Week3

Exploring Japanese Avant-garde Art Through Butoh Dance

Handout English Version

Week 1
Towards butoh: Experimentation

Week 2
Dancing butoh: Embodiment

Week 3
Behind butoh: Creation

Week 4
Expanding butoh: Globalisation

WEEK 3: BEHIND BUTOH: CREATION

Activity 1: Creating a butoh notation

Tatsumi Hijikata's butoh work has been created based on paintings. And he did the stage equipment, lighting, music and costumes himself, and creating innovative performances that had never been seen before.

3.1 BUTOH OF BUTOH NOTATION VIDEO (04:26)

3.2 HIJIKATA'S SCRAPBOOKS AND THE VISUAL ARTS VIDEO (04:22)

3.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHIVES: BUTOH NOTATION VIDEO (03:17)

3.4 "MOVEMENT" CREATION AND THE METHOD OF "NOTATIONAL BUTOH" VIDEO (01:42)

3.5 COSTUME EN FACE VIDEO (01:16)

3.6 THE COMPLETION OF BUTOH AND HIJIKATA TATSUMI AS A TOTAL ARTIST ARTICLE

3.7 LET'S THINK ABOUT BUTOH NOTATION DISCUSSION

Activity 2: Tatsumi Hijikata the last years

Tatsumi Hijikata died in 1985. Creating a huge amount of butoh notation and completing butoh's method, Tsumabuki Hijikata was attempting to develop a new butoh score in its last decade.

3.8 REVIVAL! OHNO KAZUO ARTICLE

3.9 HIJIKATA AS A TEACHER VIDEO (07:57)

3.10 HIJIKATA TATSUMI'S LAST BUTOH WORK ARTICLE

3.11 QUESTIONS FOR TATSUMI HIJIKATA DISCUSSION

Activity 3: Dance choreography

How was the movement of butoh created? Tatsumi Hijikata made a notation for butoh. Let's focus on Butoh notation.

3.12 FROM LABANOTATION TO POST-MODERN DANCE NOTATION VIDEO (02:54)

3.13 DANCE NOTATION 1: WAYS OF NOTATING IN A DIGITAL AGE ARTICLE

3.14 DANCE NOTATION 2 : NOTATION EXERCISE VIDEO (05:54)

3.15 WHAT MAKES BUTOH NOTATION DIFFERENT THAN POST-MODERN DANCE NOTATION? DISCUSSION

Activity 4: Summary of Week 3

Let's review what we've learned in Week 3 "Behind Butoh: Creation."

3.16 REFLECTION OF WEEK 3 QUIZ

3.17 SUMMARY OF WEEK 3 ARTICLE

Activity 1. Creating a butoh notation

Tatsumi Hijikata's butoh work has been created based on paintings. And he did the stage equipment, lighting, music and costumes himself, and creating innovative performances that had never been seen before.

3.1 BUTOH OF BUTOH NOTATION VIDEO (04:26)

3.2 HIJIKATA'S SCRAPBOOKS AND THE VISUAL ARTS VIDEO (04:22)

3.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHIVES: BUTOH NOTATION VIDEO (03:17)

3.4 "MOVEMENT" CREATION AND THE METHOD OF "NOTATIONAL BUTOH" VIDEO (01:42)

3.5 COSTUME EN FACE VIDEO (01:16)

3.6 THE COMPLETION OF BUTOH AND HIJIKATA TATSUMI AS A TOTAL ARTIST ARTICLE

3.7 LET'S THINK ABOUT BUTOH NOTATION DISCUSSION

Step 3.1 (Video)

Butoh of butoh notation

In Week 1, we explored the background of butoh and how it was created. Then, in Week 2, we saw how Tatsumi Hijikata and butoh revolutionized dance history. In Week 3, we will learn the development and creation of a new body expression called "Butoh Notation" which was invented by Tatsumi Hijikata—until he dies in 1986.

Video Script

0:03

So far, we have been looking at Hijikata's work from the late 1950s to early 1970s within the wider context of Japanese avant-garde art and society during the period. Right now, I am standing in the archive of the Keio University Art Center where many of the documents that recorded this incredible period of avant-garde activity are kept. So, I am sorry for the noise, but this machine helps us to conserve the documents. There was an incredibly active experimental art scene during the postwar years in Tokyo. A number of important artist collectives formed around this time like Hi Red Center and Group Ongaku.

0:56
And there was a buzz of avant-garde activity with international performances and film festivals, exhibitions and happenings being organized on a regular basis. Certain venues became very important for these activities like the Sōgetsu Art Center where Hijikata also performed. The Sōgetsu Art Center was very involved in opening up the Japanese avant-garde art scene, internationally inviting artists like John Cage and Merce Cunningham to perform. We have here not only the archive of Tatsumi Hijikata, but also the archive of the Sōgetsu Art Center and other key avant-garde archives like those of surrealist artist and writer Shūzō Takiguchi and modernist poet Junzaburō Nishiwaki.

1:50
What is really exciting about presenting Hijikata's work within this context is you start to see many connections between artists working in different disciplines. The Japan Expo in 1970 in Osaka is a particularly interesting example of this. Hijikata was just one of many of Japan's most important avant-garde artists to present work there. Other important figures include architects connected to the Metabolist Movement like Kenzō Tange and Arata Isozaki and important visual artists like Tarō Okamoto. This was quite a remarkable moment even by today's artworld standards in that avant-garde art was being supported by a more large-scale and commercial event and being made available to huge international audiences, with visitor numbers reaching over 64 million.

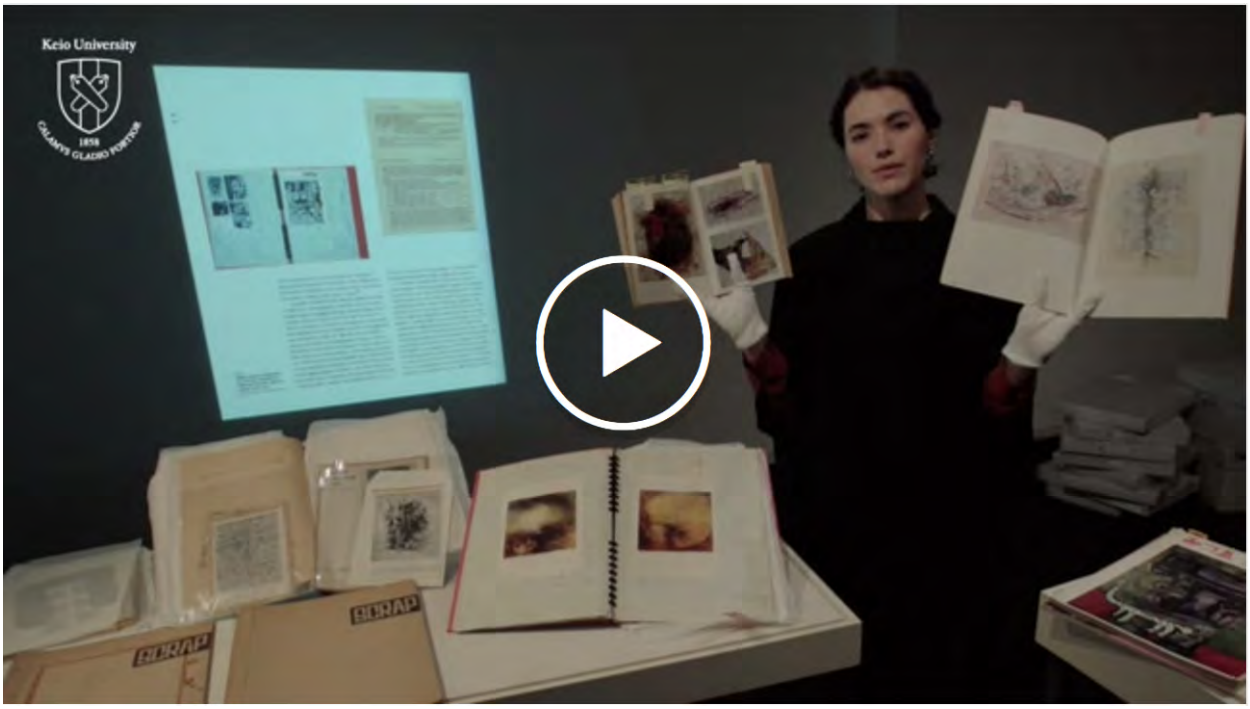
2:58
This, as an event, had a huge impact on the Japanese avant-garde scene in terms of tensions around who was involved. So, it is a useful orientation point for thinking about Hijikata's work too. This is Rosa who will be leading you through the next couple of weeks. She is a researcher of late twentieth-century performance, who has worked with the Hijikata Archive for many years. So, Rosa please… Thank you Yohko. And hello again. So, over the coming weeks, we are going to be thinking about Hijikata's work in the 1970s and 80s and about the international spread of his butoh dance from the mid to late 1970s onwards.

3:47
This coming week, we are going to be focusing in particular on the method he used to create his dances. So, we will be looking behind the scenes a little bit at the kind of performances

you have been looking at, and we will be thinking about how his method developed over the 1970s and into the 1980s. I want to look a little bit more at some of those documents I briefly introduce you to, his butoh notation, or butō-fu, as we do this. And we are going to begin this exploration with Takashi Morishita who you have already met, talking to you a little bit about Hijikata's work in the mid-1970s.

Step 3.2 (Video)

Hijikata's Scrapbooks and the Visual Arts



Hijikata began to create scrapbooks in which he would collage visual images, from which he derived butoh movements. In this video, Ms. Rosa will show some of the scrapbooks, and explain how those were used in developing butoh dance.

There are sixteen of Hijikata's scrapbooks housed in the Hijikata archive. These contain visual images which have been clipped from magazines, and collaged in, as well as pencil markings and written phrases around the images. These images were mainly clipped from two contemporary art magazines, Mizue and Bijutsu techō, which covered a wide range of art, both Japanese and European, from the Old Masters to the contemporary. And the images Hijikata chose to clip show a similar range: from images of North African cave paintings from 6000 BC to works by Willem de Kooning from the 1960s. What is apparent is that Hijikata was not selecting these images according to a specific style or national tradition but for some quality in the work that interested him. At the same time, Hijikata's interest in the visual arts did not end with the image itself. Looking at the magazines from which he clipped these images, and at his book collection, his marginalia reveals a more researched understanding of some of the artists that most interested him.

He had books on Henri Michaux and Pablo Picasso which he has underlined and annotated, as well as annotated art critical books like Kenneth Clark's The Nude (translated into Japanese). Hijikata even used an art critical text to create one of his choreographic movements. Yukio Waguri's notational records for one of the dance movements listed under the title "Flamand" is made up of quotations from an essay by the art critic Andō Tsuguo on the works of Rodolph Bresdin. The title for this choreography, "Flamand," also draws, at least in part, on the title of a Bresdin painting entitled "Interior of Flamand" or "Flemish Interior," which is referenced by Andō in the essay. But Hijikata's interest in the visual arts was not only bookish. He had, especially in his earlier work, collaborated with visual artists to create

his own performance works—artists like Genpei Akasegawa and Natsuyuki Nakanishi—and had also been influenced by an older generation of Surrealist artists like Shūzō Takiguchi.

Fig 1: William Turner images collaged into Avalanche Candy scrapbook.

Taking a look at one of the most vibrant of these scrapbooks, Nadare Ame, or Avalanche Candy, we can start to speculate as to how Hijikata organised and thought about visual images. Most of the scrapbooks have more straightforward titles—Birds, Nerves, Picasso's Figures—but the unusual title of this one, Avalanche Candy, suggests Hijikata did not only gather materials under thematic headings. Candy, here, refers to a traditional Japanese candy made from molten sugar. Like Avalanche, it suggests a material that collapses or melts and subsequently hardens or sets (Saga Kobayashi and Yukio Waguri have both pointed out this textural affinity). Looking at the images inside the scrapbook, there is a concentration of paintings in which paint is being used in a particularly textural way—its materiality, as a substance that hardens or sets over time, is being drawn attention to. So, images are seemingly being gathered, here, more for a common texture than because they share a thematic interest.

Avalanche Candy was also the title Hijikata gave to one of the pieces that made up the serial performance, Twenty-Seven Nights for Four Seasons (1972). This doesn't necessarily mean it was a scrapbook for this performance, but it does suggest the scrapbook might date to around that same year, 1972.

Fig 2: Avalanche Candy Photo by Makoto Onozuka

Dating the scrapbooks is generally rather difficult, because Hijikata seemed to gather images according to a “quality” that interested him, rather than simply using the scrapbook as a kind of visual diary. This means the images contained in any one scrapbook might come from a range of issues of Mizue or Bijutsu techō. And, indeed, those collaged into the Avalanche Candy scrapbook alone seem to have been clipped from issues dating from 1964 to 1971 (see Wurmli 2008, 157).

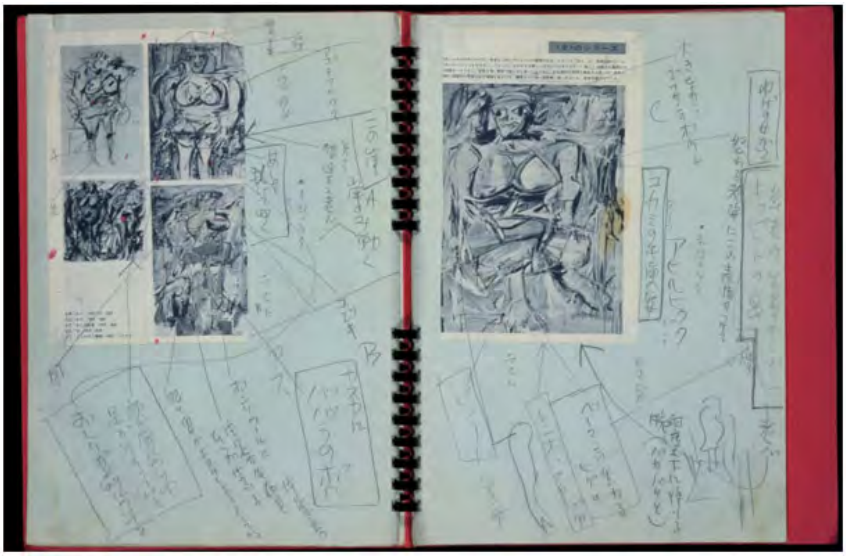


Fig 3: Willem de Kooning images collaged into Avalanche Candy scrapbook.

Looking a little more closely at a page of this Avalanche Candy notebook (see fig. 3), we see Hijikata’s markings all around the images. This is a particularly busy page, and one in which many of the pencil marks look like Hijikata’s (often the writing in these scrapbooks is not in Hijikata’s hand). The first markings that are noticeable are the pencilled arrows pulling out details from the image. Around these are words that likely correspond in some way to movement. When Hijikata’s dancer Yukio Waguri has taught some of Hijikata’s movements that draw on visual images—such as those relating to paintings by Francis Bacon—he would use this attention to minute detail and direction to teach the movement in a set order: with

moving the face, say, in one direction then another. This way of discovering order or sequence within an image also allows for something two-dimensional to transform into a three-dimensional movement in time. In this way, Hijikata discovered a way to use language to translate a flat image into a bodily movement.

Further Reading and Resources in English:

- Hawkins, Richard. 2014. “Tate Liverpool Exhibition: Richard Hawkins: Hijikata Twist.” 02–11/05 2014. http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/richard-hawkins-hijikata-twist .
- Wurmli, Kurt. 2011. “The Power of Image: Hijikata Tatsumi’s Scrapbooks and the Art of Buto.” University of Hawaii – Manoa.

Video Script

0:03

Sometime in the early 1970s, Hijikata began to create scrapbooks in which he would collage visual images, from which he derived butoh movements. We have 16 of these scrapbooks in the archive, and I have selected a handful for us to look at today. Now, when you look inside these scrapbooks, what you notice is a real array of paintings from very different sources, so you get traditional Japanese paintings alongside classical art, or ancient cave paintings, and then you get more contemporary art by people like de Kooning, Francis Bacon, Schiele, Klimt, Henri Matisse, et cetera.

0:48

Now, many of these images that he collaged into the scrapbooks were taken from contemporary art magazines, in particular he drew many of the images from two magazines which he had subscriptions to. One is Bijutsu Techō and the other is Mizue. So, he would look through these magazines and select images which either he or his students would then cut out and collage into the scrapbooks. When you look at the scrapbooks, you can see that he doesn’t just collage the image, but he also draws little pencil marks all around the images.

1:27

He picks up details that interest him, perhaps the texture of the paint or the particular direction of a hand in one of the paintings or perhaps a certain formal detail that interests him. And from this, he then starts to derive language, so you get little notes about these details in the paintings and then sometimes you start to get slightly longer phrases which perhaps become the choreography. But he wasn’t just interested in the formal qualities of the paintings he was looking at.

2:02

He also had a wider interest in the visual arts, so in his archive you can find books that he owned on painters, like books on Picasso or books on Henri Matisse in which he has underlined details of their life and work. So, he was clearly also involved in a more serious research into the visual arts, which informed his dancing. Now, I have picked up a couple of examples here. This is a scrapbook called Nadare-ame, which means roughly Avalanche Candy —so a slightly unusual name for a scrapbook, and it might seem a bit of a mystery.

2:43

But when you start to think about it, something like an avalanche and then a kind of melting traditional Japanese candy might share some textural quality of collapse or melting or dissolution, and then when you start to look at the paintings that he selected for the scrapbooks, you see that there is a kind of textural commonality, so some of the paintings have a particular paintiness. Some of them have a quality of something collapsing or dissolving, of blurring into the background. So, it's apparent that the way in which he gathered and organized these paintings was not necessarily in terms of period or painter, but more in terms of something that interested him in the work, like a paint quality or texture.

3:33

In this one, which is Shinkei, Nerves, you similarly have a lot of works which have very fine lines, as though he is thinking about a kind of nervousness of line or is trying to think about a certain kind of intricate movement. And out of these collages, he derived movements that then often have the names of certain painters, so some of the movements that his dancers will perform have names like Goya or Francis Bacon. So, when we look at all of this material, we start to see how much Hijikata is drawing on a wide range of sources that are not only Japanese to create this incredibly intricate and layered kind of dance.

Step 3.3 (Video)

Introduction to the Archives: Butoh Notation

So far, we have traced the emergence of butoh dance as an art form from the late 1950s to early 1970s. The 1960s, in particular, were years of radical experimentation for Hijikata, during which he often collaborated with artists working in other disciplines to create his performance works. These works frequently incorporated an element of chance, so not everything was decided in advance of the performance. This included the dance, itself, which was often not intricately structured or choreographed, but have incorporated improvisatory moments.

This period from the late 1950s to early 1970s also marked a shift in terms of the scale and reception of his works. He went from the creation of a piece that lasted for around 15 minutes, Forbidden Colours (1959), to a serial work that lasted for 27 nights, Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons (1972). The first of these led to him leaving the All Japan Association of Creative Dance; and the second, attended by an aggregate audience of over 3,000 people, resulted in his winning that year's Association of Dance Critics Award. So, the Hijikata of 1972 looked very different from the Hijikata of 1959.

One of the most significant moments for Hijikata's butoh occurred around this time in the early 1970s: he began to develop and refine a language that could be used to record his dance movements. This language is often called "butoh notation," or "butoh-fu"—though this wasn't a term Hijikata himself used. An important thing to note is that "notation" doesn't only mean a written language, here. "Butoh notation" is, principally, a language spoken by a choreographer to a dancer, as a way to communicate movements quickly. Hijikata developed this language in dialogue with his dancers, and in particular with his principal dancer, Yōko

Ashikawa, who had joined his studio around 1967. Developing this shared choreographic language was necessary for the creation of a large-scale work like Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons, because it enabled Hijikata's dancers to learn and remember choreographic sequences in a short space of time.

"Butoh notation" was a working language, that was constantly being modified and refined by Hijikata as he created new choreographic works. It was never recorded in a systematic way by Hijikata himself, and so the records of Hijikata's "Butoh notation" take many different forms. There are thousands of loose sheets of "Butoh notation" in the archive, and Hijikata's dancers have also kept their own records and notebooks. In addition to these loose sheets and notebooks, there are sixteen scrapbooks containing collaged images that were used by Hijikata to develop his notational language. The images in these scrapbooks are often surrounded by arrows and words, either in Hijikata's or his dancers' hand. It is usually difficult to work out from these documents alone exactly how they were used to create choreographic movements, and the best clues we have to this process of creation come from talking to Hijikata's dancers.

In week 3, we will be looking at these notational documents and talking to Hijikata's dancers to get a sense of exactly how he created new movement using images and language. We will be exploring the relationship between these notational documents and the archival footage of Hijikata's performances in the second half of the 1970s. Through this, we will be able to build a better picture of Hijikata's unique way of creating dance.

Further Reading and Resources in English:

- Baird, Bruce. 2007. "Structureless in Structure: The Choreographic Tectonics of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butō." In Modern Japanese Theatre and Performance, edited by David Jortner, Keiko I. McDonald, and Kevin J. Wetmore. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Baird, Bruce. 2012. Hijikata Tatsumi and butoh : Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits. Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mikami, Kayo. 2016. The Body as a Vessel. Edited by Ben Jones. Translated by Rosa van Hensbergen. Birchington: Ozaru Books.
- Morishita, Takashi. 2015. Hijikata tatsumi butōfu no butō = Hijikata Tatsumi's notational butoh : Kigō no sōzō hōhō no hakken [Hijikata Tatsumi's Notational Butoh: an Innovational Method for butoh Creation]. Tokyo: Keiō gijuku daigaku āto sentā.
- Waguri, Yukio. 2004. Butoh Kaden: DVD-ROM Booklet (What Is BUTOH-FU?). Tokushima: Yukio Waguri & Kohzensha / Nousite.inc.

Video Script

0:03

So, you have been finding out about Hijikata's work as a choreographer from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, and also in the last session about his work as a writer through the text

Yameru Maihime, or Ailing Dancer. When I first came to research Hijikata's butoh, what really interested me was the possibility of connecting these two worlds of the writer and the dancer, or the writer and the choreographer, and the way that I think you can connect these two is through his notational language. Hijikata used a very unusual notational language to create and record his movement. It is unusual because it is poetic rather than, say, descriptive.

0:48

It doesn't tell you about what the outward form of the dancer should necessarily be, so much as create an image for the dancer to work with when they are moving. This language usually gets called butoh-fu, or butoh notation, which most literally designates something written —a record written by a dancer or a choreographer. But it is important to remember that this record is only part of the picture, so while we have lots of documents in the archive which show these notational records, we also have to think about the fact this language was principally used live between a choreographer and a dancer.

1:28

So, Hijikata would say this language to his dancer as they moved, as they learned the movement, and only afterwards would they note it down as a practical record so that they could reproduce the movement in rehearsal or in performance. And when we begin to look at these records, we see a variety of documents. So, we have Hijikata's scrapbooks which contain lots of images, which then gave rise to some of this notational language, or we have written documents that are structured, they look like they might be divided up into sections of a dance, and they contain little sketches as potential prompts for movement. Then, we also have things among these notational records that look more like text.

2:18

So, here we have some quotations that he has taken from a book of European poetry, from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. And we don't exactly know how this poetry might have fed into his notational language, but what we do know is that he was using a lot of materials, visual images and poetry, to generate this language that would then give rise to, and structure movement. So, over the coming sessions, we will be looking a little bit more at this language and thinking more about how it relates to the movement. Behind me, you have Yukio Waguri, one of Hijikata's students, dancing from this language and it's important to realize that this language always has a real connection to the movement.

3:06

It structures it both in time and space. So, over the coming sessions, we will be working out exactly how that happens.

Step 3.4 (Video)

“Movement” Creation and the Method of “Notational Butoh”

Tatsumi Hijikata’s “notational butoh” is based on the creation of discrete “movements.” He developed and created a vast number of “movements” in a very efficient way. While it is impossible to count precisely how many there were, it is possible to get a rough idea.

Hijikata choreographed 1,200 “movements” on one of his dancers alone, Yukio Waguri. Another dancer, Moe Yamamoto, danced around 320 movements in a single performance, as the principal dancer of the 1976 work Costume in Front (Shōmen no Ishō).

Each created “movement” had its own name—that is, it was converted into a symbol or sign. That is what makes it possible to quantify the “butoh notation,” or butoh notes, that his students have preserved.

Hijikata would create new “movements” for each performance. And while there aren’t always records of the structure of these performances, we can use their length to estimate that a lead dancer in any one performance would know around 300 to 500 “movements.”

From 1974 to 1976, Hijikata held a series of thirteen performances at his studio-cum-theater space Asbestos Hall. In these performances alone, the number of “movements” he developed and created must have been vast.

Hijikata’s basic choreographic method was to train dancers in each “movement,” one by one, and then to bridge or combine the various “movements.” The more “movements” he created, the more possibilities there were for combinations. Over many years, Hijikata named thousands of these “movements” to produce a system of signs.

With thousands of “movements,” the combinations could be endless. So Hijikata didn’t need to keep creating new movements in the way he did in order to create new performances. But he nonetheless conceived and presented works that were always new, one after the other, for which he created and developed new “movements.” It seems possible that rather than create new “movements” for the performance works, he rather created new works in order to develop new “movements.”

We might have records of many of these “movements” in their notated form—that is, in language—but the notation alone is not enough to recreate them. Hijikata’s fragmentary notational language is more like an encoded sign system. It is hard to term this a “notation” or a “score,” because there is neither an image showing the movements, nor is there a “score” showing the timing of the movements.

Without Hijikata consolidating the “movements” in the bodies of his dancers, they couldn’t become dance. This process of consolidation went through the following stages:

1) Creation and development of movements (using references, such as visual images)

2) Teaching the words associated with the “movements” to his students (encoding)

3) Recording of these received words by his students (creation of code book)

4) Transformation of “movements” from language into bodily movement (embodiment)

5) Re-recording of this now embodied language by his students (text)

One can consider the notes created through this process as a corpus of signs, but the body is ultimately what channels the actual “movements.” Hijikata would install these “movements” into the empty bodies of his dancers, such that they could perform them on cue. This would allow Hijikata to then take each of these “movements” and combine them or link them in chains, to create movement scenes. The possibilities were endless, but the combinations Hijikata created were, of course, carefully and expertly constructed.

In this way, he created a systematic method for layering movements to create whole scenes, and it was this development that constituted the creation of his “notational butoh” method.

Video Script

0:03

Tatsumi Hijikata stopped dancing onstage in 1973, when he turned from being a dancer to being a teacher and choreographer What I'll do now is explain a little about how Hijikata created his technique and system of "butoh notation" using archival documents. Then, I'll introduce you to one of his actual stage works. The basis of Hijikata's new approach to butoh creation was the "movement." He created at least 3,000 to 4,000 movements. Using this large number of movements, he was able to construct his method of "butoh notation." At that time, the dancers who gathered in Hijikata's studio, Asbestos Hall, were not trained dancers. They were young people with no dance experience or technique.

0:57

Using his "butoh notation" Hijikata was able to choreograph these young people, allowing them to perform onstage.

1:06

Let's take a look at one of Hijikata's lead dancers: Yukio Waguri.

1:14

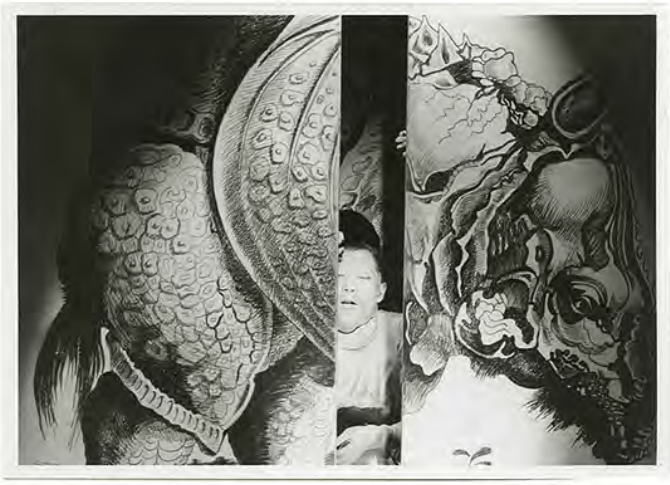
Waguri learned around 1,200 movements from Hijikata. The reason we can count the movements in this way, is that Hijikata gave a name to every single one. His dancers would write down these names in their notebooks, learn the movements in their bodies, and in this way acquire the movements. Then they would be able to respond to Hijikata's direction to produce the movements from their bodies as dance.

Step 3.5 (Video)

Costume en Face

Shōmen no ishō, translated as Costume in Front, or Costume en Face, was a work created by Hijikata late in 1976 for the dancer Moe Yamamoto. It comes from the tail-end of Hijikata's most busy period of choreographing and creating his "butoh notation," or "butoh-fu." It is one of three works from that year for which a video recording survives in the archive, but it is especially illuminating because the lead dancer in this performance, Yamamoto, has made available his written notation for rehearsing and performing the dance. This makes it invaluable when trying to understand how Hijikata's notational language works.

Poster or *Shōmen no ishō*



Shōmen no ishō Photo by Syouzo Yoshie

Yamamoto kept an array of notebooks from the process of creating the performance. In 2015, a bilingual edition of the notes from the rehearsals for the piece was published. This did not include the notes from a final notebook that was closest to the order of the choreography as it was performed. So, between the published rehearsal notes and the unpublished notebook, it is possible to get a sense of the extent to which Hijikata revised and edited his choreography. Under the heading “Black Dress,” which is Yamamoto’s opening solo in the performance, the published rehearsal notes begin:

●<Black Dress>

↓ Metallic flowers — when standing pause
↓ Beardsley
Fox
Racoon dog
Ghost

Whereas the notes that are closest to the final order of performance begin a little differently:

○ Black Dress, solo (Yamamoto): Lace Scene

In the weak darkness sitting twice

Skeleton
Pulling the crucifix nerves

(Sitting)
Space of the hair of a saintly girl and space of the flower
Mask on the drawn-up water
Hung head (stop midway)

But even these notes that are closer to the final performance do not precisely map the version of the performance caught on video. In fact, Yamamoto, watching the video recording, suggested those first few lines of notation were cut out in the final choreography of the dance. So, the choreography of the final performance in fact begins with “(Sitting) / Space of the hair of a saintly girl and space of the flower.” These changes to the notation indicate that Hijikata would alter his choreography right up to the last moment. Another dancer, Yukio Waguri recalled that when he performed in Hijikata’s performance cycle Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons (1972), Hijikata continued to alter the choreography from night to night even once the performances were underway.

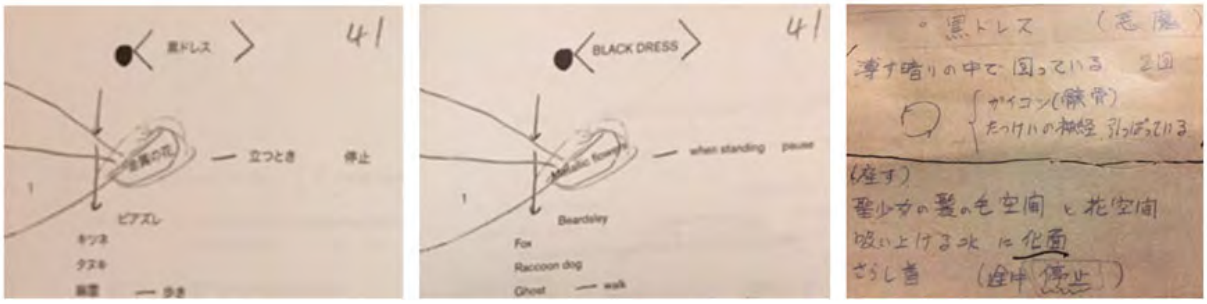


Figure 1, 2, 3: Costume en Face publication, pp. 108–9, and Yamamoto unpublished notes.

The unclear relationship between the written record and the final performance, that resulted from Hijikata’s continual choreographic revisions, is one that only Yamamoto can help clarify. Watching the opening of Yamamoto’s “Black Dress” solo it would be difficult to guess at which words correspond to which movements. This is in part because the beginnings and ends of movements are themselves unclear. But it is also because without training in Hijikata’s butoh, his notational language is often opaque. The words “space of the flower” only mean something physical to a dancer who has learned exactly how to translate them into bodily movement.

Further Reading and Resources in English:

- Hijikata, Tatsumi, and Moe Yamamoto. 2015. Costume En Face: A Primer of Darkness for Young Boys and Girls. Translated by Sawako Nakayasu. New York: Ugly Duckling Press.
- Morishita, Takashi. 2015. Hijikata tatsumi butōfu no butō = Hijikata Tatsumi’s notational butoh : Kigō no sōzō hōhō no hakken [Hijikata Tatsumi’s Notational Butoh: an Innovational Method for butoh Creation]. Tokyo: Keiō gijuku daigaku āto sentā.

Video Script

0:03

So, Hijikata's use of language as his notational form neither emphasizes what the dancer is doing in space, nor does it exactly emphasize what they are doing in time. In other words, it doesn't really focus on the outward form of the dancer so much as something else. So, if I read you a little bit of his notational language, I think you will get a sense of what I mean. This comes from the performance which you can see behind me, Costume En Face, Shonen no isho, which was a 1976 performance in which Yamamoto Moe was lead, and it's been recently translated into English. So, this is some of the language that gave rise to the movement you are seeing.

0:45

"Face in the woods, go back to the center, face of the mask, walk through the woods, Hanako with mask, Deloney's Mask." So, you can see or you can hear rather, already that this is quite different from something that shows what are dancer's doing in space. And over the coming sessions we are going to be discovering a little bit more about how that language is distinct from other forms of notation.

Step 3.6 (Article)

The Completion of butoh and Hijikata Tatsumi as a Total Artist

Having spent nearly three years creating performances for his group Hakutōbō at his studio-cum-theater Asbestos Hall, Hijikata arrived at the completion of his "notational butoh" method. By this point, he had created a vast quantity of "movements," and the technical skill of his dancers in the Hakutōbō group had also improved. In particular, the dance technique of his principal dancer Yōko Ashikawa had become quite astounding.

Hijikata would choreograph Ashikawa first whenever he was developing "movements." For if she couldn't perform a "movement" well, then there was no hope for any of the other dancers. Once Ashikawa had learned a new "movement," she would choreograph this "movement" on the others.

Poster of *Human Shape* (*Hitogata*)

Hijikata presented performances, one after the other, at Asbestos Hall in which Ashikawa was the principal dancer. In June 1976, she performed an ever-transforming dance in the work Human Shape (Hitogata). To list some of the roles that she danced in this performance: "Baby," "Wavy old woman," "Bamboo," "Rice cracker" (Senbei), "Moonlight," "Buddha," "Demon," "Sakura," "Ohoke," "Fusa," and "X'mas." Of course, her costume, stage setting, and the stage backdrop also changed according to these roles.

“Baby” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Wavy old woman” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Bamboo” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Rice cracker” (Senbei)” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Moonlight” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Buddha” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Demon” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Sakura” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Ohoke” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“Fusa” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

“X’mas” by Human Shape (Hitogata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

Let’s take a look at Human Shape (Hitogata).

This is an additional video, hosted on YouTube.

If Ashikawa could transform into baby, she could also transform into an old woman. If she could dance violently, she could also stand quietly still. If she could turn around onstage with her centre of gravity lowered, she could also dance freely as though intoxicated. Her dance was that of an exceptional butoh dancer.

Different scenes, with a variety of costumes, stage setting, music, lighting, and dancing, were collaged together and dizzyingly presented within the small stage space of Asbestos Hall, measuring around 6.3 meters, by just under 5. Around 20 dancers would often dance within this narrow space. These performances were dynamic, with dancers and stage setting changing freely. The dancers’ movements, choreographed according to Hijikata’s “butoh notation,” were rigorously executed. But the overall impression of the performances at Asbestos Hall was of something quite mannerist or ornate.

In December of 1976, with the announcement of the closing of Asbestos Hall as a theater, the performance Lady on a Whale String (Geisenjō no okugata) took place. This performance was also marked by constant change, with more than 20 butoh dancers appearing-and-disappearing, disappearing-and-appearing onstage. The stage setting was very striking, and the lighting was incredibly precise. As the performance went on, it became increasingly fantastical, captivating the eyes and minds of its audiences.

Lady on a Whale String (Geisenjō no okugata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

Lady on a Whale String (Geisenjō no okugata) Photo by Makoto Onozuka

Let's take a look at Lady on a Whale String (Geisenjō no okugata).

This is an additional video, hosted on YouTube.

Through the series of Hakutōbō performances at Asbestos Hall, Hijikata, working with his dancers and Ashikawa in particular, really showed his full creative and compositional brilliance as a choreographer and director.

Overseeing the stage setting, lighting, music, and costumes, Hijikata developed a new genre of performance work. He was able to create something remarkable through a combination of constantly changing the detailed stage setting, making very subtle use of light and darkness,

and using a surrealist collage technique with the music. This total artistry revealed Hijikata's brilliance as an artist who could synthesize many different elements.

This period of the mid-1970s can be considered to mark the completion of one of the most revolutionary dance forms of the Late-twentieth Century: Hijikata's butoh dance.

Step 3.7 (Discussion)

Let's think about butoh notation

So far, we've learned that Tatsumi Hijikata's butoh evolved through creating and using butoh notation. As shown in the previous steps, in butoh notation, various "movements" were written and preserved in a "score."

However, besides using a "score," there are of course many other ways to create the choreography (e.g. in type of dance such as ballet or jazz dance).

Now, we would like you to go online and do some quick research, and share with us some different ways or styles of creating choreography. Take some time to reflect on this and post your findings (your comments, URL, link to online videos) in the discussion area.

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can 'Like' comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.' You can also see who has replied to or 'Liked' a comment that you have posted by clicking the notifications bell icon next to your profile (in the upper-right corner of your screen).

Activity 2. Tatsumi Hijikata the last years

Tatsumi Hijikata died in 1985. Creating a huge amount of butoh notation and completing butoh's method, Tsumabuki Hijikata was attempting to develop a new butoh score in its last decade.

3.8 REVIVAL! OHNO KAZUO ARTICLE

3.9 HIJIKATA AS A TEACHER VIDEO (07:57)

3.10 HIJIKATA TATSUMI'S LAST BUTOH WORK ARTICLE

3.11 QUESTIONS FOR TATSUMI HIJIKATA DISCUSSION

Step 3.8 (Article)

Revival! Ohno Kazuo

After completing his “notational butoh” method, Tatsumi Hijikata started his career as a choreographer according to his method. And this method led to the revival of Kazuo Ohno, the legendary founder of butoh. In the following steps, we will explore Hijikata’s moves in the later years.

Kazuo Ohno, who both performed longer than Hijikata, and was even referred to as “teacher Ohno” by Hijikata, was part of the 1959 revolutionary dance movement that Hijikata launched. From this point on, Ohno performed in many of the performances that Hijikata created and directed. It would be impossible to omit him from the history of Hijikata’s butoh.

Kazuo Ohno, already an established modern dancer, responded Tatsumi Hijikata’s ideas on butoh, even though Hijikata was himself unknown as a dancer. At the same time, challenged by Hijikata to take on a number of roles, Hijikata helped Ohno to become more recognised as a dancer. From 1968, however, Ohno stopped dancing onstage as a butoh dancer. He acted in things like documentary films, but he more or less retreated from the dance world.

However, from 1977, Kazuo Ohno decided to dance on the stage once more. Tatsumi Hijikata acted as his choreographer and director.

Ohno’s reason for wanting to dance onstage once more, despite having turned 71 by that point, was the memory of seeing La Argentina dance when he was young. This led to the creation of the performance “Admiring La Argentina.”

“Admiring La Argentina” Kazuo Ohno with Tatsumi Hijikata in 1977 Photo by Tadao Nakaya

Just the year before this, Hijikata had completed his “notational butoh” method. It is not hard to imagine that Hijikata may have used this method and the “movements” of “butoh notation”

when he choreographed Ohno's dance. He would have approached "Admiring La Argentina" in a completely different way to the way he had choreographed Kazuo Ohno in the 1960s.

Kazuo Ohno transformed his own life into butoh in Admiring La Argentina. He used tango music with the dance that he devoted to La Argentina. This performance marked the revival of Ohno, who had left a deep impression on many of his audiences since the 1959 butoh recital. "Admiring La Argentina" completely definied Ohno's life from that point onwards.

Let's see "Admiring La Argentina" starring Kazuo Ohno

This is an additional video, hosted on YouTube.

Kazuo Ohno was invited to the 1980 Nancy Festival, and performed abroad for the first time. He received high praise for his performance of "Admiring La Argentina." From this point on, audiences were amazed with Ohno's dance activities both inside and outside Japan. He went on to perform "Admiring La Argentina" all over the world.

With Hijikata Tatsumi's choreography and direction, Ohno went on to create a number more performances, like "My Mother" and "Dead Sea," which he performed internationally. Even after Hijikata passed away in 1986, Ohno continued to be invited abroad and to busy himself with travel and a life on the road. Ohno's health deteriorated at the beginning of the 21st Century, and he began to make use of a wheelchair. But even whilst in a wheelchair, he performed onstage.

In a miracle of time and beauty, Kazuo Ohno's butoh can be described as "Life as butoh, and butoh as life." Ohno kept his own life neither too close nor too far—both drawing on his life, and drawing on the memories and myths of others. In June, 2010, Ohno departed this world.

Step 3.9 (Video)

Hijikata as a teacher

Besides Tatsumi Hijikata, many young people gathered at Asbestos hall, and they also performed as well as developed butoh. Let us introduce Mr. Seisaku who is a butoh dancer and used to be one of them. He is looking back on the days he spent at Asbestos hall where he practiced butoh together with Hijikata. Please enjoy the video of the account by Seisaku below.

Keywords introduced in the video

- Seisaku
- Yōko Ashikawa
- Asbestos Hall
- Tōhoku Kabuki Plan

Video Script

0:03

I'm Seisaku, and I do butoh. I first began attending workshops 2 years before my teacher Tatsumi Hijikata passed away. I performed in performances and took part in his activities, but Hijikata died

two years later. I was involved in creating the Hakutōbō dance group with the lead dancer at that time, Yōko Ashikawa, and researchers from the time. I was a member of that group for around 10 years. Then I left the group and began to work independently, and for the last 15 years or so I have been a member of the dance group run by butoh dancer Yuri Nagaoka, Dance Medium, through which I have worked as a creator, performer, choreographer, and dancer.

0:57

I went and participated in workshops at Asbestos Hall, but at the time there were around 30 workshop participants. If you include the researchers and other teachers, there were around 40 people in these workshops. Even with those numbers, though, the atmosphere was quite a tense because we weren't allowed to say a single word. And our teacher Hijikata would be stood over looking at a bunch of documents over on a table.

1:30

How to describe it? The tense atmosphere was like being surrounded by countless threads in the dark space of Asbestos Hall.And then, occasionally, [Hijikata] would suddenly look [at you] through lowered glasses, and it was as though he were piercing just you within that crowd of people with his terrifying gaze. That was how he continued to suddenly create new threads among the people in the room. That was what this feeling of tension was like. If I'm honest with you, I didn't exactly take part in rehearsals during my time with Hijikata. Because, while the structure and direction were precisely and minutely fixed, they would continuously change. When one day's performance was over, whatever we did Hijikata was dissatisfied.

2:32

We would go back to Asbestos Hall, and because we had to perform the next day,we would be told to sleep so would all go to sleep in the first-floor studio. Then, having chatted to friends for a while, Hijikata would suddenly rush down [to the studio]. He would be holding paper with choreography written on it, and would start dancing.

2:54

Whilst dancing he would be saying things like: after this, do this, dance like this, then you lot come over here. Around three of the women would be taking memos together. It's impossible to get it down correctly without three of them, because it's a real problem if anyone misses anything. Afterwards, they would consolidate the notes, and tell us all the correct version. Hijikata as a Teacher, a choreographer and a dancer So that's how we would train in the middle of the

night—Hijikata was a real dance maniac. But the studio would be full of futon, pulled out for people to sleep on. So, before Hijikata arrived we would quickly get them out of the way, and then he would be gone again.

3:37

Ashikawa would tell us to pick them up, and we, as the chorus, would lift them onto our shoulders. There were lots of things we had to do like that. This kind of thing would go on for some time, until we would finally go to sleep around 5 in the morning. But we would have to be in the theatre, Studio 200, in Seibu Ikebukuro by 9a.m. So we would get there at 9, and begin rehearsing pretty immediately. Everyone would be frantically trying to remember, because we had to dance as Hijikata had instructed the night before. As we did so, he would shout out “that’s wrong.” What he was shouting, getting angry, was “dance as it was decided last night.”

4:20

But everyone felt inside that the way they were dancing was what had been fixed the night before.

4:27

If anyone said “Hijikata, this is what was fixed yesterday, he would get angry with us again, saying “what is fixed now, has been fixed for a long time.” So, in that way we didn’t exactly get rehearsal time. He would continuously change, and change the dance, and we would hardly have time to put on white make-up, so would frantically put on the white make-up and then the performance would begin. We would dance according to what had just been decided. But as soon as the music and lighting came on it would be completely different from whatever had been decided. The reason for that was that Hijikata would be in the lighting booth, giving instructions based on each thing he saw.

5:14

That way, the things that had just been decided would change once more. So you really had to have your antennas alert so as not to make a serious mistake. And if your antennas were up, you’d certainly know. It was really like being made to dance on top of a frying pan. Then, once it was over, without fail once the performance ended, if it was in Studio 200, you would hear the sound of Hijikata’s feet running from the lighting booth. You would hear the thump thump thump,

then the door would burst open, and he would call the names of the women butoh dancers —the dancers who were the leaders of the female chorus.

5:58

Getting angry, he would ask why they were late. Then the women would say “but when I was about to go onstage, the second dancer pulled me back saying I was too fast,” or “I thought I was right, but was dragged down as I went onstage.” Then Hijikata would get really angry, and the women would start crying. Even though the performance had finished, the audience would be able to hear all of this noise coming from the changing room backstage. They would be thinking something else might still happen, so wouldn’t go home.They would keep thinking something was about to start. There was that kind of tense atmosphere. The fourth “Tōhoku Kabuki Plan” became Hijikata’s last work.

6:38

When it was made, Hijikata was able to come to rehearsals for the performance, but on the actual performance night he was taken to hospital. At that time, there is one thing, how should I say it? I think other dance forms are also like this, but for Hijikata lowly people, townspeople, normal people —the lives of these people were incredibly important. The lifestyle of people like these, living in rows of houses in the middle of noisy downtown crowds. We should value this landscape which Hijikata created inside himself out of the things he found important. We should express things outside of what has taken root in our own existence.

7:27

These things are really important.Because butoh is those things connected to human life.It’s not just something like another dance style. It’s a dance of life. And the people who live facing that. Even without knowing about butoh, the important thing is the problem of living.That is butoh. I think it was a performance that gave praise to the lives of those people. It was a dance of blessing. Or that’s what I thought, anyway.

Step 3.10 (Article)

Hijikata Tatsumi's Last butoh Work

Having stopped creating performances in 1976, Hijikata returned to creating butoh in the final year of his life. He gathered up the butoh dancers who were left around him, and made an effort to train new butoh dancers in Asbestos Hall.

The year before he died, he organized a large butoh festival in February 1985. This once more drew attention to butoh within Japan, which had by that point become popular abroad. He became active in spreading his own idea of butoh, through lecturing and appearing on television, and began talking about the origins of butoh and about the connection between the body and the landscape, particularly that of his home prefecture Akita.

During that final year, Hijikata presented four performances in a series entitled Tōhoku Kabuki Plan (Tōhoku kabuki keikaku), which featured the seasoned dancer Yōko Ashikawa alongside new dancers. He had used the words "Tōhoku Kabuki" to describe his 1972 work Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons, and borrowed the term as a title again.

Tōhoku Kabuki Plan (Tōhoku kabuki keikaku) in 1985 Photo by Teijiro Kamiyama

Hijikata planned to dance onstage for the first time in thirteen years the following year, in an even greater work for which the Tōhoku Kabuki Plan series were preparatory performances. While Hijikata more or less completed his "notational butoh" method in 1976, with the creation of vast quantities of "butoh notation," he continued to develop new notation in the decade leading up to these performances.

In order to create new dances, Hijikata continuously sought to discover the world that lay behind the words of butoh notation. Understanding this world also allowed him to deepen his understanding of being human. Having renounced being a dancer in 1973, Hijikata became a choreographer and director, as well as a thinker and pedagogue.

Over the decade leading up to this final year, Hijikata deepened his insight into the kind of body a butoh dancer should have. He had long suggested the body of a butoh dancer needed to be a "passive body," which required the dancer to throw away their

self-consciousness, intellect, and desires, in order to be able to respond fully to his language—the metaphorical language of butoh notation—using their nerves and senses alone. Emptying out the body, in this way, allowed the dancer to stand and walk in the space between life and death. In that space, they had no desire to express anything, nor even the desire to dance well.

But during the last decade of his life, Hijikata developed the concept of an “ailing body” (suijakutai) as the desired body-condition for the butoh dancer. This concept also had practical implications for his dance. An example of dance that comes from the “ailing body” would be becoming a self who watches another self who is slowly facing death.

Tatsumi Hijikata of the later years to speak in 1985 Photo by Daisuke Masuda

During the rehearsals for Tōhoku Kabuki Plan IV in December 1985, Hijikata was taken to hospital, and a month later, he passed away. His training of young butoh dancers stopped; his thinking on butoh also stopped; and it was no longer possible to see the new dance creation Hijikata was seemingly moving towards in 1986.

Let’s see Tōhoku Kabuki Plan IV, who became a historic work by Tatsumi Hijikata.

This is an additional video, hosted on YouTube.

Step 3.11 (Discussion)

Questions for Tatsumi Hijikata

Tatsumi Hijikata died at the age of 57 in 1986. However, Hijikata is still adored by many butoh dancers as well as artists. What do you consider to be his most important achievements in butoh and/or Japanese avant-garde art? Besides, if Hijikata was still alive, what would you like to ask him?

Please share your opinion or findings in the comments area.

Activity 3. Dance choreography

How was the movement of butoh created? Tatsumi Hijikata made a notation for butoh. Let's focus on Butoh notation.

3.12 FROM LABANOTATION TO POST-MODERN DANCE NOTATION VIDEO (02:54)

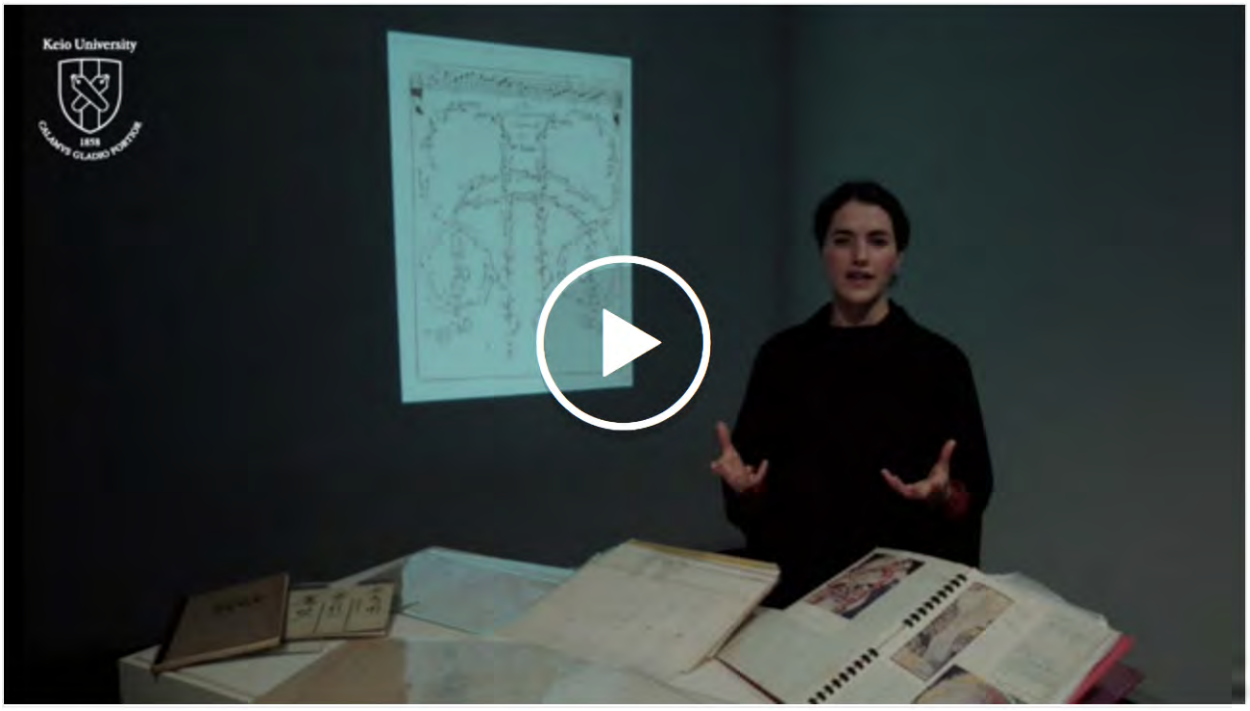
3.13 DANCE NOTATION 1: WAYS OF NOTATING IN A DIGITAL AGE ARTICLE

3.14 DANCE NOTATION 2 : NOTATION EXERCISE VIDEO (05:54)

3.15 WHAT MAKES BUTOH NOTATION DIFFERENT THAN POST-MODERN DANCE NOTATION? DISCUSSION

Step 3.12 (Video)

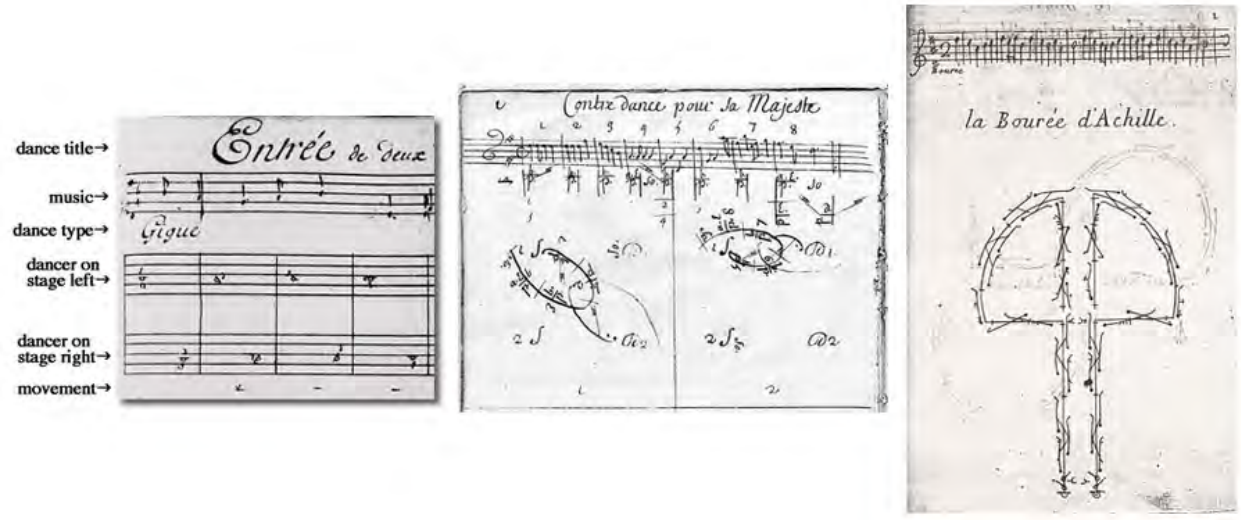
From Labanotation to Post-Modern Dance Notation



So far, we explored Tatsumi Hijikata's life alongside the birth and completion of butoh. From now, we'll explore how butoh, as well as butoh notation remain vibrant today.

A choreographer might choose 'note' down their dance before or after they have created the movement—as a way to generate movement, or as a way to record it. They might choose to do so in order to aid their own memory, in order to teach the dance to others, or in order to preserve it for posterity. There are also many different ways to notate a dance: as a series of drawings, as something that looks more like musical notation, or as a collection of words. These ways of notating could be private ones developed by a choreographer, or more widely used notational systems that are well-known to dancers worldwide. What these various approaches to dance notation are most often looking to record is what a dancer is doing in space and time.

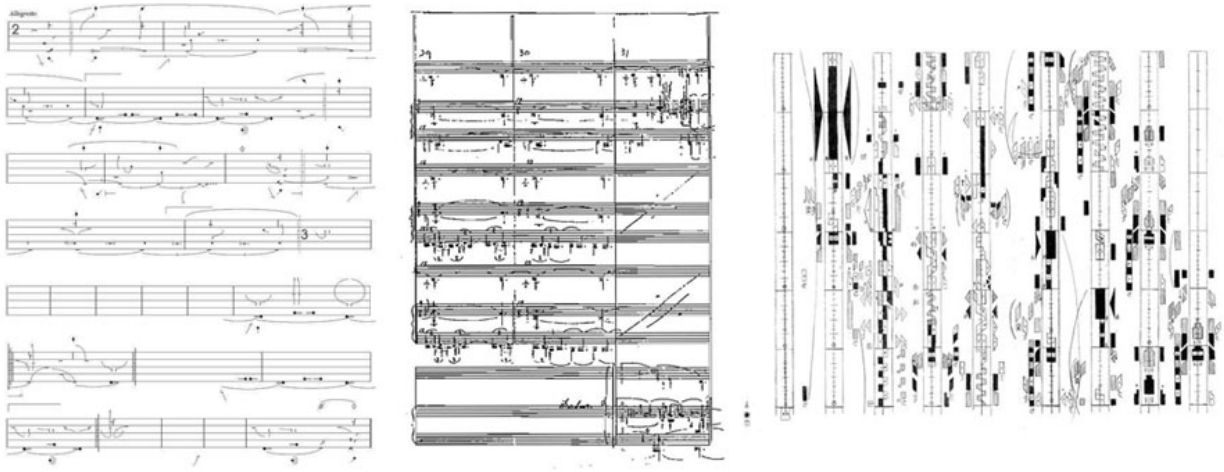
From the late Seventeenth Century, several ways of doing so began to emerge in France. Favier notation plotted the dance steps along musical staves, which allowed for a quite careful mapping of the dance's time structure. Lorin notation used a combination of this noting of the steps' timing with a diagram that showed the position of a dancer in space. And Feuillet notation plotted the dance steps in a spatial diagram—that resembled a floorplan—with timings marked onto it in "measure marks."



From left Fig 1: Favier notation. Fig 2: Lorin notation Fig 3: Feuillet notation

These ways of mapping dance, using either musical staves or spatial diagrams, or a combination of the two, have remained popular into the Twentieth Century. One of the differences that might be noted, however, is an increased detailing of what the dancer's body is doing more than, or as well as, a mapping of their pathway through space. Choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, for example, developed a way of notating that used marks designating different parts of the body drawn onto musical staves. And Benesh notation, one of the more widely used notational forms developed by Rudolf and Joan Benesh, similarly abstracted the human body into a series of marks drawn onto what looks, at a glance, like a musical score. Labanotation, another widely used form developed by Rudolf Laban, abstracted the human form into geometrical shapes that showed what a body was doing in space. These weren't mapped onto musical staves, but the lengths of symbols indicated the duration of movements.

Labanotation, like Nijinsky's notation, had been developed in response to the sense that prior forms of notation restricted the movements that were possible. Breaking down the body into its component parts made it possible to map all kinds of movements in the case of Labanotation, whether a more traditional ballet step or a pedestrian's walk. As a result of this flexibility, and a wider literacy in Labanotation, there has been an effort in recent years to 'translate' dances into Labanotation as a way of preserving and reconstructing dances that would otherwise risk getting lost.



From left Fig 4: Benesh notation Fig 5: Nijinsky's notation Fig 6: Labanotation

The examples listed thus far all represent systems for notating a dance, but there are, of course, all kinds of idiosyncratic and non-systematic ways in which different choreographers note down movements: using their own drawings, their own code-words, or a combination of the two. Or using digital means, as I will discuss in 3.13: video recordings, computer programmes, digital diagrams.

Whether we consider Hijikata's approach to be systematic or not, depends on which aspects of his method are emphasised. His notational language was never finalised and fixed, and Hijikata continually refined and revised this language as he created new work. At the same time, it was not improvised, and nor was it imprecise. Hijikata taught his dancers to understand precisely what movement his notational language corresponded to, so that he could string together choreographic sequences in a short space of time for a performance. Even a phrase that would seem completely opaque to someone new to Hijikata's notational language, could correspond to a very precise movement, such as:

> A room is filled with pollen.
> Show the density and drowsiness of the pollen.

It would be impossible to imagine how this language could be translated into another notational system, like that of Labanotation. For this language doesn't, like Labanotation, inscribe outward form. Only a dancer who has been trained by Hijikata would know what this language means for a body in space and time. It is a language that speaks to the imagination of the dancer, and this imagination then translates or transforms the language into bodily movement. This is unique in the history of notational approaches and marks a clear departure from forms of notation that inscribe the outward position of a dancer in space and time.

Further Reading and Resources in English:

- Hutchinson Guest, Ann. 1998. Choreographics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present. London: Routledge.
- Whitley-Bauguess, Paige. 2010. “Baroque Dance.” http://www.baroquedance.com/research/dancenotation.htm
- Waguri, Yukio. 2004. Butoh Kaden: DVD-ROM Booklet (What Is BUTOH-FU?). Tokushima: Yukio Waguri & Kohzensha / Nousite.inc
- van Hensbergen, Rosa. 2018. “Waguri Yukio’s Butoh Kaden: Taking stock of Hijikata’s butoh notation.” In The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance, edited by Bruce Baird, and Rosemary Candelario. London: Routledge.

Video Script

0:03

By now, you have been introduced to a range of Hijikata’s butoh notation, from the scrapbooks he used to collage images, around which he would write brief notes, to the more textual documents produced by him and his dancers to record movement. So, you will be aware that his principal way of recording and generating movement was language. Now, it’s not that unusual to find a choreographer using language to create movement. If you have been to a dance class, I imagine the teacher might have told you the names of certain movements or might have corrected your movement using language. But it’s also not the only way a choreographer can choose to record movement on the page.

0:49

So, in the history of notation, it is actually more common to find something pictographic, something which looks a little bit more like a drawing as a way to record movement. Early on in ballet, you get things looking a bit like floor plans being used, and this way of notating carries on into the late Twentieth Century, with experimental performance being notated using something that looks more like a minimalist drawing. Now, what this emphasizes is where a dancer is in space, Of course, it can also record the time— there might be a musical score above it for example— but the thing that is being recorded, is exactly what a body is doing in space and time either from above or sequentially.

1:37

Another way to record that has been quite popular, is to record movement in a more musical way, so in a way that emphasizes the temporal structure, and this again has been used in ballet and contemporary dance to show where a dancer is and what they are doing in space and time. So, this way of recording obviously doesn’t show you in quite such clear terms

where someone is, but it might show you what a different part of their body is doing at certain moment. And it also, of course, emphasizes the musical component to dance. So, it is particularly useful for choreographers who structure their movement according to music, who structure their movement in line with the timing of the music.

2:24

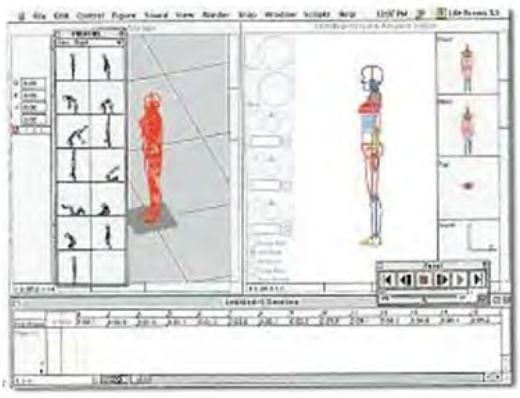
This way of working has been developed by people like Vaslav Nijinsky, and it again emphasizes something slightly different. When Hijikata uses language, he is neither emphasizing what a dancer is doing in space nor is he exactly showing what they are doing in line with the music. So, he is emphasizing different elements of the choreography.

Step 3.13 (Article)
Dance Notation 1: Ways of Notating in a Digital Age

Merce Cunningham was one of the many choreographers who did not find traditional forms of dance notation particularly useful. He suggested it made no sense for a choreographer to "translate" dance into and out of a system of symbols when dancers learned movements in a far more direct way: a dancer "looks directly at a step, or someone doing a movement, and reorganizes that immediately into his own body" (Cunningham 2018). But computers did present, for Cunningham, a way to both notate and preserve this directness. He suggested:

It seems clear that electronic technology has given us a new way to look. Dances can be made on computers, pictures can be punched out on them, why not a notation for dance that is immediately visual? (Cunningham 2018)

In the late 1980s, Cunningham began to use a digital technology developed at Simon Fraser University for choreographing dance, called LifeForms. This technology allowed Cunningham to use digital technology to invent choreographic possibilities that could exceed what a body might think is possible. It also allowed for him to play digital notation in real time; to translate the movement of a body in a far more direct way into a record of that movement.



From left Fig. 1: Screenshot from LifeForms Fig. 2: LifeForms stage previsualization for Biped

The screen becomes a notational surface, like the page had been with more traditional forms of notation. This didn't have to just mean through the use of digital technologies like LifeForms, it could also mean through video recordings. The choreographer Yvonne Rainer suggested Twyla Tharp had been using video recordings in this way since the early 1970s:

Twyla Tharp had been videotaping rehearsals and then asking her people to learn what they saw on the videotape, including gestures, speech and the choreographic material. She was incorporating this into the final performance which made for very peculiar looking things. (Rainer 1999, 66)

What video recordings made possible in the case of Tharp's work was the notational capturing of improvisation, such that it could be re-performed. This interest in capturing or notating improvisation has grown along with digital technologies, and is particularly legible in the work of William Forsythe. In the early 1990s, Forsythe collaborated with visual media artists to develop possibilities for digitally visualizing choreographic work. The resulting CD-ROM, Improvisation Technologies, made it possible to analyse what happens when a dancer improvises, through producing digital traces of movements. It was, as Forsythe suggested, "less about how to improvise than about how to analyze when you're improvising," more about how to "observe motion" than how to choreograph (Forsythe 2012, 17, 19).

What digital technology has brought to choreography is also the ability to present or re-present dance in ways that facilitate understanding. The choreographer Lucinda Childs revisited her earlier 1977 work Melody Excerpt and used digital technology to map the dance in such a way that its choreography could be viewed more clearly. Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker produced a series of books and DVDs that allowed her to present her choreographic work using a range of media. And the butoh dancer Waguri Yukio has also used digital media to explore the notational language of Hijikata Tatsumi. In 1998, he created a CD-ROM, that later became a DVD-ROM, which presented Hijikata's notational language through video, image, and text. This allowed for him to show the relationship between Hijikata's notational language and movement in a way that had previously only been possible within a workshop setting.

Further Reading and Resources in English:

- Cunningham, Merce. 2018. "Notations from Merce Cunningham - Changes: Notes on Choreography." Merce Cunningham. 2018. https://www.mercecunningham.org/merce-cunningham/mc-writing-text/params/textID/7/.
- Forsythe, William. 2012. "William Forsythe: Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye (Introductory Booklet)." Hatje Cantz Pub.
- Rainer, Yvonne. 1999. A Woman Who… Essays, Interviews, Scripts. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Step 3.14 (Video)

Dance Notation 2 : Notation Exercise

As we've learned so far, "Butoh Notation" was originally developed by Tatsumi Hijikata, and consists of various types of physical expressions. In this video, we'll simulatively experience a butoh lesson led by Hijikata. On behalf of Hijikata, Mr. Seisaku—a butoh dancer who studied under Hijikata—gives a lecture.

THE FULL VERSION OF BUTOH NOTATION EXERCISE

We'll simulatively experience a 2 types of physical expressions.

Video Script

0:03

So, today Seisaku who trained with Hijikata is going to give us an example of Hijikata's butoh notation in motion. He is going to show us with Kae the example of the "Walk of a Measure,"

which is one of the most basic choreographies in Hijikata's butoh. So, we've been looking at Hijikata's notation on the page. But in fact, this kind of note is a practical tool for a dancer. These are Seisaku's notes from Hijikata's late workshops, and in fact the way this language, this notational language, is used is in a live exchange between a teacher and a dancer. So, we are going to watch Seisaku teach Kae an exercise from butoh notation, Hijikata's butoh notation. Seisaku, please show us.

0:54

So, let's try a basic exercise for butoh: "Walk of a Measure." This is also sometimes called "Walk of a Log." This is about becoming a log that is the height of a human. And because you have become a log, you don't walk (as a human), but walk instead as a measure that moves. Also, one of the foundations for butoh is the idea of an empty body, and the "Walk of a Measure" is a key training for becoming empty. So, let's give it a go. First, we relax the body. Shoulders and elbows, relax. To begin with, there is a single thread suspended from the top of the head, that allows the body to relax.

1:44

Looking to one side, the elbows are pulled back a little. Then, it's as if there is water dripping from the fingertips. It's nice and light, light. That from which the droplets fall (the hands) are gently pulled up to around where the trouser seams are. Then, lightly lightly, lowering the hips. They drop lightly. You're suspended so don't lean forward. Good.

2:13

First, in order to keep the length of the measure, we have to do two things.

2:22

There is a basin on top of your head. And it's full of sulphuric acid. So if it tips and spills, your body will get bathed in sulphuric acid. You try not to spill it as you walk. Good, have a go.

2:40

So, Seisaku is using an object to make sure that Kae is actually feeling the real sensation of what that image would be like, the image of a basin full of acid on the top of her head. Now, walk freely. You no longer have four versions of yourself, but the whole room is full of versions of yourself walking in all directions. So, this body is not the extent of yourself, the whole room is in a state of being full of your bodies. Gradually the entire surrounding space is full of your bodies. That is why your particular body, here, is walking over here, but your true self is actually walking here.

3:35

The reason these people are walking here is because somewhere they are attached to threads. That is why whilst being here, in one place, I'm also really here in another. This is the condition we're trying to create. So, again, this way of accumulating the image starts with something very simple, the walk, the walk of a measure. Then Hijikata often adds other images, so more bodies accumulate in the space. This is what we call "gohō". It is five bodies. First, beside this actual body is another version of yourself. And beside you, here, is another version of yourself. And behind, another. And in front, another. Begin by thinking about these four surrounding people. These people are walking.

4:37

You're walking because there are 4 versions of you walking behind you. It's not that you are walking, but that the four surrounding people are walking. Then, for example, if the person to your left turns, you also turn. You turn because the four people around you turn. It's not that you are trying to turn. So, the image here means that Kae isn't moving herself, she has these bodies around her. So the imagery is used, in fact, so that the dancer doesn't try to move, but is moved by something other than themselves. So, this is a kind of basic training, this exercise for butoh.

5:23

And the end goal, in one way, is to have an emptied out body which means that she can then have many different images or movements come into her body. Putting things inside the body in this way is what butoh is. So, this kind of way of emptying the body is key to Hijikata's butoh and it's in some sense the aim of the butoh notational language. Good, let's stop there. Thank you very much, Seisaku and Kae.

Step 3.15 (Discussion)

What makes butoh notation different than post-modern dance notation?

In light of the previous steps and primary sources you have just engaged with, please discuss the following question:

- What makes butoh notation different than post-modern dance notation? What are the uniqueness as well as important features of butoh notation?

Please share your opinion or findings in the following discussion area.

Activity 4. Summary of Week 3

Let's review what we've learned in Week 3 "Behind Butoh: Creation."

3.16 REFLECTION OF WEEK 3 QUIZ

3.17 SUMMARY OF WEEK 3 ARTICLE

Step 3.16 (Quiz)

Reflection of Week 3

Let's reflect what you've learned in Week 3 focusing on the creation of butoh dance.

Question 1

Please fill in the blank with the correct word.

Tatsumi Hijikata created massive numbers of "movements" and each of them had its own name. It was converted into a symbol or sign called "butoh【　　】".

It seems that rather than create new "movements" for the performance works, he rather created new works in order to develop new "movements."

Question 2

There are some significant butoh dancers. Among them, who is the legendary founder of butoh?

He performed in many of the performances that Hijikata created and directed. It would be impossible to omit him from the history of Hijikata's butoh. He also contributed to expanding butoh to all over the world.
Please choose the dancer's name from the following choices;

- Kazuo Ono
- Akaji Maro
- Sankai-juku

Question 3

The following text talks about one of Hijikata's famous works.

In 1985 Tatsumi Hijikata presented four performances in a series, but since he passed away in 1986, it became impossible to see how the series would have developed further. This series became his last butoh work.
What is the name of this performance? Please choose from the following choices;

- Ankoku Butoh
- Tohoku Kabuki Plan
- Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese

Step 3.17 (Article)

Summary of Week 3

In Week 3, we have learned about the structure and method of Hijikata's "notational butoh"—looking at notational materials and related documents, as well as watching videos that show it in practice. Then now, we would like you to imagine, exactly what did Hijikata want to achieve? Moreover, if he were alive, what would you like to ask him?

The uniqueness of Hijikata's choreographic method and approach to creating works means there are no other examples of such a method elsewhere. There are, however, examples of choreographers who were developing their own methods at the same time as Hijikata, during the 1970s and 80s, such as Pina Bausch and William Forsythe. When seeking out a common point between these three choreographic methods, we arrive at the idea of "editing or compiling."

Bausch, working in the tradition of German expressionist dance, would gather words from each of her dancers and draw these together to choreograph and direct them. Forsythe applied digital media to ballet techniques in order to construct and direct dance. And Hijikata, as we have been discovering, gathered vast numbers of "movements" in order to generate new choreography.

Each of these choreographers was, in a different way, a revolutionary of late twentieth-century dance. Though each of them developed different philosophies, themes, and methods for their choreography, they developed these approaches around the same time. Each contributed to the rise of diverse dance forms in the transition from the Twentieth to Twenty-first Century.

Hijikata developed butoh within a unique creative environment populated by dancers with no previous dance experience. This was also what made the revolution that was butoh possible.

In week 3, we have watched films from the period in which Hijikata completed his "notational butoh" method, and become acquainted with Hijikata's brilliance as an artist, choreographer, and director. Shortly after completing his "notational butoh" method, Hijikata stopped creating work. But, in his last year of life, he returned to directing and choreographing with the aim of discovering a new form of butoh. Unfortunately, this new butoh only leaves an indication of what it might have been, for its content was never realized. Through the words of dancers who worked with Hijikata in this last year, and through the record of his last performance series Tōhoku Kabuki Plan, we were able to glance at his last work as an artist.

We had a look at various forms of contemporary dance notation, and watched a short video introducing twentieth-century dance notation. We were also able to get a practical sense of how Hijikata's butoh notation worked by watching workshop footage of Hijikata's dancer, Seisaku. Through this, I hope it has become clear that, while Hijikata's butoh has no diagrammatic score, it does use "words" to create and record "movements." The way in

which this differs from other early twentieth-century modern dance and late twentieth-century postmodern dance has, I hope, become clear.

In week 4, we will be looking at the state of butoh as it spread from Japan to various countries abroad from the 1980s to the present.