

Special Affects

Compositing Images in the Bodies of Butoh

Michael Hornblow

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regulations for Master of Arts Thesis

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the relationship between ‘*the body*’ and ‘*the image*’ may be understood within the Japanese dance movement called *butoh*. The aim of the thesis is twofold – to investigate what it means to construct a body specific to *butoh*, and to consider how the image in *butoh* may be seen to affect this body. In the first instance, I examine how the materiality of the *butoh-body* constrains or delimits its expressive capacity. In the second instance, I investigate how the materiality of the *butoh-image* performs a generative function, to stretch the bounds of this body and the limits of its expression.

As far as theorising the *butoh-body* is concerned, what interests me are the points of confluence that may be explored through the materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I seek to demonstrate how the ideas of Tatsumi Hijikata (*butoh*’s co-founder) may be discussed through the writing of Antonin Artaud, whose approach to the body influenced both Hijikata and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. As far as the *butoh-image* is concerned, I seek to show how Deleuze’s *cinéphilosophy* may also inform an understanding of Hijikata’s choreographic method of working with images, called *butoh-fu*. Here, I develop a conceptual model with which to probe the materiality of the *butoh-image* and the cinematic qualities of the *butoh-body*.

This twofold approach stems from my own art practice as a filmmaker and performer. The initial impetus for the research emerged through an intensive period of *butoh* dance training, as well as the production of a short film. This film experiments with a dynamic interaction of performers, sculptural elements, plus digital and optical effects. In the thesis, I use the theory of complex systems and the ideas of Deleuze, Guattari, Hijikata and Artaud, to discuss how the film may be imagined as a ‘systemic narrative’. This approach explores the interactions between the filmic elements, to produce the narrative as an ongoing process of construction.

This thesis is a work in progress towards two outcomes. The first of these is a *diagrammatic* model for *butoh* dance notation, to provide a graphic template for Hijikata’s choreographic method. The second is a proposed video-installation, which may further implement the systemic narrative with a technical configuration that corresponds to the diagrammatic model. Through this research, I seek to develop my own praxis, which investigates a systemic approach to the embodiment of the image.

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