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From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein

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# From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein

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*Hijikata Tatsumi*

Only when, despite having a normal, healthy body, you come to wish that you were disabled or had been born disabled, do you take your first step in *butoh*. A person who dances *butoh* has just such a fervent desire, much like a child's longing to be crippled.

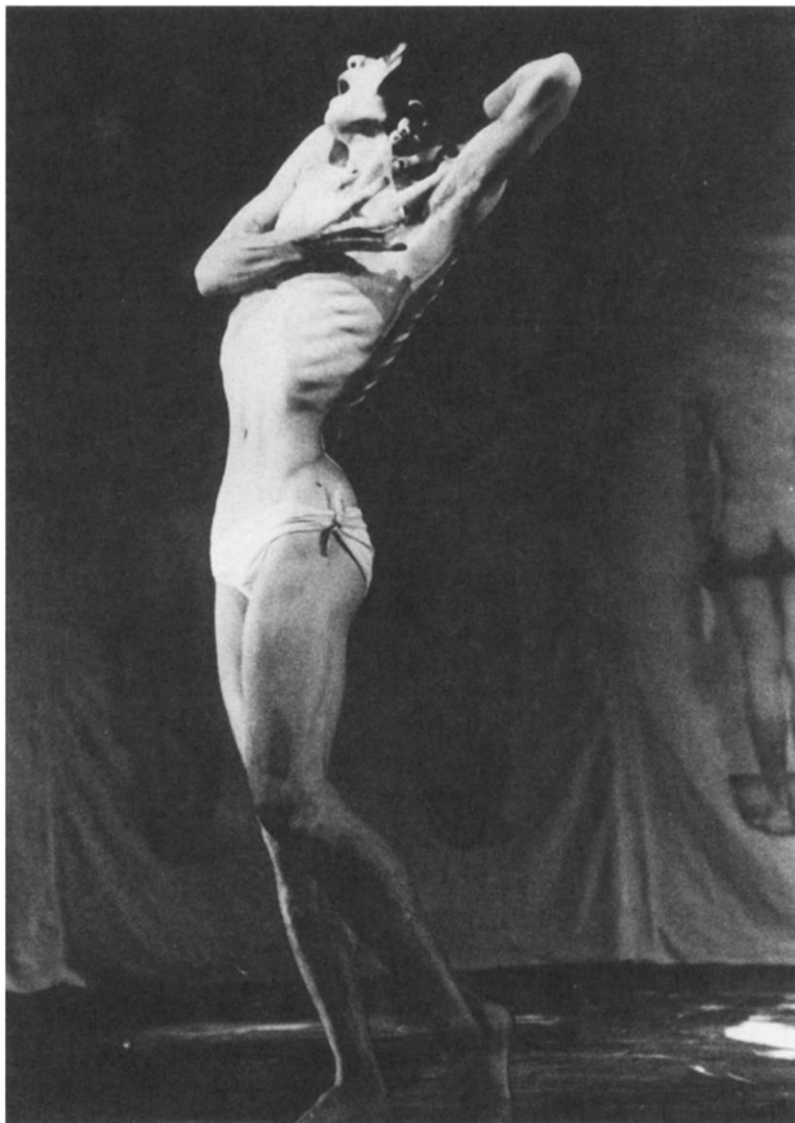
When I see children throw sticks and stones at a lame dog trying to slink from sight, then corner it against a wall, and mindlessly beat it, I feel jealous of the dog. Why? Because it is the dog which derives the most benefit here. It is the dog that tempts the children and, without considering its own situation, exposes itself completely. One kind of dog may even do so with its intestines hanging red from its belly.

With fish and birds, things are quite different. First of all, fish do not have legs. Also, I have to prepare myself in various ways before entering that dimly lit world that fish see each day. With birds, I am unable to get excited unless I first crush the birds together with their nesting box before taking them on. I get my first thrill only after I struggle to clear away heavy obstacles, then find lots of eggs incubating underneath it all.

I am able to look at a naked human body savaged by a dog. This is an essential lesson for *butoh* and leads to the question of exactly what ancestor a *butoh* person is.

I adore rib cages but, again, it seems to me that a dog's rib cage is superior to mine. This may be some old mental image I have. On rainy days I sometimes see a dog's rib cage and feel defeated by it. From the start, my *butoh* has had no use for cumbersome fat or superfluous curves. Just skin and bones, with a bare minimum of muscle—that's the ideal. If blue veins can be seen through a dog's skin, then there is no need at all for a woman's body. Even when, as now, I struggle to write something, a woman is just no help; she is not even able to serve as an eraser. I have known this for as long as I can remember, with an understanding that reverberates deep in my heart.

I have yearned again and again for the meaning of where to start, a meaning I have not been able to ascertain in my own life and which does not come alive in my talent. I cherish wet animals and the bodies of the old, withered like dead trees, precisely because I believe that through them I may be able to come close to my desire. My body longs to be cut into pieces and to hide itself somewhere cold. I think that is, after all, the place to which I shall return and am



1. Hijikata Tatsumi in  
*Keijijōgaku (Emotion in  
Metaphysics, 1967)* directed  
by Hijikata for Takai  
Tomiko's Dance Recital.  
(Photo by Nakatani  
Tadao)

certain that, frozen hard and about to fall down, what my eyes have seen there is simply an intimacy with things which continue to die their own deaths.

I have now and again thought about keeping a corpse. But I get bored with things such as cotton or spider webs, lightbulbs or bread, which require gentle handling. Undoubtedly, I too grew up melting my brain while drowning in the futon in the closet and eating soggy rice crackers, but those feelings, those emotions have now gone totally astray somewhere in my body and are unable to develop into anything even close to that terror I felt, wondering where I had gone in the dead of the night.

If the whereabouts of food that can jolt us is lost, I think humans will be as good as half dead. I have a childhood memory of eating so much chicken, a food that frightened both my mind and body, that I only nibbled at other foods, without swallowing them. For that reason alone, my body has bred several important things. By the same token, though, I was often severely punished for it. When I saw children with their mouths gaping or children

2. Hijikata Tatsumi in  
Honegami tōge  
hotokekazura (*Corpse  
Vine on Ossa Famine  
Ridge*, 1970) written by  
Nosaka Akiyuki and di-  
rected by Eda Kazuo at the  
Shinjuku āto siatā  
(Shinjuku Art Theater) for a  
performance with Ningenza  
(Human Theatre Group).  
(Photo by Hosoe Eikō)



drowning their hearts in the shallows, I thought they were merely plump, messy creatures, only there for the breeding. Salmon roe seemed to me like the intestines of Christ and I did not eat it. I have at present a steadily growing desire somehow to get away from food by gnawing only on air or by putting a small piece of wood between my teeth. Because I believe that the things that get lost once I eat them have actually settled down in my body, I may at last no longer allow food to go into my stomach. If that time comes, there will be absolutely no need for my family and friends to worry or to weep. When it happens, everything must inevitably become clear, but since my dead sister started living within my body, things no longer work like that. My sister, moreover, does not complain at all but only makes an inarticulate sound maybe twice a day. If she were to complain, she would no longer be a sister to me and, more than that, disaster would never again walk by my house. Then I would be in trouble. How shall I be able to communicate that, because I used to be a positive genius at finding things with monetary value, I could not afford to dream? I no longer think I need to talk about how I was in my childhood, using the economics of romantic adults.

I conceived all manner of things and made them come erect along the long hallway of a normal school, and because of that my body became utterly hollow and dim. I was seized by a feeling that a sperm, using a laxative on everything and abandoned by rhythm, was staggering along this hallway.

Twelve or thirteen years later I saw the butoh of a young woman who had crawled on her hands and knees under the porch and stayed there, with a wet cotton cloth on her face. No matter what, she did not come out from under the porch. Her face was like burned charcoal, and I have believed since then that no one would bother to wonder just what it was that that young woman and my sperm had eaten which linked them together. At the time, I smeared

a rabbit on a wet, splintered board of wood and tried to draw a picture, but the crayon slipped and the color didn't take well. The feeling between my sperm and that young woman seemed to drift up like smoke from that hidden place. Since then, I do not think I have ever had the experience of concretely and directly hiding such an emotion as a result of a relationship with a normal, healthy woman.

When I think about spirit exalted to physiology, my taste remains unperturbed, remorselessly smashing even the shadow of a naked body sobbing on the edge of the abyss. After that, however insignificant, however indistinct, I feel that a piece of me that is difficult to discern remains in subtle light. This is the way things are. I am someone who rejoices when people die. It makes no difference if they are intellectuals or even those who defend writers. There is a wind-bell echoing in my cursed head and I want only to sit down, like a child on the threshold of wholeness who is waiting for something to be handed out. But in three years my hair grew too heavy to flutter in the wind. I make the "farmhands" who come to my house in Meguro eat like cows, with their eyes closed, and urinate standing, with their heads hanging down. I have transformed myself again and again into a strange and brutal musical instrument that does not even sweat and I live my life turning a stick of silence beating on silence into a

shinbone. I have transformed myself too into an empty chest of drawers and a gasping willow trunk. I have also seen ghosts doing sumō [wrestling] in a parlor and have been able any number of times to create a baby who picks up their bones and bleeds at the nose. One day an evil wind, like a beautiful woman, came moving in a clot, and when it touched me there on my head I, too, hardened into a lump.

When I think about the menarche of an old woman, I have the feeling I can go anywhere. But these phenomena occur in the world where sound has ceased. It seems to me that these things, squishy like somnolent sweets, will eventually come under the control of things frozen hard. This “I” breathing nearby will make this faraway “me” who, numbed with cold, no longer even knows whose ancestor I am, aware of myself as one virgin body. What I dance there is nowhere even near the “butohification” of experience, much less the mastery of butoh. I want to become and be a body with its eyes just open wide, a body tensed to the snapping point in response to the majestic landscape around it. Not that I think it is better at such a time not to look at my own body, but my regret for having looked at it is also numbed and I am unable to allow my hapless body to bud.

Where butoh is a means of expression, it only provides a form of hot butoh, which is based on the whole gamut of jealousy and submission, and always takes the shape of supplication and prostration. This is not very important to me. While a lack is yet a lack, one can still call any lack in his or her body a self-sufficiency. Though it be indecent, because of my need to restore something to my cold body, I think I will keep this face that is fresh from waking up a little while longer. In the past, several of my butoh used to sit on veneered tatami mats facing the garden. When the sun shined, I would rush outside.

It seems almost clear to me what help my butoh must have so as not to be hit or miss.

*May 1969*

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