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THE ROUTLEDGE
COMPANION TO BUTOH
PERFORMANCE

Edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario

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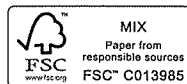
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For Jeanne, Beckett and Axel
Ayako Kano and Linda Chance

And for Rosemary Candelario, the best co-editor one could possibly imagine

Rosemary:

For my first butoh family: Deborah, Ellen, Alice, Hortense, and Nathan
And, as always, for Karl



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MUROBUSHI KŌ AND HIS
CHALLENGE TO BUTOH

Katja Centonze

Dance/Death as a political choice: the 1960s

Murobushi Kō (1947–2015) occupies a key position in articulating butoh's original intention of corporeal revolution. One of the unique traits of Murobushi's work is that he persevered in exploring the political quality inherent in Hijikata Tatsumi's butoh. Murobushi also attempted to challenge the image of butoh itself and to continuously remap corporeality. He opted for dance envisaged as a practice of radicalism and resistance and attempted to demonstrate that making this decision implies a certain responsibility, which puts us in the uncomfortable condition of facing corporeality and spectatorship (Centonze 2009). Hence, in Murobushi's case, dance is a paradox that unfolds already as a political act, while being apolitical. Crucial to this aesthetic enterprise is the coupling between dance/corporeality and death, which guides the performer and the audience towards the raw experience of risk, danger, and crisis. The body stands out as a place where critical forces come into play, and the ground on which problematic conflicts interact.

Murobushi says he started to dance when he decided to die (Murobushi in Centonze 2016a), and he started to dance/die when he encountered Hijikata's corporeality and writings. The core of Murobushi's art becomes the oxymoronic essence of dance, which according to Hijikata is "the corpse standing straight at the risk of its own life" (cf. Centonze 2017, 204). In his teens Murobushi was devoted to Nietzsche, French literature (in particular to Rimbaud's poetry), Artaud, and Beckett. He frequented dance clubs and jazz cafés in Shinjuku. During the tumultuous 1960s, Shinjuku's streets were the main stage for avant-garde happenings and demonstrations against Security Treaty-driven postwar domestic policy and Japan-U.S. alliance politics. In 1966, he entered Waseda University, which was dominated by student activism.¹ His devotion to poetry writing was transformed in these years into a curiosity for the rebellious and critical body: the *nikutai* (cf. Murobushi 2011).² Fascinated by the actions of avant-garde artists, such as High Red Center, he formed with university fellows the experimental group Mandragora, whose happenings expressed anti-nationalism and anti-imperialism.

Nevertheless, it was in Hijikata that he discovered a possible solution for his questions about corporeality. At the recommendation of Nakanishi Natsuyuki, Murobushi went to see *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body* (1968) and was deeply impressed. Months later he visited Hijikata at his studio with his school friend Bishop Yamada. They were immediately recruited by Hijikata for the shooting of Arai Misao's *Onsen ponbiki jochū* (Hot Spring Spa Maid

Pimps, 1969) and were subsequently also featured in Ishii Teruo's *Kyōfu kikei ningen* (Horrors of Malformed Men, 1969). Murobushi practiced only for a short time under Hijikata, and only in the films and the *kiyūpun shō*, the gold-painted body cabaret shows, which contributed to the livelihood of the butoh dancers and to performative experimentation.

In 1972 Murobushi was a founding member of Dairakudakan along with Tanigawa Toshiyuki, Ōsuka Isamu, Amagatsu Ushio, Tamura Tetsurō, and Bishop Yamada, gathered around the charismatic and influential Maro Akaji. Important female members included Carlotta Ikeda, Yuki Yuko, Furukawa Anzu, and Mizelle Hanaoka (Yoshioka Yumiko). In 1974 Murobushi edited and published the first issue of the butoh newspaper *Hageshii kisetsu* (Violent Season) (Centonze 2009, 167). He also started to direct and produce the female company Ariadone no kai centered on Carlotta Ikeda (who was trained in Graham modern dance technique), choreographing among others the trilogy *Mesukazan* (Female Volcano 1975–1977).³ In 1976 he founded his male butoh company Sebi⁴ and established his butoh studio, Butō Garan Hokuryūkyō, in the mountains of Gotaishi (Fukui). Throughout the 1970s the work of Ariadone, Sebi and Dairakudakan overlapped, as fluid exchanges of dancers and services were carried out between the "mother group" Dairakudakan and the different companies formed by its individual members (Okamoto 2016).⁵ Beginning in 1980, Murobushi's choreography of Ariadone and Ikeda attracted increasing attention, such that he contributed to shaping the image of butoh overseas, which was particularly associated with Ikeda in the press.⁶ Jean Baudrillard described their butoh as the "theatre of revulsion, convulsion and repulsion" (Baudrillard 1985, 38).

At the same time as he worked with these companies, Murobushi also continued to create solo works. Over the next two decades, his influence outside Japan grew exponentially and he became a point of reference for the notion and practice of butoh. In 1986 Murobushi and the Italian dancer and visual artist PierPaolo Koss founded the mixed-gender Ko Murobushi Company. Their transcultural butoh fostered interactions between Japanese and western dancers, and gained visibility with important productions like *Panta Rhei* (Maison de l'Unesco, 1986). Beginning in 1991 Murobushi began to spread his influence to Central and South America, touring also with Kusanagi Urara while choreographing their intense duets. Murobushi's influence on the international dance scene cannot be underestimated. He inspired countless overseas butoh dancers, such as Yvonne Pouget (De Giorgi 2012). Since the late 1990s Murobushi played an important role in reorienting butoh with respect to contemporary dance, while shaping bodies of young contemporary dancers (Centonze 2010, 2014).

Shugendō, yamabushi: a further step towards the outside

Pivotal to Murobushi's corporeal landscape was a centrifugal attitude which pushed him to continuously experiment with new ways of challenging his body, and which was presented in his manifesto as the concept of "butoh of the outside" (1986). With respect to this, during his university years, Murobushi's concern for blurring identities, gender hybridity, anti-social forces, and self-sacrifice (as conceived by Georges Bataille) found a new cognitive source in the itinerant *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics), who cultivate *shugendō*, folk beliefs based on arduous body techniques that may bring the practitioner close to death. He was interested in Honda Yasuji's survey on *yamabushi* in relation to Japanese folk performing arts and in 1970 joined several extended ascetic trainings as a lay participant at Yudonosan in the site of Dewasanzan.

Yamabushi, or liminal beings (Miyake 2001, 79), were feared in the past for their transformational power. Their environmental practices – principally articulated in exposing the ascetic to untamed nature – included rituals of death and rebirth, dietary rules and fasting, risky mountain-climbing and long distance walking, fire and waterfall-rituals, and retreat into dark and

narrow caves. *Shugendō* leads to a peculiar command over the body, and the *yamabushi*, by undergoing extenuation, heighten their physical capacities and refine sensorial perception while crossing the borders between human, animal, and divine.

Although these are disciplines strictly connected to mountain worship, Murobushi did not approach these techniques for mystical or religious purposes, but in order to expose his body to terror and peril, exploring collapse and enduring pain. In addition to the corporeal avant-garde strategies put forth by Hijikata based on the metamorphic body and non-human agency (Centonze 2016b, 2017), these corporeal experiences were to have a strong repercussion on the (kin)aesthetics and the economy of movement of Murobushi's performances, where superfluous dynamics are avoided.

Miira and *sokushinbutsu*

Murobushi explored *shugendō* as a form of resistance to social order, to cultural categorization. He discovered the nucleus of his performance, the apotheosis of the corporeality of the outside, in the *miira* (mummy) or *sokushinbutsu*, “the ascetics who sought to achieve salvation and immortality through self-mummification” (Raveri 1990–1991, 250). Proscribed from the Meiji period onwards, self-mummification, the attainment of Buddha-hood in this body, was the ultimate goal of a *yamabushi* (Miyake 2001, 65, 78). *Miira* were buried alive in coffins or in tiny chambers, sometimes sitting in a lotus posture, and disinterred usually after three years.⁷ If the mummification process was incomplete, the corpse would be disemboweled and dried with candle smoke and incense. These destabilizing and disruptive figures incarnate the apogee of ambiguity and hybridity. The *miira* debunk the category of age and gender, and, above all, they disintegrate time logic. The *miira* may be considered as anti-establishment catalysts who cast doubt on the cultural difference between life and death and engender a new form of power, while indicating the need for a new social and political body in historical situations of upheaval (Raveri 1990–1991, 257–260).

Drawing on the idea of the *miira*, Murobushi viewed dance as a playground for investigating the limits of the body, a heterogeneous body which trembles on the edge between life and death. His radical ideas about dance practice led to experiments in self-entombment in performance, rather than in a spiritual process. The *miira* corpse presents an extreme challenge to borders of physicality and becomes a symbol of the apex of contradiction shivering between presence and absence in performativity, visibility, and invisibility, and points at the highest form of self-sacrifice. These eternally preserved corpses, the ultimate objectification of the body, may denote oscillations between human and thing, organic and inorganic, and embody to the nth degree, the idea that, as Murobushi says, “our own body is the first ‘Other’ and the first ‘alien thing’ we confront,” and that dancing is “being outside” of the myth of identity (Murobushi 2015).

Komusō and the *acéphale*

In *Komusō* (1976), his first official *miira* performance, he confined himself in a coffin where a fire was kindled. He then faced the audience sitting with his legs crossed in front of the open box in a fetus-like position with high flames behind him. His mouth is wide-open in a dilated mute scream of terror (or is it a laughter?), and his clenched fists seem like they are affixed to his darkened face. His black-painted⁸ head and naked, stiffened body are covered with ashes, smeared with mud and different materials are applied, which hang from his ‘carbonized corpse’ like epidermal shreds. His feet are in a contrived *en de dans* position, while his leg painstakingly lifts. For Murobushi, *Komusō* consecrated his distinguishing characteristics as a self-defining artist.

Komusō are mendicant Zen monks who cover their heads with woven reed hoods that completely cover their faces like an overturned basket. This procedure of concealment is a form of erasing one's identity. The headless body (*acéphale*) is a peculiar aspect of early *butoh* (Centonze 2017), and Murobushi made a trademark out of wrapping the head. The process of removing the face, of wiping out one's connotations may be connected to the concept of “effacing” and obliterating one's presence, which appears in Foucault's discourse on Blanchot and the outside (1987, 13). What Foucault refers to in language and thought, Murobushi applies to his dance politics and corporeality, or to be precise, Murobushi mirrors his ‘dance of the impossible’ in the philosopher's biopolitics.

Murobushi defines himself as the “*miira* poet” and aims at the laughing *miira* (Murobushi 1995). He detects the paradox the *miira* embodies: “If we look at it, we see how it continues to metamorphose moment by moment . . . The *miira* is not dead, it seems as if, being resolute in death, it lives while continuing to embody death” (2009, 2). He refers to Hijikata's concept of dance as the standing corpse and adds:

The whole life is a process of collapse, and collapse itself is dance. . . . Obviously, there is something like the impossibility of movement in the body of the *miira*, but how shall we move starting from such a condition? This has become my theme. While untying this [condition], how can we invent movement? [Therefore] I trained in electric baths.
2009, author's translation

Murobushi underlines the transcultural aspect of practices of mummification, disrupting them from a discourse of national identity, and contrasts the rhetoric built around Tōhoku and *butoh*'s origins with his artistic exploration achieved in Fukui, which he views as an international ground, as the entrance and exit to other countries (ibid.). Referring to *Komusō*, Hijikata (1987, 227–228), declares that he has discovered in Murobushi's strange dance a new form of Buddha's holy remains, a new *miira*, a new *butoh*, which he considers very close to the starting point of his own *butoh*.

Hinagata and Lotus Cabaret

Mainly choreographing Sebi and Ariadone and dancing under the project name Lotus Cabaret, which suggests his sense of life-risking cabaret dance mixed with humor, Murobushi created the series *Hinagata* (1977–1982) in relation to self-entombment. The term *hinagata* may be referred to as “shapes of eternal darkness” and is one of Murobushi's poetical shifts composed by a peculiar combination of Japanese signs. It may also indicate, for example, the “stratification of multi-dimensional darkness.” In this series Murobushi continues to explore physically and intellectually the eternal darkness one might experience in an ignited coffin, the economy and states of the body in a lightless burial chamber, where the senses may be overturned, and the eye is de-authorized and reoriented. His written manifesto “*Hinagata*” (1977) addresses corporeality in relation to the verge, edge, corner, madness, self-sacrifice, and eroticism, and Murobushi declares that he kills himself in the place of *butoh*. The text in the “*Hinagata*” manifesto is followed by a quotation from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the passage about chaos and the dancing star in the prologue (1939, 13–14), demonstrating that this dance is envisioned in light of Nietzsche's thought. This creates connective associations among the *Übermensch* Zarathustra, the wandering *yamabushi*, and the *sokushinbutsu* mummies.

In January 1978, under the name “Mesukazan and Sebi,” Murobushi, Ikeda, and Yoshioka premiered *The Last Eden* in Paris, and put *butoh* firmly on the map in Europe. As this performance

is discussed elsewhere in this volume in detail, I will limit myself to two observations. Divided into ten tableaux, *The Last Eden* alternated trios, solos by Murobushi and Ikeda, and duets by Ikeda and Yoshioka. In their solo parts, Murobushi enacted his *miira*, adding also a scene of a cross-dressed mummy, and Ikeda danced scenes taken from *Mesukazan* (Murobushi 2009). The second tableau, where he appears in an ignited coffin, presents the living mummy identified with Miroku (Maitreya Buddha), the future Buddha to come, worshipped in the millennial cult and Buddhist eschatology. Centered on the body as the door to the otherworld, it combines elements from western and Japanese mythology, religion, and esoterism.

Murobushi and Ikeda themselves unwittingly contributed to another stereotype of butoh, which Murobushi later drastically opposed. The *miira* corpse with its aesthetics of burnt skin dropping from the body might be easily confused and coupled with the images of the ignited cadavers left after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki leading to an immediate identification by the French audience of butoh with the atomic bomb. As was suggested some years later, Murobushi's body, the incarnation of the physical suffering, and his mummy evoked the universal image of prisoners of the concentration camps and of the mannequins exposed in the museum of Hiroshima (Palmier 1985, 27–28).

Zarathustra

Without a doubt Murobushi's representative choreography for Ariadne is *Zarathustra* (and its subsequently altered re-stagings). In some versions, it enacts a complicated reworking of the myth of Ariadne, Dionysus, and the Bacchantes. Retracing themes treated in *The Last Eden*, but reorganized into an organic and aesthetically polished style, *Zarathustra* unfolds in eight tableaux of oneiric and hallucinatory scenes highlighting the ambiguity between dream, illusion and reality, madness and violence. In its Tokyo premier, *Z-A 1980 Zarathustra*, a gigantic iron Minotaur is decapitated and female dancers appear from behind the dead man/bull as Nijinsky's fauns. In its European stagings the half-naked and white-painted bodies of the female dancers, moving in slow-motion, are a vessel wherein the memory of the past transforms into the memory of the future, and into a book of conundrums.

Nietzsche's prophet Zarathustra is considered as the body that bridges East and West, and an explicit identification of the dancers with Zarathustra is made. In order to deepen their knowledge of the alterity (of the West) they descend holding Ariadne's endless thread. And thus, for Murobushi, the descent along Ariadne's web is an intercultural process of acquiring knowledge, which testifies to his feverish eagerness to escape attitudes of exoticism and to level differences in a reciprocal process of acquaintance, between him, the stranger, and the Other, who is his double. Murobushi seems to re-enact Nietzsche's fight with his enemy who is himself. *Zarathustra* was also informed by Murobushi's idea that "the first dancer was an ironsmith" (Murobushi 1992).

Eventually, Murobushi's *miira/hinagata* works were presented in Japan in a transnational light and in an explicit association with Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. On the invitation postcard for the 1981 opening performance of "Shy," his tiny drinking place/theatre, is written: "Koh Murobushi presents RHIZOME de lotus Cabaret." Besides this clear reference to the rhizomatic thought of Deleuze and Guattari (1996), Murobushi's restless mobility later finds complicity in Deleuze and Guattari's idea of nomadism and de-territorialization. There is a constant attempt in Murobushi to reach the outside from the fringe, and to approach this politics of thought in his active corporeality. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Murobushi was necessarily bound to the process of reterritorialization (Centonze 2016a), which probably entered into conflict with the "nomadic absolute" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 494) in his everyday life, whereas he achieved it in his performative corporeality and the economy of movement (cf. Centonze 2009).

For the recreation of *Zarathustra* (2005) Murobushi weaves into his choreo-speculative labyrinth, among others, the re-examination by Deleuze (1997) of Nietzsche's dancing thought concerning Ariadne.

Murobushi's non-human theater and reterritorialization: quick silver on the Edge

In my opinion, Murobushi's ideal goal lies in the 1960s corporeality of the *nikutai*, preserving its constituent elements of rebellion and anarchism, visible in his productions in the 2000s. The apotheosis of Murobushi's political body placed outside, its outrageousness and insurrection takes on a more concrete shape beginning at the end of the 1990s, when he concentrates again on solo productions like *Edge* (2000), *Experimental Body* (2004), *quick silver* (2005), and *Krypt* in Kamakura (2012). At this stage we see exacerbated his negation of art and the project of dance as a preservation of incisive radicalism. His devotion to anti-dance is empowered and articulated as a strategy to avoid associations with both butoh and contemporary dance categories. He recants love, ecstasy, and trance, and the accent is laid on the political rapport and the critical distance among the dancer, his body, and the spectators (cf. Centonze 2016b). His philosophical investigations find their embodiment in his denouncing corporeality, and it becomes more obvious that his dance posits a philosophy, while challenging cognitive practices. His choreographies pay more attention to challenging forms of crisis and dissident corporealities as shown by his male company Ko&Edge founded in 2003 (Centonze 2009), whose members are Meguro Daiji, Suzuki Yukio, and Hayashi Sadayuki, who is succeeded by Iwabuchi Teita.⁹

In this later phase he usually appears half naked and sometimes silver painted, wearing only a pair of trousers, or in only a suit he normally takes off on stage. His dance focuses more on non-emotional corporealities crossing the edge between the organic and inorganic, including

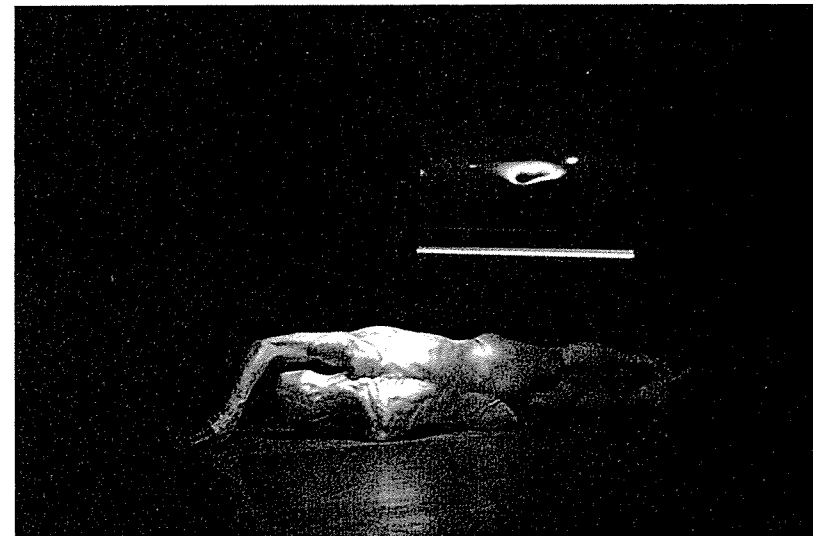


Figure 24.1 Murobushi Kō, *quick silver* (Azabu Die Pratzte, Tokyo, 2006), photograph by Awane Osamu. Courtesy of Awane Osamu.

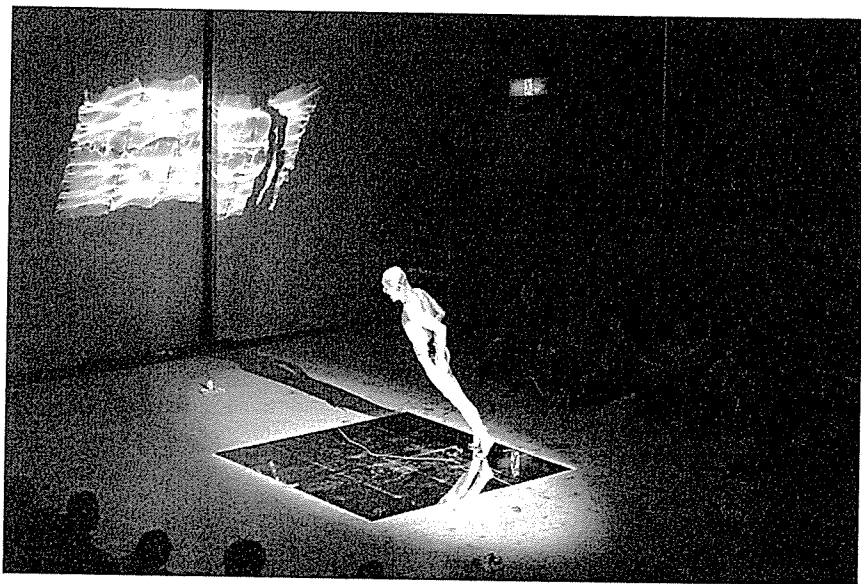


Figure 24.2 Murobushi Kō, *Krypt* (Kamakura, 2012), photograph by Awane Osamu. Courtesy of Awane Osamu.

processes for which the performer animates the inanimate and renders inanimate the animated.¹⁰ In *quick silver*, dance and identity develop distinctly as intoxication, the experience of contagion, and freedom (cf. Murobushi in Centonze 2010, 127; Centonze 2011, 277). His toxic silver body is the thermometer measuring the audience's attention and tension. Practices of self-intoxication, which prevent the body from corroding, are typical in the *miina* procedures. Murobushi envisions a corporeal identification with the extremely volatile and toxic mercury, a poor conductor of heat and fair conductor of electricity and the only metal that reaches liquid state and dissolves other metals. Mercury is the symbol of speed and mobility, the First Matter embracing gender fluidity in alchemy, and an important element in *shugendō* tradition (Miyake 2001, 182). In Murobushi's later *theatrum chemicum* we encounter an exasperation of restlessness rubbing against the immobility achieved in his stone-hard metal-body in order to approach the impossibility of movement (typical of the cadaver) displayed in a context where his transformational identities are in a fight among themselves.

His engineer-like operation on movement, resistance, and attrition in relation to corporeality, identity, and territory appeared palpably in his extraordinarily vehement *quick silver*, performed in Lecce in 2007 during the transcultural project "Atnarat," which critically examined corporeality in butoh and tarantism in order to overturn the concept of dance (Centonze 2011, 224–229).¹¹ It was obvious that he was violently coping with the host territory's identity, while being in friction with his own. The aggression against his own body reached its apex when he crashed into the cameraman, which is quite unusual for Murobushi. In contrast, his more balanced *Atnarat*, enacted on the following day in collaboration with Elektra Ballet, seemed a (re)conciliation with the *alter* and a re-evaluation of his Dionysos and Ariadne who encounter Arachne.

There are several notable aspects of Murobushi's dance including the extraordinary, falling technique, the masterly shivering, his elevation and elasticity, the conformation and

maneuvering of his spine. His characteristic walking on all fours like a feline is a telling example of how he constructs the movement without imitating the animal, while his body voices the process of *devenir* contemplated by Deleuze and Guattari (1996). Murobushi's extremely detailed dynamics and anti-dynamics manifest an extensive multiplicity and intriguing outcome based on contradictions. Repetition in contrast to repertory unfolds in its pervasive plurality and among the fundamental principles sustaining his dance are: *taoreru* (falling) and *keiren* (seizures). His paralyzed and contracted body suddenly falls on the ground from a vertical position, heavily and rigidly like a compact block, like an unanimated object.¹² These collapses, abrupt precipitations, seem to be without intervention on behalf of the executor, and contain his concept of zero speed. His body smashing impetuously to the ground, often followed by *keiren* when landing flat on the floor, provokes a violent impact, which resonates and produces a compact, loud bump. Generally speaking, *keiren* may be envisaged from an anti-capitalistic perspective as contesting neoliberalism and the politics of society of surveillance. Butoh's *keiren* escapes choreographic rules, but is disciplined. This dance strategy of disturbance makes clear the non-integrity of our body, while disrupting its culturally constructed relation to identity and to the object in a disintegration of the vectoriality of language and naming (Centonze 2016c, 2017).

Decisive are the sounds engendered by his body: his frightening vocalizations, as those produced in *quick silver* (Lecce), are not human. He crouches down like a quadruped and with impressive take offs, raises his forelimbs, followed by a rapid extension of the hind limbs. In Murobushi's dance these elevated vertical jumps fly out of the crevices of ontology, while he emits lacerating primal screams hailing out of the cracks of his conflictive body, which provoke cracks in the audience, lacerating their bodies. The flexibility of his spine enables him to land on the floor and then to repeat the jump and landing over and over again.

Murobushi stops the dance before dancing. He creates obstacles and abrupt interruptions, which disrupt the performative act and its fictiveness, thereby processing and performing through corporeality crevices in ontology and fiction. In that respect, important elements, to be grasped by the audience, are the spoken or murmured interjections, self-ironic comments about his movement, which edge in and abort the potential narrativity intrinsic to stage art, as when he suddenly stops and reflects (Centonze 2009, 172–174). At the end of his improvisation at the *Tokyo Experimental Performance Archive* (2014), when he drags his inert body out of the high tension scene, looking at the audience, he says unexpectedly: "*Kaerimashi*" (I am going home), provoking spontaneous laughter among the audience. When facing one's own body, the conflictive rapport creates a corporeal resonance in space capturing and electrifying the audience's bodies standing on the edge. Both the beholder and the performer are immersed in an electric bath. Murobushi also shifts the border of the stage which separates the spectator from the performer, such as when he falls off the stage, as happened in *Edge* (2003) at Teatro Rasi (Ravenna, Italy).

Murobushi creates fissures between thought and dance, as when he lay down and buried his face in the cracks of the dry earth in the outdoor part of *quick silver* (Lecce), singing in a distorted version some verses of the popular song *Santa Lucia* (Centonze 2011, 226). The core of Murobushi's dance politics is that these cracks are provoked by and intrinsic to the shivering of the body. As he states, spasm is chasm, deviation and digression, momentary and unreachable, the evidence of our lacerated body (1979). *Keiren* displaces and places the dancing body outside fiction, brings it close to silence, resonance, and exchange, and is a form of knowledge never to be achieved, and the dancing body is incognisable (Murobushi 1996). For Murobushi these spasmodic contractions, which combine the antinomy of tension and release, are "the exhaustion after an impossible resistance," the failure of it, but its only strategy (Murobushi 2012).

Conclusion

Murobushi contests forms of butoh that wink at the audience, betraying the essence of disturbance. Constantly in collision with the narrativity of the homogenous Japanese identity, Murobushi's corporeality attempts to erode from within the *kokutai*, the body of the Emperor-centered state, which implies a construction of embodied nationalistic identity. He was not a political activist, but an artistic activist, and his dance stands out as a denouncement, more than an act with a particular political aim. His anti-nationalistic and anti-fascist sentiment addressed evolving forms of Japanese nationalism in the current society of advanced globalization, and the impossibility of his identity is fostered by socio-political theories.¹³

One of his last performances was his contribution to the dancing museum project *20 Dancers for the XX Century* (2015), directed by Boris Charmatz at Tate Modern. Even in such a revolutionary project, which questions dance conventions, he seemed to be restricted by limits. I wonder if he was the only one among the performers who attacked with his teeth and bit the rope which separated the performance space from the exhibition space.

In his fight with his body, which articulates in an open self-criticism, Murobushi threatens his own body as in a self-ignition, while putting fire on dance. His dance unfolds as a falling into one's own grave, as delineated in *Enthusiastic Dance on the Grave* (2013) and in his solo *Ritournelle* (2013). This was Murobushi's butoh: always questioning, always challenging, until the very end.

Notes

- 1 Murobushi refrained from joining any student movement. Nevertheless, he was arrested after Zengakuren's successful demonstration in 1968 against the opening of the military hospital at Camp Ōji for treating patients injured in Vietnam. For a report on the demonstrations, see Jameson (1968).
- 2 I intentionally do not translate *nikutai* as "flesh." The agency of *nikutai* in the 1960s was central to avant-garde counterculture and the corporeality of *nikutai* proposed by Hijikata is of particular note. My research is based on the diverse constructions of the body in Hijikata's strategy of performance and literature by analyzing terms of corporeality (Centonze 1998, 2010, 2016b). Murobushi, passionate reader of an extensive literature, was aware of the high value of Hijikata's writing in relation to performativity.
- 3 The early trilogy of *Mesukazan* was directed by Maro. Regarding Ariadone no kai, some sources define Ikeda and Yoshioka as the co-founders, whereas others, Murobushi and Carlotta as its co-founders.
- 4 The members of Sebi (fire on the back) included among others Kato Masamichi and Okamoto Yoshifumi. Fire related names are frequent in Murobushi's and Dairakudan's activity, and they also integrated the use of fire on stage.
- 5 The osmotic relation among these groups makes it difficult to trace precise historical data. Moreover, Dairakudan's work was based on a choreographic method in which each dancer presents his/her own choreography under one umbrella structure.
- 6 For several reasons, problems of authorship between Murobushi and Ikeda will arise.
- 7 For the code of ascetic behavior and mummification process of the uncorrupted bodies see Raveri (1990–1991).
- 8 In contrast to the general practice of painting the body white, during the 1970s and early 1980s, in his *miira* performances Murobushi cultivated the *kuromuri* practice of painting the body black.
- 9 For Meguro's experimentation, see Centonze (2010, 2014, 330–331). For the shift from butoh to contemporary dance of Suzuki, see Centonze (2010, 122–128, 2014, 331–332); for the interrelation between butoh and Japanese contemporary dance, see Centonze (2010, 2014).
- 10 The struggling rapport between the performer's corporeality and the brass-panel-bodies in *Bibō no aozona* (Beautiful Blue Sky) is a significant example (Centonze 2009, 174–181).
- 11 This project, *Tōrito Parco Danza I*, was conceived by Annamaria de Filippi, Andrea Pati, and myself.
- 12 His "free falls" are in opposition to the technique of release and self-protection as carried out in modern/contemporary dance techniques, or in judo. It should be noted that during his workshops, Murobushi explained and demonstrated how to fall to the ground in a way accessible to amateurs as a precaution against injury. Conversely, he himself was beyond such "safe technique." Oda (2016)

- describes the dancer's unique falls as "*hotokedaore*," literally, fall of Buddha, a terminology borrowed from *no* technique, which indicates falling backwards like a statue of Buddha.
- 13 Murobushi's counter-discourse is underpinned by an extended literature, among which are studies of intellectuals such as Karatani Kōjin, Asada Akira, Matsuura Hisaki, Osawa Masachi, Nibuya Takashi, and Uno Kuni'ichi.

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25

OSCILLATION AND
REGENERATION

The temporal aesthetics of Sankai Juku

Iwaki Kyoko

Amagatsu Ushio, the founder and artistic director of Sankai Juku, is an artist who ruminates through the process of sedimentation: dripping and dropping superfluous thoughts. Opposing the western classical ballet tradition, in which narratives are constructed through a dialectic development, or, differing from the collective brainstorming methodology of Hijikata Tatsumi, whereby a pool of literary and iconographic imageries are thrown pell-mell into the creative vessel, Amagatsu, conversely, peels off redundant concepts, aesthetics, and semiotics. This method of “creative filtration” has been adopted from his very first work *Amagatsu-shō* (1977): A metaphorical tale of an *amagatsu*, an ancient Japanese doll that used to be placed by a child’s bed as a talisman (Amagatsu 2015, 23).

Moreover, since many of Amagatsu’s choreographies are variations of the same theme, one could cogently argue that, for more than four decades since the founding of his company in 1975, Amagatsu has been committed to the same reflexive sedimentation for the sake of discovering what he calls the *sokei*: an archetype of humans (not in terms of Jungian psychology, but more to do with physical bodies), which, like Leonardo Da Vinci’s *L’Uomo Vitruviano*, could become the guideline for measuring the forms, movements, and the overall physical aesthetics of his dance (Amagatsu 2015, 20).¹ By the same token, although there are many other interpretations in terms of why *shironuri* (powdering the bodies in pallid white) is adopted in butoh performances, for Amagatsu, it has to do with highlighting the dancers’ bodies as mere archetypes – an anonymous “canvas of bodies,” that is devoid of “personal features and characteristics of the profane world” (ibid. 108).

Quotidian aesthetics and social topicalities have never seeped into the theatrical cosmogony of Sankai Juku. For Amagatsu, immediate social components responding to the zeitgeist are cheap auxiliaries, which do not form the quintessence of an artwork. However, it is too simple to deduce, from here, that Amagatsu’s works conversely approach the realm of mysticism and spiritualism. In fact, countering those critics who assert that ‘obscurantism’ is taken as a ‘creed’ in Sankai Juku, Amagatsu has not spoken in mystical language in interviews and conversations conducted over the past decade-plus years (Crisp 2008). Rather, most of his words are supported by references from natural science such as anthropology, cosmology, paleontology, or evolutionary biology. In contrast to those ready assumptions that a certain form of spiritualism is practiced in Sankai Juku, the choreographer has admitted that dancers meditate no more than a professional