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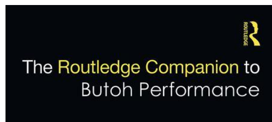

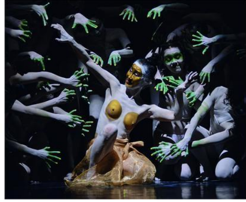

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12

RETURNS AND REPETITIONS

Hijikata Tatsumi's choreographic practice as a critical gesture of temporalization

Sara Jansen

I initially wrote this essay in response to an invitation to make a pilgrimage to the Tohoku region of Japan to attend a conference in August 2015.[1] It takes the "return to Tohoku" enacted by this conference as the starting point to question some of the many returns performed in and around Hijikata Tatsumi's oeuvre. As I was preparing to make my first trip to the area to participate in this event, I wanted to engage specifically with my own resistance to the conventional reading of Hijikata's body of work through his personal history with Tohoku.

Scholars continue to trace the origins and aesthetics of *ankoku butō* back to Hijikata's experiences growing up in the rural Northeast, and to farm life and culture, local religious rites, rituals, and traditions. I have always felt uneasy about the uncritical return to this and other, often personal and anecdotal, narratives in publications on the artist. Not much documentation of Hijikata's performances is publicly available and serious critical engagement with his choreographic thinking and methodology remains scarce. The same information, stories, and interpretations are cited and circulated endlessly.

And then there are my own returns. I have been turning and returning to Hijikata's oeuvre for many years, trying to find an appropriate entry point: one that does justice to his dance, to the extent that this is possible from a (temporal and spatial) distance, and when one has to make do with its traces and the limited and, in my view, limiting narrations of it.

It is not my intention to examine this "compulsion to repeat" in the psychoanalytic sense. Butoh is frequently marketed as a representation of a post-apocalyptic world and a direct response to the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All too often it is psychologized or pathologized and framed in the context of personal traumas of the artist, the Japanese trauma of the loss of WWII, several waves of Japanese identity crises, or the healing effects of the methods developed by his disciples. Despite the dance's radical countercultural beginnings, butoh and the butoh body became utopic sites, and the object of projection, orientalism, nostalgia, and nationalism. Hijikata's "dance of darkness" aims to be opaque, draws on an eclectic range of sources, and indeed provides ample openings for appropriation, misreading, and mystification. However, it is my contention that the conventional interpretations of his oeuvre tend to obscure the dance itself – its reality, actuality, and materiality – and attest to a general resistance to recognizing Hijikata's work as *choreography* and the artist as a *choreographer* (indeed, often butoh and choreography are seen as mutually exclusive).

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I decided, therefore, to revisit the very event that is commonly considered the turning point in Hijikata's career, and the very moment when he is perceived to have made a radical aesthetic and ideological turn and, after a decade of cutting-edge cross-disciplinary collaborations, embarked on a new, and more "Japanese" period by returning to his own past in Tohoku for inspiration, namely the performance series *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* in 1972.[2]

My aim is to propose another approach to this key work by foregrounding choreography as what I will call a *gesture of temporalization*.[3] I introduce this concept to challenge how most writing on Hijikata revolves around constructing chronological timelines and periodizing his oeuvre as a way to pinpoint the exact origins and sources of his dance. This, I argue, results in a movement further and further back in time that neglects the (eruptive) timeliness of Hijikata's experiments and their radical intertextuality and openness. It also feels counterproductive to fit this oeuvre into a coherent linear narrative or to try to grasp it completely/as a whole, considering Hijikata's vision for dance and the dancer's body actively resists such linearity and wholeness. Instead, the choreographer cites, juxtaposes, and layers diverse material, and combines multiple temporalities to create openings for other perspectives (on dance, movement, the body, the world) and productive moments of slippage.

I am interested in discovering other ways to explore the stakes of Hijikata's gestures of return in his later work, not as merely symptomatic of the nostalgia for things past/Japanese prevalent in 1970s Japan, but as part of a dynamic engagement with time itself – as material in dance. The notion of gestures of temporalization is meant to underscore choreography's fundamental entanglement with time and the times. Hijikata's returns and repetitions are in the first place particular to choreographic practice and how it always figures and refigures time. Butoh especially is well known for its radical transformations of the time and timing of dance. Below, I will foreground this aspect, and the ways in which choreography as an apparatus (*dispositif*) – that is, "a praxis, . . . a practical activity that must face a problem and a particular situation each and every time" (Agamben 2009b, 9) – works in, on, and against time and the times. By proposing "a counterpoint and counterrhythm" (Didi-Huberman 2003b, 274) to the dominant focus on a return or regression to a better past, I hope to open up spaces in which Hijikata's innovative choreographic methodology may be appreciated as praxis: as a self-reflexive, critical, and political artistic practice.

Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons (*Shiki no tame no nijūnanaban*, 1972)

In contrast with the happening-like actions and impromptu events in the 1960s, *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* introduced an expanded performance format: it consists of five distinct evening-length pieces, each linked with a specific season, performed after hours at Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka, a movie theatre in a back alley of Tokyo's Kabuki-chō, on twenty-seven consecutive evenings from October 25 to November 20, 1972.[4] The event engaged the passing of time on multiple levels simultaneously, and indeed performed a number of "returns."

Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons marked Hijikata's highly anticipated return to the stage as a dancer, for instance, after a "silence" *(chinmoku)* of four to five years. During this absence he had acquired a near mythical status (and, according to critics at the time, became part of the institution), resulting in a rush on tickets and extensive coverage in the mainstream media. After a series of collaborative projects, Hijikata also returned to being the sole choreographer of his work. He assembled a group of young dancers around him – the so-called second generation of butoh dancers (which for the first time included women); changed the name of his troupe to *Hangidaitōkan*; and began exploring a new choreographic methodology.

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I don't perceive this work as the radical break it is often purported to be: it enacts many returns to Hijikata's previous performances, movements, and ideas. However, it does reveal itself as an instance when the artist radically challenged his own dance history and choreographic thinking, and began carrying out extensive research into new possibilities for dance and the dancing body. This process unfolded over time. For instance, a few years before the premiere of *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons*, Hijikata began directing Kobayashi Saga, Ashikawa Yoko, and others in short experimental *ankoku butō* pieces, which were performed multiple times a day at *Shinjuku Art Village*, a small space above a jazz café in Kabuki-chō. These cabaret-style shows ended up forming the basis for the individual installments of the work (Kobayashi 1998, 31).[5] In addition, the series set off a long-term research project entitled *Tōhoku kabuki keikaku (Tohoku Kabuki Project)*, which continued until Hijikata's death in 1986.

I see Hijikata's so-called return to Tohoku as an integral part of this research into new methods to generate movement material or, in Hijikata's own words, into the "contours" of *ankoku butō* (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1972). This process involved looking for material outside of dance (visual arts, literature, philosophy, society) but also revisiting his own trajectory as an artist. Much like his work of the 1960s, *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* is, for example, created in dialogue with artists and art movements across artistic disciplines, in Japan and abroad. Hijikata continues, for instance, to engage with how the Surrealists, Dadaists, and Fluxus artists, to whom his work is very much indebted, repeat, reframe, and debase found images.[6] For this series, he collects and brings together on the stage numerous borrowed images and gestures, and an over-abundance of everyday objects, clothing items, and props. This strategy also reflects his interest in the material/materiality of the medium of dance (time, space, body, and movement), which is also evident in the scrapbooks he started compiling in preparation for *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons*. Presumably in the late 1960s, the choreographer began filling a series of notebooks with a diverse range of images of iconic (European and American) paintings and sculptures cut out from mainstream visual arts magazines of the time, which he used during rehearsals as a source of inspiration for gestures, facial expressions, costumes, color schemes, textures, and light design. Hijikata cuts, pastes, and re-purposes these reproductions, and juxtaposes, re-combines, and re-organizes them in dissident, non-linear chronologies. The pictures and the gestures they inspire become (part of) his (personal) choreographic archive. In most cases, the scrapbooks are not explicitly linked with a specific performance in the series. He likely turned and returned to them in the context of multiple pieces, re-inscribing his relationship to and the connection between these images over time.

We recognize references to earlier work. Photographs of *Hōsōtan*, the first piece in the series and the only installment (partially) documented on film, show the dancers executing poses inspired by documentation of Nijinsky's dance, which were originally developed for Tamano Kōichi's *Nagasukujira* (1972). Hijikata also revisits the journeys to Tohoku he undertook with photographer Hosoe Eikoh between 1965 and 1968, and which were a major source of inspiration for his previous evening-length choreography *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People* (1968).[7] It is perhaps this experience that encourages him to turn to past experiences of life in the countryside to further mine his (corporeal) memory for gestures, sensations, ideas, and imagery in order to generate and compile, re-invent and expand his movement vocabulary. The choreographer borrows and transforms such "found" gestures to challenge conventional perspectives on what constitutes dance at this particular moment in time (on the cusp of modern, postmodern, and contemporary dance).

Hijikata also continues to draw on some of the discourse developed around his earlier work. Asbestos Studio announces the series as a ritual *(gishiki)*, for instance, which not only frames it as a late night underground event in an obscure location but also references literary sources of inspiration and echoes the characterization of Hijikata's first choreographic works as heretic ceremonies

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by novelist Mishima Yukio and others.[8] The term *gishiki* was also used in relation to the political resistance at the time. Artists including the members of *Zero Jigen (Zero Dimension)* referred to their interventions in the streets in this era of mass-demonstrations as *gishiki*. The ritualistic aspects of the performance are coupled with the cyclical time of the seasons (a common motif in the ballet and classical music), the cycle of life, and the notions of death and memorialization, all important themes of the work. *Gishiki* (ritual) also evokes Hijikata's earlier experiments, his ongoing relationship with radical movements across artistic disciplines, as well as the political context out of which his dance emerged, its timeliness.

It is my contention that Hijikata here delves into the archives of modern art and into his own archive as a dancer/choreographer, to mobilize choreography as a (self-)reflexive gesture. He also appears to take on the history of, and particularly his personal history with dance (modern dance, German expressionism, ballet) in this work. Perhaps his cramped hands in *Hōsōtan*, his toes turned inward, the "dance choirs" (of "stomping" dancers behind him when he performs a solo), and the ritualistic, mythical, archaic, "primitive," and ethnographical elements that punctuate his movement language in *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* are not merely an evocation of the rural landscape of Northern Japan but also (a layering of) critical citations of the choreographic vocabulary of Wigman and Nijinsky (and their respective sources of inspiration), for instance. We might also think of his gestures of "self-exotisation" (by drawing on kabuki, *ukiyo-e*, Japanese folklore and rituals), as in dialogue with (and as part of a critique of) the exoticism and orientalism that informed the modern art, (ethnographic) Surrealism, early modern dance (including the work of Japanese "pioneers" like Ishii Baku), or even the work of John Cage (who found inspiration in Zen philosophy and aesthetics) that (in turn) informed Hijikata's own dance.[9]

One could argue that Hijikata's returns and repetitions are the material of dance. While there is an imaginary aspect to these "returns"[10] – they activate his imagination (as an artist) – there is also a material quality to them. They are part and parcel of the temporality of artistic creation, and of how time operates in choreographic practice in particular. His reflections are those of a choreographer.[11] They are also critical gestures. Hijikata's gestures of return are perhaps a turning back, but they also demonstrate a turning on, turning away from or turning upside down, and act of *détournement*, of re-routing. He returns as an act of resistance, of pushing against the limitations of (conventional/Eurocentric ideas surrounding) the dancing body and dance. In the process, he radically expands the possibilities of the medium, and indeed how it works on/in time, in the specific context of early 1970s Japan. It concerns, as Sas has also argued, a "return*ing*" (Sas 2011, 176), and a movement. It is a repeated gesture, an active and ongoing process – of positioning and repositioning, discovery and rediscovery, confrontation and overturning – as well as a critical reflection on the prevailing tendency to return itself. Indeed, as we will see below, Hijikata performs various strategies of opposition and deconstruction – in dialogue undoubtedly with the anti-art and non-art movements in the visual arts at the time – and of *détournement,* on dance and on the discourse on (his) dance perpetuated at the time when he created *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons*.

Tohoku Kabuki Project (Tōhoku kabuki keikaku)

Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons inaugurated a new, continuing project that Hijikata termed the *Tohoku Kabuki Project*. The combination "Tohoku Kabuki" embodies the kind of "radical juxtapositions"[12] that came to characterize Hijikata's dance. It merges the imaginary categories of the (marginalized, exploited, and idealized) rural Northeast of Japan and the (originally popular but by this time highly formalized) "traditional" Japanese theatre. It layers multiple times,

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realities, and references, and produces provocative tensions, ambiguities, slippages, and a myriad of possible (mis)readings.

Although it is the combination of these two terms that makes them particularly potent here, it is useful to examine them sequentially, starting with the term *Tohoku* and then moving on to the nuances of Hijikata's use of the term *kabuki*. Hijikata provides several perspectives on what he might mean by these two ideas in interviews leading up to *Twenty-seven Nights for the Four Seasons*. His words reveal that his performance series does not (re)present Tohoku, is not a return to his own origins per se, let alone those of the Japanese people, Japanese dance, or Japanese tradition. As I point out above, Hijikata here appears to return to the project he started with photographer Hosoe Eikoh a few years earlier, and the kinds of performativity of identity and memory it explores. It is in this project, which is now known as *Kamaitachi* but was originally entitled *An Extravagantly Tragic Comedy* (Hosoe 1987, 25), that theatre and Tohoku appear to merge for the first time. By inserting the dancer into the remote rural landscape, it turns the daily reality of the other (accidental) performers into theatre, and simultaneously reveals the fictional aspect of photography (and of memory), countering its purported reality (Hosoe 2016). While Hijikata went along to perform in the landscape of Hosoe's wartime memories, the experience clearly resonated with his own reality and personal history, opening up new possibilities for his dance.

In an interview, Hijikata speaks of the tension between "the theatre as everyday" and "the everyday as theatre" (*Sports Nippon* 1972). His work introduces other types of gesture and other, embodied histories into dance. By recognizing as dance the unsteady movements of the farmers stumbling along the ridges between the rice fields, for instance, and the postures and attitudes they develop to cope with the extreme climate or labor conditions, Hijikata also introduces dance into the everyday and expands the limits of dance, to cover every aspect of life.

His words also suggest that his project involves a return to and a turning on – a perversion, and oftentimes a literal inversion or reversal of – a particular clichéd image of rural Japan. The choreographer not only explicitly takes on this image (rather than the reality) of Tohoku, but his references to (his experiences in/of) the countryside are also inextricably bound up with the image of dance and with his search for ways to revolutionize choreography by developing a new perspective on what might constitute movement material and dance practice (akin to what is happening in other parts of the world at this time).

"You could call my latest dance *Tohoku kabuki*," the choreographer states. "I am cramming in all that is part of the *image* of Tohoku: rice paddies, the sky, the wind, and salty foods. If classical ballet stands for an extension upwards towards heaven, I cling to the land and return to the inside of my own body" (*Sports Nippon* 1972, my emphasis). This quote illustrates how his gestures of turning on the clichés circulated about his native region on the one hand and about the ballet on the other are intertwined. The return to the land and to the body's interior space are offered as literal counter-movements to the upward extension of the body, the outward focus, and the particular worldview of the ballet.

In this context, Hijikata describes his strategy to develop a unique choreographic methodology as one of opposition (*Asahi Shimbun* 1972 and *Sports Nippon* 1972). His use of the term *rinkaku* (contours) is evocative in this context, as his method revolves around the radical pursuit of the negative image of what people expect from dance (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1972). He does this thoroughly, literally, and in a humorous fashion. "The world of darkness, which expands endlessly, that is my world" (*Tokyo Chūnichi Sports* 1968), he states, as he counters the clear lines of the classical ballet and modern dance with blurred silhouettes, deformed faces, collapsing shapes, slowly shifting movements, and in-between states. His starting point is the intent observation of the inner workings of his own body, as it transforms and crumbles, withers and weathers away. The ideal butoh body is then a literal counterpoint to a whole/healthy body in control,

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disciplined, mechanized (the technologies of the body of ballet), an act (not of composure but) of decomposition and ruination. Rather than standing up straight and emanating lightness and light, he states that his dance emerges from the damp darkness of a futon in an empty house (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1972) and "begins when the body wants to hide because of the cold, to fold over and shrink as much as possible. This kind of dance doesn't exist. Anywhere in the world" (*Asahi Shimbun* 1972).

Not only does he revisit past experiences as tools to revolutionize dance, he is also explicitly critical of the superficial ways in which Tohoku is turned into a spectacle by his contemporaries. For example, he refers explicitly to the "*angura* boom" and points out that the citation of indigenous *(dochakuteki)* culture in the theatre results in the "vulgarization" *(fūzokuka)* and "disintegration" *(fūka)* of this culture (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1972). He answers by turning the popular image of Tohoku itself inside out. His explorations of its landscapes serve to expose the darker reverse side of the romanticized imagery perpetuated in the media. He addresses the politics behind and the perversity of this nostalgia, as he associates the countryside he grew up in above all with death, loneliness, and misery. Hijikata underscores the area's marginal position and notes the real poverty and destitution of its inhabitants. In interviews, he contrasts the idyllic image of the rice fields with images of himself as a child, snot and tears running down his face as he walks along the ridges carrying urns filled with the bones and ashes of his siblings, observing labor so harsh that it made farmers pretend to be working, or experiencing cold so fierce that it makes one's bones snap (Hijikata 1970 and *Asahi Shimbun* 1972). Different "realities," and different sides of the same reality, come together in one image, which, in turn is variously transformed. The result is violent, uncanny, and humorous.

Hijikata also dismisses the connection made between his own dance and local folk dances, which he refers to as tourist performances (*omiyage buyō*) (*Sports Nippon* 1972). He is equally dismissive of ties to the traditional performing arts, stating that, "*Ankoku butō* was born from cutting ties with all Japanese tradition, and sets itself apart precisely by not taking the poison of tradition" (*Tokyo Shimbun* 1972).

Looking at the limited documentation of the pieces, Hijikata appears to experiment with elements of kabuki such as *kamae*-like postures, *mie*-like poses, transformations/metamorphosis, colorful costumes, and make-up-like facial expressions. However, he also employs kabuki as a procedure to spectacularize Tohoku. As I point out above, he underscores the theatricality of the environment in which he grew up, and aims perhaps to expose the fiction (and the politics) of Tohoku, and of kabuki at the time.

His dance evokes formalized, high-end theatre culture as well as kabuki's popular origins, and the alleged derivation of its name from the verb *katamuku*, to slant or tilt.[13] "Kabuki-as-perversion" is employed here as a strategy to challenge and overturn the current situation in art, politics, and everyday life, as well as the "returns to Tohoku" and Japanese tradition many artists resort to at this time.

Traditionally, kabuki actors were relegated to the margins of society, and to areas of town that housed other kinds of popular entertainment as well as the sex industry. Significantly, Hijikata returns to one such area. Indeed, kabuki here also evokes Shinjuku's *Kabuki-chō* (and its obscurity, decadence, and position as the birthplace of counterculture). It is here that *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* premiered, and where previous versions of most of its installments were created and presented. In 1960s Japan, it is also the area of the capital where the bars and jazz cafes are located where artists met to drink all night, exchange ideas, perform, and set up the exciting collaborations that ended up shaping postwar vanguard art and popular culture. This is arguably where the real origins of *ankoku butō* are to be found. This connection also hints at the collaborative aspect of this dance, its underground qualities, its politics, and its eroticism. Hijikata's dancers

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danced in cabarets and nightclubs to raise money for his stage performances. The material developed for the cabaret shows are a significant part of the choreography and eroticism an important characteristic of the dance (as Gunji 1973, for instance, points out). *Kabuki-chō* is a temporally and spatially heterogeneous space/place. In this sense, too, Hijikata plays on layering and juxtaposing divergent images, references, and worlds, and, like the many other sources of inspiration, popular discourse and culture become part of the dance material and is unpacked, transformed, and woven into the very fabric of the choreography.

"Return to Japan"

In February 1973, visual arts magazine *Bijutsu techō* dedicates a forty-plus page special to this event (*Bijutsu techō* 1973, 109–152). It includes articles by kabuki scholar Gunji Masakatsu and theatre director Suzuki Tadashi, among many others. The texts describe Hijikata's dance as innovative and timely but tend to locate its timeliness in how it folds onto itself, retracts into the (personal confines of the) body, moves back in time, and taps into the nostalgia for Japanese tradition and folklore widely covered in the popular media in the early 1970s. It is read as symptomatic of the out-of-joint-ness of Japanese society at this juncture, which, as Marilyn Ivy has beautifully shown, resulted in the tendency to return to elements of Japanese culture perceived to be in the process of vanishing, and to the omnipresence of specters in postwar Japanese art (Ivy 1995).

In "*Shi to iū kotenbutō*" ("A Traditional Dance Called Death"), Gunji describes Hijikata's solo in *Hōsōtan* as a performance of the "ecstasy of death," a ceremony that pulls the audience into its trance and transports it, and as a "dance of blood" and a "*danse macabre*." According to Gunji, who specifically underscores Hijikata's extremely fragile physique, this dance not only summons the spirits of the dead, but also revives the rural Tohoku landscape, Japanese folklore, and indigenous culture. He characterizes Hijikata's butoh as "superb traditional dance" and as the "home [origin] of dance."[14] While he points to the contradictions/tensions in Hijikata's movement language, he also suggests it re-presents a return to an ancient, local body.

The authors describe Hijikata's movements as uncannily familiar and as a (re)collection of repressed memories, gestures, and postures disappearing from daily life and memory. In his review of *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* for the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, dance critic Ichikawa Miyabi, for instance, writes that Hijikata

> takes on the task to . . . turn his back on the idiotic culture that we have built in the capital to subsequently retrieve and resurface what has been buried deep in our memories, what unfairly ended up deposited in the depths of history.
>
> *Ichikawa 1972*

Similarly, Suzuki Shiroyasu writes that this dance is an attempt at saving "the local Japanese body" *(nihonjin no dozokuteki na nikutai no arikata)*, which is about to vanish, as "since the Meiji period, the Japanese have been eager to get rid of it." He continues: "I could not help but be impressed by Hijikata's rescue attempt" (Suzuki 1973, 125).

Gunji describes Hijikata as a shaman conjuring up ghosts and as an appearance returning from the realm of the dead. Cycling between birth, death, and rebirth, the dancer is seen as beside himself, outside of himself, or not himself; and as outside of time. Hijikata's role is not so much that of choreographer but of magician or sorcerer. The perception is that this dance is not the result of a (collaborative) creative process, nor of years of dance training, artistic research, professional experience, and critical thinking but rather appears – in true modernist fashion – as if naturally, just like that, from the body/unconscious of the artist as charismatic genius. In Hijikata's postures, Gunji writes,

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> we do not see the usual training of the body. The only movements we see are those called for by flesh and bones that have ignored the training of the body as material or for expression. We don't see the fraud here of training or accumulation.

Dance technique and choreography are dismissed as "fraud," and "rather than about artistic dance *(geijutsuteki buyō)*," Gunji also states, "it is more apt to speak about the dance that preceded it," or an older form of dance (Gunji 1973, 122).

Such interpretations are frequently repeated. The "return to Tohoku" in question is not so much spatial as it is temporal. Hijikata's dance is seen as part of the widespread trend in postwar Japan to "return to Japan" (*nihon kaiki* 日本回帰) to look for inspiration in so-called pre-modern Japanese art, culture, and rituals. The remote countryside of Tohoku in particular came to be seen as a site where such disappearing practices and sights could still be encountered. Miryam Sas speaks about an "imaginary return" (Sas 2011). Since Hijikata's death in 1986, this reading of Hijikata's dance as a nostalgic return to the more real or more Japanese Japan of the past is compounded with another kind of return, and indeed another practice of mourning, also referred to as *kaiki* (回忌): much writing on the artist takes the form of personal memories, and performances are scheduled to commemorate the anniversary of Hijikata's death.

There is validity and timeliness to the perception of this choreographic work as a return to Tohoku/Japan, which, as Ivy and Sas have shown, was in the air at the time (Ivy 1995; Sas 2011). Hijikata for his part speaks extensively about Tohoku. However, as I argue above, I believe such readings are rather reductive and tend to lose track of the choreographic.

By focusing on the choreographic I aim to question the binaries and preconceptions that inform readings of this oeuvre, and indeed my own position. *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* is a complex work and challenges my understanding of history and of contemporary choreography. How might one theorize the (pseudo) autobiographical, the exotic, the ghostly, and the ritualistic elements of Hijikata's aesthetics of the 1970s and 1980s, without inscribing his work into the dominant narratives of the time, or reducing it to familiar categories? How else might time be at stake in Hijikata's dance?

Gestures of temporalization

The critics cited above identify an untimely timeliness in *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons*, an uncanny being caught in-between times. "It is essential," Hijikata states in one of the interviews, "to take on the time of the everyday at all times" (*Sports Nippon* 1972). Elsewhere he points out that butoh must be danced "in a place where there is no time to waste" (Hijikata 1998, 152). The result is a movement language that incorporates both sudden, violent jolts of movement and focused, minimal gestures and maximally expanded suspensions of time. Hijikata's gestures are borrowed from, re-routed, and re-inserted into the fabric of the everyday. His choreography activates the intersections between the time of dance and other times/temporalities, including the lived time of daily life, memory, and history, in order to radically refigure dance as well as directly confront the art's socio-political context. Hijikata's engagement with time moves beyond a mere reflection/re-presentation of the demands and anxieties of the times. His dance explores counter movements to the linear progression of time and history in modern times and introduces alternative/dissident approaches to time. I read his temporally heterogeneous experiments not so much as enacting a return(s) – in order to save or recover – but as a revolt, a radically physical struggle, with time(s), and the times, time and time again. He does this in the shared here and now of a performance but also stretches this time to overlap with that of daily life (day and night).[15] His choreography is a gesture of dissent: it infiltrates and takes on the "time of domination" (Rancière 2012, 37).

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Hijikata's choreographic methodology evokes what Jacques Rancière calls a "montage of times," or a "heterochrony," which he defines as "a redistribution of times that invents new capacities for framing the present" (Rancière 2012, 36). To the extent that Hijikata explores returns, he does so to question and re-organize the present, in the present. I see Hijikata's returns first and foremost as an aspect of his being "contemporary," of being "actual" and "internationally contemporaneous," to cite terms used by the choreographer and his contemporaries, and, to quote Terry Smith, of "being with time *(con tempus)*, that is to say, with many times at the same time" (Smith and Mathur 2014, 168).

According to Giorgio Agamben, being contemporary involves a particular relationship to time, which he qualifies as a "dys-crony." "Contemporariness is," he writes, "a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*" (Agamben 2009a, 14, italics in original).

> It is important to realize that the appointment that is in question in contemporariness does not simply take place in chronological time: it is something that, working within chronological time, urges, presses, and transforms it. And this urgency is the untimeliness, the anachronism that permits us to grasp our time in the form of a "too soon" that is also a "too late"; of an "already" that is also a "not yet."
>
> *Agamben 2009a, 47*

The philosopher defines this relationship not only as a "special relationship with the past" but also as a "special relationship between the different times" (Agamben 2009a, 50, 52). Like Smith, he qualifies the present as a coming together of multiple times. Agamben's understanding of the contemporary itself as returning to the past,[16] as part of grasping and confronting the present (which is not yet lived) offers another entry point into Hijikata's choreographic strategies. It specifically reframes the idea of the "return" as located in the present.

"The entry point to the present," Agamben writes,

> necessarily takes the form of an archeology; an archeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living . . . The present is nothing other than this unlived element in everything that is lived . . . And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.
>
> *Agamben 2009a, 51–52*

Reading Hijikata's returns as part of this dynamic, I would argue that, rather than (re)constructing linear timelines it is more apt to draw on what Georges Didi-Huberman calls an anachronistic temporal model. He introduces Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne* as an alternative form of art history, focusing, not on its familiar narratives of revival or innovation, but instead on a model he names "survival" and "afterlife." It represents an understanding of history that does not separate past and present but instead brings them together in ever shifting ways. "Time conceived as a succession of direct relationships ('influences') or conceived in the positivist way as a succession of facts had no appeal for Warburg," he writes. "Instead he pursued, as a counterpoint or counterrhythm to influence and fact and chronology, a *ghostly and symptomatic* time" (Didi-Huberman 2003b, 274).

This resonates provocatively both with the spectrality of Hijikata's dance (which draws multiple pasts into the present), for instance, and with the prominent role citation, collage, and montage play in his aesthetic and choreographic methodology. Agamben's archeology and dys-chrony and

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Didi-Huberman's anachronism and afterlife offer alternative angles from which to explore the stakes of Hijikata's gestures of repetition and return, not in the context of the melancholia, the nostalgia for a disappearing past prevalent in Japan in the 1970s, but as a dynamic engagement with time itself in contemporary choreographic practice, in the present/now, in which time is layered, multiple, and may be alternatively temporalized and activated as part of a timely critical praxis.

Caesura in time

Agamben describes the contemporary as disjointed and draws on the corporeal metaphors of "shattered backbone[s]" and "broken vertebrae" to talk about the cuts in time he sees as characteristic of the contemporary's relationship to the present. He states that the contemporary poet embodies the fracture of the time: "The poet, insofar as he is contemporary, *is* this fracture, *is* at once that which impedes time from composing itself and the blood that must suture this break or this wound" (Agamben 2009a, 42).

(Re)turning to the methodology Hijikata begins developing in preparation for *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons*, this image resonates provocatively on different levels. It speaks to the incisions and cuts, the ruptures and moments of temporal suspension performed by the collages in Hijikata's scrapbooks. His use of modern art and literature as the basis for his movement language has its roots in the history of ballet and modern dance, but the cuts across the pages appear as fractures, as breaks. Hijikata rewrites his own dance history by cutting up, reframing, and re-assembling imagery, and by exploring alternative networks of/between influences. He turns and returns to similar images and narratives to invert and subvert them. He "recall[s], re-evoke[s], and revitalize[s] that which [he] had declared dead" (Agamben 2009a, 50). He takes, makes, and transforms time, splits it up, or creates caesura in time.[17] He constructs alternative histories by cutting and pasting, layering, folding, crossing out, and connecting differently.

The collage- and montage-like procedures the choreographer applies to the documents glued and annotated in these scrapbooks is reflected in all aspects of the work, from posters and fliers to sound and set design. Consider the reproduction of Marcel Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages* (1914), worked into the set for *Susamedama,* or the portrait of Hijikata with Abe Sada, taken after they collaborated on a film, reproduced on a pamphlet for the event (Ishii 1998, 19, 70). Such examples illustrate that his choreography does not appear in a vacuum or outside of time, as an original and originally Japanese genre (as is often claimed). Instead, I see it as highly "intertextual" work (Kristeva 1986, 37), as a "tissue of quotations" (Barthes 1988, 146)[18] or a "mosaic of quotations," (Kristeva 1986, 37) which is in a "constant dialogue" with and a "perpetual challenge" (Kristeva 1986, 40) to what came before, a "rewriting" of – dance, art, and personal – history, as well as "a social and political protest" (Kristeva 1986, 36).

Images of dislocation also feature heavily in Hijikata's movement vocabulary. Think of the literal rupture with established dance genres and the dance he studied/encountered in the past, and the strategies of opposition or reversal/inversion discussed above, which also play out in/on the body. *Hōsōtan* includes a solo showing Hijikata curled up, on his back, emaciated, dressed in rags, his hair long, his body dusted white, slowly and repeatedly trying to get up from the floor, only to lose his balance and footing, and to collapse to the ground, over and over again. *Hōsōtan*, considered representative of Hijikata's aesthetics of the 1970s, inaugurates his poetics of the precarious body. He speaks of an estranged body, of flesh gone astray (*hagureta nikutai*), and of the solo as depicting the carnal body's attempt to escape the control of the mind (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 1970).[19] The dancer's limbs move in opposite directions and away from the trunk, continuously refiguring the outline of the body.

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Gunji focuses extensively on Hijikata's personal metamorphosis and sees in the dancer's skeletal figure a real dance of death. He stopped eating ten days before the premiere and returns to the stage mere skin and bones (Asahi Shimbun 1972). He literally sheds his body of the very flesh that became such a common, overused term in popular and artistic discourse in the 1960s, and juxtaposes the healthy body of German expressionist dance and the fitness craze with a *mōretsuna suijakutai* (violently frail body) (Hijikata 1998, 153). The phrase *nikutai no hanran* (rebellion of the flesh) takes on new meaning here, as he turns on the flesh itself.[20] Perhaps he addresses also the recent omnipresence and failure of other rebellions of the flesh, including the student demonstrations of the 1960s.[21]

"In Tohoku there is a culture one can only call Tohoku Kabuki," Hijikata states.

> It can be summarized as "a corpse standing up straight at the risk of its life." In this performance, I want to use the body to give shape to the wind of Tohoku, its piercing skies, the howling electric wires and other things Tohoku, as well as the misery and humility of the people.
>
> *Mainichi Shimbun 1972*

Hijikata juxtaposes life and death, speaking to the tension between presence and absence central to dance and an important theme in his movement language and writing. He sets out to materialize the immaterial: wind, air, the sky, sounds, shadows, death, and time. Tohoku and kabuki merge in this new "outline" for the body, which is shaped by exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and starvation. Its boundaries porous, its contours blurred. *ankoku butō* takes the formless (*l'informe*), as Bataille describes it as the "task" to "bring things down in the world," to the extreme (Bataille 1984, 31).

Hijikata turns on the popular returns to Japan by going further, to the point of no return, as it were, where the body itself becomes undone. He pushes to the extreme the capacity for metamorphosis of the kabuki actor, not only confronting different identities and entities – dead and alive, animate and inanimate – in one and the same body but also effacing the body itself. He starts the performance days in advance by fasting or, in his words, turning the body "into a ruin" *("jibun no nikutai wo ichido haikyo ni suru")* (*Sports Nippon* 1972). Tohoku Kabuki then stands for a poetics of ruination and the decomposition of material, flesh, and time. Not just "wabi," as the artist states elsewhere, but real disintegration. (Hijikata 1998, 153). He proposes the body as a transformational object, reduced to a single bone, or to a bone fragment, freed from all identity markers (Hijikata and Shibusawa 1998, 13).

This fragile, ephemeral body underscores the tenuous relationship between dance and history. Hijikata speaks provocatively about the history embedded in the flesh (*nikutai no maibotsushi*) (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 1970). He examines the meaning and potential of this (personal, corporeal) history by literally deconstructing it to start from an outline of the body, a skeleton. This procedure reflects a concern with the tension between remembering and forgetting in dance,[22] and specifically speaks to the crisis surrounding the meaning of history, the past and the future in postwar Japan, when artists across disciplines experiment with ways to keep the past alive while also actively resisting it, both for political reasons and to revolutionize their art. The body/flesh plays a key role in such explorations.

Hijikata's decomposition, de-(con)struction, and reconstruction of the body in dance also questions the way in which the body is constructed in other realms, including daily life, politics, and ideology. Such strategies are symptomatic of the way in which Hijikata, from the start of his career, takes position (or opposition) in relation to dance and indeed to what happens in the world around him, by turning against, overturning, reversing and inversing images, norms and conventions.

Hijikata's dance, while making many returns, continuously expands the scope of time. This involves a re-organization, a re-alignment of past, present, and future. It is a process of exploration,

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experimentation, and of tentativeness, insecurity, urgency, and potentiality, rather than of certainty and of bringing back (or regressing to) a familiar and timeless past. I read his procedures of layering, montage, and radical juxtaposition, the expanded and heterogeneous time/temporality of the dance, and his poetics of the porous, disjointed body as strategies to break open the dominant discourse on dance to open up new possibilities. In the process, Hijikata also, in Jacques Rancière's terms, challenges the "time of domination" (Rancière 2012, 37).

Rancière sees political "potentialities" in "forms of art that work at the crossroads of temporalities and of worlds of experience" (Rancière 2012, 37). Choreography, which offers endless possibilities for transforming, distributing, juxtaposing, activating, and resisting time is a particularly powerful *dispositif.* Hijikata's practice in particular pushes the limits of Rancière's ideas. He paces time differently, challenges lived time, engages radically with the experience of time – in daily life, history, as well as in dance – in order to interrogate the way in which dance, time, and history are understood at this historical juncture.

Notes

1 The Performance Studies international conference, *Beyond Contamination: Corporeality, Spirituality and Pilgrimage in Northern Japan*, hosted by Keio University Art Center (Hijikata Tatsumi Archive) and the Aomori Museum of Art took place in Aomori City from August 28 until September 1, 2015. The oeuvres of Hijikata Tatsumi and Terayama Shūji, both born and raised in the region, were key topics of the conference.
2 While it is difficult to discuss one work in isolation, I will, for the purpose of this essay, focus solely on *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* (1972) and on the documents produced in conjunction with this performance, including photographs, newspaper articles, interviews, previews, and reviews. It is not my intention to be complete or to offer the definite reading of this complex work but rather to open up potential alternative perspectives. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Japanese are my own.
3 I am inspired in particular by Georges Didi-Huberman, who uses the phrase "an act of temporalization" in reference to the "choice of time" inherent in "every act, every decision of the historian" (Didi-Huberman 2003a, 35).
4 Each section is linked with a specific season: *Hōsōtan* with the spring, *Susamedama* with summer, *Gaishikō* and *Nadareame* with the fall, and *Gibasan* with winter.
5 Editors' note: for more about the cabaret shows, see Coker, Chapter 42 in this volume.
6 A photograph of a panel with a reproduction of Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages* (1914) is included in Ishii (1998, 19).
7 Hijikata returns to his trips with photographer Hosoe Eikoh for the photo series *An Extravagantly Tragic Comedy* (later *Kamaitachi*), exhibited and advertised contemporaneously with the premiere of *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People* (1968), which, as Hosoe points out, is part of the same project (Hosoe 1987, 26). Hosoe inserts Hijikata's dance (in all its out of place-ness) into the landscape of his own wartime memories. He juxtaposes the fiction of the dance with the reality of the countryside and its inhabitants, in order to address the subjectivity of the medium of photography (see also Hosoe 2016). As we will see below, Hosoe's performative portrait of Hijikata and the questions that inform it are reflected in *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People* (1968) and in *Twenty-Seven Nights for the Four Seasons* (1972). Every show by Hijikata's dancers at *Shinjuku Art Village* was preceded by a slide show of Hosoe's photographs (Kobayashi 1998, 31), and Waguri Yukio points out that especially *Gaishikō* unfolded inside the "black and white world" of these prints (Waguri 1998, 26).
8 The programs for the *Dance Experience Meetings* (1960 and 1961), for example, make ample reference to rituals. Mishima Yukio's dramatic ritual suicide in 1970 is often cited as behind Hijikata's temporary retreat from the stage. All performances literally bear Mishima's mark, as his calligraphic rendering of "*Hangidaitōkan*" is on all flyers and posters produced in conjunction with the event.
9 This is an aspect American choreographer Trajal Harrell explores in his recent work inspired by Hijikata's dance.
10 I am referring to what Miryam Sas calls "imaginary returns" (Sas 2011).
11 Dancers engage in daily practice, rehearse and repeat movement (to make it their own), revisit elements from previous work (differently, over time), and explore ways to access, re-activate, or erase corporeal

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memories. While Hijikata's words are very poetic, I would argue that he is speaking from the perspective of a dancer/choreographer, exploring novel ways to think about key elements of dance, including balance; gesture; the timing, intensity, level, architecture, and dynamics of a (series of) movement(s); transitions; facial expressions; the expression of emotion; intention; concentration; the relationship between music, rhythm and movement, care of the body, and so on.

12 "Radical juxtaposition" is a term coined by Susan Sontag in her essay "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition" (1962).

13 Kabuki scholar Faubion Bowers mentions that the verb *kabuku,* to slant or incline was derived from the verb *katamuku,* meaning "to slide downhill . . . to decline or degenerate" (Bowers 1974: 38).

14 "I think," Gunji continues, "his *butō* is not new, but, because it touches on our very roots, presents the tradition of human beings" (Gunji 1973, 121).

15 Apart from the introduction of scrapbooks and performing at cabarets and nightclubs, Hijikata's new choreographic methodology also involved ballet *barre* exercises during the day, *ankoku butō* rehearsals all through the night, and fasting. Day and night were inverted and butoh seeped into every nook and cranny of daily life.

16 Agamben includes references to the archaic and the primitive in avant-garde art, for instance, which are relevant in this case.

17 "Those who have tried to think about contemporariness have been able to do so only by splitting it up into several times, by introducing into time an essential dishomogeneity" (Agamben 2009a, 52).

18 A text, Roland Barthes writes, is constituted of traces, it is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (Barthes 1988,146).

19 "The rebellion of the body against the way in which people have been controlling the flesh with the mind" (*Mainichi Shimbun* 1972).

20 Perhaps he is taking on the perception that in his previous work, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People* (1968), later subtitled *Rebellion of the Flesh,* he purged his dance of his (foreign) influences by turning on the flesh itself. I read his strategy as a procedure of *détournement* on other levels too. The term resonates with the alienation of Marxism, Brecht's alienation effect, Bataille's argument on the discontinuity of life in *Erotism,* Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty," and Grotowski's "Poor Theatre."

21 The student demonstrations in 1968 are often referred to as "hanran" (*gakusei hanran*) and the participants as *nikutaiha seinen* (youths of the body-faction). Kan, for instance, refers to *angura* theatre directors including Betsuyaku Minoru as *nikutaiha seiji seinen* (Kan 2003, 177). Noi refers to the prevalence of happenings and events featuring the naked body in the late 1960s as the "'*nikutai no hanran*' of the late 1960s" (Noi 2002, 176).

22 Dancers return, revisit, and repeat to store movement in the body and to re-surface it. They also attempt to "re-member" the body and forget the ways in which it has been formatted over the years (through habitual use, in daily life, and in dance), in order to arrive at something different, other potential movements of the body. I am thinking about what Adrian Heathfield calls a "re-membering of the forgotten" (Burrows and Heathfield 2013, 144).

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