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Global Butoh as Experienced in San Francisco

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GLOBAL BUTOH AS EXPERIENCED IN SAN FRANCISCO

Brechin Flourney

Forward

Butoh. The very word has been known to elicit groans, quizzical looks, and/or ecstatic devotion. During the 1980s and 1990s, even the most stalwart of fans identified butoh as the Dance of Darkness, made familiar by images of bald heads and physical contortions performed at an agonizing slow pace. White, painted bodies. Silent screams. Hypnotic, indelible imagery. Self-indulgence. Spectacle. The walking dead. Butoh was the embodiment of darkness or light capable of igniting powerful reactions of revelation, boredom, or disgust.

When I was first introduced to butoh in the mid-1980s, it was shrouded in myth and very, very difficult to find. The network of teachers and artists seemed to exist underground, known only to those who pursued butoh through a complicated network of personal connections. Most of the teachers and artists were concentrated in Japan or Europe. In the United States, there were a handful of butoh artists who brought the art form from Japan. For instance, on the East Coast, Maureen Fleming taught and performed solo work in New York City; and on the West Coast Koichi and Hiroko Tamano of Berkeley, California, taught and choreographed for Harupin-Ha, their Bay Area-based dance company; and in Seattle, Joan Laage was teaching and performing.

Outside of these singular opportunities in the United States, a larger framework that an aspiring student could plug into and learn, simply did not exist.

My first experience with butoh was in 1985, in Ohio. At the time, I was a peace-punk performance artist, studying contemporary dance and arts administration at Antioch College. My teacher, Professor Dimi Reber, took us to see Sankai Juku on their second U.S. tour. The company's timeless use of space and theatrical grandeur was a revelation. Here was something utterly new, different, and fascinating. It was a feeling of wonder that many people experience at their first butoh performance.

Professor Reber later invited Maureen Fleming to teach a week-long residency at Antioch College. Through Fleming's instruction, we were introduced to a new interpretation of the Mind/Body Connection – an original combination of alchemy with movement styles from both Ohno Kazuo and Min Tanaka. For this young dancer, Maureen Fleming's workshop was an epiphany.

What began as my personal journey to study butoh in the late 1980s ended up manifesting as the San Francisco Butoh Festival in the 1990s. Simply put, I wanted to study butoh and was

unable to go to Japan, so I designed a multi-week festival in which one could learn, watch, participate in, and discuss butoh dance in a guided forum in San Francisco.

The roots of the festival were in San Francisco's vibrant DIY (do-it-yourself) scene of the early 1990s. I was just out of college and self-producing dance performances with other independent artists. The relaxed atmosphere, inexpensive living, and collection of talent in the Bay Area was especially conducive to DIY initiatives. If you had an idea, you just had to do it. This period bypassed the traditional performance model of producer/presenter/artist in lieu of the artist as self-presenter model. And so, a lot of performance spaces and art galleries popped up in people's living rooms, garages, and loft spaces. Artists congregated for specific projects. Community was the buzzword. Vision was our currency. Local funders were generally supportive of these programs, which gave seed money to local arts companies and independent spaces.

Out of this climate emerged Dance-Network (formerly d-net), an independent artist-run organization founded in 1992 by Takami (Mochizuki Craddock) and myself. From 1992 to 1996, we produced dance concerts of our work, and showcases for others. We sponsored low-cost workshops in fundraising, publicity, and documentation to equip independent artists with the skills essential for self-production. Our mission was to empower the artist-administrator and to promote dialogue and practice among artists and communities worldwide.

When I took my fascination with butoh dance to my d-net partner, Takami, she hadn't heard of it but appreciated the connection to Japan. Unbeknownst to her, at the time, and coincidentally, she had a personal connection to the artists of Asbestos-kan through a dance teacher from her youth. Fortunately, Takami's connections to Japan established our credibility with the primary artists in butoh. She traveled to Japan to meet with people, and she worked diligently to convince people to trust our unknown project. To engage the support of the Japanese Consulate, Takami took a book about butoh with her to a meeting with the Consulate General.

Also significant was Takami's tutelage about Japanese culture. Takami schooled me in the cross-cultural aspects of presenting our guest artists, which was quite different from American standards. My history was in the scrappy world of performance art, punk, and the Lower East Side. I knew how to put on a show with few resources. Takami added panache and class to our presentation style. She translated everything and hosted artists. She alone elevated the experience for the artists so that they would endorse our project and return to perform or teach.

I focused my energy on the design of the festival, cultivating American partners, fundraising, and working with critics to better understand butoh. Between the two of us, we compelled support for our project one conversation at a time. When we started out, neither one of us expected our audacious scheme to mushroom into a 501(c)3 with an international profile, a dedicated student base, and critical acclaim.

The San Francisco Butoh Festival was launched as a one-week event; due to the overwhelming success of the early years, the festival quickly grew to three weeks every summer. Each season, audiences and participants saw performances in proscenium and outdoor settings; took workshops and master classes with venerable artists; discussed butoh's history and future directions in symposia; and (when available) performed student concerts directed by guest artists. Every year, 1,500–2,000 people were exposed to, and directly participated in butoh dance through the festival. Our goals were to shatter myths through education, to build bridges of communication between artists of different cultures, and to nurture the American spirit of butoh. But where did it all come from?

Tapping into the zeitgeist: the roots of the San Francisco Butoh Festival

In the 1980s, Sankai Juku was perhaps the most visible butoh company outside of Japan. Sankai Juku first toured their breathtaking works in the United States in 1984, at the invitation of the Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles. During their performance, the dancers hung from a building, suspended in the air by a rope tied around their ankles. While performing in Seattle, one of the dancers fell to his death. This singular, tragic event ripped through the international arts community, and further deepened butoh's enigmatic reputation as the Dance of Darkness. When the company toured their next piece, several years later, the audiences were considerably larger.

Three years before the launch of the first SF Butoh Festival in 1995, I approached Bay Area theaters with the idea of presenting butoh in their programs, and immediately ran into two myths: (1) that audiences weren't interested in butoh, and (2) butoh dance was all the same – slow, painful, dark. It quickly became apparent that the genre of butoh was misunderstood and readily dismissed by the established art world. Presenters did not see the value of taking any risks when presenting butoh artists. Critics didn't have a strong handle on how to write about it. Because of its underground status, the myth of exotic Orientalism persisted. And yet, when I went to a butoh performance I saw more people in the audience, not less. It was apparent that a mainstream audience for butoh was growing. The San Francisco Butoh Festival was designed to fill that void, to dispel myths, and to explore the trends developing within the butoh genre.

The lineage of Bay Area butoh starts with resident butoh masters Koichi and Hiroko Tamano. Koichi Tamano was born near the Ooi River in Shimada, Shizuoka. In 1964, at the age of 18, he began studying butoh with Hijikata Tatsumi at Asbestos-kan. Tamano's first performance was *Barario* (Rose Colored Dance) in 1965. He studied with Hijikata for 10 years, earning the title "bow-legged Nijinsky." Koichi and his wife, Hiroko, danced in Hijikata's company in the 1960s and 1970s before emigrating to Berkeley, California.

Since 1978, the Tamanos have been the root and foundation of the butoh movement on the West Coast. When they emigrated to the Bay Area, the Tamanos brought with them Harupin-Ha, a company founded by Hijikata, as well as Hijikata's style of butoh. Per Yafonne's interpretation of the term, "Harupin-Ha" refers to Manchuria and literally means "a studying station from Asia to Europe, a place of journey for mixed cultures" (Yafonne 2000). Harupin-Ha have performed through Japan, France, Germany, Mexico, and the United States. They have collaborated with the Japanese musician Kitaro on several occasions. Through this work, the Tamanos cultivated a new generation of American butoh dancers infused with the unruly energy of California. Many Bay Area artists attribute the start of their careers to the Tamanos, including Shinichi "Momo" Koga and Inkboat, Leigh Evans, Kinji Hayashi, and Molly Barrons. Thanks to their influence, we could tap into a ready-made audience here in the Bay Area.

Early in the process of developing the festival, Hiroko Tamano invited Takami and I over to her home to drink tea, watch videos from Asbestos-kan, and learn about butoh. It was the first of many such encounters with first- and second-generation butoh artists. We were officially part of the global butoh family.

If we were to bring butoh to a wider audience, it had to be done with the support of our artistic elders. The Tamanos, Akira Kasai, Yumiko Yoshioka, Akiko Motofuji, Katsura Kan, Setsuko Yamada, and others played a guiding role in the development of the festival with information, resources, connections, and help. In the first festival, it was Maureen Fleming who suggested that we add "San Francisco" to, what was at the time, just the "Butoh Festival," thus sparking a trend of identifying butoh festivals by city.

With the evangelical assertion that butoh is one of the most important artistic innovations in the latter half of the 20th century, Takami and I sought out and cultivated partnerships with

other cultural emissaries connected to Asian culture, such as the Japan Foundation in New York, and the Portland International Arts Festival, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and AN Creative in Tokyo, Japan.

With the help and blessing of these leaders, the San Francisco Butoh Festival became a hub for people from around the world to study, perform, and digest butoh dance. Through this network of first- and second-generation artists, we found and brought some of the field's top artists to the United States to teach and perform. Most of the artists we presented made their American and Bay Area debuts at the SF Butoh Festival.

In the early days of the festival, pre-internet, I (snail-)mailed promotional brochures to community centers, arts institutions, individuals, and higher education learning centers in the United States, Japan, Mexico, Canada, and Europe. Most of the addresses were found in the back pages of *Contact Quarterly*. The first year, we didn't know if anyone would be interested in the festival; but then the registrations started to come in from around the world.

Takami was with the San Francisco Butoh Festival for four seasons, after which time she left to concentrate on her own art. Takami founded MO-BU Dance, started a dance school, and continues to teach and perform locally and abroad. Molly Barrons, a student of the Tamasos and choreographer/performer, came aboard the San Francisco Butoh Festival as the Associate Producer after Takami left. Molly was invaluable to the continuation of the festival in every respect.

The San Francisco Butoh Festival began as a guerrilla operation, then established itself as the premier butoh festival in the United States with funding from the National Endowment of the Arts, the San Francisco Arts Commission, Grants for the Arts, private foundations, businesses, and individuals. The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts were two constant partners that provided key resources for our symposia and outdoor performances.

Curating the SF Butoh Festival: themes and trends

The first San Francisco Butoh Festival debuted in August 1995 at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater; scheduled to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombings in Japan. Despite the timing, the inaugural San Francisco Butoh Festival set out to bust two myths about butoh, namely that all butoh was the same, and that it was a direct reaction to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when in fact it is a more complex history.

The inaugural festival presented the work of four radically different artists. They were Koi-chi Tamano (Hijikata-style), Oguri (Tanaka-style),¹ the classical grace of Maureen Fleming, and butoh pioneer Akira Kasai whose style was influenced by eurhythmics. The artists performed radically different works, taught workshops, and participated in a symposium moderated by Alexandra Munroe. The inaugural festival, with the theme "Butoh's Prism," demonstrated that butoh was more individualized and complex than first imagined. Any doubts about butoh's appeal were quickly dashed. We sold out the run in a 440-seat theater. On opening night people stretched out down the 60 foot hallway out the door to the parking lot. The energy was palpable and it was clear, butoh had arrived in San Francisco en force with all its intensity and conflicts.

Author Charles Boone reviewed the inaugural festival for *P-Form Magazine* (Winter 1995/96), wherein he captured a heated exchange during Akira Kasai's performance of "My Own Apocalypse."

Any concerns I harbored about butoh lapsing so soon after its inception into a set of too familiar practices – white body paint, grimaces – were blown away by Maureen Fleming's and Akira Kasai's breathtaking performances. They broke every rule of the

genre, demonstrated the breadth and depth of present-day butoh, and provided views of their own electrifying artistry.

His review continues to describe a confrontation between performers on opening night. During Akira Kasai's performance, "one audience member who decided become part of the show was immediately taken on as a gladly accepted participant. When someone else . . . noisily heckled, Kasai absorbed this hostile energy, including it as part of his show."

The exchange happened in Japanese, so only a portion of the audience understood what was said. The heckler had shouted abusive insults and condemned the performance, saying "That's not butoh." To which Kasai incorporated his fury into his uninhibited dance, proclaiming out loud "This is my Blood. This is my Life." The authenticity of that heated exchange was at once exhilarating and shocking. The air was electric; clearly, we tapped into the zeitgeist of butoh, here in San Francisco.

At the festival, we learned that like American postmodern dance and release technique, butoh is a deeply organic art form whose central principle is to "make your own dance." Year after year, in the workshops, students were encouraged to shed our ideas of traditional butoh, instead asking the question, "what is American butoh?" We learned that the very point of butoh is to encourage iconoclastic, individual expression. We were encouraged to find our own dance, be true to our own spirits. And yet, within this level of self-expression, butoh is the act of "stripping all things down to their bare essentials" (Yafonne 2000).

Leigh Evans, American butoh artist and yogini, remarked in an article published in *Asian Week* that butoh

seems to express what the person is at the root, and the expression of the underbelly of society . . . what are the things that don't see the light of day, things that are buried? For the Japanese, it's like the image of the crippled rising from the mud. The images for Americans are totally different. We have a different set of circumstances . . . butoh allows me to go deeply inside of myself and listen, and allow the yearnings, desires, and experiences to come forth in a way that none of the other forms I've worked with have.

Yafonne 2000

Like some American postmodern dance and release technique, butoh relies on imagery to source movement, and places equal importance on the inner sense of movement and precise physicality. SU-EN, a Nordic butoh artist and guest in our 2002 festival, described her process:

In my work I always focus on the body as a living body, an organism and a living material. This body will be transformed, and this starting point for movement . . . The challenge of the body – mental, physical, and existential – is the tool. The pain must be real; the pulling of gravity must be real. I am deeply devoted to the quality of movement and the true experience of the body.

Yafonne 2002

The San Francisco Butoh Festival artists came from Japan, Thailand, Mexico, Argentina, Sweden, Germany, Canada, and the United States. Each artist brought new complexity to the definition of butoh with their challenging, and often breathtaking dances, making it difficult to generalize what butoh was, and is. Their performances demonstrated that butoh is a spirit; an energetic force bound and released with exquisite physical control. Butoh is dynamic, ugly, transcendent, powerful, enigmatic, funny, absurd.

1995: The Inaugural San Francisco Butoh Festival

BUTOH PRISM
Program I: Maureen Fleming EROS
Akira Kasai MY OWN APOCALYPSE

Program II: Oguri WATERS
Koichi Tamano A LAG OF TIME - IMPREGNATED WIND

Butoh: From Ashes to Enigma, A Symposium
Master Classes and a 5-Day Intensive Workshop

"Butoh in essence is a revolutionary act. It's very much a trip into taboo land. It cracks the body open and strips away acquired social habits to expose what is subliminal, unspoken, forbidden. It leaves you naked inside and out... What does butoh discover in that empty body shell? Ecstacy, horror, violence, and eroticism - often at the same time - but also lightness, luminosity, and focus."

- Rita Felciano, review in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *Without Steps: A trip into the taboo land of butoh.* (June 7-13, 1995)

1996: WOMEN IN BUTOH

Superb artists illuminate S.F. Butoh Festival

By Allan Ulrich
www.sfncc.com

CHANCES are that in the 200 years of its existence the Moscow Ensemble in 13 Minor has never been used as strongly as it was Thursday evening at Fort Mason's Cowell Theatre. A portion of this most revered of world musical masterpieces accompanied two women entering from opposite sides of the stage. The pair glided slowly to the center, each performer clinging to precise intervals men's shoes and hose. One response, I suppose would be "Kitty election and I'll have them ready for you Thursday."

Another would be, "Welcome to the second annual San Francisco Butoh Festival," where each imagery floods the stage regularly in the world of "ankly butoh" (dance of darkness), the post-World War II, postmodern Japanese movement form, logic often yields to a more profound coherence. And the local festival, which sold out last year, reports to achieve another precipitous this weekend. The festival, which is presented by dance (dance network), runs through Sunday evening with two different programs, the project is equally emerging as one of the most important events on the local scene calendar.

After this year's festival and the first edition, it's apparent there's a lot more to butoh than one sees in the major Japanese touring companies. And, if your idea of this species of dance has been formed by the self-conscious, even self-parodying extravaganzas of Sakai Juko, then consider yourself un-orientalized in this regard, you don't really know butoh.

Butoh can also be funny, or, at least whimsical. It took Thursday's audience a while to see the humor in the first section of Motoh's "Ame Tameki" (Haven and Earth). A spotlight searches for the performer all over the stage, while (on stage) Joseph Strouse, "Artist's Life" Waltz constantly lists. What the spot finally focuses on is a body part - you're not sure at first whether it's an arm or a leg. This line, which juts imperiously from a figure outlined in black, assumes its own life and is soon complemented by its mate in what seems like ballet routines, including tucks and moules de jantes.

The first generation of butoh artists restored details from Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku to their movement plans. And imagery, rather than linkage of stage, is the essential element. Yet, the form is too neurotic, too driven (and much too young) to speak (in do some reviews) of traditional butoh and its affiliates. Perhaps the paradox is that while butoh is intensely concerned with the self, even at moments that require extreme virtuosity, it is, in a curious way, selfless.

Motoh's re-enters in black pleated skirt. She is 68 and a bit round, but her body follows the owner's will in a severe sequence of raised arms and small, precise steps. A metallic sound from the Station as another woman (Hiroko Yamano) surrounds Motoh on a small box and the older performer seems to spring from her colleague's form.

Yamano's solo sequence, involving slow and purposeful balancing on a platform, looks more conventional than what preceded it. But the final presence of Tami Hata crawling downward, while acrid smoke fills our nostrils and ac-

rid music fills our ears, is confrontational and even risible. After the festivity with the footwork (one is free to interpret, perhaps it's an abbreviation of Western culture), Motoh saves the rest of the 45-minute piece for herself.

And it's a ravishing close: Now in flowing ivory, she launches a promenade while a forest of white ropes descends slowly from the flue. The music is Victoria de los Angeles singing "Bathers" from "Songs of the Aegean," and as Motoh reaches for the cords and gathers them, the mood is serene and joyful, and the moment is unforgettable.

Yamano follows a more austere path in her 45-minute "Kinshahi Oden" (Dancing on the Stairway), set to intermittent outbursts of Masaki Akawa's score. The performer isolates limbs, crumples in a fetal position, hugs across the stage and confers the trajectory of classic drama on these maneuvers. Yamano's technical control is admirable. Her purpose is obscure.

This program will be repeated Saturday at 8 p.m. in Hiroko Tamano and Soga Kobayashi perform Friday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m.

For tickets to the S.F. Butoh Festival call (415) 392-4400.

San Francisco Chronicle review June 14, 1996

Figure 33.1 Images from the 1995, 1996, and 1997 San Francisco Butoh Festival. Courtesy of Brechin Flournoy.

Akira Kasai, Katsura Kan, Yumiko Yoshioka, Setsuko Yamada, Anzu Furukawa, Diego Piñon, and Hiroko Tamano became the core curricular teachers – as it were. All the teachers we featured at the festival were outstanding. To name only a few seems a disservice to them, especially since many other people contributed their expertise to the event; however, there were some teachers whose style and movement language resonated deeply with our participants. The teachers were also invested in helping us to create our own style of butoh.

These artists could see the seeds of something growing here, and so gradually, as the seasons progressed, the festival started to include more opportunities for younger artists to showcase their own choreography, and to perform with established artists. For example, in 1998, Akira Kasai directed Takami, Megan Nicely, Kristin Leith, and myself in *Exusiai*, which was presented in partnership with Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Katsura Kan returned to the festival several times to teach and perform. In 2001, Kan directed several Bay Area artists that studied with previous Butoh Festival workshops to perform a group piece on the mainstage. Anzu Furukawa taught choreography study. Setsuko Yamada directed a student performance. Hiroko and Koichi Tamano directed a student choreography that performed for free on Ocean Beach.

One thing we understood is that butoh is not a fixed entity. It is in constant evolution. And so, as the festival evolved, and our collective knowledge deepened, my curatorial strategy shifted from historical inquiry to the cultivation of advancing participants from the classroom to the performance space. In search of transcendent performances, the San Francisco Butoh Festival sought to curate the top butoh artists, as well as to nurture emerging talents, and to grow the American spirit of butoh (although Akira Kasai, asserted – in his classes, and in personal conversation – that “hip-hop was American butoh”). Every festival and event was considered from a strategic point of view and incorporated indoor and outdoor locations, large and small venues. As a dance student, myself, I was particularly interested in creating a space that encouraged experimentation and total immersion in butoh. In addition to the performances, there were symposiums and week-long workshops and master classes. Every year, the festival had a free, outdoor performance. These curated events frequently featured the professional artists in our student base. Additionally, we commissioned local artists to collaborate on performance installations to expand our reach in the public’s imagination.

Each year, the festival focused on a different theme to more fully explore the history, influences, and future of butoh. The 1996 Women in Butoh festival featured Akiko Motofuji, Setsuko Yamada, Hiroko Tamano, and Saga Kobayashi performing original works before a rapt audience. Motofuji’s work in the San Francisco Butoh Festival was named one of the Top 10 Dance Performances of the Year in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. This recognition marked a change in how butoh was perceived. No longer a fringe element in the Bay Area art world, butoh was recognized as a major artistic development alongside performances by the San Francisco Ballet and other high-profile dance artists. In addition to performances at Fort Mason’s Cowell Theater, we held a symposium at the Asian Art Museum, a panel discussion with the artists, and a screening of short films from the Tatsumi Hijikata Archives. At the Kabuki Theater (co-sponsored by San Francisco Cinematheque and the Asian Art Museum), we held another film screening from the Tatsumi Hijikata Archives, introduced by Motofuji.

The 1997 festival, entitled German Arts and Culture in Butoh, featured Akira Kasai and Yumiko Yoshioka in her American debut. The Asian Art Museum once again hosted a symposium, co-sponsored by the Goethe Institut, with keynote speaker Sondra Fraleigh, as well as a panel discussion moderated by Yukihiro Goto with Akira Kasai, Yumiko Yoshioka, Delta Ra’i founder of Tatoeba Theatre–Danse Grotesque (Germany), and screenings of film excerpts from the Tatsumi Hijikata Archives.

Global butoh was the theme of the 1998 festival, which brought Katsura Kan from Thailand, Yan-Shu, Masahide Omori, and Abe “M” aria from Japan, Gustavo Collini Sartor from Argentina, Diego Piñon from Mexico, and Kokoro Dance from Canada.

1998: GLOBAL BUTOH

Posters designed by Barbara Pataton

Symposium Global Butoh
A Tribute to Tatsumi Hijikata
Sunday, August 16, 2pm
 Trustees Auditorium
 Asian Art Museum, Golden Gate Park
 Free by Museum Admission
 Free Parking

Keynote speaker:
 Gustavo Collini Sartor (Argentina)
 plus panel discussion with guests of the festival & video excerpts.
 Moderated by Rita Feliciano
 Free performance by Kokoro Dance at 2pm



Performances - Ft. Mason's Cowell Theater
 See the world's leading Butoh artists in their ancestral U.S. habitat!
Program 1. Butoh's Edge
 Thurs. & Sat., August 20 & 22, 8pm
 Katsura Kan (Thailand)
 Ake "Hana" (Japan)
 with live music by Larry Gonzalez
 Yan-Shu (Japan)

Program 2. Butoh's Roots
 Fri., August 21, 8pm
 Sun., August 23, 7pm
 Masahide Onoz (Japan)
 Gustavo Collini Sartor (Argentina)
 with live music by Sylvia Nakbach & Michael Knapp

One night only!
 4-ret and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts present
Performance by Akira Kasai (Japan)
 in collaboration with
 Carl Stone, Jaume Jugal, Takami, Brechlin Flournoy, Kristin Lemburg, Megan Nicvly, Akiko Nohsaka

Fri. August 28, 8pm
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater
 700 Howard at 3rd St.
 Tickets: (415) 978-ARTS
 and at BACS outlets
 \$13/\$17 Box Office open Tues. - Sun.,
 11am-5pm. Student/senior/group
 discounts available. No refunds or
 exchanges except in the case of a
 canceled performance.



Special Events
Free Outdoor Performances by Kokoro Dance (Canada)
 Sat. August 15, 3pm
 Ocean Beach at Lincoln St.
 (across from the Beach Club)
 Sat. August 22, 1pm
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Garden, 700 Howard at 3rd St.

One night only! Performance by Diego Pinon (Mexico)
 Mon. August 24, 8pm
 Theater Tegen both Square
 2840 Harpole St. at Florida
 Tickets: (415) 621-7978
 \$10-\$12 sliding scale

Master Classes
 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum
Akira Kasai (Japan)
 Monday, August 17
Gustavo Collini Sartor (Argentina)
 Tuesday, August 18
 Both classes 7-10pm, \$25 each
 To register call: (415) 352-1190



Posters designed by Kevin Clarke

1999: The Flower of Butoh

Technique, Choreography study, & the first incorporation of young American Butoh artists.

Performances at ODC Theater

Master Butoh Artists



Anzu Furukawa (Japan)
 Thursday & Saturday August 5 & 7, 7pm, \$28



Kochu Tamano and Harupin Ha (Shelley CO)
 Thursday & Saturday August 5 & 7, 7pm, \$28



One Night Stand with Bay Area Butoh Artists
 Leigh Evans, Judith Kanjwara, Collapsing Silence
 Friday August 6, 8pm, \$15

Butoh Bash & Video Cafe
 co-created by Lisa Adams and Brechlin Flournoy
Sunday, August 8
 Join us for a full day marathon of Butoh events!
 Choose from either the matinee or evening performances. Video-calls is open throughout the day.

Program 1. Mid-Day Madness Matinee 1:30-6pm.
 \$15 admission includes instant gratification
 1:30 pm: Stand Performance: King Haruhiko
 2:30 pm: Matinee Performance: Dappo Butoh (Seattle WA), Megan Nicvly (San Francisco), Angela Anderson (San Francisco), Benjamin Performance Group (Seattle)
 3:30 pm: Loft Performance: Deanna Anderson, King Haruhiko, Tamara Farrowworth & Aochi Baker
 4:30 pm: Matinee Performance: Brechlin Flournoy (San Francisco), John Doyle (Atlanta), Heidi Barnes (San Francisco), Kazuo Haka (Santa Fe, New Mexico)

Program 2. Twilight Toast Evening Performances 6:30-10pm
 \$15 admission includes instant gratification
 6:30pm Installation Loft Performance: Seth Ellen
 7:30pm Matinee Performance: Brechlin Flournoy (San Francisco)
 8:30pm Matinee Performance: Brechlin Flournoy (San Francisco)
 Repeat of 6:30pm performance

ODC Theater: 1035 Larkin St @ Shelley, San Francisco
Box Office: (415) 383-9979 or www.odctheater.com
 Advance ticket purchase strongly advised.
 Seating is extremely limited!!!
 By donation for students and seniors.
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2000: Large-scale Works

d-net [dance-network] presents



SAN FRANCISCO BUTOH FESTIVAL

AUGUST 2-6
Theater Artaud
 Tickets: (415) 621-7297 | TDCUnion Square
 www.bkartsweb.com

Four notable performances:
 Bontoro Dance (Kansai) July 29, 1pm
 World Butoh Center for the Arts Garden

Anzu Furukawa's VERMINDS
 Kochu & Hiroko Tamano's MALUPE
 Setuko Yamada
 Shiroko Momo Koga's
 Leigh Evans

Special Workshop with Katsura KAN, March 2000*

"Rethink your body in the context of your aura region."
 Stillness. Rhythmic Patterns. Improvisation. Range of Movement Qualities

Katsura Kan aims to create a higher quality of conscious barriers to reach our pre-cognitive identity, which we all hold deep within us." Although Kan respects and deeply understand the foundation that pioneer Butoh dance Tatsumi Hijikata created, Kan's strategy is to develop a form of Butoh that exists beyond Japan. " If the roots are different, so is the flower. "

*This description is an example of the types of classes that d-net (dance-network) produced in the off-season.

Figure 33.2 Images from the 1998, 1999, and 2000 San Francisco Butoh Festival. Courtesy of Brechlin Flournoy.

In the wake of the global butoh program, two honors were achieved that marked the first time butoh had been recognized by the critical community. I was awarded the San Francisco Bay Guardian GOLDIE Award for Dance – one of two dance artists awarded for 1999. And the prestigious Isadora Duncan Dance Committee bestowed an award for “Sustained Achievement in the Arts to the Festival” in recognition of our contribution to the arts. This marked the first time, the IZZIEs recognized butoh, and its role in dance history. Since then, local butoh artists have been more readily included in the IZZIEs: Koichi and Hiroko Tamano were recognized with a Sustained Achievement Award in 2005 and Shinichi Koga’s INKBOAT has been awarded several IZZIEs over the years.

The 1999 festival, *Butoh Bash & Video Café*, included a full-day marathon of butoh performances with Bay Area and U.S.-based butoh artists and companies such as Leigh Evans, Judith Kajiwarra, and Dappin’ Butoh. The Video Café showcased a large collection of curated video performances on a loop. Anzu Furukawa and Koichi Tamano and Harupin Ha also performed. In 2000, the focus was on group works in butoh. Featured artists were VERWANDLUNGSAMT, Anzu Furukawa’s German company, HARUPIN-HA, and Setsuko Yamada. Also featured were new works by Leigh Evans and Shinichi Momo Koga.

Ironically, while butoh was enjoying growing popularity in the United States, butoh was declining in popularity in Japan. It was considered old fashioned, and audiences were dwindling. During the evolution from one generation to the next, Japanese artists eschewed the butoh label and referred to their work as “Contemporary Japanese Dance,” “New Wave,” and “Post-butoh.” Younger, predominantly Japanese artists had taken the lessons of butoh and gone on to create their own style of dance with elements of American pop culture and hip-hop into their art. This was most evident in the performance of Abe M’aria, whose raw, visceral energy was purely physical – no story, just energy – and in Nibroll, a multi-media collective from Tokyo, Japan. The traditional images of butoh were blown apart by coherent/incoherent, chaotic spurts of pure force.

As a curator, I had many discussions with artists and critics about how to present this evolution to American audiences, who were still embracing traditional butoh and had a different understanding of the term “contemporary dance.” These discussions were reflected in the 2001 festival theme, “Japanese New Wave and Traditional Butoh.” I balanced the audience’s expectations by presenting artists who excelled at the classical style of butoh, while creating daring new programs that posed questions about butoh’s artistic future. The festival featured Op.Eklekt (Kyoto), Yan-Shu (Tokyo), NIBROLL (Tokyo), a solo performance by Kei Takei alongside “classic” butoh by Katsura Kan and Diego Piñon. We also held discussion with the artists about the future of butoh in Japan, and its influence on other artforms, moderated by Yukihiro Goto.

The 2002 festival with the theme *Classic to Contemporary* highlighted three sub-themes. “Past to Future: Women in Butoh” featured SU-EN (Sweden), Kathy Rose (filmmaker/ animator, New York), and Hiroko Tamano. “American Butoh: New Visions” included Ledoh’s SALT FARM (SF), Michael Sakamoto (LA), P.A.N (Seattle), Shinichi Momo Koga (Berkeley), Molly Barrons (SF), RK Corral (LA), Megan V. Nicely (SF), Kinji Hayashi’s HUMAN SEWING MACHINE (Oakland), and Helena Thevenot (Miami). “American Butoh II,” a series of free, outdoor performances included Dean Street Foo Dance (NY), John Doyle’s Medicine Wheel Dance Project (Sausalito, CA), Deborah Butler (MA), Red Junk-et Butoh Company (UT), and Julie Bectum Gillum (NC).

To summarize, the curatorial trajectory of the San Francisco Butoh Festival began with the individuality of the first- and second generation-butoh artists. Then progressed to showcase younger Japanese artists working with “post-butoh” ideas, and ultimately, in our final season, the festival put a spotlight on the evolution of American butoh. The questions we posed changed from “What is butoh?” to “What is the future of butoh? Does it exist anymore? If so, how does it speak to us?”

2001: JAPANESE NEW WAVE & TRADITIONAL BUTOH

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 • NIBROKI (Osaka)
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 *Special Wednesday Night Discount (see Tickets)

Traditional Butoh
Katsura Kan (THAILAND)
Diego Prieto (MEXICO)
 Friday, August 3, 8pm
 "We can't remain, but not pin down, that something primordial is going out through the pores of the dancer's skin." —Rita Falckano DANCE VIEW

A Rare Solo Performance by Kei Takei (JAPAN)
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 "She's banging on the bottom doors of the soul."
 —Jan Ann Aronson, DANCE MAGAZINE

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 A new generation of artists: **Ledoh's SALT FARM (SF)**, **Michael Sakamoto (LA)**, **RK Corral (BAY AREA/LA)**, **Helena Thevenot (MAMI, P.A.N. SEATTLE)** plus installation/performance by **Human Sewing Machine** and **King Hayashi**
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DESIGN: Kevin Clarke PHOTO: Helene Tamano



"Butoh Festival, having succeeded, to wind down," By Jeanne Fogler

Alameda Newspaper Group, August 2002

"After this year's run, the festival will be closing shop... In the festival's early years, it was geared toward bringing in [master artists who hadn't yet broken into the U.S. market]. Later the event grew to represent a vision of butoh as a broader art form used in different ways around the world... The festival's accomplishing what it set out to do... [Brechin] Flounoy says the event began with a very specific purpose, "to create a solid conduit of teachers in Japan and students in the United States," and that now has firmly been established. This is a sign, Flounoy says, that the festival has been a success."

Figure 33.3 Images from the 2001 and 2002 San Francisco Butoh Festival. Courtesy of Brechin Flounoy.

Popularizing butoh in the United States

Once established, the San Francisco Butoh Festival was recognized by the media, funders, and artists to be the largest and most influential butoh festival – the *de facto* center for butoh in the United States. We pushed the understanding of butoh and its significance forward in many ways.

From 1995 to 2001, we were the only annual butoh festival of its kind in the United States and the sole American presenter that provided consistent training with master artists. Over the course of eight seasons, 105 dancers from around the world performed on our stages for thousands of people. We connected an international community of practitioners and enthusiasts by making butoh more accessible and by strengthening the connections between students and teachers with which students had a strong rapport. To achieve this, Dance-Network produced 2–3 technique and performance workshops per year, in addition to the annual festival.

Dance-Network became a recognized authority on butoh dance, and the “go-to” organization for information and referrals. Major performing arts institutions such as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and media outlets, including international publications, and the *New York Times*, utilized our expertise to connect them with artists and ideas about butoh. We coordinated tours for butoh artists to universities and art festivals internationally. We inspired similar butoh festivals in Portland, Oregon, Seattle and Olympia, Washington, San Diego, New York, Thailand, and other places. Sixty percent of our students and audience traveled to San Francisco to participate in the festival. The students ranged from beginning dancers to non-dancers to professional artists. They came from every region of the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Each year we saw a growing percentage of students return on a regular basis to continue their studies in butoh and then take the information back to their communities and students. It was a proliferation that lasted for the eight years, and continues to resonate.

Through our program, we took butoh out of the shadows and made it accessible to a great many people. Through one-on-one discussions and symposia, we educated the audience and media to look at butoh in a critical way, beyond prejudices and assumptions. Through ongoing cultivation of funders and donors, we assigned monetary value to butoh and challenged the myth that butoh was a fringe art form unworthy of support.

Many of the bonds that were formed through the festival carried into the 21st century, long after we closed our doors in 2002. The legacy of the San Francisco Butoh Festival is found in the connections that remain between artists, students, and presenters to this day. For the past decade, international butoh artists have continued to teach and perform in the Bay Area. Bob Webb’s “Bay Area Butoh” continues to stoke the flame with open showcases for butoh artists several times a year. The Thailand Butoh Festival just celebrated its 15th season. While discussing butoh and its past, present, and future with Akira Kasai, he made a statement in a private conversation that sticks with me to this day: “butoh is not an art form; it is a phenomenon. It moves around the world and lands in the place where people need it most.”

Rachel Howard, dance critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*, wrote,

Year after year, the festival had seldom been less than mind-blowing. It’s brought together Japanese greats and American upstarts, and looked at this difficult-to-define, post-WWII form from some surprising angles, turning up links to German Expressionism, say and venturing into the relatively uncharted terrain of “post-butoh.”

Howard 2002, 20A

Everything must come to an end

After nine major productions and numerous smaller projects, the San Francisco Butoh Festival shuttered its doors in 2002. Initially I had wanted to end the Butoh Festival and re-open the festival with a different title that better reflected this new evolution in arts. However, the political climate in post-9/11 America made it difficult and expensive for foreign artists to come to the States. At the same time, the Bay Area economy was ravaged by the first dotcom boom that ushered in a wave of gentrification. The sudden influx of new money pushed the real estate prices up, leading to the closure of many theaters, rising expenses, and a mass exodus of local artists to other cities and countries. It was time to let the festival energy move to a new place, where it is needed most.

We cracked some thick glass ceilings. Due to general misunderstandings about butoh, prior to our work, the critical community didn't consider butoh to be on a par with classical dance or other well-known dance companies, with the exception of Sankai Juku. Butoh performances were difficult to get reviewed. Foremost among the challenges was convincing critics that butoh wasn't a fringe artform that appealed only to a few. Our large houses helped to change their perception about butoh's popularity, as did the ongoing discussions with critics.

As the Founding Director and Curator, I consider myself the gardener in this larger story about the butoh tree. Through the San Francisco Butoh Festival, we succeeded to bring butoh out of the shadows and to connect the international community in an indelible way. Years after the Festival's closure, new butoh festivals are being planned around the world; artists and students are connected across international borders; a new generation of contemporary dance artists and butoh artists are emerging. It is a beautiful thing to see.

Note

- 1 At the time of the festival, these artists were self-identifying as butoh artists. Only later did the post-butoh conversation come up. How they present themselves now is beyond my experience.

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