

LUTSF REPORT – SUZI CUNNINGHAM

JAPAN, 18th JUNE TO 18th JULY 2017

Dear all at LUTSF,

I am writing to express my heartfelt thanks for the opportunity LUTSF gave me to visit Japan in the summer of 2017.

I travelled to Tokyo on the 18th June 2017 to research the foundations and history of Butoh at the Kazuo Ohno (one of the forefathers of Butoh) archives in Tokyo and to attend 2 weeks of workshop training with Yoshito Ohno at his school in Yokohama. I travelled to West Japan, to Kyoto, to visit The Art Complex which is home to the first fully dedicated theatre for Butoh Performance. I saw Butoh work there, met performers and did class with them.

I attended the Music Therapy World Congress in Tsukuba from 4th-8th July 2017. During this conference I performed and presented an Academic Paper which is a collaborative piece of research on improvisation with myself and 3 other arts therapists from the UK. I met with Japanese therapists to discuss the crossovers between Butoh, performance, improvisation and therapy.

Following the conference, I spent a week researching at Keio University, where the co-founder of Butoh, Hijikata Tatsumi, archives are held. I met with protégés of Hijikata and took extensive workshops with Yuki Waguri, Natsu Nakajima, Yurabe Masami, Aiko Kurasaki and Ima Tenko. I returned to Edinburgh on the 18th July 2017.

Project and Highlights

1. To research the source of Butoh and further my vocabulary in Butoh **with a view** to developing solo work. I did this by visiting the offices of Kazuo Ohno and Tastumi Hijikata in Tokyo, where there are extensive archives, and to train with the son of one of the founders of Butoh (Yoshito Ohno) and other practitioners.
2. To share an Academic Paper, regarding research in improvisation, and to perform at the World Congress of Music Therapy 2017.

1. Research the source of Butoh

This project enabled me to develop new solo work and contribute to Butoh research in Scotland, riding the resurgence of interest in embodied movement as a gateway to a new wave of performance art (and not necessarily just Butoh performance). As one of the only female performers using Butoh techniques in Scotland, and composing new work with an environmental conscience, it is vital to me that I maintain the authenticity of Butoh whilst developing innovative and exciting work. This trip also enabled Butoh elements to be a successful composition to add to the new work created with Mamoru Iriguchi for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Our show acclaimed 4 and 5 star reviews respectively from The Herald, The Times, The Stage and Broadway Baby. I have also just been offered a residency at The Work Room at The Tramway to develop my solo work which will employ my Butoh discoveries in Japan. This will be a public sharing and include an open workshop for dance professionals to attend. This is a vital springboard for further funding opportunities and performances in festivals over the coming year.

2. Performance at the World Congress of Music Therapy 2017, Tsukuba, Japan

Our performance at the WCMT **was unexpectedly** touching and surpassed my expectations. People were enthused and inspired. **Some** had never seen dance improvisation, especially not so interconnected to live music and were enthused as to how this could be used both in therapy and

performance. I met therapists and delegates from all over the world. I and the Concurrent team are following upon these contacts with the possibility of future research, presentation and performance. We will be sharing our Japan experience and research as performance in the next GIO Fest in Glasgow in November 2017.

I could not have proceeded with this project without the help of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. The trip far exceeded my hopes and expectations, gaining so much insight into the beginnings of Butoh and working with Yoshito Ohno at the Kazuo Ohno Dance School. I was particularly inspired however, to attend the archives at Keio University, and to meet the curator, Takashi Morishita and Yukio Waguri who worked closely with Hijikata (Arguably, the founder of Butoh). They shared both their enthusiasm and their kindness, and now I understand why I feel so close to the work of Hijikata, by studying the archives and taking part in over 15 workshops whilst I was there. Delving into the deep practice of Butoh in its homeland has enabled me to realise deeper connections within myself to the work of Hijikata in particular, and I did not realise the significance and impact of his work before I embarked upon this journey. I was really inspired, moved and driven to create new work after these particular discoveries during my research, more of which I have detailed in my report.

After visiting the Butoh Kan Theatre in Kyoto, I am now in talks about a possible collaboration with the curator there. Morishita is also keen for us to exchange work between Keio University and Edinburgh.

Suggestions to help future Awardees

I think what was vital for me during my research was to be adaptable and open to opportunity throughout my travels, whilst always having the goal of my project in mind. Every day was rich with discoveries and opportunities and so recording my thoughts with a written journal, voice recorder a video ensured varying levels of learning and absorbing the experience.

I would advise future applicants to be realistic with their travels within the space of time, especially in a country where the transport system is unknown to you and in a language you don't understand. Do not always rely on Wi-Fi, and book accommodation as much ahead of time so as not to waste vital research time. Finally, jump at opportunities to meet people, follow up contacts, go off the beaten track and don't be afraid to step into the unknown!

The Concurrent Blog containing details of our research is available online. I will publish this report on my Facebook page with pictures and videos. It will also be available on my academic research page linked to Queen Margaret University (<https://qmu.academia.edu/SuziCunningham>) and disseminated as a member of The Arts for Well Being Edge Hill University.

I attach my report detailing the project and discoveries I made. Once again I give my heartfelt thanks to the LUTSF for making this possible.

Best wishes

Suzi Cunningham

Report

I travelled to Tokyo and Kyoto to research the foundations and history of Butoh in the archives of both Kazuo Ohno and Hijikata Tatsumi. I attended workshops with key Butoh practitioners and performed and presented a research paper in improvisation at the World Congress of Music Therapy in Tsukuba.

Week 1: Kazuo Ohno archives and workshops with Yoshito Ohno

Adjusting to Japanese time was easier than I expected and within a day of arrival, I attended the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio in Yokohama. In a way, this is the only existing shrine to Butoh, since the death of both Ohno and Hijikata, and the demolition of Hijikata's dance studio, Asbestos Hall. This studio was where Ohno danced and taught for over 40 years, and now his son Yoshito takes regular classes. There was a real sense of connection to the spirit of this history as soon as I entered. Yoshito's soft guidance, tales of his father and his understated way of teaching allowed me to reconnect to some of my former Butoh training but also gain new insight into the essence of Ohno's way of performing. A particular focus on the hands, the use of space and gaze was key to the work.

His legacy was reiterated by visiting the archives of Kazuo Ohno¹ that week, held in the office and home of Mina, who is the dedicated secretary (and my translator) of the archives. It was touching to see the vast collection of writings and drawings² from across Ohno's career. I sat for many hours reading cuttings from newspapers and watching videos of his performances and 2 documentaries made about his life from a simple and humble perspective. From this experience, the work that stood out was seeing 'The Written Face' which Ohno performed in a dress, dancing in shallow water, at twilight with the backdrop of the raised skyline of Tokyo. It resonated with my work: the contrast of the simplicity of nature, the exploration of femininity against a large looming city. I was also struck by watching the first ever performance of Tatsumi Hijikata and Ohno together, with its implied exploration of homosexuality, in a culture where being gay is fiercely vilified (even to this day). I had not realised until now, just how revolutionary these artists were. Not just in attitude, but in style, denouncing and dissecting art, tradition and dance performance that had come before.

Butoh begins with the abandonment of the self and, in letting go of the ego, dancing begins. This felt slightly more difficult to do abiding in the fashionable and modern Tokyo. After a few days of being with Yoshito, I was trying to achieve this more spiritual state of dancing (which I had found so easy to connect to in previous training in Scotland and Europe, especially in open air/ serene spaces). However, when you are travelling two hours each way through a crowded underground, pollution, searing heat and negotiating unfamiliar pathways, I then found this 'oneness' with all around me hard to find. Yoshito's softness was certainly endearing, looking to find a nothingness, a harmony with everything, the Buddhist way, however the Christian element (from his mother) was certainly also a strong influence and there seemed to be an ever present awareness of the sky, the heavens. This was a little more difficult for me to connect to, and the more time I spent in Tokyo, the more I was drawn to the work of Hijikata, the grit of the city, the disconnection and disharmony of life, fear, that for him was the real beginning of Butoh. A workshop later that week with a former pupil of Ohno, Aiko Kurosaki, who now lives in New York, was a refreshing journey into exploring more

¹ See Appendix 1 – Picture of Kazuo Ohno Archives

² See Appendix 2 – Picture of Kazuo Ohno's Personal Notes

dynamic and modern Butoh using contact and by embodying less endearing emotions such as anger.

Week 2: Kyoto: Butoh Ken Theatre and workshops with Yurabe Masami and Ima Tenko

In my second week I visited The Butoh Ken in Kyoto. Opened in 2016 and run by the Art Complex Group, it is a dedicated theatre for Butoh performance and aims to increase the prospect of viewing Butoh in Japan. The theatre is a converted old store house from the Edo era, with only enough room for 9 seats. It's creates a beautiful intimacy with the performers and the sound of the shamisen (three-stringed instrument) fills the dense space. I first saw Ima Tenko (a former dancer with Hijikata) here. She performed like the floating spirit of an ancient geisha, with incredible facial expressions and the strength of a Sumo wrestler. Later that week, Ima was kind enough to give me a one-on-one workshop where she explained her techniques and we explored these images together. Butoh was made for Japanese bodies, long backs, short and bowed legs, in-turned feet and tucked pelvis (almost the opposite of the body emphasis in Western dance training) and here I learned how to transform or adapt my body with this in mind. I learned about breath; 'the eternal moment' between, that is neither inhalation or exhalation; be aware of the back, where you have been as well as where you are going; the 6 directions that connect to The Hara (the influence of Kabuki and Sumo): Heaven(Father), Earth(Mother), North, South, East and West. I asked her about the striking facial contortions that are prominent in Butoh, most of these came from Hijikata's choreography and notation (later known as Butoh-fu) which took images from mythology, animals and the everyday working man/woman. I learned from her the power of the gaze. I thought about how often I perform Butoh without my glasses or contact lenses, in order to achieve the 'crystal eye', which enables me to connect to my inner world, but I began to think more about how I need to see, to look out for connection too.

I observed a beautiful yet poignant image that seemed to reiterate this personal observation. I was on the underground train in Tokyo, a young woman got on with a baby strapped to her front. The baby, wide-eyed, body soft, open, legs and arms loose and swinging freely. In contrast, her mother's shoulders hunched, legs turned in and eyes cast down. The child seemed to be searching for connection, yet the commuters were mostly engaged in their mobiles. The baby sat next to a business man, her little leg occasionally resting upon him as her little reflexes kicked gently across their invisible boundary. The business man unflinched, on his phone, the mother, not looking up, repeatedly but gently pulling the leg back off him. This image stays with me now as I question cultural conditioning that reinforces this development of restricted movement from a child to an adult. Something I observed so much of in Japan, and Ima explained as the societal consequences of a history of strong rituals, dictatorship and living in small, crowded spaces. This is something that resonated with the explorations in my work in Scotland and adds an exciting perspective for development.

During this week, I met Abél at the Butoh Kan, he is the Secretary and also a performer and choreographer, and he has asked me to collaborate on a piece he is creating with a composer next year. This is something I will follow up on, and look into possibilities of match funding. I also attended a full day workshop with Yurabe Masami³, who focuses his practice on the elements of water, air and flowers. His technique was quite precise, correcting my elbows, legs and hips during the exercises and improvisations.

In a total contrast to the intimate space of the Butoh Kan, and the visceral close up solos of both Masami and Ima, I attended a performance by SanKai Juku. Possibly the most famous and successful modern Butoh dance company to come out of Japan, I was struck by the modern glass arena style

³ See Appendix 3 – Video of workshop with Yurabe Masami

theatre where at least 500 people were in attendance. Sankai Juku are slick with contrived choreographic style and trademark bald heads, white make up, and Butoh loincloth/white sheeted skirts and embryonic movement. It was gently mesmerising and with a theme of circles. I aligned with the Kanji definition of Butoh, the 'bu' as well as dance, means to go in a never-ending circle and 'toh' is to stamp (a much more present and definitive step). I did enjoy it, but felt separate and static as a visual observer, an audience member, and not something I associate with the impact of Butoh. I feel I should be, and want to be, moved and this reaffirmed why I want to perform in more inclusive, intimate and everyday settings.

End of Week 2/Week 3: Performance at the World Congress of Music Therapy 2017

Like a beautiful conclusion and exploration of my research, work and observations so far in Japan, I travelled to Tsukuba to meet my colleagues at the World Congress of Music Therapy, attended by around 2500 delegates and therapists from across the globe. I presented with my colleagues from the Concurrent Improvisation Network in the UK and performed our piece "Encounters on stage: exploring embodied empathic improvisation as performance"⁴. It really was incredible to attend and a real contrast from the Japanese lifestyle I had adapted to. In fact I found the loudness and the body energies of the Westerners almost overwhelming, realising that my focus and movement had gently internalised. Therefore the day we performed our improvisation was like an exploration of that experience and my struggles of where Tokyo city life and the openness of my homeland collide. This was observed by people who attended and Nicky Haire wrote a wonderful blog about the experience that day⁵.

Some Japanese people had never seen a body improvise and we got some touching responses from those who felt they had glimpsed something very special. I made some contacts here that I hope will create new dialogues and opportunities to expand our practice across these cultures. The Concurrent team are also following up on possibilities of future research, presentation and performance. We will be sharing our Japan experience, findings and follow-on research on empathic improvisation as performance in the next GIO Fest in Glasgow in November 2017.

Week 3: Hijikata Archives and workshops with Yukio Waguri

After difficulties in accessing the Hijikata Archives, I finally arranged a meeting at the beginning of week 3 with the curator at Keio University, Takashi Morishita. He showed me the incredible gateway to Hijikata's work and I sat mesmerised over the next few days as I read, perused and viewed hours and hours of rare, stunning and sometimes shocking footage. There was abandonment, rawness and explorations of life and death that I had never witnessed before. I was utterly transfixed and inspired by what I saw. I was touched by Morishita's enthusiasm and dedication to the work of Hijikata and his kindness when he gave me the book he wrote (Hijikata Tatsumi Notational Butoh: An Innovation all Method for Butoh Creation). I also met Rose, who is doing a PhD on the choreography of Hijikata and she arranged for me to attend 2 wonderful days with Yukio Waguri. Waguri was a former dancer, protégé and friend of Hijikata. We spent many hours together effecting some key traits of his work based on the original 'ankoku butoh'. Ankoku means darkness and was the name Hijikata first used to describe his avant-garde style. The workshop included learning the almost impossible 2D body structure of Maia and Nijinsky and how to dance distance, burning, smoke, water and glass.

⁴ See Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 – Concurrent at the World Congress of Music Therapy

⁵ <http://www.concurrent.music.ed.ac.uk/2017/08/08/concurrent-in-japan/>

Hijikata believed the body could transform into anything, that all materials were fluid structures made from different qualities of particles held within different structures, so that everything can become everything else. We just had to learn from them; the gas is our teacher, the table is our teacher, the plastic is our teacher. I became quite preoccupied by the image of the doll (and something I am heartened to say that Waguri praised me for) and since my return I have been working on an improvisation about Nijinsky, his transformation into the image of the doll, descent into madness and how this perhaps led to his suicide.

Waguri talked about his sadness at the divide amongst the Butoh community, something I had also observed, often between followers of either Ohno or Hijikata, or insistence that Butoh belongs to Japan, or neither of these and is about life itself. To me it is in fact a harmonious or sometimes disharmonious mixture of them all. Despite rumours of his difficult nature, complex choreography, and harsh teaching and training regime, Waguri's fondness for him and tales made me feel very connected to the man and the myth of Butoh. Hijikata arrived from the countryside into the throng of Tokyo city after the Second World War. His homelessness, hunger, demons (drugs) and disillusion were often represented in his work, along with his concerns for progression of technology and the loss of the past. He played with tradition, the remnants of war and anxiety for where the world was heading. Something I relate to on many levels and want to be reflected in my work.

Under Waguri's guidance I learned some small yet invaluable (and vital for Butoh) lessons in how to connect to my back space, how to bring the space with you when you move, my eye gaze and connecting to my hara by literally winding my neck in! These were invaluable techniques I used to enhance and personify my character in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Show with Mamoru Iriguchi when I returned to Scotland in July⁶.

Week 4: Workshops with Natsu Nakajima, My Performance in Tokyo and Conclusions

My final week was spent researching more of the archives, reconnecting to Yoshito's workshops and group in Yokohama. I was also delighted to discover workshops with Natsu Nakajima back in Tokyo. Natsu is one of the oldest female Butoh performers in the world. She was also a protégé of Hijikata. I loved her style of teaching. We did an intense warm up of the body using Yoga, Noguchi Taiso, Shiatsu and breath work and she also focuses her work on ankoku Butoh. She worked with us on some of the strongest images from Hijikata's work, such as the rooster and the fisherwoman. She reminded us that in Japanese culture, dance primarily came out of language, image and story-telling, not out of following the melody or rhythms of music. This perhaps explains the richness in Butoh. We also had time to improvise, something that had not been so encouraged during all my other workshops. That had been good, as I wanted more technique, structures, and new ways to enhance improvisation, that I could not get anywhere else but here in Japan. This felt like the time for me to embed the teachings, formulate methods of choreographing Butoh and nurture all that I had absorbed over the past 4 weeks in Japan.

I had been recording myself dancing in various locations across my time in Japan, responding to the environment and my research. In the bamboo groves outside Kyoto, inspired by their strength yet flexibility, their density yet hollowness: In the dark, eerie, yet quiet calm of Tokyo playgrounds in the middle of the night, being playful, mischievous yet feeling like an outsider: On the hilltop covered in hydrangeas where I felt the spirit, beauty and life of my grandmother who passed away last year, a dance so full of light and heaviness at the same time. However I sought something to

⁶ See Appendix 6 – Picture of Suzi Cunningham with Waguri Yukio

bring all this together. I wanted to perform, to share where Suzi, my work, my practice met Japan. This had been in my thoughts as the end of my visit approached.

Then, on a day where the heat was nauseating, I took a walk through Ueno Park on my way to a workshop, hoping to find some shade, when I heard the sound of a beautiful cello being played at the side of the trees. It was enlightening and I wanted to dance. I approached the busking cellist and we arranged a time for a small 'performance' together for the Saturday just prior to my departure. Little did I know he was going to play 'Ave Maria', the song that Yoshito Ohno finished every Butoh workshop with, symbolising motherhood, pride, joy and loss, all in one final dance⁷.

Conclusion

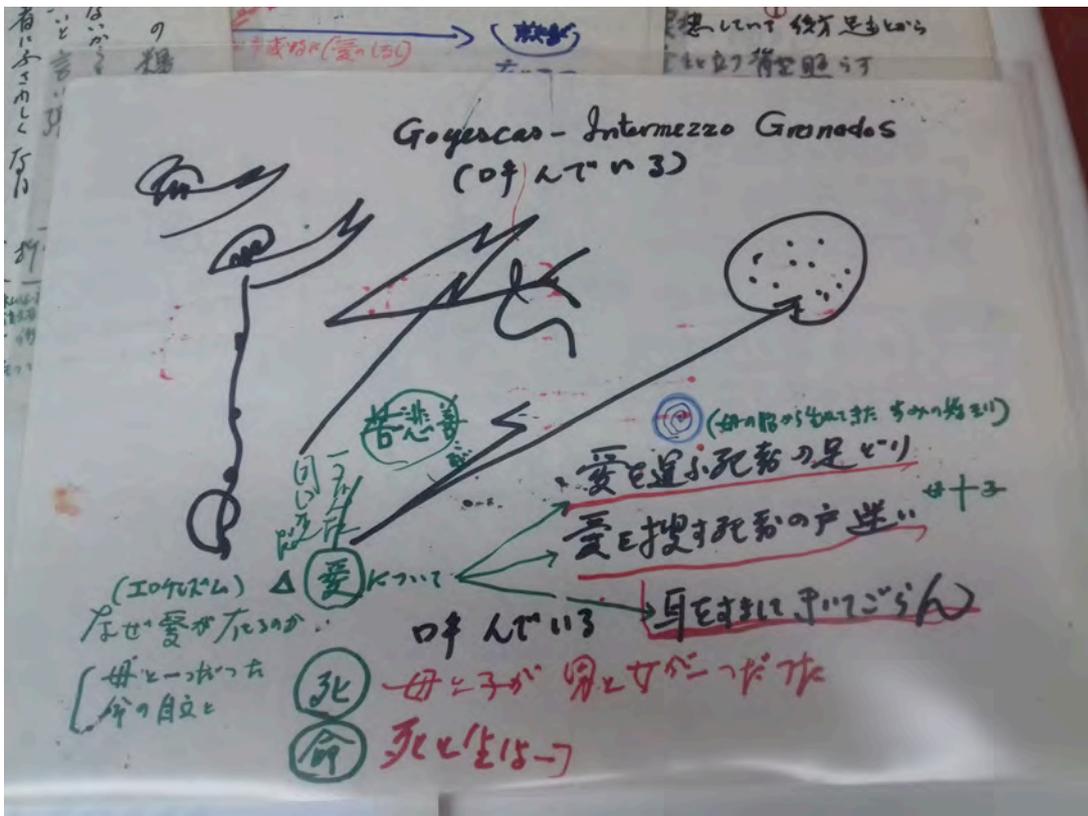
Japan was an incredible experience which I know will have repercussions and resonance for many years to come. Thanks to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship, I was able to embed a deeper understanding of Butoh in my body as well as make new connections to improvising and future opportunities across both disciplines. Since my return I have been able to use the skills I learned to enhance my performance in a successful Edinburgh Fringe show ("Eaten") with Mamoru Iriguchi. We are now negotiating dates with programmers to appear in Festivals across the UK, as well as in Istanbul and China. I also gained an opportunity in September 2017 to work in Findhorn with renowned improviser Kirstie Simpson which I believe came as a result of my trip. I have also just been told that I have been awarded a residency with The Work Room in Glasgow to develop my solo work, some of which will be exploring instant composition and the experience and discoveries I made in Japan. This trip opened up a new world to me, enhanced my practice and gave me confidence in my own abilities and skills. I could not have had that without the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship and I am truly grateful for this experience.

⁷ See Appendix 7 – Video of Dancing in Ueno Park

Appendix 1



Appendix 2





Appendix 5



Appendix 6



