



Susanne Daeppen

**The Art of Slow Movement – A Dance from
Nature to the Soul**

“This stone is merely a stone, it is worthless, and belongs to the world of Maya; but because it can become human and become spirit in the cycle of transformation, because of this I give it value also... this stone is stone, it is also animal, it is also God, it is Buddha, I revere it and love it, not because it could become this or that, but because it always was and is – and just this, that it is a stone, that it appears now and today as a stone, that is why I love it, and see value and meaning in each of its veins and cavities, in the yellow, in the grey, in the hardness, in the sound it offers when I tap it, in the dryness or dampness of its surface. There are stones that feel like oil or soap, and others like leaves, others like sand... words are obscuring their hidden significance. At the same time it is all somewhat foolish, yes, I also find it very good and it pleases me very much, and I am very much in accord, that what for one person is treasure and wisdom, to another sounds like foolishness.”

-Hermann Hesse,

Siddhartha

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1 Forward

'Tradition is the passing on of the fire, and not the worshipping of ashes.'

This book came into existence, because of the fulfillment I have felt in my encounter with Japanese Butoh dance. I wanted to express this experience in written form.

In Butoh there is nothing to hold onto and no trophies to win. All the more profound the experiences that await. I studied with teachers like Kazuo Ohno, and Eiko and Koma, teachers who communicated Butoh with humility, and continuously modeled individual freedom as artists and as human beings. As their student I was richly rewarded, and as an artist I was liberated as I witnessed that it is indeed possible to learn and live the dance without competition and hierarchy. Min Tanaka, a Japanese dancer from the first generation of Butoh, articulated this very well: "As soon as you have the wish to grasp Butoh, it disappears again."

Butoh is a dance that does not exclude the dark sides of life. It attempts to meet us without self-proclaiming importance as it advances towards themes indicating our universal affiliations. It began with *Ankoku Butoh*, 'The Dance of Darkness'. This was the revolutionary birthing of Butoh, whose initiator was Tatsumi Hijikata. I am very grateful to him for his radicalism in the history of dance. I believe that it was absolutely necessary in the revolutionary era of the 1960's to give dance a flavour of antiquity again. Many choreographers and creative artists from other fields were inspired by him.

From these beginnings, Kazuo Ohno developed a softer, more poetic Butoh, as did Eiko and Koma. This dance was more accessible and served beyond the purpose of merely shocking its audience. For me, these dancers are the initiators of a unified work, which I want to share more about in this writing. Their way spoke to me very deeply. From them I learned the magic of slow movement, which is what touched my soul. As a woman and artist, I was always looking for a dance in which I could really live out, in which I could dive into the adventure of everyday life. I wanted to live a dance by which the secrets of life could be discovered.

As an active educator and artist, I have observed how so many people have become estranged from their bodies. This has happened through a multitude of experiences and conditionings. Many carry extremely personal sufferings as well. Luckily, we live in a time today when it is possible to heal these wounds again. It is my experience that Butoh is one possible way to do this. To me, it seems vitally important that we inquire, that we attune ourselves more consistently to our inner soul and to the voice of the body. In this way we can avoid landing in old manipulated patterns again. The time that has been granted to us in this life is too valuable for unnecessary detours.

For me, all dancers can be described as 'beautiful' when body, soul and mind move together in resonance. The slow movement of Butoh comes to meet each person in the place where he or she is, in mind and in soul. Slow movement is not a goal to be achieved nor is it a doctrine. Rather, it is a manner which allows one to go deeper, which allows the opportunity to touch the soul. This is the foundation of what I call the 'soul dance'.

Creative dance finds a special source of inspiration in nature. Through many dance expeditions, I have experienced much beauty and some of nature's infinite depths, which has encouraged me to continue along this path.

I have divided this book into two parts. In the first part I offer a short history of Butoh, and portray my own entry into this world. The second part is dedicated to practical aspects of the dance.

I will be happy if, through these words, I am able to transmit my enthusiasm for creative dance. This book is an invitation to dance in the middle of each moment, and an invitation to immerse yourself in the magic of Butoh.

2 Ursula Frauchinger: An Encounter with Susanne Daepfen

Part 1: Historical Background

3 A Journey into Slow Movement

I will begin the tale of my journey into slow movement with a quote, which provided courage and inspiration during all my years of searching and researching. I have called upon it again and again like a recurring mantra, and have often repeated it in workshops:

"Slowness is something universal. We have only become unaccustomed to it. Slowness, constancy, and harmony of movement... and our consciousness arises. The body begins to find joy in each small thing. We are attentive and wide-awake. We sense the complete and absolute freshness of the world. We communicate. We open our senses to the abundance of being."

These words originate from a woman of Yoga, the Dakini Lalita Devi, a recluse who lived a hermetic life tucked away for years deep in nature. It was she who Daniel Odier, a teacher of Tantra, met and whose teachings he presented in the book, 'An Encounter with Absolute Love'.

I was introduced to slow movement through Butoh dance. My first improvisations were in the Butoh workshop 'Delicious Movement' with dance-masters Eiko and Koma, a dancing couple from Japan. The experience left a lasting impression. It was like coming home. Something within me felt elevated. An indescribable language revealed itself. I felt infinite worlds within the landscapes of my body and soul manifesting, while an intense perception of the outer world was simultaneously present. Body, mind and soul came into unison in this slow-motion dance. This was a feeling that was satisfying in the greatest depths of my being; something I had dearly missed for what seemed like an eternity. Now it had revealed itself.

Slow movement is like looking through a microscope. The longer one looks into the depths and the more meticulously one observes, the more one is able to distinguish. This is what happens in slow-motion dance. Energies deeply concealed, unfathomed and long-forgotten, surface again in our consciousness as our bodies move within this deliberate dance form. Our usual sense of time dissolves as the world around us steps back for a moment. Now an infinite journey inwards can begin. The body and soul landscapes expand before us. Life presents itself in a new diversity. The quality of our awareness increases. Slowness demands that we listen very precisely and see who and what we are as human beings. We encounter ourselves, and find it impossible to avoid everything that exists.

It requires courage to meet the merciless demands of slowness. That is because it may be that we will not only discover what is beautiful inside us, but rather, what scares us; the incoherent, the ugly, the dark and the unskillful. The slowness of Butoh steers things before our eyes, which we would not want to look at of our own choice. It manifests itself often in the form of illnesses or wounds from our past, and they arise unexpectedly.

Slow movement fades out the normal tempo of everyday life, and reinserts us in a timeless space. In this space, our awareness is freed from the linear concepts of time found in our human cosmos where, for most, darkness and light co-exist. If, upon our journey through life, we have an inner desire to give the brightness more room (or no more choice!), because the darkness is so restrictive and painful, then the dance of Butoh can be a suitable way to move through the darkness and into the light.

In slowness, a heightened sense of the body arises. A creative dance begins, as if we are crafting ourselves in each moment. One senses the liveliness of the body, which anchors us to the here and now. This heightened state allows us to perceive the soul, our material substance and the shape of other living beings, and to connect to all of them. In this common harmony, we communicate with the Earth, with her animal and plant worlds, and with the four elements of fire, water, air and metal. We are everything in everything, permeating everything. The feelings of isolation and disconnection disappear. The slow movement of Butoh shows us the way to unity. This experience

allows us to enter our everyday life more consciously, and to be more serene in the fast paced and complex world around us.

4 The Origin of Japanese Butoh Dance

Butoh, which would become a revolutionary dance style in the 1960's, was initially brought to life through the solo performance of dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, entitled 'Forbidden Colors'. His artistic colleague and friend Kazuo Ohno would become the central figure of Butoh, and has continued to perform until our present time. Ohno, who had his 100th birthday on October 27th, 2006, lives in the Yokohama/Tokyo area, where his son Yoshito Ohno carries on with the duties at his legendary dance studio.

Many groups from the two generations of Butoh have brought this expressive and radical dance form into the world. It has traveled to Berlin, Paris, New York, and many other cultural centers. Many female and male artists in the West have been inspired in their own particular way by the radical nature of Butoh, such as Pina Bausch, Maguy Marin, experimental stage director Grotovsky, as well as painters and writers.

Inside Japan, the arrival of Hijikata's Butoh created a division. A split developed between the modern dance world, which was more influenced by the West, and the experimental scene, where the Butoh dancers aligned themselves. The leaders and teachers of this second group, Hijikata and Ohno, were themselves modern dancers, having studied with the pioneers of German Expressive Dance: Mary Wigmann, Harald Kreuzberg and Rudolf von Laban. After World War II, having witnessed a period of Westernization and Americanization in their homeland, the founders of Butoh sought to rediscover their own roots and values again. They refuted all prescribed dance forms and concepts, in order to allow the generation of something new.

5 The Essence of Butoh Dance

Butoh is the eternally unborn dance. It concerns itself with birth, life and death, and devotes itself to the metamorphosis of the human condition. The form originates from inner sensations and emotions. It is a dance of reduction, which doesn't strive to compete. It is free of gain, yet anything life has to offer can find space within it. As in Zen philosophy, emptiness, waiting, and simply being are of greater significance. In Butoh, enquiries are made into human existence, into nature, into the soul, and into the universe. It is a way of submerging in the microcosm of the body through an unremitting slowness. The inner state may be referred to as trance, dream, ecstasy and deep attentiveness.

Butoh is a way to discover the world and to abide in the totality, because Butoh is a dance of life. In Butoh, life is dance, and dance is life. It requires dedication and integration in everyday life. Butoh comprises more than the merely physical level of gymnastics, it is neither a formal dance, nor an analytical system of movement.

Butoh is a path on which one can discover relationships within nature, between nature and human being, and between visible and invisible realities. A deeply hidden wisdom emerges, one which we experience anew. It allows us to trust in being human again, with all our inadequacies, perplexities and imperfections. Seen and unseen worlds encounter each other in the universal poetry of Butoh dance. A voice of inner wisdom is awakened, a gift of rebellious Japanese dancers to us in the West, expressing a viable path to unity.

10 Skills, Qualities and Internal Imagery

Guided exercises and suggestions for personal practice:

***“If you have a knowledge of form, then you know your kingdom.
The first teacher looked at the sky and learned from the birds,
The first teacher looked at the trees and learned from the trees,
The first teacher experienced the wind and learned from the wind.
Each of us can do this.
Ultimately the teacher is consciousness itself!”***

- David Life, Jivamuktiyoga

The following exercises are developed from my own dance practice and are components of my teaching in Butoh. I regard this collection as a stimulus to approach the body, or better, the perception of the body. Exercises are an external form and no substitute for the deeper understanding of Butoh as an existential dance.

Time and Slowness

Walk slowly for 20 minutes at an even pace from one wall to another. This can be done in a studio, in your room, in a hallway, or in a gallery.

Walk slowly for 20 minutes at an even pace in nature. Walk through a field, a meadow, or through a forest.

Take 20 minutes to bite into an apple or some other piece of fruit. Here, an even pace is again important. Sit down holding the fruit in the palm of your hand. Lead it to your mouth with constant slow-motion movement. Bite into it, chew it, swallow it, and watch how the fruit moves and connects within the body.

Alternate positions of lying down, sitting, standing and walking every ten minutes. Remain constant in your movements. This can be a meditation on experiencing the evolutionary process of coming to stand, or re-experiencing what we learned as a baby or small child.

Important note: How does one evaluate or discover an appropriate pace?

It is possible to ask someone to watch the time, or to use an alarm clock. Ultimately it is not a competition or test, but rather an inquiry and an experience of slow movement in a desirable realm of time and space. In this way, it is possible to encounter the relativity of time and the infinity of the universe which, through slow movement, unfolds within us.

Growth and Decay

Out of the void, something comes into form

Imagine how a flower grows.

Imagine how a tree grows.

Imagine how a lotus flower grows through slime and water and into the light.

Imagine how our physical body transforms from sperm and egg to embryo, and

how the embryo grows in the uterus of the mother. In the depths of this exercise it is possible to consciously experience the growth of one's own body.

- What and how is the physical body?

- Can I really perceive the substance of my body-landscape?

- Meditate on the wonderful treasure of the body, so that we learn to honor and care respectfully for it. We only have this one body in this life. This sequence demands a deep attentiveness and great sensitivity. A conscious immersion in the 'inner body' is asked. Take about 30 minutes or longer to go deeper into this exercise. When finishing, do not come out of the mind-state too quickly. Take time to wind down and get used to your surroundings and a normal tempo again.

Something goes from form into the void

Imagine how a blossom or a plant wilts and dries out.

Imagine how a leaf withers, dries, and becomes soil again.

Imagine how the human body changes, how it wrinkles, becomes smaller, loses energy, stiffens, becomes wobbly, and finally dies on the earth or is cremated and turns to ashes.

Contemplate the mortality of your own physical body, and its metamorphosis.

Connect yourself to the constant change of cloud formations in the sky. See how your movements originate and end again in the void. For this sequence, it is best to be on an open field or on the top of a hill or mountain.

Landscaping: The Body as a Landscape

Landscaping is a slow progressive sensitizing of the outer body form, when coming into contact with a particular surface or some imperceptible quality within the ether.

Dance while conscious of the area of contact when touching the floor, against a wall, or as in Contact-Improvisation with the landscape of a dance-partner.

Dance in nature with the surface of a stone, on sand, down on the earth with its variety of surfaces. Precepices, rock-formations, ice (!), the bark of trees, stone walls, and boulders in water are ideal.

Ether-landscaping: A special dance which requires steadfast awareness, as there is no point of confrontation with a form or boundary. It's worth a try!

- **"Two Points"**

Imagine two points somewhere in your body-landscape without using any anatomical idea of muscle, tendons or bones. Let both points slowly come towards each other at the same pace. Let them come as close as possible until a shaking vibration arises and continuing feels difficult. One must decide for oneself how high the tension can go, and when the energy is at its maximum. See what you can do,

and how far you want to go. Then follow the same principle in letting the two points move back to their original position. You can use this principle as a foundation as you move to two, three or even four or more sets of points, if your attention can manage it. This is a wonderful practice to let go of arranged movement. You will see that the body takes over, and you can observe yourself on a moving journey with your inner eye, a journey you could have never dreamed of. This is the quality of Butoh! Butoh communicates to us that we can entertain ourselves well on our own, and can be continually open to new frontiers.

- Elements

Imagine that we are water, earth, fire and air. We move as those elements do, as we visualize and connect with their consistencies, their quality of movement, their surfaces, their essential beings. What is your personal relationship to water? Allow yourself to discover the answer as you deepen your dance. One doesn't imitate, as in pantomime. You are water itself, as you connect to it on every level, in movement, in spirit and in your own soul. A saying from the school of Zen Calligraphy: 'You can first paint bamboo when you are bamboo itself.' In your dance, you are water, earth, ether and air, because we are indeed generated from these elements on the physical level.

- Moving and Stopping

Here, one varies long sequences of movement and non-movement. Try to break through all rhythmic patterns. Don't allow any boundaries to your imagination. This is free-flow! Look at where the potential of memory guides you without hanging on to anything. Let it flow like an internal film. Movement and stillness as a continual flow in our physical being. This practice is also very beautiful with a partner, where one can develop a shared language. Look around in nature. This quality is readily observable.

- Electricity and Fire

Move like a flowing surge of electricity. You pulse, you shake, your nerves twitch. A chicken moves like this. Or, move impulsively, as when you are frightened. Stretch your body to the limit of its possibilities, until you feel the heat within yourself, and allow it to burn to the limit of your capacity.

- Sleep and Dream States

Imagine that you are asleep or dreaming. If we humans could observe ourselves sleeping, we would be astonished by how much we move during our sleep. Move very intuitively, as if you were asleep, allow the body to feel calm, stay gentle and relaxed in your movements. This is a wonderful entry into slow-motion dance. I sleep in movement, and move in sleep.

- Emotional Landscapes

We dedicate ourselves to the landscape of our feelings, without any goal, and we awaken in ourselves a profound experience, which could be either positive or negative. In order to discover all possibilities of inquiring with a renewed awareness into the dance of emotions, one can use one of the following basic human states and feelings: happiness, sadness, bliss, ecstasy, hate, anger, disappointment,

jealousy, love, longing, spite, aggression, insecurity, helplessness or fear. There are many other possibilities. In this exercise it is important to remain in motion, so that we don't become absorbed in our thoughts and fall into a memory. We can dissolve blocks and collected sediments of emotions in our body-landscape when we remain diligent and have the courage to re-enter those places once again. If we are doing this dance on our own, self-responsibility and self-knowledge is required, so we can determine how deeply we can let ourselves sink into the depths of our feelings. Music can be very supportive for this dance. It is also possible that we trust someone to be a 'witness' of our dance.

When we dance joyfully, ecstatically, we don't need to fear ourselves. And if we are perhaps able to transform some of our dark feelings into an illuminated dance...what more could we want!

Biography

Susanne Daeppen is a freelance dance teacher and performer with her own production company, 'Dakini Dance Projects'. Presently, she is touring with her solo work 'Fragile', and with her dance company in the production 'Twilight'.

She received the Culture Prize from the city of Biel-Bienne in 2004 as acknowledgement for her artistic efforts. Susanne's particular interests in the art of dance are the transformation of darkness into light, feminine power and love for nature. Educated in Switzerland, New York and Japan, she now teaches Yoga and Butoh regularly in Bern, Basel and Biel, and continues to give performances in her home country and throughout the world. She lives with her family near the Lake of Biel, in Switzerland, where the Dakini Dance Studio is also located.