A basic issue in dance is how to link human agency with movement form and expression. When we dance we embody agency through bodily orientation and consciousness. The dialectic nature of these links is played out daily in our movement choices and body-mind awareness. Judith Butler asks what kind of performances will destabilize received and rehearsed categories. The possibilities of transformation may be found in a “failure to repeat, a de-formity.”

Dance forms are repeated daily, hourly, in rehearsal rooms around the world. Thus a major question we should ask is, “What do we want to instill in this process, what do we want to repeat?” Repetition encodes movement in the body, leads toward mastery of form, and for the most part goes unquestioned. I want to understand what I need to stop repeating and what the hazards of mastery are; I want to explore how I can be more receptive to therapeutic activism toward transformation.

**Mastering the Body**

Entreating history and looking forward, this introductory chapter sketches the development of philosophies of the body in the West, considers body as spirit in Japanese phenomenology, and sees how philosophies of the body intersect with Western dance and Japanese Butoh.

Plato and the masculine philosophies that followed him founded the ardor of the Western mind. These Western ideologies of the body set the stage for a splitting of matter from mind, body from soul, and flesh from spirit. In some exceptional contemporary cases, that route
has led to more than Greek tragedy, as it did with the Heaven’s Gate cult whose leader, Marshall Herff Applewhite, taught that the body was a mere “vehicle” for a soul that could evolve to a higher level of being among exalted extraterrestrials. Thirty-eight people committed suicide with him in March 1997 in the belief that their souls would go to the “Next Level.” They expected to be taken up to heaven by a flying saucer trailing the Hale-Bopp comet. The group practiced celibacy and cleansing of the body through castration.

The route beyond body is not only Western, of course, but in Eastern versions the body is not alienated from the soul, from Eros and spirit. Shiva/Shakti is Lord of the Dance in India, both male and female. As Shiva performs tapas to transcend earthly passions, kama, the force that returns him to bodily and feminine embrace, troubles him.

The terms of dualism can be confusing, especially when translated from one period or one culture to another. Plato’s dualism relates mind, soul, and spirit through psyche. And yet, at the root of Western dualism, Plato holds that the “soul is utterly superior to body . . . . What gives each one of us his being is nothing else but his soul, whereas the body is no more than a shadow which keeps us company.”

The Hermetica, a collection of writings originating in Egypt and influenced by Plato’s teaching, pits mind, “O Lord, thou art Mind,” against body, “the irrational torments of matter.” This work passes on the belief that it is necessary to hate the body in order to fulfill a higher transcendent purpose of mind; flesh is commensurate with base sensuality. In a very Christian-sounding passage in Libellvs 13, Hermes teaches Tat that the senses must be cleansed: “Stop the working of your bodily senses, and then will deity be born in you. . . . Rejoice now my son; you are being cleansed by the Powers of God; for they have come to build up in you the body of reason. . . . Thus, my son, has the intellectual being been made up in us; and by its coming to be, we have been made gods.” Hermetic views finally enter into Christian teaching as the writers themselves become Christianized.

The ancient world still resonates with the Father and Son of Christianity and in its obedience to a law of transcendence of the body—although, as I still remember hearing in my childhood, Jesus invites his followers to “partake” of his body in the sacrament, and the Christian church is also called “the body of Christ.” notwithstanding the associ-
ation of carnal evil with the feminine body through Eve's "temptation" of Adam.

What Platonic and Hermetic writers refer to as body and mind is not exactly equal to contemporary uses of the terms. In classicism, humans are related to nature and mind through perfection of form. Man is the bestower of form, and woman merely the incubator, according to Aristotle. These relations still hold in classical aesthetics of formalism and can be seen in the transcendence of ballet as it perfects an idealized bodily form in stipulated shapes conforming to plane geometry in mathematics.

In Greek classicism, body is not entirely cut off from soul/spirit/mind and the triplicate unity this represents. Even though soul and body are empirically distinguished throughout the ancient world, the original togetherness of body and soul is, nevertheless, a fact for Plato. Therapeutically, the troubled body can be calmed in its relationship to the movements of the planets, for instance.6 An original unity holds even more so in Aristotle, where a sense of the temporal is much stronger.7

Plato points heavenward,
Wearing a mask of stars.
Aristotle’s feet plant firmly on the ground.
He wears the mask of a human being,
One side shaded with animals,
The other with divinity.

Modern metaphysical dualism beginning with René Descartes (1596–1650) severs what unity we find in antiquity. Through Cartesian dualism we still assume a metaphysical gulf between material and nonmaterial phenomena. Mind is cut loose from its material physical basis, from flesh and blood bodies.

Descartes could be masked several ways,
Through his concern for education,
Or even in his velvet dressing gown
And a meditative pose.
He appears here with the soul side of his face extended into ether,
And the physical side painted as a machine.
Transcendence of the body in the airy nymphs and apparitions of ballet exemplifies metaphysical dualism, as does the objectified body mechanics of technical dance training in the West, including much of ballet and modern/postmodern dance.

Properties are owned
And they are metaphysical qualities
Belonging to a painting
Or a dance
Colors and movements
A sharp, shimmering sound
Flesh

Historical Backdrop
Modern/postmodern intellectual history, in which existentialism, phenomenology, and feminism are relatively recent links, is long and complex and began in the nineteenth century with Nietzsche’s questioning of religion and metaphysics. As Andreas Huyssen maps the postmodern through its modern and poststructural connections, it becomes clear that it is not easy to separate any of these intellectual movements entirely. I have elsewhere written of the modern/postmodern continuities and breaks in dance, and dance historian Sally Banes has covered the development of postmodern dance more thoroughly than anyone. The postmodern dance found many of its descendant possibilities as well as its ascendant points of departure through modern dance. As Jean-François Lyotard also points out, the postmodern “is undoubtedly a part of the modern.” But it has significant differences as well, differences that intensify the modernist question put by Thierry de Duve, not “What is beautiful?” but “What can be said to be art?”

Existentialism, like modern/postmodern dance, feeds on experiment, and many of its processes and products continue in that spirit. The improvisational existentialism of Foucault probes the regulatory power of knowledge and paves the way for poststructural criticism in the arts, as we see in chapter 8, “Existential Haircut.” Postmodern dance, still called modern dance in the academy, continues in the experimental mode of the original modern, even as it inverts the bodily styles and practices inscribed therein. It may be obvious, but still
It is worth saying, that revisions depend on antecedents, whether they be the highly wrought philosophy of Foucault or the neoeexpressionist dance of Pina Bausch, pushing boundaries and exposing conventions. Unlike classical ballet with its codified vocabulary of movement, modern/postmodern dance improvises toward its choreographic ends and openings, maintaining an unresolved nature that stimulates radical tensions among gender, politics, and aesthetics.9

Ballet, on the other hand, has a long history and patriarchal tradition that often circumscribes its sexual politics, but this situation can also create tensions in valiant stances of reformation, as ballet professor Melanie Bales shows.10 Feldenkrais teacher and ballet dancer Jocelyn Boeber researches the intersection of motor learning, somatics, and ballet, and Wallie Wolfguber utilizes the sensitivity of Trager Mentastics in her progressive and popular ballet courses.11 While ballet satisfies a thirst for romance, magic, and myth in airborne aesthetics, its practices need not culminate in destructive bodily practices. Dance practices can offer a chance for engagement and self-knowledge or can punish and deny the body, and the practices of ballet are no exception. It offers special challenges in this respect because of its objective, codified techniques.

As the philosophy that grows out of existentialism becomes focused through self-reflective phenomenology, it produces a fluid field for eliciting subjectivities in art, literature, psychology, and philosophy where no one size fits all. The original existentialist opening allows philosophy to darken and descend from the presumed enlightenment of the rational self and escalating positions of authority. Existentialism is not the story of the enlightened conquering hero. It articulates the limits of objectivity and tells the story of the wounded, lonely hero. It is despairing of the subject, but it can also affirm life. It has theists (Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Søren Kierkegaard, and Paul Tillich) as well as atheists (Jean-Paul Sartre) and feminists (Simone de Beauvoir). It also produces a respect for nature through Paul Ricoeur, whose analyses continue to correct the field of existential phenomenology that he helped to create.

Poststructural theory through Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard carries existentialist improvisations further (perhaps) than Nietzsche’s unleashing of the subject in Joyful Wisdom. Here we step beyond breath and wander into
emptiness. As for Nietzsche and astronauts, “there is no above and below.” I sometimes feel so unsettled—in dancing, back diving, and in meditation—but not so far from the sun: “Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us?”

Recent innovations on themes of existentialism and phenomenology place me on equally precarious footing with gender and body politics. Through Judith Butler, I gather how malleable I am. Through the sensuous phenomenology of Glen Mazis, David Abrams, and Bruce Wilshire, I return the earth its due; I celebrate my senses and understand the necessity for joy in my body.

**Embodying Feminism**

Luce Irigaray (b. 1930), a continental feminist, participated in the radical inquiry associated with poststructural deconstruction that surfaced in the 1960s. These strategies highlighted the importance of “différance,” a term coined by Jacques Derrida. A loss of common ground in Irigaray’s deconstructive, divisive theory of sexual difference distinguished her from Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), the French feminist whose interdisciplinary philosophy generated the difference but also the possibility for a common genealogy of female and male sexual identity.

Irigaray as a practicing psychoanalyst provides one of the most scathing critiques of the exclusively masculine perspective of sexual identity dominated by the Oedipal complex. Irigaray and Kristeva converge on the issue of gender from different directions, but they are both critiquing Western philosophy and psychoanalysis. Kristeva’s semiotic analysis never totally dismisses the subject, but explains the subject-in-process. She revives an existential position with this concept, but extends it for feminism. Kristeva also initiates a metaphysical position for feminism. For her (and for me) the maternal time of repetition and organic cycle needs to be reconciled with the linear time of history and politics. The semiotic and the symbolic are not at odds, but neither one offers permanent safety.

I take a dancer’s approach to metaphysics, a sometimes unpopular word in feminism, but one that draws me to it, and which I hope to
provoke into whirlpools and calms. Continuing to develop the terms of embodiment, as I have elsewhere, in *Dancing Identity* I expand lived body concepts beyond theatrical dance to encompass a broader conception and to press toward dance as metaphor and metaphysics. Heidegger saw an interesting connection here: “Only in metaphysics is there metaphor.” We are bridging a gap or crossing an amazing synapse whenever we *leap between* and *bind up* differences in metaphors. I am interested in this gap, the space between images, and the shape it takes, for I sense that here in the gap is transformation and information dancing together.

Some feminist scholars have been critical of use of the term “embodiment” in philosophy because of its background in religion. On that basis, we might well have to exclude much of our language. In India, all of Sanskrit would have to go, as would modern words like “dance” that trace back to that source. I like “embodiment” as a nondualistic process descriptive. It contains material intelligence (body) and the transformative prefix “em-,” which gives it motion. “To be embodied” is quite different from “to have a body,” which splits subject from object and indicates “possession” as the outcome—hence, possessive materialism: self-mastery, mastery of others, owning bodies. The possibility of using the verbal infinitive form “to embody” activates the more passive word “body.” I also like the metaphysics that “embodiment” implies—the ongoing mystery ruminating behind reflection. The inseparability and interactivity of all animate life, the embodiment of earth, animals, and insects, is captured in a word, and I do not wish to reject all things religious—even dance, poetry, and magic.

There is a sense in which dance and somatic process helps us to conceive of an embodied metaphysics. They open up the manner in which nature and culture are embodied in our “metaphysical artifacts.” I use this term to include metaphysical products, both material and transitory, that bear a human mark. And why not some other mark? Because the manifestations of metaphysics are human inventions, tracings of human history that reflect how we came to be (and to record) who we are. I extend the linguistic of metaphysics in using the term “artifact” to include verbal and nonverbal forms. I do not privilege the metaphysical artifacts of language over those of art, architecture, ritual, and story. Dance is one of these metaphysical trac-
ings or human artifacts. It exists through the dancer and for the time being, an art and a fact both material and evanescent. As embodied, particular dances become apparent as corporeal artifacts. They may be the most obvious of corporeal artifacts, but they are not the only ones. All doing and making stems from our corporeality, just as culture hangs together through the collective, invisible body of our works.

This book derives in part from the metaphysics of continental philosophy, especially as it evolves toward a more reflective feminist poiesis, poetry as a living process. Kristeva examines the first phase of feminism as grounded in suffrage, concerns for equality, and later in existentialism through Beauvoir. This is followed, says Kristeva, by a second phase that seeks to give language to intercorporeal experiences through a manipulation of signs (semiosis). The effort to articulate experiences of women as different from men, and to eliminate sex/gender difference, coincides with linguistic deconstruction in semiotics.\textsuperscript{17} Other commentators place Beauvoir at the beginning of the second phase since she initiates its anti-essentialist stance on gender and brings existential phenomenology into the arena of feminism.

As a dancer and somatic movement therapist, I am interested in moving in tune with nonhuman nature and in the constant rediscov-ery of the nature of the human body. I have doubted radical anti-essentialist feminism even as I want to defend some of the liberal (original anti-essentialist) positions of Beauvoir. If biology is not destiny, as she claims (1949), our historical position now requires that we nevertheless affirm our kinship with the natural world: animals and plants, rocks and rivers, sky and water. I would rather see how we all, men and women alike, have a home in nature, our here and now obligation to take care of the nature that supports us, and how dance/movement can give us the somatic means to explore the nature-culture continuum of our human bodily being. Our body is both a natural and social phenomenon; our dances, innate movement potentials, and our natural capacity for healing provide evidence of this.

As the female founder of existential phenomenology, Beauvoir produced not only the anti-essentialist ground of feminism, but she also wrote on ethics. Her 1948 Ethics of Ambiguity preceded the development of standpoint theory by Sandra Harding in 1991 and the theories of situated knowledge by Donna Haraway in 1991 that inform
contemporary feminist ethics and epistemology concerning women’s ways of knowing. Beauvoir’s ethics were, however, not systematic, and she had only just begun to write her feminist standpoint in The Second Sex, published in 1949 after lengthy research.

As theories of relativity were being articulated in physics, existential phenomenology originated theories of relativity in philosophy. It produced “situation ethics” without naming it as such, and set forth theories of knowledge derived from partial views and particular situations, respecting how human experience also changes through time. Beauvoir noted that “An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all.” No laws are valid for all, she says, yet through our bodies, the bodies of other creatures, and the body of the earth, we can see how all life is entangled. A modern imperative forges in us a new ethics and respect for nature. But Beauvoir was making her argument from another point of view: her struggle with conscience amid the onset of World War II. Beauvoir explains art as a form of transformation, not merely contemplative pleasure, but an alchemy through which we learn. As one of the original phenomenologists, she studies the positive aspects of ambiguity, mixing freedom with engagement, art with conscience, and sensitivity with the intelligent body-self.

In America, the conservative critique of Christina Hoff Sommers looks at feminism as it has grown internationally through academic discourse and politics. She calls the second phase of feminism “sex/gender feminism” and believes its male hatred and disdain for women who disagree with it to be detrimental to the advancement of women. The total overhaul of education in view of woman-centered knowledge, she says, is coming from a small but powerful elite who have “stolen” feminism and pose a danger to a society of free persons who may not wish to embrace sex/gender feminist ideology. Sommers sees value in preserving and teaching important achievements of history, including “the great masters” in art. Discussion of what constitutes “great art” and what the hazards of “mastery” are do not enter into her thesis. Her aesthetic position rings hollow, but I appreciate that she exposes the dangers of discounting all male achievements, and that she traces the issues of political correctness in gender feminism.
Julia Kristeva critiques the second phase of feminism, but within its liberal quarters. She wonders what will happen through the “counter-power” of the second phase as it takes on aspects “ranging from a club of ideas to a group of terrorist commandos?” A female society as an “alter ego” of the official society would constitute a “counter-society,” a place outside the law, “utopia’s floodgate.” Both Kristeva and Sommers believe that the problem of a counter-society is becoming massive.

In “Women’s Time,” Kristeva examines a third phase of feminism in a face-off with the second, where a younger generation provides another signifying space that is not exclusionary and admits the satisfactions of motherhood. In the third phase—which she envisions and advocates—“the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics.” This would resolve not the difference, she holds, but the battle, and a retreat from sexism both male and female.21

It is in this latter sense that I hope to bring metaphysics down to earth, as I employ and critique Heidegger’s metaphysics and also implicate some non-Western metaphysical concepts and corporeal artifacts.22 To yield a cross-cultural perspective, I approach a corporeal feminism from various metaphysical backgrounds. The body itself is a site for international metaphysical convergence, as the “community body” of Akira Kasai’s Butoh workshops and dances shows. Many movement and dance forms are shared across boundaries of race and culture. Whites perform African dance, all races perform Eurocentric ballet, although non-whites like Arthur Mitchell have had to settle aesthetic quarrels in the process, and Butoh, which was originally Japanese, is now international. Somatic forms like yoga and tai chi have long since become global. Modern dance as it grew in America and Europe borrowed heavily from African and Asian aesthetics and eventually spread its creative practices and cultural fragments around the world. Modern/postmodern dance now knows no national boundaries. Indian choreographers like Chandralekha and Anita Ratnam recast Indian mythology and classical dances with postmodern techniques in a feminist guise.

The meeting of East and West is not new to philosophy, as evidenced in Nietzsche’s philosophy of “eternal return,” a Taoist and Hindu concept. In Being and Time, Heidegger’s whirlwind metaphysics
also cycles continuously, picking up previous arguments, setting them
down in new and unfamiliar circumstances. Heidegger’s mysterious
nonlinearity and his critique of Western metaphysics provided one of
the bases of deconstruction. Time itself is Heidegger’s existential de-
constructive tool—as it is also Kristeva’s. He uses the phenomenon of
time to take apart the classical metaphysics of essence and to critique
Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, even as he dedicates his
work to Husserl.

If Heidegger and Kristeva were to dance together,
They would both wear masks of time:
Time is an elusive, metaphysical dancer.

Pursuing themes of gender and determinism, I take up the precari-
ous goal of creating a corporeal metaphysics through dance aesthet-
ics. As a branch of philosophy, phenomenology often entails ontology
(theories of being) and develops existential rather than universal
metaphysics. Through its concern for human agency and temporal
change, existential phenomenology roots the view that humans are
not biologically determined. My view rejects both biological and social
determinism. I seek to valorize agency, but not a totalizing agency
that is unconcerned with others and the environment. What phe-
nomenology calls intersubjectivity, things-in-relation, steps forward
from its concern for consciousness of things-in-themselves and from
individual embodiment to relational embodiment, we as part of the
world’s body.

The mobile correlation of being with nonbeing in existential philos-
ophy provides a critique of the traditional ontology of substances
where each element of being attains its proper place and status in the
universe. Like a somatically designed movement exploration, the post-
metaphysical view is not unidirectional but reversible. What moves
forward can just as easily retrace to its origin. Hannah Arendt repre-
sents such mobility as a gap in time between past and future when she
writes of the existentialist rejection of age-old metaphysical questions
to the commitments and predicaments of action in Between Past and
Future. This gap in time is our insertion
Into the dance of time.
Being is a presence and
Absence arising in nonbeing,
Darkness in light and descent.

This seesaw way of speaking gives rise to the focus existentialism
has had on ambiguity, the release of controlling impulses into an
ethos of descent and not knowing. The reasons for postmetaphysical
views become clear when we ponder the consequences of escalating
cycles of control in politics, technology, and the arts. Beauvoir’s anti-
essentialist philosophy as set forth in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* provides
the *cantus firmus* of my essay, “Thickening Ambiguity.” Her feminist
views in *The Second Sex* resound throughout the text. Beauvoir’s con-
tributions to phenomenology and existentialism, particularly her in-
sights into corporeal metaphysics, not to mention the values of the
arts, have long been hidden behind the visibility of her male counter-
part, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and her lover and lifelong companion,
Jean-Paul Sartre. Her philosophy remains, nonetheless, enduring.

Beauvoir wears a mask
Of being, becoming
A woman of dissent
And immanence, thinning
Sexual facades, and
Thickening into happiness.

**Body as Spirit in Japan**

Beyond the Social Body,
Ichikawa and Yuasa
Appear in masks of spirit.
Ichikawa wears the sun,
And Yuasa wears the moon
Able to integrate and dissolve
High degrees of unity,
And low degrees of unity.
Laced with *mi* and *ki*.

Japanese philosophers Ichikawa Hiroshi and Yuasa Yasuo approach
the phenomenological concept of the “lived body” from another cul-
tural perspective altogether, one that I believe more closely explains
how the body is lived and presented in Butoh dance styles, as it originated in Japan with Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986) and is now spreading across the globe. Yuasa’s *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, originally published in 1977, was translated into English in 1987, the same year my *Dance and the Lived Body* was published. Ichikawa’s prominent works *Seishin toshite no Shintai* (The body as spirit, 1975) and *Mi no Kozo: Shintairon wo Koete* (Structure of the body: Overcoming the theory of the body, 1993) have not yet been translated into English, but his theories have been introduced to English speakers in Shigenori Nagatomo’s *Attunement through the Body* and the work of Chikako Ozawa-De Silva. Ichikawa counters Western dualism in his philosophy of *the body as spirit*. He employs the phenomenology of Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, but carries their work further on Eastern grounds. His thesis is that the body we live is much closer to what we understand by the word “spirit” than it is to matter or biology.

Ichikawa’s work has implications for understanding *body as spirit* in Butoh, as Hijikata’s Butoh challenges the materiality of the body through a nondualistic route. It is difficult to claim that Hijikata’s dance and subsequent Butoh is akin to Western notions of ethereal spirit, even if Butoh dancers deconstruct the physical in morphing from image to image and project the body toward *nothingness*: Theirs is not an ethereal escape from the material body; it is a transformative inner dance not separating the physical and spiritual. Hijikata starts with the somaticity of the body in his writing of *Inner Material/Material*: “There is no way to remove ignorance and misery from my dances, but I do not want people to draw a lesson about hereditary diseases from them. . . . I have never been visited by genius and my appearance is far from that of a certified incompetent. Not a devotee of ghost aesthetic, I am a mere virgin. My semen should bring a good price.” Hijikata’s surrealist writing, like his dance, is his way of getting close to his body, the closeness that is difficult to grasp through rational means.

Medicine and science distance the body technologically. And even dance in its highly disciplined, abstracted forms can distance us from felt experience. Somatic amnesia, the psychic numbing of the body, is not uncommon for dancers when the body is pushed to the brink in punishing situations. “I knew my toenails were ready to go, and
would come right off,” one of my students wrote in a recent paper, “but I put on my toe shoes and went on stage, not feeling the pain.”

Dance can also bind us to the intimate contours of bodily life and bring us intuitively close to the bodies we are. If body is spirit, as Ichikawa holds, then we experience various degrees of spiritual connectivity through dance, even the freedom we seek through unification of body with conscious intent and intuitive life. This in turn allows us to understand the body that is beyond the skin, and connectivity as a gift of bodily being, what Ichikawa and Yuasa cite as the “immaterial body” beyond rationalization. This is the body without boundaries that so captures me in Butoh and is indeed very suspect in materialist cultures.

Ichikawa sees that studying the body “as phenomena” enables one to perceive the body as it appears on a conscious level, but not the subconscious body that supports it.27 This is not the subconscious that Freud posits, however, nor can it be compared exactly to the collective unconscious of Jung. It is more akin to body as encompassing spirit. Hijikata projects this subconscious body in a Butoh way, not laden with Western psychoanalytic. He explores the underside or darkness that portends a telling gesture, or one half awake and forgetting itself in that difficult state to excavate that he calls “ecstasy without obstacles.” “Inside this one body,” Hijikata says, “there are various mythic things that are still sleeping intact. . . . The work is how to excavate them at the actual site. . . . I would like to see something where such things float up like departed spirits.”28

Ichikawa’s theory of the body as spirit is based on various levels of unity. He claims that our existence itself unifies the spiritual and physical levels. “Spirit” and “mind” are nothing but names given to the same reality, as I also have held.29 The body becomes truly human when the distinction between spirit, mind, and body disappears. Thus a high degree of unity expresses our freedom, while mental disorders are characterized by a low degree of unity: “When the degree of unity is low and we are controlled by the environment and have less freedom, we feel the body. The ultimate situation is that of a corpse.”30 Hijikata’s student Kayo Mikami says that he sometimes explained his Butoh in terms of a corpse: “Butoh is a dead body standing desperately upright.”31 Would this mean then in terms of Ichikawa’s philosophy of the body that the Butoh dancer experiences a low level of
unity, a disorder that brings the dancer closer to the body through des-

spair and the struggle of uprightness? Clearly the Butoh dancer lacks
the ballet dancer’s control over gravity and uprightness. In Butoh, bod-
ily control goes the way of imagistic morphology, the metaphysics
of becoming through metamorphosis, not arriving, but always in pro-
cess of integration and dissolution.

There is still another parallel between the Butoh body, the body that
becomes, and Japanese phenomenology of the body. Ichikawa develops
a concept of the body as unfinished “potential,” unfolding the idea of
the Japanese word mi—the body as a potential whole. He explains that
mi is an equivalent of body except that mi has several more layers than
the word “body.” It expresses what phenomenology developed as
“lived body dynamic” rather than the material object we generally
think of as body in the West. Ichikawa examines fourteen different
meanings of mi shifting outward from fruit to dead flesh, living flesh, a
whole body, the way of the body, garments on the body (or all of the
person’s belongings), life, the meaning of social life, self, multiple indi-

gual selves (myself, yourself, ourselves), socialized self, social status,
heart, and whole existence. Here self and heart move outward toward
the whole of existence. He further draws a connection between mi—
including the body, mind, and heart—and ki, the Japanese concept of-
ten translated as “spiritual energy,” an organizing force field and dy-
namic unity. Ki pervades nature and connects the body to nature,
whereas, in the West, the social constructivist convention sees the
body as distinct from nature. As sociologist Anna Yeatman observes,
sociology elaborates the category of the social inclusively, and nature
is seen as a limiting and residual term in social theory. Clearly the
body is understood as part of nature in Japan, explicitly through the
linguistic structures of mi and ki. Ichikawa explains that once we un-
derstand the embodied nature of human existence, the dichotomy of
nature and culture dissolves. Nature is no longer pictured outside of
culture as something to be overcome and dominated. In respect to
Japanese connectivity, it is intriguing to consider how Hijikata ex-
plains that his invention of Butoh comes from his somatic associa-
tions with mud and wind.

We see Hijikata through a mask
Of Mud and Wind
As *Kaze Daruma* (Wind Daruma),
A limbless figure weighted so
It bounces back when knocked over.\(^{13}\)

In February 1985, the night before the Butoh Festival ’85 and one year before his death, Tatsumi Hijikata gave a lecture titled “Kaze Daruma” that quoted an ancient Buddhist priest, Kyogai, and then told stories of blustery winter winds in his homeland of Akita. Darumas there come garbed in the wind. When the Wind Daruma stands at the door and goes into the parlor, “this is already *butoh,*” he said. Then he spoke about Showa the Third (1928), the year and era of his birth:

> In early spring the wind is something special, blowing over the sloppy, wet mud. Sometimes in early spring I would fall down in the mud and my child’s body, pitiful to its core, would gently float there. I try to speak but it’s like something has already been spoken. I have the feeling there is a knot of wood, somewhere in my lower abdomen stuck there in the mud, that is screaming something. . . . I am distinctly aware that I was born of mud and that my movements now have all been built on that.\(^{34}\)

Yuasa investigates the inseparability of the mind and body in Eastern traditions that cultivates rather than attempts to control the body. In the contemporary philosophy of Ichikawa and Yuasa, the body is not an object to control and dominate by the mind, not an instrument of art, but a part of the extensive whole of nature, at the ready for unity or dissolution. Here art is envisioned as process and is not an end in itself. How does art, how does dance, make meaning and engage life forms in its processes? How is the body affected at a cellular level? Somatically? How is the body lived through movement? How is it changed? Transformed in positive ways? These might be the guiding questions of dance forms that issue from cultivation rather than control.

Eastern traditions like Zen and yoga take up the question of being through practice, seeking the basis of human nature by investigating the body-mind as transformational. Discipline is not the master word here; rather, cultivation is suggested. Yuasa sees in Eastern traditions no sharp distinction between the metaphysical and physical dimensions. Rather, they are permeable as lived. Self-cultivation can free the
self from the dominance of mental forces and the experience of separation, and we can experience the bodies of others through the unlimited nature of our own body.

Yuasa articulates the difference between intrinsic mind-body connections as opposed to acquired mind-body unity. Western theories of the body typically discuss the will—whether it is free or determined, mental or somatic—but in the Eastern way the will is seldom prominent; rather, the expression of creativity is.

As Ozawa-De Silva examines Japanese contemporary thinkers, she sees how their work transcends conventional social constructivism, allowing biological, psychological, and social aspects to be understood as a unity, that they transcend cruder forms of materialism by seeing embodiment as “non-reducible to merely physical or visible phenomena.”35 Embodiment does not reduce to social categories. Thus, art in the Japanese unified view relates to life, society, and the larger body of spirit. Social constructivism, theories of the body as social/cultural constructions, enters uncritically into dance theory where the body is considered primarily as a social actor, not mitigated by concerns for the body as part of nature and the living world.
Simone de Beauvoir was the first philosopher to look into the darkness associated with woman and nature in *The Second Sex*, which stands at the beginning of the second wave of feminism: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” This most famous sentence from Beauvoir’s book sums up her argument against biological determinism. Beauvoir’s comprehensive and still controversial text also initiated existential feminism, as she developed her themes within the emergence of existentialist philosophy—an open-ended, anti-essentialist, and nonsystematic philosophy that studies life as an undecided project-in-the-making. She did not call herself a feminist at first, but associated with feminist causes when she officially joined the women’s liberation movement in France in 1971. She said that writing the study had turned her into a feminist, as described in Toril Moi’s *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994).

As when I first encountered Beauvoir’s book in 1962, it still disturbs me to read her thoroughgoing existentialism and voluminous treatise on the “othering” of woman. As the second sex, woman receives second-class citizenship, and what is more frightening, her very personhood is stunted. I was twenty-three when I read Beauvoir’s study of the consignment of woman to passivity, mystery, and darkness. It was then that I decided to earn my own money and to be vigilant. Now it is time to own the mystery.

I cut my existential/feminist teeth on Beauvoir’s work. It accompanied me to Germany in 1965 when I went to study dance in Berlin with Mary Wigman (1886–1973), the principal founder, along with movement theorist Rudolph Laban, of expressionist modern dance.
Wigman’s works grounded a starkly poetic aesthetic in twentieth-century dance, investigating an independent and undomesticated femininity that explored darkness, witchcraft, and hysteria. Her gestalt approach to movement influenced the development of the field of dance therapy as well as Japanese Butoh. Hers was a resistive, erotic, and grotesque feminine unheard of in traditional ballet and discouraged in the Germany of her time with its image of “the Aryan beauty” focused on scrubbed docility and sturdy blonde health. Wigman was dramatic, but she had a softer side as well, songlike, as her committed lyricism shows.

Her teaching inspired a variety of choreographic responses, some typically Wigman, and some not. One choreographic problem she gave us was on Swiss composer Honegger’s music, King David. It involved a witch, that favorite archetype of Wigman’s, still going strong. We danced around a brew that held mystery and power; even now I remember the feeling. The film I made of our dances for Wigman’s seventy-ninth birthday party show several dances that are soft and inner directed, like Suzanne Linke’s solo. My dance of contrasts, Black and White, is cast more rhythmically into space, and a duet on water and earth made by Americans Betsy Sacks and Powell Shepard is elemental and delicately detailed. Canadian Judy Jarvis performs a dance based on fencing.1 I remember a group work where we wore gray (anything gray you could find in your closet or someone else’s) and passed oranges from person to person improvisationally (quite playfully postmodern). Wigman encouraged play and experiment and spent a great deal of time reflecting with us philosophically on the importance of dance as personal development.

These two European women, Beauvoir and Wigman, influenced the unfolding of my feminist/philosophical imagination and inspired my dancing and choreography. Both of their adult lives spanned the horrors of World War II that I remember as a child. Both of them suffered and survived the darkness of Fascism, but from entirely different positions and on opposite sides. When Beauvoir’s The Blood of Others was published after the liberation of Paris in 1945, it was acclaimed as “the great existentialist novel of the resistance.”2 Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda minister, banned Wigman’s participation in the First German Arts Exhibition in Munich in 1937 because of her commitment to artists’ prerogatives and decidedly “philosophical” dance.
Echoing a romantic ideal, Goebbels insisted that dance should be “buoyant and must show beautiful women’s bodies.”

The Nazi party seized power in Germany in November 1933. Wigman’s school was officially closed in 1942 after a seven-year decline during which she choreographed under restrictions. Susan Manning’s history of Wigman’s work now interprets it as ambiguous in its politics with proto-Fascist leanings. Manning reconstructs what she considers to be Wigman’s feminism and nationalism, interpreting her work through the concept of “the male gaze,” a feminist psychoanalytic polemic developed by Laura Mulvey in film studies.

Manning posits a gender division in Wigman’s work during the rise of Hitler. Wigman’s dances of this period, Manning theorizes, present women as passive objects, eroticized and controlled as “the other” in the male imagination. Manning believes that Wigman’s choreographic strategies of “autobiography, archetype, and musical visualization” represent a shift in her work under the Third Reich to accommodate masculinist/Fascist aesthetics. Wigman’s inclusion of the softer female archetypes in representations of marriage and motherhood essentialize woman, in Manning’s view, and open the door to Fascist aesthetics. Would feminist ideologues deny woman’s positive associations with motherhood? Are dances that issue from nurturing impulses Fascist? Does she want to go that far? As she transports the theory of the male gaze from film to dance and from the present to the past, applying it globally to another cultural setting, she interprets Wigman as a supporter of the dominant Fascist order, even as she acknowledges the many resistive ploys in Wigman’s aesthetic choices. Marion Kant also accuses Wigman of Fascist sympathies, more as a result of her professional choices. Sally Banes critiques the reductionist tendencies of the male gaze as a critical model for dance when she charts a comprehensive feminism in Dancing Women (1998). In my 1991 article on phenomenology, I outline the limitations of theorizing dance through “the male gaze,” tracing the broader idea of “the gaze of the other” to Sartre and the feminist root of “the objectified other” to Beauvoir.

The static theory of the male gaze as a predictor of aesthetics has by now been challenged on many fronts. Wigman’s nationalism and feminism, her identification with Germany and her gender, is complex in her choreography. And it is not unusual for artists to identify with
their origins—Martha Graham’s Americana and Jose Limon’s Mexi-
cana, for instance. Our dances say as much about national and com-
munal identities as they do about the self, and it is not easy to sort out
the difference, as Foucault’s upending of egocentric anthropology re-
veals. We are all subject to collective powers that evade our attention,
and we fool ourselves if we believe that dancing escapes national iden-
tity. Aesthetic character marks personal style, but it is also inescap-
ably ethnographic: as such it will convey national origins and identify
the artist. Did Beethoven, Brahms, and Bach transcend nationality?
No. We do recognize the Germanic source and time of their music.

Wigman’s work was also ethnographic and certainly a product of
her times, but it was not about obedience or mastery of accepted
aesthetic rules. No movements were rejected; the ugly and the beau-
tiful could both tell the truth so long as they were evocative. As I
watch her work on film and remember my studies with her, I am
aware that her choreography is formed less for the gaze than for the
soul. Wigman urged her students to find motivational sources for
their dances? I will not forget the dance I did that she liked best. It was
based on a photograph of a young boy whose hearing had suddenly
been restored. I danced in silence, searching my body’s memory of
first sounds.

Wigman was interested in drama, sense, and mood, not so much
the visualized body, but the tactile-kinaesthetic-affective body, al-
though her group choreography was poured through a visual archi-
tecture, as we see in her book, Die Sprache des Tanzes (The language of
dance, 1963). She taught us to use space the way a swimmer feels the
water—as fluid resistance and joyful partner in facilitation of form.
Her teaching sharpened powers of bodily speech and empathic con-
nections; thus, she sometimes structured classes based on hands and
touch. Concentrated in vertigo and ecstasies, her whirling classes be-
came famous, and she described her own performances with the so-
matic immediacy of “a sunny day,” “the beach,” “the tango,” or—as
in the Witch Dance”—“the forbidden.”

In 1980 I choreographed Dreh Monotony, a solo for myself based on
whirling classes that I experienced at the Wigman School in 1964 and
Wigman’s description of her Dreh Monotony in class. Dore Hoyer’s
Dreh Monotony (1965), which I saw Hoyer perform in Berlin that year
also inspired me to dance on this theme. Wigman’s Dreh Monotony de-
developed as part of *Celebration* (*Die Feier*, 1928), an evening-long work for Wigman and her ensemble, utilizing the circular pattern of return in movement and structure. “In the Sign of Darkness” was the knotted and tragic middle section of Wigman’s *Celebration*. The opening section, “The Temple,” was based in part on ecstatic turning, solo and group dance. The end, “Festive Conclusion,” was ceremonious. My *Dreh Monotony* is in two sections. The first, “Temple,” performed to singular sounds of a large Chinese gong, gathers momentum and shows the circular line of infinity. “Sign of Darkness,” with the sharp sound of woodblocks added to the music performed by percussionist Gregory Ketchum, breaks the spell of the circle, distributing the movement as in Wigman’s original work—kneeling, squatting, jumping, reaching, ripping, and falling. The dance is an interpretation, not a reconstruction, of Wigman’s dance.

**Melodramatic Utterance**

The melodramatic utterance breaks through everything that constitutes the “reality principle,” all its censorships, accommodations, tonings-down. 

*Peter Brooks*, *The Melodramatic Imagination*

Romance is curiously compelling. It goes in and out of fashion quite frequently, but it never goes away. On one hand it leads into fiction and on the other into relationship. There is an aura of melodrama in romance and the sweep of saga. Often it comes in disguise, but when it is unmasked, we see a life/death/life cycle underneath. Our hopes are made to face our illusions and fears. When romance reaches toward melodrama with a serious purpose, hysteria lurks there in the dark spot of consciousness.

Romance and melodrama are two doorways to the numinous, to dance experiences and dance works, *per se*. They provide entrance into German expressionism and the tragicomic faces of Butoh, allowing safe passage to darkness in the mythos of the senses. When we revalue the dark, we revise myth, or we make the unconscious conscious, as Carl Jung held. We also take the evil out of darkness and revision nature in the process.

New Dance in America, Neue Tanz in Germany, and Japanese Butoh are all descendant forms, rejecting the geometric purifications of classicism, and they also share a basis in the mythical feminine earth
Sondra Fraleigh in “Sign of Darkness” from her dance *Dreh Monotony* (1980), inspired by whirling classes at the Mary Wigman School in 1965, Wigman’s description of her *Dreh Monotony*, and Dore Hoyer’s *Dreh Monotony*, which Fraleigh saw in Berlin in 1965. Photograph by Jane Burke.
principle. In its rejection of idealized romance in classical ballet, the new dance of the twentieth century, which sprung from the new woman who founded it, became known as modern dance. Like modern art, it took the name of “modern dance” in America, progressing and changing into late-modern dance, evolving a postmodern rebellion, and eventually recovering expressionist roots, first in Germany through the Tanztheater of Pina Bausch and Suzanne Linke. Modern/postmodern dance still continues to bend and branch out internationally, blending with ballet at many points, as in the eclectic, passionate work of Alonzo King. It is becoming increasingly difficult to trace pure dance identities as forms continue to blend and merge, and romance wears a range of masks, from the ethereal to the darkly erotic.

The stereotypic romance of ballet is legendary and singularly attractive, Romeo and Juliet, purity and first love, the power of physical transcendence, tragedy and melodrama as youth follows love into death. Ballet has thrived on fairy tales and idealized love, honing perfected bodily forms in airborne aesthetics. The darker romance of modern dance has been more about magnetic relations and soul work, often traveling somatically inward. Martha Graham said that she wanted to dance “the heart of man.”

Japanese Butoh is historically related to modern dance through German expressionism and its proliferation in Japan during roughly the first half of the twentieth century. Butoh is short for Ankoku Butoh, meaning “dance of utter darkness.” Its mythos is primal, challenging Western notions of physical reality and embracing a wide emotional spectrum, from pathos to absurdity. It would be difficult to call it romantic in any Western sense, but it is often mysteriously erotic and melodramatic. Its chthonic romance lies in mud and wind, its identification of the human body with nature, and its radical revival of Japanese “pagan” aesthetics or “nativism,” a popular movement in early 1970s Japan. Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno pioneered Butoh (by itself meaning “dance step”) as the true form of the body. Their dance advanced bodily sensitivity as a philosophy of life. In the Butoh of Forbidden Colors (1959), “Hijikata threw the first stone,” critic Nario Goda declared. Hijikata danced wildly and with mixed sexual metaphors. Ohno’s famous solo, My Mother (1981), contrasted this with a gentle grace. Both of these men admitted the femi-
nine at work in their art. They often danced as women, as is typical in Japanese Kabuki and Noh theater, and felt the spirits of their mothers and sisters move through them. The Butoh body, as in mi, the Japanese word for body, is not understood through physical limitations, but expansively. It includes one’s personal body, the body of others, and the world’s body. “Tohoku is everywhere,” Hijikata says, speaking of his homeland. This vast body is a mysterious concept for Westerners, but nonetheless imaginable. Hijikata’s description of dancing includes the body of his dead sister and women from Tohoku sold into prostitution when he was a child. It speaks of his empathic connections:

When I dance
my sister scratches away
the darkness inside me . . .
I shake hands with the dead.

Tatsumi Hijikata

Butoh and German expressionist dance both acknowledge dark emotions and subconscious content. Mary Wigman, at the root of expressionist dance, used these to dramatic purpose in her dances. Below I reconstruct Wigman’s Witch Dance from 1926 and juxtapose it with a contemporary relative, the Butoh Ghost of Natsu Nakajima in her dance Niwa from 1982. Having traveled full circle in the global thrust of modernity, Nakajima’s dance resembles Wigman’s without copying it. Both draw dangerous hysterical portraits, streaming fervent images we can inhabit corporeally. Their dances embody feminine resistance and dissatisfaction; they allow us to seize the power of hysteria, inverting its negative connotations.

Hysteria: Cooling the Witch

What was to be done? The only way out, the only possible banishment, was and became: the mask.

MARY WIGMAN

Wigman’s Hexentanz (Witch dance) from 1926 can be seen through the poetics of hysteria, expressionist drama, and what Peter Brooks identifies above as “the melodramatic imagination.” I invoke melodrama as intervention, counteracting assumptions that reality can be
controlled. Through dance description and poetry, I explore Wigman’s feminist resistance to ownership and mastery. Her Witch Dance would appear on the high end of Brooks’s study of melodrama, since it bodes no happy ending. Quite the opposite: it thrives on intensity and signals to the future through its fugitive spirit. It functions as a romantic form of counterdiscourse that undermines realism and suggests a range of fears and desires that dominant social discourses simply cannot account for. The Witch cannot be contained. As Richard Murphy explains in Theorizing the Avant-Garde (1998), expressionist melodrama exerts an oppositional power upon repressive discourses, forcing them to reveal their limitations and sites of power.9

Planted and percussive gestures, untamed hair, and a polished mask with tightly distilled features render Mary Wigman’s solo, Hexentanz, both excitingly expressionist and starkly abstract. The dance fastens our gaze on a sitting figure in silk brocade embossed with gold and black on a copper-red background. A carved mask by Noh mask maker Victor Magito covers her face and contrasts with the elaborate fabric. The simply drawn features of the mask cool the fervor of the Witch’s pulsing hands and pounding feet, creating a split in the aesthetic effect of the dance. Unloosed frustrations mix with trance, ice, and silence.

The Witch is an overflow of dammed emotions: banging, stamping, and signaling powerful driving forces. Rocking on her haunches, she never goes far from her sitting place. Like an inkblot transfiguring, she turns on her spot, walks forward on her buttocks, then falls, hunched over a leg as it juts out to catch her weight. She closes her legs in front of her chin, then forces them open bluntly. Her spine curls forward as she looks down into her belly. The witch stays low on her backside and leans into one buttock as an elbow finds a knee, and her hand passes across her face, transporting a fragment of the dream-body. There is time for her breath to catch up before the Witch faces forward and looks out. Gradually both hands raise up to frame her head at a wide angle before they begin their magnetic motions.

They pulse, sucking in the witness. At moments the dance deflates its wild gesticulations. The hand calms, finds a soft direction, and Wigman, the choreographer, hedges the emotional shaping of energy in space that made her famous. This dance is not simply a wild letting go of energy in expression of the demonic. It is much more complex. The
Witch and the Demon are, after all, different creatures that represent distinct archetypes. The Witch is a hag and sorceress; she dives into feminine source and psyche. The Demon, on the other hand, is a possessor of bodies and souls. Wigman’s Witch is undoubtedly woman, even as a secretive, sphinxlike smile plays on the mouth of her mask.

The repressed feminine erupts from her *Witch Dance*, and lays bare the hysterical. From Wigman’s Witch, we cross over to the persecution of witches in medieval Christianity. We remember how their power was feared and how Freudian psychoanalysis later identified and treated hysteria as a madness, ignoring or turning around the hysterics’ descriptions of sexual abuse. Still later, the feminism of Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) explores linkages of hysteria and witchcraft with the repressed feminine. They critique Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan for their phallocentric beliefs on the hysteric. Elizabeth Grosz also examines feminine resistance to exploitation as the root of hysteria in her feminist work, *Volatile Bodies* (1994).

Wigman’s *Witch Dance* may also be read as resistive. As the Witch’s fingers curl in the air and scratch the space, they are full of their own power, but they are restless and unsatisfied. Wigman writes of the opposing poles of the dance and of her discovery of the split character of the Witch in which “tumultuous” and “enigmatic” actions question and answer each other. The answer is not a dissolve, however; as the hand courses the mouth it issues “a warning.” Her dance is certainly aware of the complexity of the witch/hysteric. It foregrounds continental feminism, performing a response to repression and sexual ownership. With resolve, it carries us into the darkness of an expressive world: “How intensely I tried in each performance to feel myself back into the original creative condition of *Witch Dance* and to fulfill its stirring form,” Wigman writes.10

She explains her urges in shaping *Hexentanz*: “I had the sensation of being full to the point of bursting and near desperation. I felt it ought to be possible to give shape to whatever it was that distressed me beyond measure.” She worked the figures of the dance sometimes to the point of intoxication, resisting order, feeling forced into a sitting or squatting position “in possession of the ground.” One night after working on the witch dance, Wigman returned to her room very agitated and caught a glimpse of the witch in the mirror: The hair un-
kempt, the eyes deep in their sockets, the nightgown shifted about, which made the body appear almost shapeless: there she was—the Witch—the earthbound creature with her unrestrained, naked instincts, with her insatiable lust for life, beast, and woman at one and the same time. She shuddered at this facet of her ego, she writes, even as she allowed it to emerge in recognizing the witch as a powerful aspect of woman. Wigman molds repressed and thwarted energies into an elemental gestalt. The Witch is two in one: the independent for itself commingles with the revolting. The one who shapes, stills, and breathes cuts through the ferment.\textsuperscript{11}

Down on the ground, close to its scent, the Witch sits with her legs spread and her feet pressed into the floor. She binds her ankles with her hands, lifting and planting her feet: stronger and faster—turning—edging toward disintegration.

\textbf{ON HEXENTANZ}

Stiffly masked, the thing cannot be shut up.

In tipping around, the object circulates.

One butt sits and twists.
The next butt sits, back and forth, side to side in the stamping.

The dance circulates as the hand grows a claw and reaches out of the embossed silk.

The witch cannot be had nor hoodwinked. She cannot be psychoanalyzed nor hashed over by masters. She makes the object circulate.

Widespread with electricity, the circuit belongs to her.

From contact.
From refusal to conform, to be beautiful, her pleasures and secrets break apart a paradise of body imaged, gestured and sent. Contaminating love potents and over-turning balances.

There she sits, grown hazy and brutal, winding around herself, mixing a brew of precious threads and growling anima.

Turned back from behind the mask Unholy.

Who would dare this danger, this she-wolf reversing grace, and bit by bit the power of dis-grace, of strained armor grasping space.

Quick—before order gets to us—Open the limits.

Death does not harm the Witch, and God shows no interest. She celebrates and vents herself. She is not exchanged or produced. Hexen-tanz is catastrophe before language got it—our dance before knowing the right answer. The feet that mock and the shoulders that hunch are their own reason and ruin. They hold a future, unleash the symbol. Astir and unashamed, the Witch passes from passion to conflict, supports the living germ man never chose for her. The scales fall from her eyes into the piece of brocade, and she dances her revolution, turning and turning on her seat.

Another word for witch

The dance will never be otherwise wise—

Beldam\textsuperscript{13} in touch with fragile contortions taking place in space.
Re-membering

the pressure against her forehead
that dis-membering broke in tears
and sweat kept apart—far—far away—
in the violet fire—

Entrails pulled out
Through her mouth—
The body’s extremities
Disentangling the Imaginary,
the Real, and the Eloquent.

**Niwa: Goddess or Cyborg**

The Ghost in Natsu Nakajima’s dance *Niwa* (The garden, 1982) summons Wigman’s *Witch Dance* with the same archetypal consciousness that reconnects with primal powers and bewilderment. This is the receptive “yin” as cauldron, the divine well of creative energy. Ensuing from Japanese Butoh, the feminism of *Niwa* conjures a ghost and goddess symbolic of fluid change and metamorphosis. As life, the garden represents process, growth, and change—flowering and dying regeneration. It is a natural symbol, where nature meets culture, where plants are tended. Nakajima reconstructs many faces of the Goddess and explores a woman’s journey in her solo dance.

Like the gripping expressionism of Wigman in the background of Butoh, Nakajima’s choreography grows out of a similar search for feminine powers. But the ghost in her garden of life is part of a more sweeping whole. It glances the Witch, puffs out its cheeks, and moves on. *Niwa* is Buddhist in spirit, even if it resists singular religious categories. Shinto, with its nature essence and priestesses, also motivates this dance. Its transcendence toward the Buddhist goddess takes an irrational course, and its glory is indecisive. Nakajima’s Goddess imagery slides across cultures and is dialogical.

*Niwa*’s darkness and grotesqueries, like those of Wigman’s *Hexentanz* can be repulsive. But the distorted faces of *Niwa* often appear alongside a translucent beauty, requiring us to hold conflicting interpretations: Unadmitted ugliness and untapped beauty, the two sides of our original face, are held uneasily together. The body encloses an in-
substantial poetry, not knowing which way to turn; a third interpretation stirs in us. Or maybe a state of breath is released, opening a space in the lower lobes of the lungs, in the belly and in the heart, as the rational mind is befuddled. Thus the healing potential of Niwa is revealed.

Nakajima is one of the first women in Butoh to refine works for the stage and to pioneer Butoh as therapeutic process. She crosses boundaries as a choreographer and dance therapist, so it is no surprise that Niwa in its spiritual essence and aesthetic structure possesses a cyclic therapy. Its elaborate theatricality is surprising. Kindling jo-ha-kyu, Cyborg supports Goddess in Niwa. Single spotlights hidden in the set light the face from below as electronic music gathers to a rumble, then cuts away suddenly, or ebbs and flows in hypnotic repetitions.

Denise Fujiwara in Sumida River, choreographed by Natsu Nakajima. Nakajima pursues a personal and Japanese vision of intimate space known as Ma, or “the space between.” Fujiwara’s performance brings to life a mother’s agonistic search for her kidnapped child. Sumida River, based on a popular Noh drama, Sumidagawa, is a dance of transformations, disclosing the metamorphic context of Butoh. Photograph by Cylla von Tiedemann.
ON NIWA

Unabashed, theatrical technologies
gather the white-hot light
as from the front row to the back
a single slow glow inches closer,
painting space on the diagonal.

Nakajima in her dance, Niwa.
Is it so very large, this interval between us?

Seven autumn flowers
rustle with muttering lips—
lead us forward in Noh time.

Time
for changing our minds
and the rooms in the chambers of our hearts.

Cherry blossoms falling in the wind
cut the assembling *jo* of Niwa,
and tremble in the darkness.

In the next instant, by the hand
the dancer takes us, blown and covered,
huddled under a small tent, peeking out.

A baby sees the world from a boat,
hears the foghorn and the soldiers
shouting—smells the burning defeat.

Night falls, wobbly and walking,
Tilting her head in the fan of *ha*.
Breaking from *jo* the brilliant face
hung in space by the changing light.

Would I understand enough
of vessels that held the cooked viands,
of sleeping upright with firm footing,
to echo back the eerie steps where the ghost appears?

Sitting on the floor,
The Ghost nods her head and shakes her hands.
The head doesn’t know what the hands are doing.

A muddy mask looks out at me,
Falls black in the lap of hiding,
Turns red and back to you again.

Melting appearances and costume changes—
The dancer switches with her double
Until the difference disappears.
As One—they journey from birth to birth.

...  

After the performance
I returned to my room agitated
and looked in the mirror.

Uncertain of my glance,
I saw fragments of wide loops
around the stage, and the crooked fingers
of Wigman’s Hexentanz,
the image of one possessed,
impenitent.

There she was, the earthbound creature—
whether Witch or Ogress—
spilling out of her basket
through the murmurs of chanting
and a high-pitched shakuhachi flute.

The lights dimmed to black as I fell asleep.
Willows are green and flowers red.
What is MU?  

...
Laughter moves serenity, awash in blazing light and shadows of our secret gazes, complete and relative as panels on a folding screen, Niwa inclines away from earth.

Holding back the vigor of kyu and rising up in Kannon, Compassionate Bodhisattva.

Quiet over time, the ghost has told her story. Welling up like water her smile an afterimage, the rapture of the burning Kali, Wise and awesome Tara, Madonna.

Through the vastness of such space, Why does the glowing dancer link the tip of her thumb and first finger in a tender mudra?

Her sex is uncertain. S(he) has been said to appear in whatever form is needed.