

Exploring Japanese Avant-Garde Art Through Butoh Dance

Davide Lanza

Keio University
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Outline of the course

Butoh is a genre of performance that comes out of Japan. It began in the late 1950s, so only has a roughly 60-year old history, but it has spread internationally since then. On this course, we will be focusing on the world's first Butoh dancer, Tatsumi Hijikata. The **Keio University Art Center** is a research institution that focuses on post-war Japanese art. And one of our activities is managing the Tatsumi Hijikata Archive.

Butoh dance is practiced and researched globally, but the work of its founder, **Hijikata Tatsumi**, is relatively unknown. This is in part because archival materials necessary to learning about Hijikata's Butoh are not widely disseminated.

1. This course will begin this course by exploring Hijikata's **creation** of Butoh dance from the **1950s to 1960s**, in order to get a sense of what is meant by the term "Butoh."
2. From here, we will turn to the **revolution** of Butoh during the **1970s**, which will be the focus of week 2 of the course. In the 1970s, Hijikata began to explore new ideas, themes, and techniques, at the same time as refining a new choreographic method.
3. So, it was during this period that the Butoh method, as such, was established. Butoh dance uses **notation**, just as music uses a score. And it is this form of Butoh notation, or "Butoh fu", that will be the focus of the third week. Building on your understanding of Hijikata's Butoh method from week 2, we will be delving into the world of Hijikata's "notational Butoh". This will be framed in relation to the other ways in which dance notation has developed internationally. Though it is over 30 years since Hijikata passed away in 1986, the dancers who learned Butoh under his direction continue to preserve the heritage and aesthetics of his dance form.
4. In the last week, we will be looking at the **dissemination and reception** of Butoh internationally, and at the international research of Butoh. Finally, we will wrap things up by thinking about the development and future of Butoh. Throughout the course, we will be making use of archival documents housed at the Art Center. We will also be inviting guest teachers like Rosa van Hensbergen, who researches dance notation and Butoh dance to offer you a wide range of perspectives on the dance form. Our hope is that, through learning about Butoh dance, your eyes will be opened to a new art form, created in the far East in the late 20th century

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Chapter 1

Creation

1.1 What is Butoh?

Let's ask what Butoh is. When did it originate, and who created it? Why did it originate in Japan, and how did it spread internationally?

To sketch the backdrop of global dance: First, there was **classical ballet** with its origins in Europe. Then, in the early Twentieth Century, **modern dance** grew up in the U.S., and spread internationally. **Butoh** came into being in the second half of the Twentieth Century, spread globally from Japan, and is now a current within the contemporary dance world. Japan had long practiced classical ballet, and had even taken up modern dance before the Second World War. Even now, both dance forms continue to be popular in Japan.

Japan has a history of **absorbing and uniquely developing foreign cultural influences**. It imported its writing system (kanji characters) and governmental structure from China in the ancient period, and has more recently sought national self-sufficiency through importing modern science and legal systems from the West. After its devastation in the Second World War, Japan turned increasingly towards western thought, systems, art, and literature, which fueled its rapid postwar development.

The dance revolution of Butoh originated in Japan from the late 1950s to the 1960s. Butoh founder **Tatsumi Hijikata** had become fascinated by **American films and music** while living in a devastated postwar Tokyo, and later drew on **French literature and art** as important influences when creating his butoh dance. So, it was the reception and absorption of western arts and literature that motivated the creation of this new art form. At the same time, the creation of Butoh came to absorb a distinctly **Japanese aesthetic and philosophy**.

1.2 The background of Butoh

As mentioned above, one of the factor that led to the creation of Butoh was the western art and culture. Let's see the background closer.

– Beginning of 20th century dance

The dancer who opened the curtains on Twentieth-century Dance was American dancer **Isadora Duncan**. Having grown up in natural environs in California, Duncan felt the human body to be part of nature, and sought a naturalistic form of dance.

Duncan created a free form of dance that allowed for the release of the spirit and body of the dancer, and **critiqued** the way in which **classical ballet** ignored the humanness and feelings of the dancer. To do so, Duncan rejected ballet shoes to dance **barefoot**, and didn't make use of ballet steps or positions. She also chose **Greek-style tunics** to dance in, rather than costumes that restricted the movements of the dancer. Duncan became known internationally as a reformer of dance and **pioneer of modern dance** off the back of her 1900 performance in Paris.

Another company that gained recognition in Paris at the beginning of the Twentieth Century was the **Ballet Russes**. Produced by the impresario Sergei Diaghalev, their first performance at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 1905 met with tremendous applause. One of the Ballet Russes' principal dancers, **Vaslav Nijinsky**, in particular, captivated Europe with what was seen as his exotic and primitive style. His own works, *L'Après midi d'un faune* and *Le sacre du printemps*, moved beyond existing ballet works.

The **launch of modern dance in German** resulted in the widespread of German **expressionist** dance, with **Mary Wigman** as an important figure. Wigman had trained in ballet, but became absorbed in the expressive possibilities of **improvisation**. Through deepening her conversations with expressionist painters, she was able to develop her own style of dance. She became known for her masked work *Witch Dance*.

Having absorbed the influences of German expressionist dance, also known as *Neue Tanz*, **pre-war Japanese** dancers established the style of "**creative dance**". Both **Tatsumi Hijikata**, who founded butoh, and **Kazuo Ohno**, who disseminated butoh globally, were originally *Neue Tanz* dancers.

While several German choreographers contemporaneous with Wigman left Germany under Nazism, such as Rudolf Laban and Kurt Jooss, Wigman remained, and even performed at the Berlin Olympic ceremony in solidarity with the Nazi party.

– Postwar period

In the postwar period, **modern dance** flourished in **America**, producing many exciting new dancers. **Martha Graham** had been active as a dancer and choreographer since the prewar, and had established a Company early on, allowing her to gather a number of dancers. Even in the postwar, Graham technique helped to establish modern dance. One of Graham's dancers, **Merce Cunningham**, differed from his teacher in pursuing the **pure beauty** of the human body. This became the origin for artistically sophisticated **abstract dance**. As the father of postmodern dance, Cunningham also worked closely with the composer **John Cage**, and collaborated with a number of visual artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol.

Pina Bausch emerged **in contrast** to American abstract dance. Influenced by expressionist dance, Bausch worked against the idea of **pure movement**, and reintroduced historical and narrative sources. Drawing on the **radical violence of emotion**, she created a new form of dance theater.

Bausch's work was also important to modern ballet dancer **William Forsythe's** decision to take to the stage. Originally American, Forsythe became the choreographer for the Frankfurt Ballet, where he began to create his own dance language and develop his own **improvisatory dance system**, drawing on the technique of ballet.

This is how dance became important to the performing arts of the 1970s to 80s. Moving towards the new century, many different dance experiments were possible and many different dance forms were created, from modern ballet to post-modern dance, and from contemporary

dance to butoh. It is even possible to think of the Twentieth Century as the century of dance.

1.3 Post-war reconstruction and high economic growth

The Second World War marked a new historical and ideological moment for Japan, and this led to a lot of new activity. Butoh grew up out of the harsh economic conditions of its beginnings, in the devastated landscape of postwar Japan.

– Tatsumi Hijikata’s Chronology

Here is a brief history of Tatsumi Hijikata’s activity. We will learn more about some of the butoh works listed here in this course:

Year [Age]	Events
1928 [0]	Born in the Akita prefecture of northern Japan. Given name was “Kunio”.
1946 [18]	Starts taking modern dance lessons at the Masumura Katsuko Dance School in Akita city. Learns German Expressionist dance (Neuer Tanz).
1948 [20]	Moves to Tokyo. Stayed at Shōgenji, located in Tokyo Minatoku.
1949 [21]	Impressed by Kazuo Ohno’s first solo modern dance performance.
1952 [24]	Stays at a flophouse, located in Tokyo Minatoku (Azabu Sannohashi bridge). His friend guides him to Mannen town in Ueno district—known as one of the worst slums of Tokyo. The scenes of Mannen town influenced butoh and his works.
1953 [25]	Starts taking lessons at the Mitsuko Andō Dance Institute.
1954 [26]	Gives his first performance at the Andō Mitsuko Dancing Heels Special Performance. Kazuo Ohno made a special appearance in the stage and Tarō Okamoto was in charge of the stage settings.
1958 [30]	Changed his stage name to ‘Tatsumi Hijikata’.
1959 [31]	Performs ‘Forbidden Colours (Kinjiki)’. Performs a revised version of Forbidden Colours (Kinjiki).
1960 [32]	Plays the lead in the film Navel and A-Bomb (Heso to genbaku), directed by Eikoh Hosoe.
1962 [34]	Gives a first butoh performance at Asbestos Hall. The hall started housing Hijikata’s activities, and also received the name Asbestos Hall.
1963 [35]	Choreographs and performs Masseur (Anma).
1965 [37]	Returns to his home prefecture of Akita with photographer Eiko Hosoe. The photographs were later gathered and published under the title Kamaitachi. Choreographs and performs Rose-coloured Dance (Barairo dansu). Begins to refer his avant-garde dances as “Ankoku butoh Group”.
1966 [38]	Choreographs and performs Tomato.
1967 [39]	Performs Emotion in Metaphysics (Keijijoukaku).
1968 [40]	Choreographs and performs Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese: Rebellion of the Body (Hijikata Tatsumi to nihonjin—nikutai no hanran).

1969 [41]	The photobook Kamaitachi, a collaboration between photographer Eiko Hosoe, gets published. Appears in the film Horrors of Malformed Men (Directed by Teruo Ishii). Appears in the film The Tale of the White Serpant Heso Kakka (Directed by Takayuki Nishie)
1970 [42]	Performs in the play Honegamitoge hotokekazura. The film Birth—which Hijikata appeared in—was shown at Midori-kan (Green Pavilion), Japan World Exposition, Osaka 1970.
1972 [44]	Stages a major butoh performance cycle entitled Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons (Shiki no tame no nijūnanaban).
1973 [45]	Becomes the last year that he performs on stage. Hereafter, he focuses on writing, directing, or choreographing.
1976 [48]	Choreographs Human Shape (Hitogata) as part of the series of Hakutōbō performances at Asbestos Hall. Choreographs Costume en Face (Shōmen no ishō) as part of the series of Hakutōbō performances at Asbestos Hall. Choreographs Lady on a Whale String (Geisenjō no okugata) as part of the series of Hakutōbō performances at Asbestos Hall.
1977 [49]	Begins a serialized literary work Yameru maihime (Ailing Dancer) in the theater magazine Shingeki (New Theater). Choreographs and directs Kazuo Ohno’s performance Admiring La Argentina.
1983 [55]	His series of articles Yameru maihime (Ailing Dancer) is compiled as a book and gets published.
1985 [57]	Choreographs Tahoku Kabuki Keikaku 4 (Tahoku Kabuki Plan 4) which becomes his last work.
1986 [57]	Dies at the age of 57.
1987	Foundation of Hijikata Memorial Archive at Asbestos Hall.
1996	Establishment of the Hijikata Tatsumi Archive at the Keio University Art Center.

1.4 Post-war Japanese Art

During the war years, artists were under pressure to paint “**war paintings**”, and unable to exhibit freely. It was only in the years following the end of the war in August 1945, that artists **returning** from foreign battlefields began to exhibit works which depicted their war experiences and observations. Some of these artists were Nobuya Abe, Yasuo Kazuki, Yokoyama Misao, and Masao Tsuruoka, and Maruki Iri, who painted “atomic bomb paintings”.

– 1950s

With the advent of the 1950s, a group of artists seeking to create politically engaged work began to **distance** themselves from **Socialist realism** and **reappraise Surrealism** instead. The French art critic **Michel Tapié**, who had established the theory of “art informel” in the global artworld, visited Japan in 1957. He praised the work of Kansai-based art **collective Gutai** in terms of “**art informel**”, which led to their work being introduced abroad. Gutai, led by Jiro Yoshihara, aimed to move away from pictorial work towards freer forms of creation **using physical actions**. In Tokyo, too, artists at the forefront of intermedia art associated with the

art group Jikken Kōbō, and painters and sculptors promoting **Abstract Expressionism**, were exhibiting works with some energy.

From the late 1950s, a **new generation** of avant-garde artists began to appear. They exhibited works at the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, which allowed for more freedom in that it didn't involve a selection committee. These artists engaged in radical artistic activities that deviated from existing creative methods. Their **Dada-esque** activities can be considered under the banner of “**action art**”.

– 1960s

In the 1960s, the art group **Neo-Dada Organizers** was established. **Happenings**, **Action Art**, and **Conceptual Art** began to flourish among artists like Genpei Akasegawa, Shusaku Arakawa, Shiyō Kazakura, Ushio Shinohara, and Masunobu Yoshimura. These movements **negated the aims of traditional art**. **Hijikata** took part in these artists' events as a dancer, and likewise collaborated with them in his own dance performances. His performances from the time can even be termed “Happenings”.

Around the same time, “**Junk Anti-Art**,” represented by the works of Tetsumi Kudo, was beginning to generate debates around questions like: “What is Anti-Art?” and “Can Anti-Art be realized?” Through this, the “Anti-Art” movement began to gain momentum. Artistic collectives like **Hi Red Centre** and **Zero Jigen** (Zero Dimension) formed, and performances outside the gallery space, such as on the street, began to garner attention. All that remains of these ephemeral events are photographic records.

Hi Red Centre member Genpei Akasegawa was put on trial for his counterfeit money work, “A Thousand-yen Bill”. Akasegawa's legal defense argued using the question “What is art?”, and used another Hi Red Centre member Natsuyuki Nakanishi's works as evidence in the trial. A number of artists went to the U.S. to practice their art, like On Kawara, Yayoi Kusama, and Shusaku Arakawa, while an artist like **Yoko Ono** crossed back over to perform Happenings in Japan. The composer John Cage also visited Japan and performed a Happening-style concert which had a massive influence on Japanese artists.

With the war years long behind them, and the **Tokyo Olympics** of 1964 in the air, artists began to **fuse art and technology**, and, in the late 1960s, to turn towards **environmental art**. This movement from technological art to environmental art became part of the bright vision of the future represented by the **Osaka World Expo** of 1970.

– 1970s

Around the same time, the group of artists known as “**Mono-ha**” appeared. One of the works that forged the way in transforming **environment into art** was Nobuo Sekine's work “Phase–Mother Earth” (Figure 1.1), a work that consisted of a large hole dug into the ground and a compacted earth cylinder above ground measuring the size of the hole. From the 1970s on, the artists of “Mono-ha” began to exhibit works that presented **raw and unprocessed materials** like stone, wood, and steel.

However you look at it, the major national event that was **Expo '70** was a decisive turning point. It presented Japan at the peak of its postwar recovery and modernization, in a period of rapid financial growth. After Expo '70, Japanese art completely changed.

In the 1970s, the art of the Happening and Action Art took a back seat, and the “**revival of painting**” gained momentum. Moving into the 1980s, the avant-garde artists of the 1960s and those artists who had been creating work abroad, were incredibly active in making work.



Figure 1.1: Nobuo Sekine, *Phase–Mother Earth*, 1968, (Earth, cement)

Having created *ankoku butoh* in the 1960s, **Hijikata** also turned to the **Japanese traditional arts** in the 1970s to develop a **new form of Butoh**.

1.5 Post-war Japanese dance

The end of the Second World War in 1945 left Japan devastated. Of the over 16,000,000 military deaths internationally, over 2,500,000 were Japanese. Towards the end of the war in August, the American military dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing over 200,000 people, and reducing both cities to ashes overnight.

In 1946, the **Takaya Eguchi and Misako Miya Dance Company**, which had been successful in promoting German *Neue Tanz* since the prewar period, **reopened** its doors. **Kazuo Ohno**, who later became well-known as a *butoh* dancer, had been a member of the company before being conscripted to go to China and Southeast Asia in 1939. In June 1946, Ohno returned to Japan.

From 1947, **modern dance** and **classical ballet** performances **started up again** in Tokyo. Dance companies wanting to put on performances, however, had to be willing to suffer economic losses, for they weren't allowed to decide their own ticket prices and were taxed for tickets at 150%.

In 1948, Japanese modern dance companies and dancers came together to form the **Japan Creative Dancer Association**. There were increasing numbers of dancers training in modern dance, who were interested in a **new ideal of beauty that emphasized the dancer's sensations and emotions**. This differed from the emphasis on "form" in ballet and traditional Japanese dance. As a result, modern dance performances also became more and more popular.

In 1949, Tatsumi **Hijikata**, newly arrived in Tokyo, **watched Ohno** dance at Ohno's first solo modern dance performance. Watching Ohno's dance, the young Hijikata was so struck, that he described him as a "poison dancer" (literally "powerful drug dancer", Hijikata meant that Ohno's dance had an incredibly strong effect on him.).

This was a period in which the Company formed by **Eguchi and Miya**, who had both trained with Mary Wigman in Germany during the prewar years, was spectacularly active.

1.6 Before butoh – The furukawa river

The **Furukawa river** runs through central Tokyo, and the **Sanno bridge** crosses it. This is an incredibly important site for the history of butoh dance, as it was in this area that Hijikata first came up with the idea of butoh.

The Furukawa is a small river that flows from **Shibuya**, **Harajuku**, and **Omotesando** into the **Tokyo Bay**, is one of the most important waters in Tokyo's city center. Although a humble river, Furukawa has long been part of the local life in **Minato Ward**.





Hijikata first arrived in Tokyo without a house, food, or a job, hoping to become a dancer. He moved from place to place around Tokyo, before settling in a dorm-style lodging in this area. Many areas of residence, along with many lives, had been lost during the Pacific War, when the Americans bombed Tokyo. **This whole area**, for example, had been **completely razed by bombs**. When **Hijikata** moved to Tokyo at the **age of 20**, it was into these devastated environs. The living conditions in these dorm-style lodgings were particularly bad, even by postwar Tokyo standards. Hijikata, in his mid-20s, moved into one of these lodgings, and became a **day labourer** along with many of the other lodgers. The Furukawa river was lined with such lodgings, turning it into something of a **slum**. The kind of people who lodged here had no other homes to go to in Tokyo, and, even if their environment was very bad and their living conditions very low by Tokyo standards, these lodgings only cost around 30-50 yen. Many of these lodgers were, like Hijikata, day labourers.

It was **within these environs** that Hijikata became passionate about becoming a dancer. He spent all day every day **thinking about dance**. In the immediate postwar, Japan had absorbed many **American influences**. American films and music were popular, as was American dance. Jazz music and jazz dance had been imported, and Hijikata **became a jazz dancer**. Whilst living here, in these impoverished and challenging conditions, Hijikata also **read** the works of **Jean Genet**, and felt an affinity with Genet's life. This was what fueled him to move away from existing modern dance and jazz dance, and to **create a new form of dance**. It was living a life on the peripheries of society like Genet, that Hijikata discovered the total connection between dancing and life.

This was really the **starting point of butoh**. Butoh came out of this idea that **life and dance were unified**, which Hijikata arrived at through living an outcast and immoral life after the model of Genet. So, the banks of the Furukawa river can, in some sense, be considered the origin-place of butoh.

1.7 The birth of Butoh

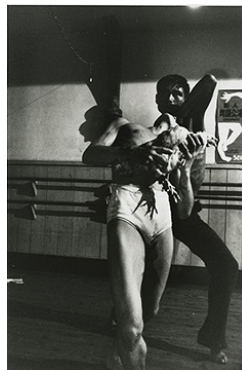
– Forbidden Colours (Kinjiki, 1959)

Tatsumi Hijikata began studying modern dance in his home prefecture of Akita, before going on to study a variety of dance styles in Tokyo. Even though he lived in impoverished conditions in Tokyo, Hijikata never gave up on his dream of becoming a dancer. He **attended the Mitsuko Andō Dance Institute**, where he learned **jazz** and **flamenco**, as well as **classical ballet**.

At the time, Japan was absorbing the influences of American film and popular music, and Hijikata danced as a jazz dancer in concerts and musical films. He was, however, **not satisfied** with being a **jazz** dancer, and so began to seek out his own unique style of dance. He moved away from show-style dancing and began to develop an original dance form. This new dance worked **against the formalism** of the dominant style of **Japanese modern dance**, known as “**creative dance**”.

In **May 1959**, Hijikata performed a short work entitled **Forbidden Colours** (Kinjiki), that would revolutionize Japanese dance. The title alone, which alluded to **homosexual love**, was enough to drop a “bombshell” into the conservative world of Japanese modern dance, but the performance was also shocking.

Yoshito Ohno, a famous butoh dancer who has been performing Kinjiki around that time.



– From American to French influences

At least one of the reasons was that Hijikata felt an affinity with the life and works of **Jean Genet** – the French author of *The Thief’s Journal* (**Journal du voleur**) – who helped him to discover a **connection** between his **life in a dorm-style** lodging in central Tokyo **and his dance**. French anti-moral literature, like that of Genet, and the Existentialist philosophy of **Jean-Paul Sartre**, were important influences in motivating Hijikata’s creation of works that presented taboo themes.

The theory of “**art informel**” was imported from France in 1957, around the time Hijikata was creating butoh. While it usually refers to the fine arts, **Hijikata applied** the idea of “art informel” **to dance**, as an approach to his method of dance creation. He also drew on the ideas and techniques of French **musique concrète** in creating the **music and soundscape** for **Forbidden Colours**.

Moving away from American influences in this way, and **towards French** literature, philosophy, and art, Hijikata **began to create a new dance form**. His radical critique of existing dance forms, and **critical** or even negative approach to ideas of “modernity” and “**a productivity-driven society**”, paved the way for his “Butoh” dance to come.

1.8 The Establishment of Butoh

Hijikata created a **revised version of Kinjiki** within a year after he released the original version. It's not too much to say that Hijikata established a core part of "Butoh" expression through this revising work.

– Mishima's friendship

The performance of Forbidden Colours (**Kinjiki, 1959**) provoked **unexpected responses**. Yukio Mishima, the well-known contemporary author, attended a rehearsal and showered Tatsumi Hijikata's "avant-garde dance" with praise. **Mishima's approbation** and support were an incredible encouragement to Hijikata, who was unknown at the time, and had a real effect in turning public attention towards him.

Mishima wrote about homosexual themes in his novels and was himself a homosexual. **The title**, Forbidden Colours (Kinjiki), was, in fact, **borrowed from Mishima's work**. Mishima showed real friendship towards Hijikata, visiting his studio Asbestos Hall a number of times, and writing recommendations for Hijikata's events, and reviews of his dance works at Hijikata's request. Despite this, the creative methods and themes of Forbidden Colours, as well as its violent antisocial approach, meant it drew increasing criticism within the modern dance world. This performance led to **Hijikata leaving the All Japan Association of Creative Dance**, and to him taking the risk of carving his own path to a new dance form. Both his collaborators on Forbidden Colours, **Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshito Ohno**, also left the Association, perhaps following Hijikata's lead.

– The revised Kinjiki

Hijikata would later create a **revised and expanded version** of Forbidden Colours that developed the ideas behind the work. Already an established figure in the world of modern dance, **Kazuo Ohno performed** in the revised version of Forbidden Colours, playing the character of Divine from Genet's novel, at Hijikata's request. Divine became an important role for Ohno, and one that he would continue to play into old age:



Leaving the world of modern dance, Hijikata and Ohno also forfeited their modern dance audiences. A number of important writers, poets, artists, and musicians, including Mishima, however, expressed an interest in Hijikata's avant-garde performances. Though they hadn't been serious dance viewers before, these **intellectuals** who held sway among a **younger generation**, recognized Hijikata's creative power and passionately **supported his work**.

Hijikata also drew on the knowledge and ideas of these supporters in **expanding** the possibilities for dance creation and in pursuing his new dance form. He called this dance form "**ankoku**

Butoh (“**dance of darkness**”), and suggested that “**ankoku Butoh**” dance should **aim at the bodily and spiritual condition of a condemned prisoner who walks towards the guillotine**. As Hijikata wrote in his essay, “To Prison” (“Keimusho e”):

[There is] a human being not walking, but made to walk, not living, but made to live, not dying, but made to die... in this total passivity—despite it, even—the fundamental vitality of human nature is paradoxically revealed.

Hijikata perceived the fundamental form of Butoh in the image of a **condemned prisoner**, and used this as the nucleus for creating his dance. In this way, he took the first step towards butoh expression and towards establishing the philosophy of Butoh.

1.9 Navel and A-Bomb (Heso to genbaku, 1960)

Hijikata established “**Ankoku Butoh**” as an **empowered version** of “Butoh” in **1965**. From here, using several steps, we will trace how Hijikata created the new stage of “Butoh”.

Navel and A-Bomb (Heso to genbaku) is a film that premiered in October **1960**. Hijikata was involved in a total of six **experimental “modern jazz films”** in 16mm format, in collaboration with young artists, writers, and jazz musicians, like poet Shuntarō Tanikawa, composer Toru Takemitsu, and director Shūji Terayama.

Navel and A-Bomb was one of these films, **directed by Eikoh Hosoe**, and starring Hijikata. Hosoe had been moved by Hijikata’s first butoh work, *Forbidden Colours*, and soon afterwards enlisted both Hijikata and Yoshito Ohno in the creation of this film. Video footage from the 1960s is rare, and this film is a particularly valuable resource in showing Hijikata’s dance technique and particular style of physical expression at that time.

Filming took place on the coast of Tokyo’s neighbouring prefecture, **Chiba**. The film featured local fishermen and children alongside Hijikata and Ohno, who were amateurs when it came to acting and dancing. Hijikata’s direction of them nonetheless created a pleasant scene. The film also featured sacrificial animals, like cows, goats, and chickens, which were common motifs in Hijikata’s works.

According to Hosoe, the “**Navel**” of the title represented the **origins of life**, while the “**A-Bomb**” symbolized **total destruction**. The film depicts a peaceful paradise with children playing nude on a beach, but cuts to footage of an atomic bomb explosion when a single adult touches a child’s navel. The film then closes on footage of a **single apple** resting on the water’s edge. The waves gently lapping reflect the summer sunlight, presenting a vision of eternity, as the film symbolically represents the end and rebeginning **of history in an eternal cycle** of mythical time.

1.10 The Avant-garde and Experiments in Physical Expression

With his performance of *Forbidden Colours* (Kinjiki) in May 1959, Tatsumi Hijikata drew the eyes of preeminent writers and artists, like Yukio Mishima. He was working towards the creation of a **new form and philosophy of dance**, undeterred by criticism from those in the field of modern dance.

→ Dance Experience events (1959-62)

Hijikata began a series of **events** under the title “Tatsumi Hijikata **DANCE EXPERIENCE** Event”, and, **from 1959 to 1962**, presented a number of events under the banner of **avant-garde** and experimental art. One such event was titled “Six Avant-garde Artists”, and gathered events by avant-garde musicians, theatre performers, and film makers, alongside dancers. Another was the “DANCE EXPERIENCE” events, which featured experimental dance performances. Through these events, Hijikata showed himself to be a talented producer as well as dancer.

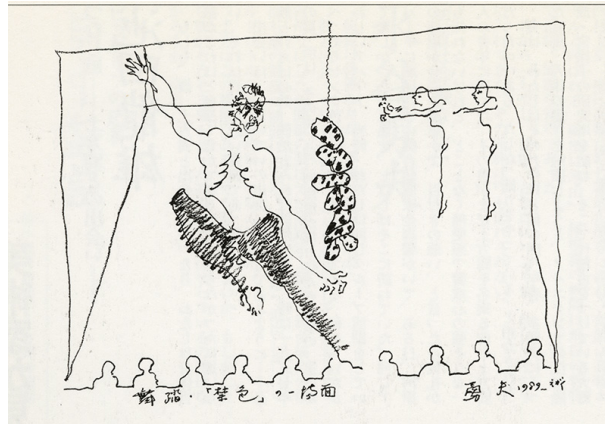


Figure 1.2: Flyer or “Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Event” By Isao Mizutani

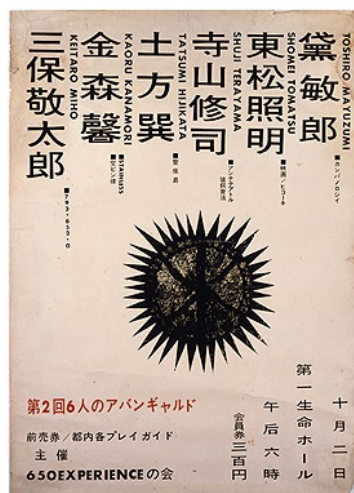


Figure 1.3: Flyer or “Six Avant-garde Artists” By Mitsuo Kanou

Hijikata was in frequent contact with avant-garde artists and musicians during this period, and would actively collaborate with many of them. It was **becoming common** in the artworld of the time to criticize existing artworks as “**Anti-Art**”, which in turn **gave rise to a new branch of “contemporary art”**. Influenced by this movement, **Hijikata** began to create forms of physical expression that could be termed “**anti-dance**”. What was **particular** about Hijikata’s approach was his **restriction of movement**, rather than the attempt to create an impression of free and easy movement as previous dance forms had.

→ Seed (Shushi, 1960)

In his short work Seed (Shushi)¹, Hijikata curled up into a fetal position on stage. His movements were restricted and constantly turned inwards, in what can otherwise be described as a “**meditation in the womb**”. This poetic form of physical expression suggested his body was doing the thinking rather than his mind. It was a performance or Happening that can be taken to criticize the desire to “express’.

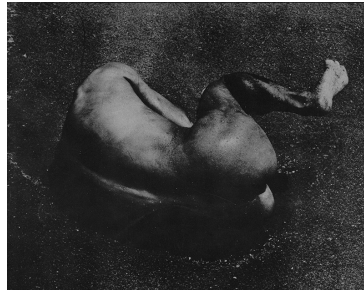


Figure 1.4: Meditation in the womb, Photo by Eikoh Hosoe

Hijikata was influenced by the works of **Jean Genet**, as well as the thinking of **Georges Bataille**. He sought to make works that were equal to Bataille’s thinking on the key concept of “**immanence**” through drawing on Bataille’s ideas about death and eroticism as motifs in his works.

Though the term “**ankoku Butoh**” did not yet exist, Hijikata adopted the proximate term “**ankoku buyoh**” to describe his series of avant-garde and experimental works. This “**ankoku**” (meaning “darkness”) was not only the physical darkness of the colour black (“**kuro**”), or the darkness of shadows (“**yami**”), it was also a term directed at the **darkness of human nature** and human **existence**.

1.11 Avant-garde Art and Anti-Art

From the late 1950s to early 1960s, avant-garde art was in full swing. Unknown artists gathered to present their works at the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum – an exhibition that unusually had no selection committee.

This annual exhibition was organized by the private newspaper company **Yomiuri Shimbun** and had, in the past, been a fairly conservative exhibition, presenting works by established artists. From the **late 1950s**, however, **young independent artists** began to gather. A contributing factor was the French art critic **Michel Tapié**’s visit to Japan in 1957, which introduced to Japan the theory of “**art informel**”.

Rather than use paint on a canvas to paint in a realistic way, these young artists mixed in sand and stone with the paint and attached different solid objects to the canvas. This allowed for an uninhibited and free style of art making to emerge, that ignored existing forms and techniques. These artists weren’t self-consciously painting in an “informel” style, but the works they created can nonetheless be considered as “informel” paintings.

As this art movement expanded, artists started making works that were more like performances

¹ 1960 July: First recital, **Hijikata Tatsumi DANCE EXPERIENCE no kai** (Hijikata Tatsumi Dance Experiences Recital). Works include Hanatachi (Flowers), Shushi (Seeds), Div inu sho (Divine) which was a solo for Ono Kazuo, and Shorijo (Disposal Place). – From muse.jhu.edu/article/32986

and exhibiting outside traditional exhibition spaces. The Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, in being non-commercial, gave a space to this rush of energy and free thinking among young artists.

In the **1960** 12th installment of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, the art critic Yoshiaki Tōno described **Tetsumi Kudo**’s work as “**Anti-Art**”. As a result of this, people started to term avant-garde artworks of the time and the contemporary state of art as “Anti-Art”. Though the artists themselves did not use the term “Anti-Art”, their critique of the institutionalized presentation of established artworks within museums can be considered a form of “Anti-Art”. Avant-garde artists like Ushio Shinohara, Genpei Akasegawa, Jiro Takamatsu, and Natsuyuki Nakanishi, did not end their creative activities with the **end of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in 1963**, but continued to seek out new opportunities for their artistic practice.



Figure 1.5: Photo by Natsuyuki Nakanishi

The works of these artists both absorbed the influence of “art informel”, and could be considered as “**Happenings**” – a genre of performance coined by the American artist **Allan Kaprow**. Happenings are often described as a form of “**fine art theatre**”, that also moved in the direction of Action Art. More and more art groups involved in the Happening were formed around this time: Neo-Dada Organizers, Zero Jigen (Zero Dimension), Group Ongaku (Group Music), and Hi Red Centre. These joined the growing eddy of avant-garde art.

Tatsumi **Hijikata** collaborated with many of these avant-garde artists in establishing his “**anti-dance**” movement and created a number of performances that could be termed “Happenings”, placing him right at the forefront of avant-garde art at the time.

1.12 The Happening Dance

From the late 1950s, Happenings began to gain popularity in New York. Happenings were a type of “**Action Art**” also called “painters theatre”, which fused dramatic performance with visual art exhibitions. The first public Happening was held in **1959** by **Allan Kaprow** at a New York art gallery.

The first Happening in Japan was held by **Yoko Ono** in **1962**, who imported the movement from New York. Tatsumi **Hijikata** also participated in this event. And that same year, he

staged a dance performance with avant-garde musicians entitled Leda Event (Reda no kai). He also presented a performance to Kaprow's mentor, John Cage, when Cage visited his studio Asbestos Hall that year.

– Masseur (Anma, 1963)

In **1963**, Hijikata created his legendary work **Masseur (Anma)**. This performance consisted of a series of activities that could hardly be called dance, with dancers running around the stage and playing games.

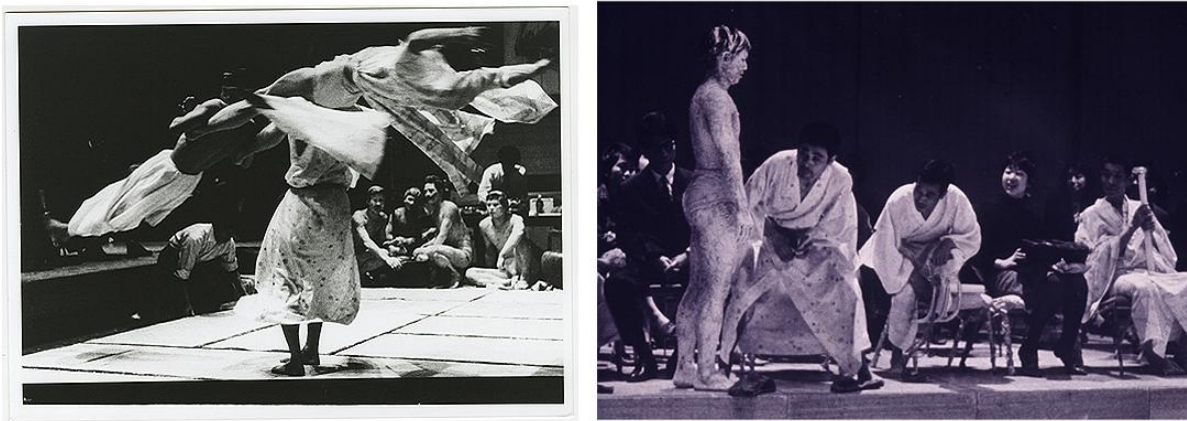


Figure 1.6: Anma Photo by Akira Tanno

It also involved a number of elderly **shamisen** players getting up onstage and walking around whilst playing, who Hijikata then shouted at and drove away. This was alarming for the audience to watch. Around this time, Hijikata created a number of works, along with Masseur, that might be termed “Happenings” rather than “dance”.

The American critic **Susan Sontag** offered a compelling description of the Happening in her essay “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition”. In this essay, she asked questions of how to handle the audience and how to manage the duration of the event, suggesting that the core of the Happening was an **experience of terror combined with the aesthetic of Surrealism**.

Sontag's description maps perfectly onto Hijikata's dance works of the time. His works certainly produced a feeling of terror in his audiences, and his basic creative approach can be considered Surrealist. **Hijikata's works of the early 1960s are**, indeed, better described as **Happenings** than dances.

1.13 The Formation of Ankoku butoh

Through the 1960s, increasing numbers of dancers and artists became interested in Hijikata's avant-garde dances and Happenings, and he began to **refine his unique philosophy** and style of expression. From 1965 to 1968, Hijikata created a series of Butoh performances. He was as committed to choreographing works for his students, and to directing and producing works, as he was to his own butoh works.

→ Rose-Colored Dance (Bara iro dansu, 1965)

In 1965, Hijikata created the butoh work Rose-coloured Dance (Barairo dansu), which was the **first** piece to be publicly referred to as “**ankoku butoh**” (meaning ‘dark’ butoh in Japanese). Its performers were the first generation of Butoh dancers, Kazuo Ohno, Yoshito Ohno, Akira Kasai, and Mitsutaka Ishii. All were experienced dancers with training in modern dance and classical ballet, who were also able to perform butoh and understood the thinking behind Hijikata’s dance. It was with this group of dancers that Hijikata began to refer to his “ankoku butoh group”.

The avant-garde performance structure and style of Rose-coloured Dance lends itself to the label of “anti-dance”. In creating it, Hijikata collaborated with contemporary avant-garde artists and musicians: Natsuyuki Nakanishi created unexpected stage sets, and “Happener” Sho Kazakura created **humorous non-semantic performance scenes**. Posters for the performance were designed to Hijikata’s satisfaction by Tadanori Yokoo, a rising star in the design world, known for having his finger on the pulse.

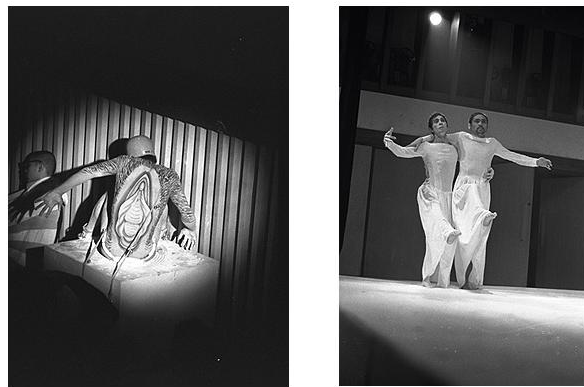


Figure 1.7: Rose-coloured Dance (Barairo dansu) Hijikata with Ono Photo by Tadao Nakaya

→ Tomato (Tomato, 1966)

Hijikata’s work of the following year, Tomato (Tomato, 1966), would use even **more destructive actions and audience participation**. Neither of these performances can easily be described as dance, and both were unrepeatable.

During these years, Hijikata also turned his talents generously to the creation and production of works by his students Tomiko Takai, Mitsutaka Ishii, Natsu Nakajima, and Yōko Ashikawa. Through this, he was able to spread his new form of dance, butoh, by encouraging more interest in butoh and increasing its audiences. Even within the context of 1960s Japanese art, butoh was distinctive. These dancers participated, along with the avant-garde artists listed above, in performances like Rose-coloured Dance and Tomato.

This period marked the shift from the “announcement” of Butoh as a new dance form, to its **establishment as an artistic movement**. It also marked the time in which Hijikata **began to enlist young students with no previous dance experience**. Many of these young students came to his studio in order to “live authentic lives” or to “change their lives.” And, while there are many meanings ascribed to the “ankoku” of ankoku butoh, one of them is this question of “existence” – of how to live fully.

1.14 The Photographing of “Kamaitachi”

After Hijikata established “Ankoku Butoh”, he advanced butoh to the next stage. From here, let’s examine how Hijikata created *Nikutai No Hanran* in 1968, recognized as a masterpiece came out from his challenges.

In September 1965, the **photographer Eikoh Hosoe** and butoh dancer Tatsumi Hijikata traveled to Hijikata’s home prefecture of Akita. Upon reaching the town of Tashiro in the mountains of southern Akita, Hijikata and Hosoe began to take photographs in the rice paddies, fields, traditional homes, and at various other sites around the village.



Figure 1.8: The Photography of “Kamaitachi” Photo by Eikoh Hosoe

The **village** was in the middle of its harvest when they arrived, and Hijikata played at being an “idiot” or a “king of the fools”, a buffoon or a shaman, with the villagers. He invited the village children to race through the fields and to hide in the shadows of old homes, creating a number of non-everyday scenes for Hosoe to capture on camera.



Figure 1.9: The Photography of “Kamaitachi” Photo by Eikoh Hosoe

Over the course of two days, Hijikata and Hosoe involved the villagers in a photo shoot that was more of a *Happening*, before leaving the village in the blink of an eye. **For the villagers**, it was as if they had been set upon by the mythical creature, “**kamaitachi**”. Looking at the photographs, we see a pastoral mountain town transformed into a mythical world through the entry of a single man, Hijikata.



Figure 1.10: The Photography of “Kamaitachi” Photo by Eikoh Hosoe

The experience of shooting in Akita influenced Hijikata’s *butoh* works, with folkloric elements starting to appear, and with a scene entitled “March of the king of the fools” created for the opening of his work *Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese: Rebellion of the Body* (*Tatsumi Hijikata to nihonjin—nikutai no hanran*), made three years later.

A selection of these photographs was later gathered and published under the title *Kamaitachi* – a photobook which heightened Hosoe’s fame as a photographer, and became well-known and praised worldwide.

1.15 Rebellion of the Body (*nikutai no hanran*, 1968)

Hijikata performed the 1968 *butoh* work “*Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese: Rebellion of the Body* (*Hijikata Tatsumi to nihonjin—nikutai no hanran*)” for two days running, to a full house at the Nippon Seinenkan venue. As we have been learning, Hijikata had been creating series of performances in a concentrated way for a number of years. *Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese* was a **solo work**, performed by Hijikata, but it can also be considered as a **culmination** of, or final accounting for, Hijikata’s *butoh* activities over the preceding years.

Leading up to the performance, Hijikata made statements to the effect of: being “the origin of dance in Japan”, or of “**needing to define dance in Japan**”. *Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese* was an attempt to respond to these sentiments. But it was also a performance that defied simple explanations or easy interpretation.

To consider some memorable scenes from the performance: It began with Hijikata parading into the theater on a palanquin. Two white horses stood harnessed at the entry of the building, and a rabbit and pig went through the theater on the parade. The parade included men carrying a motorcycle engine and a barbershop sign alongside the animals, making it truly a “March of the king of the fools”.

Hijikata first danced in a **white bridal kimono** and then stripped down to a **gold strap-on phallus**. He danced around wildly wearing the phallus, with a body emaciated from fasting. His other costumes, too, continued to **invert “gender”**, from the red dress he wore whilst dancing Spanish dance, to the short white dress and long socks he wore whilst dressing like a young girl.



Figure 1.11: Rebellion of the Body Photo by Ryouzen Torii

At the end of the performance, Hijikata was **hoisted into the air** on a chord running over the audience. This final scene alluded to the image of a *pietà* and to the **ascension of Christ**. The packed audience responded with enthusiasm, showering Hijikata with applause. This won the performance the label of being “the ultimate ceremony of the ankoku butoh group”, though **for some it signaled the end of Hijikata’s “true” butoh of the early 1960s**. Either way, the performance stirred extreme responses.



Figure 1.12: Rebellion of the Body Photo by Roku Hasegawa

One such response in an article by German literature specialist and avid Hijikata supporter, **Suehiro Tanemura**, entitled “Rebellion of the Body”, resulted in the performance being colloquially known as Rebellion of the Body (which was, in fact, its subtitle).

Please watch the video below, a 5-minute clip of Rebellion of the Body. As you can see, Hijikata, riding on a shrine-like cart moves onto the stage where there is nothing other than a brass plate with a hanging chicken. Sometimes, he dances like a flamenco dancer, wearing a phallu, and sometimes he dances like a girl in a kimono. Then he flies out from the stage hanging from a rope. As that physical expression was too extreme, the audience was divided over the performance. What do you think?

With Rebellion of the Body Hijikata was agitating for change, leading a **dance revolution**, and facilitating a revolt that came from the bodies of his dancers. The year of its creation, **1968**, was one of global **political revolt**. In Japan, as well as elsewhere, anti-government and anti-authority protests sprang up in universities and on the streets. Young people chanted and shouted, and even physically clashed with riot police.

Having brought dance that symbolized “violence” to the stage, **Hijikata became an important figure** in the performance world of that time. He began to feature as a favourite of newspapers and magazines, and to appear in photographic and film works.

Chapter 2

Revolution

Chapter 3

Notation

Chapter 4

Dissemination and reception