



TAPS MASTER CLASS RESOURCE PACK: Butoh dance.

By Tanya Calamoneri

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Butō Dance - Tanya Calamoneri

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Master class description

Using Japanese Butō movement techniques, this class guides participants to develop a strong internal landscape and move from deeply-rooted instinct. We will work extensively with imagery to invoke quality of movement and to inform improvisations. Warm ups use the physical discipline of Noguchi gymnastics to foster efficiency of movement, increasing articulation and awareness, endurance, and exploding to the edges. Discussion addresses Butō history and philosophical concepts as appropriate to provide context. This is an intensive body-mind workout!

What is Butō?

Butō is an avant-garde dance movement that was born in Japan in the 1950's and 60's. As developed by founder Hijikata Tatsumi and primary collaborator Ohno Kazuo, Butō explores the boundaries of human perception and experience, utilizing image as impulse for movement and as definition of states of being. Butō challenges everyday awareness by emphasizing the state of constant crisis and transformation in nature as manifested through the human body. Butō methodology calls upon the dancers to transform their bodies by imagining that their form literally becomes another substance. Hijikata exhorted the body that is danced (sub- and unconscious creative processes) rather than one that is dancing (conscious processes). Butō teaches a deep connection between movement, breath, and *ki* (the body's life-force energy). It also connects dancers to atmosphere or environment in such a way that they see themselves not only as a body in space, but as a body in context; the body is perceived as part of a system – be it an ensemble, a complex stage picture, or a metaphysical experience that involves the audience and the world beyond the parameters of the performance space.

The definition of Butō as a dance form is highly contested; in fact some people even contest whether it is a “form” at all.¹ It is difficult to define in concrete physical terms because, unlike other dance forms, Butō lacks a formal dance “grammar.” Further complicating the matter, Hijikata re-invented his working methods at least three times throughout his career, and also encouraged his dancers to develop their own dance. There are several artists that can be considered his protégé, and all resemble a distinct phase or aspect of his different approaches to movement and performance. For example, the first ten years of Hijikata's work were characterized by a decidedly male and often homoerotic energy, highly shocking imagery, and physically aggressive movement; Maro Akaji is one of the best known choreographers to have worked with Hijikata during this

¹ For every definition of Butō, there is an equal and opposite identification. Butoh has been called an utterly Japanese expression as well as a universal sentiment and art form, some say Butoh can be used for therapy while others say it is absolutely NOT therapeutic, some say the form is new and relate it to the avant garde, while others argue Butoh is very old. Some third generation and non-Japanese practitioners have dealt with this debate by attempting to formulate their own systems yet claiming roots in “Japanese Butoh dance.”

early period. Maro went on to develop his own company, Dairakudakan, which is recognized by its use of highly sexualized material. By comparison, the work of Yoko Ashikawa and her company Hakutobo reflects Hijikata's more internal, poetic movement investigations that occurred late in his career (1972-7). Now in its fourth generation of practitioners and teachers, Butō has many permutations specific to the people who have developed the form in their own distinct style. It is often easier to define what Butō is not rather than to clearly state what Butō is. My personal and professional quest has been to identify what is common among the various approaches, in hopes of finding a new way to approach the body, and by extension, dance.

Purpose and goals

This master class is an introduction to the concepts and practices of Butō dance, for the purpose of instilling a greater understanding, appreciation, and articulation of the body as a performance tool. Now in its fourth generation of practitioners and teachers, Butō has many permutations specific to the people who interpret it in their own distinct style. This course brings together key concepts articulated among Butō masters, particularly those relating to non-dualistic perspective, the body in/of space and time, and training subtle body consciousness. The focus is on Hijikata's foundational concepts and their elaboration by his students and other principle practitioners.

This course incorporates physical conditioning based in Noguchi Taiso (Noguchi gymnastics, used by Butō companies to release tension and exhaust the mind-body) and also uses poetry and visual images to inform states of being. Exercises and guided improvisations provide space for students to explore their own dance.

Students will leave this class with a greater range of performance skills that can be applied in a variety of settings, either in creating and performing their own unique Butō works, or using Butō methods in conjunction with their other performance techniques. In addition to content areas covered in typical dance and theater training – time, space, effort, improvisation, composition, and ensemble – Butō training adds several foci aimed at changing one's everyday standpoint, including the following: resonance, atmosphere, image-thinking, *ma* (in between),² and “becoming.”³ Essentially, these skills ask dancers to slow down movement of both mind and body, expand their awareness of both time and space, pay attention to a variety of sensations throughout the exercises, and develop the ability to hold an image in their consciousness, staying connected to that image as it changes.

Key concepts

² *Ma* refers to the experience of time and space that is “in between” chronological time and everyday perception of space. Butō training and performance often involves glacially slow movement, which facilitates sensitivity to *ma*.

³ “Becoming” refers to the continual state of transformation and emergence fostered in Butō. The dancer never arrives at a stable state, rather is always in the process of “becoming.”

- **Manipulation of space:** Working with the body in ways that change everyday space, working beyond one's own kinesphere, working beyond one's singular perspective and becoming part of the space;
- **Manipulation of time:** Condensing and stretching time beyond daily time, working with the rhythm of images;
- **Living the experience:** Allowing images to change the performers body, space, and time;
- **Transformation:** Following a journey through images, allowing the image to dance instead of one's idea of the image.

Exercises

- **Noguchi warm up** (10-15 min)
remove tension and blockages so body can respond to images Introduction to Noguchi gymnastics warm up – basic patterns (point, line, circle, wave) and figure 8s
- **Arrows and webs** (20 min)
to stretch space and use Imagery as landscape – imagining and interacting with/participating in a landscape, changing scale (ranging from a speck of dust to the cosmos); working with partners, students “shoot” webs using different parts of their bodies to pull and be pulled through space. Gradually expand the distance between partners and play with the timing of the “shots,” also expand awareness to others in the room and organically form trios and quartets. Break students up into groups so they can watch each other and see the invisible lines in space become visible, as well as see space expand and contract.
- **Suriashi** (from Noh Theater) (20 min)
a slow motion walk to stretch time – Slowing down sensory information with slow motion walking, and exploring soft focus, gradually adding in atmosphere (i.e. wind, water, dust, mud, pollen, electricity) and noticing the sensation on skin, slowly allowing image to change the body's form, i.e. each step pulls up roots out of the ground, and vines grown up around the body, gradually turning it into a tree.
- **Images** (25-30 minutes)
 - Metal – from liquid form to rust
 - Nerves and Wires – exploration of electrical current
 - Break students into groups to allow them to learn by watching, and develop their own outside eye as they are improvising
- **Transformation** (25-30 minutes)
 - Exercises on imagery and transformation (i.e. body is a leaf eaten by caterpillar, or body is a sack of grain with a small cut in one side and grain spills out, or body is a building, pipes rust and cement crumbles; or clear progression of one image to another, seed to grass to flower, cool water to boiling water to steam, lava to volcanic rock); break students into groups to allow them to observe and also to get comfortable improvising

their movement explorations in front of others (emphasize that they are not performing, but allowing the audience to witness their process).

Transformation Guided Image Improvisation – Metal Theme



(photo of Ko Murobushi)

Begin with a solid form of metal. Make a shape and fill it with the hardness of steel. Everything is metal, including your arms, legs, spine, neck, and face. You try to move but cannot. Gradually discover how this metal creature moves. Explore very tiny rotations in the joints that allow you change your shape. Be very specific about your movements. Imagine these rotations moving as gears. Travel in space exploring your unique mechanism. Play with magnitude and time (short – long rotations). Support your movement with breath and/or sound.

(allow 2-5 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Imagine nerves connecting the joints of your metal body, moving like electrical currents throughout your body, connecting the sequences between your joints. Transform your entire body with this image, down to the spaces between your fingers, behind your ears, the back of your knees, and under your feet. Take your time. If you get stuck or drop out, go back to stillness and reconnect with the mental image, sense its vibrations, resonance, and movement qualities. Allow yourself to be moved by these energies.

(allow 2-5 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Your electrical currents short circuit and catch fire. Sparks fly as explosions violently change your form.

(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

The heat intensifies and your metal begins to boil and melt. You become quick silver (like in Terminator).

(allow 2-3 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Recognizable shapes emerge from the quicksilver – first a foot, then a hand, then a head with no facial features. Gather these randomly appearing pieces into a new creature with a different form than your first metal creature. (A little more quickly this time) go through the process of learning how the creature functions and travels in space – explore joints as gears and nerves/electrical current connecting your body, making sequenced movement more fluid.

(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Your new metal creature is equipped with magnetic light beams, shining from tiny openings in your hands, wrists, eyes, chest, belly button, knees, tail, etc. Use them to help you change shape and travel in the space. Notice other metal creatures in the space and experiment with connecting with them energetically, and moving throughout the space. Avoid developing a human narrative at this point - Follow the images and sensations where they take you. You may be pulled away from one connection by another – allow these interruptions to happen and follow where it leads you.

(allow 1-3 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Your light beam system gets jammed and you freeze in an extended form. You have to revert to your back up system of nerves/wires and gears to travel. Gradually these systems begin to rust. The gears stick together and your whole body become rust.

(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Your rust body completely disintegrates and turns to dust. Sometimes large chunks of metal break off and you collapse, bit by bit. Eventually your whole body settles into a pile of red dust. The wind comes and blows your dust across the landscape.

(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Guided image improvisation – water theme

(included for reference only, not enough time to do this in the master class – please feel free to use it with your students, and adjust the times to suite your needs!)

Begin with wave patterns, traveling up and down from bottom of feet, through legs, pelvis, and spine to top of head. Travel in space with this pattern. Shift the orientation of the pattern so that it travels in diagonal spirals through the body, moving in and out of floor, and in all directions in space. Play with magnitude, time and effort quality. Support your movement with breath.

(allow 5-10 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Imagine waves crashing on the shore of a lake or ocean. Using wave patterns, transform your entire body into this image, down to the spaces between your fingers, behind your ears, the back of your knees, and under your feet. Take your time. If you get stuck or drop out, go back to stillness and reconnect with the mental image, sense its vibrations, resonance, and movement qualities. Allow yourself to be moved by these energies.

(allow 3-5 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

You come to a deep place in your body of water, a very cold place. Your water gets thick and heavy, slowly freezes, and turns to ice.

(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

The sun shines on your ice body, slowly melting it. Sense yourself melting molecule by molecule. Every once in awhile, chunks of ice might break off.
(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

Find yourself on the edge of your ocean or lake, where it turns into a great river. Follow the river as it flows into a stream, then a brook, moving over rocks and muddy earth.
(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

You pass over hot, volcanic earth and become a boiling, bubbling hot spring. Tiny bubbles bump against each other as they fight to get to the surface. Move very fast and very tiny on the inside. Sense the bubbles moving up your body gradually, increasing the pressure inside you.
(allow 1 minute for improvisation and discovery)

Once you reach the surface, you transform to hot steam. Your whole body becomes steam and floats above the surface of the earth.
(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

You settle into a pool of water and cool off. It begins to rain. Sense the raindrops on your surface.
(allow 1-2 minutes for improvisation and discovery)

The pool/puddle overflows until it becomes the lake/ocean again. The rain stops, the sun shines. The breeze causes ripples in the water. Sense the pull of the tide. Move with it. Come to stillness. Notice the small waves traveling deep within your body.
(allow 1 minute for improvisation and discovery)

Resources

Books, articles, dissertations

Baird, Bruce. 2005. *Butō and the burden of history: Hijikata Tatsumi and the Nihonjin*. Ph.D. Diss. University of Pennsylvania.

Blakely Klein, Susan. 1988. *Ankoku Butō: The pre-modern and postmodern influences on the dance of utter darkness*. Cornell East Asia Papers. Ithaca: Cornell University.

Fraleigh, Sondra and Tamah Nakamura. 2006. *Routledge performance practitioners: Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* New York: Routledge.

Kuniyoshi, Kazuko. "Butoh in the Late 1980's." <http://www.xs4all.nl/~iddinja/Butō>. 2001.

Kurihara, Nanako. 2000. "Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butō." *The Drama Review* 44.1:12-33.

---. 1996. *The most remote thing in the universe: critical analysis of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butō*. PhD diss., New York University.

Sellars-Young, Barbara. 1998. "Somatic processes: convergence of theory and practice." *Theatre Topics* 8.2: 173-187.

Zarrilli, Phillip B. 2009. *Psychophysical acting: an intercultural approach after Stanislavski*. New York: Routledge.

Documentaries and DVDs

Blackwood, Michael. *Butoh: body on the edge of crisis* [videorecording], 1990.

Waguri, Yukio. *Butō Kaden* CD ROM. 2000.

Web sites and videos

Hijikata in Hosotan 1972

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xYsO7OpQkQ>

Hijikata in Nikutai no hanran (Revolt of the flesh) and Akaji Maro of Dairakurakan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dANmcbepNdY>

Kazio Ohno in The Dead Sea

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUjhQLB0hXY>

Shinichi Koga and Yuko Kaseki in Ame to Ame

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYfK-8YsfUE>

Sankai Juki

(**WARNING PARTIAL NUDITY)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5phfF4qUIU>

Ko Murobushi

(**WARNING PARTIAL NUDITY)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPZSe16qS8Y>

Carlotta Ikeda

(**WARNING PARTIAL NUDITY IN BEGINNING OF CLIP)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opaS-W7b6GI>

Mark Holborn documentary

(**WARNING, NUDITY AND SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gquklxf8oM&feature=fvw>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3hMdZNAI_U

Butō Masterclass

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Butoh.net website of international butoh community
www.butoh.net

New York Butoh Festival
<http://www.cavearts.org/?p=28>

Butoh San Francisco Festival (new generation after the San Francisco Butoh Festival, the first and longest running Butoh festival in the U.S.)
<http://butohsanfrancisco.net/>

Practitioners Pathway

I am a performer, choreographer and teacher who works with post-modern dance, physical theater, and Butō. I trained in ballet from the age of 4-15, expanded to experimental theater in highschool, post-modern dance in college and beyond, and improvisational performance and acrobatics after college. I began producing my own work in San Francisco in 1997 with my first company, violent dwarf, for which I choreographed numerous full-evening works including our Izzie Award-winning *Heaven's Radio*.

For the past 10 years, I have been very focused on Butō dance, training intensively in the form and also exploring its boundaries and possible bridges to other performance techniques. When I first encountered Butō in San Francisco, I dove head-first into it, performing with Shinichi Koga's Butō-based company InkBoat for three years and touring in the U.S. and Europe. From the beginning, I began training with extensively with other Butō masters in the U.S., Europe, and Japan, including Ko Murobushi, Minako Seki, Yoshito Ohno, Takuya Muramatsu (Dairakurakan), Su-En, Yuko Kaseki, Yoshito Ohno, Natsu Nakajima, Yukio Waguri, Carlotta Ikeda, Katsura Kan, Tadashi Endo, and others. My teaching bridges their methods and sensibilities with my own deep kinesthetic knowledge and explorations into the human imagination factory. I am also a PhD student writing about Butō, and I bring a scholarly perspective on the history and philosophical basis of Butō dance to my teaching.

Over time, I began to find and accentuate connection with my classical and modern/post-modern dance background, and explore my own choreography that merged the two. I have always been interested in hybrid forms; my undergrad major was international studies, and this has carried over into my artistic work, leading me to cross cultural boundaries and mix unlikely partners, from which surprising chimeras emerge.

My artistic vision is now carried out through Company SoGoNo, the mission of which is to create a visually rich and viscerally experienced hybrid form that pushes the boundaries of contemporary performance. Pieces range from wild and boldly expressive to quiet and intricate, enveloping the audience in a surreal dream-world experience charged with mystery and allegory. The mood of the work is often

irreverent and darkly humorous. Based in New York City since 2003, we have created ten pieces to date, including the NYIT-Award winning *Art of Memory*. For more information on Company SoGoNo, including videos and reviews, please visit www.sogono.org.