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Performance Studies international Fluid States 2015 Tohoku, Japan

Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality, and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan

Select conference proceedings

**Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality, and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan**

28 August 2015 (Pre-event, trip to Mt Osore),  
29 August -1 September, 2015, Aomori, Japan.

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## Preface

PSi Fluid States 2015 Tohoku, Japan was held in Aomori from 28 August to 1 September 2015. The title of the conference was: 'Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality, and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan'. Excerpts from the Call for Papers (following) elaborate on the conference themes.

The conference was curated by Hayato Kosuge (Director), Katherine Mezur, Takashi Morishita, Peter Eckersall, and Yu Homma with help from Rina Otani and organisational support from the Keio University Art Centre and the Aomori Museum of Art, where the conference took place. Keynote addresses were delivered by Professor Marilyn Ivy (Columbia University), Takashi Morishita (Keio University Art Centre) and Takahiro Okuwaki (Aomori Museum of Art).

The conference featured a mix of papers with 20-minute paper presentations, working groups and performances (see <http://psi21.portfolio-butoh.jp>). Four working groups were convened on the themes of: Corporeality (convenor Katherine Mezur), Performance (convenor Peter Eckersall), Pilgrimage (convenor Stephen Barber) and Place (convenor Yasushi Nagata). Included here is a selection of papers from the conference gathered as a select conference proceedings. They address the conference themes in a diversity of ways. They have all been reviewed by peers and are published here without further editing. Reports from working groups and documentation of the conference will also be available on the conference website.

We are grateful for support from the Keio University Art Centre and the Aomori Museum of Art. We thank our keynote presenters and all the participants for their contributions. We also owe a depth of gratitude to the officials and citizens of Aomori who were so welcoming. We deeply thank the many helpers, local artists, businesses and city officials.

## Table of contents

Preface.....	3
<b>Welcome address:</b>	
Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan. (English) <i>Hayato Kosuge</i> .....	7
けがれを超えて：パフォーマンスと東北（身体・霊性・巡礼）」(日本語) 小菅隼人 .....	10
<b>Call for Papers:</b>	
Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality, and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan .....	12
<b>Conference dramaturgy</b>	
<i>Katherine Mezur</i> .....	14
<b>Working Groups:</b>	
• Corporeality .....	16
• Performance .....	17
• Pilgrimage .....	19
• Place.....	20
<b>Corporeality Working Group Reflections</b>	
<i>Katherine Mezur</i> .....	22
<b>Papers:</b>	
Re-Vision: Waste and Memory in Post-War Japanese Visual Art <i>Gunhild Borggreen</i> .....	34
Fluid Corporealities: Hijikata Tatsumi’s Bodies Trembling between States of Crisis <i>Katja Centonze</i> .....	43
Hyperrealism and Everyday Performance: How is the text constituted in Everyday Theatre? <i>Raimondo Cortese</i> .....	55
The gap between the <insider view> and <outsider view> on Fukushima as seen in the change of Festival/Tokyo’s lineup <i>Ken Hagiwara</i> .....	66
The Hunter in Soto-no-Hama of the Noh ‘Utō’ and Performers <i>Rurihiko Hara</i> .....	77

Môn Tohoku Môn Triad: ‘We are water carriers: committing our bodies to transformation in places of sacredness and contamination.’	
<i>Ariana Jordão</i> .....	95
Performing Recovery: Music Making and Disaster Relief in Post-Tsunami Japan	
<i>Nana Kaneko</i> .....	100
VORAZ [Ravenous]: Reflections on Butoh Fu Notation from Mexican imagery in times of crisis and violence	
<i>Laboratorio Escénico Danza Teatro Ritual</i> .....	113
Save your own skin: Performative Text	
<i>Tanja London</i> .....	117
Body as a place of poetry: memory and imagination in Antonin Artaud	
<i>Samantha Marenzi</i> .....	142
Transmission of Gestures in Dance: the Spectrum of Corporeality of Kazuo Ohno in « Ô sensei » by Catherine Diverrès	
<i>Mariko Miyagawa</i> .....	151
Butō Workshop	
<i>Lori Ohtani</i> .....	160
A Fly in the Light - The Corporeal Presence of the Organic and Inorganic Other	
<i>Krisztina Rosner</i> .....	163
We’re Here Now: Site-specific theatre beyond place in Canadian Jewish Diaspora	
<i>Jenny Salisbury</i> .....	179
Trauma and Survival in the Art of Yoshiko Shimada and Soni Kum	
<i>Eliza Tan</i> .....	193
Hijikata Tatsumi—Artaud’s True Heir? Corporeality and Spirituality in Hijikata and Artaud	
<i>Tsu-Chung Su</i> .....	210
The Singer of Tales as Itinerant Performer: the Michiyuki Trope	
<i>Alison Tokita</i> .....	224

*World Factory: Staging Migrant Labour on a Migrant Stage*  
*WEI Zheyu*..... 243

## Fluid Corporealities: Hijikata Tatsumi's Bodies Trembling between States of Crisis

Katja Centonze

This paper concerns the contiguous spaces between the writing practice and the dancing practice of Hijikata Tatsumi.

In 2009 the 15<sup>th</sup> Performance Studies International Conference (Zagreb, June 24-28) faced the complex problem of 'MISperformance: Misfiring, Misfitting, Misreading'. What came to the fore, were emerging agendas that radically discussed the error within theory in relation to a 'mis-performativity of transmission of knowledge and of its lecture machine, of the very academic format of the conference' (Čale Feldman 2010, 2). One of these was the urgency for a new vocabulary, while the existing one was challenged by a 'provocative terminology coinage' that attempted to re-position the status of rhetoric and the notion of subjectivity itself (ibid.). The nature of illegibility which affects the body and corporeality was inevitably under examination. This challenge denounces a shared uneasiness about approaches to performance studies nowadays, and shows the strong necessity for exploring new tools that might reduce the distance between theory and practice, the body and discourse.<sup>1</sup>

Performance studies and dance studies are young research fields, and the most recent is the latter. Dance research, as defined by Janet Lansdale, 'is very much a newcomer as a discipline' (Lansdale 2010, 158) and it has given rise to continuously new challenges in analytic approaches to movement and choreography from the 1980s and, more pronouncedly since the 1990s. Many debates are still open and it is a difficult task to solve theoretical and methodological problems that arise from the encounter between scholarship and choreutic arts, the area which visibly manifests a very high degree of complexity in its survey.

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<sup>1</sup> Problems concerning the discourse on the body are felt strongly by a large group of theorists working in many areas.



The specific cluster of problems we encounter, when dealing with Hijikata's art, is of translating dance, translating corporeality, translating Japanese, translating Hijikata's hermetic texts.<sup>2</sup>

Stemming from Japanese studies, since the '90s I have been trying to demonstrate, that the investigation of Hijikata's praxis and writings may open up new perspectives on the encounter between dance and discourse, the body and words, and that the explosion of issues relating to corporeality, and the questions they embrace, have been investigated by Hijikata. In my works I also discuss how the fibre and fabric of movement in *butō* praxis, if viewed from a certain perspective (Centonze 1998; 2013), pertains to a different order from that of contemporary dance and many other types of experimental performance, i.e., *butō* may belong to a register that necessarily requires not only a new language of criticism, but a specific thermometer of corporeal sensitivity. In my opinion *butō*, in particular, requires a new formulation of its survey, due to its paradoxical character.

Especially during the '60s Hijikata's *butō* unfolds as a 'terroristic act', and the corporeal matter, he works on, appears as a minefield and site of critique against the socio-political system and the pervasive commodification of existence. Hijikata condenses the critical corporeality and the crisis of the post-war body in a revolutionary project enacting a resistance to post-war politics.

The complex operation of dance aesthetics undertaken by Hijikata is considered here in light of his radical exploration and diversification of corporeality as it was dissected into multi-layered nuances, which manifest subtle and changeable spectra in a polysemous interplay.

Within this landscape emerges the *nikutai* (the carnal body), i.e., the anarchic corporeality or the starting point of the adventure of *butō*'s history. Besides the *nikutai* Hijikata fleshes out the *suijakutai* (the weakened body, the altered body, or, as I define it

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<sup>2</sup> My politics of translation is trying to avoid as much as possible a contamination of the original source, even if this means sacrificing the final textual aesthetics.

here, the contaminated body),<sup>3</sup> the *shitai* (the dead body), *jintai* (the human body), *mi* (body), *karada* (body), etc.<sup>4</sup> As, for example, Hijikata writes:

'The *nikuta*'s voice, inside which are buried an infinite number of chasms [*sakeme*], is something as if you would wrap in a handkerchief anew the scream from the material. This happens often in the civilisation inside the body [*karada*]. Who is the creator of the overconfidence in transforming into flesh and blood? The pure spirit and the dim soul gazed at by the *nikutai*, which is divinity of flesh [*niku no kami*] and raw dream, cry with a faltering voice, hand in hand under the collapse while still pending up in the air as ever...' (Hijikata 1969, 35; my translation. Cfr. also translation in Centonze 2010, 116)

Hijikata's radicalism and deep concern for the body manifested in his performative practice penetrates into verbal landscape enforcing the revolutionary act of his art, where bodies are taken in extreme situations, and threat and risk are displayed on the choreographic level by, for example, unbalance, instability and entropic forces (Centonze 2013).

Hijikata's obscure literature goes beyond rhetoric. We see confirmed in it, the way the bodies, as conceived by the dancer, condense states of crisis turning into critical corporealities. The body itself is questioned. While dealing with bodies/corporealities in his texts, he applies distinguished terminologies in differing contexts, connoting case by case the specific materiality and matter of the body. For this purpose Hijikata treats words as bodies and opens up the same word to continually new meaning. His 'bodily writing' (Foster 2010) confers corporeality to words and creates synaesthetic texts which are multidimensional and involve all senses.

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<sup>3</sup> The *suijakutai* may be also viewed in contrast to Harald Kreutzberg's vigorous physicality (Centonze 2015, 104-108).

<sup>4</sup> For the construction of disparate corporealities see Centonze 2010.

The critical body or body of crisis (Centonze forthcoming) is revealed in Mishima Yukio's text 'Kiki to buyō', written in 1960, when the definition *butō* was not yet in use. Mishima's literature on the avant-garde dance is without any doubt one of the most intuitive group of texts written about Hijikata's dance preannouncing the main traits of its development.<sup>5</sup>

'He said that, **an example that seizes this posture of crisis**—and it is a very singular example—is **'a man who urinates in a standing position seen from behind'**.' (Mishima translated in Centonze 2012, 224)

We may say that the novelist was confronted with an artistic reality characterised by the potential to display concretely what its intentions and desires are, and by the actual and carnal manifestation of a discourse that goes beyond words. In fact, he often puts emphasis on the actuality (*akuchuarite*) of the performative act in Hijikata's creations (Centonze 2012, 224).

The de-figured body seen from behind becomes a topos in Hijikata's anti-dance, where the main territory is occupied by the rear which replaces face, head and hands which are/were the usual vehicles of expression. This implies that together with the erasure of the face and hands, expression is also erased (see Centonze 2013; forthcoming).

As he declares in his programme notes for *Kinjiki nibusaku* (1959):

'The execution of the action will be done all at once without bending the domesticated articulations. The expression of this body writhing in agony under the strict restriction of the bar [*bōjō*], will be reoriented from the face to the back. The promotion of the prioritised back to carry out a very important role, in consequence of this drama in which all the evil comes from the rear, the chest, which circles, the chest which moves slowly, and the chest which flies high around and must land, are

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<sup>5</sup> For Mishima's writings on avant-garde dance see Centonze 2012; forthcoming.

equivalently used.' (Hijikata 1959; my translation. Cfr. translation in Centonze forthcoming)

Hijikata divests not only the body in his art, but he undresses also words (naked words, naked body) often through a mix of cruelty or apparent sarcasm and his dry realism. Hijikata goes further: he eradicates and opposes one's/his own physicality which is conditioned, shaped, formed, informed, domesticated by the system or by dance formulas.

A further important aspect in Hijikata's revolution, enucleated by Mishima ante litteram, is the relation between the body and the object, which is exemplified by the dancer as a patient affected by poliomyelitis, who tries to catch an object. Mishima envisages in this relation a process of estrangement and detects the thing (*mono*) as a dreadful thing-in-itself (*monojita*).

I think that, what is described by Mishima, can be connected and extended to that specific corporeality of the *hagurete iru nikutai*, often mentioned by Hijikata. *Hagurete iru nikutai* is the carnal body which has become lost, errant/wandering/roaming, disoriented, the body of which we lose control, which has lost control, alienated from itself, detached from the bonds which govern society and the individual, divorced from subjectivity and from the person herself/himself. Such a body cannot be subjected either to choreutic methodology, or to "readable" kinetic configurations or dynamics oriented towards a goal with an aprioristic and distinguishable point of departure and arrival. It belongs to the non-oriented and non-directed gesture and to the de-figuration of the systemic organisation of choreography (Centonze forthcoming). It has also a strong connection to what Hijikata defines as the *mumokutekina nikutai*, the *nikutai* without an aim, aimless *nikutai* or, as I call it, the atelic *nikutai*, which operates against the society of productivity. This *mumokutekina nikutai* is at the centre of his dance, as he declared in 'Keimusho e' (1961, 46; Centonze 2010, 118-119), and may be linked to immobility (Centonze forthcoming).

Mishima isolates a crucial characteristic, which I consider as the Copernican Revolution actuated by Hijikata, i.e. the non-dialectic between the body and the object and the manipulation of the *nikutai* in respect to the object. Hijikata obliterates the hierarchy among human being, animal and object, dismissing an anthropocentric vision of dance in terms of human expression.

Ichikawa Miyabi focuses on this *nikutai/object* relation and discerns in Hijikata's dance an operation, which he defines as the *nikutaika sareta mono*, or the nikutaised thing (Centonze 2014, 96-100; forthcoming).

Hijikata reserves a peculiar attention also to natural crisis underlining the difference between his region, Tōhoku, and the city. He relates natural calamity and disasters to specific corporealities, in particular to the bodies of children. Without rhetorical gloss, Hijikata focuses on the situation of natural catastrophe and the infant body surpassing the possibility of moral judgment. As far as I have observed, the infant body is denoted by Hijikata throughout his texts with the term *karada* or *shintai* and never with the term *nikutai*:

'Natural disasters and children are connected. There are many children considered to be the appendix to natural disasters. It is a natural disaster when they are swept away by illness, as well when a *mochi* gets stuck in their throat. Children are standing next to natural calamity. They scream, not because they have found their hat or one of their shoes has fallen, but rather because they cannot find their body [*karada*].

I have made the experience, one after the other, of being nearly thrown into the iron pot, but I was not able to have such a natural disaster in the city. Speaking about natural disasters reminds me of the flood. Together with the flood come the corpses of drowned children [*kodomo no suishitai*], and when the children's white

swollen belly comes drifting, it gives a cool sensation.' (Hijikata 1969, 33; my translation)

This excerpt is taken from 'Nikutai ni nagamerareta nikutaigaku' (The study on the *nikutai* scrutinised by the *nikutai*, 1969). This essay enacts a concrete movement from text towards the carnal body.

As the title highlights, Hijikata operates an inversion of the rapport between the *nikutai* and the discourse on the *nikutai*: it is not the study of the body that observes the body, but here the body observes the cognitive practice and research. Present dance studies punctuate this very aspect: the body of the observer or scholar is epistemologically included in the analysis (see for example, Rothfield 2010; Foster 2010). In contemporary terms we may say that Hijikata accomplishes what dance studies and performance studies recently claim: to bring back corporeality to its corporeal sense.

'Nikutai ni nagamerareta nikutaigaku' embraces stratified observations, perceptions and cognizance concerning bodies, and is an important key to access Hijikata's conception of diverse corporealities, as well as their intriguing rapport with language, with the verbal and rational universe. It may be considered an investigation ante litteram of several issues posed by recent dance theory. Moreover, this text came out in the special number *Nikutai to gengo* (*Nikutai* and language) of *Gendaishi techō* (October 1969), preceded by the September number (1969) including Kasai Akira's critique and other essays on language and *nikutai*. In my opinion, both issues epitomise the articulate debate about the *nikutai* in the '60s (Centonze 2010, 113).

I dare to say that for Hijikata the text is a bodily text, which melts orality and writing, performance and literacy, bodies and words, and I see this clearly displayed in this essay.

A fundamental aspect of Hijikata's dance politics, corporeality, and artistic strategy introduced explicitly in this essay, is the shattered visual rapport, the debunking of the optocentrism (Centonze 1998), i.e. the monopoly of the sight in perceiving performance, as a criteria in producing performance and in philosophical phenomenology. This aspect

is crystallised in the reign of *ankoku*, in the subtraction of light, in confusing the audience's visual perception and empowering the other senses. Also the performing body is deferred from the production of visual forms through disorienting the spectator's and the performer's gaze. Recently dance and performance studies have concentrated on reorienting the optomonopolism and turned to the analysis of performances involving our organs beyond our eyes (see for example, Banes and Lepecki 2007).

As Gunji Masakatsu highlights:

'On top of that, Hijikata Tatsumi peeps constantly into the *nikutai*'s inside/inner part as if he would go beyond the inside of a cavern, and as if he would look at something which is his own *nikutai*, but is not his own *nikutai*. There the relation of showing and seeing seemed not to have been established. While the spectator sees Hijikata's dancing *nikutai*, and also Hijikata is seeing that *nikutai*, it seems as he would render this *nikutai* and its condition different from the usual scenic arts in the world.' (Gunji 1991, 253; my translation)

The extraordinary condition created in Hijikata's performances, according to Gunji, can be paralleled only by the folk tradition based on the sympathetic magic, *jujutsu*, as happens in the Hanamatsuri and Yukimatsuri, performed in Winter in the area between the mountains of the upper course of Tenryūgawa. In these rituals the relation between seeing and show/ing, between who dances and who is watching is erased. Spectators (*kenbutsu*) are excluded, because a fundamental condition of partaking in the event is of blood relations (Gunji 1991, 254; Centonze 2008).

It should be noted that the definitions *nikutaigaku* (study on the carnal body, or study on the *nikutai*) and *nikutaishi* (history of the body, or history of the *nikutai*), Hijikata deals with in 'Nikutai ni nagamerareta nikutaigaku', are not common designations for both disciplines and I suppose, that we should cut out also here a specific address to a discourse concerning distinctive nuances of corporeality, which in this case is the *nikutai*.

A sort of neologism is emphasised in respect to the *shintai*, the corporeality prevalingly considered in a philosophical context, and a sort of normativised body inserted into a social context (Centonze 1998).

The layering of words attached to the *nikutai*, which is probably ineffable, created by the historical discourse of the carnal body (*nikutaishi*) and by the study on the carnal body (*nikutaigaku*), shared by a large number of people, is seen by the dancer as a mythology constructed around the carnal body, and is compared to bacteria, or microorganisms, which can be viewed as pathogenic cells causing infectious disease. In contrast and as a paradox, Hijikata adds that these discourses are for maintaining the hygiene of the body (*karada*). He manifests a sort of critique against the imposed social body designated here as *karada*.<sup>6</sup> According to the dancer, this condition of the discursified *nikutai* is transitional, then, he adds, anything is hushed up when “real extinction” makes it entrance. The dead body, *shitai*, does not take part in the ‘real extinction’, and therefore it is affected by the mythological bacteria.

The nature of the *nikutai* is to be shattered, disintegrated even in the very moment of birth; it is not intact or integral and untouched. This is reflected also in Hijikata’s choreographies since the beginning, and will be fixed as a method in his dance practice defined as that of *butōfu*. The *nikutai* concerns a condition of corporeal fragmentation, a split corporeality, a straying and alienating/alienated (*hagurete iru*) corporeality, characterised by chasms, splits, tears, cracks, rips (*sakeme*), not graspable in a unity. Therefore, the hand chases the hand, seen as independent entities, alienated from the subject. Subjective identity is obliterated and the *nikutai* melts, congeals, coagulates like a sugar candy (*bekkoame*) in a physiochemical process reproduced in dance. The body’s structure is radically disturbed in its normal and normative organisation, its parts and senses are once dissociated from their original physiological position and function, dismembered, mixed up and then dislocated, as for example a seeing foot (eyes under

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<sup>6</sup> Confront here the importance of hygiene introduced during the immediate post-war period analysed by Edward Seidensticker, Tsurumi Shunsuke, Igarashi Yoshikuni and reflected in art by High Red Center.



the foot) or a seeing rear (eyes on the rear).<sup>7</sup> The dancer's hand does not belong to the dancer. The *nikutai* is an object independent from the dancer, and is aligned with the external objects. This deferred and distantiated body, the distance between the dancer and him or herself, is the peculiar *Verfremdung* achieved in *butō* dance, where the attention is shifted from the centre to the periphery, and the focus is distributed everywhere. The decentering process can be very similar to postmodern readings and point at the anti-modern aspect of Hijikata's dance strategy. But, as I often have discussed elsewhere, the condition of *Verfremdung* is not a prerogative of *butō*, although it has been accentuated and made explicit, and recurs historically and technically in Japanese performing arts dating back to premodern theatricality (I discussed the 'diachronic polymorphism of *wazaogī*' in Centonze 2004; 2008).

Hijikata's words reveal that the *nikutai* is approachable cognitively through bodily knowledge—and not through *nikutaigaku* or *nikutaishi*—and is bound to loneliness.

We may say, that the discursive disciplines embracing *nikutai* are fallible and misfiring, because the *nikutai* is not circumscribable, confinable, containable.

Hijikata's words convey that we can dominate history as a cultural construction, but we cannot dominate the *nikutai*. I suppose that herein lies the anarchic nature of the *nikutai*. Nevertheless there are also contrasting and paradoxical aspects of the *nikutai* or different nuances or states of the *nikutai*. Therefore, it is a fluid entity. It is fluid, because these corporealities maintain paradoxes and contradictions inside (such as the standing dead body).

In Hijikata's text we are not confronted with the idea of the body, but the body in itself. Through this perspective, the word does not entrap (corpo)reality in a fixed category, but flows together with it.

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<sup>7</sup> This was put into practice, for example, during Kobayashi Saga's workshop (POHRC event, Tokyo, May 13, 2014), where the topics were: eyes under the feet, on the rear, or corporeal situations linked to Francis Bacon's art, or Hans Bellmer and articulations with spherical junctions.

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