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THE SPRINGS OF ACTION IN BUTŌ IMPROVISATION

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Improvisation pertains basically to all art forms in the 20th century and is often considered a mark of the contemporary. However, improvisation is ubiquitous and transcultural, and bears some paradoxical traits. On the one hand, it constitutes an aggregative force, a sort of "social effervescence" – to use Emile Durkheim's term. On the other hand, and across cultures, improvisation has been perceived also as disturbing and perplexing, when not openly subversive.[1] The explication of the latter effect certainly depends on features that should be studied in context, but it is arguable that improvised action *by itself* does not fit squarely with the categories of activities that are paradigmatic and expressive of intentional and rational agency. In particular, it seems to lack altogether normative standards, e.g., standards of correctness or success, and bears a problematic relation to deliberation and rational planning. If an act is improvised how can it be deliberate? And if it is not deliberate, can it be a genuine expression of the exercise of intentional agency, something for which an actor can take full responsibility, and which represents his authentic self? Furthermore, improvised action has some paradoxical traits if intentional agency is understood to be agency based on reasons. It seems that the "reason for action" should be settled prior to the performance of the action itself. But an improvised action is, by definition, unprecedented, unplanned, and, thus, spontaneous in the primeval sense of the term. So, it remains unclear how improvisation pertains to intentional agency, and whether improvised dance belongs in the domain of action at all (cfr. Ryle 1966).

This chapter discusses butō dance as an example of improvisation that challenges not only some deeply entrenched philosophical definitions of improvisation, but also some current fundamental presumptions about self-government and agency in action theory. In the first part of the chapter, I identify the main features of butō improvisation, with regard to the nature of its basic movement, and the kind of subjectivity implicated in its generation. I then raise some questions regarding the philosophical characterization of this form of dance and, in the second part of the paper, I argue that butō improvisation undermines intuitive distinctions between "ordinary" and "specialized action," thereby eluding both the philosophical rationalistic theories of action as mediated by intentions, and the theories of arational action as expressive of individual subjectivity (Cfr. Hursthouse 1991). My claim is that butō can be better interpreted as a *shared* action that is neither mediated by intentions nor expressive of the individual self, but, rather, is meant to generate a community by sharing the experience of the living body.

This characterization has the advantage that it helps to put in the right perspective the puzzle about the normative standards of improvised action, which is addressed in the third part of the chapter. For many, improvisation *as such* undermines the very idea of a normative paradigm against

which to evaluate possible solutions. In the case of butō, the absence of normative standards of action (e.g., success, correctness, or rightness) may be also connected to the absence of a subject in charge of her action. This is because butō improvisation does not count on the dancer as a predefined subject existing prior to and independently of her performance. In contrast to these interpretations, I hold that there are normative criteria for butō improvisation, which govern its explorative and generative functions through a training based on unselfing. This model turns away from the rhetoric of spontaneous free movements and the search for individual authenticity. It advocates for a model of intentional agency that it is not mediated by (individual or joint) intentions, but that aspires to generate a community by sharing the experience of a living emotional body.

1 The Body in the Dance of Darkness and Light

Butō is a Japanese dance that was elaborated in the Sixties, by Hijikata Tatsumi and Ōno Kazuo.[2] It is also known as the dance of darkness (*ankoku butō*), especially in relation to the tormented choreography of Hijikata Tatsumi's butō, though one should bear in mind that the dance celebrates death as part of life, the aspiration to truth, and the values of gratitude and communality.[3] While it may be a matter of discussion what the defining features of butō are, I will take the liberty of focusing on improvisation as its distinctive mark, because this aspect brings to the fore butō's decisive emphasis on the body being implicated in the generation of action.

Rather than young, gracious, and athletic bodies with unperturbed face expressions, the body of butō is fragile, though not imprecise. The dancer's muscles are visibly strained; his face is distorted by grief or ecstatic joy, impellent urges, and disturbing desires; the posture is difficult and unstable, swept away by disorienting forces. The expressive force of the dance does not build upon the sublime and controlled movements of a classic choreography, but upon instinctual emotional drives. In the first butō piece, *Forbidden Colors* (1959), Hijikata Tatsumi chose Ōno Yoshito the son of Kazuo, who had not completed his training as a modern dancer.[4] The rationale of this choice can be seen in the search for primeval acts that are not mannered and codified by aesthetic canons. The movements are imperfect in terms of technique or, rather, they are defiant of any technique as they are in search of an originality that cannot be codified, reproduced, and graded. The movements of the dance are not spectacular and do not celebrate the elegance of the body; rather, they are ordinary and tentative. Sometimes, they are ancestral postures, reminiscent of universal experiences of the living cycle, comprehending birth, life, and death, such as the fetal position adopted by Carlotta Ikeda in her solo *Utt*,[5] but also especially resonating with the grieving experience of living a maimed, ill, malformed body.

These features of butō challenge the traditional canon of beauty and composure associated with dance, but they also question the alleged ancillary role of dance in respect to music, and the narrative structure imposed by the choreography. In stark contrast with the normative standards of Western and Eastern dance, butō dancers do not seem to execute an intelligible choreography, instead stringing together a seemingly chaotic and disturbing redundancy of aimless and almost beastly moves, as in Hijikata Tatsumi's solo performance *The Rebellion of the Body* (1968).[6] Uncoordinated dancers build a broken narrative, composed of sparse gestures, which do not seem organized by any norm of integration and coherence. Yet, the gestures are in some sense powerful, precise, and fit, and reach out to the audience: how so?

It is tempting to conceive of butō improvisation as undisciplined, because it is unruly and builds on whimsical and idiosyncratic gestures. In fact, it takes discipline to let such instinctual drives emerge and overcome the postures, habits, customs, and etiquette associated with traditional dances. However, the relation to tradition is rather complex.[7] Butō draws on the significant legacy of other ancient forms of Japanese dance and theater, as well as echoing many strands of Western tradition. Butō dancers seem destitute and even aspire to marginalization, very much like *kabuki*

actors during the era Tokugawa. Ōno's *Argentina* (1974) borrows the costumes and attitudes of western opera,[8] which was known to the Japanese large public thanks to the musical theater introduced by Italian choreographer Giovanni Vittorio Rosi.[9] Ōno's repository of collective images of the frail and suffering body resonates with Christian images of an embodied god, borne out of the womb of a woman, taking upon himself the misery of humanity, and destined for a violent death. Some of the subversive aspects of butō fall easily into continuity with the European avant-garde, and in particular with the *Neue Tanz* inaugurated by Rudolph von Laban and Mary Wigman, which was introduced in Japan by Baku Ishii and Takaya Eguchi.[10] In a way, Ōno reiterates von Laban's dictum that "Everybody is a dancer" enacting a democratization of the body but also reaffirming the ancient idea of dance as a spiritual experience (Hoffman 1987: 76).

Before being an aesthetic category, "dance" is a sacred term. The body is the locus of the soul/mind, and not a mere instrument through which a choreography is executed (Ōno 1997: 170). The body of the butō dancer is frail, skinned, and almost unskilled. This image sharply challenges the stereotype of the powerful, perfectly shaped body of a ballet dancer, but it is reminiscent of the deprivations of the hermit (*senkotsu*).[11] Likewise, the elderly body of seventy-four-year-old Ōno in *Argentina* – half-naked and playing with old laces, attempting at jumps and arabesques, or keeping unstable operatic postures may be taken as pointing out a tragic model of decadent beauty, but it also borrows from theater *Nō*, in which the elder's dance (*Okina*) celebrates the accomplishments of a long and full life – something only the Master can perform (see D'Orazi 2001). But the way in which butō borrows from different sources is made peculiar by the distinctive way in which its audience is implicated in action, so that the symbolic effects of the moves are amplified: the white powered faces that populated traditional theater stages become lost souls covered in the atomic dust, for a post-atomic generation; the graceless, skinned bodies remind us of the bodies brutally starved and maimed by a senseless war.

Yet, butō masters do not choose improvisation with a polemical or political intent. In fact, to take at face value Ōno's remarks, they have *no intent* at all: dance is not an intentional enterprise, neither in its inception nor in terms of its deliverances. The body is not an instrument for communicating a message (e.g., the democracy of the body, or the accessibility of dance), nor is the dimension in which a specific political struggle takes place (e.g., the struggle to build a truly Japanese dance body). Unlike other kinds of theatrical performances, butō is not directed to the audience in the sense that it is not a performance aimed to amuse, outrage, or persuade its public. The masters insist that it is not *staged* but *shared*.

The acting body is a *living* body, not a performing one. Nonetheless, the dance is supposed to have some epistemic gains, since the sharing of the body is also the sharing of a hidden truth. This is because the body is conceived as the locus of the search of truth: it is what it is, and nothing else (Ōno 1997: 20). Its ordinary movements – such as ran, jump, turn, walk, rest, and sit – become ritual, and should be interpreted as ritual nodes, rather than as scattered acts. Ritualized movements are patterned, but they are not reproducible in the mechanical sense of the term. The patterns are inherent to the living body. Within this context, showing the elderly body, with its frailties and limitations, counts as *sharing* a living experience. Ōno's body is truthful, not exhibited or staged, but given to others and shared as a life experience. To take these bold proclaims at face value, we need to revisit the underlying concepts of action and agency.

2 The Springs of Action in Butō Improvisation

An understanding of the features of agency at work in butō can be gained by reviewing the process through which butō action is constructed. Coherently with the understanding of the body sketched in Section 1, the training deployed by butō masters is not a technique (Ōno 1986: 156). Ōno's distrust of technique is profound and justified on the basis of different considerations.

2.1 Codification as Artificiality

First of all, imposing a technique on the body amounts to adopting an artificial posture toward oneself and the world, which is not conducive to the search for truth. Artificial means not genuine, counterfeited, and hence fake. The technique makes the body something like an artifact, estranged from its "natural" state. We should be wary of the term natural, which is understood in different senses across time and cultures. In traditional Japanese culture, humanity belongs in a divine natural order. Nature is acknowledged the power of spontaneous generation, which is creative but does not have a personality or individual subjectivity.[12] The ambition of butō training is to recover natural powers, by setting aside movements that have been normalized and codified in tradition, and to reconnect with life. The recovery of such natural powers must be done without technique, which is understood to be conservative and such that it invites uniformity. The technique insists on the seriality of movements and the body memory of movements perfected over time. The refusal of technique is ultimately the refusal of procedural and standardized action. But it is also the refusal of relying on normalized relations among the sequences of movements. By contrast, the recommendation is to rescind such relations so that a sort of "illogical movement" emerges (Ōno 1997: 38). I take this to mean a movement that is not interpretable as belonging in the logic of action, by reference to reasons for action, intentions, and plans.

The second reason for rejecting technique has to do with emotions: emotions represent primary springs of action, in contrast to intentions and reasons. Perfecting a technique does not help one be true to one's own inner emotional drives. On the contrary, it can hide them. This is a particularly important reason to distrust technique. Emotions are the starting point, the materials from which dance action is built; they guide the construction of the artistic process, and importantly characterize the effect on the audience. This pervasive role of emotions can be clarified by reviewing improvisation exercises.

2.2 From Specialized Action to Self-transformation

By rejecting codified movements and insisting on live gestures, butō undermines the intuitive distinction between the ordinary and specialized forms of action such as dance. One should not be misled by the emphasis on the unskilled body of butō. Butō improvisation requires heavy training. The dancer works on himself,[13] and the improvisation training starts with emotions elicited by personal images. There is no sharp division between life and art, or between ordinary living and staged acting. I venture to say that the very notion of action does not admit to this division. On the other hand, both dimensions can be very confused and very far from truth. Thus, the sense in which one appeals to the repository of ordinary images does not indicate the aspiration to reproduce or mimic the ordinary. On the contrary, the appeal to the dancer's personal repository of imagines serves to build a new dimension of agency by raising a new level of awareness (Ōno 1997: 98). The improvisation exercise starts with a transfiguration of personal memory through which specific movements become universal ones.

The instructions of exercises are oxymoronic: they demand excellence in imperfect movements, inspired by the fragile, limited, faulted gestures of real life. Yet, dance does not aim at mimicking reality. Rather, the improvisation exercises are almost spiritual exercises that enable a progress in *unselfing*: leaving the self behind by making personal images into the images of life – or life as is. In fact, some of the exercises try to explore human desires from a non-human perspective. An exercise starts with visualizing the image of a fish. The smell of fish is imagined to arouse an animal desire in the fishermen as well as the bear of Hokkaido. Human desires are not considered raw materials, nor are they represented through one's own distinctive subjectivity: they are shown as shaped and bent by a perspective that is bound to misrepresent its objects (e.g., the

perspective of the Hokkaido bear desiring a fish). The point of the exercise is to transform the body into a body *driven* by deep-seated emotions through the patient deconstruction of an actual desire, aside from particular representations, e.g., through experiencing how difficult it is to understand desires aside from being human, or not.

Another exercise that may be taken as paradigmatic of unselfing requires dancers to adopt the posture of *dead eyes*. In this posture, the dancer's eyes are open but do not look. Their gaze is not directed outside in order to see something outside oneself. Instead, the gaze projects attention inward, rather than being directed at the outward world. It is the reflective stance on life, which is posited outside of it. The inward mode of acting changes the relation to the audience: rather than performing for an audience, dancers are focused on the action occurring in and among themselves (cf. Novack 1990: 128 f.; 1992: 43–50).

While there are some recurrent gestures and mimetic postures in improvisation, their role is to root the agent in his path of transformation. It is not a performance that is aimed at instructing, enflaming, or disconcerting the public. Dance shows the way, by uncovering the force of emotional drives, and making the audience aware of the instinctual forces of life (Ōno 1997: 150. Cf. Gunji 1970: 70). It is a spiritual journey shared with others. But audiences are not invited to join as fellow travelers; they are implicated in action, if the proclamations about sharing are to be taken seriously.

2.3 *Criteria of Agential Authority*

While these spiritual exercises are not codified, they certainly have normative force, that is, they contain normative criteria that guide dancers in their activity. Precision in action is essential, though it does not mean precision in the execution of a *pas de danse*. It is precision in doing what it is: sometimes it is the precision of a still, limping, crouched, or convulsively shaken body. Because of its emphasis on the lack of intentionality of these dance movements, butō raises questions about the purpose of the training and its normative criteria. In fact, butō dance seems to elude current philosophical conceptions of action.

Philosophical theories of action privilege activities authored by agents as exercises of autonomous self-government. While there are various definitions of autonomy and different philosophical proposals about the sort of self-government required for rational agency, there is a wide agreement that actions are *purposive*, that is, performed in view of an end, or in order to address an audience. Most philosophical theories of action emphasize the special relation of authority that agents have with their action, which it is generally conveyed in terms of reasons. Reasons for action make action intelligible to oneself and to others (Velleman 2009),[14] and justify agents in doing what they do (Korsgaard 2009). These philosophical theories take very seriously the idea that agency bears a special relation with subjectivity and that agential authority is a value to be preserved in action, as it is the key way in which agents can change the world according to their mind. The relevant agent is a subject endowed with distinctive rational and emotional capacities, through which he/she plans his/her life. Intentional action is understood to bear the mark of the agent – to show where "the agent stands." Likewise, shared action is mostly understood as mediated by intentions and plans (Korsgaard 2009; Velleman 2009; Bratman 2018). We can join others in action by sharing intentions with them, that is, by forming a collective intention to act together.

2.4 *Revisiting the Springs of Action*

These philosophical characterizations of action and shared action are unfit for butō, and it is interesting to consider what follows from this mismatch. First of all, butō improvisation does not conceive of the dancer as a predefined subject existing prior to and independently of her performance

(Hashimoto 1993; Greiner 2002). Thus, under this description, it is unclear how butō action is some-body's *doing*, something that can be ascribed to dancers as their responsibility. Ōno's recurring dec-larations suggest that dance should renounce the claim of expressing the actor's own emotions and responsibility, and refrain from intellectualized forms of predetermined symbolic acts. While the activity of dancing itself is supposed to increase awareness, it does not amount to an intellectual act of self-monitoring. The suppression of subjectivity that is recommended in the exercises of unselfing described in Section 2.2 is importantly related to the refusal of some canonical representation of self-conscience, which divides the agent into acting self and observer. In contrast to the philosoph-ical understanding of self-reflection, butō increases self-awareness by overcoming the distinction between the reflective self and the active self within the reflective conscience. Second, the relevant sort of agency at work in butō improvisation is not exercised through the subject's volitional control. This is the reason why Ōno remarks that butō should not be characterized as an intentional activity.

The first step to unpack this declaration is to correctly identify the springs of action in butō improvisation. This form of action is not conceived as a process starting with "intentions to be re-alized" or "desires to be fulfilled." Rather, action springs as part of sequences driven by emotional forces deprived of any individual subjectivity. The dancer is acted upon by such forces, rather than being in charge of them. This is the sense in which butō action is understood to be "part of life" (Ōno 1995: 15–23). While action is not authored in the egocentric sense of the term, it is also not an expression of anyone's own subjectivity, e.g., expressive of one's own emotional states. The expression of the actor's emotions is an important part of his training but it takes place in the body: emotions are not mental states, but are, rather, primarily embodied dynamics, which may be elicited to drive a communal motion.

The identification of the springs of action with impersonal emotional forces, outside of the individual volitional control may seem to cohere with the definition of butō as "nonintentional."[15] But it is unclear how something for which the actor undergoes a training so similar to a spiritual exercise can be unintentional. Besides, isn't the emotional training part of the process through which butō action is produced? In Section 3, I will argue that this difficulty can be solved by dis-tinguishing between the intentionality of the activity and the claim that the springs of action are emotional drives rather than intentions or reasons that explain and justify the action. The purpose of this section is to clarify in what sense butō refocuses on emotions as the primary springs of ac-tion, and how this is in stark contrast to current action theory.

2.5 A Distinctive Account of Agency

One may object that the contrast conceptualized in Section 2.4 can be avoided by conceiving dance's aims as expressing emotions.[16] But this answer cannot be correct in the case of butō dance. Unlike other contemporary conceptions of improvisation, butō dance is not expressive. Its function is not to let subjective emotions out, but to share them, separate from subjectivity. The emphasis is not on the subject's need or entitlement to express their state of mind.

The latter claim supports an interpretation of the conception of butō action that is profoundly alien to the conceptions that are alive in contemporary action theory. First, the action is *not expres-sive* in the sense that expresses emotions inside out.[17] The expressive aspect may be present, but it is not the defining mark of butō action. Second, the dance is *not representative* in that it does not fol-low *mimetic* patterns (such as the dance that represents animal steps, or that personifies emotions). Third, it is *not theatrical or performative*, in that the dancer is not primarily a performer that executes a choreography in order to entertain a public. Four, it is not *didactic or demonstrative*, in that it is not initiated by the agent in order to educate the audience, e.g., teaching body acceptance, limitations, or the democratization of the body. Finally, it is not a *communicative* act, though it is meant to share an experience; this last assertion requires some explaining.

In improvisation training, novices are asked to take hints from their own emotions as building blocks to construct dialogues, in full awareness of the personalities of the interlocutor and of the audience. None of these elements are the constitutive aims of improvisation, so it would not be correct to say that improvisation aims to address the audience or to involve the partner in dialogue. The purpose of the exercise is to refine the actor's capacity to adjust to circumstances and identify appropriate opportunities of action. It is arguable that such refinement goes through a dialogical understanding of the context, that is, a relation in which the agent is open to the external world. In contrast, in butō improvisation, the audience is not openly addressed. Thus, the structure of the relation is not *communicative*, in that the dancer is facing an audience, but does not try to communicate or establish a point, nor does she try to have an effect on them. Dance is not instrumental to the cognitive contents being communicated, nor is it persuasive. The dancer is said to be sharing his experience as a living body. To this extent, the dance makes available and accessible to dancer and audience alike contents and emotions that otherwise remain hidden or inchoate. But the suggestion is not that the dance merely conveys the cognitive contents that are there to be known prior to and independently of its artistic manifestation. On the contrary, butō makes the effort of shaping some emotional recess and disciplining it, while remaining noncommittal to any educational or demonstrative aims. To refocus on the body as the locus of emotions is not to say that the body is the means to reveal the emotions as modes of discernment, and that improvisation is an epistemic tool, even though there are some epistemic gains in practicing as well as in watching butō dance.

Such gains are better illustrated by noticing that the butō dancer must comply with discipline, and that he trains by studying his body and its movements. The discipline is both physical and mental/spiritual, and consists of disassociating the body from social images that are superimposed on it, including imagines of the individual self, beauty, and choreographic coherence. It is a discipline that does not distrust the body as an obstacle to meaningful agency, but refocuses on the body as the seat of generating powers in action. So, there are normative criteria of success in butō dance, though they cannot be captured in terms of its performative effects. This definition may help solve a puzzle about the lack of intentionality as preempting normative standards, which I shall consider next.

3 The Puzzle of the Normative Standards of Action in Butō Improvisation

The springs of action in butō improvisation are emotional drives that bypass volitional control and, to this extent, means that butō is quite unlike activities based on reasons or mediated by intentions. However, such emotional drives are retrieved to consciousness, and channeled in action through training that bears a striking resemblance to spiritual exercises of unselfing. This is a puzzle for action theory because the availability of normative criteria of success is generally related to intentional activities.

It may seem that this puzzle applies to any form of improvisation. In some prominent philosophical views, such as Nelson Goodman's, it is improvisation as such that undermines the very idea of a normative paradigm against which to evaluate possible solutions, precisely because it does not rely on regular patterns of pre-defined norms (Goodman 1976: 32 f.). This approach sees improvisation as radically deviating from deliberate action. Improvisation dance is often defined in terms of absence of deliberation, and it is precisely the lack of deliberation that allows for the utilization of intuitive resources of the mind and body. Deliberation is understood to be an obstacle to creativity and spontaneity, and intrinsically conservative in that it favors uniformity. In contrast to deliberation, improvisation is praised for the power to invent new forms spontaneously, create uncharted interactions among the dancers, and "break the causal chain between existing conventions and new developments in an artistic practice" (Carter 2010: 181).

My claim is that this is a mischaracterization of improvisation, which thrives on some overlapping misunderstandings about intentional agency, and equivocal notions of delibera- tion, spontaneity, and creativity. Reflection on butō practice may help us better characterize the relation between deliberation, intentionality, and improvisation. Given the peculiarities of butō dance evidenced in Sections 1 and 2, the alleged lack of normative standards may be connected to two distinctive features of butō dance. First, the centrality given to the body and, correspondingly, the displacement of individual subjectivity make it difficult to conceive of butō action in terms of purposive execution of an intention, or the fulfillment or expression of a desire.[18] Second, while dance is a specialized domain of action, butō masters insist on nor- malized dance movements on the model of ordinary actions, and a normalized body, with no preference for body type, gender, or age. This normalization contributes to confounding the normative criteria under which butō is (to be) evaluated. The rejection of the classification of butō in terms of expressive, mimetic, didactic, and communicative actions make it difficult to recover the normative standard of the discipline. If butō is not a theatrical performance like other forms of dance, and its movements are not governed by a specialized aesthetic code, because they consist of walking, falling, lifting, and other everyday movements – what is the ground of its normative standard?[19]

This question arises especially for those who understand a normative standard to be a norm that applies to a domain of action and guides agents in their doings. There is a general consensus that in order to account for actions as opposed to natural events and other things that happen to hu- man bodies, one has to focus on subjects as intentional agents, capable of authorizing actions and acting for a reason and, *therefore*, subject to normative standards of practical rationality. According to theories of volitional or psychological control, an agent is responsible for an action when it is under his volitional or psychological control, e.g., when he could have chosen or willed otherwise. In this debate, actions are expressive of (rational and intentional) agency when they are chosen on the basis of reasons, where this means them being in accordance with appropriate desires and beliefs (Davidson 1963), that are based on reasons that everyone can share (Korsgaard 2009), that are wholeheartedly endorsed (Frankfurt 1988), or that are planned (Bratman 2007, 2018). These theories assume, one way or another, that agents take charge of the action by exerting a form of normative guidance or willpower, even though they disagree about how to understand normative guidance and what follows from it.

In Section 2, I argued that none of these models seem to be helpful in characterizing the sort of action and agency at stake in butō. But I also suggested that there must be normative standards that guide dancers in their dance. Thus, it is important to consider more precisely how butō challenges current models of action and shared agency. In butō, the subjectivity of the agent does not take center-stage and the question of agential authority on action does not arise. In fact, one may say that the preparation process that leads to butō improvisation is meant to *de-authorize* the dancer. This is because such preparation processes seem to undermine all the usual ways in which subjects take charge of their actions: by ensuring volitional or psychological control or through normative guidance. In the theory of normative guidance, agents act on the basis of reasons that they accept or to which they respond insofar as they are rational. According to rationalistic theo- ries, the success of an action is governed by rational standards, and such standards are normative and partly constitutive of rational agency (Korsgaard 2009). In contrast, in butō the subject is not the author of the action but *its limit*. While in other forms of dance the body is an obstacle or an instrument for the free expression of subjectivity, in butō the reverse relation holds: it is individual subjectivity that should be singled out as an obstacle to the body. The actor must learn how to stay within the body by exhibiting its limits or forcing its boundaries, e.g., moving the body in a way that is aimless rather than merely idle, that is, purpose-less, rather than molded on preexisting functionalities.

Many may go along with Goodman's contention about the lack of normative standards in improvised art, and say that butō does not fit the mold of action theory because such theory applies exclusively to intentional agency. However, it is not clear that butō is an unintentional activity, and my claim is that the grounds for rejecting the general framework of action theory are subtler and more interesting: they concern the very source of agential authority.

To begin with, it is useful to distinguish between actions and dance. As a dance, butō is a complex diachronic activity that extends over time, from the training to the eventual performance. Understood in its diachronic aspect, it is hard to deny that butō is an intentional activity, though particular segments of it are not. It is more accurate to say that, as a dance, butō comprises act that are not intentional. But this feature does not make butō particularly special. Any activity that extends over time comprises segments that are not intentional, but also consists of automatic and routine acts, latency, and stalemates (Ferrero 2010). This complexity is what requires the "theoretical presence of the agent": the agent is the deliberative unit that coordinates and integrates movements and actions into an activity that extends over time (Bratman 2007; Korsgaard 2009).

Philosophers have focused on the value of diachronic will in terms of the volitional capacities that enable us to commit to action over time, avoid distractions, overcome obstacles, and take opportunities (Ferrero 2009). Some have argued, in line with a long-standing tradition, that it is precisely the diachronic will that preserves human agency from the tyranny of the present, and that allows humans to commit to distant objects through future-directed intentions. The human mind is particularly subjected to the prompts of the present, especially in the deliberative perspective. Sometimes the deliberative salience of the present context distracts us from long-term commitments and obligations, and builds upon a form of temporal bias (Elster 1979). The diachronic will needs to conform to norms that react against such temporal bias to avoid practical irrationality.

Butō swims in the opposite direction by fighting the ambition to coordinate the future. Its dance evokes and builds upon images of the past but is driven by occurrent emotions and does not have any ambition to extend to a distant future.[20] Thus, butō challenges the models of action not because it is not intentional, but because it does not recognize the need of a diachronic will, and does not endorse self-governing agency over time. Precisely for this reason, butō turns away from the rhetoric of spontaneous free movements and the search for individual authenticity.[21] Deliberate action does not exclusively indicate action done on the basis of reasons, or as a result of conscious processes of reasoning. Deliberate movements are not necessarily codified: they may be unplanned but may result from mutual adjustment, exploit shared feedbacks, and build upon complex activities such as risk-taking actions and spatial disorientation.[22] The capacities that are activated in deliberation are the very same that are activated in improvisation. In fact, it is arguable that practical deliberation requires improvisational skills (Rorty 2000). These are understood as skills that enable the agent to exploit contextual features as opportunities of action. They should be understood broadly as skills that rely on multilayered competences concerning situational and interactional aspects of the context. On the basis of these considerations, I submit that butō maintains some significant traits of intentionality, even though it is not composed of sequences of discrete intentional actions and is recognizable driven by the emotions.

The combination of these two claims makes butō the perfect candidate for the category of *arational actions*. According to Rosalind Hursthouse, arational actions comprise intentional actions explained by occurrent emotion (Hursthouse 1991: 57). In her view, "these actions threaten the standard account […] by undercutting the false semantic theory that holds that account in place" (Hursthouse 1991: 57).[23] There are three necessary conditions for arational action. An action is considered arational if, and only if: (i) the action was *intentional*; (ii) the agent did not do the action for a reason; and (iii) in the case that the agent was not *in the grip of an emotion*, she would not have acted. Actions such as shouting at objects because of anger, running or jumping for joy, or tearing

one's clothes out of grief count as arational actions (Hursthouse 1991: 59, 60).[24] This category is proposed as an alternative to Donald Davidson's standard theory of action, but it can be contrasted with the prevailing theories of action referred to above, insofar as they privilege actions based on reasons and mediated by intentions.

The third element in Hursthouse's definition represents emotions as states that may govern the agent. Arguably, while in the grip of the emotion the agent does not have authority over his action. For some, at least in some cases, emotions, are irresistible forces that determine the will and that represent volitional necessities. It is an open question whether an agent who is completely determined by his emotion is autonomous: he may be, if he endorses such a determination whole-heartedly (Frankfurt 1988) or reflectively (Korsgaard 1996). Likewise, an agent that acts in the grip of an emotion may still be said to maintain some form of self-governance, even though not under the guise of rational self-governance.

Furthermore, emotions may be recognized as having an intentionality of their own, e.g., be-cause and insofar as they are directed at an audience. When discussing the springs of improvised action, we talked of emotions as elicited by personal images. The training consists of enacting or re-enacting the emotions, according to an associative model in which present emotional states are induced by the involuntary activation of past emotion-laden memories though associative process-ing mechanisms. The induction by meaningful imaginaries seems to bypass the normative criteria of assessment. Arguably, the induction happens without any voluntary or conscious awareness of the link between the image and the reaction. However, proper training consists in a special way in which some emotions are put to work in the specific context, in which the dance creates a community by sharing a living experience.

AU: The phras-ing of this is a little awkward, hence the meaning isn't clear. Please clarify.

The interpretation of butō action as shared while also not being mediated by intentions is par-ticularly helpful in this regard, and it helps connect the relevance of dance to the development of social bonds. In this perspective, even the alleged absence of a goal-directed activity in butō can be questioned, for instance, by referring to the adaptive role of dance in furthering non-linguistic and emotional forms of understanding, communication, and social cognition.[25] However, this connection must be qualified, since butō provides a complex case in which the relation between actors and audience does not exploit the mechanism of empathy or sympathy. Sharing the experi-ence of a living body does not always take the form of sympathizing with the actor impersonating an emotion, or putting himself in the other's shoes. For instance, the butō dancer often insists on grotesque postures to block sympathy and alienate the audience as a key mechanism of the dance, though this is not properly described as a task or an expedient.[26] Nor is the social bond to be understood as one of harmony or complicity in action. Rather, the claim is that butō is an agential mode such that actors and audience construct a shared world of salience, through embod-ied-emotional interactions. This modality of shared agency has been kept at the margins of the philosophical debate, which privileges action shared through the sharing of intentions or reasons.

The construction of action in butō is shared only to the limited extent that the parties par-ticipate in an interaction. As in other forms of improvised dance, individual impromptu varia-tions may depend on the reactions and feedbacks of the audience, even though the focus is kept inward (Carter 2010: 184). The "dead eyes" of the dancer remind the audience that his gaze is inward rather than outward: he is not reaching out in order to amuse or to entertain them, but to share with them the experience of living. Whether this sharing is sufficient to create or reinforce stable social bonds is unclear, but it may still play a crucial role in the process of participatory sense-making (cf. De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007), and in some cases improvisation may include communal decision-making between the actors and the audience.

There is enough here to differentiate between butō and ritual dances that are practiced as ways of expressing or reinforcing social bonds and the sense of belonging to the same community. The unconventional relationship with the audience leads to a different understanding of community

building: the audience is drawn into the experience, so that there is sharing rather than show-ing. The experience of the living body is shared together with the audience, rather than being observed by spectators. The focus on the efforts of the body is a feature of butō that sets it apart from ballet, for instance. While in ballet the effort is concealed, in butō it is shared with the audi-ence. The concealment of the effort could be plausibly understood as a way of not relating to the audience and creating a work-like appearance.[27] I have argued that the focus on the efforts of the body, deprived from subjectivity can be seen also as a model of shared agency that has not been contemplated by prominent philosophical theories of action.[28]

4 Conclusion

This chapter argues that butō refocuses on the body in a distinctive way, as divorced from subjectivity, and brings to the fore interesting issues about the source of agential authority and the normative standards of improvised action. In current action theory, shared agency is understood to be mediated by intentions and reasons. Butō represents a category of action that maintains some features of intentionality, though it is not grounded on intentions or reasons. It requires a normative training based on unselfing, which enables dancers to attain at their emotional powers and share their emotional experience, thereby directly implicating the audience in action.[29]

Notes

1 The orgiastic dance for Dionysus and Cybele was considered unruly and upsetting and, thus, unsuited for Greek citizens whose distinctive virtues required the balanced dominance of reason. On the con-nection between Dionysian and improvisation, see Plato, *Ion*, 534E–535B. On the problematic status of dance in Plato, see Fraleigh 1987: 10, 27. On mimesis in art, and in relations to various life forms, see Nehamas 1999 and Lezsl 2006.

2 On the history and legacy of butō from a multidisciplinary perspective, see Baird and Candelario 2019.

3 This interpretation is particularly apt for characterizing Kazuo Ōno's understanding of dance, and res-onates with his Christian values. The dance bears the suffering of the world, but grief is paired with ecstatic joy, see Ōno 1997: 144, Ōno 1989, 1999; Ōno et al. 1994; Ōno and Ōno 2004. Cfr. Greiner 2002, Kennedy 1995; Schechner 1986.

4 This is based on the novel of the same name by Yukio Mishima. It ends with Yoshito apparently killing a chicken, which leads to the banning of Hijikata from the festival and establishing him as an iconoclast. Cfr. Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006.

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cQ_oD8hvqI (accessed October 25, 2020).

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNV0T5zI7VI (accessed October 25, 2020).

7 On the aspiration of butō to transgress boundaries and build bridges, see Fraleigh 1999: 2.

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rk5_Kc2BDQg (accessed October 25, 2020).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LRIQetJODY (accessed October 25, 2020).

9 On the operatic traits of Ōno's butō, see Boué 1986. Naomi Matsumoto argues that the operatic prod-ucts diffused in Japan thanks to the mediation of Giovanni Vittorio Rosi were not faded copies of the Western tradition, but, rather, took a life of their own and constitute a forceful attempt of "syncultural construction," see Matsumoto 2017. Cf. Blakeley 1988.

10 In 1933, Ōno studied creative dance with Baku Ishii who had trained in the USA with Isadora Duncan; and in 1936, Ōno studied with Takaya Eguchi, son of Masao and Seiko Takada, who had learned dance with Giovanni Vittorio Rosi, see D'Orazi 2001. Perhaps, butō represents a more significant rupture *within* Japanese culture, considering that it was acknowledged in Japan only after being welcome in Paris: the first festival butō in Tokyo dates back to 1986. On the expectations about the avant-garde, see Herridge 1969.

11 See Gunji 1988: 95; cf. Ichikawa 1989; Schechtener 1986: 165; Centonze 2001, D'Orazi 2001.

12 The term *shizen* – in the Miji era (1868–1912) – could be translated as "nature" in contrast to what is artificial, but it is not deprived of creative powers and, thus, can be understood to be include human capacity to create art.

13 I noticed several analogies with Stanislavskij's method, see Stanislavskij 1988; Cfr. Magarshack 1950.

> For in the process of action the actor gradually obtains the mastery over the inner incentives of the actions of the character he is representing, evoking in himself the emotions and thoughts which resulted in those actions. In such a case, an actor not only understands his part, but also feels it, and that is the most important thing in creative work on the stage

> (quoted in Magarshack 1986: 375)

14 Velleman does use improvisation to explain how social coordination happens, but his aim is to emphasize the deliberative skills at play in negotiation. Cf. also Rorty 2000.

15 Improvisation is often understood in contrast to non-intentionality: "sensing, rather than preset intentions, provides the desired motivation for the dance movements" (Carter 2010: 186).

16 In comparison with poetry, dance is understood to be in function to express truthful emotions. See Haerdter and Kawai 1988: 9.

17 I think this is an element of butō improvisation that sets it aside from the performances of *Neue Tanz*, in which the expressivist conception of dance action is more at home.

18 "The artifice of performance has been reevaluated in that action, or what one does, is more interesting and important than the exhibition of character and attitude, and that action can be best focused on through the submerging of the personality; so ideally […] one is a neutral 'doer'" (Reiner 1974: 64).

19 This is a recurring trait of the avant-garde:

> The display of technical virtuosity and display of dancer's specialized body no longer make any sense. Dancers have been driven to search for an alternative context that allows for a more matter-of fact, more concrete, more banal quality of the physical being in performance, a context wherein people are engaged in actions and movements making a less spectacular demand on the body and in which skills is hard to locate.

> (Reiner 1974: 65)

20 On how consciousness is *supported by images,* see Paxton 1993: 63.

21 By contrast, see: Carter 2010; Novack 1990; Paxton 1993: 63; Reiner 1974.

22 For instance, in contact improvisation:

> each party of the duet freely improvises with an aim to working along the easiest pathways available to their mutually moving masses. […] Within this flexible framework of shape, speed, orientation, and personal details of the relationship are left to the dancers who, however, hold the ideal of active, reflexive, harmonic, spontaneous, mutual forms.

> (Paxton 1975: 40)

23 For another taxonomy that allows for actions driven by emotional to be also intentional, cf. Chan 1995.

24 According to Hursthouse, arational actions are explained by desires, rather than beliefs, since the beliefs associated with the action (e.g., shouting at objects) would be absurd (e.g., believing to have an effect on objects?). I take emotions to be different from desires, and so I do not find this way of understanding arational actions particularly illuminating. Recent studies have worked on the hypothesis that group dancing involves exertive synchronized movement to music and plays a role in social bonding, potentially via the release of endorphins, which are analgesic and reward-inducing, and have been implicated in primate social bonding, see Tarr et al. 2015.

25 There are several models of emotions as springs of action, and we should be reluctant to explain the relation in purely mechanistic and inductive terms, see Bagnoli, forthcoming.

26 There might be a tension between actors and their audience: audiences may feel alienated and confused as to their role with respect to the dance (Carter 2010: 188).

27 Interestingly, in ballet, the naturalness of the movement is made dependent on the concealment of the effort: the movement must flow effortlessly: "this is true art," Ursula Hageli, describing the Cecchetti method, in *Ballet Evolved Cecchetti* (Royal Opera House): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mG-1WuZViibU (accessed October 24, 2020). Cf. "The limbs are never in a fixed, still relationship and they are stretched to their fullest extension only in transit, creating the impression that the body is constantly engaged in transition" (Rainer 1974: 66–7).

> Phrasing is thus concealed from the viewers while the actual energy required to perform the tasks is visible to the audience. Performers avoid confronting the audience in order to create a work-like appearance as opposed to initiating a conventional theatrical relationship between performers and the audience.

> (Carter 2010: 186)

28 While the sciences of social cognition have identified emotions as sources of shared and collective agency, the philosophical debate is still organized around the model of intentions, see Jancovic and Kirk 2018. Recent studies are limited to the possibility of shared emotions (Salmela and Nagatsu 2017), the mechanism of emotions (Pacherie 2018, Gentsch and Synofzik (2014), and rationalization (Döring 2003). In a debate more directly affected by empirical sciences, the epidemiological model of emotional contagion has prevailed, but this concept is insufficient to usefully discriminate different forms of shared agency by emotional resonance (Bagnoli, forthcoming). Phenomenological studies offer a more accurate account of the varieties of emotional resonance, but they focus on subjectivity and empathy, and have not addressed the issue of the sources of authority, see León et al. 2019. Enactivism points to a more promising direction in that it studies cognition by paying attention to the reciprocal causal interactions between brain, body, and environment as they dynamically unfold over time, see, e.g., Gallagher 2005, 2017: chapter 5; De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Colombetti 2014; cf. Bagnoli, forthcoming.

29 Earlier versions of this chapter have been discussed at the Conference of the *British Society for Aesthetics* on Aesthetics, Normativity and Reasons at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 2015, and at a workshop on improvisation at the University of Udine in 2015. I would like to thank these audiences and, in particular, Mirio Cosottini, Simon Kirchin, Glenn Most, and Michael Smith. I am also grateful to Consuelo Cellai to whom I owe my encounter with butō in the summer of 2012.

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