

**Drawing us in: The Australian Experience of Butoh and Body Weather**

J Robertson

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## **Abstract**

Butoh or butoh–inspired dance has become increasingly popular in Australia over the last 20 years. In my thesis I aspire to understand the attraction of butoh within an Australian context. I am interested in investigating the conversion moment. I want to understand how dancers and non-dancers came to engage with and pursue the foreign form in this country, which, before the 1980s, had no relevance or obvious place in the Australian dance scene. While the thesis touches on the obvious conceptions of butoh’s attraction (exoticism, orientalism and primitivism), it also offers a way of looking at butoh in Australia as a field of practice. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s framework the thesis is able to objectively analyse the dancers’ personal experiences, drawing together the key influences of the dancers’ conversion, while simultaneously revealing the struggles, contradictions and shifts within the field. In this sense, I will explore the development of the dance form in Australia, but also valorise the research potential of the embodied experience and place that experience in dialogue with other social, cultural and historical motivations. Furthermore, the thesis records the experiences and impact of the early Australian butoh dancers, which have important historical relevance, especially as the form has established a firm foothold in the Australian performance scene in more recent years, influencing many choreographers and dancers to this day.

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## Drawing us in: The Australian experience of butoh and Body Weather

### Introduction

*“Butoh was like the key that I was looking for to even consider having a professional practice.” (Martin del Amo)*

A considerable collection of dance and theatre practitioners, like Martin del Amo quoted above, have been drawn to Butoh, a dance form established in Japan during the late 1950s. Their attraction has led them to pursue ways of training and moving that were originally developed in Japan and other Asian countries. For some this pursuit has been a lifelong passion, a lifestyle that has consumed them and changed the way they think about practising dance, theatre, and how they understand the world. My thesis aims to investigate what I have identified here as their conversion process; to ask why and how this early attraction and subsequent practice led to their pursuit of a life and a career as a butoh-based, or butoh-influenced dance or theatre practitioner. My intention is to try and understand these performers’ attraction towards what is essentially foreign practice to them, a practice which, before the 1980s, had no obvious place in the Australian dance and theatre landscape.

Although some renowned butoh-influenced, Japanese artists such as Akaji Maro and Min Tanaka suggest that butoh defies definition, the form has been extensively studied over the last two decades. This early research and writing predominantly explores the birth of the form, focusing intently on the lives and performative repertoires of butoh’s founders: Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata. Other authors focus on encapsulating what they see as the qualities of butoh, its relation to Japan’s artistic landscape, and the historical, cultural and social influences that maintained it.<sup>1</sup> More recent research has taken a more phenomenological approach, focusing on the universality of butoh and the different bodily states that the butoh form allows.<sup>2</sup> In comparison my thesis focuses on the influence of butoh and an emergent practice called Body Weather on Australian performance culture and the lives and work of Australian-based practitioners.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I refer to the discourses of primitivism, exoticism and Orientalism and use them to explore, explain and critique

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this literature see: Fraleigh (1999, 2006, 2010, 2013), Blakely Klein (1988), Viala and Masson Sekine (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Sondra Fraleigh is perhaps the leading author who explores notions of universality and butoh and this is most prominent in her book *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> The practice of Body Weather is the creation of Japanese artist Min Tanaka. It emerged from his interest in butoh. Due to the fact that Body Weather has had such a close relationship to butoh I have chosen to include it in this thesis. Throughout I will refer to Australian artists’ experiences of butoh or the influences of Body Weather. But the general term ‘butoh’ will be used throughout. A more detailed explanation of these two forms, their divergence and relationship is provided in Chapter One.

Australia's experience with butoh. I also refer to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories, which will be explained further at the end of this chapter.

Chapter One considers various ways in which butoh has been understood both in Japan and internationally. I explore its beginnings, its characteristics, investigating both its stylistic elements and its social, cultural and political roots.

In Chapter Two I deal with what might be called the 'elephant in the room,' the appeal of Japanese butoh for non-Japanese practitioners and how such an attraction could be read as exoticisation of the form. Here I investigate the way butoh has been conceptualised in the West as a compelling and elusive 'other.' I unpack these conversions by referring to the critical terms of exoticism, primitivism and Edward Said's useful ideas around Orientalism. Using personal narratives from my interviews with Australian-based butoh and butoh inspired dancers, I attempt to come to terms with the way that the West regards Asian butoh-based forms, and subsequently European-ised (or Australian-ised) forms of the same practices. This chapter also discusses some misconceptions about Japanese butoh; attitudes that tend to fetishise and idealise the style and ignore the particulars of its original location.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I explore Australian ways of practising and understanding butoh and Body Weather, looking at how, and speculating on why, the form immigrated here in the 1980s and early 1990s and the manner in which it was received by the theatre going public, critics and practitioners. I follow the impact of Japanese butoh and Body Weather artists and their tours to Australia, discussing the fertile, local theatrical context into which butoh and Body Weather arrived. I then explore how this led to the growth and development of the form in Australia. I analyse Australia's socio-political climate of the 1980s and 1990s with a specific focus on the nature of the dance and theatre scene during that time. I explain the impact of governmental decisions, what has been called, 'soft diplomacy' in relation to the arts, and the way that the ever-strengthening economic and social relationship between Japan and Australia during the 1990s had an impact on the popularity of butoh in Australia. I also discuss the 'boom' in Japanese performance touring during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which generated practical and critical interest (both negative and positive) in Australia at that time. I look in particular at the reactions of mainstream reviewers, which helps illuminate the political, social and aesthetic understanding of Australians towards both Asia and its performance styles such as butoh, and how this was beginning to influence local practitioners.

In a latter section of Chapter Three, I deal with the existing literature on butoh in Australia. Although this literature is fairly scant, what does exist reveals particular attitudes and

approaches towards understanding the place of butoh in this country, often questioning the legitimacy of appropriation and a the lack of authenticity of local butoh practices and practitioners. Here I deal with the theories of James Young and Homi Bhabha regarding hybridity and touch on Bhabha's notion of a 'third space,' assessing the applicability of these ideas with regards to Australians who practice butoh. I also utilise a Bourdieuan-inflected methodology to examine butoh as a local 'field of practice.' This will enable an analysis of the circumstances that dancers found themselves in and the influence of butoh on their lives and performance practices, highlighting the source of some of the struggles and tensions that exist within the field.

The fourth and final chapter deals directly with what I have called the 'conversion' moments. Here the utility of my methodology also comes to the fore. In conversation with the artists I interviewed, they were asked to consider not only their social but also their embodied experiences of butoh. In this chapter I place their responses in dialogue with the other possible social, cultural and historical motivations for their 'conversion' that have been already established in previous chapters. Although the words of the artists appear throughout this thesis, they emerge in Chapter Four in more intimate detail, and the reader will encounter these artists more closely as they explore and try to explain why and how they were drawn to butoh. In this sense my thesis is not simply a project of historical recovery, but a work that attempts to unravel the mystique and allure that butoh holds for these dancers and, to some extent, their audiences in Australia. I frame these investigations through Bourdieuan analysis which, concedes to, but also looks beyond, established ideas that circulate about the appropriation of practices by those located outside the history and culture of that practice. With the help of this theory, I attempt to establish links between personal and embodied inspiration and aspiration, as well as dealing with the socio-political/historical implications for the dancers who made this choice: to 'convert' to butoh and/or Body Weather through practice and performance.

### **Methodological and Critical Approaches**

Although the critical terms primitivism, exoticism and Orientalism will be important discourses in the analysis of the historical data I have accumulated, a key methodological approach has been the conducting and analysis of the eight interviews with butoh-influenced dancers residing in Australia and Australians residing in Japan. These interviews have been supplemented with other material where possible. The criteria for the selection of the artists I interviewed between 4<sup>th</sup> July 2012 and 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013 was based on a simple premise. I spoke to artists who had been exposed to Japanese butoh in Australia and Japan through the 1980s and 1990s. These interviews provide a window into the artists' personal feelings and

assessments of their engagement with butoh and, in some instances, their corporeal experiences. Through explicit descriptions of their own actions and reactions during their first encounters with butoh, I have been able to effectively add the experiential to the socio-political, allowing my research to get closer to what anthropologists, philosophers and sociologists, with a theoretical sympathy toward the principles of phenomenology, like to call a “matrix of sensibility” (Geertz 1983), “a way-of-being in the world” (Dreyfus 1996 after Heidegger), a “habitus” (Bourdieu 1991), or a “lifeworld” (Jackson 1996). Michael Jackson explains the parameters of the latter as:

[t]hat domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies, which theoretical knowledge addresses but does not determine, from which conceptual understanding arises but on which it does not primarily depend. (1990, 7)

In keeping with this way of thinking, I wanted to take notice of personal experience. The ‘conversion’ of dancers to butoh in Australia lies not only in the sociocultural pathologies of the Western psyche, a reading that becomes dominant when we concentrate on assessing this process through notions of Orientalism, primitivism, exoticism and related ideas of appropriation, but also in relationships, as they are and were lived.<sup>4</sup> I have been inspired by Jackson’s aspiration to, “do justice to the lived complexity of experience by avoiding those selective redescrptions, reductions and generalisations, which claim to capture the essence of the lived in underlying rules or overarching schemata yet, in effect, downplay and deaden it” (1996, 8). With this in mind, my research oscillates between analysis, reflection and articulation of the recalled, lived experience of the dancers and the framing of those expressions of experience within the socio-historical particulars of time and place. What has been fascinating to observe is the way in which at times these dancers seem to make their world of butoh in Australia, and at other times it seems that they are made by the butoh world, here and elsewhere.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Jackson is highlighting the applicability of ethnographic research to the revelation of a lifeworld, as I explain later in this introductory chapter, it could be argued that reflection on one’s experience is as close as any of us can get to a reconstruction of past motivations, impressions and intentions.



## Why Bourdieu?

As this last statement indicates, and as stated earlier, I have selected Pierre Bourdieu's sociological tool kit as a way to analyse what these dancers told me about their experiences of 'converting' to butoh. Bourdieu provides a set of conceptual tools which places an analytic emphasis on both knowing and doing, allowing me to draw together an analysis of the intellectual, corporeal and cultural world of these dancers in relation to the world of butoh. Bourdieu was influenced by leading figures in the development of historiography and sociology such as Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx, but also by the central figures of the post-Cartesian enlightenment, philosophers and phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau Ponty. As his student and eventual collaborator Loïc Wacquant has stated: "Bourdieu believed that our understanding of ourselves and the world did not exist in the mind, as thought separated from bodily experience" (1992, 5). Positioned in a French intellectual world dominated by structuralism, Bourdieu reacted against this intellectualising trend. He was dissatisfied with structuralist anthropology, which imposed relational systems of meaning on data. He saw this practice as being removed from the dimensions of everyday life and as such preventing useful historical/social/political analysis.<sup>5</sup> He advocated for empirical research and was interested in the lived experience of his informants rather than positing disembodied cultural rules for governing behaviour by and for societies and individuals. But, interestingly, Michael Jackson accuses Bourdieu of following in the structuralist tradition, emphasising "mundane strategizing practical taxonomies" and relying too much on the generative forces outside the immediate lived reality of a person's or a people's 'lifeworld' (1996, 20). Yet in spite of this Richard Jenkins contends that Bourdieu's method was relational and "against models of human behaviour as intrinsically rational and calculative" (1992, 72). In fact, at the core of Bourdieu's ontology is the interplay between subjectivity (the social being experiencing and living from the inside out, shaping reality through decisions and action) and objectivity (the idea that people's actions and attitudes are determined by structures that are reproduced in the social world) (Jenkins 1992, 25). Bourdieu is known for his development of methodological devices that attempt to subsume dichotomies such as the internal and the external, the conscious and the unconscious, the bodily and the discursive (Swartz 1997, 55). Hence, his 'thinking tools,' a term used by Jenkins to refer to Bourdieu's concepts such as field, habitus, and capital, are useful here as they can elicit a more comprehensive and holistic examination of the experience of butoh dancers working and living in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s. However, I also wanted to stay as close as possible to Jackson's method, as I interviewed

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this approach see: Webb, Schirato, Danaher (2002), Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992).

artists who were reflecting on their past. I tried to give precedence to the ‘day-to-day’ lived experience of these people’s lives, which as Kate Rossmanith (2013) suggests, may have little to do with the intellectual schemes and structures both practitioners and researchers impose on their articulation and assessment of their own and other people’s activities.

To unpack the above further, it is important to acknowledge that Jackson’s views are also useful in thinking through the different types of knowledge, and the articulation of knowledge, offered by the butoh practitioners I interviewed. As Jackson states: “the knowledge whereby one lives is not necessarily identical with the knowledge whereby one explains life” (1996, 2). Using this Jacksonian rationale, Rossmanith (2009), in her investigation of the way actors talk about what they do, effectively makes the distinction between ‘propositional knowledge’ and embodied knowledge. She explains that practitioners might speak about their work and their world (propositional knowledge) in one way but they also have an embodied knowledge, a form of knowledge “articulated physically rather than verbally” that is also very important when trying to understand their actions. For butoh dancers, this embodied knowledge may be created in their dance class for instance, through the routine of wiping down floors before a workshop begins, a practice favoured by Australian-based Body Weather practitioner Tess de Quincey, or their attempt to go deeper into tense and grounded movements during an improvisation. Jackson may describe this kind of knowledge as being “urgently of and for the world rather than something about the world” (Jackson 1996 in Rossmanith, 37). For highly trained dancers this knowledge is so embedded in the body that it may be difficult to explain verbally to someone like me. This has been the challenge of my historically inflected project. I had to attempt to ask questions of these dancers that prompted new explorations of past experiences in order to try and overcome the gaps of time, the faultiness of memory, the patterns of stories people tell over time that create repetitive closure to the articulation of former experiences. This was not always possible and the responses were not always fruitful, but what did emerge from the process of asking what these practitioners thought they were doing – asking them to reflect on what it was that encouraged their conversion (if indeed that was what it was) – produced some interesting findings. Some confirm the applicability of analyses that described experiences, which could be easily critiqued using terms such as primitivism, appropriation and Orientalism. Others challenged the applicability of these discourses to the personal experience of being an Australian-based, butoh-influenced artist.

## **Chapter One: Butoh Origins and Style**

### **1.1 Talking about what you cannot talk about**

After spending some time in Japan throughout her early twenties, Australian dancer Lynne Bradley, decided to undertake an honours project on butoh. She began by interviewing a collection of the butoh masters in Japan. With the assistance of a fluent Japanese-speaking friend, she interviewed Akaji Maro, dancer and director of the renowned Japanese butoh company Dairakudakan. Bradley arrived at Maro's studio at the arranged time, 10am, to find Maro chain smoking and drinking whisky. He asked, via her translator/friend, why she was there. Bradley replied that she was doing an Honours thesis on butoh. "You will fail", he replied curtly, and burst into laughter. A timid, 23 year old at the time, Bradley's instinct was to run from the room, but she mustered the courage to ask: "Why do you think so?" "You can't talk about butoh" Maro replied, "you can't write about butoh; you just have to do butoh and be butoh"; but then he proceeded to talk about butoh for two hours.

As Bradley's story illustrates, getting dancers to talk about their dancing, or even other people's dancing, can be a challenge. The common rhetoric, so succinctly illustrated for Bradley by Maro, is that one can't talk about dancing, one has to do it to understand. I have been a butoh trained dancer since my days as a student in Queensland in the early 2000s, and am very aware of this common way of articulating what it is to understand dance and, to a similar extent, all forms of theatre or performance making and doing. But then, many dancers can and do talk articulately (and endlessly) about what they do – what their dancing is, what the genre of dancing they do means to them – when you take the time to ask and listen. But, I concede that words are, as dance critic Eleanor Brickel claimed: "inexact descriptions of real experiences" (cited in Card 2011, 129). Perhaps that is why dancers like Maro, and many of those I interviewed, talked so much, had to use so many words, when trying to describe what their dance was and is, or what it means/meant to them, and why they were attracted to this kind of practice.

Even butoh itself, like many dance forms, is full of contradictions. What it is, what defines the form, leads to paradoxical, heavily metamorphical texts, with the 'meaning' of butoh remaining elusive. Well-rounded, agreed upon definitions prove difficult to settle on, but dancers and academics, particularly throughout the 1980s, attempted to encapsulate the vital principles of the form. These include: Susan Blakley Klein (1988), Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine (1988), Vicki Sanders (1988), Tamah Nakamura and Sondra Fraleigh (2006), to name but a few. Blakely Klein did extensive research in Japan during the 1980s in order to draw together, what she saw as the key elements of the butoh aesthetic and butoh techniques

that are generally shared by Japanese dancers and choreographers. She arrived at the following characteristics:

- a) the rejection of technique and use of the grotesque;
- b) an anti-individualist stance;
- c) an acceptance and use of violence;
- d) the appropriation of marginality (Hijikata drew inspiration from the blind, the poor, the insane and the deformed);
- e) metamorphosis exercise (the practice of transforming the body or spirit into another creature or person);
- f) a metempsychotic model of time (a term established by theatre critic Kiyokazu Yamamoto to represent a non-linear cyclical notion of time);
- g) the use of white make-up;
- h) what the Japanese call *beshimi kata* (distorted bodily and facial expressions);
- i) *ganimata* (walking bowlegged with an accentuated low crouch).

Although Blakely Klein presents this well-informed and comprehensive list (summarised and paraphrased above), adherence to these principles is flexible – and they are interpreted and combined in novel ways by practitioners. For some butoh dancers it is not about the way the form manifests; they use the practice as a stimulant for moving forward in their research. Butoh technique(s) are a thing to be called on rather than a collection of aesthetic principles to be adhered to. These practitioners focus on the sensibilities the form conjures, the way it feels. For others the white make up and contorted facial expressions and moves are an important aspect of what they create. In addition to this butoh is, like most things, constantly changing with time. The dancers that I interviewed for this thesis all have very individual experiences of butoh, and the practice was filtered through their own backgrounds and their experiences with different teachers and mentors. Some do not even wish to call themselves butoh dancers, others do – a situation that will be explored further in Chapter Three.

But the purpose of this thesis is neither to assess the dancers' adherences to certain established characteristics of a style, nor is it to arrive at a definitive definition of the form. My research interest lies in why these Australian dancers engaged with butoh and butoh-inspired dance and training: how they did what they did to become who they are, how they

think about what they do, and how they maintain an ongoing association with, or a rejection and reinterpretation of this distinctive Japanese practice.

## 1.2 Going back to the beginnings

As stated in my introduction, firstly it is necessary to provide a more in depth representation of butoh by considering the turbulent climate from which it emerged. As many histories of the form have suggested, butoh was a reaction to the Japanese experience of World War II.<sup>6</sup> When the Americans dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the devastation had a deep and lasting effect on the Japanese people. Post World War II Japan was confronted with the devastation of this act and, according to Shannon C. Moore, Japan was in a state of ideological crisis in the post WWII period with the population developing an irrevocably altered psyche (2006, 45). Although many postwar Japanese citizens viewed Western ways as a potential lever that would lift their country out of economic despair, others, particularly Japanese artists, resisted the country's preoccupation with appeasement and replication of Western ways. An example of the former in theatre was *shingeki* (new theatre) that was influenced by modern Western theatre and left wing political ideology; it pushed the realistic styles of Ibsen and Stanislavsky.<sup>7</sup> The latter is represented by the birth of *sho-gekijo* (small theatre), which developed in the 1960s. Recognised as underground theatre, it completely shifted the nature of performance in Japan. By the 1960s young people had become disillusioned with the socialist inspired style of *shingeki*, which had become too political and lacked relevance to contemporary concerns of Japanese people. *Sho-gekijo* was funded by young people and was often performed in unconventional, derelict and open air spaces. Practitioners of this form were determined to create new experimental theatre that also shifted away from conventional Japanese frameworks<sup>8</sup>.

A significant figure in the *sho-gekijo* movement was one of butoh's founders, Tatsumi Hijikata. After WWII Hijikata was unhappy with the way Japanese dance was emulating Western dance forms, such as classical ballet as he wanted to shake off Westernisation and confront what he identified as the darkness of the 'real' Japan. In order to do this he appropriated into his work the popular origins of the by then classical Japanese theatre forms such as kabuki and noh. Noh was originally for the struggling lower classes of society but became an elitist art form in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Similarly, before its idealisation in the post Meiji Restoration of 1868, Kabuki represented the performance practices of marginal groups

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<sup>6</sup> See: Blakely Klein (1988), Viala and Masson- Sekine (1988), Sanders (1988), Munroe (1994), Nakamura and Fraleigh (2006), Moore (2006).

<sup>7</sup> For more information on *shingeki* and *sho-gekijo* see Akihiko (1994) and Blakely Klein (1988, 10-12).

<sup>8</sup> For information on how *sho-gekijo* has been reinvigorated in more current contemporary Japanese theatre see Eckersall (2000, 313- 328).

and outcasts within Japanese society (Blakely Klein 1988, 35). The early butoh of Hijikata aspired to capture and emulate the vagabond and bawdy nature of pre-modern, post Meiji Restoration kabuki actors, performers and characters that contemporary kabuki had revamped and made too genteel in order to cater for modernising Westernised, Japanese apologists as well as Western sensibilities and audiences.<sup>9</sup>

Kabuki actors, prior to the modernisation and elitist developments in the form, were known as *kawara mono*, which translates as riverside beggars. They represented the repressed and taboo aspects of society (Blakely Klein 1988, 36-37). In fact, these kabuki actors were considered so lowly that they were exempt from the rigid four level class structure of pre-Meiji Japan, the Edo period that divided society into samurai, farmer, artisan, and merchant classes.

The famous *ukiyo-e* wood block prints tried to capture the energy of these plays, often depicting the climactic moments in the performances (Blood 2001, 123). Other subject matter captured by the *ukiyo-e* prints included prostitutes, courtesans, landscapes and sumo wrestlers. Like the original kabuki, *ukiyo-e* was not considered a fine art of its time, because the woodblock prints were easily reproducible by a commercial process that could be disseminated at a low cost and in large quantities.<sup>10</sup> Thus *ukiyo-e* art, sometimes known as art of the oppressed, was readily accessible to the illiterate and lower echelons of society, who quickly became its major consumers, creators and connoisseurs (Marks 2010, 8). Hijikata was fascinated by the lewd aspects of common life in the Edo era, represented in these prints, and wished to emulate the hurly burly, carnivalesque nature of the *ukiyo-e* pictures in his performances. Following *ukiyo-e*, Hijikata's butoh included stylized emotions that are exaggerated; he also incorporated parody, travesty, cross dressing and burlesque (Fraleigh 1999, 11).

Hijikata's obsession with resisting Westernisation and capturing his real Japan extended to his perception of the body. He thought that the Japanese body was not suited to western styles of dance that promoted slim, light, tall, elongated and elevated bodies.

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<sup>9</sup> As other researchers have illustrated, the Meiji government's fervour for the West led to modernisation and a loss of the original spirit of the Edo plays. Kabuki actors were granted a high ranking social position and the art form was made more palatable to the Japanese upper classes. As Ortolani suggests: "Kabuki lost many of its characteristics of immediacy and responsiveness to the daily life of the big cities, but acquired a new respectability officially sanctioned by the visits of important dignitaries, including the Emperor and the imperial family in 1887, and forging chiefs of state" (1995, 184-186). For more on the changing style of Kabuki in the Meiji period see: Blakeley Klein (1988 34-37 and 13-16), Gunji (1985, 33-34), Scott (1955, 40-41) as well as Ortolani (1995).

<sup>10</sup> For more on the commercial process of Ukiyo-e see Newland and Reigle (2004).

He wanted to valorise the Japanese peasant/worker's body, a body created through labour. "It's good to be able to pick up material from among the boys wiping up at metal-plating workshops or squatting in garages" stated Hijikata. "I look at their hands. A movement of coarse particles spills over. Their backbones incline slightly forward" (Hijikata, 2000, 40). He also referred to the way that babies were bound up in baskets while their parents were working out in the fields. "They labour mysteriously at a labour that is beyond overwork. They labour bent over and that's why they can't look back. But the children [lying in the baskets] bawl endlessly" (Hijikata 2000, 77). The squatting of the workers and folded, unformed legs of the babies clearly inspired Hijikata's famous bowed legged stance and walk (Blakely Klein, 1988, 53).

The premise of the butoh body was akin to the Eastern idea of the body as *spirit*. Unlike traditional Western dance that focuses on modelling the biology of the body into statures and postures that communicate a set of meanings, the butoh body attempts to deflect materiality; it aspires towards a sense of neutrality or what is often identified as emptiness<sup>11</sup>. Hijikata was not only strongly against the American influence on Japanese culture and society, but also the pervading materialist orientation and modernisation occurring in Japan after WWII. He despised what he saw as the dehumanising, capitalist production introduced to Japan. His protest against this kind of economic model of production is evident in his writing, which was published for *The Drama Review* in 2000. His alternate Japanese butoh body, as a counter to the mechanised body, was articulated in *To Prison*: "I am a body shop; my profession is the business of human rehabilitation, which goes by the name of dancer" (Hijikata 2000, 44). Hijikata wanted the butoh body to be free of modernity's influence, to become an empty vessel, to somehow no longer be bound by restrictions of its social location.

More recent research rejects the notion that Hijikata's work was so strongly imbued with a sense of something fundamentally Japanese. As Kurihara Nanako tells us, butoh has been "erroneously essentialized and stereotyped" (2000, 17). She suggests that it is all too easy for western critics to group Hijikata in with Zen Buddhism and other Japanese or 'Eastern' elements. Americans in particular, misread butoh as a direct outcome of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The haunting, white painted body of the dancer is often interpreted as representing the burnt, melting flesh and decomposed corpses that were present in the streets of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the aftermath of the nuclear devastation (Orlando 2001 312). However, as Nanako states:

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<sup>11</sup> Gretal Taylor (2010) argues that it is not possible to attain an empty body. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Yes, the war affected Hijikata greatly, as it influenced whole generations of Japanese artists and writers. And of course butoh contains a lot of “Japanese” elements. However, the origin of Hijikata’s butoh is far more complex (200, 17).

In order to make sense of some of butoh’s contradictory and disparate elements, Bruce Baird (2012) focuses on Hijikata within a wider artistic and socio-political context. Steering away from oversimplified notions of butoh, he sees the form as a response to the changing world and overload of information prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s in Japan.

It is possible to see him [Hijikata] and other butoh artists as responding to that world of increasing but incomplete information and information of varying strengths by developing ways to be attentive to all sides of an interaction and also as developing ways to cope with either an overload or lack of information (Baird 2012, 3).

In this sense he argues that the movement techniques developed by Hijikata and others were not just a response to the conditions of post war Japan but a response to a new age of communication and globalization: excessive access to information, a developed global commerce, the production of new technologies which demanded a new role configuration of the body and mind even in the 1960s (2012, 6). The impetus behind Hijikata’s exploration of this body/mind comes, for Baird, through the pressure of a technological and production driven society that forces people to transform and become more fluid in their daily interactions. Moreover, he purports that Hijikata was not alone in his desire to create work that experimented with the languages of the body/mind. In fact, key to the development of butoh was Hijikata’s involvement with important players of the postwar Japanese surrealism movement, in particular, writer Mishima who introduced him to a whole swathe of important Avant Gard thinkers and artists. With a backdrop of surrealism, neo-dada happenings and fluxis style movements, these artists explored ideas of socialisation through processes of randomness and the experience of shock (Baird 2015, 244). According to Baird, initially Hijikata, and other dancers of the time, called their work “dance experiments” or “terror dance” and then later it became what we known today as *ankoku buyō* (dark black dance) and then finally *ankoku butoh* (foreign dance of darkness) (2015, 245).



Alexandra Munroe (1994) characterises the art of Japan in the 1960s as Obsessional Art<sup>12</sup>, a style that represented a counterculture in Japan, a movement determined to flout the veneer of contemporary modernisms and create new and distinct art with an aesthetic tendency that championed the grotesque and abhorrent, displaying sex, death and madness in performance (Munroe 1994, 190). As Munroe suggests, for artists such as Hijikata, this obsession was both an artistic style and a psychological state. His disturbed past, growing up as he did in a poverty stricken post World War II Japan, contributed to that state, leading him to develop the confronting philosophic underpinnings of his technique (1994, 1992). Hijikata's performance *Revolt of the Flesh* is interpreted here by Fraleigh and Nakamura as a reflection of the pain of Hijikata's past and his rejection of Western culture and modernity:

*Revolt of the Flesh* marks Hijikata's shamanistic descent to darkness and clearly establishes a new form of dance rooted in his memories of Tohoku, the rustic landscape of his childhood in a poor district of Japan. In *Revolt of the Flesh*, Hijikata casts spells as his body morphs through shocking juxtapositions, twisting trance like in a G-string beside a rabbit on a pole. He gyrates and provokes with a large strapped-on golden penis, dances in a dress, swings on a rope with a white cloth trailing and wrapping his hips, then surrenders himself, Christ-like, in crucifixion (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 8-9).<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 Types of butoh

Butoh cofounders, Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, met officially in 1952 through the choreographer Ando Mitsuko, who had danced with Ohno and exposed Hijikata to the German expressionist style of performance. Ohno and Hijikata worked together for several years and in 1959 Hijikata (Ohno was not directly involved in the production) created what was considered the first official showing of *ankoku butoh*, with a performance entitled *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colours). According to Fraleigh and Nakamura some accounts suggest that the performance featured homosexual acts and the sacrifice of a chicken and this led Hijikata to be banned from the Japanese Dance Association for inappropriate content; but in reality he voluntarily resigned along with Ohno (Fraleigh & Nakamura 2006, 8).

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'Obsessional Art' was established by Japanese visual artist Yayoi Kusama, "to define her work as the unique, visionary expression of personal neurosis" (Munroe 1994, 189). However, Kusama was the only artist that was treated and diagnosed with a mental illness. For other artists obsession was an artistic style and psychological state.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Baird challenges Western literature on Hijikata's performances, suggesting that descriptions are overly sensationalised. He tries to provide a more nuanced account of Hijikata's shows, suggesting that we are tricked into thinking that Hijikata's work was very unique and unusual for its time, when in fact he was not alone in his attempts to illustrate and provoke controversy. He and Ohno were products of their times (2012, 27).

Hijikata and Ohno's relationship was tenuous. They were said to have many disagreements about the role of improvisation in dance, which led to extended periods of separation. Ohno believed that dance was ephemeral and infinite; as a consequence his style focused strongly on improvisation<sup>14</sup>. His work had no fixed repertoire but involved a fluid exploration of concepts in performance: concepts as broad as life, death and birth. Hijikata's work was much darker and he was insistent on creating highly structured and disciplined performances, eventually creating *butoh fu*, a number of set images that dancers could use to create work<sup>15</sup>.

Each of these progenitors have produced a set of dedicated followers. When defining their dance, protégés of these founders suggest that their own style is more closely aligned to one or the other. However, in more recent times Japanese *butoh* dancers are more fluid with their interpretations of the form and its historical standardisation. Many have a tendency to steer clear of categorisation and allegiance, forming their own unique versions of the style.

Notable descendants of Hijikata and Ohno include: Akaji Maro; Ushio Amagatsu; Isamu Osuka; Anzu Furukawa; Ko Murobushi; Carlotta Ikeda; Natsu Nakajima; Bishop Yamada; Yoko Ashikawa; Yoshito Ohno; Akira Kasai; and Mitsutaka Ishii.

Here it is also important to mention Min Tanaka and his formation of Body Weather and the company Mai Juku. Inspired by his experiences with *butoh* and other physical practices such as kinesiology, *noh* theatre, Chinese acrobatics and sport, Tanaka constructed a training methodology that consists of three parts: Mind Body (called MB) - a dynamic aerobic workout; Manipulations - an exploration of flexibility, alignment and the movement of the breath in the body, Ground Work - alertness development through experiments with different speeds in the body (Scheer 1998, 139). Tanaka trained with Hijikata from 1982-1986 and considered himself the "legitimate son of Hijikata" (in Marshall 2006, 44). While Tanaka's image work resembles that of Hijikatas and is influenced by his legacy, Tanaka does not wish to be called a *butoh* dancer. He states, "for me *butoh* is a kind of spirit – a very important spirit. So I don't need to call myself a *butoh* dancer" (in Marshall 2006, 60).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Baird questions the extent to which Ohno's performances were "improvised." According to Baird Ohno kept careful notations of his work for performances and used some of Hijikata's imagery to create and reproduce work (2012, 253). However, the way he talked publicly about "inner urges" led people to believe that his dance was entirely improvised.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the relationship and styles of Hijikata and Ohno see: Nakamura and Fraleigh (2006), Viala and Masson- Sekine (1988).

<sup>16</sup> As mentioned earlier, this thesis does not attempt to debate or make claims about the exclusivity of the title 'butoh'. In this sense, due to its close affiliation with *butoh*, Body Weather and the practices of Body Weather practitioners will be included. Having said that, I do recognise that these styles have different principles, practices and even philosophies and I do not wish the reader to see them as amalgamated. As a significant number of those I interviewed identify, or have trained in and use the principles of Body Weather, I will be exploring the 'conversion' process of those who encountered this form of practice as well as other practices which could be identified as *butoh*. Also, as may have already become apparent, I use lower case for *butoh* throughout this thesis, as an indicator of the general descriptive nature of my use of the term. However, I have capitalised Body Weather as it is an informally 'trademarked' descriptor for and by those who teach and practice it.

## Chapter Two: Taking an interest in the exotic

I think there is a lot of romance about it [butoh] being Japanese. People want Japan to be a certain way so they will make it that way. Everybody does that. And you can create that experience and you can create it even better in Australia than you could in Japan. (Melissa Lovric, 2013)

### 2.1 Butoh goes West

For some it may come as no surprise that the non-Japanese were attracted to butoh. It was very different to anything I had ever seen before - brought up in Brisbane I was first introduced to butoh through the physical theatre company Zen Zen Zo. This form of performance was way-out: sensual, nihilistic, and displayed a darkness that drew me in. But Australians have not been alone in our fascination with the form. Productions and interpretations of butoh have proliferated throughout the Western world since practitioners first ventured out of Japan in 1978. The performance groups, Sebi and Ariadne no Kai, received an overwhelmingly positive reception when they performed for the first time abroad, at the Nouveau Carre Theatre in Paris<sup>17</sup>. Other companies like Dairakudakan and individuals such as Yoko Ahsikawa, Kazuo Ohno and Min Tanaka soon followed suit, travelling throughout Europe and the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. Butoh began to grow remarkably throughout the early 1980s in Europe and the United States; so much so, that Japanese dance critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi remarked in 1990 that, since the 1980s, it is “no exaggeration to say that not a year has passed without the participation of some Japanese butoh performer in a major international festival” (1990, 2). But according to Japanese critic and vice president of the Dance Research Society, Miyabi Ichikawa, Western audiences had a tendency to appraise the performances they saw as *exotica*:

The shaved heads and white body makeup, or contorted bodies and faces were something not seen before in the west, so audiences considered butoh something original. Originality as such is the most important point in judging modern arts, but what originality means is being distinctly different from other things. In this sense, the butoh audiences in Europe and the United States were correct in praising these groups for their originality, but the originality they saw was merely difference by virtue of exoticism (Ichikawa n.d, 210).

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<sup>17</sup> For further information on the early butoh performances in Europe see Kuniyoshi (1990, 1) and Gomi (2013).

It was not until 1982 that Japanese *butoh* performances found their way to Australia. Following this early encounter we received a steady flow of Japanese *butoh* shows across the late 1980s and early 1990s, and it was during this time that local practitioners were drawn to the form and *butoh*-influenced companies began to emerge in Australia. Although this thesis only looks at a small, but notable collection of those who began to be interested in *butoh* during the 1980s and 1990s, the histories and experiences of these artists who make up the qualitative data of this thesis are a case in point: Lynne Bradley studied with Katsura Kan, Kazuo Ohno and Dairakudakan; Tess de Quincey with Min Tanaka; and Helen Smith with Dairakudakan as well as, Katsura Kan, Yoshito Ohno, Natsu Nakajima, Yukio Waguri and Seisaku. These locally situated dancers are considered key participants and generators of interest in *butoh* and *Body Weather* across Australia. Lynne Bradley and Tess de Quincey are perhaps two of the most influential artists, bringing *butoh* and *Body Weather* to Australia and inspiring the conversion, and building on earlier inspirations in others, some of whom were also interviewed for this thesis: Martin del Amo, Nikki Heywood, Frances Barbe, Helen Smith, Mark Hill, Melissa Lovric and Rebecca Murray.

As suggested by Ichikawa, this embracing of *butoh* could be seen as playing into the long tradition of exoticising the East in the West, but on the flip side of this debate, other commentators, whose work will be briefly explored in this chapter, offer a more modernist perspective that rationalises and celebrates borrowing as a way to revitalise other forms of performance practice. Similarly, postmodernists commend hybridisation and bricolage in the name of innovation. This latter approach advocates a fluid morphing of styles and forms between and across cultures without bothering with the politics of appropriation. In analysing how and why Australian artists engage with, or are inspired by *butoh*, it is important to address the rationales and critiques of all these approaches. This chapter will do so through the lens of various Orientalist and post-colonial discourses. But also, by briefly deconstructing the influences of *butoh* in order to illuminate its own origins and intentions among its first generation of Japanese makers, we will see that imbedded within the development of the form itself is an adaptability that, it could be argued, made its move into an international context inevitable. As other chapters of this thesis will suggest, artists who have been inspired to take up *butoh*, either as a singular performance form or as inspiration from which they develop their own choreographic system, may not necessarily understand their relationship to the form in terms of an attraction to an exotic or an Orientalising appropriation; but it is necessary to address these inferences and examine the potential of this critique within an Australian context.

## 2.2 Seeking wholeness: Butoh, Orientalism and the attraction of the primitive

Orientalism refers to a particular mode and period of political polemic, historiography, ethnography, creative writing and painting that conceived of the 'East' in relation to how it was viewed, understood and controlled by the West (Gandhi 1998, 76). Orientalism was the original invention of European 19<sup>th</sup> century politicians, writers and artists, and the key theorist who drew these ideas together was Edward Said. For Said, Orientalism was a discourse that constructed, or re-constructed, the East for the consumption and benefit of the West. As such, the texts that emerged under the influence of Orientalism offered, what Bruce Rao and Pratima Ziff call, a "flawed rendering" of, in particular the Middle East, as a mysterious, primitive and exotic 'other' (1997, 12). Said highlighted the way in which knowledge of the East was, and to his way of thinking continued to be, constructed to accommodate the interests of Western powers. As Said advised, we should think of this construction as a dichotomy: the 'Occident' and 'Orient' functioning to shape idealistic and essentialised views of not only the East but also the West (Rao and Ziff 1997, 12)<sup>18</sup>. His views have created an important series of speculative epistemological reflections on the workings of cultural discourse and colonialism. In the context of this study, his views help us to understand the ethnocentric potential of the Western adoption and adaptation of performance techniques from other cultures, making us alert to 'orientalising' practices that may lurk at the centre of appropriations by Western artists of Asian performance modes and practices. The Orient, or in our case it is more accurate to call it the 'Far East,' represents the exotic and its exoticism offers our over - civilised West a view of its past, its underbelly, its more 'real' self.

In the late 1980s Richard Philp, *Dance Magazine's* managing editor, displayed this kind of attitude towards butoh. In the quote below he displays a fascination with the apparently primal nature of the form:

The dancers reduce themselves to 'animal' basics through the use of nudity, shaved heads and stark white make-up. The content of the movement probed deep, troubled areas of our

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<sup>18</sup> Although a highly influential idea, Said's deconstruction was criticised by James Clifford as being overly systematic, abstract and limited (1988, 269). Clifford was particularly critical of the way Said focused almost exclusively on the West's understanding of the Arab Middle East. According to Clifford (1988) Said was inconsistent in the way that he defined the Orient. At times, he suggests that a text or individual denies an essential feature of the real or authentic Orient. At other times, he denies the existence of any "real Orient". Clifford (1988) suggests that Orientalism dichotomizes the human continuum into we-they contrasts, which suppress human reality. Said highlights the bleak view that all human expression is ultimately determined by cultural structures (Clifford 1998, 263). Gandhi has similar criticisms of Said's theories, believing that cultural stereotypes are more nuanced than Said suggests and that he fails to accommodate the possibility of difference within Oriental discourses (1998, 70). But the work of Said remains influential, a whole swath of post-colonial theory being built on his insights.

collective unconscious, and strove to expose man's most primitive instincts – survival at the cost of brutality, killing, destruction and death (cited in Saunders 1988, 150).

This is illustrative of one side of the complex relationship that Westerners have had with what they define as the exotic and the primitive. The non-representational, pre-linguistic phenomenon of dance is often highlighted, then framed as a way of accessing the primitive. Dance is often recognised as the most 'primitive' of the arts. This fascination with the power of dance in its association with the primitive can be seen in the practices and processes of key 20<sup>th</sup> century modern dance makers. As Roger Copeland states, "above all, early modern dance was a search for the 'source' of all natural movement" (1996, 11). Americans, Martha Graham and Isadora Duncan as well as Germany's Mary Wigman felt compelled to seek out the natural, the primal, the origins of motion and emotion through dance, and they desired to make links between nature and their own and others' corporeality. These modernist dancers were dissatisfied with the way the body had become subservient to the civilising processes of their societies, where maintenance of structure and order had led to, what they saw as, the regimentation of the body. They were in search of pure expression and wanted access to supposed pre-civilised movement. Wigman herself suggested that, when improvising with Rudolph von Laban and in preparing for her dance, it was easy to lose herself in fits of emotion (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 16).

As stated earlier, Hijikata and Ohno were inspired by and trained within the expectations and traditions of this modernist turn and had similar desires and expectations for their own work. They too attempted to strip the dancer of his or her cultural conditioning in order to seek out what they saw as authentic movement. All of the dancers I interviewed in some way or other were drawn to the free and primal nature of the butoh performance and training. Some expressed a fascination for Asian culture before they even found butoh. This fascination could easily be interpreted within an aspect of this 'orientalising' thesis: one which sees the West as a bankrupted culture and the East as the saviour from that bankruptcy. As Helen Smith explains:

I was seeking something, the exotic maybe; it might have been the exotic. Ever since I was a child I have always wanted to know what the world was like. I thought I'd go to China. But once I had landed in Japan, I knew that it was what I had been seeking. And at first I thought I would find what I was looking for through Buddhism because I am also very interested in Buddhism and I do practice it, but when I

came [to] contact with butoh, I realised ahhhh...this is the thing...this is my purpose in life.<sup>19</sup>

Lynne Bradley also talks about how she became fascinated by Asia when she was at university. At the time she was doing a lot of travelling through Asia and was captivated by the relationship between religion and art in the countries she visited. Tess de Quincey's first encounter with Asian forms was through Balinese mask dance. As soon as she encountered this style, she wanted to find out more. De Quincey's initial fascination began with an interest in and relationship to other Asian forms such as Indian tabla, Japanese noh and of course butoh and eventually Body Weather (Eckersall, 2012).

Attraction to the exotic is not an unusual phenomena. The West has always been fascinated by what is regarded as the Eastern 'other' and as Alison Broinowski (1992) records in *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Australian artists have always taken advantage of what Asia has to offer. Broinowski's book chronicles the history of Australia's conflicted artistic relationship with Asia, discussing the fear, fascination and seduction that Asia has held for Australians since the 1900s.

As Roger Cèlestin suggests, artists have been known to use the exotic as a means of escape, a way to leave 'Home' without actually leaving the home (2006, 7). The subject (in this case the dancer) does not disappear into the structure and discourse of 'the other' but accesses that 'other' at a distance, without destabilising their sense of where they belong. In such circumstances it is possible to embrace an 'ideal other' – one constructed without the messy imposition of the living breathing object of their study – created and viewed from within the static, controllable medium, such as a book perhaps. This allows for the construction of performances that resemble and replicate the style of the exotic, without regard for the context and meaning in their primary location.<sup>20</sup> This is a perfect example of Deborah Root's description of exoticism as "self-empowering[,] self-referential even, insofar as the objects of its gaze are not supposed to look back" (1996, 45).

In the 1990s, Alison Richards shows that Orientalism was still alive and well in Australia. Richards highlights the considerable ignorance and anxiety, which she thinks pervaded our

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<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise identified all of the butoh practitioner's comments, ideas and impressions in this thesis are derived from personal interviews conducted over a three year period (2011-2013). Personal interviews were conducted by the author with: Frances Barbe, Mark Hill, Lynne Bradley, Nikki Heywood, Rebecca Murray, Melissa Lovric, Helen Smith and Martin de Amo. Amanda Card's extended interview with Tess de Quincey is also referred to, some of which has been published in: Card (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Examples in dance of a fascination with the exotic 'East' in Australian seem to have begun in earnest in the 1930s with Melbourne based dance artists Joan Henry and Joan Joske, who 'reconstructed' 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century Japan in their performance, particularly *Katisubata* and *Hagaromo*, and invoked the 'Far East' in works such as *The Steppes of Asia*. Amanda Card suggests that Henry and Joske's fascination with the 'East' was a way of countering the restraints of their position as women of the middle class in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They had never seen Japan or been to Asia. These women created their 'orientalised performances' through research rather than having actual experience. Nevertheless these dancers maintained that they were 'reproducing replicas' of the times and places that were central to their performances (Card 2008).

relationship with Asia at the time (1999, 139). “Australia’s Orient is close but remains an enigma,” said Richards (1999, 139).

Anthropologist Andrew Lattas (1992) provides another form of reasoning as to why this might be so. Although not interested in butoh per se, Lattas examines the way in which Australians seek out experiences that could explain what draws them to forms. He discusses the way modernist discourse positions places such as the Orient, or places, practices and peoples considered ‘primitive’ within an ambiguous, inescapable dichotomy. On one hand the primitive is viewed as negative, regressive and the binary opposite of civilisation and the civilised (Lattas 1992, 46). Such discourse, for Lattas, is built on “positioning the primitive as that monstrous psychic possibility which we threaten to become” (1992, 47). As a result of this construction, primitive pleasures (sensuality and violence) are feared for their lack of rationality and refinement. The other side of the primitivist dichotomy is our desire to have, hold, or become just that. There is a valorisation of those deemed primitive, a hunger for the primitive among the self-proclaimed modern and civilized; a hunger which sees the primitive as a corrective for an imbalance in a society deprived of pleasure (Lattas, 1992). Lattas’ views reflect an avant-gardist desire to find an authentic experience of life amidst the supposedly uncivilised. This ideology was at the core of Antonin Artaud’s idea of theatre. Artaud, was working in Europe but was fascinated with Asian practices after he was exposed to Balinese dance in 1931. This dance style provided the impetus for Artaud to write his essays, which later formed the book *Theatre and its Double* (Cormier 2009, 44). These essays proposed a different type of theatre that accentuated spiritual and experiential aspects. He wanted his audiences to be in direct relation to the primary forces of life (Hornblow 2006). As Innes suggests, Artaud and the European avant-garde were aspired “to transcendence, to the spiritual in its widest sense” (1993, 3).

Hijikata and Ohno had similar concerns during the development of Butoh in Japan’s post-war period. As stated earlier, Hijikata, in particular, sought access to sensuality and violence in his work, incorporating the ‘primitive’ into his performances. In fact, the theoretical basis of a butoh sensibility is the surfacing of the hidden violence – the basis of which proponents believe to be at the reality of the human condition. Hijikata’s performances were replete with these associations supported not only by his experiences in post-war Japan, but his interest in German Dance Theatre and Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’<sup>21</sup>. Hijikata presented his primal themes of sexual metamorphosis, human savagery and animal sacrifice in his performance of *Forbidden Colours* (1959). Nanako Kurihara describes this in his account of the work:

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<sup>21</sup> For Artaud “everything that acts is a cruelty.” Cruelty is hidden beneath the surface and is glossed over by the banality of everyday reality (Hornblow 2006).



They dance bare foot. After the boy appears on stage, the man, holding a chicken, enters and runs around in a circle. The boy stiffens, and walks to a narrow illuminated area center stage, where the man is waiting in darkness. Breathing hard they face each other, and the man thrusts the chicken into the light with the white wings fluttering “stunningly”. The boy accepts the chicken and turns his head, and holds it to his chest. Then placing the chicken between his thighs, he slowly sinks into a squat, squeezing it to death while the man watches from the darkness (cited in Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 79).

Here Hijikata and Yoshito Ohno did not perform violence, they were violent.

In her work with her Brisbane company Zen Zen Zo, Lynne Bradley believes she accesses this same primal sensibility. One of her core beliefs is the necessary ‘voyage’ one must take into the dark side of human being, what Carl Jung calls the ‘shadow space’, in order to tap into the intention and essence of butoh. In this space, Bradley believes, one can access those repressed, taboo elements of existence that we do not want to acknowledge. Following Jung she believes in bringing the ‘shadow space’ forward and in doing so “encountering what is quite often shocking, brutal and definitely unspeakable.” Through this process Lynne believes “you become a whole human being again.” The notion of ‘again’ taps into the narrative which places those who live a Western sensibility as somehow inauthentic, unable to tap into the ‘truth’ of being human – something we all once were but no longer have access to.

In light of this view, it is not surprising that butoh could be viewed as an attractive ‘other’ to some; especially those with a desire to alleviate a feeling that something is lacking in their encounters with their own culture, or as a means of escape from what they see as an over-civilised, superficial world that surrounds them, a place which lacks meaning and a sense of authenticity for them.

This is a valid way to rationalise the interest of Australian artists in butoh. Our history of invasion, colonisation and immigration could account for some Australian artists’ attraction to the form. Andrew Lattas discusses an attraction to the primitive in Australia by referring to white/immigrant society’s relation to Indigenous people. For Lattas, this is an explanation of our complex relation with Aboriginal Australians, a circumstance that fits perfectly with his evocation of the ambiguity of the primitive (1992, 53). We recoil from and yet seek out a connection with (and a sense of healing from) our relationship within the Aboriginal people and culture. We see Aboriginal Australians as both negatively and positively primitive. We have treated them with contempt while also appropriating and valorising their cultural artifacts. This is a discussion too complex to continue in this thesis; however, Lattas’ analysis

of the duality of primitivist discourse is useful when thinking through Australian butoh artists' development and attraction to butoh. For dance styles such as butoh can be seen as a way to restore an affinity with nature. This was certainly Min Tanaka's approach, as he encouraged Japanese and non-Japanese dancers who came to work with his company or take workshops at his farm, to 'become' the environment and absorb its atmosphere. As he most famously claims, "I do not dance in a place, I dance the place" (Goldberg in Marshall 2006).

Notions of community building were also synonymous with Hijikata's ideal butoh. As Fraleigh and Nakamura (2006, 39) suggest, the cult-like nature of Hijikata and Ashikawa's dance companies made them more like families than organisations. Kazuo Ohno's workshops (now run by Yoshito) had a strong sense of community, which was created through the ceremonial meal and tea that was consumed at the end of the session. It is during this time that participants shared ideas and reflections on the class. Similarly, the Tokyo based Dairakudakan lived together as a company in their heyday of the 1980s, and another famous Japanese butoh company – Byakko Sha– lived in dormitory style accommodation in their home town of Kyoto. Min Tanaka's company had a communal based philosophy although it has now been disbanded. From 1981 to 1997 members of his company lived together, dancing for several hours a day but also working on the company farm harvesting food (Marshall 2006, 56). They danced, slept, cooked and ate together. Dance teacher and community activist Nobuo Harada confirms the attraction of the butoh lifestyle and dance form in a way that echoes Lattas' assessment of the primitive:

Most of the young people don't come to dance. They come because they hear about butoh, or see a poster and think it looks different. They come searching for something different (Nobuo Harada, interview with Nakamura, July 6 2001).

The rhetorical and practical principles of butoh – valorisation of a connection to land or soil, the centrality of work, a concern for the development of community, and an attempt to expose and deal with the unsayable and the unnamable in order to develop a sense of wholeness and a universally applicable humanness – are attractive propositions and integral to the attraction of this dance form for some Australians. But, as Lynne Bradley states, the source – Japan – holds the key to an authentic way of becoming butoh for some:

[I]f people are interested in butoh I tell them to go back to the source. Go to Japan, spend time in Japan, train with the Japanese masters, and go back as far as you can and then understand your own particular point of view and take. Otherwise you are just doing a cheap copy; in my opinion, it

is a cheap imitation and you don't understand what you are doing. So I have no problem with people from different countries or cultures teaching and working in butoh but I think it is critical that they go back and understand that lineage and you know Japanese culture is very complex; it is not a 10 day trip.

Japanese butoh artists, as Harada explains above, have offered keen foreigners access to butoh: a way in which one can become the 'other'. This is the embodying, the association with butoh that Lynne Bradley recommends. Butoh studios in Japan have increasingly catered for the interest in the form by opening up their classes to non-Japanese participants over the last 40 years. Studios run by Kazuo Ohno (now run by Yoshito Ohno) and Natsu Nakajima now have websites in English and drop in classes where foreigners are welcome. But it is Min Tanaka who took the lead quite early on, offering residencies to foreign artists who wished to learn his style of training at his Body Weather Farm in highland Hakushu Town, Yamanash. As was the case with Tess de Quincey in the 1980s, Tanaka welcomed non-Japanese dancers into his company; but as De Quincey makes clear, the expectation was the acceptance of a very Japanese way of understanding notions of community, work, dance and relationships and one would never ever 'be' or become Japanese (Card, 2011).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Huggan claims, Orientalism and exoticism have moved from a relationship to "a more or less privileged mode of aesthetic perception to an increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption" (2001, 15). Through advancements in technology and the increasing simplicity and accessibility of travel, the lived reality of becoming your own 'orientalised other' is available to more and more people. There are countless examples of butoh available for viewing on YouTube, and an increasing number of books and DVDs have been released recording butoh's history, aesthetic and processes.<sup>22</sup> For some the exotic can still remain safely at arm's length, but the consequence of this was lamented by Peter Eckersall, even before the internet was the pervasive democratiser that it is today.

In 1998, Eckersall explained that butoh – something once viewed by society as obscure and distasteful (therefore, one could presume, avant-garde, cutting edge and dangerous) – was becoming "commonplace and fashionable" (1998, 145). Even in Japan, performers had adopted playful and amusing characterisations and performance styles, changes that Eckersall believed were not connected to the "physical or cultural dynamics of butoh" as it was

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<sup>22</sup> At present a short section of Kazuo Ohno's performance of *The Dead Sea* (1985) is available to be viewed on YouTube. It had been viewed 392, 982 times (as of January 2013).

originally imagined. A year later he problematised the way that some Australian versions of butoh and butoh training illustrated a fetishisation of Japanese culture (Eckersall 1999, 42-45). In 2004 he again trained his critical gaze at Australia's apparent fascination with Japan; not the real, authentic, emplaced Japan that he knew as a regular visitor, but 'Japan as fashion' (Eckersall 2004, 27):

Japan itself came to be enjoyed (and consumed) almost as a text; as a series of techno-iconographic images that in their strangeness and exotic allure displaced the need to consider the complex (and often mundane) realities of the Japanese experience" (2004, 28-29).

Pop singer Kylie Minogue's video clip was produced in a Japanese-style where her intense movement is described by Eckersall as "*butoh*- like" (2003, 103). More recently, and equally intriguing, was the moment when Kazuo Ohno became a muse for Givenchy in his 2011 spring collection. Givenchy's designs were said to be inspired by traditional butoh dancers (Alexander, 2011). We could add to this list the popular, independent, singer songwriter Amanda Palmer's use of Australian butoh inspired dancers from *The Danger Ensemble* (ex Zen Zen Zo) to complement her stage show at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival in 2007. Examples such as these raise interesting questions regarding appropriation and matters of authenticity in relation to butoh performers and performances within and outside Japan. But, as already intimated, if we consider the socio-political and historical context and intentions of the founders of butoh, we may find that it is more difficult to condemn, out of hand, artists who appear to be making frivolous and playful work under the broad church that is and was butoh.

### **2.3 Borrowing beginnings**

Watching it I had a very visceral reaction and I was both horrified and completely drawn in at the same time (Helen Smith, 2013).

When a person sees butoh for the first time his or her reaction can often be very visceral. They may experience revulsion, anger, astonishment and fascination all at the same time, as Helen Smith explains above. Often audience members will say it was unlike anything that they had ever experienced before. But, as Margaret Drabble states: "Nothing comes from nowhere" (2004, ix). Butoh has been influenced by a myriad of styles and cultural practices, some of which, as we have already seen are very familiar to the West. Although, as we saw in Chapter One, butoh was developed in opposition to what the West represented, it was equally a product of emulation. Western styles of performance were a significant influence on the early butoh creators. As has already been intimated, Antonin Artaud's ideas had an

influence on Hijikata. Alexandra Munroe suggests that Artaud's dark images enjoyed 'cult status' in Tokyo's underground theatre scene in the 1960s (1994, 189). Indeed, the images developed within butoh reflect the aberrant representations of life and subversion advocated by Artaud. Also, the impetus for many of Hijikata's early performance ideas came from the writings of French novelist and playwright Jean Genet. Equally, Kazuo Ohno's initial inspiration to dance emerged from seeing Antonia Mercé, a renowned flamenco dancer who performed as La Argentina. Furthermore, Ohno was influenced by the German Expressive dancer Harald Kreutzberg, a contemporary of Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban (Blakely Klein 1988, 7). During the 1930s Ohno trained with the pioneer of western modern dance in Japan, Ishii Baku and subsequently learnt from Eguchi Takaya who had also worked with Wigman and brought the style *Neue Tanz* or *Ausdruckstanz* to Japan (Blakely Klein 1988, 7).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Hijikata was exposed to Western modern dance while living in his rural village of Akita where he studied with Ketsuko Matsumoto who was a devotee of Eguchi Takaya (Moore 2006, 46). Hijikata moved permanently to Tokyo in 1952 where he studied with Eguchi Takaya and Ando Mitsuko (Blakely Klein, 1988).

Here we can see that appropriations were reciprocal. Japanese ideas were influencing the West, and equally Western ideas were flowing back to the East.<sup>24</sup> But regardless of the trade in ideas back and forth from culture to culture, it is hard to deny that butoh has an exclusively Japanese character. Returning to Japan's folk roots, it evolved out of the revival and transformation of various performance traditions within Japan. It is a style that is specifically tailored to the Japanese body and Asian based views of corporeality. But one has to concede that Fraleigh's assessment of the contemporary state of butoh is pertinent: "Butoh, a metamorphic form of dance that had its origin in Japan, is fast becoming a borderless art for a borderless century" (2010, 1). This view is shared by many of the dancers I interviewed. Frances Barbe carefully considered this notion of butoh as surpassing culture:

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<sup>23</sup> *Neue Tanz* is new or modern dance that formed in Germany in the early twentieth century. It involved artists such as Rudolph von Laban, Mary Wigman, Kurt Joss and Harold Kreutzberg. (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 155). In Japan it was referred to as Poison Dance (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 2).

<sup>24</sup> Mary Wigman is said to have been influenced by Eastern aesthetics through her connection with the Dresden Ethnological Museum and Felix Tikotin's collection of Oriental art. In her performance *Ceremonial Figure* (1925), Wigman had a mask made by Victor Magito who had experimented with replacing Japanese Noh masks (Scheyer in Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 17). In addition, dance in America during the early 1900s embraced the exotic, although "often through trite Oriental imitations in ballet," which is illustrated through the interpretive dance of Denishawn School and Delsartian Orientalism (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 16). Finally, Artaud was heavily influenced by Balinese theatre, its lack of dialogue and narrative significance was said to inspire his formation of Theatre of Cruelty (Banhm 1995, 51). It is interesting to note, that Butoh practitioners also revived what had initially been appropriated from them. Hijikata and Ohno were not only heavily influenced by Modern Expressionist German dance but used the work of impressionist painters and writers, who had been heavily embedded in the Orientalist traditions critiqued by Edward Said.

So it does come from a Japanese soil but I think butoh comes from a very global culture as well. So this is not Noh theatre which is very closed off to Japan or Kathakali in India which is from a more ancient and purely national [history and practice]. It comes from a world, which is starting to interact, and butoh is very influenced by German expressionist dance and Artaud. Can we lay claims to be able to understand butoh because of that? Maybe, Maybe not.

Regardless of whether we have the right to claim the form or not, a question that I will return to later in this thesis, there is no doubt that Australians, like dancers in other Western countries, have embraced it. We need to take heed of accusations of appropriation, exoticisation, an attraction of the elemental primitivism and Orientalism, but there is more to the story than that. As butoh continues its global circulation, it has become clear that the style has found a firm grounding within Australia, a grounding that needs to be investigated.

In the next chapter I trace butoh's influence in Australia, from the first performances of Japanese companies, to contextualise its arrival and reception.

## Chapter Three: Receiving Butoh in the 1980s and 1990s

### 3.1 Reviews and reactions

Visiting performers have had an impact on Australian artists; many have been responsible for engaging and attracting Australians to butoh. In this section the aim is to explore local reactions to Japanese butoh performances in Australia, taking into consideration the local performance culture at the time and important political, cultural and economic factors affecting the relationship between Japan and Australia.

Eckersall has argued that in the late 1980s and early-mid 1990s there was a ‘Japan boom’ in Australian performing arts. During this time some of the most interesting and significant companies from Japan visited Australia (Eckersall 2004, 29). Some had a profound effect on local artists, inspiring their road to ‘conversion’. However, the reception of butoh by mainstream reviewers in Australia was far from positive.

Prior to the ‘Japan boom’, there had been limited visits of Asian performers to Australia, let alone performances of contemporary Asian dance. While Asian migration to Australia had rapidly increased throughout the 1980s, there was a sense of uneasiness about these new immigrants. In particular, Japan was thought to pose a threat to Australia as it was seen to have surpassed the West in terms of economic growth and creativity since WWII. The 1960s view that Japan might invade or ‘buy’ up Australia was still hanging in the air. As Alison Broinowski observed: “The more powerful Japan became, the longer the image of all Japanese as predators endured” (1992, 10). A good way to explore the pervasiveness of these lingering community attitudes to Japan is to examine the curatorial choices at the Adelaide Festival in 1994 – as Peter Eckersall (2004) has done. Asian artists featured prominently in that year’s program: five Japanese performance events were included in one location over a two-week period (Eckersall 2004, 39). But the festival was criticised widely in the Adelaide community, accused of having an ‘Asian bias’ (Eckersall 2004, 39). Many comments concerning the festival were reactionary, with racist overtones. Radio host Peter Goers commented that the festival was “heavy on soy sauce” (Eckersall, 2004, 40). But Festival curator Christopher Hunt refused to accept that this resistance was racist. He told Arts Editor, Tim Lloyd:

It is obviously true that some people are opposed to the festival, but it is impossible to say what is the cause [.]. It doesn’t mean it’s racist, it’s just opposition to strangeness. [...] A few people have said to me there is nothing in it for them; they don’t like Asian culture[.] But I point out to them the non-Asian parts of the festival and it comes to them as a surprise (*The Advertiser* 1994, 5).

Racist or not, there was certainly some strong objections to the Asian content of the festival. Lloyd from *The Advertiser* defended the director's choices and thought the festival would "one day be recognised as the watershed which reshaped arts festivals not only in Adelaide but also throughout Australia" (cited in Eckersall 1994, 40).

My own research confirms a distaste and disdain for new performance from Asia, in particular Japan. Dislike, criticism, objections and mis-readings of performances by butoh companies were common among critics, not only in response to this Adelaide Festival but across the 1980s and early nineties. Therefore, it is not surprising that some Australian engagements with butoh mirror other imperialistic, jingoistic encounters with Asian practices in other domains, with commentators making essentialist statements about 'the Orient', its people, customs and attitudes. When I mentioned this to some of the butoh practitioners I interviewed, they were surprised. They recalled that audiences loved the form as much as they did and that there was quite a positive buzz around butoh at the time. It is of course important to note that the majority of the audience attending butoh performances in Australia would have held a presiding interest in new dance and performance and a curiosity towards Japanese performing arts, but if we look to the reviews, there was an overwhelming sense of aversion to these performances. Critics adopted scathing and cynical tones. Their responses may differ from a dancer's reaction, but I feel these are important reactions as they help us understand the dynamic nature of the performance culture at the time. For the purposes of brevity I will only explore the reception of the four major Japanese companies, who visited Australia in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

Butoh came to Australia with Min Tanaka's performances of 1982. As suggested in the first chapter of this thesis, Japanese butoh dancers had been travelling abroad since the 1970s, initially to France and then through the rest of Europe and America.

Min Tanaka came to Australia as part of the fourth Biennale of Sydney in 1982, an event that had the subtitle: *Vision in Disbelief*. Tanaka performed *Drive* as part of what was called the 'temporal collection'. This included performance and performance based installation works presented in the exhibition<sup>26</sup>. Tanaka was and continues to be an improvisational-based performer.

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<sup>25</sup> For comprehensive list of butoh performances in Australia by Japanese companies and individuals see Eckersall (2004, 30).

<sup>26</sup> Video recordings of butoh performances by Min Tanaka, Mitsutaka Ishii and Sankai Juku were also included in the temporal collection of works at the 1982 Sydney Biennale.



However, there is very little to report on this inaugural showing of contemporary Japanese dance in Australia; the temporal division of the exhibition was not well publicised, not many people saw it and there were few reviews. Virginia Hollister from *Artlink* magazine explained that the temporal events were problematic and frustrating due to a lack of information and clear timetabling (1982, 5). A provocative picture told most of the story – it featured Tanaka lying naked (Figure 1.1) on the cover of the magazine, but on reading Hollister’s article, her review does not even mention the show, as she did not see it.

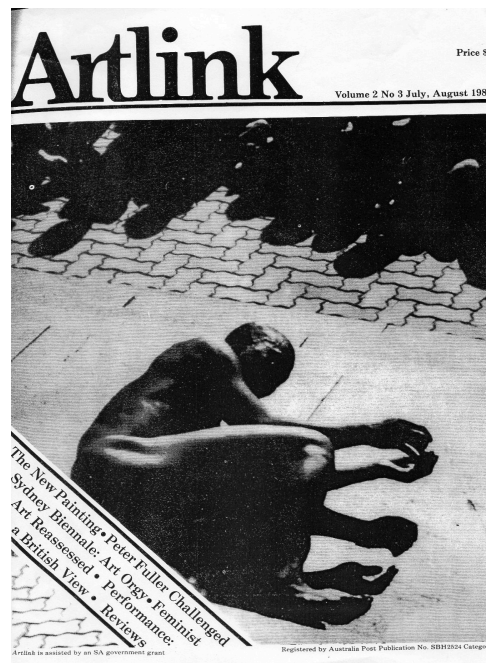


Figure 1.1

Despite the lack of review or apparent interest in the work, it is worth asking what it was that brought this contemporary Japanese dance to Australia. Japan was the only Asian nation to exhibit works in the Biennale that year. In fact 23 Japanese works were included out of a total of 219 pieces (Sydney Biennale 1982, 224). The director, William Wright explained: “As a separated, island society, we have partial and discontinuous experience of international developments in the arts”(1982, 9). It seems then that the biennale theme and content grew out of a concern for Australia’s isolation and a mounting concern that we were cut off from important issues, ignorant of what was happening in the international art scene. Alison Holland (2012) has drawn parallels between the concerns for the expansion of art appreciation in Australia and economic factors in the 1970s and 1980s. Leading up to and coinciding with the Biennale, diplomatic ties with Japan, then our biggest trade partner, were being re-affirmed. Initiatives such as the formation of the Australia and Japan Foundation and treaties such as the Nippon- Australian Relations Agreement were created to enhance

relations between Australia and Japan. The Australia and Japan Foundation (established 1977) declared their mission: “to expand and develop contact and exchange between the peoples of the two nations in an effort to project positive images of each cultural identity” (Australia and Japan foundation in Holland 2012, 26). The Biennale was a result of what Holland called “soft diplomacy” by the Australian government (2012, 25), so Australia’s initial exposure to butoh-based dance, and perhaps subsequent performances, were strongly linked to government initiatives with a political and economic aim in mind. As Holland makes clear:

[t]he success of these bilateral relationships, at least over two decades, suggests that an effective cultural engagement with another country requires a variety of initiatives, including large-scale high profile events along with repeated opportunities for individual arts professionals to maintain and establish connections (2012, 30).

The next encounter with butoh in Australia saw pioneer Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshito Ohno come to our shores four years after Tanaka’s elusive visit. They came as part of the Adelaide Festival, with the assistance of The Japan Foundation. At the age of 80, Ohno senior performed two pieces: *The Dead Sea* and *Admiring La Argentina*. *Admiring La Argentina* was based on a performance that Ohno had seen in his twenties by renowned flamenco dancer Mercè Antonia (La Argentina). The performance, *The Dead Sea*, was inspired by his tour to Israel and was a reflection on life, death and birth.

Then came Byakko Sha in 1987. They performed *Skylark and Lying Buddha* at the Spoleto Festival, Melbourne, at the Playhouse. Founded by Isamu Osuka, Byakko Sha was a community of dancers who lived in a decrepit factory in the industrial district of Kyoto. They focused on the production of grotesque, extravagant, anarchic and playful scenes. Their performances were what we would perhaps call installations today; they performed in different places and used costume and sets to create living tableau on a given theme.

By the time Dairakudakan came to Australia they were almost 20 years old. Dairakudakan was the first company to be developed in the spirit of Hijikata’s *ankoku butoh* and in the early days the performances featured extremely well trained dancers who had a dynamic group energy. But by the late 1970s the founding members of this company dispersed, creating new companies and further interpretations of the form. Sankai Juku (founded 1975) and Byakko Sha (founded 1980) were but two.<sup>27</sup> By the 1980s Dairakudakan had become an

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on Byakko Sha and Dairakudakan see Viala and Masson-Sekine (1988, 100-107).

important “site of development and dissemination of the style” (Marshall 2006, 55). By the time the company reached European audiences in 1982 their style was said to lack content and to have become “rather like decadent music hall entertainment” (Viala and Masson-Sekine 1988, 101). The dancers, usually painted white, created strong images and performances that often included a deafening soundtrack. Under the direction of Akaji Maro, the choreographer who had intimidated Lynne Bradley in her early days as an Honours student, Dairakudakan visited Melbourne’s state theatre in 1991 with their performance of *A Tale of the Supernatural Sea Dappled Horse*. This work provoked strong reactions. The show highlights included a tussle between two men for possession of a rope and a performer wearing a phallus ‘swanning’ across the stage. Jason Romney’s review for *The Herald Sun*, “Puzzles from Japan”, is charged with a sense of confusion.

Why is the twitching near-naked, white painted man in a sandpit trampled by the deafening noise of galloping horses? Why do black painted bald men in long pink and white stockings, with hats of silver and gold do sit ups? And who is the man with the 33cm gold phallus? Few would have a ready answer to these questions. Some would be too bored or shocked to find out (1991, 25).

Neil Jillett reviewed Dairakudakan for *The Age*. He took a damning tone in a text that is laden with sarcasm. At times he even offered offensive and discriminatory overtones. He states:

Towards the end of the show, the company’s founder, choreographer and lead performer, Akaji Maro, twitches around the stage for 10 minutes, as if what has gone on, without interval, in the preceding two hours has reduced him to a gibbering wreck. I might have felt a twinge of sympathy if ‘A Tale of the Supernatural Sea Dappled Horse’ had been less an exhibition of bad manners and had not inspired simultaneous desires to yawn and scream. This show is an example of butoh a 30 year old form of dance drama that seems to be a rebellion against the regimentation of Japanese life. It is not rebellious enough to ditch such Japanese theatrical traditions as the repetition of boring bits in slow motion (1991, 12).

He was particularly critical of the sound, proposing that if audience members were deaf they may enjoy the performance more.

Dai Raudaka's[sic] unique feature is noise of such brutality that by comparison, the average rock show sounds like a lieder recital. Enduring this noise (drawn from many sources, some actually musical, but mainly synthesized replications of air raids, avalanches and foundries going full blast) is like being trapped in a steel drum while someone bashes it with a crowbar. If you are deaf (that is *before* the show starts), 'Horse Tale' does have some promise (1991, 12).

But of all the performances offered by these Japanese performers, Byakko Sha's performance *Skylark and Lying Buddha* at the Spoleto Festival fell victim to the most scathing and cynical tones from reviewers. This is perhaps understandable. The performance lacked a narrative of any kind. Not only relying on tableau, the performance included spectacles such as a hair cutting ceremony, a woman crouching in a box with two white rabbits and a pile of stones with a dripping tap for accompaniment. Towards the end of the performance, company leader Isamu Osuka ate, consumed, spat and threw watermelon pieces into the audience. In his article, "A clumsy attempt to be outrageous," Neil Jillett (1987) of *The Age* called the haircutting ceremony "a silly beginning" and then it was, "downhill from there". Jillett found the performance boring and unappealing, inspiring "only a tremendous desire to be anywhere other than the Playhouse." Jillett likened the show to an absurdist comedy:

The show's governing principle is lifted from traditional Japanese theatre: a thing [that] may not be worth doing, but since we are going to do it, let's do it as slowly as possible, let's test the audience's boredom threshold or (if they are non- Japanese) their capacity for deluding themselves that they are being given a dose of Serious Oriental Culture (1987, 15).

Helen Thompson from *The Australian* trod a similar line (1987, 10). She illustrated a lack of familiarity with the style and expressed a particular aversion to the relationship the dancers attempted to foster with the audience:

Its dancers deliberately set out to shock audiences by breaking down conventions of performance, in particular ignoring those decorums, which differentiate private from public behavior. We are forced to watch, whether we like it or not, scenes of pain, ugliness and eroticism, which apparently have nothing to do with the usual relationship of entertainer and audience (1987, 10).

As if to deter theatergoers from seeing the performance, and express her disquiet towards its content, the word "**threatening**" is in bold text mid-way through the article. Towards the end Thompson openly expressed her distaste for the show. "I would be surprised if some

audience members do not intensely dislike the experience offered by Byakko Sha” (Thompson 1987, 10).

Another trend which emerged in the reviews of the time was the tendency to compare the Japanese performances to Western characters, forms and styles. Ohno’s performances shocked Australian critics, who were not familiar with the style or accustomed to seeing a dancer performing at such an advanced age. In her review for *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) Jill Sykes, a prominent dance reviewer since the early 1970s, attempted to dig for the familiar (1986, 30)<sup>28</sup>. With the intent of perhaps giving prospective punters a heads up on what they might expect to see at this show, Sykes linked the performance with well-known referents. Ohno’s movements were likened to familiar forms such as mime, and his androgynous characterisation compared to popular performers such as David Bowie, Grace Jones and Marlene Dietrich. Similarly, in his review of *Dairakudakan*, Neil Jillett suggested that the show was not original at all.

Most of what ‘Horse Tale’ does has been here before and better- by among others Pina Bausch’s Wuppertul Dance Theatre, Lindsay Kemp, Peter Brook, the Ballet of the East Berlin Comic Opera and such locals as Nigel Triffitt, Graham Murphy and Jonathan Taylor (1991, 12).

It is important to note that all of these choreographers and theatre directors are, of course, from Western European based practices and backgrounds. These reviews also reveal the polarising affect that butoh could have on viewers on their first encounter. When reviewing *Dairakudakan* in *The Herald Sun*, Jason Romney perhaps summaries this polarisation best:

[Butoh] is at best a bizarre departure from anything you have seen on a Melbourne stage. About the same number of people walked out of the 2.5-hour performance as gave a standing ovation (1991, 25).

In reviewing Ohno’s *The Dead Sea*, Sykes gave the performance a “mainly for connoisseurs” recommendation, telling her readers it was a “collector’s item”. But she did say that “people like the bored, restless, cough drop-crunching man beside me on Monday night would do the rest of us a favour if they’d stay away” (1986, 30).

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<sup>28</sup> Jill Sykes is known for her involvement in and understanding of a variety of dance practices. She had spent time in London reviewing contemporary dance (1965-1970) at the time of the foundation of London Contemporary Dance Theatre. She started reviewing dance in Sydney in 1972. She often spent time talking with dancers and observing rehearsals in the 1980s and 1990s in order to gain a greater insight into the field. For more information on Sykes see Gardner (1999, 34-44).

Sykes reviewed Ohno's *Admiring La Argentina* in a similar manner: "Kazuo's second recital was as extraordinary as his first". But reactions were "sharply divided into fervent praise and equally fervent rejection" and despite the fact that she liked the performance herself – as one of the connoisseurs of dance in this country – she apologised to those who went on her recommendation and didn't enjoy the show.

On reflection, we can see that a number of trends surfaced in the reception of butoh performances throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in Australia. Butoh obviously did not meet with immediate sympathy, at least from critics. It was not a particularly accessible style of performance for many at the time. Australian reviewers seemed unanimous in their conviction that butoh performances were not suitable for Australian audiences and that watching butoh was not particularly enjoyable. Many reviews expressed feelings of frustration when reflecting on the performances: they were baffled, confused and bored by what they saw. Butoh was unfamiliar, foreign, and there seemed to be an absence of existing frameworks through which to view this kind of work, at least on the part of some critics. Many reviews, as suggested above, attempted to assess the validity of these performances by making comparisons with Western styles, entertainers, directors and choreographers, the Western version often being seen as superior. Generally the reviews had a tendency to highlight the lack of linear narrative, and the other worldly, bizarre, obscure and grotesque elements to the performances. The performances were criticised for not adhering to recognisable, western theatrical conventions regarding audience/performer relations. A more accommodating reviewer such as Jill Sykes worked hard to understand the performances, and generously offered her personal interpretation of the shows, albeit without a Japanese performance framework as reference. Sykes was aware that she was seeing something significant and special, but seemed unsure of how to interpret what she saw. As one reviewer from *The Australian* Haruko Morita suggested, perhaps butoh was more suited to European tastes.

It is true that butoh seemed to have more of a welcoming reception in Europe and America. Reviewers there were generally more complimentary, expressing more fascination than distaste. European critics were besotted by the startling originality of the form when Sebi and the Ariadne group performed at the Nouveau Carr Theatre in Paris in 1978. *L'Express Magazine* records the following comments regarding the performance: "a disturbing plunge into the metamorphoses and questionings of the human body, going to the very roots of anguish. Fascinating [...] In short, nothing like it has been seen before" (cited in Kuniyoshi, 1990). Later that same year Yoko Ashikawa performed a work by Tatsumi Hijikata, also in

Paris, at the *Louvre Museum of Decorative Arts*. This show enjoyed a similar reaction.

French writer, poet and artist Alain Jouffroy wrote:

Ashikawa's powers of communication are so intense that spectators felt their bodies tremble, and tears flowed unsummoned. Everything explodes at once. The ruling character of the exhibition- discipline, brevity, and mild reserve-flees in the face of explosion, shudders of fear, the blinking of eyes suddenly expose to burning sunlight, the palpitations of the heart in the grip of an oppressive emptiness. Everyone present experiences the real feeling of aloneness, an isolation such as they have never felt before (cited in Kuniyoshi 1990, 1-2).

Butoh company Sankai Juku performed at the Nancy festival in France in 1980, and were so well received, they were invited back the following year. Subsequently they resided in Europe for four years. However, in Canada it was also acknowledged that butoh had a specialized appeal. Kevin Griffin from the *Vancouver Sun* noted that, "like retsina or Campari, some people try it once and realize it's not for them. Others try it, love its unique flavour and come back to it again and again" (2009, 6).

### **3.2 Fertile Ground: setting the scene for the development of butoh in Australia**

Although the critics, variously abhorred, were confused or apologetic in their appreciation of butoh, dancers in these audiences were often enraptured. This had a lot to do with the nascent performance scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s that provided fertile conditions for the positive reception, growth and development of butoh in Australia. As is to be expected, there was no neat inauguration of the form within this country, but rather exposure to and interest in butoh materialised gradually in fits and starts. Arguably it took hold as the result of a concoction of conditions that have been described by Geoffery Milne (2007) as the inspiration for the 'third wave' of change in Australian theatre. Innovative practitioners, who were compelled to leave the country to train abroad, began to change expectations of theatre at home. There was a cross fertilisation of genres, and the emergence of key performance centres and venues for experimental arts practice, which welcomed visiting artists and the establishment of pertinent companies. All these elements were features that played a role in fostering not only this third wave in Australian theatre but also the reception and development of butoh among Australian avant-garde performance makers and their audiences.

According to performance maker and scholar Yana Taylor (2007), prior to 1986 a strong physical performance community had not existed in Australia, but there were the beginnings of a lively and eclectic scene. Taylor tells us that during the 1980s and early 1990s the term

physical theatre was not widely used, but rather the form was known as dance theatre. Taylor also identifies the types of physical theatre that were around prior to 1986. These include a variety of dance identified genres, mime and puppetry traditions, theatres with heightened gestural body use on the part of the actors (such as working on the principles offered by European practitioner Jerzy Grotowski) and circus (2007, 68).

Milne confirms this view. Fringe theatre and theatre for young people became increasingly popular; also puppetry, visual theatre, and contemporary performance proliferated (Milne 2004, 234). It was a time of blurring boundaries between forms; dance, music and visual arts were often amalgamated to create new collaborations. Increasing networks of artists and genres overlapped. Interest in performance art was also continuing to grow; the performance end of the visual art tradition began to attract Australia's visual artists in the 1970s. Performance modes such as these touched on the prevailing concerns of the time: the examination of multiculturalism, immigration, feminism and the needs and contributions of indigenous communities. While many artists during this period focused on exploring the 'Australianness' in their writing, others drew on an international and diverse repertoire of themes, experimenting with a range of directorial styles, modes of physical interpretation, and presenting work in performance spaces with alternate audience actor relations (Milne 2004, 277). Milne tells us that these groups often experienced varying degrees of support from government bodies – funding being “sometimes harmonious and long term; but in other cases fraught and short term” (2007, 277).

Dancers of the late 1980s experimented with abstraction and notions of the theatrical, often using lighting effects, projected images and video projections to embellish their works. During this time many hybrid dance/theatre companies (later labeled physical theatre companies), emerged around Australia: *Legs on the Wall*, *Sidetrack*, *Entr'acte*, *One Extra*, *Tasdance* and *Expressions* are examples of important dance/theatre or hybrid companies that emerged in the 1980s/1990s<sup>29</sup>. Also, during this time, many Australian artists felt compelled to seek training overseas in dance and mime, extending their practice. Many also returned home, disseminating and developing what they had found overseas. Australian performers were attracted to places such as London Contemporary Dance, Lecoq's International Theatre School, The Suzuki Company of Toga and various *noh* and *butoh* troupes in Japan<sup>30</sup>.

The *One Extra* Company was established in 1979 by Chinese Malay born dancer and choreographer, Kai Tai Chan. This company had a significant impact on Sydney's

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on the practices and impact of these companies and others see Taylor (2007) and Freeman (2013).

<sup>30</sup> Across the 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian artists of all kinds have been travelling abroad. For information on artists travelling to Asia see Broinowski (1992). For information on artists travelling through Europe see Alomes (1999) and Piersie (2012).



performance scene throughout the 1980s. It produced examples of intercultural and experimental dance, based on physical theatre principles that inspired many key practitioners at the time. Chan's works featured settings that were reminiscent of his architectural background, and he aspired to capture what he saw as the universal truths hidden beneath our everyday existence. But at the same time, he wished to comment on the contradictory and ever-shifting nature of Australian identity.<sup>31</sup> His company facilitated regular summer schools and offered workshops with visiting international practitioners: Graham technique, Chinese, Balinese and Indonesian workshops were offered (Lester in Taylor 2000, 69). Chan also maintained that instead of simply importing contemporary dance and practices from Europe and neighboring countries such as India and Japan, "we should be doing it ourselves" (Kai Tai Chan in Broinowski 1992, 155).

The Sydney Front (1986-1993) was one of the most influential performance companies at this time. They also played a crucial role as a catalyst for local arts practice<sup>32</sup>. Consisting of a collective of six performers (Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Claire Grant, Nigel Kellaway, Christopher Ryan and Elise Ahamnos), they collaborated with guests and travelling visual artists, lighting designers and writers, to produce provocative works that used the body in a highly expressive manner. They deliberately steered away from performing 'plays'. They travelled abroad and performed on the streets, but primarily presented their shows in the Performance Space in Redfern. This space was an important Sydney venue for new and innovative performance practice. It opened in 1983 with performance artist Mike Mullins as the first director. One Extra also regularly presented work there as did Entr'Acte, Party Line plus many other companies and independent artists of the time.

It is most likely that Grotoskian experiments first infiltrated the performance scene in Australia through the work of the Australian Performing Group (APG) in Melbourne. Of significance at this time was the visit of Jerzy Grotowski to Australia in 1974 whose workshops were attended by Mullins. But Grotowski's influence on Sydney's performance scene also predated his visit. In 1969, Nick Lathouris received a 'xeroxed' copy of Grotowski's *Towards Poor Theatre* (Maxwell, 1998, 20). Lathouris together with David Cameron, Rex Cramphorn and Bob Millican, experimented with the exercises in Grotowski's book and became absorbed by his doctrine. A driving member of the group, Cramphorn was particularly dissatisfied with what he saw as the banal state of theatre in the late 1960s and

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<sup>31</sup> Chan's work had popular appeal among audiences and critics but received some criticism from a small sector of those in the dancing profession, "who had a very singular vision of what constituted dance and who had power in terms of membership of funding bodies" (Lester 2000, 101). For more information on One Extra and a summary on how Kai Tai Chan was viewed from the hegemonising practices at work in Australian dance of the 1980s and 1990s see Gary Lester's PhD *Kai Tai Chan a Different Path* (2000).

<sup>32</sup> For more information on the influence, practices and performances of The Sydney Front see Milne (2004, 369) and Taylor (2000, 71).

believed “theatre’s unique asset to be the actor’s physical presence” (Cramphorn in Maxwell 1998, 22). This fitted perfectly with the Grotowskian philosophy and practice. In 1970, the Grotowski enthusiasts formalised themselves into the Performance Syndicate and aimed to experiment with as many different training methodologies as possible<sup>33</sup>.

This proliferation of experimental arts practices, independent artists, companies and performance centres illustrates the desire of Australian artists to move beyond conventional theatre venues and repertoires, and to investigate a cross fertilisation of genres through gaining international training experiences and skill in various performance styles. But this progressive flavour was also rubbing off on more securely funded companies as well. In 1979 Graham Murphy took the reins at what he named Sydney Dance Company (previously it was known as The Dance Company NSW) and began experimenting with what theatre reviewer Lee Christofis has called “sinuous, quirky and often irreverent choreography” (2012, 30). Murphy was said to possess an openness of mind, which was what distinguished his company from his former employer, the Australian Ballet (Broinowski 1992, 153). Murphy performed at Kinselas – a night club in Sydney, forged relationships with Chinese dancers, developing an early vision that drew from non-western sources, often combining Australian music with Asian instruments.

In the midst of this lively, confident and growing community of physical based performance practitioners, a key collection of individuals emerged who were responsible for the gradual development of a butoh and Body Weather scene in Australia.

#### *Tess de Quincey– Body Weather*

De Quincey brought butoh and its related off shoot Body Weather, to Australia when she visited to perform *Movement on The Edge* at The Performance Space in 1989.<sup>34</sup> As part of her trip, de Quincey also ran workshops in the same space. De Quincey’s performance gained a glowing review from Jill Sykes in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Sykes was in awe of the serenity of de Quincey’s movements but also the way they presented contradictions: “soft and vulnerable or jagged and savage”. Sykes even suggested that the “butoh style she had brought to Australia is less commercial than some we have seen but just as vivid and far more affecting because of that.”

After the hour-long performance ended on the same level of serenity as it began, there was a long pause before the appreciative audience could bear to break the silence with

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<sup>33</sup> For more information on The Performance Syndicate see: Maxwell (2005, 178-185), Maxwell (2008, 17-41) and Waites (1999, 7).

<sup>34</sup> For a brief description of *Movement on the Edge* see Scheer (1998, 136).

their applause. That's how good it was. (Sykes 1989, 10)

The positive reception of de Quincey's work encouraged her to come back the next year to perform *Another Dust*, again at The Performance Space, which was at this stage under the direction of Sarah Miller. Miller warmly embraced her butoh inspired performance. *Another Dust* was a great success and on the basis of enough people being interested in a workshop, Tess was invited down to Melbourne by La Mama. During these early days, she was traveling between Australia, Europe and Japan, and it was not until 1998 that she received an Australia Council Fellowship and returned to Australia permanently. In interview she recalls: "Australia welcomed me. The Performance Space was a home away from home" (Card, 2011). In 2000 de Quincey established her own company: De Quincey Co. De Quincey was and remains responsible for training and inspiring numerous dancers and performers in Australia, some of whom include Martin del Amo, who in fact followed de Quincey and her partner at the time, Stuart Lynch, from Germany to Australia. Also inspired by de Quincey were Nikki Heywood, Peter Frazer, Victoria Hunt, Linda Luke and many more.

#### *Lynne Bradley- butoh comes to Brisbane*

Bradley began training in Kyoto, Japan with ex- Byakko Sha performer Katsura Kan. In 1992 she returned from Japan to complete her Honours thesis, mentioned earlier and while at the University of Queensland, performed the *Never the Elephant* (a loose translation of Zen Zen Zo)<sup>35</sup>. The show was well received and this encouraged Bradley to keep experimenting with butoh. The following year she directed and performed an extension of this first performance, *Butoh: The way of Mud*. Richard Waller (1993) from *The Courier Mail* wrote:

What could have been merely an interesting exercise in an underexposed physical theatre philosophy, becomes – under the exciting and inventive direction of Lynne Bradley – much, much more. If you have never seen a performance of butoh (a Japanese post-war dance theatre form), you really should see this.

From 1993-1995 she returned to Japan, along with her company members, for another few years of training and performing. In 1996 she came back to Brisbane to officially establish her company with her husband, Simon Woods, who had studied extensively in the Suzuki method. They secured a company-in-residence position at the University of Queensland, which gave them the Avalon Theatre as a training and performing space and began to teach

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<sup>35</sup> In the same year another Brisbane company Frank (now Ozfrank) was established. The company directors, Jacqui Carroll and John Nobbs along with company members aspire to fuse both Western and Asian sensibilities and aim to produce Japan/Australian fusion theatre. Their main training methodology is the Suzuki method (Nobbs and Carroll n.d)

weekly classes in both methods. In 1998 they added Viewpoints<sup>36</sup> to their palette of training methodologies. Bradley has also trained many students who have become important practitioners and disseminators of the style including Helen Smith, Frances Barbe and Mark Hill. It is her belief that practitioners such as these should be committed to teaching as well as practising, which has meant that butoh has blossomed as an art form in Australia.

But neither Bradley nor de Quincey found their roles, as initiators of their various styles of butoh/Body Weather, in Australia easy. Despite the fact that by the late 1980s many Australians were embracing physical theatre, the two women faced challenges with regards to their isolation from similarly trained performers. As Bradley recalls: “When I came home, I didn’t have any access to teachers of course, so I had to start teaching butoh, which felt very strange.” Bradley quickly established her company, introducing her peers to the style and bringing them back and forth between Japan and Australia. The isolation was also significant for de Quincey.<sup>37</sup> She had been working intensely in Japan with Min Tanka’s company Mai Juku for six years, only to come to Australia and work with and within a local dance and performance scene that was enthusiastic for, but completely uninitiated in, the expectations and rigour of the form. Like Bradley she had to go it alone and train those she has wanted to work with, something she has continued to do over the last 20 years.

Two other interesting artists that have continued to be movers and shakers within the form:

Yumi Umiumare is the first and, as far I can tell, the only Japanese butoh trained dancer to take up residency in Australia. She came in 1991 to perform with the Japanese butoh company Dairakudakan for their Melbourne international festival performances and migrated to Australia in 1993. Since then she has been performing hybrid style works and running regular workshops.

Tony Yap, also resident in Melbourne, is a Chinese Malay Australian, trained in and strongly influenced by butoh. He established his own company, Mixed Company (now Tony Yap Company) in 1993 and focuses on the ‘exploration and creation of an individual dance theatre language that is informed by psycho-physical research, Asian shamanistic trance dance, Butoh, voice and visual design.’ He also consistently offers workshops in these forms.

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<sup>36</sup> Viewpoints is a theory for getting actors to focus on different elements of performance (time, space, tempo) in improvisation. It was originally developed by Mary Overlie and then adapted by Tina Landau and Ann Bogart (Herrington, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Daughter of British/Australian parents with French Scandinavian ancestry, De Quincey was born in Wales. She gained most of her arts education in Denmark, Bali, India and Japan. She travelled between Sydney, Copenhagen and Tokyo before settling in Australia (Card 2014, 150).

### 3.3 An Australian way of doing things

As explained in the former section, butoh arrived in Australia through visiting performers and trained practitioners keen to teach the form. A collection of Australian artists have embraced butoh and Body Weather, replicating the practice or making it their own to varying degrees.

Although many Australian performers may not particularly identify themselves as butoh dancers, it is often the case that Australians have trained in the form for a period of time, and butoh has become a seminal part of their larger artistic palate. In their migration to Australian soil, butoh and Body Weather have inevitably undergone shifts and changes in order to satisfy the unique needs of its local practitioners and the local places, spaces and audiences. Nikki Heywood uses an apt metaphor to explain how some Australian practitioners have received the form:

[Butoh] is like any [art] form...you begin to paint and you want to paint like Rembrandt or Van Gogh and you copy that style and then you recognize that actually, that is not *your* style at all. Maybe you have learnt how to apply the paint and now you have to get in touch with what it is that you want to paint. I guess that is a kind of crude example in a way, but it is like finding a tool and then understanding what it is that you want to say with that tool.

For some Australian performers, staying true to the Japanese aesthetic and history of the style is very important. For others, like Heywood, it is about 'appropriating' butoh, changing it to adapt to an individual style, altering it to acclimatise to an Australian way of life, the landscape, the local socio-political atmosphere and an altered creative milieu.

#### 3.3.1 Butoh as universal. Butoh as emplaced.

In examining the small collection of literature on butoh in Australia, it appears that two camps exist with regards to theorising the form. One emphasises butoh as emplaced; the other highlights its universal applicability. These different positions help illustrate and contextualise the current condition of the discipline in Australia.

As has already been established, the origins of butoh are firmly rooted in Japanese culture, but many dancers and critics comment on the universality of the form. They are convinced that it has a fluidity that allows it to transcend cultural specificity. As Helen Smith observes:

What I actually saw was humanity. It was existence, it was human, it was animal and it was beyond culture. Ultimately for Yoshito and Kazuo Ohno it was a dance of the soul, a

dance of the heart. Everyone has a heart, and it isn't just the Japanese body that contains a soul.

Similarly Lynne Bradley thinks butoh "is very much about the shadow space of the human being which crosses all cultures." As explained in Chapter One, for her it is about "stripping away the civilized veneer and looking at the beating heart of what it means to be human". But Bradley also sees the importance of adjusting the form to suit an Australian context. While she is well versed on the history of butoh, Bradley suggests that her work does not have a direct link to 1950s and 1960s Japan, simply because she wasn't there and she isn't Japanese. Instead she takes from butoh a fascination with the margins of society. Her company, Zen Zen Zo, aspires to reflect the raw fearlessness of butoh through interpretations of texts (often Shakespeare) and self-devised work. But then:

[y]ou have to find your own take on it and have your own voice in relation to it. Otherwise you are just doing a cheap copy. In my opinion, it is a cheap imitation and you don't understand what you are doing.

Having said this, Bradley still includes aesthetic elements, which are "a nod to the traditional butoh". When performing butoh, more often than not, the members of Zen Zen Zo still paint themselves entirely white. They also use the iconic *beshimi kata* (distorted facial and bodily expressions):

Obviously when we are performing in Japan with Dairakudakan, we paint our bodies gold and sometimes we paint them ash. But often we use the white [body paint] and that is an artistic choice that is about stripping back to a blank slate. Visually it is beautiful and it very quickly acknowledges the idea that we are all human beings and we are stripping away the individual markers of what it means to be human.

Yet the white body paint is also a clear marker of Japanese-ness of a butoh dancer.

Tess de Quincey resists the exclusivity of Body Weather; it is not, for her, solely Japanese. She maintains that her interest in Tanaka's form emerged from the fact that he was himself an internationalist; he was "less concerned with Japanese identity and was more interested in human identity" (cited in Scheer 1998, 137). According to Edward Scheer (1998, 137), "De Quincey encourages cross-cultural oscillation in Australian performance" and she does insist that Body Weather training in Australia cannot be practised in the same way as it is in Japan. For de Quincey, Body Weather is an "open investigation," a "laboratory" and as such can be

made available for sharing across cultures and within other social circumstances (cited in Scheer 1998, 139).

Scheer (1998) also claims that Body Weather, particularly in the work of Tess de Quincey, reflects Victor Turner's concept of liminality: "a betwixt and between condition often involving segregation from the everyday" (Turner in Scheer 1998, 138). According to Scheer, Body Weather's intention is to create a liminal space as the dancer becomes part of a larger eco system (1998, 139). They resist and forge through their embodied and psychological habits of action and reaction, exposing and negotiating their cultural conditioning to find what de Quincey calls 'new spaces'; 'new forms.' These impressions are characteristic of those who see butoh, and its related form, Body Weather, as universal or cross-cultural systems of practice.

However, not all Body Weather and butoh artists working in Australia feel the same about the form's universality. Gretel Taylor emphasises the difficulties in relocating the Japanese developed training of butoh and Body Weather onto a European or Australian terrain. Taylor maintains a view that the form must be emplaced.<sup>38</sup> Her particular concern is with the concept of the 'empty body,' a concept encouraged by the training methodologies offered by Body Weather's European progenitors.<sup>39</sup> Taylor suggests that butoh and Body Weather encourage a person to transcend what she sees as valuable devices for performance:

If my body is inscribed before I am even born, by such determining markings as skin colour, sex, ethnicity, class, religion etc., I do not wish to attempt to ignore these influences upon my self-body as a performer and, in my particular area of research, these influences upon my relationship to place (2006. 81).

She highlights that the idea of aspiring to emptiness is problematic in Australia because of our history, wherein Australia was considered an 'empty land' (a terra nullius) by the country's colonisers. Hence, this conception of 'emptiness' runs into a history that has denied the rights of Indigenous people and their connection and ownership of the land. As a white Australian dancer/researcher, Taylor feels her work should reflect a history of struggle and cultural injustice committed on the land. In following the work of the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Taylor believes that a radical embodied philosophy should not seek to transcend the body but to reclaim it. Taylor aspires to capture the challenge of contested,

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<sup>38</sup> Gretel Taylor attended many workshops ran by Frank van de Ven (a member of Maijuku 1983- 1991 and now the head of a company called Body Weather Amsterdam <http://bodyweatheramsterdam.blogspot.com.au/>) including those in Itxassou, France, Bohemiae Rosa and the Czech Republic. She also visited Min Tanaka's Body Weather farm in 1999 and 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Body Weather developed by Min Tanaka encourages the dancer to "dance the place" rather than "dancing in the place". Though cryptic in nature, this according to Taylor "bears a trace of the assumed state of emptiness" (2010, 71).

embodied histories and representations in the face of ‘colonial cruelties’ perpetrated by her ancestors upon Aboriginal people, situations which allow white Australians a privileged presence within the country (Taylor 2010, 84). In this sense, while the training methodologies for butoh and Body Weather may be inspiring and advantageous in the process of devising work, Taylor believes they should be approached with a sense of wariness when transferred to other locations.

Similarly, dance anthropologist Karen Vedel (2007) refers to the significance of site specificity in Tess de Quincey’s Body Weather based performance series *Dictionary of Atmospheres*, which was performed in Alice Springs as part of the Alice Desert Festival in 2000 (one outcome from three laboratories held in the Australian outback, collectively entitled *Triple Alice*, which ran between 1999 -2001 at Hamilton Downs north of Alice Springs). Vedel addresses the way that the dancers inhabited and responded to the space that they danced in and some of the theoretical and ethical issues with regards to these actions. She reflects on the 1960s modernist idea that “works of art should be informed by the materiality of the actual location” (Suderberg 2000 and Kwon 2004 in Vedel 2007), an impression that allows her to deconstruct the concept of site specificity “into more nuanced and complicated procedures” (2007, 2). *Dictionary of Atmospheres*, in Vedel’s estimation, involved the dancers reconfiguring the space rather than erasing it (2007, 10). It is her view that de Quincey’s dancers actually embodied the complexities of the environment in which they had been placed, even though the tools they employed, through the guidance of de Quincey, were from a Japanese form – Min Tanaka’s Body Weather. Hence, it seems that just as Taylor is concerned with emptiness, de Quincey also wishes to avoid the idea of ‘emptiness’ in relation to place and to the body.

Stuart Grant also looks at de Quincey’s work in his paper, *A Dictionary of Atmospheres- Performing Place as Self*. Here he investigates the 2001 Body Weather Laboratory at Old Hamilton Downs Station from a phenomenological point of view. Through his observations, Grant highlights that the Body Weather body is not an empty space but an active receptor, constantly being inscribed or re-inscribed by place. He contemplates the embodied experience of having a place within us, and the way that body and place are combined in this kind of work. As Grant writes:

With time, abiding in the dwelling with sustained attunement, she [De Quincey] finds the place in her body, as her body is in the place. The place leaves its footprints, its residues, in her flesh, vibrates her, making her something else (2003, 4).



While de Quincey perceives Body Weather as having universal application, commonalities that surpass cultural specificity, the way she implements the training and the creation of work in an Australian context is very much about being emplaced. De Quincey discusses the way she has had to reconsider the fit of the form in the Australian landscape:

Coming to Australia and experiencing the Australian outback, I had to reflect on Body Weather and consider how I [could] stand up in Australia. I had to understand what this place means, the enormity of it and the whole Aboriginal position in Australia (Card, 2011).

Nikki Heywood struggles with the sensibility and physical intensity of butoh and also admits to stepping away from its Japanese aesthetic. A primary question she asks of her own practice is: “How does [butoh] apply to a contemporary Australian aesthetic?” Heywood uses her training in various physical methodologies, including Grotowski, kendo, Suzuki, as well as Body Weather and butoh, to create work that is personally meaningful for her. Her works cover topics such as domestic violence, dysfunctional families, the affect of place and the female body in contemporary cultures. Similarly, Martin del Amo, although having trained extensively in Body Weather techniques, has never had any real desire to go to Japan or to claim the form as his own. “I am going to be informed by where I am,” says del Amo, “and that has always made me quite reluctant to call myself a butoh dancer”.

As these artists illustrate, many dancers who ‘converted’ to a butoh-based practice in this country have worked towards altering the form to suit their sensibility and their location – to make an Australian way of being and doing butoh. Nevertheless, some dancers and companies believe a connection to the original Japanese aesthetic is very important. Helen Smith connects strongly to the Japanese origins of the field:

Having spent so much time in Japan, there are certain qualities of Japanese aesthetic that I love and I just cannot help but play with those images. So when I do that, some people look at me and think I am trying to imitate a Japanese quality but I feel very, very strongly that I can.

For Smith, it is important that she call herself a butoh dancer. It shows respect for her teachers and mentors in Japan and relates her practice to the source of the original butoh dancers with whom she trained. To some extent, Lynne Bradley also uses variations of the traditional Japanese aesthetic in her work. But artists like de Quincey, Heywood and del Amo claim a different association, a position that works well within an alternative subfield of dance and butoh in Australia, one that values a close association with place and local identity. Body Weather, through its internationalising originality, seems to allow for a great

association with place and an adjustment of form and content in relation to location, both in an emplaced and temporal manner.

### 3.3.2 Fields of struggle

When looking at these differences, it is French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories that have offered me a way to understand the competing but complementary notions of butoh as emplaced and butoh as universal in Australia. According to Bourdieu each field is a social arena with individual resources and mechanisms of development<sup>40</sup>. Swartz writes that fields "denote areas of production circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status" (1997, 117). Within any field the individual struggles to gain capital and control over the available resources<sup>41</sup>. The adoption of the Japanese butoh field in an Australian context has inevitably led the style to undergo a number of changes, due to the different cultural and social climates. It is impossible to extract the practice from its field, from its Japanese roots, and transpose it onto Australian soil without alteration. Thus, the Australian butoh field has been established with its own particular values and regulative principles, but this field is a slippery and contentious entity. It is a homogenous structure to some extent and those involved in the field have to contend with its past. However, within the Australian field of butoh and Body Weather practice, practitioners attempt to differentiate themselves one from the other, while emulating structures and combinations of capital evident in the original Japanese butoh field, making them both distinctive and similar. Helen Smith, who has alternated between training in Australia and Japan, says that in the earlier stages of her training she needed to go back to Japan to "get more input" implying a need to have contact with the source, to get 'real' training. Martin del Amo, who originally trained in butoh and Body Weather in Germany, also discussed the difference in training according to location. When reflecting on a Body Weather training experience he had in Australia, he compared this with the logic of practice that he was used to:

I remember these very experienced performers came in eating chips and I thought "oh my God". And then they did the MB to music, and then there were people singing to the music and I was quite shocked in the beginning.

During his training in Germany and what he knew about Japan, there were all kinds of restrictions such as not being allowed to drink water, eat or talk during the training. As he got

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to keep in mind when reading this paper, that the premise of Bourdieu's work is relational (Wacquant 1992, 18). While each conceptual device (his ideas of field, cultural, capital, *illusio* and habitus) will be treated separately at times in this thesis, they all function in connection with one and another.

<sup>41</sup> Swartz (1997, 117-142), also see Thompson (2008, 67-81).

to know his new location, he decided that these Japanese/European elements were entirely incongruent with the Australian weather and mentality and it made sense that they had been abandoned, if indeed they had ever migrated:

When I first came here in 1986, I was working with Tess and Stuart [Lynch] and other dancers. They hadn't been back from Japan for long so the kind of training was still very rigorous, very much in the spirit of what they thought Body Weather philosophy was. And then coming to [visit] Australia I noticed that in workshops, that particular rigor felt not exactly compatible with the Australian way of doing things in this hot dry country.

Del Amo also observed that some of the more relaxed aspects of the training in Australia did not seem to affect the quality of the work produced.

As mentioned earlier, field and habitus are relational. When the habitus does not match the field, tensions or 'struggles' arise. Like Martin del Amo, Nikki Heywood mentions the challenges faced by de Quincey in bringing the rigorous Body Weather training expected and offered in Japan to Australia. Although neither artist expresses this disjuncture in this way, their anecdotal evidence bears out the way in which the Japanese butoh field and habitus did not seem to connect with the habitus of Australian dancers. When engaged in Tess de Quincey's Lake Mungo project Heywood recalled:

something went terribly wrong in that whole process [...], I think Tess had very high expectations and [...] she felt a bit disappointed by people's attitude. I don't know. It was a bit of a breaking moment [...] I think it changed the way that she wanted to work.

This project led to disagreements and tension between some of the participants and ultimately came to some broken working relationships. De Quincey refers to this period in central Australia as a period of crisis. At the time she thought, "I can't keep working like this, and I have to reinvent myself". Her training in Japan was geared to what she refers to as a very masculinist sensibility, but when in Australia she felt she needed "to find the feminine aspect of what she was doing" (Card, 2011). Over a period of three years she went about reshaping and remodeling her approach to the form. She says her Body Weather in Australia is the same practice as it is in Japan but the way it is talked about and related to others is different.

As Peter Eckersall maintains, there is a lot at stake in the transferal of a training methodology from one culture and one time, to another. Eckersall expressed concern that Eastern styles of performance, such as butoh, are often fetishised and in that fetishism, the form is reduced to a group of essentialising characteristics (1998, 44). Echoing the concerns of Edward Said and

his description of Orientalism, Eckersall suggests that in the West, butoh is misunderstood, framed as ‘the other’, reduced to a primitive site of clichéd symbolisms espoused as an alternate form of self-expression, or adopted by the uninitiated through a “new age quasi-mystical mode of operation” (1998, 44). He maintains that this approach is detrimental to the form as it ignores the historical particularity of butoh as a cultural expression and shows a disrespect for the differences inherent not only in history but in the contemporary Japanese experience. Eckersall believes that some who claim to practice butoh in Australia neglect the fervent political, historical and cultural impetus of the style, the principles of which Eckersall believes Australians are reluctant to confront (1999, 42). He suggests that, “deeper consideration should be given to cultural context and politics of negotiation between artists and art forms in Japan and Australia” (1999, 42). His views prompt the consideration of notions and accusations of appropriation and the effect of hybridization of form and practice within the history of butoh in an Australian context.

### **3.3.3 Appropriating the form**

As touched on earlier, there are many arguments pertaining to the authenticity, or lack thereof, in butoh, both within and outside Japan. In the 1991 film *Piercing the Mask*, produced by Richard Moore, a distinct narrative outlining what some see as the true essence of butoh is constructed by representative voices – a number of key Japanese butoh specialists, dancers and critics. Butoh critic Fumiyaiki Nakamura states that: “Butoh has too many nuances that are distinctively Japanese. I don't think it can be international. [...] butoh is very much a part of Japan's ethnic roots” (cited in Moore 1991). Yet with the passing of Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno in 1986 and 2010 respectively, and the absence of the tense post WWII atmosphere that characterised Japan in the 1950s and 60s, the work and expectations of these artist's protégés and followers reveal the problematic nature of Nakamura's claim and his considerations urge closer scrutiny. Companies such as Japan's Dairakudakan, Sankai Juku, Byakko Sha and Maijuku developed their own unique versions of butoh and it is primarily through their work that butoh has become known internationally. However, authors of the influential book *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*, Viala and Masson-Sekine, suggested that the international inclination was detrimental, leading butoh to develop a “narcissistic need to please” (1988, 170). For these authors Dairakudakan's work became a form of self-indulging entertainment, their work suffering from lack of content (1988, 101). In the concluding remarks of the book they question the potential continuity of the form, suggesting that its success is the very cause of its demise:

Butoh has reached adulthood: is it capable of confronting  
maturity courageously without becoming enmeshed in sterile

self-satisfaction, without becoming weighed down by a rhetoric of rejection in which it no longer even believes? (1988, 170)

The directors of companies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s are second-generation butoh dancers – trained or inspired by Hijikata and/or Kazuo Ohno. New generations of butoh dancers are also constantly emerging in Japan. But as Yumi Umiuare, a former member of Dairakudakan argues, “these days their works seem more like pop” than butoh (Umiuare in Eckersall 1998, 145). This confirms Eckersall’s (1998) assessment that butoh has lost its original association with a sense of darkness and political energy that so pervaded its earlier incarnation. In this reading, even Japanese contemporary artists, who claim an association with or a lineage through butoh’s history, can be seen here as inauthentic. This struggle for legitimacy is not only present within Japan’s butoh field but also within the subfield of Australian butoh and Body Weather.

Eckersall believes the term ‘butoh’ itself has become an ‘orientalist and overused terminology’ (2000, 145-146). He contends it has been misinterpreted and undermined with regards to its radical, transgressive and experimental nature. Other commentators have agreed. Butoh has been watered down for the West, moving far away from Hijikata’s notion that butoh is a ‘criminal dance’. In 1996 American dance critic Ann Daly referred to the diluted nature of butoh in a scathing review of a performance by the postmodern Japanese company Sankai Juku when they performed in New York:

The internal has become externalized, and the grotesque has been banished. The difference of butoh has been erased: it has become another western spectacle, in which audiences can admire the stage picture or gasp at the physical technique. There remains just enough of the exotic (bald heads, powdered bodies) to arouse an appetite.

Eckersall and Daly’s critiques lament the loss of a radical, authentically Japanese perspective, the loss of the grotesque, exotic Japanese dance form that seemed so foreign to Western audiences when first encountered. Here again, as Rey Chow illustrates, the West condemns the ‘Orient’ for being too Western. This is another moment when the West regrets the “loss of the ancient non-Western civilization, his [sic] loved object” (Chow in Gandhi, 1998 127). What writers such as Eckersall and Daly lament is the manner in which exoticism works as a controlling mechanism of cultural translation, whereby the foreign becomes domesticated and is made comprehensible to the mainstream (Bongie and Wasserman in Huggans 2001,

14). As Foster suggests: “to domesticate the exotic fully would be to neutralise its capacity to create surprises” and therefore as a system, exoticism functions along “predictable lines but with unpredictable content” (cited in Huggans 2001, 14). Arguably this could be described as a form of reverse exoticism, a yearning for the ‘original’.

Interestingly, these days Japanese artists are keen to disrupt versions of their own *butoh* past and allow it to reflect their experiences in contemporary Japan. Japanese performers have embodied the ‘superflat’ aesthetic, a term founded by artist Takashi Murakami and derived from Japanese graphic art *manga*. The ‘superflat’ girl is able to transgress the constraints of her lived body and toy with the portrayal of other childish and playful bodies. Have these artists, as Eckersall suggests, led us to the “endgame for *butoh*” as they become too playful and apparently decorative (1998, 145)? But as I have suggested in Chapter One, *butoh* originally emerged from an association with the playful, irreverent side of Japanese life and art. Furthermore, if we look at the cute mutations of the ‘flat’ girls discussed by Katherine Mezur (2003), there is a definite dark side to this rather disturbing play of femininity. Japanese girls in these performances play up their cuteness, their *kawaii*, in order to disrupt and destabilise the being of what it is to be a woman in Japan, or at least a young woman, a personhood defined by media pressures and normative gender roles in their home country. These shows are both liberating and disturbing. Through their distorted cuteness these mostly female performers discovered “a space of creativity and abjection, a place of transformation and self-annihilation” (Mezur 2003, 51). Mezur describes the Japanese performance piece *Inori Hataraki* (2000):

Three women wearing little dresses prance and dance about a tiny stage with blood splattered on their faces and chests. In yet another, a woman in a crocheted pastel skirt and a lacy see through top with a beanie hat, is suddenly slashed by a screaming mad look alike little girl. The victim falls into the arm of yet another little girl who promptly throws up chocolate blood as they hug each other to death (2003, 57).

If the authenticity of a new generation of Japanese *butoh* dancers can be challenged in this way from inside the country’s own borders, when practiced in Australia it is inevitable that issues of authenticity, appropriation and hybridization need to be dealt with.

Using the criteria offered by Nakamura and Eckersall, it would seem impossible, even foolish to ask if one could create ‘authentic’ *butoh* in Australia. In light of their comments, Australian *butoh* may in fact be a harmful or disrespectful appropriation, detrimental to the sustainability and maintenance of this form of performance. However, deliberation that centers on the authenticity or inauthenticity of Australian *butoh* is contingent on a particular

view of the history of butoh, and subsequent definitions of the very notion of authenticity. Philosopher James O. Young (2010), in his discussion of cultural appropriation, suggests that every artwork is derivative to some extent. He advocates that we make the distinction between personal authenticity, wherein the artwork is a product of the artist's "individual genius" and existential authenticity, judging the originality of the artwork by the motivation or ideas behind it (Young 2010, 47). "Artworks can owe a great deal to previously existing works and still be personally authentic," states Young (2010, 48). After all, as has been suggested in Chapter Two of this thesis, butoh's beginnings were derived from a pastiche of forms and styles. Young goes on to suggest that: "artists can use content appropriated from another culture to express perspectives to which they are fully committed" (2010, 52). In this respect, if an artist is committed to his or her work, perhaps this is enough to make it existentially authentic.

Here, Young (2010) challenges the blanket condemnation of appropriation, suggesting that although it is an inevitable and unavoidable part of creating art, appropriative acts can still be done poorly, with artists merely imitating or mimicking the practices of another culture without committing to the source of the practice or their own interpretive skill; perhaps this is the kind of Australian butoh that Eckersall finds distasteful. It goes without saying that Australian butoh dancers cannot produce an authentic expression of a Japanese cultural product created in the 1950s – but neither can Japanese dancers.

But in the pro and anti appropriation debate, it is still important to consider the politics of appropriation – who is doing it to whom, who is taking what from whom. As the critics of appropriative acts suggest, those in the West, and in this case Western artists, often consider it a given that they have the right to access 'all areas', anything and everything is at our beck and call if it stimulates creativity. This assumed liberty needs to be critiqued; we all have a responsibility to history and an obligation to acknowledge the rights of others to restrict our access to their cultural practices.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Acts of cultural appropriation are perceived primarily as a process whereby dominant cultures borrow ideas, objects and practices from subordinate groups (Rao and Ziff 2007, 5). Pratima Rao and Bruce Ziff (2007) tell us that this often leads to the damaging of or transformation of a given culture's goods or practice. These writers highlight the way that cultural minorities are often obligated to assimilate or adapt to the cultural norms and practices of the dominant, conquering or colonising groups. Rao and Ziff (2007) canvas various arguments that consider cultural goods as precious resources which can offer material advantage to those who have access to them, an advantage that is too often lost to the originating culture if and when the object, idea or practice is removed from its local setting. The basis of this argument is that cultural objects and practices are intimately related to their cultural location. Appropriation devalues that which is appropriated – in these circumstances the sacredness and utility of objects and practices may be lost, altered or trivialized when taken out of their context. In the words of Rao and Ziff, "context counts" (2007, 13). Japan is not directly part of Australia's post-colonial context; few nations have been. But as Rao and Ziff, Said and Gandhi point out, appropriation is bound up in vested political power and policy making, which has relevance to Australia within an Asian context. However, it is important to consider what is lost when butoh is created and performed out of its original setting.

As Nakamura and Eckersall argue, when translated and reinterpreted into another culture, much of the original impetus of Japanese butoh is lost, diluted to suit the tastes and desires of another location. But even Eckersall considers that there is some good, appropriate, respectful butoh and Body Weather being produced in Australia. In his 1999 article he mentions that butoh in Australia has led to some captivating cross-cultural collaborative developments.

Much of the shift in the form has come from formalization. Hijikata began to create a technique when he started working with Yoko Ashikawa, Saga Kobayashi and Momoko Mimura in the late 1960s as did Min Tanaka in the 1980s (Viala and Masson Sekine 1988, 84). Australian butoh and Body Weather artists have formalised their form by developing a set of principles that can be taught. Zen Zen Zo runs weekly classes and intensives that teach students the movements, image work, different facial expressions and how to embody the physical presence of a butoh dancer<sup>43</sup>. De Quincey runs regular workshops, and members of De Quincey Co. also run classes. This promotion of technique means that the form is now transferable and enduring across time and place. But some, as we have seen, would suggest this takes away from the authenticity of the form. Butoh in some circles has now become an umbrella term for any dance or physical theatre that represents dark themes or includes grounded movement. In many circumstances the white face remains. The glacial pace of action is retained. The inward focus still valorised, and the disturbing facial expressions kept. Although these things still challenge audiences, it could be suggested that the whole movement, both in and outside Japan, has become more palatable to the Western eye.

Although the origins of the 'butoh aesthetic' are linked to traditional Japanese sentiments, such as simplicity, stillness and drawing on the past, Marshall suggests that butoh/Body Weather artists such as Hijikata, Ohno and Tanaka consider the aim of butoh not to languish in a culturally appropriate ghetto, but to be an aspiration towards a commonality and utility across cultures (2006, 65).

### **3.3.4 Experiencing the 'third space': hybridity and butoh**

In Western postcolonial discourse, hybridity is the condition of in-betweenness that emerges as a result of mixing cultures and identities. In the work of Homi Bhabha and Australian scholars like Ien Ang and Jacqueline Lo, hybridity is a concept that confronts fixity and problematises boundaries. Hybridity implies the unsettling of identities and allows us to consider the contestable and unstable negotiation of difference. Ien Ang argues for the

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<sup>43</sup> For recorded samples of Zen Zen Zo's butoh teaching methods see the DVD *Butoh: East & West: The making of GAIA*. Woods (2010).



importance of a notion like hybridity “in a world where we no longer have the capacity to draw the line between us and them” (2003, 143). She suggests that hybridisation is desirable because it foregrounds what she calls “togetherness in difference”<sup>44</sup>. However postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha believes that it is impossible to fit together different forms of culture and pretend they can coexist, so he uses the term ‘cultural translation’ to accommodate his critique of notions of authenticity and purity within culture (Rutherford 1990, 209). In this sense, no culture is fully original:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection *pre given* ethnic or cultural traits set in a fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authori[s]e cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (Bhabha 1994, 3).

Hence, for Bhabha, hybridity conjures the idea of a ‘third space’, which enables counter hegemonic positions to emerge, an alternate space in which difference can be negotiated; a space that is the precondition for the expression of difference (Bhabha 1994, 56). Hybridity gives way to something different and new – not authentic but definitely not inauthentic either. Bhabha’s ‘third space’ of hybrid negotiation is a result of his wariness towards totalising grand narratives and the notion that culture is non-originary (Shih Pearson 2012, 209). The ‘originary’ is open to translation. Butoh in Japan, Europe and Australia can be seen to exist in this ‘third space’, creating new positions and interpretations of the dance form.

Yumi Umiumare is a good example of a performer who exists in an ‘in-between’ or ‘third space’. Her work represents an overlapping or traversing of cultures – translating, mixing, flexing the boundaries of possibility in relation to her experiences as a Japanese trained artist, living and working in Australia. Distinctive and hybrid in style, her work “creates complex images of her own otherness, including cultural yet intensely personal images of ethnicity, femininity, fluidity, infancy and memory” (Handley 2005, 2). In investigating the way that otherness is imprinted on her body, she attempts to undermine cultural stereotypes of Asian female bodies as they are perceived in the Western world, and even in Japanese culture (Handley 2005, 2). Umiumare can be seen to have an in-between body, Japanese in Australia and not Japanese in Japan. “So then I [went] back Japan for visiting,” stated Umiumare:

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<sup>44</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) identifies two different types of hybridity, unconscious organic hybridity and intentional hybridity. Intentional hybridity emphasises strategic use of intervention and politicisation. It “is an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another” (Bakhtin 1981, 361). However, Butoh in Australia appears to resemble more closely Bakhtin’s organic hybridity. According to Lo with this approach “there is no sense of self- reflexivity of its own conditions of production, no awareness of either the tensions or contradictions of history ” (Lo 2000, 3). Butoh and butoh inspired performances in Australia do not specifically reference the cultural differences between Japan and Australia but rather they seem to bring about a new breed of dance that represents a bleeding of cultures and boundaries.

and sometimes people [would] say, 'Oh, I thought you lived in Australia.' And [I'd] come [back] here and Australian people would say, 'Oh, I thought you [went] back to Japan.' And I thought, 'Oh, where am I?' (Umiumare interviewed by Peter Eckersall, 2012).

Umiumare uses her in-betweenness as the form and content of her performances. Her dance can be seen as a manifestation of what it is like to live in a hybrid space, together in difference, in a world revealed through the embodiment of culture in the in-between. But perhaps the most pertinent question in the context of this chapter is whether Umiumare's work can still be called *butoh*. Certainly she maintains many aspects of the style (flexible facial expressions with grotesque elements, white make up, bawdy humour). Also her Japanese origin and training with second-generation *butoh* dancers certainly gives her more entitlement than most to claim the label 'butoh dancer'. Her works are not replicas of Ohno and Hijikata but by incorporating cabaret (which, as we have already established, has a long association and underground tradition within Japan and Japanese *butoh* companies) and her responses to her new Australian location and culture, she can clearly claim to be creating her *butoh* practice as a hybrid form.

Tess de Quincey is another performer who dwells in this in-between space. This is evident in the way she sees her own history – both personal and dance history. De Quincey is multi-lingual and has trained in numerous performance and artistic styles (ballet, graphics, sculpture, theatre, contemporary dance, Balinese mask, Indian *tabla*, Japanese *noh* theatre, *butoh* and *Body Weather*) from around the world. According to Card, “de Quincey is just like her work: a hybrid. Her genealogy and her education coalesce in the flux between cultures, disciplines and histories, and so does her art” (2014, 150).

The Japanese term for this in-between space, associated with the history of *butoh*, is the Zen term *ma*. *Ma* is “emptiness”, the “space between things”(n.d Endo). Fraleigh describes it in the following way:

As in meditation, *butoh* offers a slow contemplative space within consciousness, somatically transforming: one pace, one synapse, and one cell at a time. This space passage is known as *ma*. We have no Western term for *ma*. It is a middle, a hyphen in-between in any case (2010, 16).

For Fraleigh *ma* “is the global connective tissue of *butoh*” (2010, 12). Like many of the Australian dancers that I have mentioned, Fraleigh (2010) believes strongly that universal or metamorphic qualities of *butoh* enable it to transcend easily between and within other cultural locations and styles of performance. It offers an illustrative bridge between cultural differences. *Butoh* maintains its unique Japanese background and identity while

simultaneously possessing a “tolerant and inclusive morphology” (Fraleigh 2010, 2). For Fraleigh “the soma of butoh (its experiential substance) projects one beyond the physical self into a wider identification with spirit and nature” (2010, 66). Fraleigh claims that the main emphasis of Western phenomenology is to mend the perceived body/mind split. But Japanese philosopher Ichikawa “holds that when distinctions between spirit, mind and body disappear we become truly human and free” (Fraleigh 2006, 67). In butoh the body is not forced or controlled – the intention is that it simply ‘becomes’. Hijikata’s *butoh fu* images aim to construct and dissolve materiality. His intention was to give his students a way of understanding the body beyond the surface of our engagement with the world, beyond the skin, by referring to an inner material. Fraleigh (2010) believes that the way the body is aesthetically constructed in butoh allows it to carry across cultural boundaries and thus have a wide international appeal and “staying power.” Here we can recall Taylor’s arguments with regards to the problematic nature of universal and metamorphic conceptions of the body in butoh and Body Weather in Australia:

The ideal of emptiness in Butoh and Body Weather includes an implied aspiration to a non-gender specific body- a kind of blueprint or universal body that exists beneath or before sexual, ethnic, racial, class difference, etc. (2010,78).

It is Taylor’s belief that gender, identity, race and social political histories are at risk of being papered over in the transposition of Japanese techniques to Australia. Taylor does, however, come up with a compromise offering the notion of permeability over emptiness. She proposes that this system channels the transformative possibilities of these methodologies while not allowing them to quash her own historical and individual identity (2010, 85). In this sense, Taylor is acquainting with or relating to space rather than dominating or submitting to it, suggesting dance should be a reciprocal communication between self-body and place. She states, ‘my locating dance thus aspires towards fullness, inclusiveness, not emptiness’ (2010, 86).

But Fraleigh (2011) goes on to suggest that healing qualities can be derived from the in-betweenness or emptiness encouraged in butoh practices. The form tries to dissolve the ego, encourage the shedding of cultural conditioning and transformation through images. Eckersall is strongly against this line of thought. His writing forces butoh back to its birthplace, suggesting that such philosophies take away from butoh’s origins: the turbulent anti-Western air of post World War II Japan. When referring to artists who use butoh as therapy or meditation, he is a harsh critic. He writes that, “re-contextualised within a ‘new age’ personal growth-materialist philosophy, such artists disable Butoh’s fundamentally

subversive core” (1999, 44). It seems both Taylor and Eckersall find the universal camp problematic but for different reasons. Taylor is concerned with the neglect of the local history and identity whereas Eckersall is concerned with the misrepresentation of Japan.

To some critics it would seem the only true or authentic butoh is the subversive kind. Yet arguments such as Fraleigh’s are more conducive to the continuity of the form. She would contend that even though the origins of the style may be removed from Australia’s historical experiences, the principles of the form are accessible to us.

Various other critics who argue against the intercultural approach propagate that the fusing of cultures is futile because interculturalism (the umbrella term in which transcultural theatre is under) cannot be separated from colonialism and Orientalisation. They suggest that the synthesis of cultural difference is a form of ‘pillage’ that dismisses individual histories<sup>45</sup>. However arguments such as these prevent and deny artistic development. They suggest, “virtually no form of theatrical exchange can be ethical” (Gilbert and Lo 2002, 41). But even if we concede that ‘exchange’ (appropriation/hybridization) is not entirely ‘ethical’ it is inevitable, as we have seen across a century of Western theatre practice. Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Bertol Brecht, Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Wilson, Robert Lapage, Julie Taymor, Ruth St Dennis, Ted Shawn, Mary Wigman and many more have borrowed from Asia to invigorate, make sense of, and stimulate change in their own practices. In turn, as mentioned earlier, counter borrowing occurred as well. So the more interesting question is not if it is right or wrong, but what incites the conversion of those who engage in the practice, a practice which was conceived and according to some, only makes complete sense in a place far removed from these practitioners’ own experience, history and location.

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<sup>45</sup> For more information on the negative aspects of interculturalism see: Rustom (1993), Brown and Russell (1998, 9-19), Chin (1991).

## Chapter Four: The conversion

### 4.1 Defining conversion

I should begin by making reference to the meaning and connotations surrounding the word conversion, as it is an expression used quite freely throughout this thesis. It is one of those slippery terms. As Morrison states, “conversion is a collective representation that can be used for convenience but whose full range of significance is perpetually deferred and never definitively grasped” (1992, 16). The word holds a flexible etymology and its meaning is heavily dependent on the cultural context and historical moment within which it is used. During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries conversion was seen as a specific transforming moment that could be contained to a particular event or happening (Morrison 1992, iv). In 1933 Arthur Darby Nock published a series of acclaimed lectures on conversion wherein he suggested that conversion involved a change in mind or behaviour marked by a single distinguishable event in history (Morrison, 1992, 3). Yet in more recent times definitions of conversion are much more fluid with more awareness of the fissure between conversion as an ideological category and an experience. Morrison tells us, “It is a word not a thing”; by this he means it is a representation of something not the thing (feeling, fact, activity) that it represents (1992, xiv). Diane Austin-Broos’s idea is that conversion is more akin to a “passage,” some with immediate and sudden consequences, others as long term processes, but all are what she sees as a passage through which a person negotiates a place in the world, “a quest to be at home in the world”(2003, 2). Similarly, Malcolm Muggeridge suggests that conversion results in inner harmony, where the distinction between self and other is replaced with a sense of oneness; a “divided self” becomes “unified” (James in Muggeridge 1989, 21).

As will be made clear in this thesis, the experience of conversion might be quite different from what is understood as the idea of ‘conversion.’ As illustrated above when one considers conversion they often think of a sudden change or shift in thinking and/or lifestyle, but for many of the butoh and Body Weather practitioners interviewed for this research, their conversion was often a gradual, slow burning process that gathered momentum over time. For some there was a light bulb moment but this was often the result of a number of practices and experiences that led them to that moment.

American dancer writer/researcher Sondra Fraleigh traces her own transformation through an encounter with butoh. Fraleigh, whose research is referred to throughout this thesis, may be seen to have undergone a conversion process herself. Her book *Zen, Butoh and Japan* (1999) works as a diary. It traces her exploration of the spiritual, metamorphic and global

amalgamations of butoh and is full of personal experiences marking her process of conversion.

Fraleigh was a modern dancer who studied under Hanya Holm and Mary Wigman, but after seeing butoh she embarked on a quest of discovery in Japan:

As a student of Zen and Butoh, I have set forth a diary of essays and poetry that explores and savours my changes in apprehension – metaphysical and aesthetic. Inhaling my otherness, I witnessed my own unfolding transformation in Japan (1999, 1).

In a more recent book, *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, Fraleigh explains that when she saw butoh for the first time in 1985 “it so opened a wound in me that I went to Japan to study this dance and returned for more study as a research fellow at Ochanomizu University in 1990” (2004, 173). In these books she documents her experiences and discoveries in Japan while studying with different butoh masters such as Kazuo Ohno and Yoko Ashikawa. But she also makes connections with her past, explaining how her experiences of dancing in a German Expressionist style gave her a deeper understanding and connection to butoh (in fact she makes direct comparisons between Ohno and Mary Wigman). Further she makes the point that, unbeknown to her at the time, the postmodern dance that had captured her attention in 1970s America (such as the work of Kei Takei) actually had a butoh basis. As Kurihara Nanako has explained, and I suggested earlier, western commentators on butoh often focus on these “Eastern” elements of the form (2000, 17). In this reading, Fraleigh’s work can be seen as problematic, not just because of its overreliance on personal accounts but also because it does not do justice to the greater artistic movements that were affecting Hijikata in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Nanako, Fraleigh gives too much emphasis to the idea of ethnic identity. Furthermore, she has the tendency to see butoh as a pan-Asian, trans historical phenomenon connecting Zen, haiku and butoh without making distinct correlations to explain their connection.

Nevertheless, Fraleigh’s writing on her experiences clearly illustrates conversion as a process, as a number of factors leading to a lifelong practice and passion. My research aligns with this mode of understanding conversion. However, as the theorists canvassed above state, this process can manifest in diverse ways. Yet in the case of a conversion to butoh and/or Body Weather, there are similar patterns and correlations, among those I interviewed, that can be found in the experience of this passage, be it a short one or long one, toward a feeling of being at home in one’s world. As Austin-Brooks advises, conversion “is not a quest for utopia but rather for habitus. It involves a process of continual embedding [of oneself] in forms of social practice and belief, in ritual dispositions and somatic experience” (2003, 2).

For Austin-Broos, conversion is the result of enculturation and this definition provides a neat entry point through which to discuss Bourdieu's sociological tool kit (2003, 2). Bourdieu's field, habitus and capital, as Austin-Broos shows, are useful terms in deconstructing experiences of conversion, and in my case the coming to butoh and Body Weather experiences.

#### **4.2 A dancer's habitus**

Before I embark on a more comprehensive explanation of this process, I want to briefly return to scrutinize the nature of academic research and my use of 'oral history' through interviews within my research process. I initially sorted out the interviewees through my existing contacts and recommendations from my supervisor. My own background of butoh practice in Japan and Australia has given me insight into the field and helped me, I feel, to empathise with and understand these dancers' explanation of their training, their relationships and experiences within dance communities in both countries. Thus, it has been important for me to reflect on my own role in my research process, as well as examining the theory I have used. At the heart of Bourdieu's work is the notion of reflexivity (Deer 2008, 199). Hence, to be true to Bourdieu's intent, I must turn the instruments of my interpretation back onto myself in an attempt to be aware of personal institutional, professional, personal biases (Wacquant 1992, 36). In this respect, not only do I need to consider my own habitus but also the social and intellectual particulars embedded in the research and analytical tools I have used (Wacquant 1992, 40). I need to appreciate that without my place in a university institution, neither the interviews nor the analysis would have a reason to take place. There is also a need to consider that my interview questions were predicated on what I wanted to find out – in the interest of what my larger project has called the 'conversion moment'. As such, what I received from my informants have been personal responses to *my* questions, constructed in relation to a set of interests that have as much to do with me as they have to do with my interviewees and their experiences, or my intention to add to the understanding of butoh and Body Weather histories in Australia.

These interviews took me from Sydney to Brisbane, Melbourne and Japan. Some of the interviewees invited me into their homes, where, comfortable in their own territory, they spoke freely about their experiences with butoh and Body Weather. Other interviews were conducted in cafes, which provided a lively and dynamic space, but soon the clatter of plates and other conversations faded into the background, as the engaging experiences of the dancer began to unravel. As such, my relationship with the dancers interviewed for this thesis has been an intimate one. I transcribed each interview. I found myself hanging on their every word, listening to the practitioners' intonations, expressions of excitement, sighs and

moments of silence. However, impressive as each interview was, questions remained regarding the status of these recollections and the faulty nature of memory. How accurate was the information I was offered? What precautions did I need to take when using the information provided in each interview?

Research methods that rely on interviews provide an insider's perspective, a sense of reflection on what it might have been like to 'be there'; they offer a human side to a more general history, one that otherwise might remain undocumented. Yet interview responses are subjective, at the whim of recollection and at the mercy of memory. Each recollection has a tendency to suffer from the vagaries of distortion, partiality, inconsistency and embellishment. This thesis is structured in such a way that oral communication both supplements and informs written historical records. As stated earlier, the existing formal history of butoh in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s is generalised and sparse, and my interviews not only provide more information, but they also resonate with personal meanings and lived experiences.

Each of the interviewees was a rich storehouse of memories that I drew on to create a more complete picture of the motivations behind these Australians' conversion to butoh during the 1980s and 1990s. I am fortunate that all my interviewees were generous and open in sharing their experiences, but I firmly believe it was important for me to keep in mind a number of factors when interpreting their words. Oral historians Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell (1981) provide a number of useful guiding principles when considering orally communicated history. Here, I have honed in on a few of these principles that were relevant to my process. The first was: *disregard for standard chronology*. Our perception of history prioritises people, places, and events but the way things are structured in time is often overlooked. In some of my interviews, butoh practitioners became confused by and/or unsure of, the order of events and presented them in a somewhat scrambled manner. At other times they would describe an event but later remember other events that happened before or after the first recollection. Allen and Lynwood Montell confirm that a lack of chronological order in the way people talk about the past makes the past appear as if there is no organising structure, but often the *emotional association of a person* is used as an organizing principle. Repeatedly, my interviewees' memories were stimulated by very significant or emotional events, such as seeing a memorable butoh performance or the disappointment of failing a ballet audition. These memories may have skewed the interviewees' recollection, blotting out other, perhaps, less significant but equally important events.

Allen and Lynwood Montell's principal of *telescoping historical time* was also apparent in



my interviews. This describes a tendency for those being interviewed to bring key elements of the past into direct association with other events, sometimes to create a sense of dramatic tension or to create a cause and effect relationship between these two events, and this may not have been a direct association when each event happened. Certain intervening occurrences could be omitted. For example, when some *butoh* practitioners discussed the way they ‘converted’ to *butoh*, they referred to key events or instances that changed their lives dramatically from that point on, but in reality, these experiences may have been less congruent and part of a process more akin to a ‘slow-burn.’

This narrativisation of the past can create another reaction that interviewers must be aware of: the *patterning of oral accounts*. Often when subjects have repeatedly answered similar questions over time, they fall into patterns where the same features are emphasised in their retelling. Interviewees can tend to “remember the past selectively and in conformity with preexisting models” (Allen and Lynwood Montell 1981, 40). Some of the practitioners I spoke with had been interviewed several times, over a long period, on similar topics. Their stories could tend to solidify when the same information has been repeatedly elicited from them, allowing these artists to fall into regular patterns of narration and speech.

Even though, as Alessandro Portelli tells us, “there are no false oral sources” (1998, 68), I think it is important to keep in mind the above characteristics, as they allow a more critical and comprehensive understanding of the value and problems inherent in what is being expressed. Fortunately, I have been able to work through any inaccuracies in the transcripts and have found the interviews to be extremely fruitful in revealing the dancers' processes of conversion. In fact many common factors and parallels have emerged across the interviews, which I would like to detail in the next section.

### **4.3 Details of the conversion**

In the previous chapter I focused on the Australian context for the development of *butoh* and explained some of the contentious issues regarding the transposition of *butoh* from Japan. Having sorted through some of the issues that exist in my primary methodology – oral history interviews – in this final chapter the concern is with matters of conversion. My questions to the artists featured in this thesis revolved around trying to ascertain not only why and how these individuals were drawn to the form, but also how and why they made the decision to commit to learning, fostering and performing this kind of work. I am also concerned with how, once ‘converted,’ *butoh* practitioners stayed engaged with the practice and gain, what Pierre Bourdieu calls ‘capital,’ of various kinds, that are specific to the field. My interviews

have revealed a number of common factors and influences that have led individuals toward butoh. These include: a collection of specific formative experiences; the influence of mentors/teachers; the impact of seeing a performance; experiencing a particular crisis; the allure of the exotic; dissatisfaction with Western styles of dance and performance; the appeal of/and understanding of butoh as an immersive practice; and the personal shifts and discoveries that the form offers. Using a selection of responses, I hope to shed light on the practices, conditions and motivations that directed these dancers to their place and process of ‘conversion’.

Some of these influencing factors have been touched on in earlier chapters. Chapter Two dealt with the appeal of the exotic, explaining the attraction of butoh to Australian performers as an orientalist or primitive ‘other’. In Chapter Two I also explained how the various contextual and socio political conditions of the 1980s and 1990s provided a conducive atmosphere for butoh to flourish in Australia providing fertile ground for these ‘conversions’ to take place. In the section to follow, I discuss the experience of these dancers in a more intimate manner, looking at their experiences, challenges, vexations, disappointments, revelations and their corporeal and intellectual shifts that brought them to the place they occupy today.

#### **4.3.1 The perfect fit**

At a first glance many of these dancers’ conversions to butoh seem instantaneous. After participating in a class or seeing a show, they were hooked, quickly becoming consumed by the demands of the butoh or Body Weather world and never looking back. After Tess de Quincey’s first class with Min Tanaka in Japan, she recalls being in deep pain; she could hardly walk because of the rigour of the training, but she knew this was it for her: “[T]his is what I had been looking for, it was as clear as a bell” (cited in Card, 2011). Likewise Lynne Bradley remarks:

From the very first moment I saw it, I was very attracted to the form and then I started training and I just knew it was my dance form. I didn’t think about how I was going to do it. I just knew I had found my dance, my primary way of creative expression.

Martin del Amo explains that butoh was the crucial element that allowed him to pursue a professional practice in dance:

It was like the key that I was looking for to even consider having a professional practice. I knew I wanted to be a dancer but the dance that I had found wasn’t right for me. And then I started to think: “but I am sure there is something.” And

butoh, together with other influences like improvisation and Laban, was my key for going: “this is something that I am happy to dedicate my time to, and it is [now] the backbone of my practice

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is enlightening here, it helps explain how and why the dancers interviewed were first drawn to butoh.

#### **4.3.2 Feeling frustrated: a dissatisfaction with the West**

Bourdieu explains habitus as a “structured and structuring structure” (Bourdieu 1994, 170). Maton elaborates: habitus is the result of structured internalisations of early socialisation and present circumstances (2008, 51). Our habitus helps shape our present and future practices through our negotiation with a range of experiences we have already had. Habitus is therefore a structure because its relation to the past sets limits for action. For Bourdieu, as Maton explains, habitus is “systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned” (2008, 51). The structure of our habitus generates perceptions, aspirations and reactions (Maton 2008, 51). The concept is intended to dissolve the problem of an either or choice, between the influence of individual desire and expectation and of societal influence, solving the unhelpful dichotomisation we often fall into between nature and nurture. As a concept it creates a bridge that allows me, the researcher, to see how anyone’s reality, including my own, exists both inside and outside individual biographies and social positions. In other words, the individual and society are not two different entities; they shape each other<sup>46</sup>. Following Bourdieu’s lead, his theories encouraged me to look at a dancer’s formative experiences (the things that may have structured their habitus) in order to see what sort of an impact that structuring could have had on their encounter with butoh.

All of the dancers I interviewed had some previous training in dance and/or physical theatre. For those who had been trained in dance (in most cases ballet, contemporary and jazz), all explained that during this training they had internalized the methodology of their form. They had studied the postures, rules, set routines, potentialities and restrictions that were particular to the form they had learnt. Even those who had trained in other forms of dance and physical theatre all suggested that before their encounter with butoh, they had feelings of frustration with their original form of training. Three of the dancers had physical hindrances that prevented them from succeeding in their chosen field. As Helen Smith remarked:

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<sup>46</sup> For a detailed explanation and analysis of the utility of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus see: Jenkins (1992, 3-14,78, 79), Swartz (1997, 96), Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992, 21-31), Maton (2008, 53).

After about 10 years of studying classical ballet, I got really tired of the form and felt very restricted by the fact that I didn't have the perfect [ballet] body. I didn't have a flexible back; I didn't have a beautiful arch of the foot.

Similarly, Rebecca Murray stated:

I only really gave it up [ballet] when I realized that I was far too tall to pursue it at a higher level and that was a bit crushing for me. I remember going to some Queensland Ballet auditions and them saying, "look you are a great dancer but you are so tall". My physicality then was actually a detriment and that was crushing.

Other dancers I interviewed experienced similar frustrations regarding their bodies and their relation to the expectations of ballet. They expressed a need to rebel against what they saw as the limitations and rigidity of the classical Western form. De Quincey was frustrated by the fact that she could not attain her ambitions in the field. She was devastated when she did not get into the Royal Ballet School at White Lodge in Richmond, in the United Kingdom. Following this disappointment, she did not dance again for some years, and she never danced ballet again (2012, Eckersall). Even though Frances Barbe was interested in contemporary artists such as Pina Bausch and DV8 when she was a young dancer, she kept asking herself: "Why am I always falling into these balletic forms." Her early butoh works were inspired by this history; they involved rebellious demonstrations against ballet: the ripping up of tutus, wearing point shoes while crouching and contorting herself into distorted postures. Barbe and the other dancers mentioned here saw butoh as desirable because it appeared to be in opposition to what they found physically, visually, emotionally and symbolically frustrating about other forms of dance they had encountered. As these reflections reveal, some of them had very common experiences. As Bourdieu has stressed: "individuals who internalize similar life chances share the same habitus" (Swartz 1997, 105).

Most of the dancers I interviewed said that their bodies experienced painful reactions and a sense of awkwardness when they were first introduced to butoh-based training. Nikki Heywood recalled: "I had to keep breaking through pain barriers because the training was pretty hard core back then." Helen Smith concurs:

I realised the immense strain on the body it [the butoh training] created. I don't have a big arch in the back but I remember having to lie on the floor with a big arch in the back, with the head tilted back and the mouth open wide with horror, with the whites of the eyes showing. It was really really demanding, and I couldn't believe that I sweated so much even though I was moving so slowly.

Often dancers experienced bodily dissonance while training, as their previous dance training often made them move in opposition to the expectations of butoh training. Ballet training emphasises lightness and turning the feet and hips outward; however, butoh training called for a reorganisation of their body schemas so that the movements were grounded and turned inward. This is a particular goal of a form like butoh. Practitioners claim that they are trying to undo the habits of the body and conventional ways of moving. They create new ways of doing and being that support those things that are valued in the field of practice they have found themselves in.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.3.3 The crisis: looking for something

As stated above, most of these dancers encountered butoh at a time when they were ‘in crisis’; they were looking for something. Often they felt unfulfilled in what they were doing, a sense of dissatisfaction that arose from dissatisfaction with Western theatre and dance in some cases, but their choice was also influenced by other personal and professional factors. In the early 1980s Tess de Quincey was part of a theatre group in Copenhagen called The Ladies Dance Theatre led by choreographer Rhea Leman. The ‘Ladies’ work had been influenced by American choreographer Meredith Monk and the whole field of dance theatre practice to which Monk belonged. After spending some time with this company, De Quincey experienced a “crisis of faith” and left (Card, 2011). She realised she was not interested in the mode of self-expression encouraged by practitioners like Monk, but was still fascinated by the transformative potential of the body, which she had been introduced to while studying Asian forms such as Topeng mask dance with Imade Pasek Tempo in Bali, and noh theatre with Yoshi Oida in France (*The Performance Space*, 1996, 14).

In a similar vein, Nikki Heywood had been involved in theatre for almost fifteen years before she discovered butoh. Her conversion also emerged from dissatisfaction with form, but this time from the kind of theatre that she had been working on in Sydney:

I’d almost got to the point where [...] I hadn’t really found people I wanted to work with, and I think I was on the verge of [...] withdrawing from the whole performance scene. [...] I had always seen myself as a performer from the time I was in high school, [but] I was doing things like reading play scripts and thinking, why would I say these words? Is there

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Casey maintains that a schema for bodily action is “intrinsically intermediate” oscillating between image and rule (1996, 29). For instance, attaining the bodily schema for butoh would involve a combination of a specific image (e.g. a version of how to dance butoh) and the rule that supports a specific, sanctioned way to do/be butoh. In this sense, schema is developed from the outside through habituation to become something that ‘makes’ a body, and this “implies not just form or pattern but something more dynamic: a basic way of doing something, a manner of proceeding, a mode of acting” (1996, 27). Once a schema is learnt it becomes difficult to unlearn because it becomes part of the way we do things, personally and collectively, in the field of practice with which we are engaged.

any writing that actually speaks to me? And then through a very good friend of mine I met Tess de Quincey.

Lynne Bradley's experience was slightly different, she was actively involved in Asian practices at the time of her crisis. Her predicament came about after her interest in Noh theatre clashed with her desire to be a professional performer. Lynne was in Japan when she had her "great epiphany":

I was never going to be a [professional] noh dancer because I wasn't male, I wasn't Japanese, and I wasn't born into a noh family. I don't know why it took me so long to work that out. But anyway, I had a bit of a crisis about what I am going to do [professionally] and [therefore] why I [was] studying this beautiful form?

#### 4.3.4 Seeing a show

Almost every dancer I interviewed told a story of seeing their first butoh performance, a particular performance that had a profound impact on them. Chapter Three outlined the nature and reasoning behind the boom of Japanese performances in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the dancers interviewed saw these shows, but others encountered butoh away from Australia. For some the encounter is remembered as an instant transformation. Tess de Quincey remembered the showing of Hijikata's *Nihon no Chibusa* (The Breasts of Japan) in Copenhagen as a life altering moment. She described the experience for *The Performance Space* magazine in 1996:

After having watched a performance by Hijikata, I remember standing on the street in Copenhagen and thinking: "What the hell was that?" I felt I had to go to Japan and find out why this work was being done, what it was about and what its language is. So I went, had the opportunity to see a lot of different work and then finally joined Min [Tanaka]'s [Maijuku] company as I felt a total and immediate rapport with his way (14).

However in most cases, this viewing of a performance was not the catalyst for an immediate change of direction or new direction within performance as a vocation. The performances seen may have led to a shift in thinking or an arousal of curiosity, but not to a rapturous or sudden conversion. The impact of the performance seemed to germinate for some, emerging later when training opportunities and the historical, cultural and stylistic features of the form became available to them.

Nikki Heywood saw Kazuo Ohno at the Adelaide Festival many years before she was officially introduced to the style:

I was at the Adelaide festival in 1986 and I went along to the performance having no idea who he [Ohno] was or what the context was. I saw this old woman coming down the aisle of the theatre in a funny big hat and I thought it was an audience member. I was struck by this quite interesting character, and the next thing I know, this figure got to the front of the stage, climbed the stairs (he had to be helped up onto the stage) and then lay on the stage. It was a total shock because I thought I was coming to see some incredible movement/dance person, and here I was looking at this.... I was really gob smacked actually; the entire audience at the Adelaide Festival was here to watch this old crumbling body. And of course the most extraordinary thing about Kazuo Ohno is that when the music came on he just came to life. So he just rose virtually from the floor into this extraordinary charismatic performer. It was a pivotal moment.... it totally blew any prejudice I had towards older performers because up until that time, I don't think I had seen anyone that old perform live on stage. Also the extreme extension of the body that he managed to produce was amazing. I can't forget the section when he was just wearing a loincloth and playing Maria Callas singing an aria from [the opera] Norma..... that was absolutely divine.

Lynne Bradley saw Dairakudakan's show, *The Sea Dappled Horse*, when she was in Japan studying noh in the late 1980s. She was drawn in by the performance but had no idea what it was. Sometime later she found herself in a workshop with Katsura Kan in Kyoto<sup>48</sup>. "Ahhhh this is the thing that I saw", she said. "So I made that connection and I felt very lucky to have found it." For Martin del Amo, his first glimpse of butoh was on screen. In the early 1990s he saw the landmark documentary *Butoh: Piercing the Mask* directed by Richard Moore. This aroused his interest; he was fascinated by the extreme expression of the dancers. At the time he was studying Laban and the Expressionist styles of Mary Wigman and Pina Bausch in Germany. But it was not until a couple of years later, in 1992, that he finally found himself in a Body Weather workshop with Andres Corchero<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Katsura Kan is a Kyoto based butoh dancer who was part of renowned company Byakko Sha (1979-1981). In 1986 he started his own dance company, Katsura Kan & Saltimbanques.

<sup>49</sup> Andres Corchero is a Barcelona based performer who studied intensively with Kazuo Ohno and Min Tanaka in Japan. From 1986-1995 he was a member of Tanaka's company Majjuku.

#### 4.3.5 Structuring more structures: *the vaguely familiar*

Bourdieu's habitus particularly draws on Martin Heidegger's idea (later developed by Maurice Merleau Ponty) that we experience the world with/through our bodies (Wacquant 1992, 20). For Bourdieu (1992, 20) "the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body"<sup>50</sup>. For Merleau Ponty (1962, 146) our bodies give us the medium through which we can have a world and he explains that our bodies open up to the world through biological, figurative and cultural means. Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus (1996, 2) elaborates on MerleauPonty's work when he suggests that our bodies are made through action. In other words, our relation to the world is transformed as we acquire bodily skills. Individuals are always striving towards experiencing equilibrium with a situation, what Merleau Ponty (1962) calls getting a 'maximum grip' on the world (Dreyfus, 1998, 1).

This realisation of the interplay between the social world and our body, and the attempt to escape from the limitations of quotidian expectations and habits, is clearly evident not only within butoh, but also within many forms of actor training. While training in the Grotowski method, Heywood and de Quincey spent time, in different locations, learning to undo what Bourdieu would identify as their existing quotidian or trained bodily schemas. The Grotowski method was intentionally designed to reset the body, the idea being that the individual would lose their habits and be able to absorb different ways of being – able to explore different social worlds, gestures, vocal tones, movements, idiosyncrasies and thoughts through action. This idea creates a particular habitus, one that values a flexible repertoire of movement/gesture and an ability to improvise. Although it is intended to deconstruct a habitus that may have solidified or ossified into a way, even the only way, to be and act, this idea of flexibility, if we follow Bourdieu and Casey, creates particular body schemas and a particular habitus. This is how any actors work. As Paul Moore (2004) makes clear in many Western based actor training methods, the intention is to expose the 'symptoms' of habitus:

such as accent colloquialisms and bodily expression, all of which help to locate our past in the present, are suppressed, allowing the actor to temporarily ['sign'] another. The more completely actors master the ability to do this on a precognitive level, the more successful and comfortable their attempts at performance are likely to be (2004,43).

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<sup>50</sup> This can be compared with Merleau Ponty's statement, "Inside and outside are wholly in-separable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (cited in Wacquant 1992, 20).



What is relevant in relation to this idea for my purposes here, is that the training processes in acting techniques such as Grotowski's, bear some connection to the structural expectations of butoh and Body Weather, where the dancer is encouraged to (attempt to) shed all their cultural conditioning and use the body to absorb images and/or environments and places – to be 'weathered' if you like, a process that Min Tanaka likens to becoming liquid air (Marshall 2006, 66). After interviewing Tanaka, Jonathan Marshall (2006, 66) concluded that in Body Weather, "the body is always moving in response to these internal and external stimuli, endlessly transforming".

Butoh researcher from the University of Pennsylvania, Bruce Baird confirms this relationship between the intents of Western and Eastern forms. In his book *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* Baird (2012) he compares Stanislavski's training methodologies with those of Hijikata's butoh. He thinks that Stanislavski's 'Method' and Hijikata's butoh can be thought of as analogous, as they both attempt to excavate the individual's past. However, a difference lies in the fact that Hijikata's training attempts to cancel the sense of self:

Method Acting essentially tells actors to go deeper inside themselves, and bring out their past emotions with no regard for whether those emotions match with what is on stage. Butoh technique attempts to tell dancers to shut off their past so that they can have access to the mental universe and viewpoint of someone or something else (Baird 2012, 171).

In addition to these particular forms of Western actor training, previous training in the Asian forms created formative conditions for a recognition of butoh's Eastern based physical training aesthetic and this shaped some of the reactions of the dancers I interviewed to the form. For some, when presented with the principles of Body Weather or butoh, the structure and form was to some extent recognisable. Almost all of the butoh practitioners I talked to had previous training in Asian forms: Nikki Heywood had experience in Suzuki and Kendo; Tess de Quincey Balinese mask and noh; Jenny Lovric kung fu and ashtanga yoga; Lynne Bradley noh and yoga; and Helen Smith tai chi and yoga. As Heywood stated, butoh or more specifically Body Weather, was "vaguely familiar" to her when she began training with De Quincey:

Arriving in the studio to work with Tess, I knew there was something vaguely familiar about the work because I had done quite a lot of body isolation. I had done a fair bit of low center of gravity work through suzuki and kendo but then,

Tess was right, the thing that really attracted me was the work with images.

De Quincey also recognised the similarities between Body Weather and Grotowski training.

While reflecting on her first workshop with Min Tanaka in Japan she stated:

I thought he [Min Tanaka] was talking with Grotowski terminology. He was clearly influenced by a dialogue between East and West and I could tell this immediately, as soon as I arrived at the lab (Card, 2011).

Frances Barbe, who had also trained in various acting and contemporary dance techniques, offered similar remarks:

I enjoyed the newness of it. But in hindsight there was a strange feeling of 'I knew it could be like this,' a feeling of being at home and in a strange place at the same time.

As these comments suggest, most of the dancers I have interviewed were drawn to the work of butoh because it was new and different, even exotic in some circumstances, but they were also attracted to the form because it was recognizable; it built on previously established, embodied ground; it was an expansion of the already structured, and their encounters became a process of re-structuring (as opposed to eliminating) their already embodied structures.

#### **4.3.6 Personal: shifts and discoveries**

Chapter Three discussed Sondra Fraleigh's views regarding the potential of *ma* in butoh and the way it allows the individual to transcend boundaries and awaken the practitioner to important aspects of themselves, offering important self-reflexive moments. According to Fraleigh (2010), butoh is not just a training technique or dance style, it is a way of being: a way of healing, thinking and coming to terms with what she understands as an inner self. "Whether amateur or professional, butoh performers challenge inner enemies, mourn the living and the dead, carry ancestors, resonate with fear and faith" (Fraleigh, 2010,16).

My research has revealed that part of butoh's attraction for these Australian-based practitioners was how it encouraged them to look inward and incited individual shifts and discoveries through training. Many of the dancers I interviewed commented on how they embarked on a personal journey of exploration through butoh, coming to understand themselves and the capacity of their lives as well as their bodies in more emphatic ways.

For Frances Barbe it was about facing personal frustrations within herself as well as with the way she danced, and then coming to terms with alternatives through the training and process of preparing to perform for butoh:

I think that in butoh you have the time and the space to work with practices that are very revealing. You have to face what you really are. But I remember I was planning to go to Tadashi Endo for another project, which I did several times a year, and I detected in myself a sense of, “Oh God I don’t want to go. It’s going to be so hard”.<sup>51</sup> It is hard, but I feel it is so useful to have the chance to face what I am, the good and the bad. But it is not navel gazing self-indulgence. There are some things you don’t like about yourself, the way that you dance or the way that you are or the way that you think. Some of it is changeable with observation in terms of meditation and mindfulness and some of it isn’t. Butoh showed me that you can only dance with the dancer you are, and I think that is a tough and a really beautiful lesson to learn for life.

Equally, the form enabled Helen Smith to address her frustrations regarding the repressed aspects of human existence as she knows it:

In daily life I feel quite restricted. We are so conditioned by social norms to respond in a particular way. Those impulses inside that we really want to express such as flashes of anger, just really want to be released but because of social pressures we can’t. We have to suppress and repress, and I think when I saw that dance [butoh] I saw the potential release of all those pent up emotions and taboos as well, things that you are not supposed to feel or express. I almost understood immediately that this was a safe place to explore the kind of emotions and feelings that are otherwise not allowed.

Martin suggests that the appeal of forms such as German Expressionist dance and butoh lie in the fact that the dancer is extended beyond formalisation and “it becomes personal because the dancer is able to bring something of their own to it”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Tadashi Endo is a Japanese born butoh dancer based in Göttingen, Germany. He is heavily influenced by Kazuo Ohno who he met in 1989. Currently he is the director of the Butoh-Center MAMU and the Butoh-Festivals MAMU in Göttingen. For more on Endo see: [http://www.tadashiendo.de/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.tadashiendo.de/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

<sup>52</sup> When the form fails to offer this personal and individual contribution from the dancer, it becomes more about the aesthetic of the style, pushing the dancer to attain a ‘certain look’. Melissa Lovric explained how she became less interested in practicing the form in Japan when the focus was on replication of a prescribed aesthetic or style. Lovric felt like she was not being “true” to herself. Some of her experiences of training with companies in Japan meant that she had to be “grotesque for grotesque’s sake” and often the deeper meaning and feeling of the form was lost for her. Here it becomes evident that the idea of self-expression and what one perceives as ‘grotesque’ from a Western perspective may be very different from a Japanese viewpoint. This is a complex disjuncture within butoh as a form of practice and butoh as a style, is a direction for my future research.

#### **4.3.7 Teachers and mentors**

All of the dancers I interviewed in Australia and Japan have been strongly influenced by either Tess de Quincey or Lynne Bradley. These women often played a pivotal role in their students' conversion to the form and, in most cases, as mature artists with the cultural capital gained in the field from being associated with the 'source', having been trained in Japan, they were the ones who initially acquainted most local dancers with the form. After a student's first induction into the style with a particular teacher/school, a set of butoh-based structures seems to become part of his or her corporeality, their way of doing and thinking about doing and being. Thus, it is not unusual for dancers to extend their repertoire of training by working with other teachers and variations of butoh. Often practitioners, even when introduced by those who have been to 'the source', students are keen to travel to Japan to partake of an association with, what is inevitably seen as a more 'authentic' experience.

For example, Helen Smith started training with Bradley's company, *Zen Zen Zo*, and then moved on to train with numerous other butoh teachers/masters in both Japan and Australia. Heywood was introduced to *Body Weather* by Tess de Quincey, but then went on to train with Min Tanaka in Japan and also attended butoh workshops in Sydney with Yoko Ashikawa. It is also common, however, for a dancer to remain loyal to one particular style or teacher; and often this is the teacher or style that led to his or her initial conversion. This is an illustration of the fact that new approaches are compared to the original edifice structured by the students' encounter with early teachers. In Bourdieu's vocabulary, this is an illustration of habitus orienting action according to anticipated consequences (Swartz 1997, 106). Here the dancers are seeking out practices that they are familiar with and thus most likely to achieve success within. For Swartz "habitus predispose actors to select forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in light of their resources and past experience" (1997, 106). But the search for an association with Japanese butoh artists is also about finding a relation to the source, getting closer to the inspiration of their own, local, teachers who themselves may have had an association with that source.

#### **4.3.8 Going deeper: *becoming a devotee***

The idea of complete immersion in the form was attractive to all the dancers I interviewed and was at times a key motivation for their conversion to butoh or *Body Weather*. After showing initial interest and practising it for some time, these dancers quickly became absorbed, allowing the practice to affect almost every aspect of their lives. They had (to borrow Bourdieuan terminology once again) "enter[ed] the game" and with this came "a tacit acceptance of the rules of the game" (Swartz 1997, 125). Being a butoh dancer in Australia

was and continues not to be an easy ride. Aside from the physical strains of the training, many dancers also sacrificed comfort in terms of financial and lifestyle security. Unlike other more conventional dance styles in Australia, butoh is not widely funded or patronised. In particular, in the 1980s and 1990s when it was first brought to Australia from Japan, there was some resistance to the style from mainstream reviewers, as I have highlighted in Chapter Three. Also presented in Chapter Three, Peter Eckersall's critique of the contemporary form of butoh in Australia and Japan reveals that butoh artists also suffered from an accusatory devaluation of their practice as distant, in location and time, from what could be seen as 'authentic' butoh. Yet these butoh dancers have invested just about everything in their choice of art despite their awareness that many people think it is peculiar and irrelevant to an Australian identity and way of life. The dancers interviewed faced real challenges – limited arts funding, little chance of paid work – but they all accepted and expected that their form required full time dedication. What is interesting is that the form was not overly popular or well funded in Japan either. Grants and financial assistance are a rarity in Japan and dancers are often forced to support themselves and pay for their performances out of their own pockets (Ichikawa n.d). But despite all this, the current or former Australian-based dancers I interviewed expressed a willingness to allow butoh to consume their lives. This commitment is in fact a desirable and appealing aspect of the form for many. Before coming to Body Weather, Heywood was longing for an immersive kind of practice, similar to that which she experienced with the Grotowski method:

I worked in a company with the Grotowski based method, very very intensely, very seriously. We were almost a cult group for a little while. But after we disbanded, I was miss[ing] that kind of intensity and complete devotion and the community.

Bourdieu (1992, 98) calls this shared absorption and investment in a field *illusio*. Butoh dancers in Australia illustrate *illusio* in the way that they allow the form to consume their lives. Three of the butoh dancers interviewed moved to the other side of the world to pursue their passion for butoh, sacrificing familial, social and economic connections and support to do so. Smith left her family and friends to pursue her passion for butoh. She now worries about her elderly parents far away in England but, "I think it is worth it" she says, "it has to be. You have to make it worth it." Similarly, a younger butoh dancer that I spoke to, Mark Hill, left a permanent and secure job in teaching for a lifestyle of uncertainty as a dancer and continues to try and make ends meet, economically and socially, in order to pursue his

passion for butoh. But like Smith, when he reflects on this process, he considers that he has no choice<sup>53</sup>.

Through “prolonged immersion in the game” a dancer embodies not only the technique, the embodied practice that makes it possible to be and do what is required by the form, but also a pre-reflexive knowledge of the form known, in Bourdieu’s terms, as *doxa* (Wacquant 1995, 88). *Doxa* refers to a set of core values and discourses established by the field, which are deemed as ‘natural’ or inherently true. In this sense, butoh dancers acquire an unquestioning, intuitive knowledge for the ‘rules’ of their chosen practice (for example they accept the requirement of intensive training and lack of support and income) and thus their trained body becomes their site of commitment, a vehicle that demands they give themselves over to or relinquish their lives to the form. Like Wacquant’s (1995, 88) boxers, butoh dancers experience a “willing embrace and submission” that is called for within the practice and the performance form<sup>54</sup>. When referring to her early Body Weather training Heywood admitted, “I became a bit of a devotee”. There is a sense that the dancers involved in this marginal activity, at least in Australia, become intoxicated by the form and have no choice but to continue their association with it. Heywood likens butoh/Body Weather to drugs or alcohol in the way that it possesses one’s body and allows for an experience that is intense and engaging. Equally, Smith suggested that butoh was akin to a spiritual practice allowing the individual to delve deep into the recesses of his or her body/mind. But there is also an embodied praxis that feeds into this process – once one has been doing a particular practice for a long period of time, he or she does not ‘feel right’ unless they are training and engaged in (re)making the body within their practice.

This complete commitment is an assumed expectation in Japan. As explained in Chapter Two, butoh companies have a strong sense of community and encourage a monastic style of living. Tanaka’s dancers trained and lived communally on his farm in the mountain village of Hakushu. Similarly, companies such as Dairakudakan established community living arrangements that everyone accepted; up until the mid 1980s the company lived together, trained together and performed together in a space called Toyoto Magaran in Nerima, Tokyo (Umiumare interviewed by Peter Eckersall, 2012).

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<sup>53</sup> It is important to note here that in general dance is not a particularly well-funded practice in Australia. In fact many dancers choose to do exactly what butoh dancers do – sacrifice the comforts and benefits of a ‘normal’ life to pursue their commitment to their form of art practice. This is also true of artists in other forms as well.

<sup>54</sup> Some of Wacquant’s prominent work attempts to deal with the gap between theoretical accounts of the body and “actual living bodies of flesh and blood” (1995, 65). In particular, he performed an ethnographical inquiry into the social structuring of body capital and bodily labour among professional boxers. Essentially his method of inquiry, which is detailed in his article *Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour among Professional Boxers*, involved the ethnography of a boxing gym and participant observation of the daily lifeworld of boxers over a four-year period. His findings can easily be paralleled with other forms of laborious training.

Australian dancer Melissa Lovric was so captivated by butoh and Japanese culture that she relocated to Japan in 1990. In Japan she trained with as many butoh companies and practitioners as she could. She became the first foreigner to join Dairakudakan (she was with the company for approximately seven years). Regardless of the fact that the company had made some adjustments to their ‘live in policy’ in the late 1980s, the experience of being part of Dairakudakan was absolutely immersive for Lovric. In 1994 she told Rebecca Clarke from *Theatre Australasia*: “Butoh is never just a performance; it is a whole world that goes with it”.

The shared belief, the *illusio*, required of butoh dancers in Japan can often lead them to do things they would perhaps never normally do. As Bourdieu (1992, 99) identifies, *illusio* incorporates an element of risk. In Japan dancers are often encouraged to work in nightclubs. Hijikata owned a club in Akasaka, Tokyo and his company dancers would perform there in order to fund their butoh shows<sup>55</sup>. As Barber suggests, “the vast, multi-faceted Tokyo sex club and prostitution industries would remain a principal, enduring source of income over the next decades, for both male and female butoh performers” (Barber 2010, 74). Australian dancer Lovric trained with Ashikawa’s *deshi*<sup>56</sup> for a while and this meant that she also performed in a club owned by Hijikata’s wife called *Shogun*<sup>57</sup>. Lovric reflects on her experience of working in the clubs:

I remember I was sent to this S and M shop and was suited up in this kind of silicone number that you had to kind of paint on, literally. And then in the performance they gave me a whip and said I had to whip these guys, who were writhing around. I was sort of standing there going: ‘what the hell am I doing’....but I did it. So there was another side to the serious butoh performances. Some people in Japan think that it is natural that these worlds should go together, but I don’t quite think it is natural, [for me] they don’t really go together.

Here it seems that the Japanese performers had a tacit acceptance that these nightclub performances were part of butoh, but Lovric found this practice and her butoh devotion incongruent.<sup>58</sup> Her values and understanding of the field, which had initially been structured in Australia, were misaligned with the expectations of the butoh dancer in Japan. She tolerated the practice but eventually left the

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<sup>55</sup> For more information on Hijikata’s nightclub shows see Baird (2012, 82-85) and Barber (2010, 73-75).

<sup>56</sup> *Deshi* is the Japanese word for disciple, follower or student.

<sup>57</sup> Yoko Ashikawa joined Hijikata’s dance troupe in 1968 and led the transformation of his work from a male to a female sensibility. She also helped him to develop his kinesthetic images known as *butoh-fu*. For more information on Ashikawa see: Viala and Masson-Sekine (1988, 84-91).

<sup>58</sup> The butoh company Dairakudakan also sent their dancers off to perform in clubs. Prior to the 1990s Dairakudakan took all the income made by the dancers for performing in the clubs. However, as times changed and company members began to live independently the company took a percentage and the dancer got to keep the rest (Umiumare interviewed by Peter Eckersall, 2012).

company. Lovric also reflected on the financial strains of being a butoh dancer in Japan. She recalled a time when she didn't even have enough money to buy a train ticket to go to one of her own shows. She remained, and still remains, in Japan, but the financial strains, intense devotion and all consuming approach of the companies she worked with, drove her to cease performing and training in butoh. In Bourdieuran terms she could no longer sustain the *illusio*:

I was a bit sick of the world. I had been involved in the whole art and music world and all this sort of seriousness and I just didn't need to be in that world anymore. Yeah there was a breaking point.

In Australia the financial and lifestyle sacrifices were perhaps not as extreme, but maintenance of life and art were always an issue. Despite the enjoyment Murray received from performing and being part of an ensemble, the lack of money and unpredictable way of life became too overwhelming and led her also to withdraw from the practice:

I wanted an income, to actually pay off some of the house before we had children and stuff like that. I just found that I would have a job for, you know, 8 weeks and then nothing for months and months and it is just too hard to live like that, especially [...] as you get older. Once the kids came along I said goodbye to all that. I wanted something stable. But I miss performing, I really, really miss performing properly on stage with an ensemble.<sup>59</sup>

#### **4.3.9 Getting ahead with butoh: *pulling on resources***

Bourdieu uses the term *capital* to define all forms of power whether they be symbolic or economic. According to Moore (2008, 103), Bourdieu makes a broad division between economic and social capital. Economic capital includes “mercantile exchange” whereas symbolic capital includes sub-types such as cultural, social, linguistic and scientific capital (2008, 103)<sup>60</sup>. In the butoh field, economic capital is of course attractive but is not the key concern for practitioners. Here it is helpful to draw on German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist Max Weber's example of priests for whom monetary gain was unimportant, shunned even, and a higher value placed on characteristics such as piety and holiness<sup>61</sup>. In congruence with this, complete commitment and devotion to butoh, and

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<sup>59</sup> This experience is again not unique to butoh. Many practitioners find the lifestyle of a performer/maker in countries that do not subsidise this process at a reasonable level, difficult to sustain at a certain point in their lives.

<sup>60</sup> Alternative forms of capital such as cultural and social, can be seen as economic capital that has morphed into another form (Moore 2008, 102).

<sup>61</sup> Bourdieu was heavily influenced by Weber's social theory and research. For further information see Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992).



therefore surviving with a lack of income, can in fact be seen as a form of capital, albeit of the symbolic kind. Those dancers who work in other jobs full time, or are engaged in other artistic pursuits, are considered as casual by more dedicated butoh dancers. In the field of practice, they have less symbolic capital than those who are poorer and more fully devoted to the form. In the field of butoh, there is a sense that one cannot be taken seriously unless one is immersed in and devoted to the practice, as Smith makes clear:

For many people it is an intense curiosity that drives them to the workshops [in Melbourne, Australia]. But what they see and then what they learn [...] is a mismatch; because, as you can appreciate, butoh is not something that you can learn in one workshop or even in a month [of workshops], [...] it doesn't work like that at all. It's a long intensive study and very few people really appreciate that [...]. So my experience of teaching butoh in Melbourne has been that a lot of people express interest, they come along for one or two classes, and then they drop off. They have a taste [...] and then they realize it is not for them [...]. But then there are other people that come – we call them the 'die hards'. There are a core group of 'die hards' that attend regardless. It's good that some people have the desire to explore deeper and deeper.

As Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, 22) tell us “groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes as capital within a field and how it can be distributed”. In the above quote Helen illustrates patterns and hierarchical orders that make up the butoh field in Australia, for her. While all students are usually welcome at the butoh workshops, they are after all paying, which is useful for Smith, they are not considered serious butoh dancers unless they have proved they have staying power and commitment, the latter of which constitutes a form of symbolic capital in the field. Similarly, in de Quincey's Body Weather training in Australia, participants are asked not to stop while they are engaged in the rigorous Mind Body (MB) training. Even if they are exhausted and aching, they must remain moving with the group, albeit at a slower rate. To sit out as others move up or across the room in the long lines of repetitive action, is frowned upon and withdrawal would result in loss of symbolic capital within the field of practice. Dancers must break through personal pain barriers in order to gain respect and admiration in this field. As Nikki Heywood states:

I am not a fast person. You know some people have fast twitch muscles. I don't have that. I have to really push myself to stay in that zone. I had to pull on all my resources to maintain that, to keep up with it.

The 'die-hard' dancers accumulate capital because of their experience, determination and willingness to commit. Of course, as teachers, Smith, Bradley and De Quincey are in advantageous positions of power that allow them to designate what is authentic symbolic capital in their field. But the training is hard and strict, which limits the ease with which a participant can achieve success, thus further admiration is attributed to those who can.

Some performers, teachers and company directors have been said to adopt self-perpetuating hierarchies of domination within their butoh practice. They have taken the Japanese training methodologies and tried to impose them on Australian dancers in an authoritarian manner, but in doing so, have failed to address differences in context and the habitus of their Australian learners. This has led to aggression and a lack of nuance in some approaches to butoh training in Australia. As Peter Eckersall suggested:

To replicate the interlocking networks of responsibility found in Japanese companies (which can mediate more authoritarian forms of leadership) in Australia is naive and undesirable, if not impossible. Even so some actors [and dancers] have reported abuses of power and overblown egoism in Australian-led Butoh workshops (1998, 44).

Bourdieu would suggest that those with less capital tend to be less ambitious and satisfied with 'their lot' (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002, 23). However as suggested by Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, 23), this does not stop "lowly agents" (in this case, inexperienced butoh dancers) from gambling for capital to improve their place within the field. Well-trained Butoh dancers often condemn those dancers, those that claim to dance butoh but have done very little training or research into the style before they perform. Martin del Amo refers to this when he states:

Bad butoh is different from [bad] ballet, where you can fault people on their technique. With butoh it is slightly different. It is more when people don't fully commit or when they don't enter images and they take short cuts.

Full time butoh dancers are valued and respected because complete commitment is a rarity. Smith refers to a colleague who is a lecturer and teacher of butoh at a Japanese university. In her 8-10 years of teaching, none of her students have become butoh dancers. She suggests that few people choose to follow butoh because it requires such in depth study and commitment. "So it seems that in an academic setting very few people have the desire or the intensity," says Smith.

But it takes more than just commitment to gain capital in the butoh field; you need to have a well-trained body – although the well-trained body, by association, reveals the dancer's

commitment. In most dance forms, the trained body is a form of symbolic capital. In this sense dancers, like Wacquant's (1995, 66) boxers (referred to in footnote 53), are *entrepreneurs in bodily capital*. Arguably, the ideal body for butoh is hard to describe or even define. There are no particular types of bodies that are more favoured or desired when a student presents to learn butoh. Unlike classical ballet<sup>62</sup>, one does not need to be a certain height or have a certain ratio – head to body, body to leg length etc. But, committed dancers do hours of work on their aerobic fitness, imagery and sensory training so that they can be more sensitive to the environment they find themselves in, and be spontaneous and 'in the moment' when creating and performing. While to an outsider these characteristics may be difficult to identify, it is obvious, to those within the field, which students and performers have well-trained butoh bodies and who do not. After all, the dancer's body is a somatized product of its training. As suggested by del Amo above, well-trained bodies are able to "fully commit" and "enter images" whereas poorly trained dancers cannot.

The challenge of attaining, or being able to shift into, a sensitive, emptied or in-between body is the thing that keeps butoh dancers engaged in the process of practicing. They are constantly trying to overcome the structural limitations of their bodies, and to seek a bodily state that is valued and has capital within the field, which will not only give them self-satisfaction but will also earn them respect from other dancers. As Helen Smith remarks:

It takes so many years of training, I can often feel the sense of being moved by image and qualities in the body now, which also took years and years to master... [actually] I wouldn't say master at this stage even. But what I love about butoh [is that] there is always a constant challenge. There is never, you never feel like you arrive. Your body is different each day and what you could do yesterday you can't do today.

Butoh dancers also struggle for legitimisation, identification and recognition in Australia, with various critics, as I suggested in Chapter Two, accusing or suspecting the dancers of exoticising the foreign, of contributing to the contemporary orientalising of a Japanese practice. All of the dancers I interviewed agreed that there is confusion, uneasiness and ambiguity surrounding the title 'butoh dancer'. As mentioned in Chapter Two Lynne Bradley from Zen Zen Zo suggests that if non-Japanese want to do butoh and call themselves butoh dancers, they must have an understanding of the lineage of the form; they should go to the source, Japan, and find out what it is all about. In this sense, if a person has travelled to Japan and trained with Japanese masters of butoh, they accumulate more capital than someone who

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the body types that may be preferred and, in turn, manufactured within dance see Foster (1988).

has not. Japanese teachers are treated like gurus, by Japanese and non-Japanese students. Both Bradley and Smith had contact with Kazuo Ohno before he died. They speak about their experiences and interactions with him with a sense of pride and privilege. The seven years Tess de Quincey spent training with Min Tanaka, and her place in his company, Mai Juku, has earned her respect and admiration in Australia and Europe. In fact, most of the well-known teachers of butoh or Body Weather in Australia, and other locations as well, have had some form of training from the source. Their training in Japan gives them a sense of authority, sanctification and respect.

Similarly, within Japan, those who have trained with Kazuo Ohno and/or Tatsumi Hijikata have more symbolic capital than those who have not. To have trained with the founders is a rare and precious privilege; it is also finite as they have both passed away. In Japan, dancers are therefore classified by their association with the source and are titled 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation butoh dancers according to the lineage of their teachers.

In Australia butoh has garnered further cultural and now economic capital through its induction into the university and school sector. In 1998 Lynne Bradley began a youth education arm to her company, Zen Zen Zo. This involved bringing butoh, Suzuki and Viewpoints training into secondary schools. Zen Zen Zo also regularly teach at universities all over Australia as artists in residence. In a similar vein, both Martin del Amo, Tess de Quincey, and key members of the De Quincey Company are or have been part of the artist in residence program at the Sydney University. Frances Barbe is the Course Coordinator of the Bachelor of Performing Arts at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Martin, Tess and Nicky Heywood are also sought after mentors, often from emerging artists who do not necessarily have a linkage to butoh or Body Weather, but appreciate the state and standard of the style and these practitioners. Although very small, this stakehold in the wider dance community and within secondary and tertiary education systems, moves towards the validation of the butoh field within Australia, recognising it as an important part of academia, theatre and dance training.

## Conclusion

On presenting some of the content from my interviews at a seminar at The University of Sydney, I was confronted with some interesting comments regarding the practice of butoh. Some, listening to the words of the dancers I spoke to, were struck by what they termed the ‘cult- like’ nature of their devotion to the form. Various members of the audience suggested that the form had ‘possessed’ these practitioners, trapping them in a mindset that led them to adopt a unique lifestyle and practice. I was, at first, taken aback by these statements. My own involvement in practicing butoh and spending time with butoh practitioners had shielded me from this sort of understanding or assessment. Nevertheless, while my experience and impressions of the form are not of this nature, I think it is quite easy to see how others may make these associations. The *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* tells us that cults are non- traditional religious movements that “attach importance to searching for mystical experience, are weakly structured, are small, are led by a charismatic leader, and participants feel they are final arbiters of what is or is not the truth”(1997, 247). Generally, committed butoh practitioners do seem to seek unconventional bodily experiences, under the guidance of an all-encompassing system of belief that can come to pervade every aspect of their lives. From the inside this commitment and extreme devotion is normal, but from the outside it can seem fanatical and unconventional.<sup>63</sup>

However, with the help of Bourdieu’s sociological approach to ontology, I have been able to expose the way that these dancers’ previous experiences and the cultural conditions that surrounded them led them to a recognition of, an interest in and, for most, a subsequent commitment to butoh, Body Weather or their personalised derivatives of the related practices. I have examined butoh as a field of practice, a field in which social/cultural/symbolic capital is gained and maintained through associations with the historical and cultural roots of the practice. This mode of analysis deals with notions of conversation and subsequent dedication, to the practice. It takes its cue from the practitioners themselves and tries to explain the world from their perspective.

I began this dissertation by suggesting a number of reasons why Australian individuals may have discovered and ‘converted’ to butoh and related practices such as Body Weather. I have concluded by framing this process, and analysing the ways in which a variety of influences

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<sup>63</sup> It is interesting to note that other forms of performance practice such as ballet are also anecdotally perceived by outsiders as generating a cult- like devotion amongst dedicated practitioners. For some analysis that examines this idea in an academic context see Walter (2011) and Aalten (1997).

and experiences led these dancers to butoh, and helped maintain their interest in butoh derived dance forms. My first chapter encapsulates the existing definitions and understanding around butoh. It traces the essential origins, cultural and historical conditions on which the form was built, providing a basis through which I hope the reader has been able to understand the progression of the form and its reception in the Western world. Chapter Two examined the way that the West has conceived and adopted the practice of butoh. It investigates a Western fascination with the form and those unavoidable notions of Orientalism and exoticism that pervade the analysis of the appropriation of Asian forms in Western contexts. Chapter Three specifically locates the study within Australia. The analysis of theatre reviews, alongside an investigation of the cultural and historical conditions in Australia-Japan relations across the 1980s and 1990s, provides insight into the performance culture of this period. With a specific focus on the theatre and dance activity during this time, I explored how social and economic circumstances provided a context against which we can come to understand how and why Japanese artists came to Australia and, subsequently, Australians came to understand (or misunderstand) butoh. Having tried to come to terms with the complex way butoh has been considered in Australia, two camps emerged: one considers butoh as emplaced, the other claims butoh as universal. There is competition over claims to authenticity here. There are different modes and processes of validation for many practitioners and theorists as they approach the history and lineage of the practice. There has emerged a competition around ideas pertaining to ‘ownership’ of butoh in Japan, Australia and internationally. In more recent years, the notion of butoh being emplaced seems to reflect a newer strategy: the localisation of the form, not only amongst Australian practitioners but also in other countries. As Melissa Lovric, the former dancer I interviewed who has been living in Japan for the past 23 years, suggests, “there is a tendency nowadays to quote your own culture in butoh and delve into the meaning of it”. The notion that butoh or butoh inspired work is emplaced is particularly apparent in the work of not only Tess de Quincey but also Yumi Umiumare, Linda Luke, Victoria Hunt, and other emerging butoh and butoh-influenced artists in Australia.<sup>64</sup>

My final chapter allowed me to explore uncharted territory. Here I was able to reflect on the dancers’ experiences in detail, tapping into their ‘lifeworld’ to get a more definitive and practical grasp on the artistic, social and personal imperatives that motivated them to move toward butoh as a practice. This research crystallised my investigation, understanding and analysis of motivations and intentions for these individual conversions to the form.

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<sup>64</sup> For more on Yumi Umiumare see <http://yumi.com.au/> ; Linda Luke <http://lindaluke.blogspot.com.au/> ; Victoria Hunt <https://victoriahuntperformance.wordpress.com/>

Bourdieu's sociological tools assisted me as I analysed the information that emerged from my research. His important epistemological and ontological framework allowed me to uncover the more opaque structures within the social and personal world of this practice and these practitioners, as well as allowing me to understand how the structures function, are reproduced and transformed.

Although there has been a burgeoning of interest in butoh in Australia with its inclusion in the institutions explained above, butoh remains a form that struggles for local recognition and support. Recently pioneering practitioners such as Lynne Bradley, Tess de Quincey, Cheryl Heazlewood, Yumi Umiumare featured in the 2014 NIDA conference, *Tearing the Mask: An exploration of Japanese Performance*. When discussing their experiences of butoh they communicated the anxieties, challenges and complexities they encountered in practicing the form in Australia. They also discussed the future of the form as further interest has been spurred due to the emphasis on Asian theatre forms in the recent federal curriculum for high school drama in Australia.

As my thesis has revealed, although it may have seemed that these dancers arrived at their conversion through random and purely personal means – by chance or some miraculous turn of events – conversions were more, what I called in Chapter Four, a matter of a 'slow burn'. In many cases it was not a coincidence that these subjects were attracted to the principles and practices of butoh. There were a number of important contextual and personal factors at play that left these dancers open to this Japanese dance form. Although each dancer had a distinctive experience, there are surprising correlations between their passages toward conversion. These included: a collection of specific formative experiences; the influence of mentors/teachers; the impact of seeing a performance; their experiencing of a particular personal crisis; the allure of the exotic; dissatisfaction with Western styles of dance and performance; the appeal of/and understanding of butoh as an immersive practice; and the personal shifts and discoveries that the form offers. Many of the dancers had comparable experiences and used similar phrases, motifs and metaphors to explain their journeys toward 'becoming' butoh. For these Australians it is not just a matter of being attracted to the exotic and/or spiritual new-age qualities (as some writers on the style such as Eckersall, Viala and Masson-Sekine suggest) but butoh 'conversions' were the result of a number of overlapping and interconnecting influences that manifested over time. However, due to its short history in Australia, butoh is still reaching its potential. We are currently in the first wave of its development, as most of the practitioners mentioned in this study (all but two) are still practicing, in one form or another. But as we shift into a different era of theatre praxis, these artists are perpetually rethinking their form, and their adjustments manifest in the shifts in

training, performing and devising of both emerging and established butoh and butoh-influenced artists in Australia. As suggested earlier, there is a contemporary move toward legitimisation. The next ten years could be an interesting time for Australian butoh, Body Weather and the practitioners who have, or in the future will, commit to the form.



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