



To Prison

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To Prison

Hijikata Tatsumi

I, who caught a cold by looking at a stone and became anxious on seeing a landscape with no one in it, grew up thinking myself maimed. One day a man stood next to my father; a tree cracked and my father fell. Clutching a stone, I resisted; my father was being beaten up. That was the start of my perception of an unhappy world. There must, however, be more fruitful mistakes in bleeding nature.

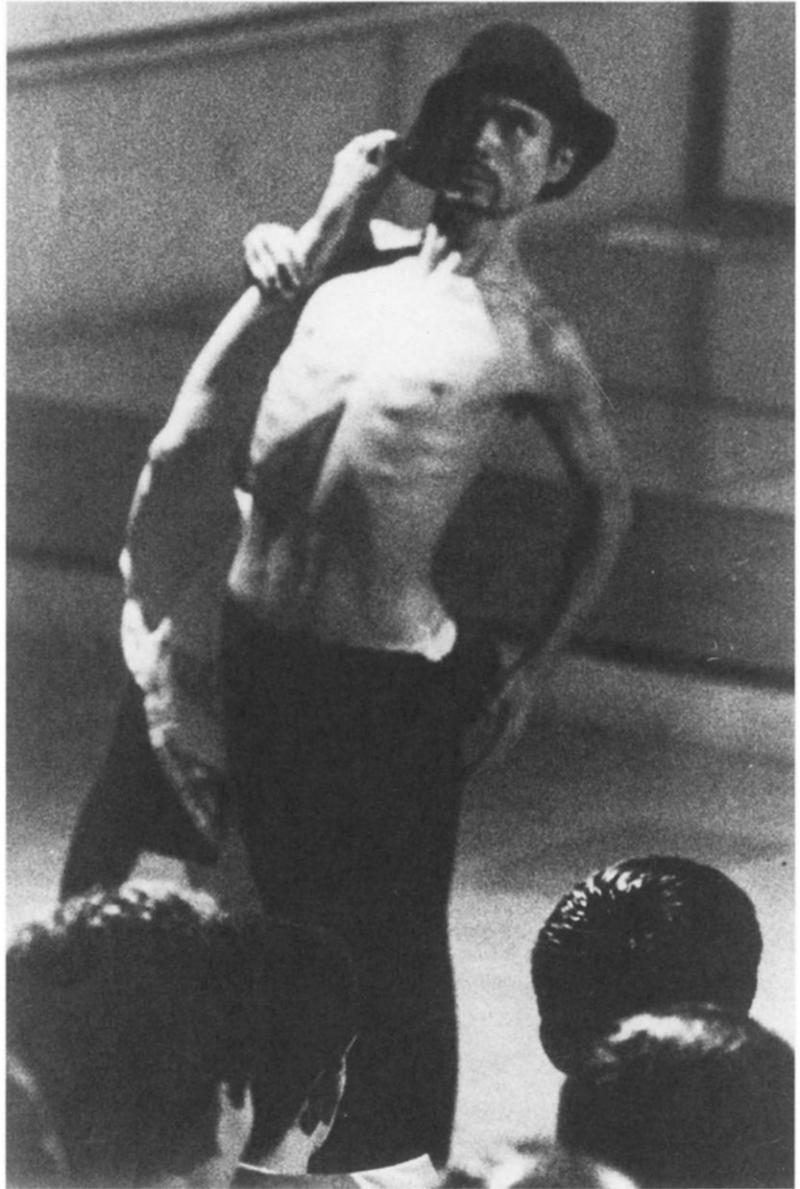
I grew up always sniffing out criminals, that is to say, such company as theirs. Everyone bears the burden of being a human child, yearning for companions to run away from home with. My anger over that alone was ample.

A gang of pals contains the dimension of smell. The word "world" was nothing but raving to me, who had spent my youth like a cur. Bleeding nature always overflows the allotments of history and sociology, and my gaze never wavered from it. The friends I made in Tokyo were, so to speak, inhabitants of the transparent, mechanical "world," without any ties to bleeding nature and even without smell. I could not help seeing them as corpses.

Isn't there some work that strews absolute putrefaction and graphic terror throughout the world? I have always thought I would like to put my hands to the axle of anger that sustains that kind of work.

Today I am no longer a dog. Albeit clumsily, extremely clumsily, I am definitely recovering. What, however, does my recovery signify? What on earth does recovery mean to me? Haven't I already recovered? Don't I continue to recover in order to be sick? In any case, my current situation is that of walking around a room with the windows wide open while holding a matchlock musket.

I am desperately trying to escape from the cellar of the freedom of being tied and from the relationship between the ropes used for tying. I was frustrated in boyhood because of talk of an unfortunate rice paddy. One thing for sure, though, I will no longer be cheated by a bad check called democracy. No future correspondence will reach me from slightly soiled pigeons set free by society's hands and I am enforcing silence too on my youth, when I was not even a dog licking the wounds of capitalism. At any rate, I have a matchlock at the window. But for some reason my finger does not reach the trigger. Is there any greater misery than entrusting a dream to a reality from which one will sometime have to wake? I should shut the window immediately and continue the conversation between this, my only life, and the universe. What I was unable to find even in childhood... I have, at last, just transformed from a dog into a living creature called a human being.



1. *Hijikata Tatsumi in Emiri no bara (Emily's Rose, 1960), choreographed by Hijikata Tatsumi. (Photo courtesy of Keiō gijyuku University Art Center)*

All of a sudden a naked body has come into the gun port. The naked body is bleeding. Amidst a continuity resembling anger, I make repairs to arms and legs, which constantly go astray in an individual organic body. Forgetting the origin of legs and even that of arms. I am a body shop; my profession is the business of human rehabilitation, which goes today by the name of dancer.

All the power of civilized morality, hand in hand with the capitalist economic system and its political institutions, is utterly opposed to using the body simply for the purpose, means, or tool of pleasure. Still more, to a production-oriented society, the aimless use of the body, which I call dance, is a deadly enemy which must be taboo. I am able to say that my dance shares a common basis with crime, male homosexuality, festivals, and rituals because it is behavior that explicitly flaunts its aimlessness in the face of a production-

oriented society. In this sense my dance, based on human self-activation, including male homosexuality, crime, and a naive battle with nature, can naturally be a protest against the "alienation of labor" in capitalist society. That is probably the reason too that I have expressly taken up with criminals.

There are some common points in the taciturnity of criminals, and there are crushing mistakes that extend straight on. I am always dragged by the legs of the young criminals today who pass me by. They are legs which have never carried politics as accomplices for horsing around. Youth who chase far beyond suspicion the internal medicine and surgical knife, which today's civilization dispenses to them. I wager reality on a nonsensical vitality that has purged the echo of logic from my body and I dream of the day when I am sent to prison with them. In prison I will learn to play football. They are the legs of criminals with no need to learn how to stand in such a place. I am studying that kind of "criminal dance."

In the outside world, criminals have always been forced to stand. In outside reality, they fully experience that there is nothing worthy of belief. From various standpoints, a family for them cannot be a single unit where they are able to sit. Today's material, they have acquired a protective instinct that thinking is dangerous. First of all, I posit to begin with a composition in which I stand and they are made to stand. I walk and they are made to walk. All of a sudden they start to run and I too run. I fall down. They run. They get up without any injury from where they fell. Why is the place where they get up different from that where I get up bleeding? It is futile, in the end, to question what causes my activities constantly to erode. Human remodeling is accomplished only in connection with young people who unceasingly experience the natural movements that kick the matrix of today's good sense. I dream of such a criminal dance. There will no longer be any hesitation over torching theatres.

To the open air. In real life I will be able to become a second-rate murderer. I would like to have my own subjectivity, which wavers in mixing and confusing the imaginative process and the real-life process. I would like to be sitting, without even a passport, smack in the middle of a mistake.

From a closed room to the open air, from the open air to prison—that will inevitably be my path. My naked body will be carried without any pretext of inconvenience. It will be allowed to pass without any inspection of my personal effects, and I will get another look at dance that can be narrated by bare hands and by walking. The phrase "walk tirelessly" always points to the essence of dance. Georges Bataille said, "Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words." He also said, "It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being, beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity. Stripping naked is seen in civilizations where the act has full significance if not as a simulacrum of the act of killing at least as an equivalent shorn of gravity."¹ These words of Bataille's seem to approximate most closely the human solidarity of a naked body, which is first attained, even as the body is solitary, through the continuity of being, which is to say, death. I see in prison such a stage of tragedy, a stage of drama where the naked body and death are inseparably joined.

That I am dazed by the beauty of a prison gate is nothing but a posture of perplexity with myself, made to stand at the minimum distance from being naked. That is how terrifying it is to be naked, yet in the outside world we are already completely naked. For today the authority and significance of a prison gate being shut are declining. In any case, it is equivalent to being released. I will be carried merrily. Speech prohibited, sound contrived not to reach my ears, in garb of nondescript color, I shall continue to be conscious that I am still standing naked as is. No theatre matches this one, which is equipped with

the perfect mechanism for my destructive acts against production and morality. I see my own dance in a state of joyful group bathing in prison, and I see inmates on death row in the fall of modern civilization and in the family crest of its good sense. I see the original form of my dance in their walk.

A criminal on death row made to walk to the guillotine is already a dead person even as he clings, to the very end, to life. The fierce antagonism between life and death is pushed to the extreme and cohesively expressed in this lone miserable being who, in the name of the law, is forced into an unjust condition. A person not walking but made to walk; a person not living but made to live; a person not dead but made to be dead must, in spite of such total passivity, paradoxically expose the radical vitality of human nature. Sartre wrote: "A criminal with bound hands now standing on the scaffold is not yet dead. One moment is lacking for death, that moment of life which intensely desires death." This very condition is the original form of dance and it is my task to create just such a condition on the stage.



2. *Leda santai* (*Three Phases of Leda*, 1963) in *Leda no kai* (*Leda Recital*), written by Yagawa Sumiko, choreographed by Hijikata Tatsumi, with set design by Nonaka Yuri at Asbestos Hall. Kosugi Takeshi (left) and Hijikata Tatsumi. (Photo by Tanno Akira)

Sending hysterical works to the theatre has great significance these days. We have the right to ask for a guarantee of actuality among the random noise and bad taste that are the equivalent of almost raw materials. The sublime asceticism of crime. A totally empty face which endures torture. Young people who have cleverly acquired a nonsensical vitality. The pure despair that emerges before hope is crushed. My task is to organize these into a dance group and to make them into naked soldiers.

Longing for asceticism, today's generation wavers. It can be inferred that most (Self-Defense Force members) abandoned solidarity with the flesh of their generation and threw themselves into the army out of a craving to be bound rather than to make a living. The dance, which is a medium between a spirit and an impulse to a secret ritual for the sake of pouring into the flesh and blood of young people, ends in finishing them as lethal weapons that dream.

That which is capable of confronting today's condition, which envelops the distortions of a solidarity severed into pieces, is nothing other than the establishment of a new individual human image and the acquisition of that solidarity. I place that solidarity within the scope of my work. I attempt to press the limits of myself and of my material. From the nature of my work, living beings are my material. They are young living beings who hold their tongues. Jean Genet wrote: "Talent is courtesy with respect to matter; it consists of giving song to what was dumb. My talent will be the love I feel for that which constitutes the world of prisons and penal colonies."² These words, completely and exactly, lead to my determination. "One must," in Nietzsche's words, "strip the costume of barren perception designed by contemporary civilization" from these young people who shut their mouths before and after any action. Nietzsche also said: "My work is to reanimate with vitality a skeleton pieced together from the consciousness of being a victim. I am a man of simple sensual passion. The sense of the tragic increases and declines with sensuousness." Because I am, as in these words of Nietzsche, a man of sensual passion, my work in all its aspects is as follows: That I must continue still to learn many more things from chopping heads with a hoe. That, with my own will, I must grasp a lethal weapon in my hands. I must first attempt to recover these hands. These new hands for the sake of operating a machine must be backed up by the hands that have held a hoe; they are not hands that grieve over a labor accident. I must sever these slender fingers which play with scraps. "Work is *a priori* power and provocation in struggle with nature; it is the overcoming of resistance," said [Herbert] Marcuse.³ This "provocation" is, in my own words, "dance." But a tongue that licks the wounds of this runaway mechanical civilization already exceeds the scope of our provocation. Politics that conceal in their breast a function stripped of meaning are nothing but a station for incompetent humans who have started to have doubts about themselves at their source. We must continue to open up the current situation with hands that hold a chalk eraser which wipes out signs of an impotent future, of that culture of mournful cries which exist in the skeleton of victim consciousness. I am placing in the body of my work an altar similar to asceticism in front of a human body purged of impurities. My work is to remove toy weapons from the limbs of today's youth, who developed in barren circumstances, and to finish them as naked soldiers, as a naked culture.

Today I do not know anything, in terms of the formation of alienation and the continuity of harshness that work imposes on a body, which ranks with weeding in poor farm land in summer. In the crude energy combined with autonomous rhythm supporting that labor, there is something that almost makes you cover your eyes. Young farmers lose their years inside that energy. Babies delivered there grow up playing even now with shit. The current situation is that a whole family finds recovery in an anal disease suffered by a six-

year-old in a one-crop area of poor soil. The hands of parents are connected to hands that tease the gods. This phenomenon makes a design from a laughably black humor and that seems to me to be a mysterious dance.

Around the 13th year of the Shōwa period, [1938], the one-crop areas of Tōhoku were stricken with anal blockages. Those tearful voices must be recorded anew in the culture of preservation. Although they are today becoming an important accompaniment to my dance, they were such “primitive cries” that only now, 12 years since I started to live in Tokyo, have I been able to handle them cleverly. I am chewing on cries and the profundity of esoteric gestures by gazing closely and unceasingly at the mundane. I am inventing a walk molded of the present from atop the dark earth where dancing and jumping could not be united. In boyhood the dark earth of Japan was my teacher in various ways of fainting. I must bring to the theatre that sense of treading. I am a naked volunteer soldier who forces this treading to confront the handling of legs that have been domesticated by floors.

I put an initiation ceremony for youth as the altar of my work. It is perhaps akin to asceticism and can be called a coming-of-age ceremony. I would like to create such a dance made flesh and blood, which I would undertake with my own body, not by mutual understanding but by suffering the fear of believing and the act of continuing to experience. Believing people is today solitary work. Believing and continuing to live are myths of acts impossible to name. To risk. With hands that have gauged the weight of testicles, I substantiate a blind countenance.

I am dumbfounded by the bodies of young creatures who, bereft of any ethical echo, overrun the streets. I am making the subject of my work the warm sands, rapid vehicles, dramatic chases, and naked conversations that have removed the punishment given by society from their shared reality of behaving like unlovable youth. I believe—through incessant conversation with young creatures who stand at the minimum distance from the primal experience and through work that plays with their bodies—that they can be perfected as my naked soldiers. Human remodeling will be accomplished only by getting involved with a dreaming lethal weapon that has long ignored the poverty of politics.

January 1961

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Translators' Notes

1. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 17–18. Translated by Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986. Throughout, sources will be noted where available.
2. Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, 110–11. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
3. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 110–11. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974.