

Lisa Ullman Travel Scholarship Fund 2011

To the Secretary, LUTSF

Meeting first generation Butoh dancers in Japan -

Dominique Baron-Bonarjee, Tokyo, Japan: February - September 2012

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Travel to Japan to research the origins of Butoh and train with first generation Butoh dancers. My project was initially going to take place in 2011, but due to the earthquake of 11 March 2011, and the subsequent tsunami, I had to delay until February 2012.

Through this visit I was able to discover a great deal of information about Butoh dance that I had not had access to before. In this intensive period of discovery and practice I made strong connections within the local Butoh and dance community as well as with contemporary artists and I was able to develop an original new angle, which I explored through writing, performances and interviews.

Through many opportunities, I achieved everything I had set out to do and far more. My visit to Japan is perhaps one of the most beneficial experiences in my practice to date.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

Visits to Keio University's Hijikata Archive

Performing with Yoshito Ohno at the International Festival of Dance and Theatre

Presenting my own solo piece at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio

Performing with Yoshito Ohno at the Kazuo Ohno Festival 2012

Interviewing Masaki Iwana, Yoshito Ohno and Yukio Suzuki

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE:

Arriving in Japan is a big culture shock. Very few people speak English, signs are mostly only in Japanese and the Tokyo transport system is extremely complicated and expensive. I would recommend planning a budget carefully beforehand. I would also recommend learning some Japanese before going there.

PLANS TO SHARE:

I am currently sharing the work through my website and I have contacted other avenues for publishing my research. I have also gathered the visual documentation from my performances in order to send it to producers and venues both in the UK and abroad.

I am very grateful for the support of LUTSF in giving me this unique opportunity.

Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

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Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund 2011

Travel to Tokyo to visit Japan's first generation Butoh dancers

By Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

Report:

The origins of Butoh are little known in the West and even in Japan. My visit to Japan allowed me to gain an inspiring and informed perspective on this little understood art form.

My interest in Butoh initially came from a change in the direction of my practice as an artist. Since 2006 I had been searching for a way to approach movement from a new angle, one that was inspired by the energy and inherent corporeal existence of the body, as opposed to the creation of forms. It was through this intention that I came to discover Butoh dance and began my journey along this path. Firstly attending workshops and eventually beginning to integrate the ideology of Butoh dance within my projects. As my involvement with Butoh intensified I felt that I needed to visit the birthplace of Butoh to discover the roots, both political and cultural, and the motivation for its emergence as a revolutionary dance form.

It was thanks to a Lisa Ullman Travel Scholarship that I made my way to Tokyo in February 2012. A Tokyo still in crisis a year after the earthquake, but Butoh itself having emerged from the crisis of post-war Japan, I felt that this atmosphere was a fitting setting for my exploration of Butoh in Japan.

Arriving in Tokyo was a very disorientating experience so I was extremely fortunate to meet the Tamanos a few days after my arrival. I had contacted many Japanese Butoh dancers before my visit to inform them of my interest in meeting them. Koichi and Hiroko Tamano contacted me back the day after my arrival. Koichi was Butoh founder, Tatsumi Hijikata's, first student. His wife Hiroko also danced in many of Hijikata's works. They are now based in California where they continue to dance and teach.

I visited them for a one-day workshop, which involved dancing, learning to cook Japanese food as well as visiting Shrines. I am especially thankful to the Tamanos because they helped me to find very reasonable accommodation within three days of my arrival in Tokyo. They recommended me to a friend of theirs who had an empty flat which very luckily included a work/dance studio where I was able to put into practice what I was taking from my workshops and experiences.

The Hijikata Archive and Research

One of the main aims of my travel to Tokyo was to visit the Hijikata Archive at Keio University to research the origins of Butoh. The Archive houses a collection of books,

recordings, photos and objects related to the first Butoh performances. From February until the end of April, I visited the archive almost everyday to read books, watch videos, see artifacts and generally gather information that would inform my understanding of Butoh.

On my first day at the Archive I met Takashi Morishita, the curator and director of the archive who was a great help with all my research. His passion for Butoh meant that he was very attentive and keen to provide me with all the materials I might be interested in seeing, including programmes, photographs and objects of scenography or costume, linked to the early performances.



Scenographic objects at the Hijikata Archive, Keio University

I was able to see a wide range of the performances that make up the foundation of Butoh dance, in their entirety. In particular I saw the recordings of Hijikata's early performances such as **Nikutai no Hanran** (*Rebellion of the Body*), **Anma** (*Masseurs*) and **Barairo Dansu** (*Rose-Coloured Dance*). In addition I saw many films in which Hijikata had performed or collaborated including a fascinating collaboration between the photographer Eikoh Hosoe and Tatsumi Hijikata, which I was totally unaware existed.

Hijikata wrote a series of texts, which give a unique insight into his surrealist thought and philosophy. I was able to find the English translations for them at the archive and photocopy them to keep in my research files.

I found many additional materials and writings about the important collaborations with visual artists, authors, poets that are an essential part of Butoh's origins and which were of

particular interest to me as my own work is often based in interdisciplinary collaborations. Mr Morishita showed me the original stage objects and designs as well as posters and printed materials made by the visual artists Tadanori Yokoo, Nakanishi Natsuyuki and Akasegawa Genpei, for some of Hijikata's early performances. There was also a special exhibition called 'The Back', which took place at Keio University during this time, curated by Mr Morishita, which examined the relationship between Hijikata and Nakanishi's work. I was very surprised to find out some surprising parallels between work I had done and some of the ideas of the early pieces.



Bellows object by Nakanishi Natsuyuki from 'Rebellion of the Body'



Bellows pump used in my project, 'Theatre of the Viscera', 2010

Through my visits I gained an understanding of the socio-political background to Butoh as well as aspects of Japanese culture and society, which influenced its development. Through this research I started to discover an original perspective for defining Butoh dance, which I was able to develop in my writings and performances.

Unfortunately the work of Kazuo Ohno is not readily available for viewing. Yoshito Ohno's management company, which handles the documentation, kindly, arranged for me to view the recordings over a series of days. However it was less easy to do this research due to the lack of a facility for this purpose.

Because my interest in Butoh is really concerned with its possibility as a practice at the border of performance and plastic arts, I was interested in knowing more about the contemporary art of Japan. I was very fortunate to be in Kyoto when there was a major retrospective of artist, Tomoyoshi Murayama's, total art movement, Mavo, which through its early performances and manifesto, were an important influence on Hijikata's thinking.

In addition the first Gutai retrospective exhibition to be presented in Japan took place during my visit. Gutai was a world-famous Japanese contemporary art movement (1954-1972) whose intention was to experiment with the link between painting and the body. Through its use of performance as an art form it had similar influences to Butoh and Hijikata actually performed in some Gutai happenings.

Butoh dance and workshops

Kazuo Ohno, the co-founder of Butoh with Hijikata, passed away in 2010 and my aim in coming to Japan was to meet his son, Yoshito Ohno. Yoshito was both Hijikata's and Kazuo

Ohno's collaborator in the creation of Butoh dance. Yoshito danced with Tatsumi Hijikata in 'Kinjiki', the first Butoh dance performance in 1959. He is the last remaining member of the trio and continues his father's legacy, teaching workshops at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio In Yokohama.

Unfortunately it was only after I was already in Tokyo that I learned that Yoshito was unwell and would not be running workshops for the foreseeable future. I was disappointed and still wanted to meet him. Thanks to a Japanese Butoh teacher I know in Paris, I was able to arrange to visit Yoshito Ohno. My visit to the Ohno house was the first highlight of my journey. I was welcomed into the warmth of the family kitchen in Kami-Hoshikawa, by Yoshito and Yukito Ohno, Kazuo's sons. I expressed my hope that I might be able to learn from Yoshito as I had come from so far away with this intention. Yoshito later showed me the studio his father had built and there he showed me some of the wonderful photo books and other materials featuring the Butoh trio.



Luckily Yoshito Ohno recovered by April and I was soon attending the regular Tuesday and Saturday classes at the studio. I don't know if it was my enthusiasm or pleading that encouraged his recovery!

As I wasn't going to follow a specific workshop, I was responsible for structuring my own time. I decided to visit many different teachers in order to get a wide overview of how Butoh had progressed since its beginnings and how I might define 'contemporary Butoh'.

This is a list of the teachers I visited:

Masaki Iwana – Masaki is a well-respected Butoh artist, having developed his own original approach early on. He is normally based in France so I was fortunate to be able to meet him and interview him on this rare visit to Tokyo. I was particularly inspired by his teaching and method during the two-week workshop I attended. It culminated in a public presentation of work.



After Masaki Iwana's workshop

Akira Kasai – I attended a one-week workshop with Akira Kasai. This was a rare opportunity to meet one of the original dancers from the Hijikata period. Kasai has gone on to develop a very personal and original approach to dance. He has written books about his ideas on dance and is respected both in the Butoh and contemporary dance world. Through the kind invitation of his wife, I was able to see the documentation of his past work. I also attended a seminar at his studio. I attended two of his performances: a group piece 'Utrobne', which later toured to Italy, as well as a solo piece at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Festival. My meeting and experience of Kasai's dance and ideas were an important chapter in my research.



Akira Kasai's workshop

Uesugi Mitsuyo – a student of Kazuo Ohno, she is well respected as a dancer and teacher. I also attended her solo performance.

Yuri Nagaoka and Seisaku – Seisaku was a student of Hijikata and uses some of the original visual choreography that Hijikata created. His teaching partner Yuri Nagaoka is very active as a Butoh dancer in Tokyo. I followed regular weekly workshops with them and attended their performances.

Natsu Nakajima – she is one of the first generation of female Butoh dancers having trained with Hijikata. She is widely respected as a performer and choreographer. I attended regular workshops with her and she has agreed to an interview.

Yoshito Ohno – Yoshito teaches at the studio that his father built at the family home in Yokohama. I became a part of the regular group of dancers who attend workshops there: performing together as well as attending and helping with each other's projects.

Yukio Suzuki – Yukio won the Toyota Choreography Award in 2008. From the basis of Butoh he has developed his own method for choreography and movement. His workshops were fast-paced and challenging. I attended all his open classes. I got to know Yukio when I interviewed him and through this connection, I met many contemporary artists and dancers in Tokyo.



Yukio Suzuki's class

Kudo Taketeru – I attended an intensive workshop with Kudo over the summer. He is a student of Koichi Tamano and his teaching is very much influenced by the forms developed by Tatsumi Hijikata. His workshop involved intensive physical training. We discovered we had both collaborated with the same musician, Michael Pestel, in the USA, and talked of a possible future collaboration. I will be interviewing him in November.

Yukio Waguri – a long-standing student of Hijikata's at the Asbestos-kan Studio, Waguri has attempted to record Hijikata's visual choreography into a form of Butoh dance notation through writing and video, which he named 'Butoh Kaden'. His teaching was strong and challenging and involved discussions and feedback. It was fascinating to get an insight into how Hijikata communicated his choreography through images. Waguri doesn't teach regular workshops but Mr Morishita helped me to organise some sessions with him.

Daisuke Yoshimoto – Daisuke's workshops focus on techniques such as walking and falling. As he was Kazuo Ohno's stage manager he has a strong sense of the stagecraft of Butoh and provides a very professional space for improvisation. I performed with his group in Yokohama.



Improvisation in Daisuke's class

In addition to Butoh workshops I also attended some contemporary dance workshops, which I felt would feed into my questions about movement:

Nacera Belaza – Nacera is a French-Algerian dancer who was performing with her company in the Dance Triennale. She doesn't describe her work as Butoh but her workshop ideas had everything in common with Butoh's approach to the dancing body.

Julie Anne Stanzak – Julie is one of Pina Bausch's main dancers. She was invited to teach a 2-day choreography workshop at the Ohno Studio which was a wonderful insight into the practice she developed through her time with Pina Bausch.

Collaborations and performances

I was very keen to translate my insights and inspiration into my own practice and see how my work might be affected or changed by my experiences in Japan. In this respect what I managed to achieve went beyond any expectations I could have had.

In April, through my meeting and association with Daisuke Yoshimoto and his dancers, I was invited to perform with them at the Yokohama Noge Festival over the Golden Week holiday period. This was a great opportunity to meet other dancers and be involved in a professional performance event that was well attended by families and locals.

In May Makiko Watanabe, an artist who was organizing a Future Shorts Japan film event, contacted me. She invited me to collaborate with a German fashion designer Sandra Goldmann, in creating a dance piece for an installation at the Chiyoda Arts 3331 contemporary art space. Through this event I made new contacts with contemporary artists and continue to collaborate with Makiko who is based in London and Tokyo.



Future Shorts Performance, Chiyoda Arts 3331

In June, Yoshito Ohno invited a group of his regular students to perform with him at the Theatre X International Festival of Theatre and Dance in Tokyo. Again this was a wonderful opportunity to perform in a professional context and experience firsthand how Yoshito prepares, structures and rehearses his work. We performed to a full house and received some very good reviews.



Technical rehearsal with Yoshito Ohno, Theatre X, Tokyo

In July, I created a scenographic installation at Kuri Studio, Yamanashi, for the Butoh group, 'The Physical Poets', summer tour. I was assisted by Gonzalo Catalinas Gallega, a fellow dancer whom I had met at the Barcelona Butoh Festival 2010.

In July, I performed '**Black Walking Piece**', a performance action in the streets of Tokyo. Walking is an integral part of Butoh, and Hijikata developed a practice where each step taken, is an awareness of the memories and experiences that shape the body and identity. I walked a 30 km path through the busiest arteries of Tokyo carrying a black flag, inspired by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's piece of a similar name. The performance became a meditation on my feelings of 'foreignness' in Japan. I documented the performance with photographs and a film which I posted to my website and other online presences.

Black Walking Piece
21 July 2012



In March I met Ikebana artist, Yoko Morishita, who taught me a workshop in ikebana (the traditional Japanese art of flower arranging). I introduced her to Butoh by showing her some films and photos. This dance form she had been unaware of till now intrigued her and we agreed to collaborate on a project.

Through the space I had access to with my home studio, I was able to work on my own dance ideas regularly over the months and by the end of June I felt ready to develop a new solo piece which I named '**Black Box**'. Yoshito Ohno very kindly gave me his support and offered me the use of the studio for the performance. I met Arihiro Yamada, an experimental musician, through another Butoh workshop and he joined the project too.

On 20 September we presented '**Black Box**' to an audience of 30 people at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio in Yokohama. It was a very successful evening and we received excellent feedback from the audience and critics. One prominent Tokyo dance critic, Nobuo Shiga, is currently writing a review of the performance.



Black Box performance





*Performance at Kazuo Ohno
Dance Studio*

'Black Box' was developed entirely from my experiences in Japan, and through the strength of the collaboration and investment of my fellow artists on the project. The opportunity to perform my own work in the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio made my trip to Japan an important chapter in my artistic career.

The **Kazuo Ohno Festival 2012** ran at BankART gallery in Yokohama throughout the whole of September. Yoshito Ohno again invited some of his students to dance with him for the two shows he was presenting with Canadian dancer, Lucie Gregoire. I performed in these shows as part of the group and was able to participate in an intensive period of rehearsals and preparation leading up to the event. The performances themselves were a great success, with strong feedback and response from the audience.



Kazuo Ohno Festival 2012

In addition to attending workshops I managed to attend a wide range of Butoh performances by older more experienced Butoh practitioners as well as the younger generation. This scope of interpretations of Butoh dance gave me strong critical impressions from which to reflect on my own interest in Butoh. I wrote a few reviews which I also published on my website.

The interviews and writings

When I set off for my research in Japan, it was with the intention of developing a body of written work about my ideas relating Butoh and other art forms. Through my intensive period of research at the Hijikata Archive I was able to begin to formulate a line of enquiry to follow considering Butoh as an ideology with which to approach the material of the body.

Mr Morishita also introduced me to many critics, academics and researchers in the Butoh and dance field whose work I had researched at the Hijikata Archive. Through discussions with them (Tatsuro Ishii, Katja Centonze, Nobuo Shiga, Shinichi Takeshige) I was able to get a strong theoretical angle on Butoh dance and in addition formulate my own views with more immediacy.

I began to write these ideas early on and it was these new perspectives, which led me to begin a series of interviews with Butoh dancers. To date I have interviewed Yoshito Ohno, Masaki Iwana and Yukio Suzuki. All of them were very engaged by my interview questions

and keen to discuss them. The results of these interviews have prompted my thinking further and I am currently writing an article about Butoh and contemporary art where I have collected a great deal of my research from the Hijikata Archive, the Kazuo Ohno Archive and my experiences of contemporary Butoh through attending performances and making my own work.



Interviewing Yoshito Ohno in the kitchen with translator, Moe Tomoeda

I also met Ko Murobushi, currently one of the most important dancers in Butoh in the West. He performed at Sadler's Wells last year. I was asked to translate an article about him from Spanish to English, and this opportunity gave me a strong link to his work and thinking, as well as a personal connection with him.

As a thank you to the Tamananos for their help in setting me up in Tokyo, I agreed to help translate an interview with Koichi Tamano from Japanese into French, and then into English. I did this with the help of dance critic and writer, Nobuo Shiga, who had done the interview. Again this gave me a close connection to the experience of Koichi Tamano.

Through my translations I was able to make the interviews and articles accessible to a much larger audience worldwide.



Kazuo Ohno Festival Exhibition at BankART, Yokohama

Other activities

During my visit I wanted to gain an understanding of the traditional culture of Japan and understand how it had been affected by Western influence after the Second World War. I visited many other cities in Japan including Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Fukuoka as well as the architecture and art installations of Naoshima Island. A Japan Rail Pass was essential for this. I also visited the Noh Theatre and Museum to see a show and to do research into costumes and masks. I organised a meeting with a Noh mask collector from Ichy's Gallery, who showed me all his masks and explained their symbolism and use in the plays. I learned about the principles of Ikebana through a workshop. I attended Japanese language classes and appreciated another type of 'dance' at the Sumo wrestling competition.

The future

Thanks to the invaluable support of Yoshito Ohno, throughout my visit to Japan, as well as the support of the LUTSF, I was able to get a one year cultural activities visa to remain in Japan until July 2013. I have extended my stay here in order to develop more collaborations with local artists: I have a project in development with Tokyo-based contemporary artist, Pinpin Co.

In terms of my research, I have already begun to disseminate the information I have gathered in Japan on both my blog and website, 'DominiqueBB.com'. The number of people visiting my site has increased steadily since I began to publish and publicize my work with

an average of about 50 hits per day, rising to 200 on days when I have just published work. In addition there is a wide cross section of nationalities reading my work (Japan, USA, Russia, France, Spain, etc.). I am very pleased with this outcome and it has given me the impetus to consider collating all my writings into a book in the future: there are very few books available on the subject of Butoh in English, and none which give it the performance-art angle that I am interested in.

In addition, I am seeking further opportunities to disseminate my work. Marie Gabrielle Rotie of Rotie Productions will be publishing my interviews on her site 'ButohUK.com'. I have also contacted online dance magazine, 'Bellyflop' and am in the process of contacting other publications, to have my work published with them. These avenues will ensure that many more people have access to the information.

Being actively involved in Butoh research in Japan provided me with many new contacts both in Japan and outside. I was able to meet two important French contemporary dance choreographers, Anne Collod and Nacera Belaza, and establish a professional connection with them, which I will continue to maintain.

Most importantly my stay in Japan has begun my work on my own method with which to approach dance and movement. I have experimented with it in my recent work and continue to do so in a practical way through regular writing and improvisation. I have integrated many ideas into the movement classes I run and I believe that this will become further realized in future teaching.

I acknowledged the kind support of the LUTSF on my website and blog as well as on printed material for my performance. I spoke about the fund to many dancers and artists in Japan, as well as giving advice to subsequent scholarship winner, Hollie Miller.



With Yoshito Ohno and Kazuo Ohno puppet, Kazuo Ohno Festival 2012