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Non-performing –
Liminality and Embodiment in Butō Dance

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ABOUT JAPANESE WORDS
In this thesis, I will use the modified Hepburn system in order to transcribe words from Japanese to rōmaji, the Latin alphabet. This means for example that words with long vowel are written with macron (˘). The transcribed words are written in italic font. Internationally known words such as Tokyo and Kyoto are written without macron, since this is customary. Also, internationally known Japanese words are not written in italic; I include the words kōan and Rōshi in this category.¹ The word Butō has many common spellings, such as Butoh or butoh; I use the spelling Butō. However, I honor the writer’s/translators spelling when quoting. The Japanese names are written according to the Japanese tradition, family name first.

INTRODUCTION
Butō dance is an avantgarde dance form that originated in Japan after the World War II. It is known as a metamorphic art form that escapes definitions. As Butō dancer Sondra Fraleigh says, “Butō, a metamorphic form of dance that had its origin in Japan, is fast becoming a borderless art for a borderless century”.² However, there must be something that makes us call some dance “Butō” and this thesis is aiming to trace these qualities and investigate the ontology of Butō. For example, Butō has a specific view on performing owing to traditional Japanese arts as well as the European Expressionist movement. There are also aspects of Butō that are connected with its almost spiritual flavour – sometimes

¹ For an explanation of kōan, please see footnote 15 on page 6. The word Rōshi is an honorific title for an older experienced teacher.
associated with Zen. My interest in the subject grows from training Butō with various teachers and dancers as well as twenty years of serious Zen training. I have studied Butō with the dancers SU-EN, Anita Saij, Ko Murobushi, Ken Mai and Yumiko Yoshioka. I have studied Zen mainly in Sweden under the teachers Sante Poromaa Rōshi and Kanja Odland Rōshi, spending eight years in a monastic environment at the temple Zengården near Arboga. Poromaa and Odland are teachers in the Philip Kapleau lineage of Zen that combines Sōtō and Rinzai traditions. I have also trained for a year in the temple Bukkoku-ji, Japan, with Tangen Harada Rōshi and three months in Hosshin-ji with Sekkei Harada Rōshi, both Sōtō Zen temples.

BACKGROUND

Butō, a short history

The word Butō translates directly as “dance step”. Butō’s founder Hijikata Tatsumi called the dance also Ankoku Butō, which translates to “darkness dance” or “dance of darkness”.

Hijikata came from the Tohoku area, a Northern Province of Japan. He moved to Tokyo, where he studied Neue Tanz (also called German Expressionism) with Andō Mitsuko as well as other dance forms such as Western classical ballet. Through Andō Hijikata met Ohno Kazuo, who was even more experienced in Neue Tanz and was to become the other main creator for Butō.3 In Tokyo Hijikata became involved in the avantgarde subculture. Hijikata himself drew inspiration from writers such as Jean Genet, whose writings were the root of his performative surrealism. Also, Antonin Artaud’s theatrical innovations were a direct influence for Hijikata. Artaud’s The Theater and Its Double was translated into Japanese in 1965 and had a profound influence on a new generation of Japanese directors and performers, Hijikata being one of them.4

Hijikata created a new dance form, wanting to re-recover the “Japanese body”; a low centre of gravity, squatting, as well as the natural movements of the common folk. His dance did owe to the traditional dances of Kabuki and Nō, as well as the

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4 Ibid. pp. 22-23
expressionism movement, but at the same time managed to create something totally new, mixing the ingredients of East and West into a surrealistic, nearly shamanistic play. He even created his own poetic and surreal choreographic language called Butō-fu that works as a kind of mass of somatic cues for the dancer. Furthermore, Hijikata’s art was a political statement, since he wanted to stand up against the idealization of the West, the American commercialism and colonization.

Butō’s other founder, Ohno Kazuo, had a different style altogether. Ohno’s Butō was calmer and more poetic. Ohno was a Christian, yet he beheld Buddhist teachings close to his heart and used these influences in his dance and workshops as well, compassion being one of the central tones.

Hijikata and Ohno are commonly regarded as the originators of Butō, but there were indeed a number of artists training with them and going on to develop their own important variations of Butō. Ashikawa Yōko for example was Hijikata’s closest disciple and star figure for decades, famous for her ghostlike presence; later she directed her own group Gnome. Among other famous dancers were Murobushi Ko, Tanaka Min, Maro Akaji, Kasai Akira and Nakajima Natsu. However, Butō soon became an open field for artists to explore their “body that has not been robbed”, as was Hijikata’s definition for extricating the body-mind and returning to a natural state, a state of creativity. And this included artists that had few connections to Hijikata and Ohno.

Nowadays Butō is in a state of fusion, adapting itself to other cultures. Yet, it keeps to its essential aspects that owe to Japan, such as the low centre of gravity, hokōtai, the slow Butō-walk that is based on suriashi, the sliding walk of Nō theatre, as well as dancing in “timelessness” or in a state of “nothingness” that are concepts with a Buddhist flavour, to mention a few.

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5 Ibid. p. 3.
7 Fraleigh, 2010, p. 4.
8 Ibid. pp. 2 f, 49.
9 Ibid. p. 4.
10 Ibid. p. 28. *hokōtai (歩行体)*, *suriashi (摺足)* Example of *suriashi*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xA4UFEdsds&t=40s
LIMITATIONS

Demarcation

The aspects of Butō dance discussed here are embodiment and liminality. The thesis will examine why they are essential aspects of Butō and how they are achieved. The investigation will be done in comparison with Zen Buddhism, where the same aspects are cherished.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Sondra Fraleigh, a Western Butō dancer and Zen practitioner, has written several books on Butō. Fraleigh’s book *Dancing into Darkness* with the subtopic *Butoh, Zen, and Japan* offers a diary of her studies, her understanding of Butō and Zen, her reviews of different dance performances as well as meeting with various dancers.\(^\text{11}\) However, Fraleigh’s

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poetic Zen-like insights do probably not provide most readers with an easily comprehensible depiction of Zen. The ontological connection between Butō and Zen can be presented much more clearly than what is presented in the fragments of haiku poems. Fraleigh’s work Butoh on the other hand offers a comprehensive general and historical overview of Butō dance, this time likening it with Alchemy. Another general book on Butō is Mikami Kayo’s work Utsuwa to shite no shintai (Body as a Vessel). Mikami was a disciple of Hijikata’s, so she is a valuable source. There is also a MA thesis in Fine Arts from 2011 by Jochelle Pereña that discusses the liminality of Butō. However, there is more to say about what “liminal” actually means in this context, and how it is achieved and worked with. This is where the comparison to Zen comes in, mainly taking up the tradition of kōan practice, with reference to contemporary experts such as Sante Poromaa Rōshī and Victor Sōgen Hori. Still another relevant study is Abel Coelhos Ankoku Butoh and Altered States of Consciousness.

AIM
I want to investigate how the act of performing is seen in Butō and explore the essential aspects of this transformational art: liminality and embodiment. Further, I want to investigate how Butō could be understood from the perspective of performance theory and how it could generate a new way of looking at the performative.

RESEARCH QUESTION
What part does liminality and embodiment play in performing Butō and how does Butō relate to the theories of performativity?

12 Fraleigh, 2010.
15 The term kōan (Chinese: kung-an, literally “public cases”) refers to enigmatic and often shocking spiritual expressions based on dialogical encounters between masters and disciples that were used as pedagogical tools for religious training in the Zen (Chinese: Chan) Buddhist tradition. (Heine, S, Wright, D.S. ed, The Kōan –Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 3)
16 Coelho, 2008.
MATERIAL AND METHOD

Material
I proceed from previous research on Butō such as Fraleigh’s books as well as Coelho’s and Pereña’s studies. I also use Nobuo Shiga’s work *Butō-ka wa Kataru. Shintai Hyōken no Ejji* (Butō Dancers Narrate, the Edge of Body Expression), which is edited from interviews with five Butō dancers, out of which I bring up the interview with Waguri Yukio. Furthermore, I use Viktor Sōgen Hori as a source for expounding Zen, especially performativity within Zen. To obtain particular material for my research I have interviewed two Butō artists/teachers and a Zen teacher and I use these specific answers to build on my topic. The Butō artists are Yoshioka Yumiko, whose workshop I attended in Berlin in December 2016 and Yurabe Masami, whose performance I saw in Kyoto in March 2017. The Zen teacher is Sante Poromaa Rōshi, whose interview took place in Stockholm in February 2017. The interviews are used with the consent of the interviewees. I also relate to my notes from previous encounters with Butō teachers and draw on my own experience in Butō and Zen.

Method
My method is a discourse analysis on the topic of performativity applied to the art of Butō. It is a deconstructive reading of performativity theories in comparison to Zen Buddhist concepts of performativity. I interpret Butō by the means of this analysis. I have chosen to add Zen as a comparative dimension to my study of performativity and Butō, partly because it is the foundation of much of the traditional arts in Japan and partly because it offers an in depth theoretical framework on liminality. My method includes an analysis of interviews with two Butō performers and a Zen teacher. These interviews are contextualized and interpreted using theories of performativity and liminality, as well as secondary sources on Butō and Zen.

THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

An essential theory to my study is James Loxley's book *Performativity*, a work that introduces the philosophical history of the concept of performativity and thus offers a framework in which to place my research.¹⁸ The history of the concept performativity starts with John Langshaw Austin, and is developed further by philosophers such as Jaques Derrida. The philosopher Judith Butler on the other hand recasts the use of this term applying it to the field of gender philosophy and further, and her theories turn out to be important in my analysis. When discussing liminal performances, it is inevitable to turn to anthropologist Victor Turner who is known for his writings on liminality, rituals and rites of passage. Turner has even discussed liminality in the field of theatre and performance art and in this context, the director and theorist Richard Schechner also comes up.

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ANALYSIS

BODY 1
Firstly, I expound the concept of performativity, its history, use and problematics, relying primarily on James Loxley’s work *Performativity*.\(^{19}\)

J. L. Austin
According to Loxley, the history of the concept of performativity started in 1955 by J. L. Austin’s series of lectures on ‘Words and Deeds’ at Harvard University. At that time, it was not a largely appreciated event, but came to lead to a variety of appropriations by philosophers after him, which affected the contemporary performance theories as well, something that Loxley displays in his book.

Austin’s starting claim is that language is not only constative, but also, performative. He thus opposes the view that language is there to produce true or false statements or descriptions of reality. Instead, he draws the attention to the use of language that performs an action, such as words “I do” in a wedding ceremony that cannot be called true or false in the same sense.

However, Austin recognized that performatives could be invalid or ineffective in many ways. For example, “appropriate circumstances” were needed for the words “I do” to produce a marriage. Thus, Austin went on to tabulate rules that encompass the conditions a valid performativity must fulfill. The validation of a successful performativ action became very complex.

What is interesting, however, is that one of the vulnerabilities of performatives that Austin addresses, is that they could be used in a “non-serious way”:

*As utterances, our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect all utterances… I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly– used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language.*\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

The question Austin raises here has been the focus of much subsequent attention and is, to some extent, at stake in this thesis as well. It is a question of the ambivalent relation between “serious” and “non-serious”, “authenticity” and “citationality”, “life” and “art”. However, Loxley mentions that Austin himself does not go further with the claims of non-serious performatives, but instead declares that “all this we are excluding from consideration”. Nevertheless, Loxley interprets that Austin is not referring to “seriousness” as some kind of ontological “realness”, but says that non-serious actions are void in a “peculiar way” and their infelicity differs from that of an incomplete marriage ceremony for example.

What Austin does come up with is that performatives cannot be separated from statements. Austin formulates the “speech-act theory” where the constative and the performative have been re-thought as distinctive but interdependent aspects of the total speech act.

**Derrida’s deconstruction**

Loxley accounts however that Austin’s notion of the non-serious performative was questioned by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who saw it not as an accurate mapping of new linguistic terrain but a fissure that threatened the coherence of the whole enterprise. Derrida sees a contradiction in Austin’s distinction of ordinary and parasitic performatives. According to Austin, the parasitic nature is seen in that these performatives are citations of the ordinary or original ones. However, Austin also insists that the proper performatives are conventional and repeatable and therefore in order to succeed must involve a recitation of a given formula. For example, a formula to pronounce a marriage is conforming an iterable model, and is thus identifiable as a citation. If original speech acts involve citationality, then citationality cannot be marked off as that which invalidates fictional performatives as non-serious.

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid. pp. 15-19.
24 Ibid. p 63.
25 Ibid. p 73 f.
Furthermore, Derrida’s conclusion is that the citationality of a parasitic utterance is itself a more local name for the general iterability that characterises all language, all speech acts or performatives, as Loxley recounts it. (Derrida goes much further in deconstructing the division between serious and non-serious performatives, but presenting a complete account of his philosophy is far beyond the scope of this thesis.)²⁶

**Judith Butler**

A significant elaboration on the theory of performativity, is the American philosopher Judith Butler’s gender philosophy. In her works *Gender trouble, Bodies that Matter* and *Excitable Speech* in particular, she recasts the concept of the performative, affecting the theory and politics of identity, as Loxley assesses.²⁷ Butler’s challenging claim is that gender attributes are not expressive but performative, and therefore constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal.²⁸ Butler thus turns against the assumption that there is an abiding gendered self to begin with, and instead claims that we *become* what we *perform*:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.²⁹

Loxley points out that for Butler the performative norm is a form of compulsion; bodies are normalized, and they suffer under the weight of the conventions that they are thus brought to repeat.³⁰ However, Butler also brings up ways in which the performance of gender might not be a participation in the normalizing, but a kind of parody, an enacted critique, such as in the case of drag.³¹ Drag undoes the assumption that it is possible to judge which gender performance is authentic or real, and thus performs the critical

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²⁶ Ibid. p. 75 ff.
²⁷ Ibid. p. 113.
³⁰ Ibid. p. 190. Loxley, p. 121.
insight that all gender acts are equally citational, as Loxley summarises it. “In this way, then, ‘drag imitates the imitative structure of gender’ and in so doing, it is ‘revealing gender itself to be an imitation’, a copy, a citation of an ‘original’ that does not exist”, Loxley concludes.32

Butler calls this kind of enacted critique a process of “resignification”. For her the task is not “whether to repeat, but how to repeat”.33 In other words, she points to acts that repeat differently, as Loxley rephrases it. Loxley points out that Butler has extended the term “resignification” to cover even other instances of “repeating differently”, such as black persons stepping out of their normative roles forced upon them by the society. In “repeating differently”, a twist is given to the normal act in its “deviant” repetition, as Loxley formulates it.34

There are affinities with Butler’s critique of identity and Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Austin, Loxley claims. Butler takes aim at an ontological understanding of genre that sees identity as essence. The consequence is that the parallel ontology of theatrical performance is also undermined; if identities off-stage and on-stage are the product of various acts through which we become who we are, then any fundamental difference between role-playing and just being ourselves cannot be upheld, Loxley reasons. Nevertheless, Loxley does not consent to assuming such an ontological level to Austin’s distinction between “life” and “fiction”.35

An ontology of performance

Loxley points out that as a continuation of Austin’s philosophy of serious and non-serious utterances, his view on theatrical performance comes forth in his essay Pretending.36 There he classifies various ways of “not exactly doing things”, such as acting, rehearsing, posing, imitating, mimicking etc. But he also says that pretending to do something can involve “actually” or “really” doing it.37 Loxley comments that these statements have

34 Loxley, p. 127.
37 Ibid. p. 267.
proven to be a rich source for practitioners and theorists of drama to draw on, since it is difficult and ambiguous to point out the difference of “not exactly doing” and “really doing”.\(^{38}\)

One response to the dilemma of “pretending” in the West was the avant-garde movement, with its great writers Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Antonin Artaud. Brecht sought to challenge his audience to reflect what they saw, instead of sinking into illusion of life-like theatre, whereas Becket would “confound the demands for naturalistic representation of character, setting or events”, as Loxley describes it.\(^{39}\) Artaud on the other hand went as far as abolishing the whole notion of representation and wanted life to speak directly through performance. And since imitation of life was rejected, a demand of “liveness” or “realness” of performance was born.\(^{40}\)

### Happenings

Loxley points out that Artaud was not alone in his search; in the America of the 1950s there were artists such as Allan Kaprow exploring the “realness” of performance.\(^{41}\) Kaprow became famous for “happenings”, events or performances where theatre was stripped of narrative, character, setting as well as boundary between playing space and audience. As Loxley describes it, any space would do, words might be spoken, but nothing was being represented, there was no illusion for an audience to enter into, and sometimes no audience as such at all.\(^{42}\)

Another practitioner of happenings, Michael Kirby, called this “a non-matrixxed” performance, since it turned away from any temporal or spatial matrix. Instead of any fictionalising, the actions themselves made the performance:

> Let us compare a performer sweeping in a Happening and a performer sweeping in a traditional theatre. The performer in the Happening merely carries out a task. The actor in the traditional play or musical might add character detail: lethargy, vigour, precision, carelessness. He might act ‘place’: a freezing garret, the deck of a rolling ship, a windy patio. He might convey aspects of the imaginary time situation: how long the character has been sweeping, whether it is early or late.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{38}\) Loxley, p. 145  
\(^{39}\) Ibid. p. 146.  
\(^{40}\) Ibid. p. 146-147.  
\(^{41}\) Ibid. p.147.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid. p. 147.  
As Loxley points out, both Kirby and Artaud were interested in the possibilities of performance where there are no representations, instead actions are just allowed to “be themselves”.

Kaprow developed this approach even further, Loxley notes; to Kaprow a happening was “the certainty of a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive”. It could be an ice block left to melt slowly on the road as well as someone sweeping the room. Thus, Loxley describes, it was a mode of performance that Kaprow expanded to everyday life, it became an attitude that could be picked up at any point, whether in the supermarket or during tooth brushing in the morning. In this way Kaprow dissolved art “back into its life sources”, Loxley resolves.

**No secure distinction between life and art**
The lack of secure distinction between theatre and life, performance onstage and a reality subsiding it, was a new insight to artists, and lead them to experiment with performances with no recognised practices, such as acting or dance. The body was left to signify what it does in everyday life, or more; to conceal a corporeal, psychic reality that is often concealed in the everyday. Thus, it could “show the everyday what is usually hidden, but is nonetheless always there” as Loxley describes it.

However, the claims of this kind of immediacy was not a secure card either, Loxley reasons: the attempt to define performance as a kind of “being alive” was criticized by the critic Philip Auslander for example, who questioned if it can be securely opposed to modes and technologies of representation.

Loxley points out that even Derrida saw contradictions in Artaud’s efforts to do away with the inauthenticity of representation. Such criticism did not demand that an ontological division between theatre and real life should be re-established, Loxley reasons; rather, it suggested

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45 Loxley, p. 148.

46 Ibid. p.149 f.

47 Ibid. p. 150.

that there was no substantiality in the “real life” anyway, since, according to Derrida, the citationality was as much a feature of “serious” speech acts as it was of their “non-serious” counterparts.49

**Performance, ritual and play**

Loxley acknowledges that performing is a basic human function and a part of any social intercourse, affecting the societies at large.50 Yet, what can be said about the peculiar functions or scope of performing related to the everyday? Loxley claims that Performance theory offers new perspectives on the characteristics of performing that might read as signs of its separation from the everyday.

To exemplify, Loxley brings up play and ritual. He refers to the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who suggested that “play” is a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”. Yet it absorbed the player intensely and utterly.51 Loxley then draws on Huizinga in relating play with ritual, which is seen as “a kind of activity apart from the everyday that does not thereby become ‘not serious’”.52 The British Anthropologist Victor Turner on the other hand suggests that a ritual does even have a social function: a ritual transforms its participants, and as a rite of passage, makes difference in the society.53

Turner defines the ritual as a liminal process.54 In a ritual, “limen” or “threshold” is passed; the participant is stripped of his identity, goes through a transitional phase, and comes out of the process transformed, entering a new status or identity. Turner describes the transitional phase in following ways:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. [...] Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.55

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49 Ibid. p. 150.
52 Loxley, p. 155.
54 Ibid. pp. 94-95.
55 Ibid. p. 95
[It is a moment,] when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.\textsuperscript{56}

The liminal phase involves openness, apartness and freedom as well as playfulness and is thus connected with the “non-serious”. Yet it works a change for the everyday life. Loxley notes that Turner turns to grammatical terms to describe the liminality of a ritual; he calls it “the subjunctive mood”.\textsuperscript{57} If “the indicative mood” describes the “it is so” -mood of the actual state, then “the subjunctive mood” stands for the “as if it were so” -mood, where the state of affairs is imagined. However, as Loxley points out, this “invocation of the possible, this invitation to fantasise or imagine”, should not be understood as simply “not real” since the ritual has the power to work permanent changes for the society, for the everyday.\textsuperscript{58}

**Liminal and liminoid**

In his essay “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Low and Ritual” Turner discusses widely the differences between “liminal phenomena”, such as rituals in tribal and feudal societies, and “liminoid phenomena”, such as arts and sports of the modern societies. “Liminoid” is a term he uses for the phenomena that have characteristics of the liminal, such as the experience of “flow”, but are more of “optional commodities” than rituals that are expected from and affect the whole community. Thus, for Turner, theatre reads as a liminoid phenomenon.\textsuperscript{59}

However, Loxley discusses the director and theorist Rickard Schechner’s view, that some of the subjunctive character of the liminal actually carries across to the liminoid performance.\textsuperscript{60} Schechner speaks of the attempts in 1960s and 1970s to ritualize theatre, to make it efficacious instead of just entertaining. Instead of mirroring the age, the performers were supposed to remedy it. Schechner even draws


\textsuperscript{58} Loxley, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{59} Turner, 1983.

\textsuperscript{60} Loxley, p. 157.
a parallel to Shamanism, which he sees as a “theatrical religion”.\(^{61}\) Schechner also says that the behaviour of the performance is “restored behaviour”, which, as Loxley points out, is to say with Butler that the behaviour is citational.\(^{62}\) And since it is citational, there is a subjunctive quality of “as if” about it. Loxley consents with Schechner in that this leads the performer to engage in a kind of “in-between” state, a liminal, transitional state, “suspended between ‘my’ behaviour and that which I am citing or imitating”.\(^{63}\) Loxley quotes Schechner:

> During workshops-rehearsals performers play with words, things, and actions, some of which are “me” and some “not me”. By the end of the process the “dance goes into the body”. So Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is also not not Hamlet. The reverse is also true: in this production of the play, Hamlet is not Olivier, but he is also not not Olivier. Within this field or frame of double negativity choice and virtuality remain activated.\(^{64}\)

Loxley calls this situation a grey area, the border zone where the performance takes place. He summons up the aspects of the double negation in one claim: “when he plays the part, Olivier is not exactly being Hamlet, and not exactly being himself”.\(^{65}\) Loxley’s conclusion is that it is a subjunctive, liminal nature of theatre that emerges here. And that the liminal nature, instead of affirming a distinction between the subjunctive and some “actual state”, actually corrodes any such assertion of a secure difference. Loxley brings up Schechner’s example:

> Olivier will not be interrupted in the middle of ‘To be or not to be’ and asked, ‘Whose words are those?’ And if he were interrupted, what could his answer be? The words belong, or don’t belong, equally to Shakespeare, Hamlet, Olivier.\(^{66}\)

Loxley sums up that the “as if” persists as the place and point where boundaries are hard to pin down. And consequently, a question such as “whose word are those?” cannot, according to Loxley, be “legitimately posed or comfortably answered”.\(^{67}\) Schechner and Loxley thus crystallize the liminal nature of theatre in a neat paradox.

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\(^{63}\) Ibid. p. 111. Loxley, p. 157.


\(^{65}\) Loxley, p. 158.


\(^{67}\) Loxley, p. 158.
BODY 2

In this section, I explore the aspects of performativity, liminality and embodiment in Zen. Not many scholars have discussed the role of performativity in Zen. An exception is The Zen scholar Victor Sōgen Hori who sheds light on this topic drawing on his thorough experience of training in a Rinzai Zen monastery. In his writings, Hori often refers to J.L. Austin. However, emphasis on performativity is no news to Zen teachers and practitioners around the world, especially to those working on kōans. Sante Poromaa Rōshī states clearly: “In Zen we are looking for the performative”. Let us see what this means.

Kōan

Firstly, I introduce the kōan method and its aims.

In Zen, kōan is a means, a paradox, posed for the student’s mind, in order to induce what is called kenshō. Kenshō could be translated as “seeing [ones] nature”, and refers to the realization of nonduality of subject and object. The kōan curriculum is divided into so-called “first kōan” or “breakthrough kōan” and subsequent kōans. As Poromaa Rōshī says, the first kōan, usually the kōan Mu, “is a sort of anti-word, or word before words, and it is trying to locate in the practitioner the place before words or where words come from. And sort of find that place of No Self and act from there.” However, Sōgen Hori warns against reading the experience of “No-self” or “emptiness” as some kind of “pure consciousness” without cognitive content or intellectual activity. Rather it is, as mentioned before, a breakthrough into non-duality of subject and object.

The subsequent kōans, according to Poromaa Rōshī, could be further categorized. There are kōans that want to take you beyond the dualistic use of words

68 Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshī. The kōan “Mu” (無) or “Joshu’s dog” is the first kōan in the kōan collection Mumonkan, the Gateless barrier. The case goes as follows: “A monk asked Joshu, ‘Has the dog Buddha nature or not?’ Joshu said, ‘Mu.’” The paradox is that according to the Buddhist doctrine, everything is endowed with Buddha nature; yet, Joshu says “Mu”, which is a word used for negation.
70 Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshī
71 Hori, p. 282 ff.
72 Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshī. Poromaa Rōshī refers to a detailed categorization provided by the Zen Master Hakuin, but himself settles for a rough outline. A more detailed categorization is anyhow
and there are kōans that are concerned with skilful use of words, he explains. And in the process, “you learn something about being freer and more skilful in your life, when it comes to how to present yourself, how to perform”, Poromaa Rōshi says.73

**Narikiru**

In Japanese, there is a term *narikiru* that is often used in Zen. *Narikiru* expresses what is essential in the performativity of Zen; it means “to become one with”. As Hori explains, a kōan is not a question to be answered by intellectual thought; rather the students are told to answer the kōan by “becoming one with it”.74 The process of “becoming one with” consists of repeated efforts to pose to oneself the question of the kōan, such as “What is Mu?” As Hori describes it, the student will at first assume the answer to appear like a solution to a riddle. “He thinks it would be an object of consciousness, an object of seeing”, Hori remarks, “this is what would be expected if he were trying to understand it intellectually”. But instead, due to the constant repetition of the kōan, it sinks into the consciousness of the practitioner, and “no longer is merely an object of seeing, but colours his very seeing”. Eventually, the kōan will emerge effortlessly, repeating itself in the consciousness of the practitioner. This is an early stage of *narikiru*, says Hori. The “Mu” is no longer an object of attention, it now forms the background of any object of attention.75

According to Hori, a turning point comes when the practitioner realizes that his/her very seeking, as well as the way s/he is reacting to his/her inability to penetrate the kōan, in themselves are the workings of the kōan within himself/herself. The kōan “is an activity, the activity of seeking to understand the kōan that uses the monk and his mind as its arena”.76 The practitioner must realize, that s/he herself/himself, in his seeking is the kōan. This is the insight, the response to the kōan, as Hori spells out. In other words, the separation between subject and object is broken, when the practitioner realizes the kōan as not a mere object of the consciousness, but as oneself as the activity of trying to

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73 Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshi
74 Hori, p. 288.
75 Ibid. p. 288.
76 Ibid. p. 288
penetrate the kōan. Hori’s conclusion is that there is a realization in two senses; the realization of cognitive recognition, which occurs from the “realization” or “making real” where the practitioner instantiates the unity of subject and object. According to Hori, this is *narikiru.*

**Kyōgai**

*Kyōgai* is another Japanese Zen-term that is closely related to performing. In English, it could translate to “consciousness”, “experience” or even in some contexts, “behaviour.”

Poromaa Rōshi describes the meaning of the term in the following way: “there is a certain way of being that makes a cat a cat, acting like a cat, a human being acting like a human being”. The Rōshi gives a personal example: “But also between individuals, there is a very special ‘Helena way’ of being one with something and there is a ‘Sante way’ of being one with something”.79

However, as Hori points out, *kyōgai* can be called good or bad, ripe or unripe, interesting or uninteresting. It depends on the level of engagement. For example, *kyōgai* can be “good” if the person “acts without self-consciousness, totally pouring him-/herself into the activity and leaving no remainder of self-consciousness behind”, as Hori depicts it. But if the person hesitates or is self-conscious or self-reflective and thus not “one with” what s/he is doing, s/he could be criticized for “bad” *kyōgai.*80 Furthermore, both Hori and Poromaa Rōshi agree, the *kyōgai* can change and develop as a result of training. Poromaa Rōshi says that this development is sometimes called “purifying” *kyōgai*, “meaning that it becomes simpler and less ornamental. And when it becomes simpler and less ornamental, it becomes truer to some kind of core, core being or core expression”.81 (Though he adds that he is not happy with the word “purify”, since it “sounds moralistic”.)

As Hori and Poromaa Rōshi make clear, *kyōgai* is something that is being looked at and looked for in Zen. According to Poromaa Rōshi, it is a matter of “trying to work

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77 Ibid. p. 289.
78 Ibid. p. 292 f.
79 *Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshi*
80 Hori, p.293.
81 *Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshi.*
with becoming one with without being caught with a pre-created way, [...] try[ing] to find your own way of being one with it”. He explains further: “You can see, looking at a cat acting, you know that the cat does not perform in ordinary sense, it is being a cat. And maybe that is what a Zen teacher is looking for; a student who is what she or he is, nothing else. And that, I think, is ‘becoming one with’”.82

Thus, in Zen, intellectual explanations are seen to miss the point, whereas acting and behaviour are emphasized as crucial. As Hori states, “Zen concerns itself not with labels but with the facts, not with description but with the thing described, not with intellectual explanation but with performance”.83 And the performance, as we have seen, should be like the “non-performing” of a cat.

Hōri

However, it needs to be added that reason and intellect do have their place in Zen. Kyōgai is one aspect of kōan training whereas hōri is the other.84 Hōri can be translated as “Dharma reason” or “Dharma rationality”.85 Understanding the teachings and kōan rationales go hand in hand with the experience itself. But hōri is emphasized further in the kōan training, kyōgai in the beginning. As Hori states, “the full product of Rinzai monastic training is ‘The Master of Zen who uses the two swords of the teaching and the power of the way’”.86

Hen’i and shōi

Buddhist philosophy contains an idea of a twofold truth, consisting of the Conventional Truth and the Ultimate Truth. Hōri brings out that in Zen training the twofold truth appears in the distinction between hen’i (偏倚) and shōi (正意). Hori translates hen’i as “crooked”, “bent”, “inclined” or “partial”, referring to the realm of duality, of svabhāva. (Svabhāva is a Buddhist term that means self-existence, referring to the conventional presumption that objects and the “self” have a solid “self-existence” of some kind.) Shōi

82 Ibid.
83 Hori, p. 294.
84 Ibid. p. 286.
85 “Dharma” is a sanskrit word commonly used in Buddhism with the meanings “Buddhas teaching” or “the truth”.
then is transcribed as “straight”, “correct” or “true”, indicating the realm of non-duality, the absence of *svabhāva*. Hori adds that the terms have also been translated as “apparent” and “real” respectively.\(^{87}\)

The peculiarity of Zen is that it does not use two different languages to express these standpoints. Rather, Zen language can encompass both Conventional and Ultimate truths in one word or phrase. A sentence can express the “differentiated, the manifest, the conditioned, the realm of dualism”, Hori describes and defines this the standpoint of *hen ‘i*. Yet the very same sentence, he points out, “can also be used to express some aspect of the undifferentiated, the unmanifest, the unconditioned, the realm of the nondual”. A Zen kōan requires a sensitivity to the constant ambiguity between *hen ‘i* and *shōi* in the usage of words.\(^{88}\)

These different standpoints obviously call for different interpretations of a given statement. However, as Hori reminds, to “solve” a kōan it is not enough to merely come up with an interpretation more profound than the Conventional one:

> The mistake here is that every attempt to understand *shōi* as an interpretation reduce it to *hen ‘i*. Every attempt to understand nonduality as an interpretation reduces it to duality, since interpretations divide into dualistic categories like true/false. It is at this point the notion of a performative utterance is useful, for a kōan utterance is better seen as a pun encompassing not two interpretations but two functions, one descriptive and one performative.\(^{89}\)

From this I conclude that there are interpretations that are more in accordance with *shōi* than others, but what is more important, is the performative expression, the embodiment of *shōi*.

**The nonduality of “serious” and “non-serious”**

From a Zen point of view, it could be argued that when Loxley is wrestling with the ambiguity of “serious” and “non-serious”, “authentic” and “citational”, “life” and “art”, he is wrestling with *hen ‘i* and *shōi*.

Schechner and Loxley are bewildered about whether the words “to be or not to be” can be said to belong to Shakespeare, Hamlet or Olivier (See BODY 1, Section

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\(^{87}\) Ibid. p. 302.

\(^{88}\) Ibid. p. 302 f.

\(^{89}\) Ibid. p. 303.
“Liminal and Liminoid”, p.17.). Loxley seems to come close to the shōi standpoint, when he draws the conclusion that “we will not easily know on every occasion whether or not a question such as ‘whose words are those?’ can be legitimately posed or comfortably answered”. From a Zen point of view it could be argued that Loxley is wrestling with a kōan and kōans cannot be fully answered on paper, that is to say, the answer has to be performative.

Furthermore, I would argue that Loxley’s conclusion that the subjunctive, liminal nature of theatre, instead of emerging as a secure difference from “the settled, certain and actual”, actually “corrodes any such assertion of secure difference” comes close to Buddhist understanding. Hori states that “the logic of nonduality, however, when applied consistently, destroys the very notion of a separate and distinct realm of nonduality”. Hori explains:

For the nonduality of kenshō never appears as the nonduality of kenshō; if it did, that would reinstate the duality that nonduality is supposed to transcend. The nonduality of kenshō is always instantiated in or makes a phenomenal appearance as (‘presences’ itself as) conventional duality.

Since the nonduality of insight, kenshō, resides within “presence” or embodiment, it is naturally of great importance in Zen practise and explains why Poromaa Rōshi says, “In Zen we are looking for the performative”.

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90 Loxley, p.158
91 Ibid. p. 158.
92 Hori, p. 299.
93 Ibid. p. 285.
BODY 3
To shed light on the performativity of Butō, especially the aspects of liminality and embodiment, I will depend on interviews of Butō dancers as well as previous research such as Jochelle Pereña’s Master of Arts thesis *Chasing Shadows: Exploring Butoh and the Liminal*, Abel Coelho’s seminar work *Ankoku Butoh and Altered States of Consciousness*, as well as Sondra Fraleigh’s book *Butoh*. The interviews with Yurabe Masami and Yoshioka Yumiko were conducted by myself. I met with Yurabe in Kyoto Butoh-Kan in March 2017 after his performance *Underworld Flower*. The interview with Yoshioka took place after her workshop in Berlin, in December 2016. The interview with Waguri Yukio is from Shiga Nobuo’s book *Butō-ka wa Katari, Shintai Hyougen no Ejji* (Butō Dancers Narrate, the Edge of Body Expression).

**Hundred shades of liminality**
Pereña is, throughout her thesis, reluctant to define Butō – or even call it with that name. This is an attitude most of the contemporary Butō dancers seem to share. The dancers cannot and do not want to see Butō as a genre at all.⁹⁴ Instead, they want to uphold the spirit of Hijikata that cannot be bottled up into categories. Like Murobushi Ko said, when I met him in 2013: “Butō is not yet achieved”. However, Pereña ends up “chasing the shadows” of Butō into seeing some essence in its liminal qualities, and defining “the liminal” in various ways.

First Pereña speaks about the liminal as the field of the margins; Hijikata representing “the dark shameful aspects of Japan” such as the remote Tohoku and Tokyo’s underground – places in the margins of Japanese society.⁹⁵ Hijikata did celebrate the hidden and shameful aspects of life as a part of the whole – and showed this on stage. After all, he called his dance Ankoku Butō, the dance of darkness.

Another interpretation from Pereña is that liminal refers to “what is implied, but left unsaid”. “It is the deeper meaning that shines through the cracks so that it is only hinted at”, she says.⁹⁶ What is implied could also be the subconscious shining through the more superficial layer.

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⁹⁴ Pereña, p. 5.
⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 27.
⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 31.
Pereña takes up also the abandonment of self as a liminal aspect of Butō and discusses the training methods of different Butō teachers trying to evoke this aspect.97

Pereña even discusses the liminality of transformation. She speaks of the difference between pantomiming the shape and sound of a cat and opening up to the possibility of sensing whiskers or preparing to pounce. “It is a difference of trying to look like a cat and being a cat”, she clarifies.98 And, as Pereña explains, this is a method of the Butō-fu (the poetic Butō-vocabulary; see Section “Background”, p. 5.); the dancer must become the images the teacher is bombing her with, perhaps starting with one image but often advancing to multiple images to be held in the body concurrently, which results in a heightened somatic awareness.99 The dancer is so occupied by the process that there is no space for self-consciousness.

Pereña recounts the aspect of non-time as liminal.100 Non-time is a prominent aspect of Butō. Fraleigh for example describes the Butō-walk as creating a sense of timelessness: “‘How can you find eternity in the present’, this walk seems to ask?”101 Also Murobushi Ko asked the dancers to dance “out of time” in a workshop I was attending. The stereotype of Butō could be “a slow-speed dance by white-painted dancers”, and perhaps the “out of time” can sometimes appear as extremely slow movement – but the movement could as well be fast. In other words, it does not mean “slow motion”, as the Swedish Butō-artist SU-EN often reminds her students in workshops.

Another important liminal aspect that Pereña brings up is paradox. Pereña refers to Turner: “Liminal phenomena […] blend […] lowliness and sacredness”.102 Paradox is also Pereña’s final and personal argument as to what “sets Butō apart”. She describes this in the following words: “I feel like I’m having a butoh experience when paradox is at play”.103 She tells about her experience watching Murobushi Ko dance and entering a pre-body-state, a pre-word state. She describes that Murobushi, the dancer, was no longer

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97 Ibid. p. 32 f.
98 Ibid. p. 36.
99 Ibid. p. 36.
100 Ibid. p. 37.
103 Pereña, p. 47.
himself and she, the spectator, was no longer herself.\textsuperscript{104} And about her own performances, she says: “I feel myself slip from dancing to being danced – from being the subject to being object and back again”. For her this is the paradox that could be called Butō.\textsuperscript{105}

In his performance \textit{Edge} (2000) Murobushi slipped between being his “normal self”, even talking to the audience, and disappearing again into the beyond-human dance.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Interviewing contemporary Butō-dancers}

The two Japanese Butō-artists, Yurabe Masami – based in Kyoto – and Yoshioka Yumiko – based in Berlin – both acknowledge that it is hard to speak of Butō as a genre. This is because many dancers question themselves “are we Butō, are we not Butō?” as Yurabe explains, or because it is also a declaration of the dancers, whether they want to call themselves “Butō” or “contemporary dance”, as Yoshioka points out. Yoshioka also adds that she does not care if it is called Butō or not, the important thing is the essence, the

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\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. p. 48.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. p. 49.
\textsuperscript{106} Source of the picture: https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d2/d2/ab/d2d2ab45d1e95f00e77c4e4e29f58073--kosrivers.jpg. Excerpt from the Edge: https://ko-murobushi.com/eng/selectWorks/view/47
spirit of the dance; that it is touching.

When it comes to tracing characteristic of Butō, Yurabe brings up sensitivity, the capacity to feel and notice everything. He also points out that what differs Butō from other performance arts is that it does not use the body as an instrument. Yurabe says:

Butō is not using the body, it is the body itself that is becoming, it is turning into that thing. In Japanese, it is the word wo, karada wo, the body dances, the body is the one that is becoming, changing, instead of being used like a tool. So, the body itself is the expression.107

Yoshioka seems to have similar understanding of the immediacy of expression in Butō. She says that for her Butō is not expression, but rather, appearing. Something comes out. Let it happen, she says.

This moment, I myself as a dancer, I feel blessed. [It] doesn’t matter if the audience likes or not, I don’t do it as a show, but more sharing my dance with the audience, or our dance. So, this ‘Let it happen’ is essence so our body becomes a passage. …It’s not that we express but we become a passage. We resonate ourselves to the different frequency of life according to the idea of choreography or improvisation. […] Our life has many layers, sometimes very superficial or daily life, sometimes very deep which we don’t know what it is, where it comes from. And let these different layers get awake and come out through the body as a passage.108

In both cases, the question of representativeness that Artaud, Kaprow, Kirby and the performance theorists wrestled with is solved with immediacy. What is there already is the art, the expression, the appearance. However, was this not what the Happenings also were expressing? This is a very tricky point, and also, a crucial point. The secret of Butō lies in embodiment; according to Pereña, “embodiment of paradox”.109 And embodying paradox, as we have seen with kōan-work, comes down to overcoming the division to subject and object or expressing hen’i and shōi simultaneously. Let us see what Yurabe and Yoshioka have to say about embodiment of paradox.

When asked about the role of presence in Butō, Yurabe speaks about the importance of breaking the subject-object relationship. “If you just have one self, outside or inside, or one presence then it is not Butō anymore. It is multiple existences. […] It is not subject and object”, he describes.110 Yoshioka on the other hand says:

107 Interview with Yurabe Masami.
108 Interview with Yoshioka Yumiko.
109 Pereña, p. 51
110 Interview with Yurabe Masami.
Our presence is a part of wholeness. It is like to explore where we came from. […] If we trace back maybe we came from nothingness. We don’t know. This is a continuous mystery. We never know where we came from, where we are going to. Scientifically we cannot analyse. Life always is a continuous mystery. And our body carries this cosmic memory. It is a never-ending process, we never get the answer. And we are always curious. This curiosity is also for me a motivation. What am I? Where are we going to? Where did we come from? We cannot analyse, we cannot find the answer. But this curiosity drives. I am not a scientific, intellectual type so I explore through my body. And it’s funny. Sometimes very tiring, sometimes very deep, sometimes just playful. It’s not philosophical research, but sometimes I feel: this is life!111

Yoshioka is clearly describing how to work with the paradox; exploring it through the body, always being curious. Sometimes it is tiring, sometimes deep, sometimes playful. And Yurabe is very clear about the result of this research: breaking the subject-object relationship. The same result could perhaps be heard in Yoshioka’s words “this is life!”

Waguri Yukio and “the distance”

In his book Butō ka wa kataru Shiga interviews Waguri Yukio, a dancer and disciple of Hijikata, who is also known for publishing a collection of notes on Hijikata’s Butō-fu.

Waguri dwells willingly in the problematics of the paradox. Like for Yoshioka, Butō is for Waguri something playful, demanding an “optimistic irresponsibility” to explore. It means that one must be interested in what one does not understand, and rather become tired of the things one already has understood. Intriguingly, he calls for “the talent to deceive oneself by oneself”.112

According to Waguri, the most difficult thing is “the distance”. This seems to be for him the crux of the enigma. He explains that it is very difficult to say how to keep or measure the distance of one’s body and oneself, one’s dance and oneself or oneself and what is not oneself. He gives an example:

When I’m dancing on the stage, I’m in a state of madness. It does not mean that one goes mad on the stage. There is the distance of oneself looking at oneself. There is the distance of presenting that kind of whole as a one thing in front of the audience.113

Waguri describes further that the distance of oneself as subject and oneself as the one who is looking, is moment by moment changing. “The distance is always moving, so

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111 Interview with Yoshioka Yumiko.
112 Shiga, p. 142.
113 Ibid. p. 143.
what do we have to do to be able to accept such a thing sensitively?” he asks, and adds, “it must be really important”.114

Besides, according to Waguri the distance is essential for both perceiving things and observing beauty. He maintains that one can only say “this is a chair”, because there is a distance between oneself and the chair. Moreover, he tells that Hijikata was impressed by the following words he had heard: “[i]t is the distance that make us recognize a beautiful person”. An example of this would be looking at a person too closely and only seeing the skin, or looking from too far and not being able to see the person; thus, it is the distance which determines the beauty, Waguri concludes.

However, Waguri tells that when it comes to a dancer, Hijikata said that “I am the playwright, the piece of art and the observer”. As a comment to this, Waguri asks, “Then, what about the problem of distance?”. He then refers to the novel Golden Death by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, which is a story of young man who loved beauty, collected it everywhere he saw it, and in the end, wanting to be the beauty itself, painted himself gold and became a statue. “After becoming the statue, he is no more the observer. Since he must be dead, then where is the beauty?” Waguri asks.115

Waguri makes the point that it has been asked where the eyes of the Butō performer are. In the classical arts, there is “the distant gaze” or “different eyes” that make the principle of the classics, Waguri remarks. He continues by asking: “In Butō, if you say: ‘I am the piece of art’, how should the dancers grasp where to put one’s eyes and the distance of the eyes?”, and replies to his own question with: “There is no conclusion to that”.116

The interviewer Shiga Nobuo captures Waguri’s meaning by summarizing that the solo dancer is simultaneously the choreographer and the dancer. And that additionally, there are eyes looking at the soloist as the audience. The person who is expressing has simultaneously the viewpoint of the audience, they coexist in the person, he says. “Then, how to carry this distance?” he sums up.117

114 Ibid. p. 144.
115 Ibid. p. 144 f.
116 Ibid. p. 145 f.
117 Ibid. p. 146.
The spider’s net

Another disciple of Hijikata, Mikami Kayo, has written a book called *The Body as a Vessel*, where she makes a simile describing Butō:

Hijikata is, you could say, like a spider. This spider is spitting out a golden thread. Then, this spider is spitting and spitting, and what he produced by continuing to spit, is the spider’s net. Countless sticky threads of a cobweb. They reach out far, and shrink well. The web sucks the sunlight and swings in the shadow of the sun, bends in the wind and flutters. And shortly after, in the cradle of the cobweb, one life is born. An ungraspable, strange life. After a while, we started to call it Ankoku Butō. That strange life, as a matter of fact, the most beautiful thing in the world, resembled a butterfly.\(^{118}\)

My interpretation is that the genius of Hijikata Tatsumi has, by spitting out his surreal, poetic language, non-dualistic sayings and radical methods, set forth a net of paradox for the future generations. “I am the playwright, the piece of art and the observer”, “a dead body standing that is Butō”, “a body that becomes”; such words are only some of the sticky threads to which the dancers’ bodies stick. And consequently, a new life, whether we call it Butō or not, is born.

Sticky threads

So far, I have tried to present some basic views of and attitudes towards performing within Butō. My argument is that this kind of philosophy as expounded by active dancers is indeed an essential part of the “cobweb” where Butō is being born. However, also the training methods are such “sticky threads” and I find it necessary and relevant to shortly describe them here in order to connect then to the above discussed notions.

The dancer and Butō researcher Abel Coelho writes in his essay “Ankoku Butō and Altered States of Consciousness” (shortly, ASC) about the methods of Ankoku Butō that evoke altered states of consciousness in the dancers. As Coelho points out, such

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altered states are commonly associated with Butō, and described in Butō literature with various terms, such as trance, primal, spiritual, violent, meditative, etc.\textsuperscript{119} Coelho brings up the Butō-fu as one method to evoke ASC.\textsuperscript{120} Coelho then presents exercises of the Butō-fu method, which require remembering and somatically imagining vivid, sometimes even brutal images, such as bugs eating up one’s body:

A bug is crawling on the back of your right hand […]
A third bug is wriggling along your inner thigh […]
You’re so itchy, here and there. You can’t stand still […]
Ah! There are five hundred of them! […]
Five thousand bugs
A bug on every hair,
A bug in every pore.
From there two hundred thousand bugs are crawling down into your guts and drilling them voraciously […]
Now they are eating the space around your body,
Now the bugs are full of the outer space and are being eaten (together with it) by another kind of bugs,
Lo! The whole universe is being eaten up by another-another kind of bugs.
(Half a billion bugs on a tree. The inside is all gone)
This is the end of the world.
All has deceased. (Mikami)\textsuperscript{121}

Coelho notes that this kind of exercises take enormous amount of mental concentration, which resembles the mental effort required for Zen meditation. Coelho also brings up that the experience of real pain is an element in Hijikata’s practices. Coelho refers to Kurihara Nanako, who argues for that pain helps the dancer in his/her performance by not only creating psychological distress that enhances their stage presence, but also, “undercuts self-consciousness”.\textsuperscript{122} Coelho also mentions that Hijikata used fasting and sleep reduction in preparing himself and for his dancers to perform and that the dancers were highly rehearsed. Coelho notes that Hijikata required the dancers’ eyes to be passive, a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Coelho, p. 1.
\item Ibid. p. 4.
\item Ibid. p.6.
\item Ibid. p. 7 f.
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kind of “blank stare” that Coelho associates with trance. “In very real sense, by defining
the eyes so precisely, Hijikata extended his dominion over his dancers’ bodies not only to
their posture, mental energy, somatic (and imagined) sensations, but also to their very
gaze and way of seeing the world”, Coelho points out. Furthermore, Coelho brings up
the fact that Hijikata’s Butō was not just about stage performance; it was a whole lifestyle
he demanded from his dancers living collectively at the studio. Coelho’s conclusion is
that “some of Hijikata’s methods […] are classic preparatory activities before trance, and
definitely contributed to his dancer’s performative consciousness”. Coelho maintains that
Hijikata managed to transform his dancers physically, mentally and emotionally.

Coelho’s outline concerns Ankoku Butō and thus Hijikata’s close disciples and
not the Butō of today. However, he maintains that many of the strategies are still in
use, although there are elements presently missing from the type of training Hijikata’s
disciples underwent. Also, it must be added that there are other strategies than
Hijikata’s. For example, not all the Butō teachers use Butō-fu, or words in such an
intensive way. Yurabe, to mention one, explains that for him the words are still
limiting; he thinks it is better to open things up just by being extremely sensitive. Still
another strategy of Butō, though perhaps in the footsteps of Hijikata, would be to
make no distinction between “dance” and “life”, but engage with one’s environment
and daily tasks with equal commitment as the dance training itself. For example, at
the dance collective of Tanaka Min the dancers are busy working in the fields before
noon, and after noon engage in dance training, carrying in their bodies the experiences
of the fieldwork. The dancers must be tired at this point, but tiredness is often used as
a means to overcome one’s limitations and “let go”. Furthermore, as Fraleigh
remarks, Butō conceives a body resonating with nature and not above it; therefore,
nature often plays an essential part in Butō training and also, performing. For
example Anita Saij calls her courses Art-Human-Nature -courses, and indeed, the
course explores the relation between these three, and most of the exercises and
performances take place in the nature.

123 Ibid. p. 9.
124 Ibid. pp. 8, 11.
125 Ibid. p. 11.
My conclusion is that while the sayings and philosophy of Butō embrace surrealism and paradox, its practices are such that they leave no space for the self, keeping the dancer mentally and physically occupied (and in Hijikata’s case even in a state of deprivation), or just tuning them to extreme sensitivity. Thus, the “sticky threads” destroy comfort zones, resonate with nature, enhance somatic sensitivity, undercut self-consciousness and probe with a paradox.

In the Art-Human-Nature course of Anita Saij the students trained their awareness and resonance with nature by walking into the sea and back with their eyes closed, stones on their heads and shoulders (not to be dropped) and in body-contact with each other. (Picture by Anita Saij)
BODY 4
In this section, with the attempt to interpret Butō, I discuss the connections that, as I see it, can be made between the theories of performativity and disciplines of Zen and Butō.

In the theory of performativity as well as in the field of performance art, there are problems in how to make distinctions between “serious and non-serious”, “life and art”, “authentic and citational”, “really doing or not really doing”. I suggest that these problematic points can be approached with the help of the Zen concepts of narikiru, kyōgai, hen’i and shōi (See BODY 2, p. 19-22). Hen’i and shōi then stand for the absolute and relative aspects of the paradox (“serious and non-serious”, “life and art”, “authentic and citational” etc.) that can be solved by the performativity of embodiment. The concept narikiru on the other hand is used to describe the process of embodiment; becoming something without a trace of self-consciousness left. And lastly, kyōgai, is used to point to the individual manifestation of narikiru.

To train in the performativity of embodiment, the Zen tradition offers a thousand-year-old method, the kōan system that is based on solving paradoxes in a non-dualistic way. However, it could be argued that even Butō deals with the performativity of embodiment.

Non-performing
Since “performativity of embodiment” is a rather complicated concept, I would like to make an attempt at a simplification; if we recall Poromaa Rōshi’s “cat which does not perform but is being a cat”, it might be possible to derive that “performativity of embodiment” could simply be called “non-performing”. Another explanation for the term “non-performing” could be that embodiment, when it is complete, is not embodiment anymore; it is being as such, i.e. “non-performing”.

I am aware that it is difficult to pinpoint some actions as “performing” and some as “non-performing”. Poromaa Rōshi remarks, “It is somehow obvious to most of the people when they see someone who is one with what they are doing and someone who is not. And to define the difference is not so easy”.127 Yet, I would argue that this is the very quality that makes a performance touching and that transcends the borders between the

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127 Interview with Sante Poromaa Rōshi.
actor/dancer and the spectator.

What is crucial here is the presence of mind of the performer; whether the action is based on calculations and expectations of the ego (lacking presence) or whether it is direct and free of such concerns (immediate presence). In the course of kōan training for example, the student is required to pretend and role play, yet only pretending will not do. The student/actor must enter the “grey area” that Loxley refers to when “Olivier is not exactly being Hamlet, and not exactly being himself” (see BODY 1, Section “Liminal and liminoid”, p. 17.). Loxley calls this “subjunctive, liminal nature of theatre” and indeed, being totally immersed in acting and role play, the actor is in the threshold of something bigger, a state where no identity applies. Thus, what could be considered ineffective or fake, would be a half-hearted role play, where Olivier is merely repeating the words of Hamlet, but not risking his identity. The same applies for dance, even though there might not be outspoken role figures; it certainly seems to hold true for Butō which is a dance of metamorphosis, a constant change of identity. Moreover, it is the presence of mind and how the action is embodied that make it effective or true in a deeper sense. The meaning of such action comes close to that of a ritual, as Turner and Loxley discuss it, in being open and playful, yet having changed something for the everyday life.¹²⁸ This kind of action could of course also be called performing. But since there is a depth to this kind of action that cuts off intentionality and even the notion that there is someone performing something, I would argue that this could be perceived and referred to as non-performing.

**Letting the actions to be themselves**

Non-performing in the field of art could resemble the idea of Kaprow’s happenings mentioned previously (See BODY 1, Section “Happenings”, p.13.). Something is happening and the performer in the Happening “merely carries out a task” instead of “adding character detail” or “conveying aspects of imaginary time situation”. And as mentioned in BODY 1, Kirby and Artaud, are interested in the possibilities that arise for performance when it is freed of the requirement to represent anything, when the actions of the performer are allowed just to “be themselves”.

“Letting actions just to be themselves” seems to come close to a state of non-

¹²⁸ Loxley, p. 156.
performing. But here is the crux: how does one “just do something”? It should be simple, yet there are monks who train their whole lives to arrive at this kind of simplicity. The ideal of simplicity is also found in many Japanese art forms, such as Nō, Tea Ceremony, Archery, etc. Even in these fields the rigorous training takes years. Why is it difficult “not to perform” but “to let the actions just to be themselves”? Saij instructs her students:

Not to perform, but to connect with the life that is there already. Everything is already connected, no need to plan a common choreography. Being true to the task, true with the silence; you cannot pretend that. […] Allow the audience to be there as they are. By not being in the front.129

The words of Saij, “not being in the front”, echo what Poromaa Rōshi said in the ending talk of a Zen retreat, when he reminded that the only troublemaker that come between us and our lives are ourselves. A non-performer should go behind and beyond the frontal level of social, cultural and personal conditioning and reach the grey area of ambiguous potentiality. In a way, the social, cultural and personal conditioning is actually “performing” an imaginary identity. And as long as we are performing that we cannot enter the grey area of non-performing and let the actions just be themselves.

No identity

Here we come close to Butler. As discussed in BODY 1, Butler speaks of gender as an act and takes aim at a particular ontological understanding of gender, one that sees identity as essence. Butler argues that there is no gender as such in the essence of a person, but that we become what we act out or perform.130 Furthermore, Butler speaks about the burden of the convention, when bodies are normalized.131 This theory could explain something of the workings of Butō, or what it is rebelling against. Hijikata wanted to reclaim “the body that has not been robbed”, and find a body that was emancipated – not only from gender but – from being “human”, and thus from the burden of convention.132 Also, according to Hijikata, the Butō-body is “a body that becomes” and Butō is generally known as a dance of metamorphosis.133 Following this this line of thought, I would argue that in order to

131 Ibid. p. 190.
133 Fraleigh, 2010, pp. 3, 68.
metamorphose and “become” one has to know the ground of no identity, the “grey area” or “emptiness” in Buddhist terms; then the quality of non-performing, directness, openness and playfulness would naturally arise.

Repeating differently
Furthermore, looking at the playfulness, a non-performer can display and play with the very components of the conventional, conditioned identities. This could serve as a good example of Butler’s “resignification” or “repeating differently”; acting in a way that exposes the illusion of identity, where a twist is given to the normal act in its “deviant” repetition. Butler takes drag as an example, and indeed, Hijikata used drag. He used also surrealism to undermine other conventional assumptions than gender.

I would argue that Butō uses the non-serious; it is playful, repeats differently, displays surrealistic, ever-changing scenes; a colourful play of the hen‘i. Yet, Butō’s very metamorphoses undermine identities, and the presence of the dancers is noticeable; therefore, it is suddenly serious, performing the standpoint of shōi.

Kyōgai and hana
My argument is that it is exactly the performing of the standpoint of shōi that makes a Butō performance – or any performance – so effective and touching. Previously I have pointed at the same aspect with words narikiru and embodiment, and Coelho is perhaps referring to this by calling it an altered state of consciousness. As mentioned before, the personal manifestation of narikiru would then, in Zen terms, be called kyōgai. Yoshioka brings up another term referring to the stage presence of the dancer, the hana or “flower”.134 Yoshioka compares hana to an aura. She says some dancers are as if they had a “flower” behind them, they are so radiant – and it is not a matter of techniques, she adds. Yoshioka says first that such radiance or aura may be a “natural” quality of some dancers, but adds then that it perhaps could be increased by concentrating on one’s centre. Poromaa Rōshi on the other hand does have no doubts about a person’s possibility

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134 Hana is also a concept established by the famous Nō-playwright and actor Zeami (c. 1363 – c. 1443) that refers both to an aesthetic principle and a spiritual quest. Whether it is the same concept Yoshioka is referring to is not certain.
to affect his/her aura; according to Poromaa one can definitely affect one’s presence of mind and train one’s kyōgai. Yoshioka’s comment about “affecting the aura by concentrating to one’s centre” also goes hand in hand with the Zen methods, since in Zen meditation and training the centre, or hara, is emphasized as the place where one should keep one’s concentration at all times.\footnote{The Japanese word hara means stomach, which in Japan is regarded as the centre of the body.}

**Words and beyond**

Both in Zen and in Butō words are used in a performative way, to drive the student/dancer into a state of non-duality. As described before, in Zen this is often done in the form of a paradox. Paradox is used also in Butō, but the approach of Butō and Butō-fu could be said to be more somatic and physical and perhaps not quite as straightforward as working with a Zen kōan. Yoshioka says that we need the words to feel beyond and in between them, but yet they are not the whole thing, they are just the tip of the iceberg. Saij does not tie up her dancers in words, but says the following about working with text as a basis or inspiration for dance: “In relation to words there is multidimensionality. We risk this clearness when we become too manipulative. There is no need to perform the words.”\footnote{Personal notes from Art-Human-Nature course with Anita Saij, Bornholm, Jun-Aug 2015.}

**Liminality: Butō and spiritual traditions**

Butō is often referred to as “spiritual”, sometimes compared to Shamanism, sometimes Alchemy or Zen.\footnote{Shiga, p. 146 f. Fraleigh, 2010. Fraleigh 1999.} However, even without drawing similes to spiritual traditions, Butō seems to have many liminal elements that indeed constitute its essential characteristics. Let us recall how Turner describes the transitional phase in a ritual:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. […] Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.\footnote{Turner, 2008 (1969), p. 95.}

Such a description arouses many associations with Butō. For example, Butō dancers are
betwixt and between; they are in a state of continuous change. Also, Hijikata’s picture of Butō was “a dead body dancing” and he called his dance “the dance of darkness.” Furthermore, “being in the womb” could describe the state of “being unborn” that Butō dancers must dwell in in order to metamorphose. Moreover, homosexuality was already the theme of the first Butō performance, Kinjiki and wilderness, or nature is an important connection to Butō dancers. If we anyway want to see a connection to spiritual tradition, then the fact that Butō embraces and plays with the dark, even shameful sides of life, actually places it in line with the tantric traditions of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Furthermore, it seems that the liminal nature is used in making performance efficacious instead of just entertaining. This calls to mind Schechner’s argument that in the 1960s and 1970s in the West, performers were instead of mirroring the age, supposed to remedy it, like Shamans. (See BODY 1, Section “Liminal and liminoid”, p. 16.) Similar arguments could and have been made about Butō. Indeed, Hijikata himself saw Butō as a remedy: “Butō is an occupation of recovery”, he said. The fact that both Shamanism and Butō use the body as a vessel is another argument for their connection, something that even Waguri points out.139

In this light, Butō’s liminality and efficacy factor seem evident. Connections to spiritual traditions can and have been made. My intention here is not to equate Butō and Zen, however, but to use Zen’s perception of performativity and embodiment to interpret Butō.

Non-performing performance

I have claimed that the performativity of embodiment, or non-performing, appears in both Zen and Butō. What creates a paradoxical layer in the case of Butō, though, is that it is actually a performing art that aspires not to perform. Butō pieces could take place anywhere; in the nature or in the shopping mall or on a stage of a theatre. There could be a theme, script, costumes and setting or it could be widely improvised. Then, how can a dancer relate to the audience, to the content and all the characteristics of a performance and yet claim s/he is “not performing”? And as Waguri asks, how to carry the distance between the viewpoints of one who is expressing and the audience “as a one thing”, in

139 Shiga, p. 146 f.
other words, as non-duality? Waguri maintains that there are no concluding directions on to how to do this. This is probably a trait of any spiritual discipline: the search must be done by oneself; no more could anyone “teach” you how to solve kōans. Anita Saij, however, did her best to guide the students at her course:

There are so many things that are already there, so one does not need to perform it. And it is so difficult. To go beyond. Not to be too much in the front.
Your fantasy can be far away.
Heart can be very open.
Breath can be very near.
Allow the audience to be there as they are. By not being in the front.
Means: You can listen for example. Believe that things have a history in themselves. Perform a little bit like a ghost.¹⁴⁰

One word that could sum up Saij’s advice to her students, could perhaps be behold. To behold the setting, one’s own history, the history of the place, the audience, the script if there is one – and dance. Beholding the multidimensionality and not being manipulative. However, one could claim that this is as far as we can come with descriptive words and “non-performing” might be easier to be said than done. But on the other hand, “non-performing” could be found in the simple, non-verbal suchness of things, deeds and dance and thus turn out to be closer than our own nose – easier to be done than said.

¹⁴⁰Personal notes from Art-Human-Nature course with Anita Saij, Bornholm, Jun-Aug 2015. A glimpse of how Saij herself stages dance in the nature can be seen at https://vimeo.com/106261432, with the topic “Moods between dancer and nature”.
CONCLUSIONS

My conclusion is that the Western theories of performativity can be expanded by the Zen approach to performativity in order to discuss a non-dual art such as Butō. Butō cannot be bottled up as a genre, but instead it is the non-dual performing, or non-performing, that arises from a certain philosophy and training methods generated by Hijikata Tatsumi. The philosophy and methods have many liminal aspects which give birth to non-performing by the means of embodiment.

The performance theorists such as Turner, Schechner and Loxley view theatre as a phenomenon where liminality can appear and make performances efficacious instead of just entertaining. This view can with good reason be applied to Butō, which, as previously discussed, has many liminal qualities. Moreover, the theorists discourse on “serious” and “non-serious” performatives, respectively indicative and subjunctive moods that cannot be legitimately distinguished in a liminal performance. What is lacking in the discourse so far, is a discourse on embodiment, which a way to resolve the paradox of the ambiguous “serious” and “non-serious” performatives. And with that, the whole measure of how a liminal performance is embodied is missed. The Zen perception of performativity serves to illuminate this terrain. As a thousand-year-old tradition which trains people in the performativity of embodiment, Zen tradition has created a language for the perception of embodiment. Zen concepts such as kyōgai and narikiru, hen‘i and shōi, offer useful tools in understanding the performativity of embodiment, or as I call it, non-performing.

Though somewhat esoteric, this is the level where a Butō performance, as I see it, should be perceived and discussed. Even an untrained spectator is easily struck by a Butō performance; something strange is happening, something unexplainable, perhaps transcendental. Zooming into that “something”, I would like to argue that a Butō performance is a simultaneous instantiation of hen‘i and shōi, or relative and absolute, and thus an embodiment of a paradox. Moreover, in Butō the embodiment is so physical and somatically detailed that even an untrained spectator easily becomes aware of it. This is a result of the eccentric training methods of Butō that enhance somatic awareness, undercut self-consciousness and probe with paradox. For example, in the method of Butō-fu, words are used in a performative way, as somatic cues to drive the dancer into a
state of non-duality. This is of course, my articulation of what takes place in a Butō training and performance; Butō has also been interpreted in other valid ways such as in comparison to Shamanism.

I argue that the philosopher Judith Butler’s gender philosophy provides a ground to approach Butō. Butler deconstructs the gender to be constantly created through performing, but often perceived as an illusion of solid identity. Thus, Butler sees gender as a kind of conditioning, a burden of convention so to speak. Yet, she argues that performative acts can also parody the convention and the illusion of solid identity. As I see it, this is what Butō does as a form of performance art. Namely, Butō is a rebellion against conventions – not only gender, but even against the social convention of being a human. As a method, it is a process of de-conditioning and re-conditioning, where one awakens to the ground – or groundlessness – of no identity/self. The de-conditioning and re-conditioning takes place in mental, physical (somatic) and emotional levels; thus, Butō is far more than just a stage art.

Of course, there are other liminoid phenomena where dualistic borders are crossed, something that is often referred to as “flow”. However, I claim that Butō is deliberately dealing with non-duality and therefore offers valuable material for the field of performance study. In this thesis, I have tried to illuminate the qualities of liminality and embodiment in the sphere of Butō, as well as to derive the idea of non-dualistic performing, or “non-performing”. I further suggest that within the Western performance theory more attention could be given to the aspects of “non-performing” as well as artistic processes that have it as their aim.
SUMMARY

In this thesis, I explore how performing is perceived and actualized in Butō dance by investigating its aspects of liminality and embodiment.

To gain tools for this analysis, I first offer a deconstruction-inspired reading of performativity theories. I address the concept of performativity, its infelicity of “serious” and “non-serious actions” as well as discuss attempts of philosophers and artists to overcome this ambiguous distinction. One artistic example of this is Kaprow’s happenings, where actions “were let to be themselves”, thus making no distinction between “life” and “art”. One philosophical example is Turner’s, Schechner’s and Loxley’s conclusion that in liminal performances indicative and subjunctive moods intermingle and cannot easily be distinguished; instead, they result in a paradox.

Thereon, I bring up the Zen Buddhist approach to performativity, which centres around embodiment of a paradox and offers a discourse pointing to non-duality. I present the Zen concepts narikiru, kyōgai, hen’i and shōi that handle the process and personal manifestation of embodiment, as well as the relative and absolute aspects of a paradox.

Butō has previously been associated with liminality by Pereña and with Zen by Fraleigh. I pin down these associations by analysing the performativity of Butō in the previously described context of performativity theories and Zen. I interpret Butō as a liminal art that arrives to non-dual performing by embodiment of a paradox. Thus, it resolves the distinction of “serious” and “non-serious” by the means of embodiment. I refer to this act as “non-performing”. I base this interpretation on my analysis of Butō artists’ views that embraces liminality and paradox as well as their methods that uncut self-consciousness and enhance somatic awareness. I claim that it is the very quality of “non-performing”, the instant embodiment of hen’i and shōi, that makes a performance touching and efficacious – that makes Butō, Butō, if such naming even is necessary.

Furthermore, I consider the processes of de-conditioning and re-conditioning that Butō dancers go through to be a rebellion against convention, a rebellion on a mental, somatic and emotional level – a rebellion that sometimes appears as social or political critique. Here I see a parallel to Butler’s philosophy of “resignification”, where conventions and the illusion of an abiding [gendered] self is parodied. I further explain the metamorphoses of Butō by the idea of “no abiding self”, which can be grounded both to Butler’s
philosophy as well as Zen Buddhism.

In conclusion, I call the way performing is perceived and actualized in Butō “non-performing” and maintain that this non-dualistic performativity has many contributions to make in the field of performance study.
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