

GooSayTen: The Intersection of Butoh Dance Art and Mind-Body Therapy

GooSayTen, a Japanese Butoh dance group based in Sapporo, represents a unique evolution in the avant-garde dance form known as Butoh. Founded by Itto Morita in 1996 and featuring core member Mika Takeuchi, this group has developed distinctive approaches to both performance art and dance therapy that offer significant values in our contemporary world. Their work bridges artistic expression and psychological healing through the medium of the body.

Unique Characteristics as a Butoh Performance Art Group

Artistic Style and Performance Dynamics

GooSayTen has developed a notable artistic identity within the Butoh tradition. They perform with a "rigorous dance style with delicately controlled movements," though some of their pieces feature strong, dynamic movements as evidenced in their video recordings⁶. The duo of Itto Morita and Mika Takeuchi creates a compelling visual contrast in their performances, often described as "Beautifully dancing Mika in the darkness, with squirming dark Itto behind her..."¹¹. This interplay between beauty and darkness, control and release reflects the essential tensions within Butoh itself.

Morita began his Butoh journey in 1988 after participating in a workshop by Semimaru, a member of the renowned Sankaijuku group⁶. This places GooSayTen in the lineage of what Kasai refers to as "genealogical Butoh," meaning they are within 4-5 generations of the original Butoh creators while developing their unique approach⁷.

The group has performed extensively internationally, appearing in roughly 20 cities across the United States, Canada, Germany, Poland, Spain, and other countries⁶. This global reach has allowed them to both share Japanese Butoh traditions and incorporate cross-cultural influences into their work.

Integration of Psychology and Performance

What particularly distinguishes GooSayTen is the deep integration of psychology with dance performance. Itto Morita himself bridges these worlds as both a Butoh dancer and psychology professor⁶. He has stated that "one of the ultimate purposes of his Butoh dance activities is soul healing of his own, and hopefully of others through Butoh performance"². This therapeutic intent infuses their artistic work with psychological depth.

The group aims to "portray insanity from both a Butoh point of view as performers and

a psychotherapeutic point of view"[6](#). This dual perspective allows them to approach psychological states not merely as artistic material but with therapeutic understanding and intention. Their performances thus become spaces where audience members might experience their own psychological healing through witnessing authentic human expression.

Dance-Therapy Directions: The Butoh Dance Method

Theoretical Foundations

GooSayTen has made significant contributions to dance therapy through the development of the "Butoh Dance Method," a systematic approach to psychosomatic therapy. This method emerged from experimental psychological research showing that even simple bodily actions like arm relaxation are inhibited by socially conditioned reaction patterns and low bodily awareness[7](#).

The method is theoretically grounded in the concept of "de-socialization" of the body—the idea that many of our bodily limitations are socially conditioned and can be released through conscious practice[7](#). This concept aligns with Butoh's historical positioning as a dance form that challenges social conventions and presents movements that might be considered "anti-social" or "non-social"[7](#).

The Three-Stage Methodology

The Butoh Dance Method consists of three integrated stages that progressively deepen bodily awareness and authenticity:

1. Bodily Play (Playfulness)

The first stage uses enjoyable bodily activities to liberate participants from daily physical and mental constraints[7](#). These exercises emphasize non-verbal, physical interactions and "here and now" experiences[7](#). Unlike conventional dance instruction, this approach is intentionally non-manipulative and non-goal-oriented, allowing movements to emerge organically[7](#).

Bodily play helps participants recognize how their bodies have become fixed in particular ways of moving and relating, providing opportunities to experience alternatives[7](#). As the method observes, "it is strange to think that there are very few places where one is permitted to 'be oneself physically' or 'be as one is'"[7](#).

2. Relaxation

The second stage focuses on releasing muscle tension and achieving deep bodily relaxation⁷. Specific techniques include gentle passive bending and stretching of limbs while lying down, deep breathing exercises, and other practices that induce profound relaxation or even drowsiness⁷.

This relaxation state serves multiple purposes: it increases bodily sensitivity, provides healing through deep rest, and creates a time-perception shift that further "de-socializes" the body from ordinary rhythms⁷. As the ego's control of the body diminishes, suppressed emotions, memories, or thoughts may resurface, beginning the transition to the next stage⁷.

3. Confrontation

The final stage involves experiencing conflicting thoughts or movements that manifest as bodily vibrations, tremors, compulsive repetitive movements, or complete stillness⁷. These expressions are typically suppressed in daily life but are welcomed in this context as authentic bodily truths⁷.

The confrontation stage requires the groundwork of the previous stages to ensure participants have developed sufficient bodily awareness and acceptance⁷. The facilitator must create conditions of physical and psychological safety, providing theoretical understanding and acceptance of unusual bodily reactions while protecting participants from judgment⁷.

Therapeutic Applications

This method has been implemented in mental health settings with promising results. Participants with depleted physical and mental energy have experienced recovery through the relaxation practices, while others have shown improved physical capabilities and expanded behavioral range through bodily play⁷.

Specific therapeutic outcomes have included voice recovery in a previously non-verbal young woman and improved eye contact in another young woman with persistently downward-fixed gaze⁷. The method has demonstrated cross-cultural effectiveness, having been implemented in Russia, Ukraine, USA, Canada, Germany, and Poland⁷.

Important Values in the 21st Century Context Values in Performing Arts

Authenticity Amid Digital Superficiality

In an age of digital filters and virtual reality, GooSayTen's emphasis on bodily authenticity provides a powerful counterpoint. They embrace what Butoh pioneer Kazuo

Ohno described: "Butoh cannot be established apart from human life... the beginning of Butoh is in the weight of living, in the perplexity that I cannot help but feel"[7](#). This commitment to genuine human experience offers audiences an opportunity to reconnect with unfiltered reality.

Transcending Cultural Boundaries

While deeply rooted in Japanese Butoh traditions, GooSayTen has performed internationally and integrated cross-cultural elements into their practice. Mika Takeuchi's studio has accepted workshop participants from more than 20 countries[3](#), creating a space for global dialogue through the body. Their approach helps bridge Eastern and Western perspectives on embodiment in an increasingly globalized yet fragmented world.

Embracing Fragility and Mortality

GooSayTen continues Butoh's tradition of acknowledging human fragility and mortality—themes often suppressed in contemporary culture but increasingly relevant in a pandemic era. As the description of Butoh notes, it evokes "the fragility of being a 'mortal existence'" and hints at "human sacredness" or "spirituality"[7](#). This willingness to confront existential realities offers a necessary counterbalance to cultures of denial.

Values in Body-Mind Therapy

De-socialization as Liberation

The concept of "de-socialization" offers a powerful therapeutic framework for our hyperconnected yet physically constrained era. By recognizing how social conditioning limits bodily expression and awareness, GooSayTen provides pathways to genuine liberation and self-acceptance[7](#). This approach is particularly valuable in addressing anxiety, depression, and disconnection prevalent in contemporary society.

Integration of Psychology and Somatic Work

By combining rigorous psychological understanding with physical practice, GooSayTen bridges the mind-body divide that still pervades much of healthcare. Itto Morita's dual identity as both dancer and psychologist exemplifies this integration[6](#). Their approach recognizes that psychological material is stored in the body and can be accessed and processed through movement.

Safe Exploration of the Unconventional

GooSayTen creates containers for safely exploring movements and experiences typically suppressed in daily life⁷. This approach allows for emotional catharsis and authentic expression that might be socially unacceptable in other contexts. In a world of increasing conformity through social media, such spaces for genuine expression become increasingly valuable.

Other Important Values

Educational Accessibility

The group demonstrates commitment to education through their workshops in Sapporo and internationally⁶. By accepting students for periods ranging from weeks to months and working with diverse populations including mental health settings⁷, they make Butoh and therapeutic movement accessible to people from many backgrounds.

Cross-Disciplinary Integration

GooSayTen exemplifies the value of merging disciplines that are traditionally separate—art, psychology, therapy, and philosophy. Their use of experimental research to inform artistic and therapeutic practice⁷ represents an integrated approach increasingly necessary for addressing complex contemporary challenges.

Embodied Presence in a Virtual Age

Perhaps most fundamentally, GooSayTen's work emphasizes the value of embodied presence in an age increasingly dominated by virtual experience. Their practices invite participants to return to the fundamental experience of having a body—with all its limitations, sensations, and possibilities—as a source of wisdom and healing.

Conclusion

GooSayTen represents a significant evolution in Butoh dance that bridges artistic expression and therapeutic practice. Through their performances, workshops, and development of the Butoh Dance Method, Itto Morita and Mika Takeuchi have created approaches that address contemporary needs for authenticity, embodiment, and healing. Their work demonstrates how traditional art forms can evolve to meet the psychological and spiritual challenges of the 21st century, offering pathways to reconnect with our bodies, each other, and the deeper dimensions of human experience in an increasingly fragmented world.

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Citations:

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