

Butoh America

Butoh Dance in the United States and
Mexico from 1970 to the early 2000s

Tanya Calamoneri

First published in 2022

ISBN: 978-0-367-13760-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-22562-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-02847-2 (ebk)

3 American Anchor Artists and Festivals

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9780429028472-3

The funder for this chapter is Texas Tech University

3 American Anchor Artists and Festivals

Introduction

In the United States, two artists developed their practice on opposite sides of the country: Joan Laage and Maureen Fleming. Both intersected significantly with the Ohnos: Laage through Kazuo as the doppelganger of her dying mother and Fleming through both Kazuo and Yoshito but perhaps most significantly through Yoshito when he created and performed a duet with her in New York in 1991 (see Figure 3.1). These two American artists developed at almost the same time, although in seemingly separate circles. Laage is the senior artist by six years and was active in cultural studies and numerous other dance forms including Bharatanatyam before coming to butoh as her primary study in 1988 with Kazuo Ohno and then in 1989 with Yoko Ashikawa in the company Gnome. Fleming's path is etched in injury which led her to movement as therapy, as well as through myth and archetype, factors which lay a foundation of her initial connection with butoh. Further, Fleming was at the epicenter of the New York experimental performance scene—Ellen Stewart's La MaMa—and was swept into butoh in 1985 in Stewart's *Oedipus*, choreographed by and featuring Min Tanaka.

Fleming and Mexican artist Diego Piñón share a connection to Min Tanaka, and all three artists share a strong bond to the Ohnos. I chose to profile these three artists because they have had such a significant impact through their touring and/or teaching, each in their own way strongly defining butoh in the Americas.

The closing section of this chapter highlights the San Francisco Butoh Festival, which featured Fleming, Laage, and Piñón at different points in its eight-year run. This festival is critical to the growth of butoh in the Americas, as it did much to build touring networks, educated audiences, critics, and funders, and coalesced a global student community in festival format, a model that would be replicated by other festivals to come.

Maureen Fleming (b. 1954, Yokohama, Japan) Based in New York City

A 2004 New Yorker review of Maureen Fleming's *Decay of the Angel* calls her “perhaps the foremost American practitioner of butoh” (New Yorker 2004).



Figure 3.1 Eros (1991). Dancers left to right: Yoshito Ohno, Maureen Fleming. (c) Lois Greenfield 1991.

Source: Photo courtesy Lois Greenfield, reprinted with permission from Lois Greenfield

Her hallmarks are “metamorphosis” and “transforming her body with agonizing slowness” (New Yorker 2004).

Fleming, the daughter of a Navy Lieutenant Commander, was born in Japan following the American Occupation. When she was a small child, she was involved in a violent accident that framed her questions of identity from an early age. She and her sister were launched through the car windshield when her mother stopped short to avoid a cyclist. According to Fleming’s retelling of her mother’s description, the Japanese man on the bicycle laughed before riding away as her distraught mother held her two screaming and bloodied daughters. Both the physical and psychological pains from that incident have marked her creative work and focus on healing, both cultural and corporeal. Being confronted with racial tension early on in life pushed her to want to understand the Japanese man’s perspective.

As a result, a driving force in Fleming's artistic work is "a deeper understanding of human potential," which she has sought to engender through "dynamic in-depth collaborations where new boundaries between cultures and art forms are crossed" (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019). Herself of mixed race, "Black Irish"¹ as it were, Fleming sees her work as offering an end to painful cycles of racial and ethnic violence and instead, seeking regeneration (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019).

Fleming found a kindred spirit in author and anthropologist Joseph Campbell who was influenced by Adolf Bastian's concept of "elementary ideas," which is a term for the source of myths and archetypal images that appear across cultures. Says Fleming of one of her signature images—a nearly naked female body carrying an equally naked tree branch—"a woman becoming a tree is an elementary idea with different folk traditions in many places, such as the Greek story of Daphne" (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., February 7, 2020). Human and nature merged into metaphor.

The flower is another elementary idea that pervades Fleming's work. Reinforced by Kazuo Ohno's lessons—for example, dance from the instruction "a flower opens in your face"—Fleming has continued to explore her connection to nature throughout her career. In *WILDFLOWERS, A Feminine Genesis*, developed in Ireland where Fleming also holds an Irish passport through her maternal grandmother, Fleming depicts feminine Irish creation mythology through the images of wildflowers, which Fleming evokes with her body and fabric. Drawing on the ephemeral beauty of flowers, Fleming probes human understanding of the cosmos: "Is immortality a paradigm we await or is it present in the here and now?" (Fleming 2018). She was inspired by the Irish poet W.B. Yeats' writings in which there is often a blur between the temporal and the eternal moment: "Birth hour and death hour meet . . . Men dance on deathless feet" (Yeats 2002, 115–116) and from Rumi, "the flower of what's true opens in the face" (quoted in Barks 1995, p. 38). Flowers in Fleming's work have become a metaphor for the self and soul (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., February 7, 2020).

Dance training was Fleming's vehicle for healing. Due to the accident, she has experienced low-grade pain in her body since a young age and notes that her initial movement drive was to find a comfortable place to simply exist in everyday life. She remembers giving dance classes to her sisters at the age of 5, asking them to fall asleep in different positions. She eventually enrolled in classical dance as well, becoming "religious" about ballet training from the age of 7 (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 7, 2019). Eventually, she committed to the Cecchetti Method, training with British-born Cecchetti disciple Margaret Craske who invited her to audition for the Manhattan School of Dance in New York City, where she studied on scholarship for seven years. She trained with some rather elite dancers; New York Ballet Theater director Diana Byer was among her classmates. For Fleming, however, ballet was a means to an end rather than an aesthetic pursuit unto itself. Her movement exploration went beyond any prescribed technique to a larger quest for ease in her body and also a sense of connection with others through movement.

In her journey to develop her own work, Fleming encountered several critical artists and thinkers that confirmed and enhanced her vision. As noted earlier, she recalls discovering comparative mythology through Joseph Campbell's writing, which greatly impacted the ways in which she describes her art. Campbell and other progressively minded people were a part of her community in New York City in the 1980s. Following one of her performances, Campbell said to her: "your dance is your transcendence," which Fleming credits with "heightening her awareness of her calling" (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019).

Fleming was further influenced by the creative practice of Campbell's wife, Jean Erdman. Erdman had studied hula and Isadora Duncan technique in Hawaii before training with Martha Graham at Sarah Lawrence College in 1934–5. Erdman quickly became a principal dancer in the Graham company and eventually struck out on her own (Fox 2020). Erdman collaborated with avant-garde composers Teiji Ito, Guy Klucevsek, and John Cage, among others, and experimental filmmaker Maya Deren.² Writes Fox, Erdman's work "was suffused with the dreamlike aura of myth and legend" (Fox 2020). Fleming created her original work *Spirit Walk*, for which Erdman's frequent collaborator Teiji Ito had composed the music in 1982 before his untimely death of a heart attack in Haiti. Teiji's brother Genji played in his stead in the 1985 performance at Riverside Dance Festival. Erdman was in attendance, and following the performance, she asked Fleming to collaborate and perform in a Philip Gotanda play *Dream of Kitamura*, presented in 1987 at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn.

Throughout the 1980s, Fleming presented dances in a variety of Downtown New York venues, including La MaMa, which was a space particularly known for artists who blurred artistic disciplines. She felt right at home. Legendary La MaMa Artistic Director Ellen Stewart drew an incredible community of artists. Says Fleming, one of Stewart's inspirations was theater director Peter Brook, who was combining a heady array of theatrical concepts and practices from around the world. Genji Ito asked Fleming to create a memorial dance for a La MaMa event. Her response to his music and the theme was to move extremely slowly which, she realized in hindsight, bridged her previous interest in ritual to her eventual study of butoh.

Fleming's relationship with Stewart and La MaMa grew quickly intertwined. As she recalls that period of her life, Fleming says:

I remember performing in La MaMa's "La Galleria" and suddenly I was painting studio walls in La MaMa's 1st Street basement. And then Ellen said "ok baby, here's the keys" and after Fleming had a following of students, "ok baby now we're doing 'Orphei.'"

(Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019)

Fleming gratefully acknowledges that Stewart took her under her wing and helped build her early career.

Stewart cast Fleming in the production of *Mythos Oedipus* starring Japanese butoh artist and film actor Min Tanaka for its 1985 premiere in the Greek ruins of *Delphi*. At this point, Fleming had seen only a video of Sankai Juku before she found herself wearing a nine-foot wig and riding atop the shoulders of four men in this butoh/avant-garde Greek theater production.³

Though butoh was new territory, to Fleming the work felt like a continuation of her own research. She became fascinated with possession states and goddess cultural rites. She felt echoes of previous work: the *Solaris/Lakota Project* (1980–1983, directed by Henry Smith) involving Lakota from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, and touring to Africa, France, and Sweden, as well as her encounters with Erdman, Campbell, and Teiji and Genji Ito. Additionally, Fleming notes that growing up with four uncles who were all Catholic priests ensured that ritual was an integral part of her worldview, even though she took the practice in a different direction. From her personal research in improvisation and dances from around the world, she was familiar with the idea of using images to enter into an altered state, which is a method that Tanaka also employed in his work. Says Fleming, “Min opened a door as to how to get there,” in a way that would influence her own creative research for many years to come (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019).

Following the June 1985 *Mythos Oedipus* production in Greece, Tanaka invited Fleming to perform with his company in the *Fool's Festival* in Copenhagen, Denmark, and to study with him in Japan when he was first establishing the Hakushu farm. Stewart supported Fleming to stay in Japan for several months, during which time Los Angeles-based Japanese butoh artist Oguri and Dutch dancer Frank van de Ven were also there.⁴ Says Fleming,

Tanaka knew how to channel spirits and other entities. He was shamanic and very violent . . . he would say “my center is on the wall” and I could feel that . . . he would inhale and dance a space and become a deeper self.
(Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019)

She recalls fondly that Tanaka “repeatedly pushed the students to their extreme, and helped people develop their own teaching” (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019). She thrived with the challenge. In her artist bio for the 1988 production of *Mythos Oedipus*, she wrote, “In 1985 she was captured by Min Tanaka and taken to Japan where she learned to stand under an icy waterfall in November” (The Great Jones Repertory Company 1988). When Fleming eventually became injured with the Body Weather training in Tanaka’s company, Majjuku, this forced her to find her own way and eventually lead to her unique approach to movement and original choreography.

When Fleming returned to New York City from Japan in 1985, she became an official artist in residence at La MaMa. Avidly researching exercises that healed her own body, she conducted ongoing workshops under the title “Body Structure” at La MaMa’s 1st Street studio. It was during this period that Fleming connected the injury she experienced during the intensive training with

Maijuku in Japan, with the accident she had as a child in Japan. The initial trauma had left a bone spur that had grown throughout her life and the loss of a disc between the fourth and fifth vertebra, confirmed by an X-ray, was now causing nerve damage in her neck from all of the full body pounding into the earth from the training in Japan. Surgery was recommended; however, Fleming insisted on discovering her own healing through movement. After all, she had been doing this intuitively since childhood. Little by little, in the literal process of healing, Fleming developed both a codified physical practice and a large following of students. Beginning with workshops at La MaMa studio, she was eventually invited to teach at New York University, where she was on faculty in the Experimental Theater Wing for many years, as well as Trinity and the Juilliard School.

In 1988, Fleming returned to Japan to study with Kazuo Ohno, during which time she met Susan Blakely Klein, author of one of the first English scholarly documents on butoh: *Ankoku Buto: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness* (Klein 1985). Arranged by Klein, Fleming initially stayed at the Ohno's summer home in Kamakura. During this time, Yoshito Ohno became invested in her growth as a student and artist. In 1990, she returned to Japan on an Asian Cultural Council Fellowship, where she stayed in the Ohno studio in Kamihoshikawa, studying with Kazuo and Yoshito Ohno, preparing for the premiere of her work *After Eros* in 1991 at La MaMa. While in Japan, she was invited to perform her signature work *Axis Mundi* in the event "Butō Festival" organized by Akiko Motofuji to honor Tatsumi Hijikata. Kazuo Ohno, Yoshito Ohno, and Min Tanaka all performed in this festival, which took place at Asbestos-kan in Tokyo, Hijikata's studio performance space.

She returned to New York and a year later in 1991, she performed *Eros* with Yoshito Ohno at La MaMa. It was an evening of interlocking solos, some new and others mined from previous work. Dance critic Deborah Jowitt's analysis deems the partnership successful: "The solos work together quite beautifully . . . Fleming seems to incarnate the primal stages he [Ohno] is confronting or remembering. Woman become rock. Becoming flesh. Turning into a tree. Dying. Being born. The images are beautiful, cruel" (Jowitt 1991). The following is a description of the evening length work, viewed by the author on video at the La MaMa archive.

Eros

Eros opens with Fleming folding into an incredibly slow backbend, to the sound of percussionist Mickey Hart chanting. As she approaches the end of her descent, her head turns eerily toward the audience. She's naked except for a small patch covering her genitals. She continues her arch backward, then crumples down and contorts her body into knots, curls around her foundation, and gets her feet under herself, and then slowly unfurls her spine and stands up facing the opposite direction. Her white powdered body looks like a chiseled,

moving marble sculpture as it is exquisitely side-lit against the black curtain. As she curls back down into squatting weeping Buddha position, thunder strikes and lights fade to black.

In the second scene, a blue light slowly fades up, revealing Yoshito in a crouched position. As he rises his arms stiffen into blades, which gesture as if dousing for water. He is dressed in white sailor pants and a collared shirt, a costume he wore for the duet *Dead Sea* with his father, Kazuo. Facing upstage, he curls his arms in front of him and then turns back toward the audience, indicating up and down with alternate hands, heaven and hell, then both to heaven, and both to hell. Between each gesture he stirs his hands, like in the children's song wheels on the bus. He steps into a pool of water and we see his reflection. At one point he traces one finger across his neck, and his head drops forward. Immediately, he is reborn and continues the gestures.

Arms outstretched he turns and walks upstage. A soulful version of silent night begins, gestures of folded hands as if sleeping flit in and out of his slow arm dance. He slowly walks off upstage, like a fading spirit leaving this world. Soft thunder as he exits, and then he re-enters with a silver bucket above his head, walks a semi-circle around the front of the stage, and then pours more water into the pool. He puts the bucket back on his head and exits upstage right. He re-enters from stage left with the bucket and we hear light thunder again.

The next section is Maureen's infamous staircase dance. "The Stairs" premiered in 1989 in "Water on the Moon" at La MaMa (Small 1989). She descends in excruciatingly slow motion, upside down demonstrating her exquisite control. It doesn't seem like it should be possible as she slowly unfurls and rolls, upside down, down the staircase. Yoshito returns bare chested this time, slow turns with a series of gestures, beast claw hands, stiff arms, and stiff-legged jumping like in Eiko Hosoe's film *Navel* and *A bomb*. He punches and jabs around his chest, which he puffs up so that his ribs protrude. His body is painted white. We hear classical music drowned out by wind.

The next scene is Maureen with fabric across her face, seated in a Grahamesque z-sit, arms outstretched, chest arched back, wind blowing the fabric back, and light is red tinted. She slowly rises and arches back, with the fabric fluttering the entire time like a flag across her body. Suddenly, her limbs whip as if blown by strong wind, wildly tossing her upper body about as her legs stay rooted. Yoshito returns in a white suit and hat with flowers, similar to the one worn by Kazuo in *Dead Sea*.

Lights come up for the final scene, illuminating Fleming in the water with branches. She slowly rises and walks a few piercing steps, bent over, and walking on tiptoes with her arms outstretched behind her, birdlike. Yoshito appears with a picture frame around his face. She continues to wield the branches, raising them over her head. She slowly returns to a crouch and then drops the branches and slides out to an elongated position, stopping just at the point before she touches the ground with her whole body. She has mastered an incredible physicality that makes the audience catch their breath. It's as if she

stops just before the moment of resolution, suspending weight against gravity. Her physical control is just exquisite to watch, and she never stays in a recognizable shape for very long.

The 1991 performance with Yoshito marked a new chapter in Fleming's career, one in which she grew to increasing international prominence as a solo artist who had truly established her own voice. John Gillespie, former director of Japan Society, aptly described Fleming's unique approach to performance: "She is neither Eastern nor Western, belonging neither to butoh nor ballet. She is herself, *sui generis*, made of many diverse elements into one of a kind" (Gillespie 2018). Gillespie's commentary reinforces the assertion that Fleming has an artistic voice unto herself.

Following Stewart's initial effort to produce Fleming in France, Fleming vigorously pursued an international career, with much success. She performed in the Milanoltre [Beyond Milan] Festival, where dance critic Ugo Volli declared: "Fleming is a sensational discovery, one of the rare, esthetic emotions in recent years" (Volli 1993). Of her 1996 performance in Paris, *Le Figaro* proclaimed: "Not only is Maureen Fleming a phenomenon, but also a sensitive artist who uses the butoh technique for original creations of great aesthetic harmony" (*Le Figaro* 1996). This is a notable feat in Paris, where butoh first ventured beyond Japan and informed audiences were harsh critics. She returned to New York later that same year with *After Eros*, a series of solos which included her breathtaking descent down a staircase headfirst. Jack Anderson of *The New York Times* proclaimed: "She appeared to transform into stone. She also appeared to transcend the material world and enter the realm of pure spirit . . . it involved more than virtuosity . . . [the performance] became a sacred journey" (Anderson 1996). She became recognized worldwide as an original artist on her own terms, with her own truly unique expression.

Among her many international commissions, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Colombia (2005), South Korea (2006, 2007), Ireland (2016, 2017), and Latvia (2019). Between 2006 and 2011, she was an artist in residence at the Seoul Institute for the Arts, where she developed her groundbreaking Fleming Technique and "regenerative" training methods with Fleming Elastxx, a patented device of her own invention (US Patent 2020). She has also been a frequent guest at international festivals in Italy, France, Germany, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, South Korea, and Latvia, where dance movement therapy practitioner Simona Orinska has been developing a butoh community since 2005. Orinska has created a large following of welcoming students spreading the butoh diaspora and creating many opportunities for cultural exchange.⁵ During Fleming's 2019 Fulbright in Riga, Latvia, she presented her work *Mother and Child*, set to Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* and featuring 12 dancers including Orinska as a memorial to the 90,000 Jewish Latvian people who perished under the German occupation during World War II. The piece was performed at the STARTELPA Festival at the Latvian Performance Art Center, where she also presented her work *B. Madonna*.

Major works by Fleming include *Eros* (with Yoshito Ohno, 1991), *Axis Mundi* (1988 Commission for Creative Time NYC and later presented in the 1995 San Francisco Butoh Festival on a shared program with Akira Kasai), *After Eros* (1996), *Decay of the Angel* (2004), *Waters of Immortality* (2007), *B. Madonna* (2013), and *WILDFLOWERS, A Feminine Genesis* (2018). Many of the dances feature Fleming surrounded by a billowing, gauzy fabric, of iconic red, black, orange, or white. She is frequently nude, or nearly so, and unpainted. She has a host of frequent collaborators, including multi-disciplinary artist Chris Odo; musician Bruce Brubaker; composers Philip Glass, Guy Klucevsek, and Colm Mac Con Iomaire; and author David Henry Hwang. When Lois Greenfield was working for the Village Voice, she photographed Maureen Fleming and Yoshito Ohno during the 1991 performance of *Eros*. Following this first encounter, Lois Greenfield continued to photograph Fleming in her studio. Fleming's choreography and costume designs became the subject of many of Greenfield's most famous photographic images. After studying photography at the Seoul Institute of the Arts while a Fulbright Scholar there in 2006, Fleming began to create her own photography of her choreography and presented her first photography installation "Dances from Home" at La Galleria in 2009 in conjunction with photographers who had also captured her original images including Lois Greenfield, Philip Trager, Spencer Tunic, Christopher Odo, and Ethan Hoffman.

Among her significant students, Fleming cites Dana Iova-Koga (also a student of Min Tanaka at Hakushu, and the life and creative partner of Shinichi Iova-Koga, profiled in Chapter 4), Ximena Garnica (profiled in Chapter 4), Venezuelan-based Juan Carlos Linares (teacher at La Universidad Nacional Experimental de las Artes (Unearte)), and Antony and the Johnsons (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., April 17, 2019). Anohni, the transgender lead vocalist of Antony and the Johnsons, was a student at NYU in the early 1990s, when Fleming was a regular professor in the Experimental Theater Wing (ETW). Says Anohni of the impact butoh had on her own art:

Especially on stage for me, I'm always applying the vocabulary I studied in butoh, as a singer. Rarely am I mining my personal life for motivation to sing. Usually, I'm engaged in seeking a creative impulse, or a set of imagery that can propel me through the song or the moment, to unveil the present for me in a different way.

Maybe as I'm singing, a flock of flamingos are bursting out of my heart, and I ride the momentum of those birds as I sing forward. Maybe when the audience exhales it creates a green mist that collects before them, as a momentum, and it dances in a circle that resolves in a huge glowing pool in the middle of the room, and we all look at it and I sing into that place.

(Barclay 2009)

In particular, Fleming's technique of using image to access states was the key for Anohni.

I studied with this teacher named Maureen Fleming, who was amazing. Before that I went to a performing arts school, which was so focused on technique and things that were too abstract to me. Maureen would just plug me right in with a crazy image that really worked for me.

(Barclay 2009)

Anohni became fascinated with Kazuo Ohno and as a band, Antony and the Johnsons eventually met the Ohnos in Japan. They performed with Yoshito at the Sogetsu Hall in Tokyo in 2010. A black and white image of Kazuo Ohno's 1977 *La Argentina* graces the cover of Antony and the Johnsons' 2009 album *The Crying Light*.⁶ Says Anohni, "The album is dedicated to him, because he is my art hero and art parent, in a way" (Barclay 2009).

Another notable student of Fleming is Dimitris Pappaionnou, who rocketed to international fame when he choreographed *Origins* for the 2004 Athens Olympics Opening Ceremony. Pappaionnou was cast as a chorus dancer in Ellen Stewart's 1985 production of *Mythos Oedipus* in Athens, under choreographer Min Tanaka. He subsequently traveled to New York in 1986 to continue his studies in butoh and contemporary dance through connections he had made in the Greek production (Ozzie Rodriguez, pers. comm., September 5, 2020). While enrolled in a program of study with Erick Hawkins, a protégé of Martha Graham, Pappaionnou also took Fleming's workshops at La MaMa. Originally a painter, Pappaionnou went on to found his own Athens-based company Edifos and collaborate with theater director Robert Wilson (Gil 2011). As with Fleming, Ellen Stewart supported and promoted his development, including directing Pappaionnou's 1986 opera *The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter*, which premiered in Baltimore.⁷ Many of his dances include seemingly dismembered and multi-limbed humans, emerging from walls and tables. His aesthetic is decidedly dark, though *The New York Times* critic Brian Seibert notes that Pappaionnou delves into Tanztheater's "Bauschian mortal themes with a light touch . . . a comic tone that wards off pretension" (Seibert 2019). Though he does not mention butoh in his website or promotional materials, there are aesthetic connections in his uncanny imagery and temporal pacing.

Fleming continues to teach and influence a new generation of artists and movement educators. Now in her sixties, Fleming is still going strong as a dance artist, creator, and teacher. She credits her rigorous and daily practice with the Elastxx, a part of Fleming Technique, as well as her continued drive toward creative research. Despite injury, her quest has always been the same: "What is the unbreakable, indestructible essence inside each of us that the art of dance seeks to reveal?" Fleming notes that although

many artists begin creating out of pain, out of a need to escape a particular reality, that need to go somewhere else puts one close to the unconscious

and engenders a reciprocal relationship between life and art that strengthens as we attain higher levels of contact with the beyond we can sometimes reach in the dance.

(Fleming 2013)

Indeed, her body of work is a testament to this quest and has provided a strong foundation for American butoh.

Joan Laage/Kogut (b. 1948, Beloit, Wisconsin, Based in Seattle, Washington Since 1990)

Originally from Beloit, Wisconsin, Joan Laage first studied modern dance in high school. As a student at University of Colorado, Boulder, Laage initially majored in Spanish and French. After she changed her major to dance, a fellow student introduced her to a local Bharata Natyam teacher. In 1974, she relocated to Berkeley, CA, to continue Indian dance studies with the renowned Balasaraswati and her daughter Laksmi. It was here at the Center for World Music, a cultural organization that introduced many prominent Asian artists to the United States through national tours and training programs (Center for World Music, 2020), that Joan was exposed to a variety of dance forms from around the world. These encounters piqued her interest in travel and cultural studies. While in Berkeley, she also studied Indonesian dance forms and modern dance with Laura Dean, and performed her repertoire with live music by Steve Reich (Joan Laage, email message to author, November 14, 2019).

Bolstered by the cultural blending she witnessed at the Center for World Music, Laage continued expanding her training to include Tai Chi. Upon graduation with an MA in dance from Mill College, she secured a teaching position at The University of Otago and left the United States for Dunedin, New Zealand, where she taught for three years from 1978 to 1980. Each summer, she traveled to India to continue studies with Balasaraswati, in dance and also Carnatic singing and language studies. Laage credits the training in classical Indian dance for her highly expressive face and feet and says that this training was later useful when she encountered butoh. She draws the correlation specifically to the use of mask in her training with Ashikawa; they worked with *hannya* (devil) for facial expression with the *kabe* (wall) body posture, though unlike *abhinaya* in classical Indian dance, Ashikawa was not working with mask expression for an emotional goal, but rather an impetus for texture and shape in the face (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020).

At an American Dance Guild/Congress on Research in Dance conference, entitled “Traditional Dance in the Twentieth Century” held in Hawaii in 1978, Laage encountered the “lively debates centered around the questions of modernizing traditional dance and creating modern forms” (Laage 1993, 21). Her initial interest in butoh came from the perception that it was “indigenous Japanese contemporary dance” (Laage 1993, 22). In part, this notion came from the context within which she viewed butoh for the first time. While teaching

on the Semester at Sea program, she visited Japan for the first in 1982; Laage witnessed many traditional dance forms, including Noh, Kabuki, Bunraku, and Nihon Buyo (Japanese traditional dance). It was through the lens of her previous experience with Asian traditional performance that she saw Dairakudakan for the first time. While living in Hong Kong, she had seen a photo of the group's director Akaji Maro. She had sought the company out when she arrived in Tokyo and was fortunate that they were performing. She was impressed with the spectacle that she calls "visually . . . striking and mysterious" (Laage 1993, 22). The experience stayed with her and eventually drew her back to Japan as a subject to research.

In 1987–88, Laage pursued her certificate in Laban Movement Analysis at the Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies in New York. While there, she met Susan Blakely Klein, who shared her own research in butoh. When Laage decided to pursue Laban's research on "qualitative similarities in butoh" (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020), Klein introduced her at the studios of Kazuo Ohno and Natsu Nakajima in Tokyo. At that time, says Laage, "you still needed a formal introduction to be admitted to these studios" (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Her strategy was to use her own body as a research tool for her writing: "I never set out to be a butoh dancer" says Laage, rather she was taking class in order to pursue an embodied understanding.

Laage describes her training in Japan as firmly rooted in both lineages: the choreographed image training and choreographic structures of Hijikata's later work, via Ashikawa, and the improvisational explorations with Kazuo and his son, Yoshito Ohno. She trained with the Ohnos for many years. For her, training with Yoshito was "like experiencing a Zen koan; it was quite a mysterious process, much like understanding how someone believes in god" (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). With Kazuo, Laage says that the prompts given for class improvisations were more often about

the mother and fetus relationship, the body as ocean, the body as the fish swimming in the ocean, little fish being swallowed by a bigger fish . . . He wouldn't really tell you what to do, but he would more guide: "*motto chisai*" [do it smaller], bring it inside, don't let it seep out so much.

Kazuo encouraged minimal movement to "allow the *tamashi* [soul] to come up, burst and float up like an earthquake" (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Ohno's teachings were particularly special for her:

At the time Ohno was working with the image of the hungry ghosts [a classic Buddhist archetype of wandering souls], and it was a cathartic experience for me. These images struck me because of my own mother's illnesses; she had multiple sicknesses including cancer of the esophagus. Butoh is not generally cathartic for me, I know it is for some, but for me it's not so personally emotional, but more a deep emotion of the body. But

at the time, he reminded me so much of my mother, who was emaciated toward the end of her life because she couldn't swallow . . . so it was a very personal connection with Kazuo.

(Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020)

She says that though in her training methodology she draws more heavily from Ashikawa, she more often senses Kazuo's presence in her performances because that connection was so deeply felt (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020).

In 1989, her first two butoh creations included solos by her and Naofumi Fujitani, a dedicated student of Kazuo's, followed by an improvisational duet (see Figure 3.2). She and Fujitani produced *Dapp'in (Shedding)* at Terpsichore in Tokyo, followed by a second performance held in Yokohama's ST Spot. With her *sensei* Kazuo in the audience, Laage remembers feelings of awe and humility (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Laage later used Dappin'



Figure 3.2 Joan Laage in *Milky Way* at Terpsichore in Tokyo, Japan (1989).

Source: Photo courtesy Joan Laage, reprinted with permission from Joan Laage

(with a change in spelling) for her company name in the United States (Dap-pin' Butoh). Her first group project was as a guest artist in Taiwan, where she created *Four Seasons in a Rock Garden* with local dancers in 1989.

Imagery training with Ashikawa was what made Laage “captivated with the style” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Ashikawa had been a painter before she worked with Hijikata and would put charcoal drawings on the wall. These drawings spoke to Laage’s fascination with graphic images. She also appreciated Ashikawa’s ability to make her see things anew: “She [Ashikawa] would also completely disorient us, saying things like ‘up is down and down is up’ to keep us constantly recalibrating and off balance” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Laage found the challenge quite intriguing.

From Ashikawa, Laage learned the specific use of language employed in butoh. Every month for a year at Terpsichore, Ashikawa would hold a six-hour workshop with live music in which Laage participated. She describes the experience as “super intensive.” Onomatopoeia with touch words was common: “like when Ashikawa uttered ‘picpicpicpic’ while she poked the soles of our feet with a chopstick while we practiced *kujyaku* [peacock]” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Ashikawa and dancers used sweeping gestures to extend and guide the images beyond the body. Laage remembers wondering if they were playing with energy fields or auras and asking herself if butoh is about making energy fields manifest in form. She learned the importance of using internal experience to shape the external form. She describes this in relationship to *ushi*, or bull, one of the most common animal images used in butoh training:

you feel the spreading of the hips to make the big buttocks of the *ushi* and feel the weight of the horns on the head, and how that makes you move . . . it’s not doing, it’s allowing, uncovering . . . how you extend your energy changes how you relate to the space.

(Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020)

Says Laage, “The other thing is the body in stillness, feeling the packed molecules of the stone, for example feeling the density, and then a dog pees on you, and it changes your state, which can change your shape” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Laage finds that this training is useful for any performer because it teaches fundamental lessons about the body and energy in space.

Even though she was still in research mode, an opportunity came for Laage to further engage in performance. After the year of intensive workshops, Ashikawa formed the apprentice company Gnome so that Hakutobo dancers could train other dancers, among them SU-EN.⁸ Laage performed in three or four shows, which was significant exposure to the intensive process of making work. In the beginning, even though she didn’t speak Japanese and there was no translation, she had former training in Tai Chi and knew how to bring herself to a beginner’s mind, and to make her body available. She describes

specific training in weightlessness and awareness of gravity, which she feels “informs butoh [dancers’] ability to direct energy in any dimension—inside, outside, down to the earth, up to the sky. This is how you get to the animal body,” or what she refers to as the “available body,” the body that is ready to move any direction at any moment. “I would watch Izumi doing the lightning in the body, and then I allowed that energy to permeate my body” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Further, with Ashikawa and with Yoshito, the training was always about the process, or *hoko*, “traveling, not walking . . . moving from one end of the room to the other in a journey.” She describes the process of transformation *as* the dance score. At one of Gnome’s infamous all-night rehearsals, Laage recalls practicing *hoko* for over an hour, during which time she felt as if she would throw up or pass out, but somehow, she managed to keep going through concentrating on the task of embodying the images. One of the Hakutobo dancers came up to her and scratched her throat to help her find the exposed tendons of the *hannya* mask, a sensation she remembers viscerally (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020).

While in Japan, Laage continued to seek out performances outside of butoh, including Noh, Kabuki, Bunraku, and Matsuri Shinto shrine festivals, which she felt helped her understand critical aspects of Japanese cultural forms. She also witnessed the emergence of the so-called post-butoh movement in Japanese dance, when an increasing number of contemporary dancers were showing signs of butoh influence. Key among these artists was Saburo Teshigawara, whose 1989 piece *Ishi-no-hana (Flower of Stone)*, featured him dancing “on a mound of glass panes, stamping them into fragments, glass dust rising in alarming curls” (Meisner 2000). Another Japanese dancer that Laage sought out was Kumiko Kuniyoshi. Laage recalls being struck by her way of moving and staging, a very personal journey but closer to contemporary than butoh in its timing and sense of space.

Laage returned to Japan for her Ph.D. research in 1987 (Laage 1993). During this period, she interviewed dance critic Nario Goda and ingratiated herself to a number of Japanese butoh performers by hanging around after performances (Laage 1993, 34). She returned to Kazuo Ohno’s studio and also watched Natsu Nakajima in rehearsal with Yukio Waguri. Laage saw an “invitation only” performance at Min Tanaka’s farm (and witnessed Tanaka’s group Majuku’s mid-night performance during the rain while Michael Blackwood shot his film *Body on the Edge of Crises*) as well as group performances by Hakutobo, Dairakudakan, Dance Love Machine, Harupin-Ha, Yuko Yuki, and Akira Kasai (Eurhythmy). She also saw solos by Masaki Iwana, Goi Teru, and Tomiko Takai, and later, Ko Murobushi, as he was beginning his series of dances with his body painted silver. Integrating herself into the community, Laage saw countless weekly performances in intimate theaters, “packing in up to one hundred and fifty people seated side by side on flat black cushions” (Laage 1993, 35). She also saw outdoor performances in Zushi Beach near Tokyo (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020).

Based on her experiences in Tokyo in the late 1980s and early 1990s, she concluded that “the underground spirit of the experimental 1960s is alive in Japan today” (Laage 1993, 35). She returned to the United States with these influences fresh in her own creative consciousness.

While living abroad in Japan, Laage had met her husband David Thornbrugh, a poet and editor. He eventually rejoined her in the United States, where she had been finishing her dissertation at Texas Women’s University, while living with her father in El Paso, Texas. The couple eventually settled in Seattle. Laage says that she had always felt connected to the Pacific Rim and was drawn to the Pacific North West landscape. Says Laage, “there was no butoh scene here yet, but people knew about butoh here in Seattle because Sankai Juku had been here and many witnessed the fall to death of one of their company members” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). Kokoro dance may have been in Vancouver, B.C. around the same time, but she didn’t become aware of them until later.

Laage is a pioneer of butoh in the Pacific Northwest, who established and helped build a community of dancers and audience members. Certainly, the community was bolstered by touring performances by Sankai Juku, who returned to Seattle every few years to perform, as well as the Ohnos and the duo Eiko and Koma. However, it was Laage who has given regular classes and maintained a consistent presence for butoh in Seattle since the summer of 1990.

Founding Dappin’ Butoh Company in 1991, she remained Artistic Director for more than a decade. During her tenure, she produced the first Seattle International Butoh Festivals in 1998 and 2000. The first festival promoted the local community, as well as Vancouver-based Kokoro and introduced SU-EN to Seattle. The 2000 festival presented an impressive array of international artists, thanks to Kokoro’s Vancouver International Dance Festival, in which Yukio Waguri/Kohzensha Butoh Company (Japan), GooSayTen (Japan), SU-EN Butoh Company (Sweden), Tangentz Performance Group (Hawaii), and Fujiwara Dance Inventions (Toronto) all performed. The festival also brought together artists from Seattle and San Francisco, with performances by Shinichi Koga/inkBoat’s *Cockroach* and Degenerate Art Ensemble’s *Rinko*.⁹

After 2002, Laage began to actively pursue solo work and research into her own ancestral roots. In 2003, she performed two seminal solo works at the New York Butoh Festival in 2003: *Black Widow* and *Infanticity or Every Baby is Jesus*, as well as a group work, *Imprints*. *Black Widow* is a dance that Laage has been working on in numerous iterations since 1995. She calls it a “slow burn” type of work, due to the fact that each time she performs it, her experience of the images becomes “more saturated.” She works with a set structure, but the piece evolves through a series of images, and each journey is distinct. Then, Seattle-based noise artist Key Ransome/Small Cruel Party made the first music for this work, and later composer/photographer Steven Miller created the soundtrack with which she tours. She performed it in Tokyo and Kyoto, and the Red Cat Theater in LA, sharing the stage with Akaji Maro and Katsura Kan. It was an amazing experience for her, since Maro was her entrée into

butoh. The ending section of the work features Laage eating and regurgitating red beets while embodying spider postures.

Infanticity or Every Baby is Jesus, first performed in Krakow, Poland in 1996, is based on the idea that “we are all born with innocence” (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020). The images were inspired by Laage’s fascination with how and where people worship. She talks about how the buildings we build for worship radiate people’s love and fear as they try to understand their place in the world. A particular church she visited in Bucharest was dark and smoky, with the Virgin and Baby Jesus icons decorated in pounded silver. She recreates this image on stage, with an iconic mother and child that she uncovers in the process of her dance, embodying Mary Magdalene and the Baby Jesus as she transforms through worship and iconography.

Another signature project of Laage’s is *Earth Tomes*, which was born in 1993 in the middle of the night in an outhouse at a backcountry camp on snowy Mt. Rainier, Washington, while Joan sat listening to the sounds of nature and watching the shadows cast by her flashlight. She created the first solo for the Festival of One in Seattle and, also, performed it at the Seattle Fringe Theater Festival. In 2015, Laage created a new version as part of a symposium in Sweden organized by Susan Kozel, a Canadian/British dance artist. Performed in a greenhouse in Sweden’s frigid winter, the audience sat on both sides, facing one another, in what she staged as an intentional yet subtle confrontation of one another. She describes the work as a birth, in which she enters as a tree and emerges as a body turned to earth. The piece for her is political, to remind us to remain connected to the earth.

Earth Tomes related back to Laage’s roots in rural Wisconsin. She swam in the creeks in the summer, made igloos in the winter, traipsed through fields of cow patties, and tended a garden with her family. She says that when she began exploring butoh, it reconnected her with her upbringing:

I felt like I was recovering my childhood, *that* body that was really *my* body . . . When I heard Goda Nario talk about Hijikata’s one tatami mat dance and the children kept in a basket, whether or not it’s true, it says something about the importance of one’s childhood experience of space.

(Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020)

She likens her early experiences in life to her current gardening practice (and profession), and planting seeds that sprout later in life.

Initially a solo work, *Earth Tomes* became a project as Laage began inviting other dancers to join her. Since 2016, the project has been presented with local dancers in Seattle, Upstate New York, and several European cities. In many ways, it has become a community-based creative process that she can replicate wherever she travels.

Other projects have had a similar community-based improvisational feel, much like Hiroko ad Koichi Tamano’s annual project in Berkeley, as well as other community-garden-based projects produced by other butoh artists (see

LEIMAY profile in Chapter 4). In 2010, Laage became a docent for the Seattle Japanese Garden, and annually presents a three-hour durational structured improvisational performance called *Wandering and Wondering* there and at Seattle's Kubota Garden.

Significant students who have worked with Laage include Helen Thorsen, who was a member of the original Dappin' Butoh from 1990 and continues to perform with her, and Douglas Ridings, who was a student and company member from 1993 to 1997 and went on to become a renowned yoga teacher and Odissi dancer with Urvasi Dance Ensemble. Another key Seattle figure who has collaborated with Laage on producing performances is Sheri Brown. Brown, previously a statue artist who encountered butoh when Laage's husband saw her on a bus and invited her to the 2000 butoh festival, has primarily trained with Diego Piñón and Katsura Kan. I mention Brown here because she is a primary organizer of butoh events in Seattle. There is a wonderful photo on Ridings' website of Laage, Brown, and Ridings in a 2009 improvisational performance; each has a different extreme expression that highlights their distinct aesthetics: Laage looks as if an invisible string has pulled from her lips through the top of her head and her eyes express a far-away look, Brown looks like a scary doll with her hand covering her open-mouthed cackle and her eyes are turned upward against a furrowed brow, and Ridings has a terrifying grimace on his face and is pulling red material from his mouth, á la classical Indian drama depiction of viscera. They look ephemeral, horrifying, and archetypal, respectively. Says Laage, something she finds really positive about the Seattle butoh community is that "people continue to work together, regardless of whether or not they share aesthetic similarities . . . participants see the value of working together to support a diverse community" (Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020).

While living abroad in Krakow, Poland from 2004 to 2006, Laage took on the name *Kogut* [Rooster] to mark a moment of personal transformation in which she "claimed (her) artistic identity as an American of Danish/German heritage unfolding in a Japanese aesthetic" (Seattle Butoh Laage, n.d.). When asked if she calls her work butoh, Laage replies:

I come from the butoh lineage. I consider myself a carrier [of this tradition]. My journey is to go deeper and deeper, and this is my path. The core is always butoh, the weight, the body, the space, etc. To say I'm influenced by butoh does not honor my history. I understand why others say that, and it's important for them to say that, but for me it's much deeper than that.

Other things have influenced me along the way, but this is my lineage.

(Joan Laage, pers. comm., January 6, 2020)

From Krakow, Laage and her husband moved to South Korea where appeared in several performance art festivals and absorbed new creative information from Korean dance and music traditions.

Resettling in Seattle, Laage joined Brown, Ridings, and several other dancers in founding DAIPANbutoh Collective in 2009, which became the producer of the Seattle International Butoh Festival. To date, the collective has produced 10 annual festivals, featuring numerous regional artists, including the Bay Area-based Tamanos, as well as Diego Piñón (2105), LimenButoh Theater (Warsaw, Poland, 2016), Natalia Cuéllar (Chile), and Ken Mai (Finland/Japan) in 2017, and Mushimaru Fujieda (Yakushima, Japan) in 2018.

Two dancers—Shoko Zama and Katrina Wolfe—sought out Laage in 2015 to study with her exclusively. Laage created pieces for Zama and Wolfe and a quartet with long-time student Consuelo Gonzales entitled *Stone Silence*, which premiered at the 2017 Seattle Butoh Festival and explored the condition of tinnitus. Zama and Wolfe continue to collaborate with Laage as well as creating their own work.

Laage continues to perform annually in DAIPAN's festivals, and directs and performs in annual Japanese garden performances, both of which have now been running for a decade. She has been a part of the European butoh community for many years (particularly in Italy, Poland, Germany, and Norway) and tours Europe annually (winter/spring) to perform and teach and create collaborations with local artists. Since 2015, Laage has returned to Italy to study with Atsushi Takenouchi in Pontedera, which is incidentally also home of the Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards Workcenter in Tuscany, Italy.

Laage is an avid Tai Chi practitioner and gardener, which she has done professionally since settling in Seattle in 1990. She is deeply connected to the land and to weather, and feels that gardening has made her body into a barometer, with great sensitivity to changes in temperature, wind, moisture, etc. Much like her first teacher, Kazuo Ohno, there is no separation for her between art and daily life.

Diego Piñón (b. 1957, Tlalpujahua, Michoacán/Mexico, DF)

A profound connection to spirituality is the river that runs through Diego Piñón's (see Figure 3.3) life. Piñón was born in the colonial gold mining village of Tlalpujahua, home to several noted religious sanctuaries and convents, two-and-a-half hours north of Mexico City. He cites the religious fervor of his mother as his first memory that piqued his curiosity about the essence of being. He witnessed the way her body moved when she prayed or was in a devotional procession and it deeply moved him. He also remembers with crystal-clear clarity the religious ceremonial dance and song of his village in Michoacán, and the hundreds of people who would gather to celebrate the Virgen Mary of the village, Nuestra Señora del Carmen. The spirit he felt present during those moments animates his current search in dance: "for me, if there is no spirit present in performance, you might as well put a robot on stage" (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018).



Figure 3.3 *Paricutín* (2004). Dancer: Diego Piñón.

Source: Photo by Isela Mora, reprinted with permission from Isela Mora

For Piñón, the force of religious practice and belief in Mexico is something that separates the practices of Mexican-based artists from those in the United States, especially artists of his generation. Even though his mother never forced him to engage in her rites, he learned to follow them and to probe the power inherent in this practice. His own search for a comparable experience brought him to art. For him, the quest had equal emotional intensity, in understanding humanity and our place in the universe.

And now, says Piñón, “the churches are closing, because their rituals are failing to convince anyone; we recognize that we need new rituals” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). His dance proposes a contemporary ritual, drawing from indigenous roots, with the goal of personal and communal healing. Piñón went through a period of rejecting formal religion, as he realized that he felt something distinct in his own experience and body. Nonetheless, he says

I think this is a major reason that butoh has had such an impact in Latin American countries, because we are still deeply religious in a pure sense of the word, we are looking for our connection to the sacred . . . not with a specific god or divinity per se, but still with the sacred.

(Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018)

Added to the environment of religious ceremonies in his village, Piñón spent another significant part of his childhood growing up in a poor neighborhood in Mexico City, where popular dancers took to the street in social gatherings. There were some community centers, but most people could not afford to rent spaces so they danced outside. Piñón watched these dancers from his apartment window, fascinated. He asked his mother for permission to go down and join them, which she gave, and eventually people took him under their wing and taught him the dances. The music, particularly the percussive rhythm, brought him toward the spiritual sensation he was looking for, making him feel a vibration with all life forces. “Everyone feels this pulse” he says, “the priests, the old ladies, everyone . . . and this is dormant sensation underneath it all” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). His father noted his passion and gifted him a transistor radio, through which Piñón’s love of music grew: “I wasn’t dancing to tropical rhythms,” he says, “rather I connected to ballads, to melancholic and romantic music” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). His father also bought the family a record player, and Piñón would play music and dance alone in his room. One of his favorite albums, which he still has in his possession, was of Italian accordion song that was the “soundtrack of my life for years and years . . . I danced to it, I cried to it, it was very emotional” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). Through music he found a sense of catharsis.

He had intended to study music and to become a singer, but at the age of 16 was discouraged because his teachers said his voice would change and should not yet be forced. They wanted him to study many years of music theory and piano before pursuing voice, and the discipline of that training did not appeal. Moreover, his father wanted something else for him beyond music. Piñón chose Sociology instead as his academic career.

A life-changing encounter interceded between the ages of 17 and 20 years while he was studying Sociology. Piñón encountered Antonio Cué Ochoa, a Bioenergetic therapist who was experimenting with and teaching about corporeal energies. For Piñón, he was more a shaman than a therapist. Cué founded “the group SexPol (1974–78), which took its name from Wilhelm Reich’s *Sexual Politics* reading that influenced the female, sexual, and homosexual liberation movements in Mexico” (Hernández 2019). Citing theories of Michel Foucault, Cué drew attention to religious and social oppression as enacted through our bodies. Says Piñón, Cué proposed a radical notion that the restriction on human expression can lead to sickness and death, and activists in leftist and homosexual movements cited his work in their own fight for human rights (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020). For Piñón, Cué’s work helped connect his individual search to the practice of collective group therapy. Cué introduced Piñón and other participants to the Meso-American, pre-Colombian cosmivision of the *Wixarica* (*Huichol*), centered in the North of San Luis Potosí.¹⁰ They were one of the indigenous groups who had preserved their traditions and rituals, as well as sacred plants such as *hikuri* (*peyote*).

Through these deeply powerful encounters, Piñón notes that he was able to “open up and see beyond [his previous experiences of] social structures to things he could not explain but could definitely feel,” and that it “revised [his] previous sense of the limits of everyday consciousness” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). Piñón calls the process “a shamanic practice which opened a crucial understanding of the most universal principles of exchange,” whereby the participant understands themselves as a vessel for said exchange (Piñón 2018, 4). When he later encountered butoh, the bridge was obvious.

Piñón was one of the few participants in Cué’s exclusive groups¹¹ for more than seven years, invited to participate in private ceremonies with an indigenous guide. Huichol ritual involves immersive events, for example, a two-week walking meditation to San Luis Potosi, during which time the Huichol “hunt” the *hikuri* in the desert on their pilgrimage to Cerro Quemado [the Burning Mountain], a sacred Huichol site in the mythical land of *Wirikuta* (Carrasco 2014, 164; Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020). Other ceremonies take place in the *temazcal*, or the sweat lodge. Cué and his participants designed their own rituals—including meditation, pilgrimage walks, and fasting—with the help of the indigenous guide. The experiences marked Piñón significantly, as one can imagine, and pushed him to refine his pursuit of a vocation. Piñón knew that he was committed to fighting for human rights and combatting oppression, and he aimed to channel that impulse through a creative act. For Piñón, creativity is a holistic work of the body, mind, and spirit that produces something to be shared, a sentiment that resonated strongly with Kazuo Ohno’s teachings when he would encounter them years later (Piñón 2018, 4).

During one of the ritual shamanic experiences with *hikuri*, Piñón had a vision. He heard a voice, which he interpreted as some form of a higher power. The voice said to him, “you don’t belong in this space, you don’t belong in this tradition, you have a work and a legacy there, in the space of your own society where you were born and grew up, your work is there.” Not only did he find a clear directive to return to his community, but also it was absolutely clear to him that his work was through dance (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018).

Upon graduating from university in 1979, Piñón taught Sociology in high school and college, but he was restless and sought to travel. After a period of years teaching and saving up resources, he went to Spain in 1980 where he was captivated by flamenco dance. Perhaps connected to the Spanish colonial culture in Mexico, he felt instinctively that “this [dance and music] runs through my blood” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). The percussive rhythm, connection to the earth, and melancholic sentiment felt intensely familiar. While in Spain, he pursued all kinds of Spanish styles including flamenco through the community dance centers for several years. In that time, he encountered Pilar Urreta,¹² a Mexican dancer living in New York who had traveled to Spain to perform in a festival. Says Piñón, Urreta pioneered the fusion of Asian performance techniques within the Mexican contemporary

dance scene. She encouraged him to pursue his passion for dance after watching him perform a masked dance as Lorca, in which he was a last-minute substitute covering for a sick dancer.

Urreta also introduced Piñón to Lorenzo Godoy, a Paris-trained Spanish dancer who had toured internationally and by 1978, was a significant figure in the development of contemporary dance (La Provincia 2014). Piñón went to study with Godoy in the Spanish Territorial Canary Island and again found resonance in this work with the dedication, discipline, and fervor with which Godoy approached his craft. He subsequently returned to Mexico City where he dedicated himself to the study of contemporary dance through a variety of studios and teachers. He encountered Bernardo Benítez, a Mexican dancer from his own village living in Mexico City, who had been invited to study with Lester Horton in New York and later went on to direct Ballet Danza Estudio in Mexico City. Piñón studied with Benítez and absorbed a great deal of technical information about dance and performance, during a wave of innovation in dance theater in the 1980s. Piñón then participated with two different dance theater companies, one of them *Tropicanas Holiday* (Graciela Henríquez, director), which created Vaudeville-esque spectacles, and the other was *Andamio* (Cristina Mendoza, director), a group of retired ballerinas (merely in their thirties) from the Mexican National Ballet, who were interested in theatrical experimentation.

The theatrical exploration within these projects drew his attention, and Piñón sought out further theater training. In 1985, he encountered Abraham Oceransky, the polemic experimental theater director who was the first Mexican director to present nude actors onstage, and also the first to introduce *butoh* to Mexico with Natsu Nakajima and later Ko Murobushi (see section on Oceransky in Chapter 2). The second director was Morris Sabariego, with whom Piñón studied from 1986 to 1988. Sabariego was a professor at *Teatro de la Casa*, an experimental theater school in Coyoacán. Sabariego's teaching was focused on the discipline of the actor and acting as a method of transmitting myth (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020).

As in previous endeavors, Piñón continued to connect his performance research with his spiritual quest. In 1986, he encountered a theater group called *La Rueda* (The Spinning Wheel) (Susana Frank, director), who were the ones to introduce Eugenio Barba, as well as actors from the Roy Hart Theater, in workshops to Mexico. Piñón had read the books from these theater practitioners and asked to join the group as a performer. He was accepted and able to take the workshops and train with the company. For him, this was “one more petal of the flower” that confirmed his quest (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). At the center of the flower lay the essence of his work: “to open the most profound energies and memories of the human experience” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). In a workshop with voice teacher Daniel Prieto, Piñón was struck by the direction to “open to the full range of your expressive possibility,” which to him included the ability to unite the voices of his mother and father through his own vessel.

One of the acting teachers from Roy Hart Theater used an exercise in a workshop that Piñón found intriguing. When he asked the origin, he discovered that the company had adopted it from Japanese butoh practice. This was the third reference to butoh in his performance training, the first being through Oceransky, the second through Prieto, and now this one. Piñón recalls seeing images of Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata in 1985, in one of the first published butoh books. Subsequently, in 1986, he saw the photos of Sankai Juku in the Teotihuacán pyramids, which had been shot by famous Mexican photographer Paulina Lavista in 1981 when the company first toured to Mexico to perform at the Cervantino. Now encountering butoh through studio practice, Piñón's interest was piqued by this unfamiliar form.

His next encounter with butoh was in 1987 with Natsu Nakajima, a student of both of these founders, and her dancer Yuriko Maezawa in a performance of *Niwa*, in Mexico City. He describes the experience thus: "they danced a rite of access to a space of magic and mystery, outside the canons of conventional time" (Piñón 2018, 6). Her performance had a profound resonance, taking him "to an altered state of consciousness . . . [he] felt like he was witnessing his own essence" (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020). As a spectator to Nakajima's performance, Piñón experienced something similar to what he had during the *Huichol* rites.

He continued working with the theater company La Rueca and was invited with them, along with numerous other companies working in a similar theatrical lineage related to Barba and Grotowski, to perform in an homage to Grotowski in Peru in 1988. While in Peru, he took workshops with Barba and continued studying with companies from this group that came through Mexico City, including an Italian street theater group called Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo. Piñón was struck by the social and political emphasis of the vast majority of the companies gathered in Peru. This festival was another significant moment for him, special in that he had firsthand access to so many theater artists working to develop and deepen a collective spirit, through a performance practice that felt like ritual (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020).

Two years later in 1989, Piñón witnessed Kazuo and Yoshito Ohno live at the Cervantino in *Dead Sea* and *Waterlilies*. Witnessing that performance, Piñón says that he grasped a critical key in staging ritual practice for performance. He writes: "The power of his fragility on the stage, almost as if he were actually dying right there and then, transformed my understanding of what is possible in performance" (Piñón 2018, 6). He connected the liminal state he witnessed in the Ohnos to a state of rapture, or spiritual ecstasy that he had witnessed in his mother's devotional practice.

Piñón continued his research with the vibrant presence of Kazuo Ohno now a part of his consciousness. In 1992, he applied to the Japanese Embassy in Mexico for a scholarship to study with the Ohnos in Japan. Two catalytic interactions occurred in the interim while he awaited the results of his application: Mitsuyo Uesugi, assistant to Kazuo Ohno for 10 years, came to Mexico invited by the Japanese Embassy in 1992, and Byakko Sha invited Piñón to participate

in a watershed performance they gave at the Anthropological Museum in Mexico City in 1993 (described in detail in Chapter 2). Watching performances by and studying with Uesugi, Piñón describes “how her soul expression emanated from a place of detachment from the [physical] body, from an intention to transmute and transform matter . . . surpassing the limits of civilized domestication” (Piñón 2018, 12). Piñón distinctly remembers her saying, “for me butoh is a sacred path, for me butoh is a way of reclaiming the sacred part of myself” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). She had been the assistant of Kazuo Ohno for more than a decade, accompanying him on his tours, helping him paint his body and get dressed before performances. For Piñón, Uesugi drew parallels from the “mystical meaning” in Ohno’s teaching with Piñón’s own experience of Mexican folk ritual.

The Byakko Sha experience taught Piñón another layer of butoh methodology: “it required a level of concentration I had not yet experimented with. I was required to cultivate a state of stillness—feeling at my back the overwhelming force of the spectacle of Japanese butoh, [enhanced] by a dazzling scenic technology” (Piñón 2018, 14). Noted Mexican dance writer Emilio Rosales describes Piñón’s role as a “gatekeeper” or sentinel (see description in Chapter 2); Piñón depicts it as “master of ceremonies” whose job, apart from remaining statuesquely still for prolonged periods, was to cut an infant’s hair during the event (Piñón 2018, 14). He describes the preparations as “a very Japanese dynamic, as baffling as appealing for its uniqueness” (Piñón 2018, 14). He again experienced a strong bridge between these vestiges of ritual and folk practices from his childhood.

When the Japanese Embassy’s invitation finally arrived, Piñón was surprised to find that it was not to study with the Ohnos, but rather to spend three months at Min Tanaka’s farm, Body Weather Farm in Hakushu-sho. Nonetheless, he accepted, and along with Mexican theater artist Jaime Razzo whom he did not previously know, Piñón traveled to Japan in 1994 to embark on a journey that “push[ed] us to touch our absolute physical, mental, and emotional limits” (Piñón 2018, 14). He describes the training as “ego-crushing” and pushing his body to numbness, but by the third month of the intensive he found that the state of submission led him to find “compassion” in service of others through ritual. “I couldn’t say that it was ‘it,’ however it was the way my being began to settle” (Piñón 2018, 16). The discipline and rigor of the training provided a distinct method to move beyond the daily ego-self.

When he arrived, Piñón joined a group of 20 new students, mostly European and North American, and one Brazilian. Many of them left by the end of the first or second week due to the difficult training regimen (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). Piñón, on the other hand, felt a responsibility to the granting agency to continue participating. He was also 34 years old, with a more mature perspective than some of his counterparts that were in their twenties that despite the challenges, it would be worthwhile to stay until the end.

While Piñón admits that he had many hard experiences during the training, he also had extraordinarily mystic experiences as well, similar to the shamanic

journeys in Mexico. Tanaka invited Piñón to dance in the performance of *The Ancient Woman* with the company, which added to the intensity of the experience. Says Piñón, after a full day of farming, pulling potatoes from the ground and spreading animal excrement on crops to fertilize them, rehearsals would begin after dinner. Much like Hijikata's all-night rehearsals at Asbestos-kan, Piñón describes the preparation for the performance as three weeks of torment with very little time to rest. They rehearsed until 1:00 am and then began daily farming activities at 6:00 am. It pushed him beyond what he thought possible in daily life, confronting fears. Sometimes, he literally thought he would die; the risks seemed that extreme. In the performances, the men lit torches of dried cornstalks and attached them to themselves like a phallus. They were to walk across the space with the burning phallus as the flames got dangerously close to their bodies, dislodge the stalk, and then place it up on a pillar. At the end of the performance, the dancers destroyed a giant brick wall that they had constructed—they pushed from behind until it collapsed forward. Neither of these actions was rehearsed, which added to the element of extreme presence and also of danger, since no one knew if either action would be successful. Faced with one of the scariest moments in his life, Piñón says that he passed through fear and felt a freedom like “nirvana” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). At the top of the show, Piñón had the sensation that he would certainly die, but once he began the performance, he “crossed the threshold, the rest was in ecstasy” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020).

The Ancient Woman was one of the most radical experiences of Piñón's life. Even beyond the performance, during the celebration following, he remembers vomiting because his body had been deprived of regular meals for the three weeks of preparation and simply could not handle the amount of food he had consumed after the show. Tanaka ordered the dancers to be served fish after fish, and, says Piñón, “you ate because he told you to . . . I threw up four times to make more room.” But in the end, he felt content, and that the process had been worth the struggle.

As he prepared to leave, Piñón was called into the office where he met Horikawa. She asked him to join the company on tour in Europe, which to him felt like the fork in the road: After the experience with Tanaka from which he had just emerged, the decision felt quite charged. In a dramatic gesture, Horikawa placed a telephone on the desk in front of him, with the long cable stretched from another room, and said “if you need to arrange things, I'll leave you alone for a bit” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). After consulting his friend and fellow dancer Louisa Racyk (Australian), he decided that he would look for a sign in his call home to Mexico. When his mother answered the phone, she was so happy to hear from him and told him “I hope that you complete all you have to do there” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). That confirmation was enough to encourage him to stay. What he didn't know at the time was that he did feel the need to remain in Japan; his journey would take him away from Hakushu.

What followed was a brutal test, with the subsequent two weeks at double the intensity of the previous performance preparation. Moreover, he continued to be housed with the rest of the dancers who had not been chosen for the tour, and he felt such intense jealousy from his colleagues that it gave him nightmares. After two weeks of not sleeping, one early morning he went for a two-hour walk in the rain, and upon returning, he decided to respectfully tell Horikawa and Tanaka that this was not his path. From there, he went to study with Kazuo Ohno.

Following this portal through Tanaka's work, Piñón began to study with the Ohnos over a period of the next 20 years, in both the United States and Japan. Piñón was with the Ohnos about six or seven different times in Japan, and each time was like a chapter in his voyage that helped him resolve something in his own internal search (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). He characterizes his journey as "becoming, or unfolding, guided by a subtle and feminine path, much less rigid and crushing than Tanaka or Nakajima" (Piñón 2018, 19). The two extremes of his training allowed him to develop his own methods within performance training practice.

The Ohnos offered an entirely different view into *butoh*; they said to him, "since you are here, we are going to learn from you as well as you learning from us" (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). Says Piñón, "from this I learned something very important about teaching, that if you are to teach you must be open to the exchange . . . all of my teaching in the United States has taught me this as well" (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). Further, what he learned from Kazuo was not so much what Kazuo showed him how to do, rather he felt that Kazuo's grace and vulnerability exposed his being, his body, and his essence, and from that Piñón gleaned what lessons he learned.¹³ Having witnessed firsthand the Ohnos' dance within their daily life, he understands the all-encompassing nature of the investigation; there is not an aesthetic or genre or brand with which he wishes to align his own work, rather it is a commitment to ongoing process and investigation.

In 1996, Piñón began teaching and performing under the guise of *Butoh Ritual Mexicano* (BRM), a name that solidified as he toured internationally. It was not his intention to create a particularly nationalistic rendition of *butoh* practice, rather the name was initially a connection between his childhood experiences with Mexican folk rituals and Japanese *butoh* practices. It was also a function of marketing by international presenters and likely helped build his cache.

Even as he was cultivating his practice in Mexico, Piñón increasingly built a following in the United States. He first performed in San Francisco in 1996, on a festival invitation from Brady Street Theater. Some of the Harupin-Ha dancers, including Terrence Graven, saw Piñón's performance and subsequently studied with him. The following year, Piñón taught a workshop at Prescott College in Arizona in 1997, which was the beginning of many lasting relationships in the United States. Among the Prescott College students were Mizu

Desierto, currently anchoring the butoh community in Portland Oregon, Nate Montgomery, currently based in Boulder, Colorado, and Christopher Mankowski, who continued to study with Piñón over the years and is currently his assistant. In 1998, Brechin Flournoy invited Piñón to participate in the San Francisco Butoh Festival, that year, themed “Global Butoh.” He performed alongside Thailand-based Japanese dancer Katsura Kan, Argentine performer Gustavo Collini Sartor, Canadian company Kokoro, and several Japanese artists including the company Yan Shu and Abe “M”aria.

Piñón’s participation in the 1998 San Francisco Butoh Festival gained him a review by respected American dance critic Rita Felciano. Following the festival, he was invited to teach workshops in numerous communities as well as through universities, including the University of California Los Angeles, UC Riverside, UC San Diego, Warren Wilson College, and Brooklyn College.

In 2000, he returned to the Ohnos’ studio in Yokohama for an extended period of study, funded by a grant from Japan Foundation. Through their support, he was able to hire a translator, and glean even more information from the interaction, which has greatly influenced his teaching today. While there, he created and performed a new work, titled *Hñahñu*, doubly titled in the Otomi language, *Dumui (Broken Nostalgia)*. He returned to Mexico to perform the solo at Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), and also toured it to San Diego, San Francisco, and Vancouver.

Piñón opened his own center in Tlalpujahua, Michoacán, Mexico, in 2001, and since that time numerous students from around the world have studied there, seeking out his tutelage, which for many Mexican artists has become a rite of passage. Piñón is connected with the vast majority of the contemporary Mexican butoh generation, because they have passed through his doors at one time or another over the past 30 years.

Piñón has worked intensively with several small groups of dancers in workshops and research processes, and numerous of these investigations resulted in performances. In 2003, he created a group ritual project entitled *Espiritus en Transito (Spirits in Transit)*. Among the group of dancers were Espartaco Martínez, who danced with Dairakudakan for six years, and Tania Galindo (see profiles in Chapter 4).

Eugenia Vargas (see profile in Chapter 4) was in the audience for that piece. She had been a part of Piñón’s workshops over a period of 10 years, together with a group of dancers with whom she worked closely. In 2006, Piñón formed another group and made a second synthesis of *Espiritus en Transito (Spirits in Transit)*, in which danced Vargas, Pepe Bravo, Cinthia Patiño, Constanza Herrera, Augustin Elizondo, and Laura Fernandez. The group performed in 2010 el Museo del Chopo, part of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the organization that supported many butoh events in Mexico City over the years.

Tania Galindo, now director of Butoh Chilango (see profile in Chapter 4), had continued to study with Piñón and was also part of the research group in which Vargas participated. She did not appear in the 2010 performance but continued to work closely with Piñón as her mentor. Galindo produced the

Second Festival of Butoh in Latin America, in partnership with Susana Reyes, who had produced the first festival in Ecuador in 2013. Piñón suggested to her to make a bridge between Japanese butoh and Latin American performers following this link. Together they invited Masaru Susaki, director of the Japan Foundation, Mexico to present the historical aspect of Japanese butoh at a roundtable.

In the festival colloquium, Piñón pressed the question: “what is the integration or transformation of butoh that is occurring in Latin America?” Though it was controversial, he felt it was necessary to suggest that Latin American artists have the pride to express the force of their own culture, through this borrowed practice. The question for him is not what does Latin American butoh look like, but rather, where has 30 years of interaction with this dance in Latin America brought us? However, for Piñón, butoh is not a form that proposes a new movement vocabulary, nor an aesthetic. For him, it is “a proposal and a path for allowing an individual to cultivate silence and journey to their interior, toward the most profound liberation of the soul” (Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 14, 2018). He adamantly encourages the current generation of dancers to pursue their own vision catalyzed by the inspiration of Japanese butoh.

Over many years of teaching in the United States, Piñón formed several significant relationships in addition to the ones noted earlier. In San Diego, Charlene Peener and Kata Pierce of Golden Corpse Ensemble were students and supporters of his work. Together with then-San Diego-based Shakina Nayfack, these artists shepherded Piñón’s application for dual citizenship in the United States. In Chicago, Illinois, Piñón returned six consecutive years (2004–2010) to teach through Blushing Poppy in Chicago and performed a duet with protégé Nicole LeGette in 2009, who is considered “the mother of the Chicago butoh scene” (Out of Site Chicago 2014). He continues to teach in the Chicago community through Sarah Zalek.

Piñón began a collaboration in Portland in 2007 through Prescott College-alumni Mizu Desierto, choreographing another iteration of the *Espiritus en Transito* project. In 2013, Desierto organized a group under the name North American Body Ritual Movement Dance Ensemble through a residency at The Headwaters. The group has since performed the work in Portland and Eureka, California, and continues to invite Piñón to direct.

In New York, he initially taught through Ximena Garnica and Juan Merchan in the 1990s, then through Vangelina, and most recently Nick Fracaró and Gabby Schaeffer/Coney Island Butoh, with whom he directed the Coney Island Butoh Cabaret in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Other locations where Piñón has significant ties include Asheville, North Carolina (Julie Becton Gillum), Los Angeles, California (Willy Franco and Miki), Salt Lake City, Utah (Gerry Gardner, Associate Professor of Theatre, University of Utah), Miami, Florida (Helen Threvenot), and Seattle, Washington (Joan Laage, and Sheri Brown).

By 2015, after years of teaching abroad and fomenting an international community, Piñón determined that his work had truly transcended nationalistic

determinations and renamed his work Body Ritual Movement, maintaining the BRM initials but now, curiously, titling his work in English.

For Piñón, there is not a butoh lineage per se to preserve. He feels quite strongly that although he studied with the Ohnos for quite some time, that he is not carrying on their legacy. His work is his own, as is every other artist's. Of his students in Mexico, he doesn't feel that they are in his lineage, only that he has planted some seeds in their path, as seeds have been planted in his. Similarly, he does not feel it is his place to judge that a performer is ready or not ready to perform butoh. He says:

The practice I would like to support the sense to be present on stage and off stage in daily life in order to go beyond our ego-centric configuration, to offer the most pure energy that comes from our body's core. The goal is to expand our consciousness to develop a collective ritual process to restoring health.

(Diego Piñón, pers. comm., May 26, 2020)

Now, the work that Piñón is doing at his center in Michoacán is focused on restoring health. For him, the most pressing problems of our time are due to our alienation from our bodies. He sees so much depression, so much violence, the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, and the attempt to solve our problems through a computer screen. He rejects this reality and proposes that the only way to heal is through the body. For this reason, his more recent workshops in Michoacán have specifically been promoted as “not for artists” but for anyone who wants to liberate their spirit.

Additional Anchor Artists

Other artists are integral to the development of butoh in the United States and Mexico during this time as well. It is beyond the scope of this text to cover all; however, it is important to note their names in hopes that other writers will pick up the torch and chronicle their contributions and body of work. At least in the case of Eiko and Koma, this has already been done by dance scholar Rosemary Candelario in her book *Flowers Cracking Concrete* (Candelario 2016). Other artists who warrant further research and archiving in the history of American butoh are Denise Fujiwara, a Japanese-Canadian dancer based in Toronto, and Kei Takei, who worked with both Hijikata and Ohno before arriving in New York in 1967 and forging her own path both there and in San Francisco. Descriptions of both artists' work are featured in Sondra Fraleigh's *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy* (Fraleigh 2010). Despite their stance outside of butoh, their influence on butoh is important as they have taught and performed throughout the Americas, sometimes in butoh festivals, and as such have impacted the aesthetics and methods of contemporary butoh practice as well as critical understanding of the art form.

Brechin Flournoy and the San Francisco Butoh Festival

Around the same time, these pioneering American artists were solidifying their craft, a savvy young artist/curator by the name of Brechin Flournoy was developing a distinct taste for the divergent. She describes her aesthetic at the time as “blood sport—performance art, all punk, lot of screaming on stage, Carol Lee Schneeman, that sort of thing” (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017). Originally from Denver, Colorado, Flournoy encountered experimental dance and performance art through her interactions with professors at Antioch College, a globally minded liberal arts college outside of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her professor, Dimi Reber, guided her students to make socially conscious work, rooted in both the human and natural environments. Reber brought Maureen Fleming for a three-week residency, which Flournoy recalls with gusto: “Maureen had us be seaweed and I loved it because always wanted to be deeper and darker, I always wanted to be the black swan in ballet. . . . Being seaweed was the totality [of existence].” She had seen Sankai Juku’s infamous hanging piece (*Jomon Sho*) in Cincinnati and was thoroughly intrigued.

Flournoy was introduced to arts administration through all of her externships, the first of which was at PS122 in NYC. She became enamored with the idea of curation, which at the time seemed like a viable career. Major companies had emerged and found stability through NEA funding in the 1960s and 1970s, and their prominence and success continued into the 1980s.

On Reber’s recommendation, Flournoy spent a year abroad at the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam, where she studied under Netherland Dance Theatre—founding member Jaap Flier, Deborah Hay, and Simone Forti. At SNDD, Flournoy met one of her formative collaborators, Anna Kristina Tischendorf, who had studied with Min Tanaka and Kazuo Ohno. With Kristina, Brechin recalls rehearsing outside in the rain, rolling on the ground in the mud. “I’m so uncomfortable!” she complained to her collaborator. “That’s the point!” Kristina replied (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017).

These “whispers,” as Flournoy refers to them, eventually grew louder and she found herself wanting to know more. She contemplated studying in Japan, but then her mother took ill and she chose to stay Stateside. Her family was close, and, says Flournoy, they also had a significant influence on her desire to be an arts curator. Her mother had turned her on to the hippies; she herself had wanted to be a Beatnik and travel the country. Her parents met at Denver University. Her father was from Birmingham, Alabama, and had been on the front lines of the Civil Rights movements, including organizing housing for the Selma March. Her father, a preacher’s son, was the one who had first discovered the bodies of the four young girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963. Says Flournoy of her father, “As a black man who grew up in the South, he didn’t share a lot of his stories because they were too painful” (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017). His quiet presence impacted her nonetheless, particularly when it came to education. “In Black Southern families,” she said, “education is a big thing, so there was no question

that we were going to college” (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017).

Flournoy’s grandmother was a world traveler; she and her husband were the first American family to travel the length of the Panama Canal, where her grandfather was a foreman in charge of its construction. Her mother was three years old at the time. The Canal was completed in 1914, at the start of World War I. Following its completion, her grandparents became ministers and continued to travel throughout South America. When they returned home to Denver, they would present slide shows and artifacts from their trips at movie theaters. Flournoy credits some of her ideas of curation and presentation to her grandparents’ productions.

When her mother passed, Flournoy focused again on her artmaking. She and her partner at the time moved to San Francisco to dive into the performance art scene. She had been to the city previously to visit a friend who had traveled out there with the Dead Kennedys as a band groupie, and who at the time was hanging with the Tragic Mulattos. Together they canvassed on Haight Street for Greenpeace. Flournoy had to go back to Ohio to finish school, but she had found her scene and knew she would one day return to the Bay Area.

The DIY culture of San Francisco in the 1980s and 1990s was the perfect petri dish for her risk-taking curatorial appetite. At the time, recalls Flournoy, artists were just having meetings to learn how to do things, and it was common for groups of people to just assemble and make a show, with little to no funding. Very early on in her time in San Francisco, Flournoy, and Japanese American dancer Takami Craddock recognized a mutual interest in creating some structure to the process, and together they formed the organization d-net (short for dance-network) in 1992.

The pair’s ingenuity produced the first San Francisco Butoh Festival, fueled by Flournoy’s interest in the avant-garde dance form and Craddock’s ability to navigate Japanese culture. She and Craddock spent two years building contacts and developing support both through American funders and among the established Japanese butoh conduits for the butoh community, particularly Hijikata’s widow Akiko Motofuji and Asbestos-kan, and Akira Kasai. Craddock served as the primary liaison with Japanese artists and trained Brechin in Japanese social etiquette. Flournoy, a highly detail-oriented person, remembers being surprised how important it was on which kind of paper she had printed an invitation letter and credits Takami for teaching her these critical details of Japanese culture.

Flournoy recalls the difficulty of gaining the trust of these very edgy artists, even the Tamanos, who had been living in the United States since the 1970s. She and Craddock worked diligently to present butoh “correctly,” by researching the history, Hijikata and Ohno’s work and writings, scholarly work, and critical reviews from abroad. Flournoy drafted richly detailed press packets, initiating the San Francisco Bay Area critics to this “new” art form.

Perhaps even more critical to the success of the Festival was building long-term relationships and a network to identify artists. Flournoy stresses that the

San Francisco Butoh Festival developed prior to the advent of ubiquitous internet access, and everyone she found, she found by following threads and obscure connections. “I didn’t just open up some Rolodex,” she quips, “these people were under rocks!” The organizers painstakingly researched and networked to locate and invite Japanese artists to the United States.

The dancer/administrator pair met and began planning for the festival in 1993. Over the course of the next two years, through carefully crafted letters and recommendations from contacts in the field, they slowly amassed the support and the network they needed to create a critically acclaimed international festival, the first of its kind in the United States. Their work ushered in a deeper understanding of butoh among American audiences.

By 1995, Brechin Flournoy and Takami Craddock shifted the San Francisco Bay Area butoh spotlight to the international stage with their introduction of the San Francisco Butoh Festival. Each year, the curators experimented with presenting a “different facet” of butoh, including “Women in Butoh,” “German Expressionism and Butoh,” “Global Butoh,” and “American Butoh.” Over the eight-year run, the San Francisco Butoh Festival presented 105 artists to thousands of audience members and hosted workshops for hundreds of students who came from as far away as Italy, the United Kingdom, and Brazil to come to this butoh mecca.

The first festival, titled “Butoh Prism” (Flournoy 2009), was produced in 1995 on a shoestring budget of \$14,800 (SFBF 1995), with four soloists, three of whom were US-based: Tamano Koichi (Bay Area), Oguri (Los Angeles), and Maureen Fleming (New York). Flournoy and Craddock managed to secure funding to bring Kasai to the festival, thus introducing him to American audiences and beginning the most enduring relationship the festival had with any artist. The debut of the festival coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings, garnering extra attention for this Japanese art form that had grown out of the World War II aftermath. The Cowell Theater at Fort Mason was filled to capacity, with lines stretched out the door into the parking lot. Says Flournoy, “we did strike that gold vein in the mountain!” (Flournoy 2009).

When they finally launched the first festival after two years of preparation, the organizers had succeeded in securing some rather major players and brought together artists who had not seen each other in 20 years. Up until that point, these butoh dancers had diverged from the founding masters, and each company or artist was siloed in their corner of the world.

Flournoy recalls when Tamano and Kasai met backstage that they simply stared at each other for several minutes, and then moved on. It was a strange coming together, in Flournoy’s words “almost as if wild and unruly forces had been harnessed and put in a bag together” (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017). In one poignant memory, Flournoy sat crouched in her chair, gripping the chair legs with her hands, with eyes and mouth popping open. “That’s not butoh!” heckled LA-based performer Oguri; Kasai retorted, “How dare you call this not butoh! I’m pouring my heart and soul into this

moment!” (Brechin Flournoy, pers. comm., December 11, 2017). The heated banter validated for Flournoy that she and Craddock were delving into a juicy artistic conversation. The capacity houses and the crackling performance energy were the kind of liveness she was after.

In 1996, the second year of the festival, the curators chose to focus on notable women in butoh, drawing attention to a persistent underrepresentation of female artists in this form. The featured artists were Akiko Motofuji (Hijikata’s widow), Setsuko Yamada, Saga Kobayashi, and Hiroko Tamano. They were marketed in alignment with historical traditions in butoh, beginning to define for American audiences the different aesthetics and adaptations butoh had taken since Hijikata’s initial impulse. Press materials described Motofuji and Yamada as contemporary dance artists who were influenced by ballet, German *neue tanz* and American modern dance as much as they were by butoh. Conversely, the language used to describe Hiroko Tamano and Kobayashi emphasized connections to Hijikata’s aesthetic. Incidentally, these two artists had danced together in Hijikata’s *27 Seasons*. Hiroko left Asbestos-kan shortly thereafter to join Koichi in Harupin-ha, while Kobayashi remained at Asbestos-kan and danced in numerous subsequent productions under Hijikata’s direction, including *Shizukana Ie* (Calm House), and helped establish Hakutobo with Yoko Ashikawa. These historical connections marked a pedigree system that is still referenced by many current generation American butoh artists, who define themselves by degrees of separation in the butoh family tree.

Motofuji, together with a team of organizers including Dairakudakan director Akaji Maro and photographer Eiko Hosoe, had assembled the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Archives at Asbestos-kan. Promotional materials for the archives included articles by Donald Richie and Mark Holborn, which Flournoy was able to source in her press releases as a way of educating American critics. Her press releases were extensive, and she cultivated relationships with reviewers and funders alike, introducing them to a more nuanced understanding of butoh than was previously known in the United States.

By 1996, they had raised \$8,000 in grants and built enough of a following to make \$18,000 in ticket sales. The following year, attention had ignited. San Francisco Arts Commission awarded the festival \$30,000, and Grants for the Arts offered \$6,000. Ticket sales dropped to \$14,000 that year but workshop sales shot up to \$17,000, proof that they had now built a following of students as well as audience members.

The third year of the festival (1997) drew attention to a critical sphere in the global butoh community: Germany. Not only did American audiences learn more details about the influence of German *neue tanz* on the butoh founders through press materials and program notes, but they also saw the continuing impact of German dance and healing arts, in the form of Rudolf Steiner’s Eurythmy, through Akira Kasai’s second appearance in the San Francisco Butoh Festival. After introducing Kasai to American audiences in the first festival and having had a second festival to start to define the contours of the

butoh aesthetic, audiences were prepped to understand the nuances of Kasai's particular interpretation of Hijikata's inspirations.

1997 also marked an important year for the next generation of American butoh dancers: it was the year they met Germany-based Yumiko Yoshioka.¹⁴ With a clearly traceable lineage¹⁵ and a butoh farm of her own two hours north of Berlin, Yoshioka satisfied young artists' desire for connection to the past and also to the pulse of the future. Yoshioka was not only a solo artist as others presented in the festival had been but also had a company, Ten Pen Chii. She recruited Bay Area dancers and Tamano students Shinichi Koga and Alenka Mullin, then a husband and wife team who had also formed their own company, Uro Teatro Koku. In 1999, Yoshioka helped launch Koga as a choreographer, featuring him as one of eight artists in her annual eX . . . it! At Schloss Broellin. Yoshioka's festival and art colony became a butoh mecca for many Bay Area artists, including paige starling sorvillo, who later danced for Koga's ink-Boat and collaborated with former Harupin-Ha dancer Kinji Hayashi before founding her own company, blindsight, and Megan Nicely, who joined Kasai's production of *Exusiai* in 1998 and his *Butoh America* in 2010 at Japan Society.

Yoshioka and her company also modeled the interdisciplinary collaborations that had been the hallmark of Hijikata's work and early Harupin-Ha collaborations. Ten Pen Chii was the brainchild of Yoshioka, German, large-scale sculptor Joachim Manger and American electronic noise musician Zam Johnson. Their work was impressive in scale and rigor, like Dairakudakan only more industrial, and fueled the visual aesthetics of several important emerging butoh choreographers, including Koga and Mullin, and Haruko Crow Nishimura, all of whom have staged their work in quite elaborate settings that often feel like industrial fairytales.

The events of the 1998 San Francisco Butoh Festival, marketed as "Global Butoh," were as far reaching in geographic representation as they were in Bay Area producing muscle. Artists from six different countries (Japan, Thailand, Mexico, Argentina, Canada, and the United States) performed at six different venues, including Cowell Theater, Asian Art Museum, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The festival featured many outdoor events as well, including an indelible performance by Canadian Kokoro Dance at Ocean Beach. One review noted the beauty of "the image of the frozen, white painted bodies in glacially evolving movements against the gray sand and the turbulent ocean [that] carved itself into the soul" (Felciano 1998). The press release listed the Cowell Theater performance with artists from Thailand, Mexico, and Argentina as the "main event"; however, critical reviews claimed that space for Kasai's performance of *Exusiai*, which featured Takami, Flournoy, Megan Nicely, and Kristen Lemberg.

Exusiai opened with Kasai all in black against a black marley floor, taped in lanes with white tape in vertical lines moving downstage to upstage. The soundscore sounds like the electronic whine of an aircraft as it starts to taxi to its runway. Kasai's shiny black silk shirt and gold painted hair drew focus in the cavernous room. The women entered and exited as an ensemble, often crossing

the stage laterally, in statuesque profile. At times, they lay prone on one side, propped on one elbow and gazing into the distance. They were dressed in silvery gray including body and hair paint, and they invoked a sense of cosmic creatures.

Dance critic Rita Felciano, who consistently reviewed the festivals as well as provided visibility and context for Bay Area butoh, praised Kasai's performance, calling him "an extraordinary performer able to command the various parts of his body with the skill of a conductor taking an orchestra from the softest whisper to a crashing tutti" (Felciano 1998). She also noted in her review certain stylistic trappings of the younger generation that she found distasteful. Felciano criticized Gustavo Collini Sartor for mugging and vamping around the stage, quoting from Ohno's *La Argentina* in both costume and posture but not, in her opinion, inner feeling. Her review commented that Collini's "theatricality . . . did not make up for an inexpressive body and lackadaisical execution" (Felciano 1998). Collini Sartor was an actor who had studied with Grotowski and also performed in Ellen Stewart's 1986 Italian production of *Oedipus* in Colonia. Felciano had praise for Mexican artist Diego Piñón, whom she had seen previously and not been as impressed; however, this time watching him dance the same piece, she commented that he was "focused, precise, and had impeccable timing" (Felciano 1998).

The 1999 Festival saw the return of two fusion butoh artists, Maureen Fleming and Setsuko Yamada, in a move that continued to align butoh with contemporary practice. This was important in the Bay Area because the Tamananos held the anchor with the Hijikata lineage, but their dancers (Koga being one of these next-generation Bay Area artists) were criticized for simply recreating the Tamananos' aesthetic shell without taking the ideas further.

Fleming and Yamada, both products of ballet and butoh,¹⁶ brought a beauty to their work that gradually carved out a new aesthetic direction for younger dancers. These same younger generation artists that the festival sought to educate also gave a platform for their voices in the 1999 festival. There were several performances and films, under the title *Butoh Bash & Video Cafe*. Leigh Evans, former dancer with Harupin-Ha, struck out on her own. Joan Laage's Dappin' Butoh performed for the second time in the Bay Area after founding her own Seattle Butoh Festival the previous year. Anzu Furukawa performed *Crocodile Time*, and Koichi Tamano performed with his ever-evolving company of dancers, Harupin-Ha, which continued to build the Bay Area butoh community.

The next year, 2000, Flournoy emphasized group work and every piece was a large-scale ensemble. Furukawa returned with her German company in *VERWANDLUNGSAMT (Office of Metamorphoses)*, featuring six dancers: Furukawa herself and the indomitable Yuko Kaseki, who would later become a member of Koga's inkBoat and important performer and teacher in the American circuit. The work they presented was *Goya—La Quinta del Sordo (House of the Deaf)*, with text by Franz Kafka and music by Steve Reich. The choice of music and text aligned Furukawa distinctly with pastiche dance theater.

Harupin-ha presented *Beauty of the Sky*, which featured Molly Barrons, who had become an assistant producer to Flournoy this same year, and Isaac Candelight, who later became Isaac Immanuel, and has since won several artist fellowships and prestigious apprenticeships.

In the 2000 festival, Flournoy also featured two emerging butoh choreographers, both of whom were former members of Harupin-Ha. First was Leigh Evans with *Red River Run Madly to the Sea*, addressing a persistent theme for Evans, that of plastics and post-consumer waste in general polluting our natural environment. Performers clambered in and out of metal shopping carts dragging rope fishnet capes laden with garbage. Evans had initially trained to be a dramaturg at the University of Michigan, had studied Brecht, Grotowski, and Suzuki, and was an avid yoga practitioner studying under Dharma Mitra in New York and Pattabi Jois in India. Her travels led her to discover Kathakali and Odissi dance in India, and Legong and masked performance in Bali. Butoh, through her work with the Tamanos and studies with artists such as Maureen Fleming, was another pathway of cultivating awareness and intensifying the “intersections of spirituality and performance” (Leigh Evans, pers. comm., December 2017). In recent years, Evans has focused that investigation almost exclusively through yoga, leading training sessions throughout the world in sacred sites and in nature.

Second of the Bay Area choreographers to have their own feature on the mainstage in 2000 was Shinichi Koga, presenting his first of three versions of *Cockroach*, featuring former Harupin-Ha and Pamela Z colleagues Evans and Kinji Hayashi, myself, Haruko Crow Nishimura and Joshua Kohl from Degenerate Art Ensemble in Seattle, physical theater performers Cassie Terman and Eugenio Brodbeck, and the performance rock band Sleepytime Gorilla Museum. It was a cacophonous array of “sonic butoh action theater,” in which the musicians manned rolling tables with mic’d vegetables to amplify their chewing, as well as their rendition of Kurt Weill’s “What Keeps Mankind Alive.” Based loosely on Bruno Shultz’s novel *Street of Crocodiles*, Koga wrote that *Cockroach* was “a testament to the unloved and marginalized” (SFBF 2000). The arch theatricality of Koga’s work set him apart from his Bay Area counterparts, aligning more closely with developments with butoh in Europe, where he had increasingly begun to work and collaborate with other disciplines outside of dance.

Rounding out the program with her version of contemporary butoh fusion was Setsuko Yamada, who was by now a workshop favorite in the Bay Area. Yamada’s style, influenced by her training with Kasai’s Tenshi-Kan, emphasized fluid movement and attracted the attention of Bay Area dancers. The work, *Yumemiru Tochi (Land of Dreams)*, premiered at the Theater Olympics in Japan and had its US premiere in Portland, Oregon, where Mizu Desierto had begun to develop a butoh community. Canada’s Kokoro Dance also returned to the 2000 Festival with a free outdoor performance at the Yerba Buena Gardens, continuing their role of animating outdoor and natural environments for the Bay Area butoh community.

With the 2001 festival, Flournoy's next curatorial decision was an intervention for American audiences who were "still embracing traditional butoh and had a different interpretation of the term 'contemporary dance'" (Flournoy 2019, 321). To counter what many have dubbed the "classic butoh" aesthetic—ragged clothes, often kimonos in some state of disarray, gnarled, floor-bound bodies, and dark expressions of humanity—Flournoy featured two uber-contemporary Japanese companies: Nibrol and Op-Eklekt, the latter of which one review called "one of the funniest duos on the globe" (SFBF 2001). Op-Eklekt's piece *Looking to the Far East* satirized traditional institutions through a farcical tea ceremony. Nibrol, which labels itself as contemporary dance, presented *No Parking*, shining a light on Tokyo as a "hectic, unfeeling, casually brutal place" (Hicks 2001). The group effortlessly blended video, absurdist dance to pop music (dancers in tight business suit skirts trying to take giant leaps, people knocking each other on the head and laying them flat), bouncy pop music, and irreverent animation (Ibid.). The San Francisco Arts Monthly notes that another artist on the bill, Yan Shu, "breaks ranks with the old style by incorporating humor and considers itself 'butoh pop'" (SF Arts Monthly 2001). Flournoy kept her finger on the pulse of new trends in Japanese contemporary performance and shared that with the increasingly savvy San Francisco Butoh Festival community. At the same time, she shared butoh's other directions in artists who had been influenced by the founders of the form and had chosen a different path. She included Kei Takei in that year's lineup, in her first performance in the Bay Area since a 17-year hiatus. Takei had worked with Hijikata and Ohno and rejected both to forge her own work in the United States, in the same way that Eiko and Koma had done. These perspectives were equally interesting to Flournoy as she felt her way through the forest of butoh.

With each festival, the language used to describe and introduce butoh became more sophisticated. The first festival in 1995 touted butoh as "one of the major developments in contemporary dance" (SFBF 1995). By the second festival, the organizers emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of the form, as this year's festival also featured an exhibition of the Hijikata Tatsumi Archive, which at that point was managed by Akiko Motofuji. "Butoh was not only a revolutionary dance but a magnetic sphere in which artists from various disciplines interacted" (SFBF 1996).

In a letter to dance critic Alan Ullrich, Flournoy made mention of 1998 being the 13th anniversary of Hijikata's death, citing this as an auspicious year in the Buddhist calendar. Since Hijikata was not Buddhist and this year could not have been significant to him, it rather signaled the continuing exotic status of butoh for American audiences, feeding into the fascination with Japanese culture since the 1960s. Flournoy craftily played with this appeal, while at the same time introducing new knowledge. Her focus remained on butoh as an art form, but a byproduct of her curatorial choices over time was a broader understanding of contemporary Japanese culture (and American consumption of it).

By mid-2001, Flournoy had decided to end the festival. Her curatorial interests lay in the cutting edge, but she had amassed an audience and student base that still clamored for “classic butoh,” as she referred to it, that is, glacially paced, scantily clad bald dancers painted in white. Additionally, the student base began to shift, reaching a wider circle but also students with a more casual engagement in butoh.¹⁷ At the suggestion of Kary Schulman, program officer at Grants for the Arts, Flournoy billed the 2002 festival as the “Grand Finale” and closed out the eight-year run.

The 2002 San Francisco Butoh Festival drew attention to not only the butoh diaspora, primarily that spread throughout the United States and into Latin Americas, but also SU-EN, who brought her “Nordic butoh” to the United States for the first time in 2002. As one can imagine with a Grand Finale that is intended to go out in a hail of fireworks, the performance offerings were extensive. Nearly 60 artists performed in three different venues, including Fort Mason Cowell Theater (mainstage and lobby installations), Yerba Buena Outdoor Gardens, and Flournoy’s backyard garden. Highlights included *Women in Butoh*, featuring the “old guard” with Hiroko Tamano and also next-generation artists such as SU-EN and Kathy Rose, and “emerging artists” Megan Nicely and Molly Barrons. Additionally, Flournoy curated an evening entitled *New Visions* featuring Ledoh/Salt Farm, Michael Sakamoto, and Helen Thevenot. Among the numerous artists presented in Yerba Buena Gardens was Corinna Brown Hiller’s New York-based Dean Street Foo, in which New York-based dancers Ximena Garnica and Christine Coleman performed.

In addition to presenting an aesthetic intervention with so many unusual and groundbreaking performances, the San Francisco Butoh Festival educated numerous American dancers who went on to make their own careers influenced by this work. Most of the workshops were organized through Dancers’ Group, where Flournoy was Associate Director at the time, and ironically, I worked as an assistant, checking in many students for the festival before I even knew what butoh was. All of the names and dates in the following are drawn from class lists preserved in the San Francisco Butoh Festival Archives.

Students in the 1997 workshops comprised participants from far and wide. From Seattle came Joan Laage and D.K. Pan; Pan, initially a member of Dai’pan Collective, is a versatile artist/activist who participated in protests at the 2015 RNC with his group Infernal Noise Brigade and also directs Free Sheep Foundation to convert disused spaces into public art. From New York, came Jeff Janisheski, one of the co-founders of the New York Butoh Festival and currently the Chair of Theatre Arts and California State University in Long Beach, and Zack Fuller, a stalwart member of the New York butoh scene although he does not claim to be butoh since he is a student of Min Tanaka. Other New York-based dancers who participated include Irem Calikusu and Kristen Narcowich.

Many students were regulars throughout the festival years: Megan Nicely, who had danced in the Kasai’s *Exusai* and later in his *Butoh America* and became a butoh scholar and professor at San Francisco State University, took numerous

workshops. Vancouver-based Kokoro Dance co-director Jay Hirabashi frequently attended. Miami-based Helena Thevanot participated in numerous workshops over the years. An avid student of Diego Piñón, Thevanot was featured in the Grand Finale mainstage performances on the 2002 San Francisco Butoh Festival. Harupin-Ha dancers Molly Barrons, Martha Matsuda, Bob Web, and Christina Braun also frequented many of the workshops, and Barrons eventually became Flournoy's assistant director for the Festival. Jennifer Hicks often attended from Boston, where she would later found CHIMER-Alab Dance Theatre and also become a member of Katsura Kan's International Butoh Dance Company in 2001 (Dance-Tech, n.d.). Also from Boston was Alissa Cardone, who, along with Hicks, participated in a workshop with Akira Kasai in 2001 and later performed in his *Butoh America* piece at Japan Society in 2010. Seattle-based Haruko Nishimura attended Yumiko Yoshioka's workshop in 1999. Asheville, North Carolina-based butoh anchor Julie Becton Gillum attended workshops that same year with the Tamanos and Anzu Furukawa. In 2000, participants in Katsura Kan's workshop included Jennifer Hicks, New York-based Corinna Hiller (who later was invited to present her company Dean Street Foo in the Yerba Buena Gardens 2002 Festival), and Shinichi Koga. The 2002 workshop with SU-EN drew Denise Fujiwara, Sondra Fraleigh, Ximena Garnica, Kristen Narcowich, Corinna Hiller, and Christine Coleman. A second week-long workshop was added due to high demand, in which participated Helena Thevenot, Jennifer Hicks, Haruko Nishimura, Bob Webb, Martha Matsuda, Molly Barrons, paige starling sorvillo, and myself (both of whom were members of Koga's inkBoat at the time).

Notes Flournoy, "from 1995 to 2001, [The SFBF was] the only annual butoh festival of its kind in the United States and the sole American presenter that provided consistent training with master artists" (Flournoy 2019, 323). No less than 105 butoh artists from around the world graced the SFBF stages and ushered in a new generation of butoh artists. The festival became a beacon internationally as well, with 60 percent of students traveling from abroad to study each year, and many students were repeat attendees (Flournoy 2019, 323). Following the success of the San Francisco Butoh Festival, festivals emerged across the United States in Portland, Oregon, Seattle and Olympia, Washington, San Diego, Boston, New York, Chicago, Asheville, New Orleans, and many other places. Artists in Latin America produced the *Festival Internacional de Danza Butoh en America Latina* in Peru in 2012 and Mexico City in 2014. There are also festivals in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru, companies active in Argentina and Brazil, and a school based in the Lake Titicaca area of Bolivia.

Through her work on the SFBF, Flournoy feels proud that she and her collaborators "succeeded to bring butoh out of the shadows and connect[ed] the international community in an indelible way" (Flournoy 2019, 324). Her work was pivotal in educating audiences and critics, building an international community of students, securing funding, and linking a touring network for artists.

Notes

- 1 Fleming's father traced their ancestry back to discover that generations back in her paternal lineage, a Scots-Irish female slave owner's daughter had a child with one of the slaves, and their daughter was Fleming's great-great-great grandmother. This daughter's paternal grandmother was a slave. Fleming's video work *Black Madonna* created during Fleming's 2004 and 2016 artist residencies at Sacatar Foundation in Itaparica, Brazil honored Fleming's great-great-great-great-great grandmother (Maureen Fleming, pers. comm., August 14, 2020).
- 2 Deren and Erdman collaborated on a 1949 film titled *The Transformations of Medusa* but never completed the project. Erdman introduced Deren to her husband, Joseph Campbell, who subsequently published and wrote the foreword to Deren's second book, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953). Deren was married to composer Teiji Ito, with whom Erdman collaborated (Keller 2015).
- 3 Fleming played Ismene and Hippodameia in the June 1985 production and would eventually perform as Antigone and Hippodameia alongside Korean actor Manhong Kang as Oedipus in a subsequent 1989 production of *Mythos Oedipus & Dionysus Filius Dei* in New York City (Press release, Feb 7, 1989, New York. Note: Fleming is listed as Maureen Williams, going by her mother's maiden name to distinguish her from another Maureen Fleming in the production).
- 4 Both Oguri and van der Ven currently teach Bodyweather, a training and technique developed by Min Tanaka at Hakushu, but no longer claimed by Tanaka as his technique (Fuller, Butoh Next Symposium, New York City, November 2019).
- 5 Orinska edited and published the interdisciplinary book BUTOH ("BUTŌ", 2015), in which the author wrote a short excerpt on butoh in New York and San Francisco, featuring a short profile of Fleming. As evidence of the interconnected and relatively small global butoh community, Joan Laage introduced Orinska and the author.
- 6 Kazuo Ohno (1977) in *Admiring La Argentina*, Photo by Naoya Ikegami.
- 7 <https://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/2626726>, accessed Nov. 19, 2019.
- 8 Among Gnome's first dancers was SU-EN, who danced for Hakutobo under Tomoe Shizune's direction. She was with both companies from 1989 to 1994 and later went on to form her own school based in the Swedish countryside, carrying on Ashikawa's methodology layered with her own voice.
- 9 Koga and Nishimura performed in each other's works in the 2000 Seattle Butoh Festival, two of many collaborations between these two artists and companies. See Chapter 4 for profiles of both artists.
- 10 David Carrasco argues that Day of the Dead is one of the surviving rituals of pre-Colombian cosmology, merging indigenous beliefs and practices with those of the Catholic colonizers (Carrasco 2014, 169).
- 11 Cué conducted research with the Huichol for these 7 years, first inviting three men to participate with him in ritual practices. Later, three women joined the group.
- 12 Born in Mexico City, Pilar Urreta became a professional ballerina in 1969 with la Compañía de Ópera y Zarzuela de Salvador Quiroz. She was a scholarship student with Alwin Nikolais and Merce Cunningham, and was the first Mexican dancer to become a Certified Movement Analyst at the Laban/Bartenieff Institute in New York. While in New York, she also studied Tai Chi, Wu Shu, and Kung Fu (Pilar Urreta, n.d.).
- 13 Many students of Hijikata report a similar experience of learning more from simply watching the artist in daily life than they did from direct teachings. Interviews with numerous dancers, including Yukio Waguri, Hiroko Tamano, Saga Kobayashi, Ima Tenko, and Minako Seki, confirm this sentiment.
- 14 Yoshioka would first teach in Mexico in 2010 through Abraham Oceransky's Teatro T in Xalapa.

- 15 Yoshioka danced in Carlotta Ikeda and Ko Murobushi's company Ariadone, performing in the first butoh show outside of Japan in 1978, and then in 1988, she formed Berlin-based DanceLoveMachine with Minako Seki and Delta RA'I (Yumiko-yoshioka, n.d.).
- 16 Fleming was a student of Kazuo Ohno and Cechetti master Margaret Craske (Maureen Fleming, n.d.), and Yamada studied ballet and also worked with Akira Kasai (Kasai 2013).
- 17 In a talkback after the 2001 SF Butoh Festival, SU-EN commented that there seems to be some shame, particularly when she teaches in America, about training the body to make it strong and compliant as a performance tool. For her, this is a natural part of the work. She talks about cleaning the floors in the studio, which she clarifies is more than cleaning the floors. It's taking care of the studio, dance, and ensemble. And this discipline she finds lacking in American dancers, or at least she did in 2001.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Jack. "A Dancer Who Evokes The Sculptural and Spiritual." *New York Times*. Dec. 25, 1996.
- Barclay, Michael. 2009. "Antony and the Johnsons," *Radio Free Canuckistan: Musical Musings from the Frozen North* (blog), January 27, 2009. <http://radiofreecanuckistan.blogspot.com/2009/01/antony-and-johnsons.html>. Accessed Nov. 27, 2019.
- Barks, Coleman with John Moyné, A.J. Arberry, and Reynold Nicholson. 1995. "Shreds of Steam." In *The Essential Rumi*, 38. Edison: Castle Books.
- Candelario, Rosemary. 2016. *Flowers Cracking Concrete: Eiko & Koma's Asian/American Choreographies*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Carrasco, David. 2014. *Religions of Mesoamerica*, Long Grove: Waveland Press.
- Center for World Music. 2020. "Our History." <https://centerforworldmusic.org/about-us/our-history/>. Accessed Sept. 26, 2021.
- Dance-Tech. n.d. "Jennifer Hicks's Page." www.dance-tech.net/profile/jenniferhicks. Accessed May 29, 2020.
- Dappin' Butoh. Website. <http://66.39.154.24/Dappin%20Archives.htm>. Accessed September 28, 2021.
- Deren, Maya. 1953. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. London: McPherson & Company.
- Felciano, Rita. 1998. "Butoh Bonanza: Festival Featured International Cast." *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, Sept. 2, 1998.
- Finneran, Richard J., ed. 2002. "Mohini Chatterjea." In *The Yeats Reader*, 115–116. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fleming, Maureen. 2013. "O Black Madonna": Artist Statement, La MaMa's La Galleria, 2013, restaged at Riga Performance Art Festival, 2019.
- Fleming, Maureen. 2018. "Wildflowers: A Feminine Genesis." Performance Program, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, Ellen Stewart Theatre, October 18–21, 2018.
- Flournoy, Brechin. 2009. "Emergence of Butoh," Speech, San Francisco Library November 6, 2009.
- Flournoy, Brechin. 2019. "Global Butoh as Experienced in San Francisco." In *The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance*, edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario, 313–324. New York: Routledge.
- Fox, Margalit. 2020. "Jean Erdman, a Dancer Moved by Myth, is Dead at 104." *New York Times*, May 6, 2020.

- Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. 2010. *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Gil, John. 2011. *Athens*. Oxford: Signal Books, unpaginated.
- Gillespie, John. 2018. "Freeform Review of Maureen Fleming's Wildflowers, A Feminine Genesis." *Dance Enthusiast*, Oct. 18, 2018, www.dance-enthusiast.com/get-involved/reviews/why-audience-reviews/for-audiences/view/Review-of-Maureen-Flemings-WILDFLOWERS-A-FEMININE-GENESIS-October-18-2018. Accessed Jul. 5, 2019.
- Hernández, Alonso. 2019. "Antonio Cué Ochoa 'El verdadero partero del Movimiento de Liberación Homosexual.'" *Ulisex MGZN*, Jan. 18, 2019.
- Hicks, Bob. 2001. "New Wave of Energy Enriches PIPFest." *The Oregonian*, July 29, 2001.
- Jowitz, Deborah. 1991. "Eros," *The Village Voice*, Jan. 22, 1991, unpaginated.
- Kasai, Akira. 2013. "A Look into the Choreographic Art of Akira Kasai, Fifty Years after Entering the World of Butoh." Interview by Tatsuro Ishii. *Artist Interview*, The Japan Foundation Performing Arts Network, February 26, 2013. https://performingarts.jp/E/art_interview/1301/1.html. Accessed Sept. 27, 2018.
- Keller, Sarah. 2015. *Maya Deren: Incomplete Control*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Klein, Susan Blakely. 1985. *Ankoku Buto: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness*, Cornell East Asia Series. Ithaca: Cornell University.
- La Provincia. 2014. "La capital dedica una plaza en Arenales al bailarín Lorenzo Godoy." *La Provincia*, Oct. 20, 2014. www.laprovincia.es/las-palmas/2014/10/21/capital-dedica-plaza-arenales-bailarin/640659.html. Accessed May 25, 2020.
- Laage, Joan Elizabeth. 1993. "Embodying the Spirit: The Significance of the Body in the Contemporary Japanese Dance Movement of Butoh." PhD diss., Texas Woman's University. ProQuest, 9407788.
- Le Figaro. 1996. "Eros" *Le Figaro*, Jan. 13, 1996.
- Maureen Fleming. n.d. "Maureen Fleming Company: About the Artists." www.maureen-fleming.com/pages/about.html. Accessed Sept. 27, 2018.
- Meisner, Nadine. 2000. "At the Stillpoint of the Turning World." *The Independent*, May 12, 2000.
- New Yorker. 2004. "Decay of the Angel." *New Yorker*, Apr. 12, 2004.
- Orinska, Simona, ed. 2015. *BUTŌ*. Riga: Mansards.
- Out of Site Chicago. 2014. "Blushing Poppy Productions." <http://outofsitechicago.org/2014/06/blushing-poppy-productions/>. Accessed Jun. 10, 2020.
- Pilar Urreta. n.d. "Formación académica, dancística y de movimiento." <https://pilarurreta.com/formacion/>. Accessed Sept. 27, 2018.
- Piñón, Diego. 2018. "Mi Paso Por Butoh" [My Passage through Butoh], Translated by Indira Percek, Edited by Christopher Mankowski. *INBA Danzaria Magazine* 54, Jul. 2018.
- Seattle Butoh Laage. n.d. "Artist Statement." <http://seattlebutoh-laage.com/about-the-artist/artist-statement/>. Accessed Dec. 10, 2019.
- Seibert, Brian. 2019. "Mortal Themes with a Light Touch." *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2019.
- Small, L.A. 1989. "Water on the Moon", *Village Voice* July 4, 1989.
- SF Arts Monthly. 2001. "Three Festival Offerings." *SF Arts Monthly*, August 2001.
- SFBF 2001. Press Clipping. Source unknown, periodical name cut off. Accessed in SFBF Archives, December 11, 2017.
- SFBF 2000. Program. Accessed in SFBF Archives, December 11, 2017.
- SFBF 1996. Press Release. Accessed in SFBF Archives, December 11, 2017.
- SFBF 1995. Press Release. Accessed in SFBF Archives, December 11, 2017.

- The Great Jones Repertory Company. 1988. "Mythos Oedipus: A Dance Opera." Performance Program, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club. February 5–21, 1988. Accessed in La MaMa Archives.
- Volli, Ugo. 1993. "Eros." *La Repubblica*, translated by Joel Brody, Jun. 2, 1993.
- Yeats, William Butler. 2002. *The Yeats Reader: A Portable Compendium of Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, ed. Richard J. Finneran. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yumiko-yoshioka. n.d. "Yumiko Yoshioka is a Dancer, a Teacher and a Choreographer." www.yumiko-yoshioka.com/. Accessed Sept. 27, 2021.