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THE PERFORMANCE ARCHIVE AS SITE OF  
ABERRANT DISFIGURATION:  
HIJIKATA'S ARCHIVE OF BUTOH IN THE  
WORK OF RICHARD HAWKINS

Performance archives are never static or closed entities, even when they appear to be abandoned, forgotten, or even revered. Among their many potential resuscitations, they can notably generate raw material for new forms of art works that may be original particularly in the sense that they overturn the visible facets of familiar artefacts via a process of oscillation, often through the interconnections of performance with other media. For such an upheaval to be perceived, the originating art work must also somehow still be present or remembered, in one form or another. In recent years, archives of contemporary performance cultures have increasingly been amalgamated with elements from moving-image, photographic, digital-media and visual-arts cultures, often with profound consequences for perceptions of the temporal, spatial and memorial dimensions of performance, along with its traces and residues. In many cases, original artefacts and materials from performance histories will be transformed by that process, in ways that reveal unforeseen dimensions and insights, but such source materials may also be comprehensively and intentionally reconfigured, and distanced from their initial form, to the point of aberration and disfiguration.

Can the disfigurement or reconfiguration of an archive of performance be conceived of as a process that actively creates a vital new form of performance, or a work of art? And is such a process always necessarily one that must operate spatially, directed towards an audience of spectators that actively witnesses that process of disfigurement? To explore those questions, I'd like to examine one particular aspect of archival upheaval in its widest sense, specifically the contemporary

reworking of archival performance materials and documents – as spectacles within art-museum spaces.

I will focus especially on an art project, *Hijikata Twist*, by the prominent Los Angeles-based contemporary artist, Richard Hawkins, which was exhibited in 2014 at the Tate Gallery art-museum, in Liverpool in the UK, and previously, in an earlier form, in 2012 at the Whitney art-museum, in New York<sup>1</sup>. This project focuses on the work of the Japanese choreographer and performance-theorist Tatsumi Hijikata, who instigated the celebrated performance-art form known as «ankoku butoh» – the «dance of utter darkness» – in Tokyo at the end of the 1950s, and developed his work across the 1960s and 1970s, before dying in 1986. As with many other choreographers, Hijikata's work left relatively sparse tangible traces, other than film documents and collaborations with experimental film-makers. But, from the second half of the 1960s, Hijikata also began working in the medium of the scrapbook – that is, accumulating ideas and plans for ongoing choreographic works by assembling and collaging a range of “source materials” into his large-format scrapbooks' pages, and then annotating them with texts, diagrams and drawings which he conceived of as counterparts to the specific movements and gestures that he wanted to see realized corporeally in performance, in such works as his 1968 solo performance work *Revolt of the Flesh*. But those scrapbook texts were not direct counterparts to the gestures or movements of dance – Hijikata's texts are often dense, poetic, tangential, and fragmentary ones – and are also over-layered upon one another, in the characteristic way that a process of collaging operates, by successive accumulations, across time and space.

Many of the images in the original Hijikata scrapbooks are illustrations which he had cut-out from Japanese arts magazines, of paintings by mid-twentieth-century French and German artists such as Hans Bellmer, Jean Dubuffet and Henri Michaux, as well as works by Pablo Picasso and, especially, Francis Bacon. Hijikata predominantly used European visual materials in his scrapbooks. Thirteen of Hijikata's scrapbooks are

<sup>1</sup> This essay draws from a number of conversations with Richard Hawkins, in Berlin in 2013, during his research in developing his Hijikata project. Hawkins' exhibition was presented at the Tate Museum in Liverpool from 28 February to 11 May 2014.

conserved in the archive of his work at the Keio University Art Center in Tokyo. More scrapbooks may well have been made before being lost or discarded, but those archived scrapbooks are those which have survived. As with other scrapbooks assembled by artists or performers – for example, those of the photographic and moving-image innovator, Eadweard Muybridge – Hijikata’s scrapbooks form seminal archival artefacts which reached their definitive form at the instant when their creator affixed the last image, or inscribed the final text. They were not intended for public display.

Through the art project of Richard Hawkins, *Hijikata Twist*, a new set of scrapbooks were made, which work to emulate or to recreate Hijikata’s own scrapbooks, by a process that intersects manual techniques of collaging with digital techniques of simulation. Hawkins spent several months in the Hijikata archive in Tokyo, studying the original scrapbooks; he commissioned translations into English of the hand-inscribed textual content of the scrapbooks. But crucially, the contents of those original scrapbooks are amended and “restaged” – Hawkins often chose his own contents of illustrations to incorporate, and also inserted his own texts, which characteristically evoke his experiences in the gay subcultures of Los Angeles. The insertion of new text requires that Hijikata’s own texts are supplanted and deleted. And the new scrapbooks are conceived specifically to be exhibited in space, and so to have a public, performative existence in the eyes of art-museum spectators. Notably, in art-gallery exhibition contexts such as the ones I mentioned (the Tate Museum or the Whitney Museum), the new scrapbooks are exhibited directly alongside several examples of the original Hijikata scrapbooks – those documents being thereby extracted from their habitually “closed” archival existence in Tokyo – and also alongside the original art works that had inspired Hijikata in the 1960s, in the form of paintings and sculptures by artists such as Bacon and Bellmer. A complex tension is generated, between the contemporary act of simulation, appropriation and fabrication – and the original aura and presence of the archival documents of performance. A further tension – or contradiction – emerges between the dimension in Hawkins’ work of a reverential, research-based process in recreating the original Hijikata works, and the desire simultaneously to amend, to subvert or to pervert them – in Hawkins’ own term in his exhibition’s title, to “twist” them.

Why would such performance documents need to be recreated or subverted in the first place, notably in the context of an art project to be exhibited for spectators in the spatial environment of an art-museum, and through a process that might be seen as combining performance and visual art? For Hawkins, the original artefacts of Hijikata's scrapbooks become, in a way, reactivated and vivified – by their perversion or “twisting” – precisely because they themselves originated from such a process. In a conversation on his project, Hawkins commented: «What Hijikata's scrapbooks were meant to do, as I eventually found out, was something quite amazing. Take Picasso's [painting] *Guernica* for example: Hijikata eviscerates the piece [in his scrapbook], ignoring the painter's original intentions, cutting out the parts he likes, tossing [away] the parts he doesn't, and making a story... of a prostitute squatting in a vestibule and a dead baby that flies through the air».

This kind of tension that underpins Hawkins' project on Hijikata's scrapbooks – pitched between veneration and subversive appropriation – is arguably also an essential, pervasive aspect of all art-museum exhibitions which display the residues of performance cultures that have elapsed, and thereby become “historical”. Especially from the final decade of the twentieth century, art museums began to stage large-scale exhibitions of what could be seen as the detrita of performance cultures; the formative model for such exhibitions was the one entitled «Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object», curated by Paul Schimmel and exhibited at art museums in Los Angeles, Tokyo and other cities in 1998, which assembled the traces of many works of performance art, choreography and intermedial theatre, staged worldwide between 1945 and 1979 in such forms as performance scores, plans, costumes, films, and other remnants. In many cases, the works documented in the exhibition had been conceived as being autonomous, and thereby resistant to being amalgamated with other performances. The act of meshing and combining those works' traces, by setting them intimately alongside one another in the art-museum exhibition-space, both contravened or “twisted” the original intentions of such works, but simultaneously opened-out those intentions, and revealed interconnections between performance works from ostensibly disparate cultures and ways of working. In spatial terms, such amalgamations of performance residues may also constitute experiments in the status of the archive. In that sense, all art-aligned projects which reconfigure the

memories and materials of past performance are simultaneously activations and disfigurations.

In the case of the particular performance materials at stake in Richard Hawkins' restaging of Hijikata's archive, that ambivalence between disfiguration and resuscitation is especially acute, because the scrapbook format itself is one which is always exceptionally in-flux, and exposed to transformation or amendment. Usually, a scrapbook can only ever be said to be "finished" at the moment of its maker's death – until then, it can always be re-opened, for another layer of imagery, another stratum of text, to be inserted. This is surely why scrapbooks form a preferential medium for launching ideas into performances, into films and art-works, and why they have often been posthumously preserved and also digitised, as with Hijikata's scrapbooks, or those of Muybridge, or of the British experimental film-maker Derek Jarman, among many others. Scrapbooks form a malleable and volatile material for the transmission of ideas into spaces, whether spaces of performance or of projection. Although a scrapbook is usually an intimate, tactile object which a performer holds close to the body, in relative secrecy, it can also be transformed, via digitisation, into an object which may then be viewed pervasively, in the form of a digital archive, immediately, by anyone who accesses it online. In that sense, it oscillates between intimate secrecy and wide-open exposure, including an openness towards its own appropriation, subversion, and deletion. One particular transformation which an archival scrapbook endures – in its deployment within the particular art-museum context which is my focus here – is that it may become a prestigious art-work, exhibited at a prominent art museum such as the Tate, subject to economic valuation (as well as spectatorial engagement) – that is, in opposition to its previous status as the detrital residue of performance, often fortunate to have even been preserved at all, as in the case of Hijikata's scrapbooks.

In *Hijikata Twist*, the primary curatorial focus is upon Hawkins' work, rather than that of Hijikata: the emphasis is on the project of the contemporary artist who has, in the term of Bolter and Grusin, «remediated» a previous body of work, through a combination of manual collaging techniques and digital interventions. The original work still remains present in the exhibition space, in the form of several examples of Hijikata's archived scrapbooks, but the pre-eminent spectacle is that of the intermedial process of transformation itself. A dissolution

or upending of hierarchies is at stake, between the original scrapbook and its simulation.

In many ways, this process resonates with the ways in which the medium of film may serve to document a performance before it elapses, but can also propel that performance into another arena of time and space, and thereby generate an entirely distinct spectatorial experience. For example, the notorious mid-1960s performances of the Vienna Action Group artists were almost always staged only once, and intentionally left only negligible documentation, other than in the medium of the films shot of them, notably by the experimental film-maker Kren Kren. At the same time, Kren imposed his own particular set of intentions and working-methods onto those filmic documents of performance, especially by editing them in such a rapid-fire and disordered way, with an excess of cuts, that the Action Group performers then perceived their original work as having been disfigured or twisted in a negative sense, through a perversion of the habitual process of performance's documentation – with the result that, at film-projection events, violent disagreements broke-out between performer and film-maker.

An element of this contentious process of active disfiguration is also present in Hawkins' project with the scrapbooks of Hijikata. Again, this relates to the ability accorded to contemporary art to operate by means of simulation, appropriation, and aberration. Notably, in a number of Hawkins' exhibited works, he creates scrapbooks which he conceives as those which Hijikata would *ideally* have wanted to create in the 1960s, if he had only had access to a more comprehensive reservoir of illustrations within the Japanese art-magazines that formed his main source for the visual materials he incorporated into his scrapbook pages. In conversation, Hawkins commented on this process: «I wanted to flesh out Hijikata's ideas, and looked at it as a way of being haunted by the voice of Hijikata». In that formulation, the origin for Hawkins' process of disfiguration is assigned to Hijikata himself, who inhabits and haunts the contemporary artist Hawkins, both corporeally and vocally – as though Hijikata were still engaged in devising and enunciating ideas for performances, even beyond his own death. In that way, the contemporary artist is a self-nominated “medium” in a spectral sense, transmitting while also perverting an original corporeal presence and body of work, *as well as* someone working with the contemporary nature and status of the dual mediums of performance

and visual art, together with their infiltrations into one another – especially in the light of their current exposure to unprecedented instability, emerging from new forms of digital media. One manifestation of the proliferating excess which digital media instil into Hawkins' project is that digital technologies enabled him to create 150 scrapbooks for his exhibition, that is, ten times or more the total number of the original archival documents of Hijikata's scrapbooks.

As well as working with ideas of the boundaries of collage and of the overhauling of performance traces, Hawkins' engagement with the scrapbooks of Hijikata is also closely bound-up with the work of the French writer and dramatist Jean Genet – and especially with Genet's self-conception, notably in his alliance with the occupants of Palestinian refugee camps, as a «loving captive» («*un captif amoureux*») – a captive who still always possesses the capacity for betrayal, especially the betrayal of whatever he is most passionately attached to, or whatever most captivates him<sup>2</sup>. In the textual element of several of Hawkins' scrapbooks, not only Hijikata's texts disappear, but also Hawkins' own texts vanish, to be replaced by those of Genet, whose work was also one of the primary inspirations for Hijikata's instigation of the «*ankoku butoh*» performance-art form in the 1960s. In that sense, the final “twist” of Hawkins' project of apparent subversion is that it actually creates a genealogical lineage which sustains concerns – with corporeality and performance – across the work of Genet and Hijikata, and into the contemporary moment.

As a restaging of Hijikata's scrapbooks and their preoccupations, within art-museum spaces, Hawkins' project *Hijikata Twist* forms an expansion of the archival materials of performance cultures, but also interrogates the potential for such materials to be redeployed, in their inhabitation of contemporary spectatorial space: a space which is increasingly in-flux, and subject to variations, simulations and appropriations that are also integral to histories both of performance art and of visual arts media, notably that of collage. The contemporary process of recreating and restaging performance archives may itself come to form a spatially located *act* of performance, that durationally occupies

<sup>2</sup> Genet's book dealing with his time in the Palestinian camps is titled in French *Un Captif Amoureux*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986..

a specific site, and seeks there to instigate particular spectatorial experiences. *Hijikata Twist* demonstrates the profoundly transformational, conflictual dynamics at stake within performance archives<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Bibliography: Richard Hawkins and Stephen Barber, *Hijikata: Disfiguration*, London, Vauxhall & Company, 2017 (forthcoming); Richard Hawkins, *Third Mind*, exhibition catalogue, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, 2010; Tatsumi Hijikata, *Costume en Face: A Primer of Darkness for Young Boys and Girls*, New York, Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015; Takashi Morishita, *Hijikata Tatsumi's Notational Butoh*, Tokyo, Keio University, 2015.