

Butoh: A Dance Experience to Recreate the Body beyond the East-West Dichotomies

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Butoh: A Dance Experience to Recreate the Body beyond the East-West Dichotomies

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This article aims to present an overview of the context that brings together different experiences of butoh dance in Brazil. Sometimes the hegemonies that exist at “home” provide us with useful perspectives on the effects of global world. Therefore, besides a very brief history of butoh dance in Brazil, other issues will be discussed such as the different possibilities of representation of the body on the edge of crisis. I also decided to include in this final version, another example of Brazilian artist (Lia Rodrigues) that I didn’t mention during the symposium, but that can still be very helpful to think about cultural exchanges in the contemporary world.

The interest in Japanese culture has deep roots among us, as our country has the biggest Japanese colony in the world, outside Japan (around one and a half million Japanese immigrants).

Brazil used to be a colonized country up to the 16th century, but in many different ways I feel we remain clouded by this historical issue. Therefore, even now that our country has been recognized as a promising nation in the global context, there are several difficulties to understand the complexity of Brazilian culture outside the scope of stereotyped images such as carnival, soccer, exuberant forests and social misery. In the broad international academic and cultural scenario, Brazil continues to be classified in the “gray zone” that also includes other countries from Latin America, Asia and Africa, under the category of “exotic”. This could mean that despite globalization, in a very particular way, we are still in-between, as Indian scholar Homi Bhabha has pointed out in his important book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with “newness” that is not necessarily part of the continuum between past and present. According to Bhabha, it creates a sense of the new like an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as an “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. Therefore, the past-present becomes part of the necessity of living, and it is not nostalgia anymore.

In the *angura* context Japanese thinkers, artists and writers rethought issues on nationality and cultural distinctiveness while the country recovered from defeat and launched an era of high-speed economic growth after the 1950s. However, it is important to observe that Hijikata Tatsumi (1928–1986), the creator of bu-



Fig. 1 Ohara Akiko and Hijikata Tatsumi

toh dance, had a very particular way of participating in these discussions. On May 24th, 1959, he presented his first butoh performance *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors) to the audience of the Japanese Dance Association. In this piece, a young man (Ohno Yoshito) simulated sexual relations with a hen, and after that, Hijikata himself came after him. The references of this piece were deeply connected to Jean Genet and Mishima Yukio's literature, and the impact was really strong among the audience. Several members of the Dance Association were shocked. After all, it was difficult, at that moment, to understand that butoh was not a dance technique to transmit ideas or create a discourse, but a powerful way to question, to rethink, and to actually recreate the body itself.

There are few aspects of Hijikata's butoh that appeared during the butoh diaspora in the Western world after the late 1970s. Hijikata never left Japan and therefore it was Ohno Kazuo (1906–2010) who became a kind of ambassador of butoh.

As I mentioned before, I will concentrate my examples on Brazilian experiences because they represent some of the most emblematic possibilities of butoh understanding that can also be observed in other countries around the world. In the last few years, I have been particularly interested in studying the impact of butoh on Latin America.

Although the Japanese theaters and traditional Japanese dances have always exerted great fascination among us in Brazil, nothing compares to the impact of butoh. When Ohno Kazuo was in São Paulo, for the first time in 1986, he moved the auditorium and transformed our concept of dance, body, death and art. After his presentation, some Brazilian artists decided to travel to Yokohama in order to study with Ohno, integrating a circuit that started at the end of the 1970's and has transformed Ohno's house into a meeting point for artists from Europe and the Americas.

More than forty years have passed, and it is interesting to notice that the great impact of Ohno was due not only to his genius, but to the introduction of what a body-in-crisis would be in its multiple forms. Thus, the great interest of butoh in Brazil was not only due to mere curiosity or to the desire to copy an exotic model of dance, even though this did happen many times. Its most significant impact was due to the philosophical and political importance of the recognition of a body that lives on the edge of life.

Although it has been published in many books, it wasn't the atomic bomb, or a personal crisis that produced butoh in Japan. The general context has created possibilities, but it is not appropriate to simplify butoh under the label of a social effect. The body-in-crisis, known as the *dead body*, is always singular and situated. It does not make sense in a generic way, or as an aesthetical model to be followed. This is a symptom

of a messianic search that took countries such as Brazil, Italy, France, Argentina, Mexico and the United States by storm, reinterpreting the teachings of Ohno. Despite the complexity of Hijikata's research, overseas butoh has been mostly understood as a conventional style of dance defined by the white body make-up, contorted limbs and grimacing expressions. Another misconception is that through butoh the dancer's own history can be traced back to its beginnings, or that the spirit of butoh can be recognized by exotic art objects on stage. Due to the significant increase of butoh workshops around the world, I think it is more important to analyze the butoh evolutive process, searching for the dancing bodies that have been focused on similar investigations, without any explicit intention to copy butoh style.

The Foundations

Butoh arrived in Brazil through three independent events. The first was the arrival of the dancer Ohara Akiko in 1961 in the Yuba community (ten hours from São Paulo). She had studied in Japan at the Ando Mitsuko Academy with Hijikata. In the 1950s, following the Second World War, American companies such as the New York City Ballet, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor came to Japan. Ohara Akiko had her first contact with ballet and modern dance at this time, at the Ando Academy, where Ohno Kazuo was a guest professor, giving classes on his very personal interpretation of German Modern Dance. He studied with Eguchi Takaya (Mary Wigman's student).

In Brazil, Ohara developed her studies of Graham's technique. She left Japan in the early beginnings of butoh, so she knew Hijikata as a jazz dancer and she became a member of the early stages of his body experiments that involved degradation and strong violence. Looking at Ohara's dance now, my question is: Is it possible to identify a butoh trace in her dance, even considering her choice to use other modern dance techniques?

She completely denies this possibility, repeating all the time that her subject is a dance of life and not a dance of darkness. Her group at Yuba develops different activities with a tough daily routine in close contact with nature—cutting wood, preparing vegetable gardens and so on. Apparently, Ohara really gave up any relationship with Hijikata's creative process of the dance of darkness. What she really wants is to experience the body in different states. She claims that the dancing body is not separated from the daily body at the community. And this is one aspect that seems very close to Tanaka Min's butoh work in the Body Weather Farm Project, where he works with artists as well as Japanese farmers. These experiences clamor for another point of view. The result is not necessarily an artistic product such as "choreography". It can be just a way of living together and sharing the land.

The second example I would like to mention is the pioneer Kusuno Takao (1945–2001) who settled down in Brazil in 1977 and, since then started working with many Brazilian dancers and actors. We never knew details about Kusuno's experience with butoh in Japan. Actually, he never mentioned the word butoh during the first years of his work in Brazil. He had introduced, little by little, some principles of the body-space relation and had explored the possibilities of each interpreter, the relationship with life, death and



Fig. 2 Vera Sala

and Ohno himself.

A couple of months before he passed away in 2001, I talked to him, and he explained that his biggest difficulty to really work with butoh in his company was the lack of discipline. Kusuno's dancers used to come for a couple of hours each day and then go back to their families and jobs. They hadn't developed the necessary concentration to think and experiment with butoh all the time, and this was the huge difference between the dancers of Kusuno and Hijikata. So when I asked him if he considered his work a butoh experience, he replied "unfortunately no".

The third example is the work of the Brazilian choreographer Marta Soares. Since 1995, she has developed a dance experience in São Paulo that has revealed in-between spaces among several cultures and different ways of thinking.

For *Les poupées* (The Dolls, 1997) Soares was inspired by the corporeal anagrams created in the early 1930s by the artist Hans Bellmer. Bellmer proposed a rearrangement of the parts of the body through more than a hundred drawings, paintings, and photographs of distorted and dismembered female dolls. His work was considered, by some art historians, as a protest against Germany's Nazi regime, but mainly as an expression of erotic feelings. After studying these images Soares sought another movement form to further investigate the fragmentation of the body. She received a Japan Foundation grant to train for one year with Ohno in Yokohama. Just as Bellmer's dolls were transformed through fragmentation, butoh allowed Soares to explore the possibilities of the metamorphosis of the body. In response, Soares started deconstructing patterns of movement that she had been incorporating into her own work throughout her dance studies in São Paulo, London, and New York, and this process became an efficient starting point for the re-presentation of Bellmer's dolls in her choreography. The choreographic experience was focused on the possibilities of the articulations and disarticulations of the body. Specifically, she was inspired by Bellmer's *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'Anatomie de l'Image* (Small Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious or the Anatomy of the Image, 1957) and his very notion of a "dictionary of the image." In her choreography this can be ob-

the perception of the other. In the last years of his life he created his own company – Tamanduá - and for the first time he tried to develop a butoh aesthetic. He was focused on the genesis of dance movement in Brazil, which is why he invited a Xavante Indian to participate in the performance *The Eye of Tamanduá*. It can be said that Kusuno left basic marks on artists such as the important theater director Antunes Filho who already had a strong bond with Japan from the contact with the theater director Suzuki Tadashi

served when she presents a fragmented dancing body. Sometimes we just see a body upside down with legs moving like arms, or a woman in a 1950s ballroom dress transformed into a headless man with trousers, wearing shoes on her hands. At the end of the choreography, Soares sticks her head into an old oven. This complex metaphor for the acephalous body comprises a flux of voices and images teased from the work of several authors. One of them was George Bataille, who published the *Acéphale Revue* in Paris from 1936 to 1939 and discussed the idea of the formless as evidence of a pervasive insistence on form, itself a means of imposing limits. For Bataille a dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks.

Soares was also interested in experiencing the forms her body took as she moved in accordance with external impulses and inner images. By creating this dangerous and perverse self-portrait (formless and acephalous), she was also inspired by the photographs of Cindy Sherman, who created her own fragmented dolls. In the work of Sherman and Soares the female body is always a testimony to a haunted memory. There is no actual person but rather a self-fabricated fictional one. The archetypal housewife, prostitute, and depressed woman are all there but in a very unique and ambiguous way. This research on visual images of the body continues in Soares's next choreography *Homem de Jasmim* (Man of Jasmine, 2000). For this piece she explored the poems of Unica Zurn, who was married to Hans Bellmer. Taking off from Zurn's writings, Soares choreographically tested the fragile boundary between life and death. Here Soares moved with difficulty inside a glass box and sometimes appeared to be barely able to breathe. It was a fragmented and fragile communication between the internal and the external environment, and the battle was being waged for her survival. In addition to Zurn's poems, Soares was inspired by the artist Francesca Woodman and her research on formless bodies and metamorphosis—as Woodman explored in the photographic series *Space and House* created from 1975 to 1976 in Rhode Island. Woodman's photographs constitute an empathic identification of her body with inanimate objects (walls, houses, doors, windows, etc). In some works we cannot perceive the frontiers between her body and the objects or places. It is a successive embracing and enveloping of the external world. Soares gave movement to Woodman's photographs not by copying them but by exploring the potential movement of the body positions in the images, which can be better recognized during the performance in the long moments of apparent pause.

The feminine universe is always present in Soares work. For *O Banho* (The Bath, 2004), she researched the life of Dona Yayá, a rich Brazilian woman who, after being declared insane in the early 1920s, was locked in her home until her death in 1960. Based on her previous research on Bellmer, who was very interested in Jean-Martin Charcot's writings on "hysterical" women, Soares decided to use the metaphor of the bath,



Fig. 3 Marta Soares

referencing the long baths used as therapy at the Salpêtrière to “calm down” allegedly insane women. For the premiere of Soares’s performance at the Vermelho Gallery in São Paulo, the bath was located on the first floor and the audience could see both the dancer’s slowly rolling over inside the bathtub for one hour, as well as the DVD projection of Dona Yayá’s house, which was screened on the second floor. The DVD was a poetic edition of the three months of Soares’s creative process at Dona Yayá’s house, generated through Soares’s empathic sensation of Dona Yayá’s history and her house. The projections of Soares’s body in a glass solarium both duplicated and juxtaposed with the garden related to the ephemerality of the body and to the passage of time in the house. According to Soares’s description of her piece: “Inside the bathtub-house the performer moves in limited space and limited time, as if suspended by the point in which it finds itself between life and death” (2004).

These philosophical and visual references—Bellmer’s fragmented body, the butoh body, and the formless body of Bataille—converged into a singular dancing body reinvented in São Paulo, Brazil. The appropriation of foreign information can demonstrate in a complex way an original dance technique as a mediation between body, environment, and all sorts of cognitive operations, including unconscious ones. Her last piece *Vestígios* (Traces, 2010) is based on the *sambaquis*, which are Indian cemeteries in Brazil. She stays buried for a couple of hours in the sand. On the walls of the parking lot where she presented this choreographic installation, the audience could see two big screens with images from of the real *sambaquis*. The light was changed very slowly to suggest the passage of time. In some sense, the work of Soares can always be recognized as a kind of testimony. According to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, testimony always contains a “lacuna”. He discusses this idea quoting Primo Levi when he spoke about the so-called *muslims* in Auschwitz. Levi explains that the *muslims* did not speak. They were dying of malnutrition. They lived in an extreme limit situation and therefore they exposed a paradox. The *muslim* is the non-human, the one who could never bear witness, at the same time, the *muslim* is the one who cannot bear witness, is the only true witness, the absolute witness. In this case, the subject of testimony is constitutively fractured. It has no other consistency than disjunction and dislocation.

The Butoh Imagination

As a way of entering the debate on the body in crisis, I would like to explore artistic experiences that were not directly connected to butoh, but could give us insight into the transformation of some of the main butoh questions in the contemporary world.

The first one is the choreographer Vera Sala, who has demonstrated that the construction and the dissolution of the self can also be a political issue. Her three solo pieces—*Estudos para Macabéa*, (Studies for Macabéa, 1999), *Corpos Ilhados* (Insulated Bodies, 2002), and *Impermanências* (Impermanences, 2004) can be seen as a single work. As Ohno did in Japan, Sala enlarges the idea of choreography beyond visible movement to include invisible movement—thought processes and other internal actions. Through her performances, there are always the same questions about body limits, body perception, and the relation-

ships between self and environment, as well as the radicalization of the same “movement cells,” as she has precisely stated. She experiences the disappearance of the body as self dissolution and the genesis of movement. *Estudos para Macabéa*, inspired by Clarice Lispector’s book *A Hora da Estrela* (The Hour of the Star, 1977), shares a continuity with *Corpos Ilhados*. *Corpos Ilhados* was based on a different source, not related to Lispector’s book but also focused on the subject of the disappearance of the body. In this case, Sala was influenced by a brief newspaper notice announcing the burned body of an unclaimed child in the care of Febem (State Foundation for the Well-being of Minors) which is an agency that incarcerates minors accused of crimes. In *Estudos para Macabéa*, Sala explored Lispector’s description of a maid who often feels the dissolution of her body. This happens when she is lost in the rush-hour crowd on a bus, or doing housework. She represents the tragic meaning of being poor, unable to adapt to the big city, like so many migrants in Brazil who came to São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro looking for a better life. Macabéa feels she is of no value to anybody. This is translated in Sala’s performance through the complete absence of patterns of movement or a priori references. She moves different parts of her body but the audience cannot identify or recognize her gestures as “dance steps”. Lying down during most of the performance, she appears to be unable to stand on her own legs. In *Corpos Ilhados*, she was moved by the cruelty of Febem, which has been criticized because of the large number of their charges who have escaped, the rebellion within their institutions, and also allegations of torture and mistreatment of the minors. In the context of the migrant and of the abandoned child, the disappearance of a body has become so frequent that often now it is not even considered a catastrophe or emergency. To represent this situation, once again, Sala does not give any clue or clear reference to the audience. She concentrates on two points: the birth of bodily action in an individual body and the fragility of life. The disappearance of a body seems to be the loss of the primary sign of life: the capacity to move. Therefore, she intercepts, interrupts, and reroutes the process of movement in her body. If an action starts in the shoulders and would normally continue in the arm, she displaces the movement to another part of the body, for example, the leg, and improvises different qualities of movement.

In *Impermanências*, Sala radicalizes the non-movements of her body inside a sculpture of wires with no particular form. She presents the first stage of an inanimate body. There is no dislocation, only a tremor and the changing state of a precarious body. The audience is supposed to walk around her, as if they are visiting an art gallery or looking at a homeless person sleeping in the street.

Urban Violence and the Body in Crisis

The key defining feature of Brazilian culture is the ability of Brazilians to assimilate and transform other cultures. Sometimes it is not on purpose. By concerning the relationship with Japan, ideas and ideology flow in both directions, and the local contexts can be extremely powerful.

The Brazilian artist Lia Rodrigues can be a good example of this kind of political experience. She works at the Favela da Maré, one of Rio de Janeiro’s largest and most dangerous shantytowns. Rodrigues is not doing a typical social work, by distributing food and clothes. Just like Hijikata, she is trying to sup-



Fig. 4 Lia Rodrigues

by French philosophers like Jean Hyppolite, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze.

All of them agree with Foucault's thesis that "what is at stake today is life" and hence politics becomes biopolitics. What is decisive, however, is the way in which one understands the sense of this transformation. In this sense, Rodrigues approaches the question of an ethics based upon an understanding of how easily human life has been annulled in certain places. Many people think that grief is private, and returns us to the state of being solitary. However, in the experiences of Rodrigues, grief furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order. She is interested in these conditions for humanization, which is not a simple matter when we talk about the precarious situation of the Favela da Maré.

The ancient Greeks did not have only one term to express what we mean by the word "life". They used two semantically and morphologically distinct terms: *zoe*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, humans, or gods) and *bios*, which signified the form or manner of living peculiar to a single individual or group. In modern languages this opposition has gradually disappeared from the lexicon. By the term *form-of-life*, Agamben means a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself—so all these thoughts are very connected.

This formulation defines a life—a human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power. Political power always found itself—in the final instance—in the separation of a sphere of naked life from the context of the forms of life. People from the Favela da Maré live in a kind of "state of exception", always included in the city as naked life, between man and animal, victims and bandits.

To deepen this discussion, I'll start explaining more about Lia Rodrigues, by analyzing three pieces she created after 2000: *Aquilo de que somos feitos* (That of Which We Are Made, 2000), *Encarnado* (Incarnate, 2005), and *Pororoca* (2010).¹ Her performances clearly suggest: once external information is internalized by a body, the organism has no possibility of knowing whether this information came from a natural or cultural source, and will certainly never classify it as such.

1 *Pororoca* is a word in Tupi-Guarani language that means the encounter of Amazon river with the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. It is very violent.

ply the community where she works with artistic knowledge, critical thinking and sensibility. Her research on the body in crisis came from a specific place, and from a precise understanding of the terms *form-of-life* and naked life, proposed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Agamben and other Italian philosophers have been publishing several books and articles in order to rethink important concepts proposed

In 2005 she moved her company, Lia Rodrigues Companhia de Dança, founded in 1990, to the Favela da Maré (a shantytown with 138 thousand inhabitants), and since then she has conducted important artistic work there. This community work began with the presence of the dance company at the Casa da Cultura da Maré, which is a kind of warehouse located just beside the Centro de Estudos e Ações Solidárias da Maré (The Maré Center of Studies and Acts of Solidarity) [CEASM], a nongovern-



Fig. 5 Lia Rodrigues

mental organization. The building has no doors so people can come in whenever they want. During the rehearsals, three young members of the community asked to participate and were included in Rodrigues's company (Allyson Amaral, who was the first, and has been dancing with Rodrigues for seven years; Leonardo Nunes Fonseca; and Gabriele Nascimento Fonseca). Some of the company's dancers offer free workshops to the community. Funding from Europe²² to develop *Incarnate* was mostly used to improve the warehouse by creating a set (in this case only flooring) for the performance and making it a proper space for the community, with a good roof, ventilation, and a restroom. Several important choreographers like the French Jérôme Bel have presented pieces in this warehouse.

Rodrigues has just a little support in Brazil. If she had decided to create a dance school for the poor children of Maré she would probably have found a sponsor; however, as an artist, she preferred a different approach, one that does not concern itself either with community service or entertainment. The effort is focused on an artistic experience that is politically involved through its reflection on the meaning of being human and the unbearable conditions of precarious lives. Rodrigues is inspired by Brazilian artist Lygia Clark and her proposition of the "collective body." Clark created several performances between 1964 and 1981, focusing on the dissolution of boundaries between artists and audience. Rodrigues made a connection between Clark's work and Susan Sontag's discussion of the modern understanding of violence and atrocity in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004)³³ to consider empathy in relation to the performer/audience connection and the feeling that, for a brief moment, someone can be in the place of another. Testing a collective empathic body in a shantytown like Maré is a huge challenge. How can a well-educated choreographer born into a rich white family empathize with, much less feel like, an inhabitant of Maré? Rodrigues and her dra-

2 Rodrigues's funding for *Encarnado* came from Centre National de la Danse, Festival D' Automne, La Ferme du Buisson, Maison de La Danse de Lyon, and Tanzquartier from Vienna.

3 Susan Sontag's book *Regarding the Pain of the Others* reverses the terms she sets out in 1977 in *On Photography*. Arguing instead for an interpretation of images that reveals their ability to inspire violence or create apathy, she evokes a long history of the representation of the pain of others—from Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810–20) to photographic documents of the American Civil War, WWI, the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi death camps, and contemporary images from Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Israel and Palestine, and New York City on September 11.

maturge Silvia Soter are very aware of this barrier. They don't pretend there are no social differences between the artists and their audience/community. Quite to the contrary, the artistic research starts with the awareness of differences and seeks a possible exchange of singularities. Therefore, it is also important to recognize a political strategy in the way she organizes her dance, a strategy that is inherent in the dance itself—not just in the structure of her organization and its relation to the community and its location.

In *Aquilo de que somos feitos* (That which we are made), for example, words lose their social identity and ordinary sense, in order to assume another meaning related to what is corporeal in speech, resisting and confounding the very norms by which speech itself is regulated. This was her first work inspired by Clark, who explored in greater depth the perception of the body and its relationship with objects in works like *Objetos Relacionais* (Relational Objects, created from 1976 to 1981); or the body within a group, as in *Baba Antropofágica* (Antropophagic Drool, 1973). *Baba Antropofágica* was part of Clark's body of work entitled *Arquitetura Orgânica ou Efêmera* (Organic or Ephemeral Architecture, beginning in 1969). Each participant placed in her or his mouth a spool of colored thread; the end of the unwound thread was in the mouth of another participant who was stretched out on the floor. This event was inspired by Clark's dream of an unknown material endlessly flowing from her mouth, material that was actually her own inner substance. *Objetos Relacionais* attempted to relate therapeutic practice and artistic experience. These were created in the last phase of Clark's work, in which she developed a vocabulary of relational objects for emotional healing. She continued to approach art experimentally but made no attempt to establish boundaries between therapeutic practice and artistic experience, and at this point she was no longer interested in preserving her status as an artist. She started using the relational objects on the bodies of audience members/patients by stimulating connections among the senses in order to awaken the body's memories.

Rodrigues did not intend to reproduce these experiences but to explore in her own way the breaking down of barriers between life and art, artists and audience. To demonstrate this, *Aquilo de que somos feitos* was divided into two parts. The first part explores nudity and different configurations of the body. The audience is asked to move around the performance space to see from different angles the nine dancers as they construct living sculptures. They expose their bodies in a radical way, moving very close to the audience, while experiencing a metamorphosis. Two or more dancers will connect their bodies, embracing and arranging their bodies to create new physical forms. A dancer may appear with two heads or without limbs in grotesque and unrecognizable forms. In the second part, Micheline Torres quotes popular phrases from commercials such as "the Marlboro World" or political slogans like Che Guevara's "Hay que endurecer sin perder la ternura jamas" (Let's get tough without ever losing tenderness). The repeated phrases are gradually transformed by the moving bodies of the dancers as they mingle with the audience; the well-known meanings of the words are changed until they are like a foreign substance, a kind of poison in the dancing body. During the 80-minute performance, there is a tension between what we already know—common knowledge and popular imagery—and the way this ordinary information is expressed in a very crude way by the dancing bodies, which allows the movements to offer different meanings for the words. The movements also re-

organize traditional dance steps. For example, Torres's body, very well trained in ballet, becomes completely transformed during the performance through different tonus and axes of equilibrium.

Other authors have explored the idea of corporeal projects. Michel Foucault, for example, is one of the most important thinkers who has reminded us of how the body is constitutively unstable, always foreign to itself—an open process of continuous self-estrangement where the most fundamental physiological and sensorial functions endure ongoing oscillations, adjustments, breaks, dysfunctions, and optimizations, as well as the construction of resistances.

By reinventing body knowledge through dancing, Rodrigues is creating sensorial realms and alternative modes for a life without false utopias and illusory hopes. This is her corporeal project, which really seems to be more effective than many forms of verbal discourse. This can be clearly perceived in “Pororoca”, her latest piece. “Pororoca” is not another choreography “created in the shantytown”. It is a precarious representation of the shantytown's *form-of-life* itself. Something changed in Rodrigues' way of thinking and perceiving the world. After this experience, I'm wondering if we could consider her a witness of Favela da Maré.

Agamben explains that in Latin there are two words for witness. The first one, *testis*, from which our word “testimony” derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*terstis*). The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it. When Agamben thinks again about Primo Levi. Of course he doesn't consider Levi as a third part. He was a survivor. He was there and the only thing that interests him is what makes judgment impossible: the gray zone in which victims become executioners and executioners become victims. He wrote in his first book: “No group was more human than any other. Victim and executioner are equally ignoble; the lesson of the camp is brotherhood in abjection.”

Therefore, the gray zone is the zone in which the long chain of conjunction between victim and executioner is lost. The oppressed becomes the oppressor and the executioner the victim. It is an incessant alchemy in which good and evil and, along with them, the traditional ethics reach their point of fusion. Of course, the idea of a body in crisis is not necessarily connected to social misery. As we saw before, there are several kinds of crisis and different interpretations of butoh outside Japan. However, artists like Lia Rodrigues can teach us in a very particular way that the state of emergency or the state of exception in which they live is not the exception after all, but the rule. This is probably the “new” tradition of the oppressed. In this context we can consider art like a cognitive technology of transformation. This is precisely the same idea of butoh, which means to see the world through perception.

Perception is not something that happens to us or in us. It is something we do. Perceptual consciousness depends on capacities for action and thought. Therefore, it is a kind of thoughtful activity—not necessarily a process in the brain—but a kind of skillful activity of the body as a whole. As Hijikata proposed since the very beginning, we truly enact our perceptual experience.

For the last 50 years, the butoh experience has been teaching us about all this. That's why I believe,

if we think about butoh outside the international market of butoh gurus, it can be an exercise of practical bodily knowledge beyond East and West dichotomies in order to connect artists who are interested in the body in crisis all over the world.

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