

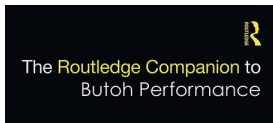
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The Routledge Companion to  
Butoh Performance



Edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario

## The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance

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### A Certain Kind of Energy

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# A CERTAIN KIND OF ENERGY

## Dancing modern anxiety

*Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (translated by Robert Ono)*

Hijikata Tatsumi is a dancer. He calls himself a dancer of *ankoku buyō*.<sup>1</sup> After hosting three dance recitals in Daiichi Seimei Hall, another one in Sōgetsu Hall, and having organized the “Leda Association” three years ago, which was a mysterious nocturnal gathering, he has already become a legendary figure.

Nobody knows what kind of life he led after he left his native region of Tohoku to live in devastated post-war Tokyo until he became a legendary avant-garde dancer. Being a taciturn man, he does not talk much about his past. From what I have overheard, his father, a well-known drinker, kept a soba joint in a town in Akita.

Hijikata Tatsumi has a different face each time I see him. That makes me wonder. One day he looks like Yul Brynner with his clean-shaven head. The next day he is covered in a long beard, with the complexion of an Indian yogi.

Every time we visit his studio in Meguro, the young members of the *ankoku buyō* circle welcome us politely. The physical training they endure is awe-inspiring. “We are staking our lives on this! Our lives!” he yells.

A naked man turned upside down on the stage with his back rounded and his limbs curled. This is where Hijikata’s dance begins. It makes one think of a meditation in the womb. He then gets to his feet and starts walking awkwardly, as if he suffers from polio.

I believe that the dance of Hijikata, which established two fundamental forms, the expression of anxiety and the expression of danger, is the most cutting-edge in the world. Merce Cunningham should be so lucky as to drink a broth made from his nail-clippings and toe jam. Yes, I really mean it.

“Take a burglar to a café during the day, and feed him some cake. He will cry,” Hijikata says with a serious face. His strange ideas, often full of unique pathos, make us laugh out loud. To him, however, they are absolute truths. At the bottom of his avant-garde dance flows Japanese sorrow.

This summer, Hijikata ran a shaved ice stand in front of the Meguro Immovable Wisdom King Temple (*Fudō-myōō*). When I visited him at the studio, I was served shaved ice with rice-flour dumplings, which cost sixty yen. “I like those hand-operated ice shaving machines,” I said. To this he replied sadly, “They are all electric nowadays. I can’t find any hand-operated ones.”

### Note

1 Editor’s note: *ankoku buyō* is literally “darkness dance.” Later this will be changed to *ankoku butoh* using the word for Western social dances such as the waltz.

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