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ATTUNEMENT AND EVANESCENCE

Key Words

Non-Possession

Just Dancing

Stilling and Falling

Tabula Rasa Dōgen

Being Awkward

I

Mono no aware

Like wind, emptiness cannot be derived from other phenomena or presented through them. Like being, wind and emptiness are non-reductive. Experiences of emptiness and wind, however, like those of being, are individuated in a variety of ways and understood circumstantially. We also grasp them existentially through the lens of poetry, movement, and dance, as in this Zen haiku of Soen Nakagawa.

Inside the zendo also

dancing

evening maple leaves

I like the ease and simplicity of Nakagawa's poem. It speaks of season, place, and time, and also contains a conundrum or surprise. Zen haiku should do all of this in a few syllables. The setting of this poem is a zendo where maple leaves blow in the wind. If the leaves *also* dance, what else is dancing that we don't see? The poetic whole inspires Zen emptiness without naming it, while setting dance apart structurally and giving it unguarded significance through nature. Nakagawa visions sensitivity to ephemera and fleeting time appreciated in Japanese literature as *mono no aware* (impermanence). Zen Buddhism would take this philosophically further to focus on the evanescence of being itself, the coming and going of everything. Death as part of life is appreciated in Zen, particularly in the generation/extinction principle of Dōgen. (Later we take a closer look at the lasting significance of this 13th century reformer of Buddhism in Japan.)

I find Zen impermanence in much butoh, the dance form that arose slowly and with difficulty in the avant-garde theater of Tokyo after WW II. I don't believe butohist Ashikawa Yoko ever professed Zen as an influence, but I remember her morph through Zen-like disappearances. Melting her flesh, she could float to the floor ostensibly boneless and dry—like a drifting leaf. Ashikawa was the primary protégé of Hijikata Tatsumi who founded butoh, at first obscure and experimental, but now global in participation. Ashikawa seemed so much more than an appendage of Hijikata, becoming herself in Zen single pointedness when she danced. Zen and butoh are not the same, of course, but in my experiences of both, they often share similarities. I took

classes with Ashikawa when I lived in Tokyo in 1991, and saw her dance at the Joyce Theater in New York in on October 22, 1992. She danced in *Nagareru Kubi* (Floating Visage) that I mention above. There were others in the dance, but her emptiness etched in my memory. In her self-erasure, she moved downward and lightly away. At least, this is how I experienced her aesthetic embodiment of 'lack' and lowering of affective thresholds. Instead of expressing herself or projecting outwardly as dancers often do, she emptied toward nothingness.

One month after seeing Ashikawa perform in New York, I woke in the mountains near Tokyo very early on a November morning at the Maple Leaf Monastery in Yumoto Hakone. I had come to meditate at the small wooden temple on the grounds. My friend Akane Akiko and I walked to the temple in the morning dark and stillness. After shuffling through damp maple leaves in preparation for meditation, we were alone in the chilly temple, except for the officiating monk. I can still smell the dark sweetness of the temple, the dew on the leaves, and will always carry the memory of Akiko's father Shodo Akane-sensei, whom I acknowledge as my Zen teacher. He is noted for helping Japanese businessmen integrate Zen into their work, and smiles when he says his students are Japanese businessmen—and one American dancer.

His Zen mastery is calligraphy, acknowledged in Japan and China as the highest and most difficult art. He has written many books on Zen richly illustrated with his calligraphy, and he also illustrated *Dancing into Darkness*, my book on Butoh, Zen, and Japan (1999). Akane-sensi gave me only two pieces of advice: 'Every day be beautiful', and 'empty yourself and dance'. That was more than twenty years ago, and to this day, I attune to his advice. He gave me my Zen name of 'Bright Road Friend', which also

means 'gathering beings together in learning', he told me. Sometimes I question that he didn't say, 'teach'. Rather he said, 'be a friend'. He let me out of school; now I could just be a friend.

2

Non-Possession and Just Dancing

I know I'm a possessive person. I hold onto things, which disposes me to worry. So a big part of my work in the world has been to learn how to let go and trust that everything will work out well. When I can do this, it does, and I become beautiful. When I interject my worries and expectations, they turn back on me, and I get tangled up in the ugliness of control. I totter. When I let go and practice patience, I can see a way through perceived problems. I dance. I dance to know myself, my capabilities and potentials, my shadows and fears. I dance to be free of ownership, free of egotism, and to feel my human continuity with other beings as also with the environmental world of rivers and rocks, animals and plants. Dance, as implied in this paragraph, provides a means of inquiry, the movement of which reaches in—and in crisis may totter—the movement of which cannot be held as mine. Lessons of non-possession are transparent in dance, given awareness of them. In Zen, non-possession is an attainment. In dance, non-possession manifests as guilelessness.

Zen emphasizes right livelihood as a way toward non-possession. So what is to be let go of, I ask, in terms of making a living the right way? Here 'right' is not so much a moral edict, but rather a pragmatic one. To be happy, we need to know how to integrate discrete acts of doing with larger purposes of living. I have had pause many times to

reflect on dance as a career, dance as theater and also as a profession in education. I have often questioned my relationship to dance, since it would seem a great deal of my livelihood has been through what I call in various guises 'dance', which really has no existence beyond the definitions and manifestations at hand (art, therapy, fun, freeze, and much more). Dance fades and falters; it soars and breathes, and then it goes away when we lose track of it. When we attune to some aspect of what we know as dance, it magically reappears. This I know: that even as I hold dance dear, it slips through my fingers.

Looking back, I see that dance has never been my livelihood, nor has it been my profession or career. Having ways to dance has given me self-sustaining work and play. As work, art, ritual and play, dance can be undertaken in a Zen frame of mind. One can dance for intrinsic purposes, for the value contained in the act itself, and not for end gaining, as one might say somatically. On a metaphysical level, I have danced through my understandings of yoga and Zen to transform my attitude toward work and everyday rituals. Now in my later years, I dance and work in an autotelic field of awareness. The work and dance is done for its own sake. The value arises in the doing and is savored in reflection.

In the largest sense, I dance to live toward light and peace. I have been a university teacher of dance, so it would seem my livelihood. But 'right living', as 'just living', is more than making money. Money can be made through wrong conduct, and we have plenty of examples of this in our current world, but money can also flow from working with love and trust in the outcomes. When I reach for some desired goal, something unforeseen and often better arrives if I am alert to surprise. Letting go of

desire (as dominant goal setting) creates more room for what one can become. There are yet many dances to do. Still, I recognize that not all dance is life giving. Dancing can reflect greed when it serves egotistical goals. I don't want to say that performing for others, or in theatrical contexts, is necessarily ego driven, but it can be. Dancing for others can also occasion community. *Intention* makes the difference, as phenomenologists like to say.

Regarding intention, dancing for the sake of dancing imbues trust, and through this, it teaches nonpossession. When we dance purely for the dance, and not to please an audience, or to make money, we can touch the world lightly, even in stamping dances. I call this approach to dance, 'just dancing', as a way to associate it with the values of 'just sitting' in meditation. In 'just dancing', we practice release of 'me' and 'mine', and have a chance to experience a pure relationship to dance and to others in the dance. When we dance together in the spirit of just dancing, we move interdependently as one and for no other reason but the dance.

Non-possession is one of the primary tasks of old age. This implies letting go, not holding on, eventually letting go to whatever binds you to life itself. The unsettling eventuality of non-possession is that we at some point will let go of everything, releasing our body and our loves—all our fleeting dances. Many people believe that in the process, we will gain something else, even if we have no perfect knowledge of this. The mystery of what is to come inheres in the beauty of present time.

My dance mentor Ohno Kazuo-sensei died in 2010, three years past his 100th birthday. In his butoh dance classes, he sometimes spoke of a river that connects this life and the next, where souls both living and dead commingle in peace on the shore.

He asked students to dance this comingling as *Konpaku*. Ohno-sensei along with Hijikata Tatsumi is considered one of the primary founders of butoh. His use of *Konpaku* startles even the Japanese; it is such an old Buddhist word and concept.

I have asked myself whether Ohno's vision of a permeable boundary between life and death relates to Japanese group oneness, stressing the group as one cooperative whole over the individual. If I see the whole, I understand that death may not be a purely personal experience—that I will have help crossing the river. This belief in transcendent community, eases my aloneness, as does poetry. It often keeps me company in a magical frame of mind where emotions flow and the heart has wings. Poetry even more than dance attunes to the moral life and ultimate questions. Dance seems more immediately on fire and flung into time.

Japan has had a tradition of death poems. Emptiness and non-possession enter the Zen suchness, or everyday quality of these poems. Here is one I like from Michikaza, a man greedy for wealth and fame who denounced his vanities later in life. He wrote this simple poem near his death (1709). I like its straightforward ordinary tone:

*Today I put on summer
clothes and Journey
to a world I haven't seen yet.*

Masumi Kato's death poem (1796) is more florid, and I'm drawn to it also. This haiku appears on the poet's gravestone. He died during plum blossom season. His poem suggests that this life and the next have congruence through flowers:

*The path to paradise
is paved with bright
plumb petals.*

3

Stilling and Falling

And here is a Haiku that I arrange from a popular song that Ohno Kazuo-sensei often used as the finale for his dance concerts:

*Wise men say, only
Fools rush in, but I can't help
Falling in love with you.*

Certainly we recognize this as Elvis Presley. I think it has Zen elements—especially in its simplicity and foolish acceptance. Nothing seems more wisely foolish than Ohno Kazuo, a centenarian and Japanese veteran of WW II, dancing to this popular American icon. Well into his nineties, unable to stand and sitting in a chair, Ohno lifted his arms and gestured with his large expressive hands, sometimes closing his eyes to the music of Elvis. (Figure 1. Photo of Ohno, dancing in chair here.) In Zen, wisdom arises unbidden and can't be forced, just as it does in love. Should we not be foolish and fall in love?

Wise men fall in love with every new day, because they know that love heals. Giving up control, heals, and can bring unexpected rewards. The early modern dancers gave up the control of uprightness, plying the ecstasy of spiraling downward into the earth, only to throw themselves into the air with gangly abandon the next moment. In falling down, we give up the desire to be perfect; in letting go, we let things be as they are—already perfect. We find ease in balancing control with freedom. In letting go, we need less and listen better.

I have taught dance in several forms for more than forty years. Now I teach nothing, because in a very Zen sense, there is nothing anyone needs to learn. Realization of self in relation to others and an objective world is where learning lies, and teachers can't do this for us. They are, at best, catalyzers who help us fall in love with a subject or activity. Joanna Macy, scholar of Buddhism and deep ecology, tells us we are not here on earth primarily to learn from the world but to fall in love with it and take care of it (Macy: 1991). We are already complete, as I have realized in studying Zen and its close relative, yoga. And we are not alone. What we do and how we live ripples out into the world and returns back to us. We are connected with each other and a part of the perfection of the world. This understanding is present in the deep doctrines of the East, and also has precedent in Plato and Greek classicism, where it is believed that learning is about realizing what is already present in the perfection of form and that the artist elaborates the intelligence of the world of forms. In his *Timaeus*, Plato calls these perfect forms 'ideas in the mind of God' (Plato in Cairns: 1961, xviii-xix).

Such perfection is intrinsic, or already always in us as part of the perfection of embodied consciousness. The task of the teacher is to stimulate in the student what he

already knows and can access, those potentials that reside in sleeping and dreaming, in tending plants and animals, in taking care of others, in service, and most certainly in dancing, painting, music, math, story, and poetry. The teacher pays attention to the talents or natural proclivities of her students and encourages these. That's all. Teaching is not about stuffing information; it is about paying attention to emergent possibilities with trust. Martin Heidegger wrote in his phenomenology, *Being and Time*: 'What is essential in phenomenology does not lie in its actuality as a philosophical "movement" ("Richtung"). Higher than actuality stands possibility' (Heidegger: 1962: 62-63).

Would we could transform our understanding of learning into the joy of doing our best, even as this varies from time to time. Buddhism, we know teaches that 'right effort' is important. The point about exertion is to apply it in love with the effort, not wasting it on stressful expectations. Stepping into the unknown, like falling in love, is risky and open to the moment. When we are in the flow of doing, the end result is learning. We progress naturally through paying attention to the work at hand. When work is done for its own sake, not in a goal-driven way but for the work, working is *just working*, like dancing is *just dancing*, and *the* incomprehensible reveals its simple parts.

In just dancing, we ignite our best selves. Dance can stir inborn wisdom when we do it for the doing and not for show. In just sitting still with nothing to do and nowhere to go, we realize our intrinsic perfection. I blanch at this word 'perfection', but I remember so well that one of my gurus in yoga told me I need not strive so much, because I was already perfect. *Being lacks nothing*. In the whirlwind of her dance, the dancer loses self-limitations and becomes present to her freedom. She releases her great doubt and moves with faith instead.

Out of being, nothing becomes possible. We fall into stillness, empty of ambition in meditation. A main ingredient of sitting *Zazen* is posture, sometimes called 'right posture'. In my experiences of sitting *Zazen* in Zen temples in Japan and in Zen centers in the United States, sitting upright is a major component. If one can do this, one can meditate. In fact getting into the 'right' posture is considered enlightenment (Shunru Suzuki in Kazuaki and Tensho: 1996, 29). I like to think somatically of feeling right, breathing and feeling good in the posture. Then I can be light, with my back long and my head floating lightly upward.

In my somatics perspective, I prefer to think of 'just posture', the singularity of sitting alone or with others, and in silence. 'Just Posture' is somewhat like the Zen practice of 'Just Sitting', where there is nothing else but the sitting, no images to focus on, no counting, just sitting, stilling the body and quieting the mind. In preparing posture for meditation, there is noting but the posture. One can dwell in it, as in a poem on nothingness. Does it have to be right? Perhaps I depart from the formality of Zen, when I say 'no', I don't think posture has to be right. Rather, let it be poetic. Well, maybe it needs to feel right, and this can vary from person to person, conditionally. Not everyone can sit easily upright. In fact it can be a struggle, as I have witnessed in my teaching (or non-teaching) of meditation in yoga. Becoming adept at meditation has a lot to do with learning how to sit more easily upright, and this is a process that continues throughout life. Somatic practices and gentle yoga help with this. If it is true that we are already perfect, then we can find perfection in the posture available to us in the moment. I like to ask students in somatic explorations, 'what is available to you now'? Rituals need to be adaptable to be put into practice.

To enlighten is to make lighter. Dance lightens as well. It can also produce heavy feelings, strong or weak aspects, and is alive with expression. I teach (or don't teach) that the very act of paying attention to our movement in any kind of dance is enlightening. Phenomenologically, this is about directing intention in stilling and dancing. Like just sitting and just walking, the purity of just dancing, engenders wholeness. In multiplying moments of wholeness, we need less, and can become lighter. One cannot command easy uprightness, but one can remember and rehearse it in dance and in somatic movement processes, including gentle yoga to support practices of meditation.

My teacher, Akane-sensei says, 'Yoga is the mother of Zen'. I also make this leap, appreciating that the aesthetics of Zen are plain while those of yoga are florid and bright like the colors of India. At night, I practice the Zen of just walking and looking at the moon, turning toward the light while being turned by it. In the day I just dance, and the mood might be yogic-baroque and twining, or as Zen-simple and wabi-sabi as a forgotten sunflower leaning on a weathered shed. When I breathe easily and sit with presence and self-forgiveness, I meditate. *Nothing* comes near and enters in. I clear my nervous system and shine my attention. The riverbank of my sitting might be *konpaku*, or in my mind, or in the park across the street. I don't know if my sitting posture is 'right', but it can feel right in the moment of my stilling. If not, I can adjust my sitting, and breathe consciously into it.

4

The Mind of the Dance

My quest for silence and true nature enters into my dance, and provides an anchor for my life. Being silent fosters resilience, clear thinking, and increases capacity for compassionate listening. The latter has helped me understand the importance of being inclusive—and in mindfulness terms—not ever giving up on a friend or student. Being transparent in my butoh awkwardness also seems to help.

I have asked myself whether the somatic field might include meditational practices, since somatics is a field that claims to develop perceptual awareness. The silence and stillness of meditation clears attention, thus presenting a special case of affectivity through the somatic readiness of tabula rasa erasure, an idea I will develop more fully. Being present to the moment and suspending judgment is one of the narratives of my work in somatic movement education and therapy. It is a meditative practice and philosophical ideal, both East and West. When Heidegger writes about ‘the ecstasy of time’, where past and future meet in the present, he might as well have been describing the temporal experience of meditation (Heidegger: 1962, 401-03). He admired Buddhist and Taoist teachings and learned from them, as we observe in *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources* (May: 1996).

The East has not been lost on Western thought, including the philosophy of Nietzsche and his teacher Schopenhauer, who was one of the first Western theorists to take inspiration from Eastern philosophies. How could any philosopher miss the metaphysics of time expressed in Zen and Taoism, as also in Indian yoga? In all of these, time is not just an abstract concept. It is lived existentially and circumstantially, and can be experienced as psychophysical oneness, as we will take up soon with Dōgen. Present time is oneness, lived in flow and stillness, as difficult to grasp as our

own being here and now. When we empty ourselves and dance, we can be present with our attention, not looking back with regret or worrying the future. When we are in contact with others in stillness, we can attune to them in the moment. My Zen teacher, Akane-sensi, puts the importance of this simply: '*Kyo Ikiru*', ('Live Today'). I wrote the core chapter of *Dancing into Darkness* as an existential leap from his exhortation (1999: 180-185).

Holding Presence is a narrative in my somatics work related to meditation and present time consciousness. It is simply about being present without prejudice, and thus it also speaks to relationships between people, including community building. The quest is how to be present to the concerns and dances of others. I have learned through my experiences in Zen and yoga, as well as depth-movement dance, and authentic movement practices that we can be supportively present to the dances of others as a witness-participant. We can at the same time be alive to what butoh teacher Akira Kasai calls "the community body." In this case, we dance inclusively, and with a concern to give back to the earth the very vitality the earth lends us (Kasai interview with Fraleigh: 1999, 228-241). Our ability to live richly involves being present in community, as African dance demonstrates. Newer cultures have a lot to learn from traditional ones. Individualism is rife in America and Europe, but it doesn't make people happy. Dancing together does.

Mindfulness is a concept in wide use in the West, made popular through the work of Jon Kabat Zin and borrowed originally from Zen Buddhism. Cultivation of bodily awareness through our relationship to others is a major purpose of mindfulness, be this mindfulness as an expansion of mind through movement and dance, or mindfulness as

moving in the wordless world of the soma. *Active Imagination* as conceived by Carl Jung is an early example of the latter. Neuroscientist Daniel Siegel, in *The Mindful Brain*, says: 'When we become our own best friend, we become open to connecting deeply with others' (Siegel: 2007, 322). Compassion and empathy are possible outcomes of structured explorations (or somatic choreographies) of body consciousness. Indeed, movement and dance produce feelings and prompt images of self-awareness. Dance, it is commonly thought, is about self-expression, but I believe it is more potent in its aspects of self-generation and body image: our existential becoming, if you will. What we dance also dances us. What do we want to become is the question. We are entraining body image in the ways of our dancing.

Dance, yoga, and somatic bodywork have together given me ways to explore consciousness, even as I understand that not all dancers or yoginis seek this. My forays into philosophy, especially phenomenology, took me toward 'moving consciously' and the study of movement somatics as such. Now I don't look so much for expertise in dance as I do for a beginner's mind, as I understand this through Zen. This doesn't mean I don't appreciate excellence in performance, but what if dancers could achieve excellence with attentional expansion. Yes, but attention to what? In a Zen sense, attention to the 'mind' of the dance, or its intrinsic power. The mind of the dance might even encourage and inspire, or as in the case of some butoh, help us empathize with illness and death like Hijikata Tatsumi's *Leprosy* (1973) and *Story of Small Pox* (1972). The mind of the dance is its nature or disposition, none other than the nature of the dancer, and so the dancer cultivates himself in both personal and physical attributes to deserve to dance for others. The dancer dances the mind of the dance, and continues

to wipe clean the slate of his own mind—that the dance might emerge from clarity and not clutter.

I have known dancers whose daily practice of dance is a form of prayer. My practice of dance is less religious, but I do think of it as spiritually renewing. Zen meditation helps me with this. Everyday I dance, both literally and symbolically, with gratitude for the ground under my feet and awe for the sky that draws me upward. I dance to pay attention to the seasons, attuning to the people dear to me, as also those to come. When I cast my attention widely, I sometimes make music from the dance that flows through me with the help of my midi-keyboard and computer. I love infusing somatic yoga with dancelike flow, as I practice a friendly adaptability in my weekly volunteer work with seniors. They teach me resilience, patience, and humor. I practice dance as an improvisational art, but I appreciate dance in many forms: modern, postmodern, contemporary (in various guises), butoh, folk, ballet, and break dance. Spontaneous jams count too, and all healing dances. I don't think it makes sense to claim superiority for any particular form of dance, or to claim that Zen belongs to a particular dance form like butoh. I have seen a lot of butoh that didn't resonate with Zen. I have also experienced elements of Zen in dances of various kinds that prompt self-remembering. Dancers and audiences for dance find themselves in their interpretations. We turn toward the dance, and sometimes it returns us to ourselves.

Dancing is essentially an action, most basically an autotelic action, one that accomplishes nothing and goes nowhere. Dance serves no practical purpose in the world. We dance because we want to, not because we have to. And yet dancing of any kind seems most practical as consciously undertaken cultivation of embodiment. In

dancing, we can feel whole and free, exuberant and alive, just as we can also feel splits of attention, or we can lack awareness. Humans experience whole stretches of attentional lull and sometimes depression and existential turmoil. These can also surface in dance or motivate it. The trick is to be able to pay attention to the mind of the dance, and to consciously direct its influence of self and other. While we don't control the dance, we do make decisions about its flow and content. Dance expresses our agency as well as our abandon. In being choosers, we learn how to make good choices.

Nothing is more cloying than complete sweetness. Dances that I like have undertows and darkness as well as light. But in general, I sense the importance of finding joy and peace in dancing as an activity for personal development. We can dance toward wholeness. Embodiment is an everyday eventuality, never fully accomplished. We are in the process of embodying, or we might say, 'we are bodying ourselves in every moment'. We can embody dance as a conscious act, for the same reason we practice Zen, to feel at one with the beneficence of the world.

The Zen oneness of the world is offered us when we attune to it. This is not a given, but rather a choice. We can attune and become attentive in stilling and moving mindfully. Conversely we can practice negativity and criticism. Being mindful, we 'world' our dance (to use Heidegger's verb, 'worlding'). I am not suggesting that we ignore social problems and cultural strife, but we have a better chance of doing something about it if we ourselves are well. It doesn't make sense to become sick with the supposed sickness of the world, to practice bitterness, or even to envision the world as problematic. We can see around us conformity without question, injustice and corruption. Certainly these are rife. But they do not define the world. The question is how to keep

alive the inner attitudes that make a better world, and this begins with the self, as spiritual teachers continue to emphasize. Gandhi put it most famously and best: 'Be the change you want to see in the world'.

Zen is applicable to all dances, most basically it is about moving mindfully, and this is a matter of intention and attitude. Ballet can be as mindfully whole as butoh, and folk dances around the world are given away with abandon, performed for love of community and tribe. Some of my most memorable early experiences with dance came through ballroom dance—tango and cha cha, especially. I could easily abandon myself to the rhythm and vital essence of these dances, especially with a good partner. Improvisation in ballroom dance is a skillful infinite art. Mindfulness in tango, as in butoh, is about full presence and participation, not withholding awkwardness when it occurs. The skillful tango dancer can transform mistakes into curious innovations, as can a skilled jazz musician or concert dancer. Improvisation in dance and life shines the present centered moment, the same vital moment of art and Zen. It's not just that anything goes; everything appears both coming and going. We can't capture moonlight, but we can experience its beauty for a time. The same is true of all dancing, when we just dance.

5

At Zero: Tabula Rasa Dōgen

I digress for a moment to look back and take stock: Beginning in 1985, I became acquainted with butoh, sometimes termed the postmodern dance of Japan. This form of dance, both theater and therapy, expanded my understanding of the East and Eastern

concepts of the body. I learned through butoh and Japanese phenomenology that the body doesn't end with the skin but extends throughout timespace. In *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, I elucidated Japanese phenomenology in relation to butoh and the body (2004: 26-31). When we breathe, nature breathes. When we bleed, nature bleeds. After my first acquaintance with butoh through Natsu Nakajima and her dance on female divinity, *Niwa* (The Garden, 1982), I studied butoh in Japan, Canada, and the United States. It was not my intention to write about butoh in the beginning, but Shodo Akane-Sensei, my Zen teacher in Japan, encouraged me to write about dance and Zen. In the process, I discerned relationships between Zen and butoh, and invented my dance (myself) anew, now in the guise of the East with *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, and Japan* (1999).

Later I wrote two more books about this globally responsive dance form, which is still evolving—*Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (2006) and *BUTOH: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy* (2010). Through study with butoh artists and writing about butoh, I became a butoh teacher (not-teaching). More aptly, I draw butoh-influenced metamorphic dance into my somatics teaching. I have already mentioned my inspiration and mentor in butoh, Ohno Kazuo-sensei (October 27, 1906 – June 1, 2010), who provided a resounding example of dancing into old age that sustains me still. My association with him continues through his son Ohno Yoshito, who is a year older than I. Once while dancing an improvised duet with Yoshito, I asked him to marry me, and he promised he would (next life, I guess!). The Ohno's approach to dance, both spiritual and somatic, continues its global influence. (In Japan the last name comes first.)

I experience qualities of Zen in their teaching, especially involving the conundrum of learning. In a special Zen feat of non-teaching, Ohno Kazuo-sensei led Mexican butohist Diego Piñón to a post in the dance studio and told him that the post was his mother. 'Dance with your mother', Ohno-sensei said, and then he left Diego there. This situation persisted for weeks, Diego told me in an interview, until he eventually got some instruction from Ohno's son, Yoshito. Eventually they became good friends. (Piñón is the subject of 'Butoh Ritual Mexicano' in Fraleigh 2010: 191-195.)

Butoh, like all dance, is body poetry, a special kind of body language and wordless communication. The poetry changes with the style of the dance and the performers. Mindfulness, being awake to the present, reinforces all matters of somatic sensibility and thus all dances and bodily poeisis. I sometimes interpret this state of naked aliveness as zero, or the state of nothingness that precedes the birth of new ideas and dances. Sometimes I say, 'zero yourself', to my students. 'Disappear' is not the same thing, nor is 'now yourself'. Zero is the place we start from before we are aware of anything at all. Zero is emptiness of a certain kind. 'Now' is present time, and 'disappearance' is a visual phenomenon. Stillness (in movement) and silence (in sound) might be interpreted as aspects of zero. They bring answers of themselves. Like many, my personal quest has been to silence the chatter of my mind and to transform my pain body. When I dance into healing, I seek the still centers of movement. I like to disappear and cover myself with imaginary wings, so no one can see me, and I especially like the emptiness of dancing zero. Zero is a feeling, however fleeting, a feeling of release and effortlessness. Zero is light. From zero one might move to plus or minus. Zero is an empty middle that floats. In butoh explorations, I ask my students to dance zero, and

they do. The human faces of zero are incredible: anti-gravity, evanescent, attuned, and unburdened.

Intuitive understanding and pleasure are the happy results of realizing effortless ease in movement. Healing can arise from ease as a sense of wellbeing enters consciousness. A condition of quiet ease is termed the “relaxation response” by Jon Kabat-Zin, the author of books and scientific papers on mindfulness and its clinical applications (Kabat-Zin: 1991 and 1994). He refers readers to the capacity of the brain to change according to whole body responses. The Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education, part of my somatic education, is based on a similar principle. It is no secret that we feel better when we can lower somatic thresholds. We breathe better. We are not in a struggle or stress mode, but rather at ease with the world and ourselves. When we embody movement effortlessly, with power and love in balance, we can heal if only for a time. Healing, it seems to me, is a daily practice. When we multiply the times of feeling good, we create momentum and change in a positive direction.

Ease in doing entails doing less to feel more, and building confidence through listening better. These are aspects of being present with awareness and knowing about the potentials of zero. I have learned present centered awareness from three studies and practices—phenomenology, somatics, and Zen. These three seemingly disparate practices teach non-judgment and tabula rasa thinking, developing a consciousness of not knowing, just as we can aim to dance every day into existence without expectations and with appreciation for the chance to start afresh. Phenomenology teaches one not to assume anything in advance, to suspend what one already knows, and to let go of

prejudice by questioning pre-suppositions. The goal of this kind of thinking is to wipe the slate clean, so to speak, as one aims to see things (phenomena) for the first time.

Non-judgment in somatics may be compared to the suspension of bias in phenomenology, but it also takes on a Zen aspect, that of waiting and patience, finding stillness within movement and in the moment. I learned the most about this from sitting Zazen. In practicing Zen meditation, the very erasure of thought, or at least the attempt, releases the known. To be at rest in meditation is to be cleansed if even for moments of silence. In silence and not knowing, there is no judge. Thoughts can be unpacked and seen simply as thoughts, coming and going, as they fade.

Phenomenology, somatics, and Zen allow me to be in the moment, and to forgive myself when I fall into worry or fear. I can always recover and start peacefully at zero. I adhere to Zen as a practice in silent sitting – in laughter, composure, and compassion. Sitting Zazen engenders forbearance and respect for suffering. I practice yoga to lengthen, to flow, and to unify. I have had several gurus in Zen, yoga, and phenomenology. For that I am grateful, and I will probably have more.

Zen emphasizes emptiness. Phenomenology and somatics do this in related ways, especially by erasing expectations. Nothing existing rests undisturbed in its original pristine state, and yet I can envision a clear place and consciousness in my dance. From there, the possible is a beacon.

I zero myself in phenomenology, Zen, and somatics. A phenomenologist doesn't assume a ready-made answer. This way of seeing and understanding doesn't depend on accepted theories. This doesn't mean that one disrespects disciplined bodies of knowledge, but one does not depend on them. What new knowledge might come from

not knowing? This is the tabula rasa question. What new knowledge might come from experience through paying attention? This is the somatic question. There might seem an inherent arrogance in the experiential stance of phenomenology, but once one interrogates intuitive knowledge, it has a tendency to dissolve into larger frameworks of understanding. This is the universalizing tendency that drives phenomenology.

Like phenomenology somatics may seem too involved with the self also, but its aim of integrating experience and connecting to others mitigate its focus on self-awareness. Some somatic practices are cognizant of our human continuity with nature, as Zen also teaches, and we take up shortly. Care of self comes first because it is basic to the ability to connect. In excavating possible-selves, we understand that consciousness is vast, welling up through psychic life, and that it has somatosensory sources in movement, touch, and stillness. We find precedent for this in both the East and the West, through phenomenology, yoga, and Zen. Body-self and nature are continuous in Zen, as are self and other. Below we consider this continuity more fully, starting with Zen oneness.

During my 1990 Japan visit, my Zen teacher, Akane-sensei, introduced me in a few strokes to a calligraphy that continues to guide my path in the world: *Shin Shin Ichi nyo*, meaning *Body and Mind are One*. This expression of nondual realization is essential to the teachings of Eihei Dōgen (1200-1253), the historic reformer of Buddhism in Japan, and a prolific author and teacher of Zen. My teacher is in Dōgen's lineage. In this path, or Zen way, the body is to be cultivated, not abused or neglected. Cleansing is important, as is the use of beautiful aromatic oils. Wellness is the way. Wholeness is an aspiration. Oneness of body and mind is an ultimate achievement of

wholeness, of 'self returning to self' and 'return to the source' (Dōgen in Tanahashi and Levitt: 17). Through my studies in Japan and association with Zen and butoh, I now use the term *Shin* to identify the nondual focus my somatics teaching and practice, more fully expressed as *Shin Somatics*.

Return to source is whole in its return to nature Dōgen tells us: 'Saying that the self returns to the self is not contradicted by saying that the self is mountains, rivers, and the great earth. All Buddhas are wind and rain, water and fire' (Dōgen in Tanahashi and Levitt: 177). Dōgen teaches that water, mountains, and grass, like tiles and walls practice together with one who meditates. Water is also realizing its way to the source. The entire world of phenomena unfolds in our dancing, because we dance as nature does, maybe not in the style of Isadora, but each in his/her own way returns to what Dōgen called 'source'. Physicist Cal Sagan also put it famously: 'We are a way for the universe to know itself'. Yoga means 'yoke' or 'union' of self and universe, and this can be signified in a single gesture of connecting the forehead to the ground. With more complexity, through movement and stilling, we can dance forth our beginnings. Heidegger characterized origins poetically as *ursprung*, *original leap*. In dancing, we return to the cosmos, and the stars are already and always in us.

Paradoxically, in such achievement, the body and mind 'drop off' or 'fall away' in Dōgen's poesis. Such non-doing is also an achievement, just as non-teaching is. The means is silent sitting and conscious dancing—in stilling movement and moving stillness. Our sitting is mindful, as is our dancing, and people find the way to dance that is theirs. In some sense, I believe we have individual dispositions, just as rocks and rivers do, and yet we are all tending toward a great ocean or common source. Ultimately,

one cannot separate body, mind, and nature. This perspective has been stated for centuries in Dōgen's Zen, and is now borne out in the findings of neuroscience, especially through the work of Antonio Damasio and others who study consciousness. Damasio's view is beautifully expressed in several volumes, first in *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999), and more recently in *Self Comes to Mind* (2012). One can realize seamless body-mind oneness in meditation and in mindful cultivations of dance. I have experienced that the values of meditation can be translated to dance and our human belonging to the natural world and each other; our moving as nature is part of such mindful wholeness.

For this reason, I develop community dances in the environment, using the camera as witness; since film also belongs to the world of phenomena and can help us remember our belonging to nature and source. Here is a dance of bonding with soft sandstone in Snow Canyon, near where I live in Utah. (Figure 2. Angela Graff, participant in *Soft-Skinned Sandstone Butoh*, 2011)

Zen maintains that the human being must be understood as a being rooted in nature as a 'being-in-nature', to use Yuasa Yasuo's phrase. His work appeals to me as a synthesis of Zen with phenomenology and the somatics of personal development. I met him at a conference in Tsukuba, Japan in 1986, where I became acquainted with his very adept explanations of Eastern philosophy through the Western lens of phenomenology, which I continue to follow now through Shigenori Nagatomo's writings about Eastern philosophies of the body, including Yasuo's phenomenology of depth-psychology and perspectives of Dōgen Zen. At the beginning of this section, I

mentioned my study and writing about Japanese phenomenology. Now we also see that Yuasa's phenomenology draws upon Dōgen's Zen.

For Dōgen, the body is developed from studying the way and becomes the true human body through cultivation:

The concept of the true human body may be understood to be the body that has been transformed through personal self-cultivation, which is a type of habit-formation, and which is accompanied by a change in the body image, since the nature of the body image is shaped by the kind of training or cultivation that one goes through.... This personal self-cultivation meant for Dōgen the practice of just sitting (Yuasa in Nagatomo: 1992, 165).

Shin shin ichi nyo, in Dōgen's scheme and more generally in Buddhism, indicates that through meditation and in self-cultivation the body and mind arise as one, functioning as an integrated whole (Nagatomo: 1992, 126-27). The common sense dualistic notions and experiences of physical and mental phenomena are 'cast off' in oneness and deepened states of meditation. I would add that meditation in motion is also about 'casting off the body and mind' (*shinjin totsuraku*). The latter is an achievement that eventuality marked Dōgen's authentication of oneness (Nagatomo, 129). Something common to both body and mind provides the ground for samadhic awareness. Modern neuroscience is showing that the body generates what we commonly call mind as thinking processes, and that consciousness as mind, generates the body. In summary, there is no way to separate physical and mental processes. As

also in Dōgen's philosophy of Zen, generation and extinction are constant. We are coming into being at the very moment of disappearance, as we do in *just dancing*. The arrival of the leap is present in its beginning. In Zen and in dancing, time as lived is relative, as indicated in the Haiku of Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh:

*Don't say I will depart tomorrow—
even today, I'm still arriving.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

Dōgen's metaphysical influence on Buddhist thought is unmistakable: Oneness is not an abstract concept for him. For me, oneness is symbolized in *Shin* and realized in Dōgen's frame of reference through cultivation of the bodymind, casting off the mental and physical in a tabula rasa process of self-erasure. We can leave the clutter of mental and physical self-constructions behind and dance toward self-renewal and source. I have observed that purposeful cultivation of wholeness manifests in the everyday as peace, health, foresight, trust, creativity, compassion, and hope (to name a few qualities). In wholeness, we can speak our truth and let go of outcomes. Purposeful cultivation of the bodymind (or body-self) is a matter of paying attention, bringing awareness to one's acts and words. 'Dropping off' the bodymind in just dancing, we bring attention to zero, and the birth of oneness.

*One spot, alone,
Left glowing in the dark:
My snotty nose.*

Gaki

This is Gaki's death poem, and I think it is meant to be more existentially absurd than funny. Gaki, a Haiku poet who died on the twenty-fourth day of July, 1927 at the age of thirty-six, is better known by his given name, Akutagawa Ryunosuke. He was a celebrated writer in his day, well known in Japan's literary scene. His mother became insane shortly after his birth, casting a great pall over his life. He killed himself by drinking poison shortly after asking his aunt to deliver his death poem to his doctor.

Gaki was apparently not afraid to embarrass himself, even in death. Who would wish for such moments of awkwardness? Clumsy would be another word for this, shyly uncomfortable—and oh, also embarrassment. Most of us push away the unpleasantly awkward. Butoh dancers are the only ones I know who consistently explore this register of movement and affect, though not to the exclusion of other expressions. I have learned a lot from them about self-acceptance and the beauty of my awkward moments.

My puppy is never awkward, even when she falls and tumbles, or turns her belly up for 'rubbing'—her legs akimbo. Unfortunately humans are sometimes awkward and get embarrassed because they lose control, or seem to say the wrong thing. Puppies are very Zen creatures, because they never worry about barking too much, and they don't judge their own cavorting. When I was young, I worried a lot about what I said and

how people would see me through my words or actions. Now I'm gratefully awkward, not needing to please. This is part of the gift of growing older, not that you just don't care, but that you can see power in awkwardness. Grace is not a better state, especially when achieved at the cost of stress. When you can simply be yourself, there is no distinction between grace and gracelessness, only a beginner's mind.

I learned the power of awkwardness through Zen and butoh. In Zen one can cover oneself in silence, not hiding necessarily, but rather taking a break from judgment, including self-judgment. One can be happy in silence and stillness, not needing to impress anyone, to speak or to dance. Nothing to teach or learn can be comforting; nothing becomes something in math when we discover the value of zero. Nothing is the blank page of *tabula rasa*, the clean slate out of which creativity and intuition can flow. One can dance out of such emptiness, leaning on the air.

Early on in my study of butoh, I realized I was practicing a form of phenomenology in self-erasure and nonjudgment, letting go of the need to be adept, clever, or accomplished. Letting go the desire to connect with expectations, I practiced uncomfortable positions and facial expressions, twisting my face into ugly shapes, rubbery and rusty. Eventually, I practiced a butoh technique that ploys the edge of falling. This is similar to risky leaning positions and movements in modern/postmodern dance, and also akin to difficult balances in ballet, except that edgy butoh moves clumsily on and on, staying off-balance, hanging awry whenever possible, and falling awkwardly. Butoh makes kinesthetically affective use of crooked awareness, so much that I've asked myself why dancers would be attracted to such discomfort. We know that dance performance in the theater and academy has traditionally has courted pain, and this is

not what I'm talking about, rather I mean to say something about an emotional discomfort that comes from being gawky (as in Gaki, quoted above).

There could be several reasons for interrupting the grace and perfection that is typically sought in dance, and instead choosing the emotional upheaval of the notably uncool. One reason I see is that life itself brings unexpected interruptions of couth, and if we get a chance to practice awkwardness in dance, we can more easily smile at our own *faux pas*. I have observed over the years of knowing many people in varied circumstances that no one gets away without social blunders (and movements) they regret, or transform and make use of—hopefully the latter.

Another reason to court awkwardness inheres in the metaphysics of *artlessness*, *emptiness*, and *lack*, lest we remember that in lack lies every potential. *Shoshin*, or the Zen concept of *Beginners Mind* expands this idea as process, explored in the spiritual classic of Shunru Suzuki, *Beginner's Mind* (1970). In an act of *Tabula Rasa* writing, Suzuki sees that beginners have many possibilities, while experts have few. We can set aside what we think we know in order to approach a topic or activity innocently. Then we can learn.

The founder of *butoh*, Hijikata Tatsumi, takes awkwardness toward a surrealist turn when he says, 'I'd like to be caught smack in the middle of a mistake' (2000 [1961]). In his admission I find bald permission to acknowledge mistakes and use them. Let me stumble, fall apart, and recover, so I can begin again—each new day and each new dance. Let me live with lack, and not the dominant goals of art.

I say I don't give advice, but I do have some advise about awkwardness relative to pain. Get lost and clumsy, and get a little foolish when you dance. Get crazy, and

give up perfection and opulence in order to find a little friendly inelegance. Then you can listen to your pain, not needing to hide it. Invite your pain to tea, and you will learn a lot. Its lessons vary according to individual situations. I learned from my back pain that I couldn't please everyone. I also learned this simply from growing older. I'm seventy-five as of this writing, and every year requires more resilience. I have grown beyond many of the childhood memories that haunted me, and I continue to transform my physical pain. I no longer seek my worth through that of men. I see my own worth. I no longer fear beauty, but find it in the everyday. I'm happy. I know that whatever comes, I can morph and move through it, not correcting myself, twisting ludicrously and grabbing my big toe, turning toward my foolish butoh face.

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