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The Routledge Companion to  
Butoh Performance



Edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario

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## FOUNDATIONS AND FILIATIONS

## The legacy of Artaud in Hijikata Tatsumi

Samantha Marenzi

The year 1938 saw the publication in Paris of *The Theater and its Double*, a collection of essays by Antonin Artaud. Compared to the extraordinary consequences that the contents of the book would have on theater during the second half of the twentieth century, its first appearance was overshadowed in the following years by the war and the Nazi occupation. In addition to this, in 1938 Artaud was locked up in a mental institution, where he stayed until 1946.

*The Theater and its Double* is an odd book. It contains many stories, beside the manifesto announcing theater as a place where life can be rebuilt. Not a place where one imitates life, but a place to materialize the forces stirring behind the appearance of reality and behind domesticated art forms. The editions of the book mark some of the stages in Artaud's experience: his disappearance inside French mental institutions, his return to life and writing, his teachings for generations to come all over the world. When it was reprinted in 1944, some people who recognized the author as a master approached him and obtained his liberation from the Rodez psychiatric hospital, taking charge of his destiny and saving themselves from the cultural void caused by the war. They were young actors, poets, writers. Until Artaud's death in 1948, they formed a small community of disciples around him. They participated in the activities of the late Artaud, who came back to Paris as a martyr and a saint, now freed from the contract with a society that tormented him. He let poetry invade daily life, and this invasion, which almost defeated the need for the ritual of performance, was still called theater: "the state, the place, the point, at which to grasp the human anatomy, and through it cure and rule over life" (Artaud, Pasi 1996).<sup>1</sup>

In 1958, ten years after the author's death, the book started penetrating the most diverse theater cultures thanks to its first English translation, and to the influence that it had on groups like the Living Theater, the American company that was the symbol for political militancy, the overflowing of theater into life and the subversive use of the body outside of the protective fence of the stage. Its influence was not simply conceptual, because *The Theater and its Double* does not hit just the brain – it reaches the eyes too and generates visions; it appeals to the guts and provokes sensations; it speaks to the heart, as Artaud wished for his actor, an athlete of the emotional muscles, to be able to control passions and thus provoke them. The actor is an athlete of the heart: his own, that of the spectator,<sup>2</sup> and, we can add, that of the reader. This book is like a performance: it stays in one's memory and from there it evokes a new theatre, different each time.

In 1965 the book was translated into Japanese, bringing Artaud's words into the environment of the postwar avant-gardes, among intellectuals in search for a cultural identity within

the Americanized country of the postwar period, crossed by waves of protest marking political movements as well as artistic research. It was a receptive environment, where Artaud joined a constellation of highly influential French writers: Jean Genet, Georges Bataille, even Isidore Ducasse, whom the surrealists had rediscovered and who was loved by Artaud. To the power of literature, the subversive themes of homosexuality, eroticism, crime, blasphemy, and revolt against social coercion, Artaud added the science of the stage.

This essay explores the deep influence of Artaud on Hijikata, his butoh, his writing, and his role as an intellectual, an influence I define as foundation and filiation. By foundation I mean the creation of a method, the theorizing, the fine tuning of the language and the literature that relate to butoh: a set of proficiencies that spawns not just a new style but a new dance culture. Filiation then comes to stand for the transmission of human legacy, where technique is used to transfer a tool for the transformation of one's body and conscience. In this case the filiation is active in two directions, towards the past with the acknowledgement of the voice of the "fathers," and towards the future with the transmission of this voice to the "sons."

### Foundation

When the book appeared in Japan, Hijikata Tatsumi's elaboration of butoh, often viewed as a realization of the Theater of Cruelty,<sup>3</sup> was in its experimental stage, pushing the research on movement to the boundaries of dance, art performance, happenings, and avant-garde action. Removed from the codes of these forms, beyond the scandalous impact of his debut (*Kinjiki*, 1959), there was his rigorous research allowing the dialogue between technique (in search for new movements and new relationships between dancer and audience) and writing: his own writing as well as that of the authors influencing him, and the intellectuals sharing his adventure and creating an environment where these tensions could thrive.

Hijikata was familiar with Artaud even before the 1965 translation became available. At the end of the 1950s, together with Ohno Kazuo, he studied mime with Oikawa Hironobu, founder in Tokyo of the Artaud-kan. Oikawa had studied in Paris with Jean-Louis Barrault and Étienne Decroux, where he assimilated the techniques of the environment in which Artaud had trained as an actor. By training the link between imagination and movement and using literary suggestions, Oikawa put together a teaching method that very much influenced Hijikata and that to this day is known under the name of Artaud System (Barber 2005, 27–28).

As is known, Hijikata was also initiated to the complexity of Artaud's experience by the writer Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, a French scholar, who was taken to court for his Japanese translations of Sade. For Hijikata, who described him as "the last of the literati" (Sas 2003, 37), Shibusawa was a guide to Artaud's thought. Prior to and together with the direct access to his texts, the French poet penetrated butoh through Shibusawa's stories, the nights of conversations with this figure who looked at Artaud from a perspective that was neither theatrical – thus not limited to the rising myth of the theater of cruelty – nor philosophical – based on the idea that books are vehicles of abstract concepts. Shibusawa's mediation brought Artaud inside Hijikata's work under the thundering sign of Heliogabalus, the protagonist of the 1934 novel by Artaud, *Heliogabalus: Or, the Crowned Anarchist*. In the early 1960s Shibusawa wrote a text about the Roman emperor, widely based on Artaud's interpretation, and quoting some of its passages (Shibusawa 1987, 42–76). Then in 1968 he translated the novel. In the same year the image of Heliogabalus made an appearance in *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body*.<sup>4</sup> Along with the representation of the young priest who entered Rome carried on a litter in the middle of a bizarre procession, and the dance with the great golden phallus, the principles collected by Artaud in the book penetrated the performance.

For Artaud, *Heliogabalus* was the genesis for numerous themes that, stripped of narrative fiction, found their completion in his writing after he was interned. One of these themes is the magic power of word sounds, which allows words to stop being only the vehicle for logic meanings, and the act of utterance to have an effect on reality. Artaud sought this effectiveness in theater and later, especially after his internment, in poetry. Another aspect that gained importance in the following years was the link between insurrection and madness and thus the political value of insanity, which marked the accusatory violence of his last pieces. The book also exposes the clash between culture and power, and places culture in a subversive position against the social order. Finally it reveals the idea of the body as prisoner of the organs that chain humans to the rational world. The liberation from the organic functioning of the body was Artaud's warning in the final text of his life, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, which also marked the last stage of Hijikata's work, to be discussed below.

### Filiations

During Artaud's time in the Rodez psychiatric hospital, he was subjected to more than 50 electroshocks, described by him as repeated deaths in which he lost his body and his memory. In the face of this death experience he used his tools as an actor and a poet to regain mastery over himself, his thought, his body, his history, and his destiny. In Rodez he started practicing breathing exercises that developed into vocalizations, declamations, and finally poetry. In 1945 Artaud started writing and drawing again. He wrote letters to reconstruct relationships and be reborn to the world, and he wrote cahiers where he deconstructed and reconstructed his history, his anatomy, his language, to be reborn in a new body inhabited by consciousness. Artaud experienced that, beside organs, bones, muscles, nerves, the body is made of memory, and also voices, thoughts, culture, images, and imagination. In his drawings and notebooks, which he filled with fury<sup>5</sup> until his death, the demons are as real as the people he lost. Ghosts and memories mingle to give birth to poetical figures between biography and poetry: Artaud calls these figures the "daughters of the heart to be born"; they are old female friends, grandmothers, a sister who died as a child, some disappeared women, some who were only dreams. He invokes them, draws them, locates them in his body, lets them speak, and calls them consciences that escaped the body, to which he tries to bring them back. And in some way they did come back because Artaud later attributed their characteristics to the young poets and writers who went looking for him after reading his letters and the new edition of *The Theater and its Double*, and finally freed him from the mental institution. His return from the mental hospital, which represents a return from insanity, coincides with a return to theater, no longer separated from life.

Through the link between body and writing, Artaud created a space where reality and fiction, life and artistic creation co-exist. In this space he moved to regain his body, removing it from the control of society, politics, and the psychiatric institution.

While Artaud lets the body penetrate his writing and his poetry, Hijikata lets poetry and writing penetrate his body and his dance. When Hijikata writes about dance, he does not describe it but sets the poetry in motion. An example of this is his choreographic notes, which are not transcriptions of movement but one of the levels on which dance can exist. His scrapbooks, filled with cutout images, notations, signs, are a method to create both choreographic language and thought, to generate associations between distant elements, to gather sources and reformulate them in view of their transformation into real movement.<sup>6</sup> Another example is his use of poetry to transmit the movement, his way to guide the dancers through a word bearing not only a literal meaning but real consequences in body, space, and imagination. Ashikawa Yoko, the dancer who was the symbol of the corporeal metamorphosis investigated by Hijikata in the 1970s, describes

their dance training by underlining the importance of Hijikata's words, "which he uttered in a stream like poetry. When we danced, the images were all derived from his verbal expression. Without the words we could not dance, so it was like following a poem" (Hoffman et al. 1987, 16–18).

In the passage from dancer to teacher and choreographer the question shifts from transforming one's own body to forging words and images able to transform other bodies, that is, other memories and other consciences. Artaud also made this shift and chose one pupil during the last years of his life: Colette Thomas, a young actress, who perfectly embodied the role of the daughter of the heart,<sup>7</sup> in life and in Artaud's theater. For Artaud, too, poetry had become a technique to transform bodies and consciences, and thus people and not characters. This parallel is a sign of a double legacy: as a dancer, Hijikata is influenced by *what* Artaud writes about, as a teacher and choreographer, and as a writer, too, he adds an interest in *how* Artaud writes and how he changes reality through his words, transforming the past (biography and source of inspiration), the present (life, language, body, and creation), and the future (pupils and readers).

The intermingling of body and writing requires rigour. Once they reached this point of contact, both Artaud and Hijikata talked of rebirth. They both worked for the disruption and the reconstruction of the body on the level of anatomy, thought, memory, and movement. They asked themselves how the body is shaped, what it is composed of, what it is affected by, and what it can be, what it can do. They both saw the possibility for regeneration: by casting off their origins they were born into a new body.

There is an assonance in Artaud and Hijikata involving the process of transformation of their own personal history, the overlap of artistic and biographical reality where the story of the past turns into myth. This is evident for example in the book *Ailing Dancer*, Hijikata's "autobiography" as well as a representation of a world of invention seen through the deceitful appearance of things, a book in which the environment and the events mold the characters and at the same time induce physical metamorphoses. Published in 1983 by the same publishing house as Artaud's translations, it is symptomatic of how Hijikata, in this as in other texts, works on his life story in the same way he works on his body and his dance, following the idea of transformation. The same shift emerges when Hijikata talks about a dead sister inhabiting his body,<sup>8</sup> who crouches down to make him dense when he gets up and is connected by a fine thread to the biography of the dancer, who told the story of a sister who disappeared, sold by his parents to work as a prostitute to allow him to dance. This is very probably a mystification but it offers a glimpse of the myth that Hijikata built for himself, and of the way this imagery turns into dance. By mixing memory and imagination Hijikata acts on the double level of the reinterpretation of his family history and his body as a space occupied and inhabited by one's demons. Hijikata had probably read or heard about Artaud's texts in which the daughters appear, but what is truly interesting is how concretely they both represent the effect of one's memory on the body: the presences coming from the past have a real impact on the body in the present.

Miryam Sas, who analyzed the relationship between Hijikata and Artaud, and between butoh and surrealism, has underlined the identification, on the part of Hijikata, of one of the central nodes in the Artaudian adventure: the union of metaphysics and matter.<sup>9</sup> This indication comes directly from Hijikata, who wrote an essay on Artaud in 1971. The text *Artaud's Slipper* is both magical and lucid (translation in Sas 2003, 39–40). The monologue with which Hijikata ends the text contains the words allegedly spoken by the slipper Artaud held in his mouth (actually in his hand) at the time of his death. Hijikata knows Artaud's human adventure, and in this case again he transforms the details into a story. A transformation that enhances the meaning of events instead of changing it. He also acknowledged the universality of a principle that Artaud considered as a

disease of the West, the disease he personally confronted in the theater, in the mental hospital, in life, and in poetry: the split of body and thought.

In the same year Hijikata wrote *Artaud's Slipper*, two texts spreading Artaud's writing after the internment were translated into Japanese: 1971 saw the Japanese translation of *Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society* (1947). It is a stunning text in which Artaud launches one of his fiercest invectives against psychiatry to vindicate the seers that society has reduced to silence. In that same year, the first volume of his *Complete Works* was translated. It collects the writings of the 1920s and a foreword written by Artaud in August 1946, three months after his return to Paris. Some of the "daughters of his heart" appear in it, and among them the little sister, one of the first ones to be born from the notebook pages. Artaud presented the works under two words: theater, which is a crematory or an insane asylum, and cruelty, which is their massacred bodies.<sup>10</sup> After his internment, Artaud went back to using the definition Theater of Cruelty but the words corresponded to a new meaning.

We do not know what else Hijikata read of the last writings by Artaud, or which themes were known to him through the mediation of the francophone intellectuals. What we know is that from the end of the 1950s until when he wrote his text, his exploration of Artaud's thought was nourished by Oikawa's practical teaching and Shibusawa's guidance in the writings and in the cultural environment of the French poet. It included the reading of *The Theater and its Double* and the perception of its impact on theater in the whole world; of *Heliogabalus* as an amulet-book synthesizing all the important themes of body and language; of the book about Van Gogh and the explosive text introducing the *Complete Works*. Next to these texts and those of the surrealist years, there was the knowledge of Artaud's biographical and clinical events, enough to go beyond fascination. After the references to the image of Heliogabalus in his solo performance of 1968 and the contemporary photography project *Kamaitachi* realised in collaboration with Hosoe Eikō, Artaud remained an important reference but entered an invisible layer of the work of Hijikata who, after 1973, never danced in public again.

The references to Artaud become explicit again when Hijikata meets the sound of his voice, the voice of the poet, and of the actor. In the beginning of the 1980s Hijikata listened to the reading of *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, recorded by Artaud in November 1947 and censored by the French public radio. The violence of the texts is enhanced by the power in Artaud's voice, his actual scream and breath. Hijikata received a copy from Uno Kuniichi, a student of Gilles Deleuze who was educated in Paris in the environment of Artaud's reinterpretation by post-structuralist philosophers especially interested in the poet's late writings and his psychiatric adventure, sparking an explicit wave of renewed interest in Artaud. With Uno, Hijikata worked on his last project, interrupted by his death in 1986: *Experiment with Artaud*. Artaud's voice became a real source for Hijikata (as for other theater people all over the world). Beyond the dark assonances between his imagery and the poet's legacy, in that fierce theater made only of sound, the dancer recognized himself. In 1984, when the experimental dancer Tanaka Min asked Hijikata to make a dance for him, he used that recording. The performance, titled *Performance for the Establishment of the Pure Love Butoh School*, brings together the idea of foundation and filiation, two words that reverberate in the title of the performance and in the language used by Tanaka to talk about his meeting with Hijikata:

Since Hijikata stung my eyes, I became his son. I am still intensely irritated. I wish to become an artist who shoots an arrow to everyday life. Hijikata constantly whispers strategy into my ears, and I would like to introduce him to all of you hardly standing on enfeebled legs. . . . Lastly, I would like to declare that Min Tanaka is a legitimate son of Tatsumi Hijikata.

*Hoffman et al. 1987, 65*



Later Tanaka used Hijikata's voice in numerous performances. In his experience, these two voices intertwine. In the 1996 special issue of *Yuriika* dedicated to Artaud, Tanaka published a text under the title "Antonin-Hijikata." Two years later he staged a trilogy based on *The conquest of Mexico* written by Artaud in 1933. In 2002, on the occasion of Tanaka's performance *Infant Body out of Joint* in Montreal, Uno Kuniichi pulled the threads of this net together by introducing the performance with a speech titled *Body-genesis or Time-catastrophe – About Min Tanaka, Tatsumi Hijikata and Antonin Artaud*. The same Uno who had brought Artaud's voice to Hijikata. That same voice,<sup>11</sup> after the dancer's death, was edited as sound background to the video fragments documenting his *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body*.

Several among Hijikata's students and dancers claim Artaud's legacy for themselves, in part filtered by Hijikata, in part nurtured by personal readings and suggestions. For example, Murobushi Kō, who studied with Hijikata from 1968 to 1970, cultivated a corporeal memory connected to Artaud, which allowed him to write that he can feel, while dancing, the right hand of the poet grabbing his rib, next to the heart, a hand taken from the image of the old Artaud in photographs of his last years that wrung the dancer's guts.<sup>12</sup> But the only one to trod the path traced by the "crowned anarchist" is Kasai Akira, who collaborated with Hijikata during the 1960s and then set out on his own autonomous journey in dance. Very interested in the power of word sound, in which he recognizes in Artaud's corporeal writing and he uses as a movement energy by practising Rudolf Steiner's eurhythm, Kasai considered the figure of Heliogabalus as the archetype of his dance, and he saw Artaud's book as a true manual for dancers, a text that is not heretic but orthodox, because it speaks the *truth*.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of this statement, it is possible to read, if not the influence, the way in which Artaud's writing acted on the creation of a new dance and a new language, escaping all definitions of the existing choreographic dictionary, dedicated to the denial of the expression of concepts and feelings.

Hijikata delivered Artaud to the memory of his dancers, by creating a link between past and future. He followed the example of a poet who saw reality concealed behind appearance and used the tools of theater to reveal and live that reality. But Hijikata let him pass through his body, his dance, his writing, his voice, overturning the legacy into a new foundation.

## Notes

- 1 The excerpt (translated by C. Schumacher in *Artaud on Theatre*, Methuen, London, 1989) is taken from *Aliener l'acteur* (Deranging the actor), one of the five texts that Artaud wrote about theater in 1947, in part meant for the public reading in Galerie Pierre during an exhibition of his drawings.
- 2 Artaud defines the actor as an athlete of the heart in *An affective athleticism*, in *The Theater and its Double*. About the heart of the spectator see Ruffini, Franco. 1994. *Teatro e Boxe. L' "atleta del cuore" nella scena del Novecento*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- 3 Various scholars have dealt with cruelty in butoh, using the Artaudian paradigm to read into Hijikata's experience. In this essay, though I chose to trace a different path, I am indebted to the studies by Kurihara Nanako (1996); Michael Hornblow (2006); Orlando Vincent Truter (2007); Catherine Curtin (2010); Efrati Benjamin (2012).
- 4 For the image of Heliogabalus in Hijikata's dance see Baird, Bruce. 2012. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, pp. 105–136.
- 5 In Artaud's *Œuvres Complètes* published by Gallimard and edited by Paule Thévenin, (indicated by O. C. followed by the volume in Roman numerals), the *Cahiers de Rodez* (February 1945–May 1946) correspond to the volumes from XV to XXI, the *Cahiers du retour à Paris* (May 1946–January 1947) to the volumes from XXII to XXV. The notebooks written from February 1947 to March 1948 appeared in two volumes edited by Évelyne Grossman under the title *Cahiers d'Ivry*, Gallimard, Paris 2011.
- 6 For more about Hijikata's scrapbooks see Kurihara (2000), Wurmlı (2008), Morishita (2015), and the essays collected in the *Dossier Butoh-fu. Dance and words* edited by Marenzi (2016).

- 7 About Artaud's mythical daughters and his real female students, see my book: Marenzi, Samantha. 2013. *Antonin Artaud e Colette Thomas. Personaggi della vita e persone del teatro*. Roma: Bulzoni.
- 8 Kitayama Kenji gives a glimpse of the mysterious assonance between Artaud's daughters and Hijikata's sister, embodied presences that respond to their denial of biological, familial, cultural origins. The proposed interpretation goes in the direction of incest, and includes them among the themes that reverberate from Artaud to Hijikata even beyond the latter's readings. Cf. *Hijikata, un autre Artaud ou un autre qu'Artaud*, report given to the Society of French language and literature at the University of Seijo, July 2003.
- 9 See also De Lamberterie, Domitie. 2012. *La métaphysique de la chair. Antonin Artaud et la danse butō*. Avion: Éditions du Cénacle de France.
- 10 Two preparatory versions of the *Préambule* appear in O. C. XXII, pp. 429–432 and in O. C. XXIII, pp. 45–47. The definitive version appeared in 1956 in O. C. I\*, pp. 7–12.
- 11 The dancer Koseki Sumako said: “Butoh is Artaud's voice at the end of his life.” *L'Autre Journal*, March 26, 1986, p. 55.
- 12 Akihiro Osawa, *Scènes* No. 1, Revue de l'espace Kiron. March 1985.
- 13 Kasai dedicated various projects to Heliogabalus, among which a choreography for a group of Italian dancers including myself. The sentence here quoted is taken from my notes (Rome, Aug. 8, 2009). About this see also, D'Orazi, Maria Pia. 2011. “Akira Kasai, il fantasma di Eliogabalo. Tre studi su Artaud.” *Biblioteca Teatrale*, No. 99–100.

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