Butô is a name for a kind of dance or performing art that has its origins in the activities of Hik cita Tatsuni in the late 1950s and 1960s. When we hear the word butô, we are likely to call to mind powerful and grotesque images of performers covered in white paint moving at an achingly slow pace, but the art form did not start out that way. Hik cita Tatsuni was a forceful personality, and he dominated a small world of dancers for the better part of a decade, as they experimented with new forms of bodily articulation and endeavored to overthrow pre-existing dance concepts and categories. He exercised a near monopoly on the tasks of choreographer, director, and producer, while dancing as well. He came from a background of German Expressionist Dance, or naive, and also studied tap, ballet, flamenco, and jazz dance. According to reports, his initial dances in 1959 and 1960 were somewhat representational or mimetic dances of an older male sodomizing a younger male, a mother sending a son to war, and a bride being passed from one family to another as one might hand over a piece of luggage.3 The descriptions of these early dances put one in mind of the stark and angular movements of the Stan- dard Steamer and Death in German Expressionist pioneer Kurt Jossis’s similarly mimetic dance theater piece The Green Table (1932).

For various reasons, Hik cita and his cohorts became dissatisfied with that level of representational dance and ranged far and wide during the next decade in pursuit of a new kind of dance. Experiments on stage included sending a dancer to do arahokus and attenuate with a maríeh inserted in her anus (with the proviso that she not allow the maríeh to fall out); having male dancers ride female dancers like horses and lash them with huge phallic, instructing dancers to move in lock-step union; subjecting the audience to interminable periods of bread; eating cake; running wind sprints; riding bicycles; taking pictures of the audience; shaving heads; and dancing with anatomy charts. In addition to these specific examples, they carved out space on stage for such things as madness, disease, senility, violence, and pain. As with many other places in the world in the 1980s, it was a deadly time.

They called their incitement dance form various things, but finally settled on “anikoku butô,” and later on “anikoku butô.” “Anikoku” means “dark black” and “butô” is a standard word for dance, while “butô” is the standard word for any western style dance such as flamenco, ballet, and waltz. The word “butô” is a compound word borrowed from Chinese, the first part of which means “dance” and the second part of which means “to tread or stamp.” This has led some observers to characterize butô as a dance of earthy stomping. However, initially it seems that the dancers just wanted a word that would suggest something new and out of the ordinary, so the phrase “anikoku butô” likely implied “the foreign dance of darkness,” where the word “foreign” should be read more in its meaning of “unrelated” or “not belonging” rather than in terms of an East-West interaction or in terms of a specific content of stamping.

To say that Hik cita was domineering is not to imply that he was a solitary genius with no collaborators. He was a product of
his time, and had fellow-travelers on his journey to create some-thing new. One was the dancer Ōno Kazue, who also shared Hi-jikata’s training in German Expressionist dance and had gained a medium of standing in the postwar modern dance world of Japan. Eighteen years later, he was to become a major force in the world of ballet, but in 1959 he quit choreographing his own dances and followed Hijikata’s direction and choreography to a great extent. Other early dancers were Kashi Akira and Isao Mitsuoka. Hijikata also cultivated contacts from the Neo-Dada, Happenings, and Fluxus spheres, and he was not shy about asking for help with stage, lighting, and costume design. And, he made the acquisi-tance of Takiguchi Shūzō and other surrealists and began to en-code all his artistic manifestos as surrealist essays. Finally, he was fast friends with the translator of his Sade, and dabbler in the occult, Shibusawa Tatsuo. The specific problematic of each of these groups is beyond the scope of this essay, but if I might be permitted a generality, these three groups of people shared some common themes. One was the notion that the world was an infinitely more complicated place than it was made out to be by the modern arbiters of both Japanese and Western convention and tradition. The second was that the world of the everyday was shot through with conventions and structures which controlled what one could say and think, but that humans had become so inured to these that they were not even aware that these conventions and discursive limits were constantly functioning in the background. So each group hunted for an alternative to the current regime of socializing pressures by recourse to processes employing the un-conscious, randomness, shock, or all three. In the late 1960s, Hijikata began to take seriously the task of creating from these surrealist postulates a choreographic method or a surrealism of the body. He developed a structured}

chorographic method, which is very useful for generating new movements or a new bodily vocabulary. The first part of the method consists of finding new movements or poses by looking at many sources, which may not have originally been thought fertile ground for movement— or pose-generation or for artistic portrayal in the dance world. These sources included various people such as low class prostitutes, farmers, diseased people, as well as ani-mals, all sorts of paintings and sculpture, and even things such as the quality of lines in a painting.

Next, the method consists of using imagery exercises to subject a newly discovered base movement or poses to various ima-gery operations in order to modify it. These modifications might include altering the person who is imagined to be doing the movement, so that if an old person is imagined doing the movement, it will look different from the way it might look if a young person is imagined to be doing it. Of course, there were only young people doing the movements, but they would still be in-structed to imagine that they were young or old while doing the movements. Or one might also alter the imaginary background medium in which one does a movement, so one might imagine doing the movement in water or in the medium of glass, and that background medium would have an effect on the movements. Fi-nally, one might go on to imagine various things such as being eaten by insects, or shocked by thousands of volts of electricity, with the assumption that the base movement or pose will be qual-itatively transformed by undergoing such an experience.

For Hijikata, as a dedicated student of surrealism, part of the point of these choreographic experiments seems to have been to find out what would happen when he combined a pose gained from observation of a character in something like a Hieronymus Bosch painting with the mental imagery of doing the movement as an old
who was being played by Russian actor Alexander Ostrovsky. The film was released in 1937.

The plot follows the story of a young woman who falls in love with a man named Pyotr. However, Pyotr is married to another woman. The young woman tries to win Pyotr's love, but he ultimately chooses his wife. The film was a critical and commercial success and continues to be viewed as a classic of Russian cinema.
of light and shadows across his body as the sun or clouds pro-
gressed overhead. In 1983 and 1984, Hikata choreographed dances for Min, but Min never was generally a pupil of Hikata’s. It appears that dance methodology developed in the Hikata method was not necessarily in a natural surrounding) as opposed to minutely structured dance. The improvisation fraction holds that only explicit movement can give access to the deep reality of the self or the universe, while the structure fraction ar-
gues that the arbitrary nature of the various combinations of movements, background media, and imagery exercises is the path to truth.

Another is the issue of what we might call the connection between the movement or bodily signifier and the signified. Hikata’s dance was predicated on the assumption that one could create a dance by not only arbitrarily combining all sorts of different elements, subjected to different operations, into new signs (somewhat as if one arbitrarily combined letters together) to make new words and then arbitrarily combine the words together to make new sentences. These new movement signifiers could then be arbitrarily used to convey an underlying narrative. It is as if he created thousands of new movement signifiers, but he never bothered to tell anyone the signifiers or the narratives that he intended for these new signifiers to convey. Conversely, Kasai and Ōno seem to assume that the bodily movements that they use perfectly convey the emotional states they intend with no gap between the movement signifier and the signified (although they would never put it in this Scandinavian term), even though Ōno used Hikata’s choreographic technique to a certain extent. This, they assumed, allowed them to present universally understand-
able dances that conveyed universally felt emotions.

Finally there is the issue of spectacle and entertainment, as opposed to simple personally cathartic, emotional, or authentic experience. Moro is the most acrosting of bodies as a form ofotten tragic) entertainment, featuring circus-style spectacle, which happens to focus on the grotesqueries of the world. In addition, Moro has not been averse to incorporating elements that are relatively representational in nature. One can see in a scene in the movie Moro ocassions movement that can give access to the deep reality of the self or the universe, while the structure fraction argues that the arbitrary nature of the various combinations of movements, background media, and imagery exercises is the path to truth.

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**Endnotes**

1. A note on Renaissance: the long vowel of bath is also commonly indicated by a breve (˘). Also, in the case of the students, the Western term is “Master Teacher.”

2. I have used the same to indicate the long vowel, but have not indicated punctuation for simplicity, as footnotes and endnotes.


**Bibliography**


