



PERFORMANCE  
PHILOSOPHY

---

## GET MESSED UP: INTENTIONALITY, BUTOH, AND FREEDOM IN PLASMA

SONDRA FRALEIGH STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, BROCKPORT

### **Introduction: Messiness, Butoh and Phenomenology**

Although there could be other ways to “get messed up,” I begin with butoh, an original and now transnational genre of dance that developed first in Japan in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>1</sup> My butoh mentor, Ohno Kazuo-sensei, said something in his workshops that stays with me and comes back when I most need it: “Don’t turn away from the messiness of life.” Life seldom conforms to expectations; quite often it veers away from our best plans. Loved ones become ill, or we don’t get the job we thought we might. Someone we love dies, or someone we thought understood us has completely missed the point. Life gets messy. For Ohno, an aspiring dancer, this was being conscripted to serve in the Japanese army when he was thirty and returning nine years later to a nine-year-old son, Yoshito, who would later become his dance partner. One might think his dance career was over before it began, but Ohno, ever resourceful and trusting, went on to become a beloved world figure in butoh and beyond.

Ohno’s statement on messiness has multiple interpretations, which are all helpful. It has existential meaning for those who dive into their creativity and fail forward. They understand that perfection and mastery are dead-ends. If they don’t understand this at first, it will most likely come to them later, even if not exactly in these terms. His statement is also a warning for those who would look away from suffering or push away disease and disability. These are also part of life and not incidentally admitted in butoh where dancing “the weak body” rubs against potential tyrannies. I write under the title of messiness because my phenomenology seeks to strike a balance between

abstractions of theory and the unpredictable characteristics of dance and movement. Butoh provides an apt example. I write thematically and extensively about the perils of perfection and mastery in another work (2004). The phenomenological significance of *subjectivity, intention, individual habitus, freedom as lived and interactive states of being* come to the front in this essay, extending my prior works toward a constitutive ontology of dance and delineation of intrinsic values of moving consciously (1987, 2015). For the most part, I write from the perspective of the dancer and performer, shifting to theory with philosophy as scaffolding.

Phenomenology is also about getting messed up, rejecting norms in accepted theories and masteries. In the practice of phenomenology, one sets upon a Nietzschean open sea akin to dance improvisation. Likewise, Vida Midgelow sees improvisation as a paradigm for phenomenology (Midgelow 2018). One might begin with an idea, however, and see where it leads. Discovery as way forward appeals to me, even as it might also guide analysis in the discipline of phenomenology. In feeling its way toward order, this essay first articulates matters of subjectivity and subjects, which are often taken for granted.

Topics of subjectivity ground phenomenology beginning with the works of Husserl at the dawn of the twentieth century (*Logical Investigations* [1900] 1970), later infusing the voluminous work of Simone de Beauvoir, Paul Ricoeur, Jean Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Accounts of osmotic subjectivity emerge more recently in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—specifically in a tripartite section of *A Thousand Plateaus: “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming Imperceptible”* (1987, 232–309). In butoh-like similarity, Deleuze and Guattari pursue *morphic* subjectivities (254). Laura Cull (Ó Maoilearca) also connects butoh metamorphosis to themes of Deleuze and Guattari (2013, Ch. 3). Their creative, performative phenomenology has precedent in Sartre,<sup>2</sup> who brings the broad field of subjectivity and subjects to light, and quite brightly, as we see in the beginning of the next section.

Experience is first constituted pre-reflectively and doesn't stand still, nor does dance in the many ways we can envision it. The experiential perspective of lived time through movement and body was first modeled by Edmund Husserl in his constitutive phenomenology and surfaced later in Paul Ricoeur through his study of embodied volition and freedom. Ricoeur's far-reaching efforts “to take phenomenology to the bloodstream” ([1966] 2007, xii) contribute greatly to the undertaking of this essay. During his years of captivity in World War II, Ricoeur translated Husserl's work, becoming conversant with his distinctive style and philosophy of the body.<sup>3</sup>

This essay moves in the direction of Husserl and Ricoeur to examine concepts of “the body” and “nature” as tools of analysis and understanding. These terms are too often reductive, and although they have produced some valuable understandings and insights, they have become saturated, ignoring somatic complexities in the relationships between humans and the environments surrounding, suffusing and affecting them. The considerable influence of phenomenology on somatic studies in dance, somatic movement arts and psychology begins with Husserl, particularly through his concept of “the lived body.” In this article, I stress this as framework for ecological activism. Correspondingly, the muddy subjectivities of crisis and passage in *butoh* provide concrete

examples for what might otherwise seem wholly abstract. Thus I include descriptive self-evidence of subjectivity in various dance experiences and somatic improvisations with an emphasis on butoh. These subjective reflections move along with the text, but are indented and set apart in the spirit of *poiesis*.

### **“A New Being Sense”: Subjectivities and Environing Cores**

Sartre asserted that subjectivity *is lived and not known* (1965, 300). Our living subjectivity eludes full knowledge. The minute we attempt to bring attention to something in subjective life, an experience, for instance, we turn it into an object, a thing or phenomenon—seen, touched, stated or expressed. It takes on forms of thought and object-distance. Like dance, subjective experience is always escaping into the lived moment. Its translation to objective knowable forms happens performatively through the arts, through sentience, and cognitively in the life and mind of the body.<sup>4</sup> We can translate the lived to the known because these are intrinsically related. In coming to attention, dance and movement become objects of knowledge. The knowable, becomes expressly known.

*I come to know myself through the hands and feet of my dance, as these are innately related in consciousness. I know dance through my embodied experience—and as I dance with others and witness their dances. I might also map the affective geography of a particular dance: its spatial cohesion, shuddering flesh or quickened glance.*

Objectivity designates the thing-hood of things, and psychologically it points towards attentional distance in relationship. Objective distance is part of impartiality, independent thought and fairness. We could even call it a value when we identify it as desirable. It makes space for receptive neutrality and curiosity. Teachers and therapists both practice this kind of objectivity.

Phenomenology explains somaesthetic subjectivities through intentional qualities of awareness. *Pre-reflective awareness* draws upon subjective experience without intervening words or interpretations and orients in the present. *Self-awareness* is by definition orientation toward “self” as self-reflexive. *Other-awareness* orients out toward external objects and others, constituting otherness in perception. It is not surprising that all of these ways interact and that orientation of awareness is part of doing, witnessing and interpreting dances. Reflecting on a particular dance as we try to “read” experiential and presentational aspects of it, or more aptly “interpret” it as dancers and writers, turns it into a linguistic artifact and object of language.

We might also, as in butoh and other dance forms, accept the present-centered subjective flow of dance as valid in itself, a ready-to-hand example of subjective knowledge. Butoh founder, Hijikata Tatsumi, terms his butoh “DANCE EXPERIENCE,”<sup>5</sup> using this English expression to suggest through the paradigm of experience that the significance of dance centers on its immediate occurrence for both the dancer and the witness. Of course writers might further meaning through theory, as they often do, and I attempt here, but this is once and sometimes more times removed from experience. Theory has the dubious advantage of being abstract and interpretive, and experiences are often

so real and relational as to be messy. Experiential values are intrinsic, subjective and foundational in dance performance.<sup>6</sup> These are the affective somatic values that are often indistinct and difficult to pin down because they shift through time. One can be happily engaged in a dance that brings pleasure, and in the next moment, feel density and sorrow.

Yet there is more than somatic self-awareness at play in subjectivity. At the same time we live through an experience, layers of consciousness connect us to a world beyond self—the *lifeworld*—originally configured in the kinesthetic field of bodily awareness. Subjectivities and dance experiences are not isolated but relate self to others and the world, what Husserl calls “the lifeworld.” His term and its layered meanings are greatly expanded in light of dance through several phenomenologies and authors in a recent book, *Back to the Dance Itself*.<sup>7</sup> Husserl first speaks of the “lifeworld” in his criticisms of empirical, observational directions of natural sciences, which he sees as simply one way of knowing (1989, 383–390). The body he envisions is experienced with complexity from various lifeworld “horizons” or “attitudes” (1995, 164–165). Lifeworld is experienced relationally through normalized beliefs, self-understandings, everyday understandings, interpersonal and intersubjective communication, intuitive understanding, affective experience, ecological consciousness, and also perspectives of science (1989, 383–390).

Sourced in the intricate phenomena of the body, the lifeworld is social and political, cultural and artifactual, extending interactively toward the environing world of nature. Husserl views nature as constituted in sense: “The world as nature remains [...] a construct of sense, a synthetic unity in the infinity of environing natural cores” (Husserl 1995, 189). The body as lived participates in the constitution of the lifeworld. Husserl originally speaks of the environing natural world, and he also inquires into the world of spirit, which isn’t a religious category in this thinking, but more socio-psychological, invoking subjective transcendence of ego. Encounters with the lifeworld aid in dissolution (or distribution) of the time-constituted ego in its ever-streaming passage (1995, 170–71). Body, the soma of self and the material world of nature are intrinsically (experientially) connected, and subjectivity has as many faces as nature.

It is thinkable, Husserl says, “[...] that there is no nature at all.” But such thinking, he explains, also places consciousness outside of nature. In this attitude “[...] consciousness is not positable as something of nature (as state of an animal); it is absolutely non-spatial” ([1912] 1989, 187). Husserl posits lived space and time as active states of human consciousness arising through nature in relation to socio-cultural life. In *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman also study constitutive questions of nature:

Whereas the epistemology of modernism is grounded in objective access to a real/natural world, postmodernists argue that the real/material is entirely constituted by language; what we call the real is a product of language and has its reality only in language. In their zeal to reject the modernist grounding in the material, postmodernists have turned to the discursive pole as the exclusive source of the constitution of nature, society, and reality. Far from deconstructing the dichotomies of language/reality or culture/nature, they have rejected one side and embraced the other. (2008, 1–2)

At the root of phenomenology, Husserl discussed reciprocity of the lived body and the natural world, describing the body as a “correlate” of nature and “a point of conversion” (1952, 297–299). Transformative possibilities ensue from there. Later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the term “chiasm” to characterize perceptual reversibility as bodily lived. Chiasm represents the body as *a crossing over*, this through “the intertwining” of touching and touch, the visible and the invisible, as body and world cross over and enfold in perception (1968, Ch. 4). To put this directly, body and world are not separate entities, but are points of conversion and correlates in elemental and constant interchange. We share this encounter vividly in dance. When we direct our consciousness to the world of nature as embodied, it takes on “a new being sense” for us (Husserl 1995, 189), and in attunement with nature we care about it.

I read Emmanuel Levinas’ phenomenological ethics in *Otherwise* (1974) similarly. And through Edward Casey’s ecological ethics in *Eco-Phenomenology* (2003), I enter a “new being-sense” of my dance through enviroing nature.

*When I experience the morphing world of nature and my body as correlated, or when I match nature in its mud and messiness in butoh, it takes on a new being-sense for me. Then I live the world and am not alone. Adapting and attuning my animal sense of being with others and belonging to nature has far-reaching ethical consequences.*

### **Butoh, Nature and Morphic Intentionality**

Butoh provides danced examples of *chiasm*—in morphic encounters where the human and more-than-human worlds meet. In process, butoh is interactive, often shambolic and ready to adapt. It does not take an elitist view of life, rather all of life has a place in butoh, the dark as well as the light, and suffering is not denied. The body of messiness and crisis reveal it. Like Zen Buddhism, butoh lets go of expectations by letting things be as they are and as they change.<sup>8</sup> Takenouchi Atsushi’s *Jinen Butoh* finds ways of including dancers of varied abilities in performances, favoring circumstances in nature where dancers listen to environmental surroundings, bonding with these meditatively or chaotically, as they are able.



*Figure 1. Atsushi Takenouchi integrates a dancer with a disability in his butoh process at Schloss Broellin in Germany. Photograph by Sondra Fraleigh ©2003.*

What Husserl studied as the conversational capacity of the lived body in relation to nature explains the transformational capacity of butoh, as does the related example of *chiasm* through Merleau-Ponty. Butoh folds into nature and the nature of individuals, as I explore in “Butoh translations and the suffering of nature” (2016).

*In butoh I morph toward earthy origins, becoming insect and smooth stone, shaking water bag and itchy biotic matter—straining against restricted body parts, like hidden arms in waiting—or I flirt with emergent and hanging limbs—my limbs, like limbs of trees suspended. Admitting the shifting uncertain ground of life, and as witness to the consistency of human life with other life, I cross over.*

The butoh body as *a point of conversion and chiasm* exposes what post-structural philosophers Deleuze and Guattari study as infinite modifications on “planes of consistency” (1987). Butoh cultivates fluid, often slow-growing dances of flow and constancy similar to the connective rhizome multiplying stems and shoots underground and over that Deleuze and Guattari made famous in philosophy.

Chiasm intertwines and converts, while the rhizome spreads without ending. In the model of rhizome from material nature, culture spreads like the surface of a landscape, filling empty spaces outwards and upwards, or dripping downwards through cracks, weathering into life like the Body Weather performances of Min Tanaka. These began in butoh through the radical examples of Hijikata Tatsumi, but now spread nomadically outward via the many students who studied and danced on Tanaka's farm in Japan. One instance can be traced *in four shoots*: beginning in Japan with Hijikata, passing to Tanaka, extending from Tanaka to Oguri in California, and then reaching from Oguri to the recent site-specific dance of Rosemary Candelario in North Texas. She writes of her experiences with Oguri through her own work in "Dancing with Hyperobjects: Ecological Body Weather Choreographies from *Height of Sky* to *Into the Quarry*" (2018).<sup>9</sup>

As a stem, the rhizome moves like Japanese cosmological *ma* in butoh, the *ma* existing in between things and sharing with the plants and animals it touches. The horizontality of the rhizome resists vertical cultural chronology and organization; instead, it favors a morphic-nomadic system of growth and proliferation. The rhizome can assimilate textures of nature and culture as they bump against each other—cross over, tangle, clump and mingle.

Rhizomes can be redirected and encouraged in nature as also in dance. In butoh, modification is lived through corporeal continuities of *becoming other* subjectively, intentionally and not so neatly. At once culturally founded and exceptionally global in aesthetics and participation, butoh provides ready instances of the complex workings of morphic intentionality. *Rhizomatic in orientation, morphic intentionality spreads individual consciousness toward otherness*. But it would be a mistake to identify butoh solely with the rhizome. Its performed variety orients consciousness in many ways, but the transformational nomadic one stands out. Becoming other—being plant and animal, shoot, salt, stone and sea—butoh dancers join the nature they find and envision. Fluid transformation can contribute to an aesthetic of freedom in butoh, particularly in dances performed empathically for the doing and not intended for an audience.

Being in transit like free ions in plasma, the dancer doesn't have to attach to anything, or coalesce a form, but in terms of identity and core, culture plays a necessary part. Butoh isn't free to be just anything. Japanese origins ground its identity, often resonating in meditative slowness and appreciation of odd or antiquated moments. Tadashi Endo's work, *Ma*, uses the connective in-between-ness of *ma* culturally and intentionally, dancing with antique pots and weather-beaten appearances that can turn silken in an instant.<sup>10</sup> Japan seeds butoh in the morphic *ma* of sand, as sand appears often in spectacles of Sankai Juku and the distilled solos of Yoshioka Yumiko. Japanese *ma* appears in appreciation of flowers loved by Ohno Kazuo-sensei, and especially in plum blossoms and slow growing *shin orchids* of Ohno Yoshito's workshops. In her chapter on the concept of *ma* in Japanese cosmology, Christine Bellerose compares such butoh phenomena to "moonlight peeping through the doorway" (2018).<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2. Yoshioka Yumiko next to a cone shaped sand pile, a manifestation of *ma* in her solo *Before the Dawn* (2005). Photograph courtesy of Yumiko Yoshioka.

### Imaginative Actions and Uncertain Events

Butoh sinks in melting disappearance, while ballet aspires upward. At least, these are some typical ways of orienting consciousness in these genres. Movement intention finds specific genres and unique styles in making and doing dances. Intentionality is not simply a projection toward future action (what I intend to do tomorrow), even as it might in some instances be about this. *Intention is embodied orientation and moving on purpose*. Husserl studies intentionality as the primary theme of phenomenology and the fundamental property of consciousness (McIntyre and Smith 1989). In his first publication, Husserl represents intention as a mental property ([1900] 1970). Later his philosophy expands toward intentional experiences of all kinds, accounting for motility, kinesthetic consciousness and lived body consciousness as integral to the larger world of nature and creativity of societies and cultures (1989, 1995, 2005).

*To act intentionally* is to orient a movement, plan or purpose, but not as purely subjective. Intentionality is a relational concept. Subjectivity becomes inter-subjectivity when flowing interactively between sentient subjects. It becomes intra-subjective in valorizing nonhuman actants, a current concern of performance in a world in crisis.<sup>12</sup> Anthropocentric studies in arts and humanities put humans at the center and in dangerous exploitation of nature. It seems



increasingly important to say that intentions in dance are embodied relationally, flowing or subsiding with others, and in a larger sense, reflecting the lifeworld that animates intent. Dancers can ignore this relational synergy, or pay attention to it through an ethic of care and belonging.

*Agency in dancing* develops through ability and trust as these grow in relation to basic motility, valuation and choice. Ricoeur's early work on "complexity of values on the organic level" (1966, 110–122) details how valuation (embodied discernment as process) and choice (the power to decide and act) are first lived pre-reflectively. His hermeneutic envisions kinesthetic consciousness in reciprocity with movement awareness and affectivity. His is an overarching view of voluntary and involuntary systems of the body relative to values of freedom and nature. The volitional basis of freedom (the ability to chose) is lived first somatically through the body in his perspective. Relationships between movement and action are central to Ricoeur's project. We commonly speak of dance as movement. Looking more closely, we see that dance is several things according to perspective. Among the arts, dance involves how people make meaning through imaginative actions and uncertain events.

*My dances grow from possible acts of movement and states of being, implicating choices and unpredictable outcomes. This is true of my improvisations, but creative wonder motivates my choreography as well. "What will this dance be, and how will it seem"? These are some of my questions at the outset. "What intentions will be realized, and which ones will fade? Maybe this dance will just be a mess! It could fail or fall apart. But how will I know what my dance could be if I never risk its possibilities?"*

Acts of intentionality settle in the body and become habits in repetition and reinforcement. Habits escape notice in everyday movement and in rehearsed skills that are eventually taken for granted. I learn this through Ricoeur's physiological phenomenology ([1966] 2007). On a pragmatic level, I encounter issues of habitus and change through the Feldenkrais method of somatic education (Feldenkrais 1985). Consciousness is laced with habit and alive in the rehearsed networks of the nervous system, or "the corporeal involuntary," as Ricoeur puts this (2007, 85–134). But movement that has been consciously embodied has the advantage of conscious recall. As permeated with movement habits, the body is constantly undergoing change and can be renewed through conscious attention, particularly in cultivating movement arts. Attempts to expand skill and to bring habit to attention are part of the educational project in the somatic study of dance. More broadly, the teaching and learning of movement in yoga, dance, sport, and martial arts is a project of working through embodied habitus and change, even as awareness of this may be superficial.

*Suddenly, I come up short. Habits interrupt an easy flow and introduce murkiness. I want to move freely—with trust and ease according to my intentions—but habits keep me stuck. Or do they?*

*To surpass habit*, we seek to move freely, or in the manner of our choices. Certainly many choices have already been embodied in dancing if one has danced even for a while in a particular style or several. But one still has choices to make in the uncertain field of movement. In its concerns for sense perception and action, the somatic project in dance explores how activities and ways of

performing become persuasive in life. Husserl first identified “sensuous dispositions with their individual *habitus*” (original emphasis, 1989, 308), and he built toward “the *total style and habitus of the subject*, pervading, as a concordant unity, all his modes of behavior, all his activities and passivities, and to which the entire psychic basis constantly contributes” (original emphasis, 290). Husserl’s work concerning habit is reiterated throughout phenomenology, showing the importance of intention and choice. Intentionality is formative.

*As initiating constitutive phenomenology*, Husserl teaches that personal intentionality has its origin in activities and becomes embodied through “the active or constitutive nexuses, and that by means of many levels built one on the other” (1989, 344). We develop *momentum* in such layers or levels of activity, hopefully in positive directions of agency and choice, and not just in upward climbs toward empowerment. To what end do we repeat and layer? Perhaps power isn’t a desirable value? Maybe it depends on the situation and one’s intentions? Do we need a less controlling prompt than empowerment to signal confidence in realizing and claiming rights? We see abuses of power all around if we are careful observers. For myself, I want to dance toward joy, and I’m cautious of power. I seek the right rapport with it, because I don’t think empowerment leads automatically to freedom. The freedom to be myself glows more brightly as I age, and the freedom that comes through aging is the most awesomely difficult of all.

Conscience should temper intentionality. *Concerning habits of thought*, languages of “power” and “empowerment” are naturalized in unquestioned habitual uses. Husserl calls unquestioned biases *the natural attitude* (Husserl 1970; also Fink with Husserl, 1995, 166). Phenomenology questions habits of language and performance, especially those that reinforce individual ego as singular and powerful. Husserl writes that ego shifts into obscurity in “every act-performance.” Self-activation (as Ego) shifts into new lines of cognition as actions are embodied and sink into obscurity. This represents a stage when we no longer think about our actions, they have become a part of consciousness, familiar patterns and rehearsed attitudes. “As soon as the focus of the Ego is withdrawn from it, [action] changes and is received into the vague horizon” ([1930] 1989, 114). Empowerment as having power can get messy. It matters what one does with having power, and it also matters in the choice to let it go.

*I ply my flaws in becoming bee pollen through Waguri Yukio’s butoh-fu (imagery). In butoh improvisations, weakness is as good as strength, and doing nothing as good as doing something.*

Empowerment signals a positive value in the ability to dance as one intends, but it isn’t a constant. As a variable matter of consciousness and intent, empowerment exceeds itself in being shared.

*When I dance with others in the morning rays of the coral-rust canyons near my home in Utah, our morphic dance marvels in sage and fog, spreading its never-ending flicks and flutters. If my foot stumbles against a cleft, I can grow a new “being sense” to carry me on. My torso shudders while my head perseveres a bobble and warm colors rub against me. When I think, I think how very little on earth remains unaffected by human interventions, but for now, I am present in beauty. Dancing barefoot on sun-warmed*

*sandstone disrupts my habitual orientations and worries. I heal through dancing this way.*

### Freedom as Lived in Dance

*Freedom has subjectively lived values.* For Afghan women, driving a car brings both fear and freedom.<sup>13</sup> For dancers, freedom might arrive in several ways, depending on the situation and the kind of dance involved. In Sartre's philosophy, freedom is not a choice but a "condemnation." We are free whether we want to be or not, and we are making choices whether we realize it or not (Sartre 1947, 27). Freedom is a root principle of existential phenomenology, and it is not simply a concept but rather a living condition of subjectivity, as I have explored in other contexts (Fraleigh 1987, 2004). We live freedom and constraint affectively. To live in "bad faith," as Sartre popularized this expression, is to fail to live in the light of one's freedom, a matter of denial if you will. On the other hand, agentic freedom is grounded in responsibility—in owning the outcomes of one's actions and amending mistakes without blaming others. This also translates to social and political spheres of action, even to the values of freedom as they manifest in taking a stand—especially in messy times—matching one's intentions through bodily powers and synergies, balances and failings, dancing and writing fearlessly amid uncertainty.

This is what art is for. As one of the original existential phenomenologists, Simone de Beauvoir studies the positive and messy aspects of art and ambiguity in her key work on ethics, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* ([1948] 1994). Admitting disorder in the uncertainties of life, she inflects freedom with engagement and art with conscience. Anti-essentialist feminist positions take root in her historic statement that "biology is not destiny." Freedom for women, as Beauvoir originally sees, lies in the freedom to determine their own bodies and lives. But this isn't all. Freedom also blossoms through happiness. For Beauvoir, freedom is not simply a matter of empowerment, the right to speak or absence of constraint. Freedom becomes concrete as the "joy of existence" is asserted: "the movement toward freedom assumes its real flesh and blood figure in the world by thickening into pleasure, into happiness" (1994, 135).

For Ricoeur, freedom relates to naturalness and spontaneity, and he is not speaking naïvely of nature, but of what becomes "naturalized" in a constituted Husserlian sense. He doesn't make a simple identification of freedom with nature, but rather speaks to how habit and skill interact as we bring what seems natural to attention and consciously improve on it, or else join the involuntary maze. In either case, we do the latter. We learn about bodily-lived freedom from this vantage point through Ricoeur's hermeneutic study of the relationship between freedom and nature in movement. Movement and knowledge are bound together in voluntary effort, as the mental and physical bring about "an undecipherable unity, beyond effort" ([1966] 2007, 249). Movement that once required effort ceases to be an effort; then bodily spontaneity and freedom can emerge. In learning a new skill, for instance, there comes a time when the movement feels natural. We commonly call this "second nature." Ricoeur argues that the voluntary and involuntary dimensions of human existence are systemically interactive in the body.

*As I decipher this experientially: volition encounters the hazy silent workings of the somatic involuntary nervous system. This gratefully stubborn system of embodiment draws volition past conscious control into the matrix of movement. Volitional encounters are part of the fascination of dancing better over time; and in contexts of healing, of dancing courageously toward obscurity and revelation. The easy and the difficult both belong to freedom and are potentially valuable in dance.*

*We become what we do and are responsible for what we become.* Values, in what is deemed to be good or the good in experience, don't come ready made and unmovable, even if they are already present in societal and familial habits. To some extent, values are malleable and developmental. In dance processes, they are lived and interpreted. As politically motivated, values stand out; people say or dance what they care about and want to change. Struggle, crisis and suffering all motivate change. But values in the backgrounds of skill acquisition are less clear. Volition as a use of the will still provides a clue, however. Will and value are not the same things, but they are connected through intentionality and the corporal involuntary ("body and the total field of motivation," Ricoeur 2007, 122–134). We direct intentions in dance, and this is a use of the will, not necessarily as willful, but relationally and in reciprocity of voluntary and involuntary systems. In this sense, our choices are embodied organically through repetition—and in consent or refusal ("motives and values on the organic level," 104–122).

*In performance,* dancers orient movement, imagery, and affect, and they do all of this simultaneously, sometimes passing through liminal states and lassitude. Internal time consciousness of intentionality in dancing is intricate and shifting. In relating to the emergent dance, we draw up various states of affective being and attendant values, some sorrowful, some painful, some joyful and free. I think somatically of "matching" my intentions, not mastering them, and about merging with the worlding motions of the world, as Heidegger speaks of "worlding" in a wide way.<sup>14</sup>

*Wholeness engulfs me, and I say "yes," to an arising action, or in refusal, "no." When actions flow as of my own nature, I can unselfconsciously and pre-reflectively absorb the somatic life of my dance, saying, "yes" to my body. What I dance also dances me. In willing, I consent and refuse; laugh and weep. In realizing my choices, I dance my uncertain freedom.*

In dance, freedom roots in motility and the ability to act and is realized through attributes of choice. In studying freedom and nature relative to the will, Ricoeur writes that the body takes the form of the will (1966, 249, 328). Feldenkrais famously taught that if you don't have at least three ways of doing something, you don't have a choice, as I learned in Feldenkrais classes. Will and freedom, including choice and its constraints, are relative faculties of moving well. They manifest explicitly in dance and performance where the social intersects affective and political life. Freedom in one of its meanings refers to rights and independence as lived. Political actions have a lived basis, as do the politics of dances.

Affects of freedom arising in feelings are circumstantial, interactive and subject to individual interpretation. Individuals can realize freedom in choreography and improvisation, in dance for everyone and in highly produced theater, as also in butoh, contemporary dance and ballet. A phenomenologist would say that freedom as lived is a matter of consciousness. Political tests of freedom also motivate consciousness. I have written about this in post-metaphysical terms of “letting the difference happen,” not to advocate a certain politic but to look at the phenomenon of difference and repression, presence and absence, as a phenomenologist might, and to relate this to “uncertainty” in dance (Fraleigh 2004, Ch. 6). Dance in its playful, autotelic or “for itself” metaphysic is synonymous with freedom. Dance as generative is fulfilled in being what it is. First, we dance for the dancing. All other values—the performative, educational or political—depend on this intrinsic (experiential) value.<sup>15</sup> Underneath its many affects and purposes, dance is another word for freedom. Dance is a verb of permission. Enforced dance is a corruption of freedom.

### Freedom in Plasma, a Butoh to Do

To perform freedom thematically, I suggest a butoh-inflected process as an odd way of slipping through a trans-theoretical hole and into a time of metamorphic pre-reflection. The improvisation outlined below is in the spirit of Ricoeur’s “phenomenology of the bloodstream” (1966, xii), encouraging morphology as entrance into a state of biologic play. We learn about plasma and freedom from life science: “Plasma makes up the sun and stars, and it is the most common state of matter in the universe as a whole. [...] Unlike ordinary gases, plasmas are made up of atoms in which some or all of the electrons have been stripped away and positively charged nuclei, called ions, roam freely.”<sup>16</sup>

#### *Dancing Freedom in Plasma*

Let the suggestion of ions roaming freely in plasma guide your improvisation. Do this dance with others, somewhere beyond four walls. If you decide to move in the metamorphic spirit of butoh, give up your habitual way of dancing, and let yourself move in simple basic ways, using everyday movements of hunching, stillness, rolling, shaking, leaning off-balance, falling, squatting, crawling, turning slowly into the ground and back up, whirling, etc.

Wear a fanciful costume that you can put together easily from your closet or available materials. If there is mud or dirt available, smear some on your face and “mess it up.” Let the environment you choose assist you in the dance. Keep your focus wide, attending to self, other dancers and the environment. Interpret plasma freely. Rocks, twigs, sand, flowers or bricks might be available as props. Use what you find. Let the sounds of the environment be your music and metamorphic ma.

Begin rolled up on the ground, leaning on something, or squatting in a tightly closed bell-shape, whatever this suggests to you. Take a deep breath, and hold it; let your dance begin as you gradually release your breath and your body also starts to roam. To begin, you might let go controlling instincts if you hiss the breath out gradually through closed teeth. Continue your dance until you feel any reticence or restriction give way and you roam easily (nomadically) at will. End by voicing a vowel sound, audibly or not. Then begin to clap your hands together softly. When

everyone is clapping, the dance is finished. Take time to check in with each other about your experience.

Butohist Yoshioka Yumiko holds that “our life consists of continuous interactions between nature, society, energy, and ourselves.”<sup>17</sup> Her butoh is shown in Figure 2.

### Intention Matters

Originally Japanese, butoh grew in retreat from late capitalist social structures, walking a messy line or sidling *ma* through chaotic and contradictory states, all of this in morphic modes of intercultural transition. As part of Hijikata's butoh revolution, he railed against the production/consumption wasteful cycle of American style democracy entering Japan after the Second World War. “I don't want a bad check called democracy” is his famous manifesto. Hijikata's rejection of dance as production is voiced in his surrealist essay, “To Prison” (1961, 44–45). Yet, his butoh is not pedantically cast solely in political terms. He conceived *dance as experience* and cast a wide net of intentionality concerned with the social body in crisis and the suffering of nature. These mesh in his last solo performance, *Leprosy*, part of a large anti-war work, *Summer Storm* (1973) performed by his company at Kyoto University. In several sections, this work moves through wide ranging performative intentions from serendipitous play to Japanese rituals reimaged. Hijikata's solo dance of *Leprosy* is faint, closely personal although distanced emotionally, and openly cast in a seeming desire to mitigate the pain of others.<sup>18</sup>

It would be a mistake to see butoh in a neutral transnational space, even as it migrates easily and is not a traditional form. In its subjective, agentic and interactive character, butoh demonstrates how the wide-ranging acts of dancing pave ways into extraordinary workings of intentionality. Like all dance, butoh derives from intrinsic (affective) characteristics of movement. And like much dance, it is motivated by cultural factors, by individual conscience and bodily-lived experiences of play, work and nature. These mesh in butoh, and not in equal amounts. The cultural roots of butoh lie in Japan, which inflects all of its manifestations, whether or not its inheritors remember. Intention matters. Intentions of performers orient danced actions and possible meanings in butoh as in all dances.

*I can be without explanation or apology in butoh, and however its experiential messages morph in my movement and imagination, they still remind me of Japan.*



Figure 3. Sondra Fraleigh with her Japanese waterfall maple butoh tree in Brockport New York, performing, *Tell Me*. Photograph 2005, courtesy Sondra Fraleigh.

In conceiving *dance as experience*, butoh offers "a new being sense" to escape interpretation and reading of dance at a remove. The being of butoh, or its ontology, surfaces in light of *dance experience* with stylizations mattering less. Today, butoh is more difficult to identify, since the stereotypical white rice powdered bodies no longer epitomize it. What remains, then?

History remains. Intentions remain. Conscience remains. Butoh is oriented in morphic transformative intentionality. Thus in Zen *suchness*, presence and acceptance, it doesn't turn away from crisis or pain and messiness. In metamorphic butoh and similar kinds of performance, one can work with loss and imperfection, not needing ideal resolutions. Butoh's orientation in *dance experience* also remains. Experience and presence remain as messages. As archive, suspicion of production also remains. Movement is fundamental to purposeful actions and interactive encounters in all dance; nevertheless, as a matter of stated intent, Hijikata, the rebel, sought a "purposeless" use of the body to avoid the onus of production (1961, 44–45), even as he did carry out many productions.

### Nature Remains

Through Husserl and his inheritors, phenomenology presents human life as part of the lifeworld of nature, which is constituted in movement both culturally and organically, like the streaming of atoms in plasma. As alive in time, dance unfolds this flowing life—a larger life of performance than production. Butoh, in particular, thickens bodily points of conversion with enviroing nature and the social body. To confound messy times, its performers shed the social body to reveal the primal

body—"the body that has not been robbed," as Hijikata famously puts this. Butoh continues, sometimes under other names, spreading into the atmosphere and soil, particularly through the ecologically inspired work of Atsushi Takenouchi who dances in tortured and remote places to heal the earth, as his mentor Ohno-sensei did before him. Like Ohno-sensei, Takanouchi also favors flowers and beauty. Through paradigms of dance experience and participation, butoh imbues "a new being sense" of our belonging to nature and generates transcultural interconnections with ecological conscience.



*Figure 4. Takenouchi Atsushi dancing on the Island of Corsica. Photograph by Hiroko Komiya ©2018.*

In ontic connection, we circle back to our earlier examinations of subjectivity and the lifeworld, as with a renewed sense of belonging, we emphasize Husserl's ontology, which does not separate subjectivity from nature but notices its power and limits: "subjectivity in its grip upon it changes nature, but alters nothing of the unity of nature as core in its own ontological form" (1995, 189).

All of this can be refined.

*By now, the cadence and rhythms of phenomenology feel deeply familiar to me, as if they were already in my blood stream. At odd moments they beckon like butoh in friendly bells and echoes. As this morning's early fog blanketed the desert, I reached back in history to draw phenomenology and butoh forward into the new age of electro-acoustic music. I call the music video that resulted, sounding earth. Dancer Robert Bingham morphs through sound and movement in the soft sandstone of Snow Canyon, Utah, as my camera witnesses his dance in the presence of nature.<sup>19</sup> I understand the video as a butoh-inflected eco-somatic performance of movement, nature, music and image. But, you might wonder, is it butoh? Imaginably, it is whatever you want it to be. I venture this with Ohno-sensei and Merce Cunningham who both valued the subjective place of the*



audience. *Butoh is the dance of everyday life, which is messy but very precious, as Ohno-sensei also taught.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For butoh and WW II, see Fraleigh, "Messy Beauty and Butoh Invalids," in *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (2004, 153–190).

<sup>2</sup> On Deleuze and phenomenology relative to Sartre, see, Stephan Günzel (2014).

<sup>3</sup> For more on Paul Ricoeur's translation of Husserl, see Don Ihde's forward to the new edition of Ricoeur's *Freedom and Nature* (2007).

<sup>4</sup> As in Sartre's work, the more recent neurophenomenology of Francisco Varela explains how knowledge is embodied and enacted through the senses (Varela 1991, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Hijikata Tatsumi's DANCE EXPERIENCE no Kai (Hijikata Tatsumi's Dance Experience Meeting) written in English was the title of his first recital/concert in July of 1960. For more on this and eight "dance experience butoh methods" of Hijikata's students, see Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo (Fraleigh and Nakamura, 2006, Ch. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Experience is explained as the basis for valuing in axiology (Taylor, 1961). For a study of value in environmental ethics, see Taylor (1986).

<sup>7</sup> See, *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance* (Fraleigh, ed. 2018).

<sup>8</sup> For the relationship of butoh to Zen Buddhism, see Fraleigh (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Candelario's article appears in *Performing Ecologies: Choreographic Practices* 9.1, Fraleigh and Bingham, eds. 2018.

<sup>10</sup> See a full description of his work, MA, in BUTOH (Fraleigh, 2010, 167–171).

<sup>11</sup> See Bellerose, "Being Ma: Moonlight Peeping through the Doorway," in *Back to the Dance Itself* (Fraleigh, ed. 2018).

<sup>12</sup> For more, see Bingham, "Improvising Meaning in the Age of Humans," in *Back to the Dance Itself* (2018).

<sup>13</sup> YouTube video, [https://youtu.be/ilbZwLd\\_Uzw](https://youtu.be/ilbZwLd_Uzw), accessed, January 28, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger writes extensively of "the worlding of the world" (1971, 163–86).

<sup>15</sup> For intrinsic value, see Taylor (1961).

<sup>16</sup> States of Matter: Plasma, <http://www.livescience.com/54652-plasma.html>, accessed February 4, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Author's conversation with Yoshioka in Broellin Germany, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> For a full description and analysis of Summer Storm through the full-length performance film by Arai Misao

(2003), see Fraleigh (2010, Part 2, Ch. 1).

<sup>19</sup> See: sounding earth, <https://youtu.be/Es2xZIR7aFQ>, accessed on July 15, 2018. Lou Harrison advised the author's music for dance master of arts study. She hopes he would be happy with the occasional drone of this music video, and its rolled silences in the presence of nature.

## Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy and Susan Hekman. 2008. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Beauvoir, Simone. [1948] 1994. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Carol Publishing.
- Casey, Edward S. 2003. "Taking a Glance at the Environment." In *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*. Edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, 187–210. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Cull, Laura. 2013. *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291912>
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hijikata, Tatsumi. [1961] 2000. "To Prison." In "Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh." Translated by Jacqueline S. Ruyak and Kurihara Nanako. Edited by Kurihara Nanako. *The Drama Review* (Spring) 44.1: 56–59.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1974. *Otherwise than Being*. Translated by A. Lingis. Dordrecht: Nijhoff.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. [1945] 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge Classics. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994610>
- . 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Chicago: Northwestern University Press.
- McIntyre, Ronald and David W. Smith. 1989. "Theory of Intentionality." In *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook*. Edited by J. N. Mohanty and William R. McKenna, 147–79. Washington D. C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America.
- Feldenkrais, Moshe. 1985. *The Potent Self: A study of Spontaneity and Compulsion*. Berkeley: Frog Books.
- Fraleigh, Sondra. 1987. *Dance and the Lived Body*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- . 1999. *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, and Japan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjp8s>
- . 2004. *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjq68>
- . 2010. *BUTOH: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2015. *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations through Dance, Yoga, and Touch*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. <https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252039409.001.0001>
- . 2016. "Butoh Translations and the Suffering of Nature." In *Performance Research* 21.4: 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2016.1192869>
- , ed. 2018. *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Fraleigh, Sondra and Tamah Nakamura. [2006] 2017. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203701836>
- Fraleigh, Sondra and Robert Bingham, eds. 2018. "Performing Ecologies in a World in Crisis." Special issue of *Choreographic Practices* 9.1.
- Günzel, Stephan. 2014. "Deleuze and Phenomenology." *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy* 2.2: 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.19079/metodo.2.2.31>
- Husserl, Edmund. [1900] 1970. *Logical Investigations*. Volume 2. Translated by J. N. Findlay. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- . [1952] 1989. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Book 2. Translated by R. Rojcewicz A. Schuwer. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-2233-4>
- . 1995. *Appendices*. In Fink and Husserl, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, 63–198. Translated by Ronald Bruzina. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . [1925] 2005. *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*. Translated by John B. Brough. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Midgellow, Vida. 2018. "Improvisation as Paradigm for Phenomenology." In *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance*. Edited by Sondra Fraleigh, 59–77. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctv80cb20.10>
- Ricoeur, Paul. [1966] 2007. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Translated by Erazim V. Kohak with foreword by Don Ihde. Chicago: Northwestern University Press.
- . 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1947. *Existentialism*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Philosophical Library.
- . 1965. *Being and Nothingness*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Translated by Hazel Barnes. New York: Citadel.
- Taylor, Paul. 1961. *Normative Discourse*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- . 1986. *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Varela, Francisco, Thompson, E. and Rosch, E. 1991. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Varela, Francisco. 1996. "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problems." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3.4: 330–49.

## Biography

Sondra Fraleigh is professor emeritus of dance at the State University of New York (SUNY Brockport), a Fulbright Scholar and award-winning author of nine books. She has also published numerous book chapters. Fraleigh was chair of dance at State University of New York at Brockport and later head of graduate dance studies, also selected as a university-wide Faculty Exchange Scholar. She received the Outstanding Service to Dance Award from CORD in 2003, and was a teaching fellow at Ochanomizu University in Tokyo in 1990. At her Eastwest Somatics Institute, Fraleigh develops and teaches her own style of somatics work internationally, including intuitive dance with influences from butoh, her Land to Water Yoga techniques, and Shin Somatics® Bodywork. Phenomenology infuses her somatics perspective.

© 2019 Sondra Fraleigh



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).