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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance

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Wrecking Butoh

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536132-50>

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Published online on: 28 Aug 2018

How to cite :- Bronwyn Preece. 28 Aug 2018, *Wrecking Butoh from: The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance* Routledge

Accessed on: 19 Jan 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536132-50>

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WRECKING BUTOH

Dancing poetic shores

Bronwyn Preece

i dance butoh. i write poetry. butoh dances me and my pen across page, through performance stage(s): a mnemonic limb of the unfurling process: embodying the making, the creating, the understanding . . .

the scribing of [a] deepening access

For two weeks, in June/July 2016, I participated in Kokoro Dance Theatre's¹ 21st Annual Wreck Beach Butoh intensive in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The yearly event – a celebrated Canadian butoh dance institution – spearheaded by choreographic dance pioneers Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget, gathers together a panoply of participants through an open call. The assembled group works together for nine days in-studio, five hours a day, then transfers the learned choreography to the tidal shores and waters of the Pacific west coast: Wreck Beach, for three one-hour long outdoor performances. The transition from floorboards to sands, windows to waves, air conditioning to the temporal temperaments of the conditions, and conditioning of white-painted body in/with the outdoor air is marked and molded by a motley crew of performers (human and other-than-human). This year's grouping of thirteen – including Hirabayashi and Bourget – engaged first-time to near-professional dancers. Relocating to Vancouver for the two-week period, leaving my off-grid remote island home, I fit into this assemblage – my third year consecutive year of participating – as a PhD student, a modern homesteader, improvisational performance artist, author, mother, and someone who moves through life with Wilson's Disease.

The language of my moving body, my body moving with others, within choreography, with and as site, evokes a raw, humbled, and sensuous poetic. Tufnell and Crickmay suggest that, "Writing in the wake of moving (or watching another move) brings the living, sensuous world of the body into our language" (2004, 63). I agree, translating and transcribing kinesthetic, synesthetic feeling into inked marks on paper: an invocation of a personalized *butoh-fu* – a calligraphy of symbols and synthesis, of interpretation, distillation, crystallization, metaphoric compound, and alchemized articulations in a non-linear (personal) pastiche of a contextual present. Immediately following each day of rehearsal and performance, I penned a poem.² References are specific and simultaneously open. The universal may be hidden in the local. The public within the individual.

The particulars may offer opportunities for wide-ranging interpretations, appropriations, and exegeses of meaning: equally inviting or distancing potential relevance for a reader. Their meaning is relative. *How do we calculate phonetic and semantic linguistic cartography? The distance between context? Where and who do we measure from?* The poetic details corresponded to choreographic elements, moments of struggle, snippets of instructions, geographic features, epiphanies, and the charting of a cultural/social/ecological landscape that met *through* dance the delicacies and relevance of dancing butoh on unceded Indigenous Traditional Territories, the Brexit vote, Full Moon and Summer Solstice, and the transitions from inner-city studio to vistaed panoramas. The poems are utterances of the seen and unseen, the sensed and the displayed, simultaneity and predicament. They are a form of “practiced vulnerability: a purposeful movement into liminality – the betwixt and between-ness – of the critical creative process” (Spry 2011, 167). The poems dwell in the liveness of the questions that butoh engages with, allows one to grapple with, through the practice. They are a form of critical inquiry.³ They are performances (unto) themselves. They exist as a palimpsest of the ephemeral: fixed. They are owned by none; written by one. The experience of one woman’s interpretations – in ensemble – inextricably linked to a larger whole, is embraced by the paradox of my pen trying to capture the moment(s) . . . always passing, already passed: the present of (shared) presence . . . *dancing butoh poetics*.

Brady remarks that poetry is tied to “the context of the immediate and the immanent, to the processes of ‘being there’ and sensual saturation, and to the art of the possible and not necessarily



Figure 49.1 butoh-as-i-as-butoh. Courtesy of the author.

the actual” (2005, 991). He continues, by suggesting that this might happen “in or out of what might seem to be an obvious historical or mythological context” (991). What I share with you here are the twelve poems penned immediately following each day. They *mythologize the [un]obvious*: her *storizing context*. They exist as raw testimonies, nascent coalescences, processual markers. They unknow the knowing concurrently knowledging the knowings of butoh. The first nine poems chart the in-studio sessions; the final three, the outdoor events. The weather, the temperature, and the climate always changing: these poems and accompanying photograph capture the spirit of the dance: without title, they linguistically dance butoh as a site-sensitive elucidation, an open offering . . .

1

dance like

you're at

war:

[my neuro-pathways
weave knots into
smooth-grained
floorboards]

fly

like a

butterfly, sting

like a bee –

(forget the choreography

non-linear pieces:

lyricism later)

less is more:

this is the

butoh way:

with lifted

(thinking)

hearts –

*even in this brick-
lined studio:*

three stories above

a downtown conglomerate

of XXX peep shows, panhandling

poverty, boarded storefronts

and consumer gentrification:

the theme is

always the same . . .

a mullioned window
frames

The Vogue's marquee:
RuPaul's Drag Show . . .

stretching time
and space, i
integrate the flashing
red as a (subliminal)
cross-dressing
nod to ohno:

his 103-year-old
spirit joining us
on this *full moon*,
on the *solstice*,

as we
gather fallen seeds,
lunge into
cumulous clouds
bump-and-
grind nutmeg,
whilst
see-
sawing off our
axis [pl. **axes** | 'aksēz |]

(both our own and today's earthly-lunar diad:
inseparable)

13 teeter-totter(er)s . . .

2

i am
a thread
of raw
silk carrying
the weight
of the
buddha (*world*)
in the palm
of my hand:
smiling
this the
sensual dance

of resistance:

*the flow
contained in
the point of
no dimensions*

dragging bone-
less body

across ground:

*total silence in
the dark it
was:*

hiding

amongst

shrouded arms:

*slowly is
always more
interesting . . .*

So Moove. . . .!!!

dancing over

and off

the edge:

*this is our now
[if you believe it]:*

barreled together
in a constant river
without accent –
we blow flowers from
can(n)ons, tackle
animal husbandry,
suck the inner tube
dry of the *Mother*

*of time that
breathes without
air*

and meet for
the first time
in a single
fingertip mudra

Potential Infinity . . .

now jump . . .

3

i am dancing
socrates'
lament:
losing what was/
is never used:

mind in body:

the underbelly
of the present:

reaching forward

arching back

a palimpsestic
ode scoured in
two sheets of
cardboard:

a prologue

for/of past fragments
traipsed through Time
in the
weeble-wobble
movements of
a shifting pivot
point:

carrying our [heavy]

*cargo like pack-
rat-in-drainpipe,*

we

cannot fly this coop . . .

but can re-
plant seeds in trees,
[a climatic change (of)
action]:
growing temporal chroniclers

because

at some point we

have to have

faith . . . in ourselves . . .

myself

i look in, i look up . . .

4

i am
the buddha-
 as-pedestrian:

breathing
orchid
oxygen (O₂) into
 the pieces of
 shit on the
 wheel of samsara:

focusing *this* lens
of engagement, the
 ordinary blurs:

an arboreal
aperture grows
trees on my shoulders:
 extending roots deep
 in the fields of my calves:

i become
an f-stop for feeling,
a shutter speed for
surrender, poised
as peripheral
polaroid, a wide-
angle for
(a darkroom's)
water: revealing
reflection and
absorption of self as
other (*precariously*
balanced/carried):
 rolling in
 the womb of and as
 (non-sexed)
 saline mother:

this is me:
 close to the earth:
bruised and
skinned alive,
 caressing the ground

this is me:
 we are this suffering
the process of
 (a) body in shared relation

this is we:

perched with (almost) articulated passion:
exhausted, devoted . . .

in process.

5

i am

(an) Atlas:

arms widening
to carry the
currency of
rolling, shifting
lines:

borders:

the poundage (£)
of economies of
choice:

my belly sinks

*this is the language
of éshappé*

my ego exfoliated

i spiral up

escaping

like smoke

(a signal):

bend my wings

at the elbow

and . . .

get tangled:

as if

suspended from

a clothesline:

i hang

in the humbled

mix of [our]

dirty laundry:

[i am

not wearing the

emperor's (*read:*

queen's) new clothes:

my nakedness will

hold an
awareness of the
double-edged
inclusive/exclusive
power of *white*]

and so together (our
core strength!),

we (an ethnic-mix)
maneuver through
imagery, symbolism and
metaphor:

(each
dancing our 'own') . . .

sweating, with messy hair . . .

6

'start
from the
place of
your handicap'⁴

yoko ashikawa's
words make my
shaky hands
sign in with a
freudian slip
of the pen:

WD instead of WB
(Wilson's Disease/
Wreck Beach):

unable to write
my body's
choreography in
a language of
linear Times New
Roman script:

at this time,
in these Times

i am
the *ma* between
vulnerability and

security, tears and
a hug, isolation and
ensemble: *in and
out of phase*,
delicate
like baby's
breath, i am
newborn
with beginner's
mind: *filled*
body trembling
eyes open
my textures,
dynamics
distinctive:
gaze up

*this is not
about
achievement:*

it is dancing
my commitment
to the moment:

transparent.
real.
honest.
impermanent.

7

i am
moving zazen:
performing
[performance:
*an elevation of
experience]*

i am [the]
*topography of
transformation:*
a beautiful struggle
(where is the joy?)

i am
the stick of

the master:
[it's not about
my experience,
it's about *tout*
le monde]
awakening
(*global*) inertia:

it's not you,
and it's not
not you

it's not me,
and it's not
not me . . .

[*butoh*].

8

i am
the wheel
inside
the wheel

dancing with
my heart
on my sleeve
and my body
on red alert:
[*revved,*
anxious]

turning on
myself:
evolutionary
circles:

spiraling
through a
menagerie of
animals i
once was,
still
am:

wiping the
fish scales of

my body, with
the familiarity
of skin:

a discipline
of remembrance
a responsibility
of (intra-)relationship:

through
[*the waking moment*
of the senses]
kinesthetic
synesthesia:
the choreography of
Be Here Now!

. . . again . . .

. . . and again . . .

. . . and again . . .

. . . and again . . .

9

i am
a flower:
trying to
open a new
chapter

[as my body
closes around
the effects of
my medical
categorization:

(privately)
gripped in
panic –

struggling . . .

how perfectly butoh]

i breathe
through:

pushing past
my limitations

to
pure kokoro
[heart, soul, spirit]:

this is
the corkscrew
the coil
the spring . . .
the open book
of my dance:

ambitious.
exhilarating.
potent:
even

within this
(shared)
soundless
soundtrack
of *dis-ease*:

there is music.

10. / 1

i am
a guest
on this
land:

unceded
Traditional
Coast Salish
Territory:

asking
permission of
the waves,
winds, rain,
sand, stones
and skies
before entering:

to honour, to
embrace and
be embraced,
in elemental

reciprocity

[on *this*,
canada
day –
a sad
marker of
colonialism,
conquest and
genocide . . .
'celebrated' in
red and . . .

white]:

in waters
equally
tidally tied
with japan,

i dance
locally/globally
holding (and
as) the Earth
Ball:

part atomic
bomb, part
seal, heron,
seaweed, part
sailing spinnaker,
cityscape, mountain
of forest, part
war, part cloud
shroud, trans-
pacific freighter,
part litter, part
peace –

this is the shore
of my present
awareness:

humbling:

collectively
moving in and

out of
trembling:

touching
and touched
by the
grittiness
of our
different
experiences
of
this
beached
reality . . .

11. / 2

eagle
calls out
heralding
our arrival:

patterns
of impermanence:

makers and
destroyers of
sand mandalas
whose swallowed
footsteps soon
become tidal
markers: puddled
metronomes for
changing orientations,
warming weather,
falling trees on
eroding cliffs, resting
spot for feathered
migratory routes –

we are
this expression of
Time

becoming
mirrors of the
stratus clouds
stretched across

the brilliant
azure:

our white now
stretched (*naked*)
from the
abrasion of
our dance . . .

12. / 3

we are
the *primal*
weather-
vanes of
the north-
west *white*-
capped
wind:

honouring
the edges of
pounding surf
and howling
sky,
our skin
registers this/
[our] ebbing
changing
flow:

curving
and
carving
the
cartography
of shore:

. . . *we trace 'the' ephemeral . . .*

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Notes

- 1 For more information on Kokoro Dance Theatre Society, visit www.kokoro.ca
- 2 The poems I have written from the previous two years of engaging in the Wreck Beach Butoh intensive can be read here: “Butoh 1.2.3 . . . (Wrecked Beach)” 2015 *Choreographic Practices*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 245–250; and “White-Bodied Poetry: Beaching the Beached” 2015 *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 159–179.

- 3 For more about Poetic Inquiry as a Critical Methodology read Monica Prendergast, Carl Leggo, and Pauline Sameshima. 2009. *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers; and Monica Prendergast and Kathleen Galvin, 2015. *Poetic Inquiry II: Seeing, Caring, Understanding*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- 4 Yoko Ashikawa quoted in Sondra Fraleigh, 2004 *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 181.

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