**How Does Butoh Become Meaningful to Seiryukai Dancers: Self Perception, Social Relations, and Community**

**Tamah L. Nakamura**

## Introduction

Aesthetic expression through dance movement and performance has always been a highly valued part of my life. I have been practicing Butoh with the Butoh Seiryukai Group (Seiryukai) in Fukuoka, Japan for two years. The group also serves as my research context for my current doctoral studies. As an American who is a thirty-year resident in Asia, I have been a participant in diverse and numerous group interactions. My Seiryukai experience has been markedly different in that it is an inclusive group, which is a meaningful extension of the Butoh dance practice in which all participate. Their re-creation of social identity, and thus community, through somatic movement is the focus of my research.

In this short paper, I will explore transformative aspects of Butoh dance including experiences of Seiryukai through reflection through movement that is expressed in embodied movement  and through reflective dialogue. The development and transformation of human consciousness occurs in an inclusive, recursive process of 1) self-perception, 2) intersubjective awareness, extending to
3) awareness of social consciousness.  Theoretical principles which integrate the bodymind, relational and social aspects are drawn from Authentic Movement psychology, social theories and the body, and Freirean consciousness raising.

## What is Japanese Butoh Dance?

Butoh is an aesthetic form of avant-garde movement that was created in 1959 by modern dancer Tatsumi Hijikata as a critical response to Western culture and political dominance which contributed to a fragmentation of self-identity and a loss of relationship between humans and nature (Tschudin, 1999, Kurihara, 1996; Klein, 1988). A dance (*bu*) step (*toh*) that challenged both Western dance and Kabuki and Noh theatre, Butoh explored movement through transformative imagery in an attempt to find the natural body. It is a genre which encompasses, on the one hand, Butoh as performing arts and spectacle dance, and, on the other hand,  movement therapy (Kasai and Takeuchi, 2001), Community Body (Kasai in Fraleigh, 1999), and Generative Butoh (Harada, personal communication). Although it is called "dance", it is not based on technique and avoids the use of mirrors in training, invoking engagement with the subtle perceptive capabilities of other senses (Kasai & Takeuchi, 2001). The body becomes more than form. It is not a vehicle for expression but becomes the content of the expression (Laage, 1993). The body form relays embodied images that are manifested through increased self-awareness in our connection to the other movers.

**Butoh Seiryukai Dance Group**

Butoh Seiryukai is an example of a contemporary Butoh group organized and founded by Nobuo Harada in 1994. His belief in Butoh as generative dance form stems from the "community body" philosophy of his former teacher, Akira Kasai, who used to dance with Hijikata (Fraleigh in an interview with Kasai, 1999). In Harada's philosophy of "Butoh for the people through community building", Butoh begins from daily life experiences, observing self, and doubting every stereotype in order to grasp new relationships between the individual and the community. Thus Butoh embodies the potential to change and renew the participant and society.

Most of the Seiryukai members are students and young people in their late teens and twenties who, according to Harada, need a place to release raw energy that has been ignored and repressed by society.

> The basic grounding and bonding of human energy used to be expressed through community festivals and other community events in which everyone participated. These events have changed focus so that a few perform while most watch. Seiryukai Butoh offers a space for a kind of community dance festival.
> (Nobuo Harada, fieldnotes, July 6, 2001)



**An Evening With Seiryukai**

*The Butoh Workshop: From Self-Perception to Relational Awareness*

I arrive at the Butoh workshop one hour late. Chiharu and Akane are bathed in two spotlights in the center of the room. Synthesized music is playing. Three other women and two men move slowly, almost not moving, almost frozen, across the floor with their eyes closed, or gazing unfocused. Feet move across the floor a centimeter at a time, hardly lifting from the polished floor. Moving as if in quicksand. Sliding their feet as if across ice or a plate of glass, everyone is very grounded and the air has a feeling of being bounded. Coming into this 'still' room has a very calming, safe effect on me. Then Harada turns on the lights and everyone lines up backs to the wall. He instructs us to walk across the room, lower back dropped and centered, knees slightly bent, holding our hands out in front of us as if holding a bowl of precious water that you want to carry to someone on the other side of the

room. "That person is a very important person in your life. There is something in the water that is being born. Your existence is not within the vessel of your body, but in the vessel of water. When you reach the other side of the room, gently, carefully, slowly turn around and carry it back again." We start in silence, then Harada puts on music that resounds like the depths of a piece of metal clanging out into the room. We do this meditation type of walking for about half an hour. Harada speaks again and tells us to stop. "Let your head be empty. Hold the precious object in front of you and then slowly bring it up to your chest and place it against and into your chest for safekeeping. Let your hands gently, slowly release down in front of you."

Ryoko's eyes 'tear' and her nose runs in long clear silvery, shimmering threads to the floor glittering in the strobe light.  Later she tells me, "Tears will come out even if you are not feeling sad. You cry not because you are sad. Tears come out because it is the sadness itself. The body is the existence of sadness. The body is sadness. I do not feel tears running down my face or my nose dripping. If I do, it is as if I am looking at another me with tears and nose running."



We watch Ryoko continue to move painstakingly slow. Harada reaches out and gently guides her forward with his hand against her lower back. Ryoko's previously deathly slow movement changes to one of arms opening into large circles, and larger steps moving forward, standing straight up. After about three minutes Harada tells Akane to go into the center to dance  as if she is watching her own memory dance. It isn't  Ryoko she sees dancing but her own memory. Then each of us goes in to dance at our own pace as if we are seeing our own dream. Harada says, "Experience your dream. When you are moving, if you bend, sit, stand up, don't simply do those acts, but feel the air with your skin as you do them." In my reflection notebook later that evening I write that there are overlapping aspects in Butoh between the internal witness and the mover such as in Authentic Movement, that is, what you are expressing in movement the image you are experiencing, while you are the other, and they are you. Musiciant's (2001) experience in her Authentic Movement group reflects movers' synchronicity of experience.  "During

the movement process there may be sounds, shared touch, and a sense that the other movers are part of your dream in which the intrapersonal mirrors the interpersonal" (personal communication, September, 2001b).

Active Imagination in movement based on Jungian psychotherapy (Chodorow, 1991) and called Authentic Movement (Adler 1999, 1996), is a self-directed movement process. As in Authentic Movement, in Seiryukai's improvisational Butoh unconscious images are expressed through movement to make the mover aware of aspects of her inner self, thus creating knowledge through highly self-directed movement work. The transformational strength of both Authentic Movement and Butoh is that they work through the body, that is, the body, rooted in its own existence and therefore tangible and believable, moves authentically to impulses arising from the unconscious (Chodorow, 1999a, 1999b). Impulses occur when" moments of moving from the will, with conscious intention, give way to spontaneous, unplanned expression. This is the moment of the shift from "I move" to "I am moved" (Whitehouse, 1999, p. 82) in Authentic Movement.  It is from this consciousness in its first utterance through improvisational dance, which Fraleigh terms "intuitive dance" (2000, p. 56), that we express what we know from within our bodies into "extended consciousness" (p. 59). Both Butoh and Authentic Movement can be thought of as a type of self- actualization expressed through body movement reflection because the person's liberation occurs through her own efforts. The Butoh exercises lead to self-actualization stemming from self-directed movement similar to Authentic Movement and this becomes an awareness raising experience for the individual. Seiryukai then extends these experiences into dialogue during the dinner discussions described in the next section. According to Freire (1970/2000), the verbalization brings awareness to the social level of human interaction.


*The Dinner Discussion: Extending Awareness to Social Issues*

Further extension of awareness occurs in activities other than the Butoh dance workshops such as the collaborative one-pot  meals  held at Seiryukai's office after Butoh practice. During the dinner conversations people who have met even for the first time at the workshop share intimate feelings and stories about their lives. One of the common discussion themes across the two years that I have been participating in the group is the exploration of identity through the sharing of personal issues. Discussion extends to social issues that influence the creation of human identity. Harada explains this phenomenon as follows:

> Actually we don't need the word "Butoh".  What is more important
> is to get together like this.  When we do, we have an underground
> river. We come here and put our feet in the river, wash our face

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and hands in the underground river. Some put their fingers in, some wash their face, and some swim when they come here. Everyone has a desire for that kind of underground river. All of us were present at the workshop and that made this kind of discussion possible. It would not just happen.  Because we went through the workshop together we could talk like this (July 6, 2002, Nakamura fieldnotes).

Ryoko is a 25-year old university graduate who has opted out of the traditional desk-work jobs available for women graduates and enjoys her work in an antique bookstore in spite of fewer financial benefits.  She talks about how Butoh exercises extend to her daily activities. She reports that because of her Butoh practice she now concentrates in a more focused, reflective manner on tasks in her daily life.

Mariko is 36, married with one child. She works in the insurance department of a large hospital doing deskwork. She had been in an amateur theater group before marriage. She talks about intimacy in married relationships. As she tells us about her personal life, other voices join to extend the conversation to others they know in similar situations, and eventually a social pattern is recognized.  The discussion shifts to reasons and solutions and Mariko says that she came to the workshop to dance but through close contact with everyone during the discussion she found a new perspective on her relationship. Harada said,  "All of us were present at the workshop and that made this kind of discussion possible. It would not just happen. Because we went through the workshop together we could talk like this."

The body in Butoh practice, then, is a vehicle for intervention and transformation of embodied political structures (Bourdieu, 1997; Butler, 1999, 1990; Althusser, 1971) recursively influencing the interplay of structure and agency toward improvisation in everyday life practices (Bourdieu, 1997, 1992; Rosaldo, 1993; Giddens, 1984). We can understand this process by thinking of the interaction of the social agent, that is the individual, and the social structure as embodied  structural forms by the agent. Althusser (1971), Butler (1999, 1990), Bourdieu (1997), and Giddens (1984) all support the "individual" as social agent who embodies a collective thought process with interpretation on the individual level. Therefore, the body must find new ways of being, doing and moving to intervene in the cyclic perpetuation of forms of structural inequality held our bodies. When we move in new ways, new ways of "speaking" through movement are created as Harada suggests in his description of his Butoh workshop.

Harada's description of what occurs in the workshops suggest that the body expresses deconstruction of daily struggles held in the body and creates new ways of 'speaking" through movement.

> We explore our body in another way that is different from our
> usual way. At the place where it was controlled and oppressed by
> work and the system, a crack will be made and words will come
> out. These words are qualitatively different from the previous
> words (Nobuo Harada, September, 2001, Nakamura fieldnotes).

What the Butoh group is doing may be considered a form of conscientization, that is, raising of awareness of the reality of the sociocultural structures combined with *action* for transformation of reality (Nakamura, 2002; Freire, 1970/2002). Freire emphasizes that "action and reflection are not a dichotomy but occur simultaneously, and further, when action is inappropriate, critical reflection is action" (p. 135). Therefore, for Seiryukai, social action is in the form of reflective dialogue. Dance scholars support "creating a script" to concretize the meaning the individual gives to the movement experience (Halprin, 1999, p. 138) toward an extension of consciousness ( Fraleigh, 2000).

I captured Seiryukai's awareness raising from movement reflection and dialogue reflection in my fieldnotes during one of the post-workshop dinner discussions:

> We do Butoh to heal that side of ourselves that society
> sees as dark, those parts that are not accepted as
> knowledge. A place to explore and take the lid off  the
> oppressed emotions through unstructured movement
> which continues into the post-workshop dinner discussions
> where even first-timers release emotions in reflective
> dialogue of personal issues as we explore new and
> different ways of moving in our lives (Nakamura, May,
> 2002, fieldnotes).

**Summary**

Self as body is connected to personal and social identity through movement reflection as well as verbal reflection on the daily lives of Seiryukai members. Transformation occurs through contemplative insight coupled with dialogue resulting in the participant becoming aware that her experience is "authentic" because it is "vitally connected to her own inner history, and only incidentally triggered by an outside facilitator" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 277). Seiryukai members are using Butoh as an expressive method of reflecting on their lives. The movement reflection and dialogic reflection suggest that the Butoh space is allowing individuals to break through the ideology of the personal to realize that the intimate and the personal are actually tied into the larger social phenomena in a form of liberatory practice.

*(I am grateful to Sondra Fraleigh, Professor, State University of New York,
for the benefit of her Butoh and somatic movement experience and knowledge
in this paper – TN)*

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Note: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Fielding Graduate Institute has approved ethics review of this study with the Butoh Seiryukai. Participant names have been changed upon their request to protect identity and privacy.

**Author contact details:** tamah@gol.com

**Note: Please cite this article as follows:**

**Nakamura, T. (2003). How Does Butoh Become Meaningful to Seiryukai Dancers: Self  Perception, Social Relations, and Community. *Dance Therapy Association of  Australia Quarterly,* 2 (2) .**