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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Companion to
Butoh Performance



Edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario

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Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536132-2>

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Published online on: 28 Aug 2018

How to cite :- Kuniyoshi Kazuko, Bruce Baird. 28 Aug 2018, *On the Eve of the Birth of Ankoku Butoh* from: The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance Routledge

Accessed on: 19 Jan 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536132-2>

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ON THE EVE OF THE BIRTH OF ANKOKU BUTOH

Postwar Japanese modern dance and Ohno Kazuo

*Kuniyoshi Kazuko (translated by Bruce Baird and condensed
and adapted by the Editors)*

In 1926, at the age of twenty, Ohno Kazuo came to Tokyo, and then entered the world of dance in 1936, while working as physical education teacher. Before and after the war, he was involved in the dance world, and then in 1954, he met Hijikata Tatsumi. Eventually, he participated alongside Hijikata in the creative period of *ankoku butoh*. How did he go from modern dance to butoh, and just what were the reasons that lead to his separation from modern dance? By looking at this period from the vantage point of Ohno, I want to cast light on the eve of the birth of *ankoku butoh*.¹

The encounter with dance: on the dance of Mary Wigman and the new dance of Eguchi Takaya and Miya Misako

Ohno started dancing with Eguchi Takaya and Miya Misako in 1936. But prior to that time, he was required to teach dance as condition of his employment at the Soshin Girls School, and thus had studied with Ishii Baku in 1933. About Ishii's actual dance training, he writes that "it was mainly like pantomime. . . . It was dance like drama, and it was theatrical," and the basis was classical ballet. He says that he thought, "If it is dance like pantomime, there is no need to study it" (Tsuboi 2002, 66).

He encountered the dance of Eguchi and Miya via reviews and photographs of their 1934 dances *Work No. 1* and *Operating Room* that they performed at their first recital upon returning from Germany (Ohno 1995, 40).² Eguchi said about *Work No. 1*,

One day, I sat in a chair, and while I was idly moving the fingers on my right hand (which was resting on my knee), when I tried to bend my wrists almost to the square and stand my middle and ring fingers up firmly, I became aware of a sharp and severe sensation, and thought to make that into the basis for creating a 'Movement.'

Eguchi 1969, 2

And again,

This 'hand movement' that I had made with no particular purpose in mind became a 'stimulus' and I was able to give birth to various movements all at once using this

movement as a base. Although I considered the overall structure and order of movements when I compiled them, it is basically just a work that was only movements.

Eguchi 1961, 18

One person was silver and one person was gold, and the only thing different was their color; their costumes, wigs, and shapes were the same, and they did the same movements, which became a powerful dance that felt quite radical.

Eguchi 1961, 174

Ohno saw photographs accompanying reviews or introductory articles about both dances in the newspapers, and said that this was probably “the first dance in Japan which was truly abstract.” And he suddenly thought, “This is it. I had the feeling that without a doubt, I had finally found what I was looking for” (Ohno 1995, 40).

When you look at pictures of *Operating Table*, and *Work No. 1*, they are both duets with Eguchi and Miya, and one can feel clear sharp sculpturality in the forms of their bodies and limbs. It must have been these clear forms that Ohno felt were so fresh and new. It was not a dance with a dramatic exalted feeling, but something that made one feel simple clear forms, (even in the costumes which were subordinate to the movements), and this matched what Ohno was looking for at the time. This was not the descriptive dance achieved through mime that Ohno had seen at Ishii Baku’s studio previously.

When Eguchi and Miya returned from their time in Europe in the mid-1930s, it had already been about ten years since the form of “New Dance” had emerged in Japan. Interest was increasing in the modern dance that was all the rage in Europe, and many people went to Europe to study, starting with Ishii Baku. Many dancers including Anna Pavlova and La Argentina (Antonia Mercé) also came to Japan in this era. From the 1930s, such dancers from New Dance as Alexander Sakharoff, the Bodenweiser Sisters, Harald Kreutzberg, and Ruth Page came to Japan. The new dance in Germany, which was to exert such a profound influence on the formation of dance in Japan, was introduced by Ishii Baku and also Tsuda Nobutoshi and Kuni Masami. Eguchi and Miya were a new stream who were reacting against Ishii. They spread the form of expressionist dance that they had learned for two years from Mary Wigman. Thus, Ishii and Eguchi and Miya had all studied with the German Expressionist dancer, Mary Wigman, but their choreography was different. Why did Ohno choose the Eguchi/Miya version rather than Ishii’s version? Before thinking about that question, let us think about Wigman’s dance itself.

Of course, Wigman is the first name in German Expressionist dance. Wigman thought of personal experience as the motivation for the creative process. She wrote,

Therefore the dancer–choreographer must turn his inner feelings and perceptions into visible expression, he must clarify and give expression to his personal life experiences through the medium of the dance.

Wigman 1973, 86

That is, Wigman generates in clear movement forms that which is felt in personal experience, and all of the transformations that are a result of natural reactions to it. The process becomes the dancing body, and is embodied. She took it as necessary to search for a method of converting the inner emotions that arise and disappear and the transformations of the spirit into bodily movement forms. Wigman thought that dance was that thing which is transmitted through form when that which is experienced psychologically and mentally is consciously given shape through visible bodily movements. Moreover, she thought that that which was expressed through

exceedingly simple strong forms, which were appropriate to convey an experience, would transcend individual experience and obtain a greater universality.

In contrast to this way of thinking, just what was Eguchi/Miya's dance like? Eguchi explained about the new dance in detail in his 1961 *Method of Dance Creation*.

Modern dance prizes the 'construction of space.' Even the 'movement' that I spoke of previously is included in the 'creation of space,' and one creates (on the basis of intuitive calculations) that which will make the place of the stage come alive: how, where, and when the movement will unfold, what kind of organization, what movements, what progression, what feeling will be contained therein, and the presentation of things which have what kind of nuance.

Eguchi 1961, 5-6

To summarize Eguchi's thought, this kind of 'creation of space' had not existed in Japan before that time, and instead, there was narrative, to which theatrical gestures were appended.

Eguchi (*ibid.*) also wrote "I wanted to know other kinds of movements, to seek out all such movements," and made all the movements of humanity part of his creative process. And, he continued, as a result of pursuing the transformations of the various bodily movements (such as the position of feet on the floor, or the way of bending joints),

I was able to discover that the movements of humans are infinite ... and just how it is that the infinite movements are infinite. This is not just that I conquered the world of movements, but coming to this way of thinking was the most important thing for the new dance.

When he went to Wigman's school, Eguchi was quite shocked to find out that there was connection between what he saw there and the kind of movements he was seeking. Because Wigman grasped the elements of numerous movements, and brought these into her method, Eguchi immediately decided to study with her. In this way, Eguchi and Miya ended up spending two years studying abroad. While learning from Wigman, Eguchi was able to touch the source from which free movements could be freely created, and we might observe that he chiefly learned a method for eliciting new movements. In sum, Eguchi and Miya learned a very analytical approach from Wigman.

On the other hand, Ishii felt the strength of Wigman in her attempt to express through bodily movements the internal transformations of the spirit and the dramatic transformations in the emotion of the individual, and not in the specific transformations of the movements themselves. Ishii thought the task of dance expression was not the expression of the truth of the human through trivial daily life, or the details of real life, but through taking the matters of daily experience, purifying them, strengthening them, and elevating them into a more universal movement. This is what Wigman called "Absolute Dance," and it corresponds to the expression that is held in the highest regard in expressionist dance and doubles up with the attempt to reach a universal world that transcends the individual. The tendency of Ishii's dance to treat universal subjects with heightened dramatic movement is due to his having imbibed this part of Wigman.

In contrast, Ohno felt that such exalted dramatic dance is unnaturally forced, and he could not get used to such lofty spheres and a universality that surpasses everyday human emotion, and for the same reason, he felt extremely uneasy with the movements that are born as a result (Ohno 1995, 41). Reflecting on Eguchi's dance training, he also said that since all the parts of the body are influenced by every single movement, limitless movements are born.

Moreover, that he understands what Eguchi means when he says that all the body's parts are connected to each other, so even in the movement of one joint, there are innumerable movements, but movement is also naturally related to problems of the heart/mind, soul and life. In the case of movement, first there is some kind of necessity and then a movement. Ohno says that first you think of going, and then the legs follow. He also says that he spent five years in trial and error trying to figure out the foundations of movement. It is interesting that during his period of establishing his dance studio, he was not worried about all the variations of a movement, but rather had an interest in what movements would come out when the "thought comes first" (Ohno 1995, 41). In particular, we can say that Ohno was proceeding by trial and error in stimulating himself internally, and also in the thinking about the connection between his own existence and expression, all the while taking lessons from Eguchi and Miya, and earning his livelihood.

The era of independence and recitals 1949–1953: Ohno's method of composition as a modern dancer

In 1949, Ohno established the Ohno Kazuo Dance Studio, and almost immediately held the First Ohno Kazuo Dance Recital. As if a dam had broken, Ohno held recitals every year until 1951, and then skipped a year and held a fourth recital in 1953. There were usually solos interspersed with group dances for a total of twenty-nine dances. In his review of the first performance, Eguchi Hiroshi wrote:

Ohno Kazuo's recital was full of extremely eccentric ideas, and while there was certainly uniqueness in his expression of them, I feel a dull regret that his intentions are not sufficiently expressed. For example, in a work entitled *Statue of the Ernst Family*, which at first glance is certainly strange work, the treatment of the protagonist Owl had a certain strange flavor to it, but the work as a whole never developed beyond conceptual boundaries. This tendency gives birth to strange works such as *Flower and Chair*, *Good Morning Praying Mantis*, and *Fetters*, but each of these lack a thorough treatment, and there is a tendency for only the ideas to be particularly glittering. When it comes to the short works, Ohno's individuality is honestly expressed. For example, *Tango* displayed a fresh individuality which was different from common practice. There's no doubt that this is a newcomer with a singular personality.

Eguchi Hiroshi 1949³

The representative phrases are 'extremely eccentric,' 'strange,' 'strange works,' and 'strange flavor.' These are connected to 'singular personality,' 'uniqueness of expression,' and 'individuality.' The conclusion is that the works are not particularly dance-like in terms of rhythm, melody, and movement, that they have a conception which is difficult for the usual spectators to understand, and that they are on the whole more literary rather than dance like. In general, rather than appraising his skill as a dancer, the reviewer focuses on the world of the performance, the uniqueness of the images, and the unprecedented nature of the works.

In another view of this same performance, the critic Nagata Tatsuo locates Ohno's distinctiveness in *Praise of Jacob* and *Tango*, which were short works. Although Ohno lacks power, he writes, "we should praise the intention of his poetic expression in his choreography, however, it is necessary for him to be precise about the organization of his bodily expression," thus indicating that in general, Ohno and his dancers are lacking in bodily training (Nagata 1949).

In 1950, Ohno held his second dance recital, and not surprisingly, there was a short review in the Tokyo newspaper by Eguchi Hiroshi:

There are no parallels for the eccentric pieces in Ohno's modern dance . . . The dance lacks the feeling of movement, but has a peculiar kind of feminine lyricism, and the fact that the result is not as he intends, is likely due to the uniform and monotonous choreography. But when compared with last year, both the pieces in the dancing have a feeling of stability.

Eguchi Hiroshi 1950

In this review for the second recital, there is the familiar refrain of the unique works and the lack of movement, but also a recognition of "feminine lyricism." In a letter from some time probably in 1951 between the second and third recital, Ohno wrote as follows:

I think I more or less have the technique of expressiveness, but the important thing is to grasp the content that I am trying to express, and thinking that I cannot squeeze this from my mind, I'm scavenging through various kinds of poetry paintings and newspaper articles. Right now, my teachers are poetry and paintings. Modern poetry that is.⁴

Along with the Rilke's "Under the Linden Tree," he uses passages from Rilke's "Song of the Statue" (in 1953 – *Fox and Statue*), Verlaine's "Il pleure dans mon coeur" (1951 in *Rain on the Town*), the Bible, Emerson, Takami Jun, Tamura Ryuichi, Murano Shiro, and Nagase Kiyoko.

The November 1953 Fourth Ohno Kazuo Dance Recital featured positive reviews. Eguchi wrote, "I want to express my respect for his effort to throw off all commonsensical pre-existing dance techniques, and for his unique world of dance" (Eguchi Hiroshi 1953). And Hiraiwa Yasuhiro wrote:

In each of his dances, which take as their themes the emotion of life, Ohno . . . explores his skepticism toward life, but they can be seen as a manifestation of Ohno's vision of life. The peculiar interest of the dance lies in freely using the techniques of expression, and distorting the emotions of movement to render them into artistic shapes. In the world of dance in which many people emulate their predecessors, it is hard to find people who think that this kind of creativity is the thing to be pursued in the essence of art.

Hiraiwa Yasuhiro, in Eguchi 1954

The 1953 reviews treat Ohno's uniqueness in a positive manner. In contrast to the then current dances which had a tendency toward spectacle such as Eguchi and Miya's *The Fire of Prometheus* (1950) and Ishii's *Human Buddha* (1953), it is fascinating to see that Ohno was tilting in the exact opposite direction, which the reviewers seemed to support.

Deviation from modern dance/1st period of latency 1954–1959/meeting Hijikata

After the 1953 recital, other than appearing as a supporting dancer in Eguchi and Miya dances once or twice a year, Ohno quit appearing in own performances for five years, so we can think of this as the first period of silence for Ohno. Ohno has never said why, but we can surmise that perhaps he was feeling frustrated about the way things were going or that it was economically impossible

to continue to stage shows. It was in this era that Ohno met Hijikata at the 1954 Andō Mitsuko Dancing Heels Special Performance, in which Hijikata debuted as jazz dancer and Ohno was making a special appearance as a senior member of the Eguchi/Miya lineage. The second time they met was in 1955 on the occasion of the first performance of Ando and Horiuchi Kan's Unique Dance Group (from 1957 it was called the Unique Ballet Group). Hijikata played the role of the bar tender in a dance called *Cocktail* and Ohno was a customer. Later, Ohno Yoshito said that Ando had the practice of staging in the same recital both serious dances that treated social topics, and also jazz dances. Usually it was Ohno Kazuo in the artistic dance pieces and Hijikata in the jazz dance pieces. In 1956, on the occasion of the second Unique Dance Group recital, Hijikata invited Ohno out for tea, and Ohno Yoshito recalls him saying to Ohno, "I have seen all your works" (Mizohata 2005, 11). It is not clear what they talked about, but it's likely that Hijikata related the shock he felt in Ohno's 1949 performance and other things that made an impression on Ohno. Likely they had many chances to meet after that. Whatever the case, the period during which Ohno could not make work had arrived. We can understand his frame of mind from his own words.

In May 1955, during the period of inactivity, there was a round table discussion entitled "Spreading One's Wings" in *Gendai buyō* [Modern dance]. We can get an idea of what Ohno was thinking about and worrying about at this time. Ohno says that he was criticized by the poetry group of a friend for the dance *Random Thoughts*, which was a depiction of commonplace scenes. According to Ohno, "the poets felt like I had been irresponsible in the unfinished quality of the work" (Ohno et al. 1955). Ohno went on to stress that even though the work was unfinished, he gave it his all.

The *Random Thoughts* program note read: "This is not like the pitiful protagonist in *Bicycle Thief* who stakes his whole life on a bicycle, but just the attempt to put a man on stage and depict how he walks in his everyday life." There was also an insert in the program with this prose:

Even if you don't think urgently about what it means to live, it is impossible to conceive of oneself apart from the world. A child cried out as if it suddenly touched fire. Did it see something in a dream? Even if it wasn't a dream, the baby as a baby is certainly being forced to live having a connection to human life. Unable to sleep, I tried to depict my walking based on this thought.

This work, that did not try to express easy-to-understand emotions such as dramatic elevated feelings, or simple joy, anger, pity, and pleasure, had a tension from focusing on both movement and Ohno's inner life.

Although *Random Thoughts* was not liked by the poets, the reception by the critics was exceedingly favorable.

Random Thoughts was excellent in showing one way of pursuing solo works (as per conversation with Ohno). The improvised harmonica music was pleasant, and the atmosphere created by playing a bird call whistle as if it was a child crying was as beautiful as phosphorescence.

Ikemiya 1954

Random Thoughts was an eccentric presentation with, just as the title says, a simplicity to it as if he was just tossing out thoughts; it was the kind of solid work that exhibits the characteristics unique to him. . . . I want to express respect for his unique dance environment and his effort to throw off heretofore ordinary dance techniques.

Eguchi Hiroshi 1953

It is likely that rather than trying to use the movements he had learned at Eguchi and Miya's studio, Ohno was already trying to create a work using his own peculiar gestures. However, this was not lyrical description like pantomime, nor abstract movement oriented to clear formalization. It was movement that causes one to strongly feel the urge to approach his inner world without preconceptions. Also, at the same time, he must have been feeling the limitations of the dance world that he had studied. During this time, Ohno quit appearing on stage, and entered the period of exploring the roots of being.

About *The Old Man and the Sea*

During the time when Ohno had ceased activities (1954–1958), the dance world was changing. In 1956, the Modern Dance branch of the Japan Art Dance Society separated from the main society and started the All Japan Art Dance Society (with Ishii as president, and Eguchi Takaya as chairman of the board), and began to sponsor joint performances with local companies and also yearly New Face concerts. Meanwhile, young dancers were forming groups and putting on performances. On the other hand, it was also the era when TV spread, and dance began to be promoted in the broadcast media. In 1955, Martha Graham came to Japan and introduced a different method from that of German *neue Tanz*, and then the later 1957 visit of Katherine Dunham, also influenced Japanese modern dance. Ohno staged *The Old Man and the Sea* (April 1959) in just such circumstances.

The Old Man and the Sea takes its subject from Ernest Hemingway's novel published in 1952, which was translated into Japanese by Fukuda Tsuneari in 1955. Ohno was deeply impressed with it and decided to make it into dance.⁵ He asked Ikemiya Nobuo to write a script. Ikemiya also acted as the producer and the music was by Yasuda Shugo, while the stage direction was by Hijikata. At the time of the performance, Ohno attempted to send Hemingway a letter asking for permission to use the novel (although it is not clear whether it was ever actually sent). According to the letter, Ohno took considerable pains to express the bobbing of the boat on the open sea, but in the end three female dancers became the boat's mast, bow, and stern. From the letter, we can see that they tried to create a means by which they would capture the interest of the audience by connecting the movements of the three women representing the rocking of the boat being toyed by the waves with the moment by moment psychological changes in the old man riding the boat: "the boat surpasses the usual understanding of it as a nonliving thing, and becomes a part of the old man" (Ohno 1959).⁶

In this letter he says, "I have been to great pains researching the relationship between dance pieces and expressive techniques since 1953. When I read *The Old Man and the Sea*, I received a lot of suggestions from it." Ohno had been impressed by the joy and bewilderment of the man who had captured his biggest fish ever in the last fishing trip of his life, and the emotional strength of will of the old man who although he had his hopes cruelly dashed in the next moment still boldly fought with enemy. He said, "I wanted to grasp this with my own body and spirit by throwing myself into *The Old Man and the Sea*, through the medium of dance." In this way, we see that Ohno was trying to realizing in his own body that which was born of the deep character of the old man.

What caused me the most trouble was the role of the Old Man. This was because if the man's whole world didn't ooze into each of his steps, the role wouldn't come alive. As you can see from this picture, I am a slender man. But I am staking my whole personality as a dancer on this old man. I want to create a stage space so that the audience will not notice the weak size of my body, which I can't change now, and I am determined to do this by understanding the old man, and his world.

Ohno tried to express with his whole body's movements the look of spirit and pride of someone who had endured long years of hardships, and triumphed over nature again and again, and caught countless fish.

A hint from Alberto Giacometti

The January 1959 issue of *Mizue* contained a special issue on Giacometti, in which Ohno underlined parts of an essay by Yanaihara Isaku entitled "Giacometti Life and Works II." Yanaihara's article says that Giacometti is often spoken of as a surrealist, but he did not seek illusions above reality, but tried to pursue a vision of reality. Ohno has underlined the following parts:

However, even if the abstract object belongs to the fruits of the imagination and is the expression of a mental image, it is itself a closed world because there is no path for it to come out into the world of reality. The works of Giacometti when he was inclined to surrealism can be seen as a conflict between the thirst to restore the connection with reality and the enthusiastic bias towards abstract structure.

Yanaihara 1959, 24

Giacometti could not be satisfied with abstract *objets* and attempted to use his younger brother as a model for sketching actual human body structure, that is, as an attempt at figural sculpture. And, in order to create a sculpture "which realized just as he saw it that which existed in reality," Giacometti excised as much as possible everything unnecessary, and tried to grasp the unified "tightly knit whole" (26). When he did so, his sculptures became smaller and smaller. Ohno has underlined this passage by Yanaihara and written in the margin, "small training." Giacometti's terrible pursuit continued and finally he arrived at a work that was close to his conception, but

Again, he surprised himself because when he wanted to make a large sculpture it became thinner and thinner. These thin sculptures were the forms of human beings at the extremity with anything extraneous stripped away.

33

Again, Ohno has underlined and in the margins written "thin." The period of trial and error until Giacometti was able to create his sculptures which were as thin as wire was fierce, but in order to create sculptures that grasped the being of living things, they ended up with this form. Ohno – who was in the middle of using trial and error in the creation of *The Old Man and the Sea* – read this text about Giacometti by Yanaihara over and over, and tried to live it in rehearsal.

Reverberations from *The Old Man and the Sea*

Right before the performance, Ohno sent a letter to an acquaintance in which he said that he was trying to stage *The Old Man and the Sea*, according to the method of "New figuralism/new representationalism." This is quite a departure from the style that Ohno had studied under Eguchi and Miya because of their sharp abstractions. In order to open up the closed off nature of abstraction, Giacometti had observed the object thoroughly and adopted an air of sketching from nature (*shasei*). Ohno had taken a hint from this for his dance. In order to understand how this

was turned into dance, we have to go to the reviews, since there are no filmic recordings and also very few photographs.

Ohno Kazuo has a kind of unique [mode of] expression not through formal movements but through what you might call moving within his heart/mind. It follows that there is no excitement that would make the form of the movement large, but he depicts psychological engravings with rich shading. So, the expression is perfect for the content.

Shiro 1954, 6

He is thoroughly not able to produce the physical strength and vitality of the fisherman. This is a deteriorated-almost-to-the-point-of-pain fisherman. It is impossible for Ohno to play the hero of such a story.

Nagata 1959, 8

It is structurally too long, and the music/sound did not form a consistent whole from beginning to end, and here also, Ohno embraced his own images ever further inside himself, and did not give enough consideration to the external materialization. However, it is fun to follow along with his writhing bountiful images that are whirling around inside him. This is what sustained this piece. There are many dancers who only dance superficial outward forms and have nothing inside themselves. The exact opposite is Ohno who is quite awkward and as a rule not stylish, but he is without a doubt a unique dancer.

Mitsuyoshi 1959, 8

As far as it goes, it is composed in an orderly and systematic manner, but there is something that makes me feel unconvinced in terms of the dance continuity in the battle with the fish and the connection to the character's memories. . . . It appears that there is a clear mismatch between Ohno's strong personality and the other dancers, and particularly in the second and third acts, there are moments that feel quite empty. To put this another way, this is because the undulations in the radiation of Ohno's personality are too excessive.

T.H. 1959, 29

In the review by Mitsuyoshi, we can see the attitude of accepting Ohno's introverted psychological expression as the indispensable personality for dancing that specific world. However, in the T.H. review, the dance/Ohno is criticized for not having sufficiently dramatized the structure of the dance work. Due to the strength of Ohno's personality, the work as a whole is destroyed. While recognizing the "excessive passion" that Ohno put into the dance, the reviews obliquely suggest that the work as a whole was a failure.

The general tone of the reviews is basically that although there are no exaggerated movements and the movements of the earnest but introverted Ohno are lacking in expansiveness, Ohno is a dancer filled to overflowing with an abundance of internal images. I cannot give any concrete evidence for this, but we can conjecture about how Ohno tried to approach his aims. That was the polar opposite of the dance methodology that Ohno had learned from teachers Eguchi and Miya, and rather a unique creative methodology that Ohno tried to grasp.

Now then, returning to the argument, we can see from the letter to Hemingway that Ohno was worried about and searching for his own technique and works as a dancer. However, Ohno's

choreography and structure do not have provocative elements but were rather works that might be said to be overly serious that expressed Ohno's internal struggles through symbolic production and choreography such as in the battle with the big fish and the battle with the sharks. We would have to say it was certainly an orthodox modern dance based in the text of a story. That is, it was the situation of one who was responding to the problems of the self, right before his eyes, or one who had his hands full with dealing with himself and had no spare time for orienting himself outward, to temporal or social matters such as what was happening in the world of dance. He was very subjective and even took his own subjective view as absolute, and he was not very interested in any external affairs. He did not have much inclination to avant-garde and was not worked up to do something entirely new, but only thinking about dancing his own dance.

In a letter to a friend after *The Old Man and the Sea*, Ohno wrote,

After it was over, I went to a mutual criticism meeting and was thoroughly criticized, but I gave it my best, even when I could not do what I wanted, but somehow after it was all over, I have a feeling of bleakness, and no feeling whatsoever of glamor. Perhaps there was a way that was appropriate, but because I followed the plot too carefully, and because I was in a state in which I had no inner reserves, perhaps if I had pursued things further, I could have drawn something out, but because now I have to start from the beginning, in that sense, I think that I got out of it what I could and did what I wanted.

However, he also wrote of his depressed spirits after the dance, "It really hit me hard, and because I spent a lot of time and effort on it, I am tired in mind and body."

Period of creation of *ankoku butoh*, 1960–1967: entrance of Divine

One month later, Hijikata staged his *Forbidden Colors*. In his dance, Hijikata danced with Ohno Yoshito, Ohno's second son, who had not trained extensively as a modern dancer and Hijikata professed to prefer the bodies of amateurs. By contrast, Ohno was making a break from modern dance when he danced with Hijikata in the 1960s. He had a quarter of a century career as a dancer, so it would have been impossible for him to go back to an amateur body. But he did have an extravagant imagination – one could say that it was almost to the point of being delusional – and he had the power to concentrate on his target with his whole body and soul. In place of the Old Man, Hijikata gave him the role of the aging prostitute in Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*. It is as if Ohno is rediscovered owing to Hijikata and is able to find his kind of expression on stage. The opportunity is Divine.

In Hijikata's 1960 *Hijikata Dance Experience Gathering*, Ohno found himself asked to appear on stage in drag playing the role of the aging male prostitute Divine. Ohno portrayed Divine exposing his old age to the world, and dying in a sea of feces. Hijikata gave Ohno a slight push and warped Ohno's approach which had spun fruitlessly in an orientation towards life and oriented him instead towards eroticism and death. Up until that time, Ohno had been investigating orthodox reliable dance while trying to be a humanist, but through meeting Hijikata, Ohno grasped the existence of flesh which lives eros. As if discovered by Hijikata, Ohno grasped the stage as a place for expression.

Ohno's appearances in Hijikata's performances lasted until 1966 (*Tomato*), and then he appeared in a supporting role in the performances of his own students. Then Ohno gradually cut off relationships with the people around him and entered a period of isolation and latency until 1976. It is likely that something occurred between Ohno and Hijikata in the years between 1966 and *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People* in 1968 that necessitated the split between the two. During

that time, the story of Ohno's travels are recorded in the *Portrait of Mr. O* movies. On the other hand, Hijikata switched to minutely choreographing Ashikawa Yoko and produced a series of works called Tohoku Kabuki, which resulted in the formation of butoh.

In conclusion

1959 was an interesting year in the history of western dance in Japan. It was the year in which the collision between the pre-war modern dance and the postwar avant-garde came to the surface. The 1959 dance *The Old Man and the Sea* was Ohno's last work as a modern dancer. He had become independent from Eguchi and Miya, while continuing to search for the interrelationships between the techniques he learned in modern dance and his own life, and *The Old Man and the Sea* was the summation of this research. Although he gave it his all, the result was a failure. The cause was the exposure of the gap between the skills of modern dance and the world that Ohno expressed in his body. To the extent that he was faithful to the original work, his body would run a path away from modern dance. *The Old Man and the Sea* was not an avant-garde work but had the structure of an orthodox emulation of modern dance, but Ohno's body had already transformed into a different kind of being. Hijikata recognized Ohno's expressive potential before anyone else, so it is only natural that he employed him in his early dances in the 1960s and the following year, Ohno was reborn as the aged Divine.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was adapted and condensed by the editors from Kuniyoshi Kazuko, "Ankoku butō tōjō zenya" in Okamoto Akira ed. *Ōno Kazuo butō to seimei* (Shichōsha 2012), 43–94. That article was in turn an expansion of a previous article, Kuniyoshi Kazuko, "Ankoku butō tōjō zenya: Ōno Kazuo sakuhin 'Rōjin to umi' kara mita senkyūhyaku gojūkyūnen" *Buyōgaku (Choreologia)* 31 (2008): 22–33.
- 2 Eguchi and Miya went to Europe in December 1931 and returned to Japan in December 1933.
- 3 In some cases, the Ohno's clipped reviews from newspapers and pasted them inside or on the back of programs, which are available in the Ohno Kazuo Dance Studio Archives. Every effort has been made to find the original articles, but in some cases, owing to the ephemerality of these sources, page numbers are not available.
- 4 The recipient of this letter is unclear, but within the letter, Ohno addresses a woman in honorific language, and also writes "among last year's works . . . there was a solo called 'Spring Offering,'" so we can conclude that this was written in 1951.
- 5 The 1958 John Sturges's movie *The Old Man and the Sea* (with Spencer Tracy) caused quite a stir. Ohno pasted pictures of the movie on the walls of his room and used them as aids in making the images.
- 6 In a memo to himself, Ohno wrote that the boat should suggest a cradle and one should feel the sea as if the old man were being entrusted to the hands of beloved.

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