



**”Resurgence, transfer and travels of an expressionist
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Translated by Simon Pleasance from: "Ré-surgence, transfert et voyages d'un geste expressionniste en France : une historiographie discontinue et transnationale. Le butô entre le Japon, la France et l'Allemagne" in Isabelle Launay, Sylviane Pages (dir.), *Mémoires et histoire en danse*, *Mobiles* n°2, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 373-384.

RESURGENCE, TRANSFER AND TRAVELS OF AN EXPRESSIONIST GESTURE: A DISCONTINUOUS AND TRANSNATIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY. BUTO BETWEEN JAPAN, FRANCE AND GERMANY¹

Translated by Simon Pleasance from: "Résurgence, transfert et voyages d'un geste expressionniste en France : une historiographie discontinue et transnationale. Le butô entre le Japon, la France et l'Allemagne" in Isabelle Launay, Sylviane Pagès (dir.), *Mémoires et histoire en danse, Mobiles* n°2, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 373-384.

Buto is a dance form which came into being in Japan in the 1950s and 1960s and was successfully introduced into France in the late 1970s. It immediately created a shock and a fascination, not without misunderstandings, among them its instant and systematic association with Hiroshima. We do not have the time here to deconstruct the buto stereotype "born in the ashes of Hiroshima",² but let us nonetheless point out that this dance, with its white, ghostlike and deformed bodies, has given rise to an interpretative shift from the macabre to mass death and, in France in the late 1970s, represented a memorial site for the tortuous and complex memory of the atomic explosions in Japan. Let us also emphasize the degree to which this stereotype has developed a tendency to freeze buto in an uncompromising Japanese otherness, because only Japanese bodies battered by that atomic horror could, according to the French argument, claim to incarnate this dance. By focusing its eye on the Japanese identity of this art form, critical discourse has been permeated by western representations of an antipodean, far-eastern, strange and alien Japan, in a

¹ This article is taken from part of the thesis titled *La réception des butô(s) en France. Représentations, malentendus et désirs*, supervised by Isabelle Launay and Jean-Marie Pradier, Université Paris 8, 2009.

² See the chapter "Le fantasme de Hiroshima", *ibid.*, and the article by Patrick de Vos, "Danser après la bombe", *Europe*, June-July 2006, p. 141-154.

nutshell typically Other. The success of buto in France cannot now be explained without this exotic way of looking at things, which mixes fascination and ignorance, and constructs this dance like a radical otherness, by seeking signs of difference in the bodies it displays—bodies that are often naked and painted white, shapeless and grimacing.

But if buto represented the finest example of the choreographic Other in France in the 1980s, it has never ceased being a reference and a source of inspiration for contemporary dancers. Many are the choreographers and dancers who travelled to Japan from 1982 on,³ or took buto classes on offer in Paris and, then, in next to no time, all over France.⁴ Many, too, are those dancers who attended the first buto performances in Paris in 1978 at the Carré Silvia Monfort, and then at the Museum of Decorative Arts as part of the Autumn Festival.

In these endless shifting movements of works and gestures between Japan and France, from the late 1970s onward, what was transmitted where buto was concerned? And if this choreographic transfer between Japan and France passed by way of many different and diffuse channels, and was enmeshed in numerous misunderstandings, how should we henceforth think about its influence? Through the aquatic metaphor contained in the etymology of the term—*influere* means to “flow into” or “infiltrate”—, and through its astrological connotation, the notion of influence suggests a linear transmission, a fluid (hi)story, smooth, without any catches.⁵ The fact is that where transmission in dance is concerned, the gesture is never transmitted in its purity, in its entirety; based on an “unusual contagion of movement”,⁶ it is always interpreted and altered. The gesture should be thought of as being able to “weave its way into the insterstices and cracks of consciousness, and [...] spread like a ‘rumour.’”⁷ By being received and transmitted through misunderstandings about Hiroshima and exoticism, buto could not represent a mere “source of influence.” But how are we to think about this choreographic transfer if we abandon the notion of influence? Would “measuring the influence” of buto in France not rather be tantamount to studying the effects of buto like shock waves, and conceiving of it like a rumour exercising the imaginations and practices of contemporary dancers?

³ In 1982, Catherine Diverrès and Bernardo Montet began a series of journeys to Japan made by many dancers working in France. Among those who were awarded grants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Villa Médicis hors les murs, Prix Léonard de Vinci...): Angelin Preljocaj in 1987, Pierre Doussaint and Isabelle Dubouloz in 1988, Daniel Larrieu in 1988, Sidonie Rochon in 1988, Susan Buirge in 1992-1993, and Santiago Sempere in 1992. Susan Buirge started the residencies at the Villa Kujoyama in 1992 followed by the choreographers Santiago Sempere in 1994-95, Cécile Proust in 1995, Didier Théron in 1995-96, Pal Frenak in 1998, Francesca Lattuada in 1998, Eric Lamoureux and Héra Fattoumi in 1999, Alain Rigout and Satchie Noro in 1999, Alain Michard in 2001, Joël Borges in 2001, Emmanuelle Huynh in 2001, Mié Coquempot in 2002, Nadia Lauro and Jennifer Lacey in 2003, Claudia Triozzi in 2004, and Gisèle Vienne in 2007... Christine Quoiraud, Katy Roulaud, Fabienne Compet, Philippe Chéhère, Julie Salgues, and Cécile Raymond all also went to Japan.

⁴ In the late 1970s, Tanaka Min organized courses at La Forge in Paris, and in Bourg-en-Bresse ; workshops run by the Sankai Juku group were held at the Studio des Quatre-Temps de la Défense in 1982-83, and then at La Ménagerie de Verre...

⁵ On the notion of influence, see the works of Pierre Vaisse, “Du rôle de la réception dans l’histoire de l’art”, *Histoire de l’art*, October 1996, n° 35-36 ; François Laplantine, Alexis Nouss, *Métissages. De Arcimboldo à Zombi*, Pauvert, Montréal, 2001 ; Pierre Gonneau, “Le miroir russe”, in Jean-Pierre Poussou, Anne Mezin, Yves Perret-Gentil, *L’influence française en Russie au XVIIIe siècle*, Presses de l’université de Paris Sorbonne, Paris, 2003, p. 12

⁶ To use the expression borrowed by Jean-Marc Adolphe from the poet Roberto Juarroz. See Jean-Marc Adolphe, “La contagion insolite du mouvement”, in Jean-Marc Lachaud (ed.), *La Mise en scène du geste*, Publications du service culturel de l’université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3, Bordeaux, 1994, p. 69.

⁷ *Idem*.

The way buto has been received in France is actually a paradoxical phenomenon: while critical arguments have greatly emphasized the exotic signs of buto, such as the white colour, the nakedness and the grimaces, contemporary dancers have incorporated them very little in their dance projects, focusing on other buto features. Without dwelling further on its critical reception, it is thus these contributions of buto to contemporary dance in France which we shall describe and analyze. This article will accordingly focus on the aesthetic dimension of its reception, based on analyses of works, selected from among choreographers who have created especially strong links with Japan, such as Catherine Diverrière, Bernardo Montet, Sidonie Rochon and, more recently, Cécile Loyer. Relying on one or two case studies, we shall show that the influence of buto is not to be sought in the most exotic signs, but in the forces of the gesture,⁸ to borrow the distinction between signs and forces proposed by Laurence Louppe, when she tries to put a name to the underground work of processes involving the emergence of the gesture. We shall then demonstrate that what is transmitted in this transfer between Japan and France is an Expressionist gesture, which introduces a third choreographic site into this exchange of gestures: Germany.

The Transmission of a Spectral Aesthetic

If the image of the buto body—a white, shapeless, at times grotesque ghost-body moving at an infinitely slow pace—has given rise to so much fascination, rare are those companies installed in France that have borrowed these ways of displaying the body on stage and dared to lay claim to a buto praxis and aesthetic. Only the “Enfin le jour” company⁹ has, since the 1990s, espoused buto and sometimes made use of its signs. The buto hallmark in the work of Catherine Diverrière, Bernardo Montet, Sidonie Rochon, Santiago Sempere and, more recently, Cécile Loyer,¹⁰ is more subtle to reveal, involving essentially the “presence” of dancers, or, put otherwise, a certain introduction of their sensory qualities.

The pieces *Stances* (1997) by Catherine Diverrière, *Chroniques du gravier* (1989) by Sidonie Rochon, and *Blanc* (2000), *Ombres* (2001) and *Raymond au paradis* (2003) by Cécile Loyer have common ground in terms of work involving sparseness in the sets, favouring half-light and presenting silhouettes. They also share in common a sobriety of gesture, whose strength is thus based on the “presence” of the dancer and on the intense attention he or she pays to bodily sensations. Very specifically in the solos of Catherine Diverrière, Cécile Loyer and Marie-Jo Faggianelli in Sidonie Rochon’s piece, the dancers’ postures give an impression of fragility and humility. We should point out straight away that it is essentially the dance of Ohno Kazuo which has directly or indirectly influenced the pieces of these choreographers.¹¹ Now this impression of fra-

⁸ “Oppression and disciplinary control”, we are reminded by Foucault, “have more to do with ‘forces’ than with ‘signs’ (And forces, it just so happens, will be that unnamed material on which all the work of contemporary dance will focus). Contemporary dance would make ‘force’ a basic aesthetic mainspring which would encompass and exceed the power of visibility of the ‘sign’, which would give to “force” oppressed in the limbo of non-significance, its own access to symbolism”. Laurence Louppe, *Poétique de la danse contemporaine*, Contredanse, Brussels, 1997, p. 48.

⁹ From 1989 to 2006, a company run by the choreographers Richard Cayre and Thierry Escarmant, and based in Pau.

¹⁰ These pieces were either choreographed after a trip to Japan, or regarded by the choreographers as those most influenced by a Japanese imagination.

¹¹ Catherine Diverrière trained directly with Ohno Kazuo, while Sidonie Rochon danced with Eiko and Koma, who were staunch supporters of the *White buto* of Ohno Kazuo, and Cécile Loyer collaborated with Uesugi Mitsuyo, likewise trained by Ohno.

gility precisely calls to mind the display of the weak and particularly elderly body of Ohno, who danced for the first time in France in 1980, at the age of 74. The most striking feature of Ohno's postures, as of those dancers, involved an erasure of the sternum, and an absence of projection and openness of the rib cage. In this posture, verticality is never triumphant, the elevation is never affirmative. The erect posture is being forever impeded, or more precisely nuanced and rendered fragile. This posture also ushers in specific ways of moving about: walks, made up of small steps, slipped, rubbed and sketched on the toes are often light, precarious and almost like those of a sleepwalker. These different walks underpin a particular conception of space: no projection, no conquest of territory in these movements. Contemporary dancers who have practiced buto thus seem to be very often affected by a conception of a space not to be conquered, rather a space to be created and transformed, but first of all by transforming their own physicality.

In this soberness of arrangement and gesture, in the economy of the gesture, and in a refusal to "dance by the kilometre"¹² to use Sidonie Rochon's words, are imposed something akin to a previous self-effacement and the abandonment of intentionality. This posture marked by the erasure of the sternum and the use of the back links back up with Ohno's work when, in the teaching he imparted to Catherine Diverrière, he referred to the ego and the plexus: "almost a philosophical attitude of not putting the self first"¹³. This posture may be loaded, as it is by Catherine Diverrière, with a philosophical and spiritual dimension. Above all, it introduces an aesthetic position, which includes a form of presence. The dancer is no longer a triumphant, decisive presence, but a physicality that is active, moved and traversed by forces that surpass it. This presence, and this way of feeling, underscored by the scenographic decisions involving sparseness and half-light, construct in these pieces a spectral aesthetic, which has been considerably worked by Expressionism.

The figure of the ghost does in fact traverse the Expressionist arts. In his book *L'Expressionisme et les arts*, Jean-Michel Palmier refers to crepuscular landscapes,¹⁴ apocalyptic visions,¹⁵ obsession with the double and death,¹⁶ actors "reduced to the state of puppets and ghosts, faces covered in white make-up, eyes violently emphasized".¹⁷ It is indeed this spectral state which so intrigues the French press when it is confronted with buto dancers. Buto's reception, both by journalists and choreographers, has focused on this "indefinable buto state", this "presence" which we might describe in terms of a spectral aesthetic, in reference, in particular, to the works of Antonin Artaud. In *Le Théâtre et son double* [*The Theatre and its Double*], Artaud, a quintessential reference for buto dancers, takes as the "driving force of the theatrical gesture" the figures of the "skeleton, ghost and double".¹⁸ Based on his theatrical project, "we must see the human being as a Double, as the Kha of the Embalmed of Egypt, as a perpetual ghost where the forces of affectivity radiate forth."¹⁹ The actor must develop an "affective athleticism", which we should probably call sensorial virtuosity; he must "make use of his affectivity the way the wrestler uses his musculature",²⁰

¹² Interview with Sidonie Rochon, 2008.

¹³ Laurent Goumarre, "Catherine Diverrière la consumée", *A voix nue*, France culture, June 2005.

¹⁴ Jean-Michel Palmier, *L'expressionnisme et les arts*, Payot, Paris, 1979, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 259.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ Catherine Perret, *Les Porteurs d'ombre, Mimésis et modernité*, Belin, Paris, 2004, p. 246.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Antonin Artaud, "Un athlétisme affectif", *Le Théâtre et son double*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. 197.

and exercise his sensoriality in order to let a double appear per se. For buto dancers, it is a matter of “emptying” the body, and letting it be inhabited by other people, by other living beings, or by ghost-gestures, so as to permit the appearance of a fictitious body, or an otherness, of a double or spectre, which is, as with Artaud, a “macabre double.”²¹

This quest for a spectral aesthetic also links up with the Expressionist project in dance, in particular that of Mary Wigman as analyzed by Isabelle Launay: “the *Witch’s Dance* reveals the work of the dance that was performed in the contemporary dance studio: a place where the dancer came to terms with the heterogeneity of his being, confronted the other of himself even as far as his monstrosity.”²² According to Isabelle Launay’s works, this ghostly state takes the form of an “ecstasy”, of an “ecstatic moment”, at the basis of the modern dancer’s work in Germany: “A moment which defines the experience of dance, for Rudolf Laban, as a moment when time topples over into space. Getting away from stasis, from oneself, and from time itself, thus running the risk of ecstasy, seems to have been what defined and explained, for these dancers, the very fact of being on stage.”²³ It would also seem that it is what defines the buto experience, especially for Carlotta Ikeda, who uses this notion of ecstasy to describe the work of sensoriality which is involved: “When I dance, there are two ‘me’s who live together: one which no longer controls itself, in a state of trance, and the other which lucidly looks at the first. At times these two ‘me’s overlap and give rise to a kind of white madness, close to ecstasy. It is this state that the buto dancer has to look for. I dance for that special moment.”²⁴

Through different methods, buto thus introduces and applies a work of emptiness and splitting in two, of ecstasy and possession, close to the aesthetic projects of modern dance as developed in Germany in the first half of the 20th century. So we shall give the name of Expressionist gesture to this quest for an “inner necessity”, that work to do with “the inner event”,²⁵ and that “aesthetics of conflict”,²⁶ which lies at the basis of the gesture among modern dancers. This Expressionist gesture entails an ecstasy which undermines the “boundary between me and not-me”²⁷ and fashions a spectral aesthetic. What is thus involved is thinking of Expressionism as a gesture, not a figure but a “background of gesture”,²⁸ a way of feeling, and a conception of bodiliness. But buto is not limited to this, be it in the projects of its founder Hijikata Tatsumi, abundant and fuelled by different influences, or among other buto artists, whose aesthetic pro-

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Isabelle Launay, “Portrait d’une danseuse en sorcière – Hexentanz de Mary Wigman”, *Théâtre / Public*, octobre 2000, n° 154-155, p. 89.

²³ Isabelle Launay, *Les Danses d’après*, accreditation thesis, Université Paris 8, 2007, p. 182.

²⁴ Carlotta Ikeda quoted by Yvonne Tenenbaum, “Ikeda Carlotta, un art de la présence”, in Odette Aslan (ed.), *Butô(s)*, CNRS, Paris, 2002, p. 215.

²⁵ Isabelle Launay, *A la recherche d’une danse moderne*, Chiron, Paris, 1996, p. 188.

²⁶ Conference “Destruction, création, rythme : l’expressionnisme, une esthétique du conflit”, EDESTA, INHA, 9-10 mars 2007, proceedings published in the collection Arts 8, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2009.

²⁷ Ernst Bloch quoted by Daniel Dobbels, “Expressionnisme”, in Philippe Le Moal, *Dictionnaire de la danse*, Paris, Larousse, 2008, p. 734.

²⁸ The basis of the gesture corresponds to the “background on which the apparent movement is drawn: the figure”. This background corresponds to the postural attitude, to the perceptive activity that is part and parcel of the posture and precedes the gesture. Hubert Godard, “Le geste et sa perception”, in Isabelle Ginot, Marcelle Michel, *La Danse au XXe siècle*, Paris, Larousse, 2002, p. 239.

jects have explored many different directions. For all this, by only appropriating in contemporary pieces the postural work, the work involving the emergence of the gesture, the French contemporary dance field has accommodated and interpreted buto as an Expressionist gesture. So it is not a matter of asserting an equivalence between buto and Expressionism, but rather of seeing its reception in France as a “thrust of Expressionist subjectivity”.²⁹

From now on, we think of Expressionism as a gesture which might be enacted elsewhere than in the between-the-wars German context. The essence of the Expressionist gesture, and the forces and processes which it entails have, incidentally, been especially widespread, during the Nazi period through the emigration which spread as far as Japan,³⁰ but also in the early 20th century, through the choreographic exchanges occurring between Germany and Japan. Among the many modern Japanese dancers³¹ who went to be trained in Germany with Mary Wigman, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze and Max Terpis, we should mention very specifically Eguchi Takaya, who worked in Dresden from 1931 to 1933 with Mary Wigman and who, on his return to Japan, numbered among his pupils the buto dancers Ohno Kazuo, Kasai Akira, Carlotta Ikeda, and Masumara Katsuko, who became Hijikata Tatsumi’s teacher. Ishii Baku is another modern Japanese dancer who was interested by Dalcroze’s theories and went to Germany in the 1920s to meet Mary Wigman and the Sakharoffs. He would also train Ohno Kazuo and influence Hijikata Tatsumi with his spectacles.³² In addition to these few direct links between buto and modern dance, it was the whole Japanese dance scene of the first half of the 20th century which was profoundly influenced by intense artistic exchanges between Japan and Germany, exchanges which have nevertheless usually been overlooked by historiography.

Buto as a Detour

If dance critics in France wanted to see in buto a specific exotic Japanese phenomenon, ways of appropriation used by contemporary dancers have focused on the Expressionist gesture. This way of getting the gesture to emerge in fact already existed in France, among representatives of modern dance like Françoise and Dominique Dupuy, Jacqueline Robinson, and Karin Waehner, all disciples of or collaborators with dancers hailing from Expressionism: Jean Weidt, Mary Wigman, and Jerome Andrews... Henceforth, why go looking elsewhere, to Japan, for a conception of the gesture present in France and still active and alive?

This Expressionist gesture, coming from Germany, was then, in the early 1980s, mostly invisible or even hidden by French dancers for political reasons, such as the memory of the painful past of the war and a

²⁹ To use the words of Philippe Ivernel, during the conference *Destruction, création, rythme : l’expressionnisme, une esthétique du conflit*, 9-10 March 2007, INHA, EDESTA, Université Paris 8.

³⁰ Eugenia Casini Ropa, “Expression et expressionnisme dans la danse allemande” in *Pina Bausch. Parlez-moi d’amour. Un colloque*, L’Arche, Paris, 1995, p. 31.

³¹ Saito Kazo, Osanai Kaoru, Itô Michio, Takada Seiko, Tsuda Nobutoshi... See the books *Dance in Japanese Modern Art*, Togochi prefectural museum of fine arts, Tochigi, 2003 and Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito, the Dancer and his Dance*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, Berkeley, 1977.

³² According to the testimony of Hijikata’s widow. See the dissertation of Murata Yukiko, *Le “Yameru Maihime” de Tatsumi Hijikata et le corps féminin*, Master’s thesis, dance speciality, Université Paris 8, 2009.

loathing of German dance, but also for artistic reasons, through the myth of the self-taught dancer. In fact, representatives of “new dance” and “young French dance” in the early 1980s felt the need to go and look elsewhere, to New York with Merce Cunningham, and to Tokyo with Ohno Kazuo, both masters, and through them seek out a new history and a new tradition. This quest also tallied with needs unsatisfied in relation to an availability of training in contemporary dance that was not very structured, not very visible, and sometimes totally unknown to those young dancers.

The history of this “new French dance” which began its activities in the late 1970s and early 1980s was thus written based on the myth of the “explosion of contemporary French dance”, even though this notion of explosion is problematic in many respects. If that moment underwent an “impressive rise in contemporary dance activity in France”,³³ the term explosion refers to the idea of a creation out of nothing which is connected with fantasies about the clean slate—*tabula rasa*—and self-teaching, and denies the rich and multifaceted activity of modern dance as it already existed in France.

The moment when buto was introduced into France is thus traversed by two historiographical myths: the myth of the “explosion of contemporary French dance”, contributing to the concealment of modern dance in France, and the mythological construction of an exotic form of buto, linked to Hiroshima, that shock of buto—we might say the “explosion” of buto, to such a degree has the semantic field of explosion been systematically associated with this dance. These two historiographical myths help to define buto as being radically different from contemporary dance, on the one hand because they are both based on a vision of art focused on nationality and geographical origin, on the other because they contain one and the same denial of history: that of Expressionist dance. Buto was in fact relieved of its source in its French reception, because the fantasy of Hiroshima and exotic understanding forged an ahistorical vision of buto. And the ignorance about art history in Japan cut buto off from its intense bonds with Mary Wigman’s disciples in Japan. The two myths thus join together over a hole of memory, and over the erasure and neglecting of the Expressionist gesture which has exercised the training of dancers and the processes of creation. These two denials have contributed to the opposition between buto and contemporary dance, and to the domination of the argument asserting the radical otherness of buto.

If buto has been felt to be familiar by certain contemporary dancers, this feeling of familiarity remained virtually inaudible, and even unexpressed, for a long time, so overwhelming was the predominant discourse setting buto up as a radical otherness. The recognition of a closeness to buto has only been expressed in recent arguments, for example through the voice of Dominique Dupuy during a meeting organized in 2002 around the publication of the book *Butô(s)*, in which he sheds light on the proximity between “deep dance”, that “dance of within”³⁴ defended by Jerome Andrews, and the aesthetic project of buto, to the point of lamenting the absence of recognition of his work and, between the lines, the fascination with buto and the departures to Japan: “How many professional dancers belonging to the new dance generation have benefited from his teaching? How many others have ignored it and gone off to seek elsewhere what was within reach of their feet? Did he not have slanting eyes?”³⁵

³³ Georgiana Gore, Laurence Louppe, Wilfride Piollet, “Effervescence and tradition in French dance”, in Andrée Grau, Stephanie Jordan, *Europe dancing. Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 31.

³⁴ Dominique Dupuy, *Où va la danse ? L'aventure de la danse par ceux qui l'ont vécue*, actes des rencontres du 24 au 27 février 2003, Hivernales d'Avignon, Seuil, Archimbaud, Paris, 2005, p. 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Buto thus exercised a function of detour permitting the re-appearance on French stages of the ghostly gestures of Mary Wigman and Harald Kreutzberg in the dances of Ohno Kazuo. It restored visibility and recognition to processes and sets of gestures still present in the dance field in France, but underpinned and worked by this little known and concealed modern dance. The first buto spectacles thus satisfied desires involving Japan and exoticism, focused on new signs and the otherness of bodies, which formed a screen masking known forces, still alive in dance in France. The exotic screen and the focus on strange signs, seen above all as foreign, have prevented eyes and arguments from recognizing forces that are close and present, but hidden in the field of dance.

The Uncanniness of Buto

So, rather than being something novel, buto seems to have given visibility to an Expressionist gesture, marked by the primacy of sensation as a driving force of motion, and by a capacity for splitting in two. Through what is afar, and through the exotic screen, it brings forth a hidden Expressionist gesture, and a spectral aesthetic that is taboo. The reception of buto thus reveals a desire for Expressionism that buto has met, as if the historically taboo Expressionist gesture could only re-appear in this exotic form.

If buto's success was so sudden and dazzling, this is because it proposed a complex relation between identity and otherness, between the near and the far, and because it permitted an easy exotic gaze at the same time as an implicit recognition of ordinary processes. Through the fascination for spectral states that it gave rise to, buto introduced a feeling of uncanniness, precisely underpinned by these phantom physicalities. Because, as Julia Kristeva points out, "ghosts and phantoms [...] fill with uncanniness our confrontations with the image of death."³⁶ They are the supreme objects which awaken this ambiguous feeling. The fact is that, according to Julia Kristeva, "what is uncanny is what *has been* (let us note the past tense) familiar and, in certain conditions [...], manifests itself."³⁷ In permitting the return of hidden gestures, buto has, in a way, turned out to be familiar and close: "Uncanniness is a case of anxiety where 'that particular anguish' is something repressed which comes back."³⁸ In that complex transfer from Japan to France, the shifts from morbidity to mass death and from strangeness to exoticism thus appear to be strongly linked to the feeling of uncanniness that this dance has managed to create. And when buto has interfered, sometimes insidiously, in the work of choreographers who have encountered it, their dance has been tinged with a fragility, a confusion, and this anxiety.

So the reception of buto cannot only be understood in the binary France/Japan relation, but also in a dynamic which includes Germany, too, based on a veritable triangular geography, within which Japan plays the role of detour and return to a concealed Expressionist gesture. The reception of this art form in France cannot henceforth be understood without taking this long history into account, one made up of exchanges,

³⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Fayard, Paris, 1988, p. 273.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

things forgotten and detours, in particular between these three countries. Writing the history of the Expressionist gesture and its “influence” is thus tantamount to moving from the history to the geography of gestures, in order to propose a discontinuous and transnational historiography.

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