeling or emotions does one have? It's related, too, to religious feelings, and also the actual biological or physical body that he has. [11] It's not just *his* body. That can connect him to something else, to other people and creatures. One has to express this or be aware of this in performance.

So sometimes it's like connecting with your own DNA, the materials you were born from. So, for example, when people are three years old: you have no education or training, but they already have a really lovely balance or really love dancing and respond to the musical side of things. As soon as they get a social consciousness though—all of a sudden all of that disappears. So it's really interesting that early part of life, before you have any real social influence—that "primitive body" that they have got.

**JM:** That reminds me of a part from the solo you [Tanaka] performed last night. I have seen similar things actually in some of Yumi's dance, where you're on your back, with your arms and legs coming out loose and soft—like a baby on its back. It's like you don't quite know how to control your arms and legs; the articulation isn't there. [12] Is that what you're referring to?

**YU/TM:** To be in some kind of foetus position can sometimes become quite a clichéd or an easy position, and he still has big doubts about whether it is "true," whether it is really coming from his own body or whether it's more like an adult body pretending to be like a child. So there's often a big gap between those two, but he might be able to find something else. Not necessarily that actual position, but to still get the same feeling and context out of it.

These days we have a social understanding about psychology and about our unconscious. So we know more about our unconscious. But at the same time, when we "learn" about our unconscious, it's not the "real" unconscious. It's still imitating, or mimicking aspects of the unconscious. So he still has to learn more about that primitive state.

He's very influenced by Surrealism and Dadaism and their work in this respect. But he feels those concepts have almost been destroyed. He feels they're not reliable any more. So he really wants to find out what is the natural, unconscious feeling—not that which comes from education.

**JM:** To use the term the "primitive body" for what you seem to be trying to explore, it's not necessarily the same as either a baby's body or even you doing something like a baby's body—it's something else again. One can see that in the way that your movement brings to mind not only a baby's body but also a very old person's body, especially with the way you hold your weight. So is part of what you are trying to do is to bring together inspiration from how an old person moves with how a very young person moves, so as to make your own personal movement through a mixture of different physical images?

**YU/TM:** If you think about the primitive body as a form, the body is getting a program about what sort of structures one finds in the bones and what's the structure of the muscles themselves. That's an ongoing question about how to interpret or become aware of that.

If you think about a baby, when he was thinking about what it's like to be a baby, he thought of two things. One is the moving baby. The other is a baby as an individual thing. If you think about an actual baby, it's ages away from his actual memory. It's very hard to copy that again from what he felt so long ago, which is so far from his current experience. He'd like to capture that image of a baby as liquid. So you focus more on what it's like to move in that liquid way—which he can still remember, because he still has a body which can do some of those things. So he tries to mix himself and those ways of moving in that body in a liquid way, then he can create something of what it's like to be a baby. So it's more about the baby as a liquid. Otherwise that era is ages away in his history.

So when you're thinking about the primitive body or primitive dance, he has to explore what's in him as well as what's not in him—and body memory. So you think about not only liquid, but also air and changing dimensions. The expert at that could be the shaman really. Tanaka has incredible admiration for shamans. Maybe the modern shaman though has become a bit like a Don Quixote [i.e. striving to recapture something which no longer fully exists], because there isn't an actual social necessity for their abilities. But a shaman would be the person who could change into the air or move beyond the time or beyond the space. They can be anything.

**JM:** What is your position on the interpretation of your dance? You used your face a lot in the performance last night, but I would not have thought that was intended to be seen as a dramatic performance in the sense of evoking an actual character or personage. Would you mind if somebody considered your work to be more a kind of theatre than a kind of dance? So if people looked at the facial expressions you make and thought that you were presenting a particular person, would that be a mistake on some level—or wouldn't it matter?

**YU/TM:** Interpretation is great! Anyone can make an interpretation. At the same time what he finds most interesting is that which you cannot define on a linguistic level. So it's changing rapidly to the extent that you can't really judge what sort of face he was

doing. So it doesn't end up with a clear message on *that* face: it's changing all the time. So you'd have to see that face for ever, for the whole of his life, to really "read it," because his face is always changing! So it's not defined that this face represents that at all. But for something like kabuki, it's really established a certain process of communication via certain facial expressions. So you can really say on a linguistic level that it is that face. So he's not trying to impose what he wants to express. He tries to be open, and whatever happens is part of it. He's constantly changing from one image to another.

**TM:** My dance is getting more and more strange, I think! Too individual perhaps—it's for me. Before, I almost always cared about what people thought about this, how people imagined this. It was full of imagination of outside things. But now I feel more inside, individual. I don't mind so much about the critics.

**JM:** What would you say is the relation between your work and Japanese culture specifically?

**YU** for **TM:** Japanese identity is constantly changing. Even in ancient Japanese history like the Jomon period [13,000-300 BC], that part of Japanese history was one of constant change—even thousands of years ago! [13]

You can however define people as living in a horizontal or a flat space. Like the Jomon people, lots of little tribes from China living in a horizontal space. If you're living in a flat area, you have to think a lot about how to build authority and about steps—about how to change to the next hierarchy [i.e. it is an effort]. Japanese architecture and planning therefore tended to start with a simple, flat road, then you get to the gate, you go to the entrance of the house, where there is a series of steps. So there are a lot of different degrees of space, and they are all still there in Japanese culture.

He can still dance in front of one person, or on the street, or with 10,000 people in front of the stage. That's a very important tradition, not only on a personal level, but as a historical term too. Pina Bausch also started in a little theatre in Wuppertal, Germany. But for her to have started off dancing in the street, she probably couldn't have done that. That's her tradition.

Most important for him though is the positive side and the negative side [i.e. the way Japanese dance tends to bring these together]. There are all those different layers, so you cannot define a single Japanese identity.

**TM:** Many traditional arts bloomed in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—like *kabuki*, *ukiyo-e*. They still exist, but their peak was that moment. Now it's quite a chaotic moment. Even in my body I feel traditions and the "new" things fighting. I don't know what is "traditional" any more. Even the traditions, at the beginning, were avant-garde.

[YU asks TM a question.]

**YU/TM:** I just said to him that when I saw his dance last night, there was never any conclusion. It was just constant movement, a constant process—but in a good way! So I asked him if he aims for it to be that way. And he said yes, maybe, but at the same time, the aim is primarily just to get an instantaneous understanding of what is there at each point. The more you try to do that, the more you have to keep trying. There isn't any meaning as such, so any dance can go on forever. Maybe, though, movement in which the meaning has been lost is far more beautiful, without any linguistic significance, or without any reason to move other than what's actually there in the movement itself. So this is itself the reason to move and that's why that movement started happening.

**TM:** I love any kind of dance if it is ... pure. Actually, I don't like classicalism any more. I am still dreaming something new, beyond classicalism.

**Conclusion: The discursive rhetoric of Japanese culture, Body Weather in performance, and butoh today**

Tanaka's 2001 commentary on *butoh*, Body Weather and Japan remains ambivalent, ostensibly reflecting a universal and non-specific aesthetic, yet illustrated by metaphors and examples drawn from potent (and in some cases culturally overdetermined) tropes within Japanese cultural history.

Otani Iku (director of Jinen Butoh and Executive Director of Dance Box, Osaka) noted that *butoh*'s most important legacy was that it helped to legitimise influences from the classical Japanese arts and culture within contemporary Japanese performance. [14] The modernisation of Japan throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be understood in terms of simplistic opposition between Western modernity and Japanese tradition. Nevertheless, the intensive, self-conscious bureaucratisation and industrialisation of Japan orchestrated by the leaders of the Meiji regime from 1868, drawing extensively on a multitude of Euro-American systems, tended to cast cultural sophistication and modernity as being associated with the new administration and its reforms. (Beasley 1973) Many Japanese themselves began to associate pre-Meiji styles with a premodern world. State efforts to preserve those arts which had once flourished during the earlier—and highly sophisticated, urban, capitalist—culture of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) therefore became necessary. Nevertheless, the overall cultural devaluing of *noh*, *kabuki* and other indigenous performance aesthetics was later further exacerbated under the US Occupation, 1945-1952. *Butoh* was therefore one of a number of forces which, along with the postwar, *shôgekijô-engeki undô* (small theatre movement), reversed this trend, re-establishing the relationship between Japanese contemporary arts and their local classical or folk counterparts. (Akihiko 1995)

Tanaka's referencing of Japanese cultural history does not therefore primarily represent an articulation of *butoh* and its related forms as inherently Japanese. It rather reflects a deliberate strategy to move away from those terms of reference typically employed within international dramaturgical criticism as are drawn from Euro-American Expressionism, ballet, Shakespearean theatre, and other styles which had their genesis outside of Japan. Tanaka's terminology thus constitutes an assertion that Japan's own cultural history contains almost everything one needs to discuss and formulate a radical aesthetic. His discourse is, in this sense, a form of anti-nationalist cultural intervention—just as his bodily performance is—coming from an identifiably Japanese point of origin, without being reducible to this source. As Tanaka has said on another occasion, "The patterns of society are inevitably printed on the body surface as it rolls around on the Earth ... [but] Dance emerges between bodies". (Bergmark)

Compared to the work of companies like Dai Rakuda Kan, Tanaka's unadorned performances, even today, would seem to suggest a close kinship with Hijikata's work. Even so Tanaka sees *butoh* as representing but a part of his career. More importantly, he sees the essence of *butoh* as being closely allied to that which "cannot be captured," in words, national tropes, or indeed in dance or any other form of expression. For Tanaka and his peers, the body is the first site of resistance against oppression, Orientalism, capitalism, militarism and other hegemonic, logocentric discourses.

Tanaka's career and his characterisation of *butoh* also reflect a refusal on the part of practitioners such as himself to draw a clear distinction between choreographic research and performance. Indeed much of Tanaka's performance constitutes a form of detailed, minute by minute research into feeling, expression and bodily awareness. The shifts and forms of the body *are* the subject of the work. For Tanaka, even the extreme facial expressions and grimaces common within *butoh* are partly a consequence of *butoh* performers attempting to access various bodily memories, such as the body at the time of birth or in pain.

Tanaka's work can therefore be thought of as functioning in two directions. It is a tunnelling inwards, of coming to know the body, its sensations and memories so well that it is almost as if one is reacting to the DNA itself, to bodily structures, and the endless flux of fluids throughout the body as the heart pumps, the cells turn over and the lymph flows. It is also an expansion outwards, of opening the body and one's awareness to everything—a process which Tanaka likens to becoming liquid or air. The body is always moving in response to these internal and external stimuli, endlessly transforming. Like the elemental body in performance, Tanaka's discourse continuously elides closure, morphing into a dizzying profusion of physical images, terms and metaphors (primitive, infant, foetal, aged, farmer, liquid, air, weather) even as the dancer attempts to verbally explicate his psychokinetic amoeboid methodology.

Tanaka's use of language in this respect resembles that of Hijikata. When working with Ashikawa and Hakutobô, Hijikata would issue a stream of verbal images and linguistic contusions which he designated, possibly ironically, as *butoh-fu* (*butoh* notation).

Accompanied by Hijikata's incessant drumming, this was used to provoke Ashikawa's fungible gestures and movement. Hijikata employed this surfeit of alogically associative, non-grammatical terms to assault the body, annihilating normal psychokinetic associations, thereby producing a new embodied, spiritual form which exceeded these original verbal motifs. (Hijikata 2000) Compared to Hijikata's deliberately provocative and aggressive use of language (which closely echoed Antonin Artaud's poetics for the Theatre of Cruelty), Tanaka's use of language is relatively light. Poetry and metaphor are deployed by Tanaka primarily to sketch the deep structures of the body—or more precisely the lack of such structures—and the sensorium of the body is listened to and dispersed. Like Hijikata and other *butoh* practitioners, Tanaka wishes to deconstruct the habits of the body. Tanaka nevertheless has comparatively little interest in actively assaulting the body, as Hijikata did. The linguistic violence of such writers as Arthur Rimbaud, Jean Genet, the Marquis de Sade and Mishima Yukio is of less importance to Tanaka than they were for his former teacher.

Nevertheless, both the poetics of Hijikata's *ankoku butoh* and Tanaka's own *Body Weather* represent alinguistic if not *anti-linguistic* modalities in performance, even though many of the physical tendencies which they are expressed *through* have today become familiar signs to audiences, now that *butoh* has been widely disseminated. [15]

What is *butoh*—let alone *Body Weather*—remain necessarily open-ended questions. The members of Hanaarashi *butoh* troupe, for example (a Kansai-based female trio of director Bando Chikako, On Furukawa and Nii Yumiko), describe their contemporary interpretation of the form as being "about the adventure of the body and the fun of the body" rather than the darkness of Hijikata's *ankoku butoh*. (Marshall 2004) This is despite the fact that works such as Hanaarashi's *Hakoonna* (2004) lack such readily recognisable external features of *butoh* as long periods of aggressively contorted movement.

Moriyama Naoto describes the late 1990s as a period of the "waning of the dictators," when the influence of charismatic absolutists in the mould of Suzuki, Hijikata and Maro declined.[16] This has opened up a space for ever more competing versions of *butoh*. Independent female artists too have been able to move beyond what Hanaarashi's director describes as Hijikata's "shamanistic role for women." Hanaarashi for their part treat the body as an eccentric toy, producing a varied and somewhat improvised pallet of actorly pedestrianism and long, held moments.

Even so, "classic" *butoh* choreography has not disappeared. Former Dai Rakuda Kan member Kamata Makiko is still working in a style recognisably derived from Maro and his peers. All of the company's signatures remained present in her 2004 performance at Dance Box, Osaka: various degrees of nakedness, white rice flour make-up, matted hair and wigs, fetishistic play with shoes, moments of daft humour (such as the finale where she upturned a bucket of water over her head and wore it), and suspended

pseudo-religiosity. [17] It is ironic that, although Kamata's performance was the most "classically" *butoh* performance I saw during my research in Japan in 2004, her tall, statuesque physique is radically at variance with that which Hijikata and others claimed was the natural Japanese body shape ideally suited to *butoh*, rather than to Euro-American dance. Even the relatively short dancers of Hanaarashi are best described as gamin, rather than according with the twisted, masculine forms which Hijikata produced during 1959-1986.

Overall therefore, while the actual bodies evoked in *butoh* and *Body Weather* are more varied than ever before, Hijikata's original characterisation of the logic of the style (if not necessarily the actual physical shapes it exhibits) remains valid even today: "Straight legs are engendered by a world dominated by reason. Arched legs are born of a world which cannot be expressed in words." (Viala and Masson-Sekine) This world is that of the *butoh-ka* and *Body Weather* performer.

### Notes

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[2] Fraleigh for example acknowledges the influence of the international avant-garde in rendering *butoh* akin to a "collage" which "unsettles traditional gender distinctions and East/West differences." She nevertheless concludes that it is an essentially Japanese form which is able to "evoke the original face of Japan beneath the fast-paced surface ... [and] the timeless austerity of Zen, awash with mystical emptiness and nature's evanescence" as well as "the profundity of their traditional life ... hidden beneath the hectic Western surface of Japan." Japanese identity thus remains mired in an opposition between mystic depths which are at once premodern and yet timeless, versus superficial, modern, Western, industrialised cultural accretions. The possibility of authentically *modern* Japanese traditions such as State Shintoism is not countenanced here.

[3] In 1992, Tokyo Dance Research determined that there were more professional Japanese dance companies which could be identified with *butoh* than those associated with any other style—namely fifty-three "*butoh*," fifty-one "modern dance," thirteen general "dance troupes," five "dance and performance" groups (variants on dance theatre and physical theatre), and four "postmodern" companies. (Hasegawa in Tsuboike 1993).

[4] Eckersall lists the following tours: Mai-Juku, Sydney Biennale in 1982; Byakko-Sha, Melbourne Fringe 1987; Sankai-Juku, Perth and Adelaide Festivals 1988; Dai Rakuda Kan, Melbourne International Festival 1991; Hakutobô, Adelaide Festival 1994. Eckersall. "Trendiness", 30, "Putting", 43-45.

[5] A recent example was Martin del Amo's *Unsealed*. The pseudo-involuntary physical tics which del Amo presented were partly derived from the influence of *butoh* within his practice. *Unsealed*, The Performance Space, Sydney, 21 April - 2 May 2004, *Breathing Space 04* program



(including *Unsealed*), Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 18-20 Nov 2004, The Performance Space, Sydney, 25-27 Nov 2004.

[6] This general trend within *butoh* is in marked contrast to Amagatsu's more aestheticised interpretation which is specifically designed to be possible to teach and closely repeat in performance. (Tsuboike 1993)

[7] Susan Sontag was famously struck by Tanaka's performances in Tokyo and New York during 1985 (*Emotion and Form of the Sky*, respectively). The two later collaborated on an exchange in which Tanaka performed with and choreographed for US dancers in *The Poe Project*, *Stormy Membrane*, first staged at Kameari Lilio Hall in the 1997 Tokyo International Festival of Performing Arts. (Stein. 1986)

[8] Ashikawa herself had studied fine arts and painting, but had no dance training before she worked with Hijikata. Michael Blackwood and Bonnie Sue Stein. *Butoh: Body on the edge of crisis*, BBC documentary (London: Michael Blackwood Productions, 1990).

[9] Hijikata choreographed Tanaka in this "group." Boyce-Wilkinson notes that the accompaniment used in this project—a recording of Antonin Artaud's *Pour finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (*To Have Done With The Judgement Of God*)—is one of the few pieces of direct evidence that Hijikata was personally influenced by the works of Artaud.

[10] Tanaka is here also drawing upon Hijikata's observation that outlying farming regions such as Tohoku acted as important reserves of manpower for Japan's centralised military from the Edo period onwards. (Kurihara)

[11] Tanaka's personal philosophy has been influenced by religious concepts such as Buddhism or Shinto, yet is not identical or indeed fully consistent with them. Kawamura concludes that, overall, *butoh* practitioners "seem" to need to "believe in something," whereas he and the other later, more deconstructivist artists "don't have anything to believe in .... I'm working against any transcendental system," such as that which is hinted at in *butoh* and *Body Weather*. (Stein.1985)

[12] As Bergmark explains, "To rediscover childhood memory, the movements of children, the life in the womb, the dead that live within the living, the pre-history of man, and "non-human," animal or vegetable origins, recur in *butoh* ... "Butoh is for me ... a kind of endless foetus movements [sic]—an energy that is always about to be born" (Akaji Maro)." (Bergmark)

[13] Jomon culture is usually identified as Japan's first civilisation, involving permanent settlements and a high level of social organisation. Recent evidence suggests that the Ezo people of Tohoku were amongst the first to exhibit Jomon cultural practices. Tanaka's choice in citing this particular example may therefore have been influenced, once again, by his allegiance to Hijikata and the latter's construction of the rural Tohoku region as the fount of *butoh* creativity. (Kurihara)

[14] Unpublished interviews with dance artists in Kyoto, Osaka and Tokyo in July 2004

[15] *Butoh* conforms in this sense not only with Artaudian discourse, but also hysteria and the prelinguistic Imaginary as formulated by Julia Kristeva.

[16] Kawamura and other critics such as Uchino Tadashi and Yasumi Akihito have gone so far as to compare the hierarchical structure and activities of the postwar companies to the Aum Shinri-kyo (Aum Supreme Truth cult) which launched the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subways in 1995. (Marshall 2004a, Uchino 2000).

[17] Part of *Dance Independent*, Art Theatre dB, Dance Box, Osaka, 20-21 July 2004.

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