OLU TAIWO

Urban Butoh: A performance philosophy in an age of digital acceleration

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to define Urban Butoh as a performance praxis, suggesting that the nature of deceleration regarding performative actions, can be considered progress. Urban Butoh has facilitated for me, a process of critical reflexivity, while in the flux of movement; cognisant that we are living in an age of digital acceleration. An important implication concerning this praxis, gives permission to take back ownership of personal narrative discourses by engaging in post-traditional research vis-à-vis knowledge systems not included in dominant westernised academic or artistic cannons; thereby enabling a process of researching untold stories to re-evaluate dominant cultural assumptions. One can argue that although underlying attitudes have not really changed with respect to underlying perceptions leading to ethnic stereotyping in Britain, cultural policy has, due to the performative resistance of those subjugated by institutional prejudice.

The Return Beat is a Rhythmic Paradigm

This article will explore a praxis-as-performance-philosophy, which I have called Urban Butoh. The intention is to unpack some transcultural implications; aspects of being and practice hybridised to transcend their original heritages (Taiwo, 2009: 103). These implications emerged from praxis, supported by a network of research, retrospectively conceptualised, employing praxis, production and performance from the perspective of a performer/choreographer, or reflecting choreologically (Laban 1966: 8). From the perspective of a performer/producer, Urban Butoh is aligned with an auto-ethnographic approach. The idea is to reflect on the dynamics of personal efforts with the holistic paths of our limbs in dramaturgical space with respect to the socio-cultural context in order to reflect:

- Retrospectively on the *past*
- Mindfully in the moment in the *present*
- By devising imminent plans for the *future*

From this holistic triumvirate of temporality, I will explicate some philosophical principles and personal observations regarding the practice of Urban Butoh. Transculturally my 'physical journal' will inform reflections unpinned by practical techniques drawn from different movement skills (Taiwo 2009: 103). I will deconstruct some assumptions of self and identity in order to discover a native distinctiveness as a black British man making sense of a post-colonial Nigerian heritage.

Urban Butoh has emerged as a decelerating response to an avalanche that the digital revolution is imposing on us; an interdisciplinary transcultural movement practice developed by combining Hironobu Oikawa's Artaud techniques of Butoh-like

movement (Fraleigh 2010: 101). This movement also incorporates elements of Jacques Lecoq's mimetic technique of open neutrality and the reification of mundane movements (Appler 2016: 23), as well as some performance styles based on the Return Beat (Taiwo 1998: 165). Principally, the Return Beat is a rhythmic paradigm that underpins both Yoruba and Yoruba's cultural Diaspora, informing the creation and production of temporal space and underpinning a traditional fractal aesthetic (Englash 1999: 49). It articulates a specific cultural experience of tempo within any given rhythm drawing attention to the spaces between the beats, experienced as a curve leading back to the self. Echoing the metabolic rhythm of a heartbeat, this creates an outgoing (centrifugal) and a returning (centripetal) experience regarding the duration between repetitive beats, beats perceived to emerge from visceral pathways in embodied experience. Western assumption of repetition as static subjugates the Yoruba perspective of the transformative potential of repetition reducing what is rhythmic to predictability. The concept of a Return Beat with notions of returning to the same experience in distributed regions of space can produce embodied fears of stagnation or the unknown. However, if we move away from static perceptions of temporal space – a perceptual hangover from dualistic Enlightenment – to a more dynamic perception, then repetition does not unfold in stasis but in pulses and waves. What repetition provides are frameworks for transformative play and improvisation in what Drewal calls:

> The indeterminacy of improvisation as praxis in ritual, that is, the transformational capacity of repetition itself (Drewal 1992: xv)

This internal experience of repeated rhythmic patterns, inspired by a curved perceptual flux, are fractal-like in nature (Englash 1999: 18). They draw the percipient inwards towards a distributed infinitesimal point throughout their sensorium; a process that is liminal in nature and in the centre of every cell. In the Yoruba's cultural memory lies a memory of a lost divine-sublime state that our art seeks to bridge, both for the individual and the community. This is further layered with, what Gilroy calls, the slave-sublime. He specifically refers to music and comment saying:

> The sacred and the profane come together in musical events where their differences dissolve into the sublime and the ineffable. The link between the music and distinct conceptions of time that have a special political and philosophical significance (Gilroy: 1993, 203).

Contemporary peoples from Yoruba diaspora engaging with new musical and movement forms moved away from the need to express the slave-sublime or the blues-sublime to the expression of an urban-sublime where resistance was to 'Fight the power'; a single by Public Enemy from the revolutionary album 'Fear of a Black Planet'. Ngozi Onwurah also reiterated this sentiment in the British film 'Welcome to the Terrordome'. These pieces presented a radically digitised version of the Return Beat infused with politics and rage. The art of free styling by re-mixing, fragmenting

and montaging iconic symbols, became one of the dominant expressions of the urban-sublime where improvisation became a conduit for political transformation.

Performance Matrix: My life - my art!

There were limited templates for Yoruba British men growing up in London in the 1970s and 80s. Like a lot of second-generation immigrants, we had to deconstruct the institutional prejudice that saturates British assumptions. However, the process of developing my artistic practice has been influenced by observations that have been derived from transcultural principles, with critical tools drawn for different cultural paradigms that include Yoruba, Jewish, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Brazilian, Jamaican, Afro-America, English working and middle class cultural perspectives to name but a few. The process of evaluating and understanding philosophical perceptions inherent within these paradigms resulted in the practice of Urban Butoh by paying particular attention to:

- Performance techniques
- New effort values
- How practice as research can produce tangible ways of knowing things
- How untold stories can construct new transcultural narratives

Transcultural approaches are not the same as post-modernist discourses, though there are similarities; like in Postmodernist thought, I am not looking for universal form or meta-narrative. However, I am not experimenting with a hybrid collage in defiance of a singular storyline where, post-modern aesthetics seeks to reduce the significance of specific cultural traditions and discourses, thereby attempting to disrupt historical meta-narratives. My praxis can be seen as post-traditional, attempting to rescue native identity from the post-colonial condition that I was born into. In this sense my life is my art! A Live Art. Though aesthetically Postmodernism was an interesting experiment with no real moral imperative, its restless values of fluidity, change and progress with no reverence for its own past (let alone the past of the other) has informed much of our digital experience today, where all is temporary and surface. This post-modern aesthetic has set the tone for rejection regarding the rhythmic tempos of the elders, whose embodied knowledge and memories traditionally are said to be ripe. Instead, we favour the restless tempo of the green shoots of youth, not yet mature but fast with its own transformational energy. Post-modernism essentially marginalised other cultural values, narrative and perceptions native to other civilisations by imprisoning them as relic in museums: collections of the past in its relentless march toward global hegemony. This leaves little space for untold narratives, with different ways to know the world, preferring instead to accelerate towards the post-human.

An implication of this youthful acceleration at the beginning of the 21st century is an unprecedented quickening regarding digital activity within urbanised societies. Our world is accelerating and with it a deep dislocation and disassociation with all our movements and metabolic functions. Why do we need effort, if we can just use our mobiles? Certain movements are becoming redundant, urgently requiring redefinition

with regards to effort values. Within urbanised societies, there are percepta, which, defined by Alfred Whitehead, are different perceptums with holographic effort forms linked to our present cognitive and visceral experience (Whitehead 1979: 16). These are forms that are being forgotten as a result of digital replacements. According to Whitehead, percepta come in two broad categories:

- Firstly, there are our personal perceptions in our now-ness – a full holographic, sensuous, geometrically structured perception in the now.
- Secondly, there is our direct bodily connection to the different layers in our physical environment; our proprioceptive animalistic feedback facility that heightens our visceral awareness of ourselves as a living human being.

Developing our percepta constitutes an embodied way of knowing (Whitehead 1979: 181). The youthful pace of new digital innovations, as stated above, has started to encroach on our subjective sense of being, becoming and performance.

Communication in Space: Resistance and Empire

Before Nigeria was colonised in 1897 and formed by the British in 1914, great pains were taken to produce a written form of the language using the English alphabet system to protect aspects of our language. Principally, this was to produce a Yoruba version of the Bible; however, some of the subtle sensibilities of communication rely on socio-cultural contexts. The nature of proxemics in nonverbal communication is culturally encoded as the Yoruba people traditionally conceive of private and public spaces, encoded in the orate structure of the language with roots that go back thousands of years. Standard Yoruba as it is written today originated in the 1850s, first by the African Anglican Bishop in the Niger area whose name was Samuel A. Crowther born in Osogun 1809, Oyo State, Nigeria (Crowther 1852). He was an emancipated enslaved person who in 1864 received a Doctorate of Divinity from Oxford University. Although this was an amazing achievement, he was undoubtedly an instrument for the British Empire. Interestingly, pidgin English was the most subversive in spreading indigenous concepts; because by mixing basic elements of Yoruba and English language, communication could be hybridised. This served to both conceal and reveal information across large trade routes facilitating information exchanged amongst the subjugated. Now, in the twenty first century, in a troubled yet more confidently independent Nigeria, information communicated about Yoruba culture can be found on the Internet via social media as well as the Nigerian film industry

Taking Lefebvre's concept of space being a social product, social dances (movement in space) and social music (movement in sound/space) are both constructions in temporal space. The ability of Yoruba culture to survive under the utter humiliation of enslavement required a different way to construct the fractal social practices of Yoruba culture within a hostile geometric social space of European settlements.

Under the conditions of modern industry and city life, abstraction holds sway over the relationship to the body. As nature fades into the background, there is nothing to restore the total body – nothing in the world of objects, nothing in the world of action. The Western tradition, with its misapprehension of the body, re-manifests itself in increasingly strange ways; laying the blame for all the damage at the door of discourse alone is to exculpate not only that tradition but also 'real' abstract space. The body's inventiveness needs no demonstration, for the body itself reveals it, and deploys it in space. Rhythms in all their multiplicity interpenetrate one another. (Lefebvre 1994: 205)

The body's inventiveness in Yoruba diaspora specifically and African diaspora in general can be seen in Breakdancing and hip hop rhythms, jitterbugging and the swing beat and playing Capoeira, as well as the different rhythms conducted by the Berimbaus (a Brazilian single bowed instrument) (Lewis 1992: 135). The techniques and disciplines that underpin these principles of rhythmic practice, were, at their genesis, forms of resistance requiring a particular skill set, which includes an ability to negotiate while improvising:

- The precision of movement in response to rhythm
- Pathways in embodied space that curves, coils and spirals around the Return Beat
- Clear characterisation utilising symbolic postures and stances
- The quality of effort in response to gravity
- A direct relationship with the audience as participant
- The scenography or design of the personal, local and general space

My research imperative is to create an aesthetic that truly represents the transcultural experience of Yoruba heritage in the context of contemporary Britain. This aesthetic, which re-conceptualises the philosophies regarding the knowledge system of my Yoruba ancestry called Ifa (Wenger, Chesi 1983: 74) call for a knowledge system as defined below. This system is underpinned by a fractal aesthetics that focuses on proportional self-similar repetition:

While fractal geometry can indeed take us into the far reaches of high-tech science, its patterns are surprisingly common in traditional African design, and some of it basic concepts are fundamental to African knowledge systems (Englash 1999: 3).

In 2005, UNESCO proclaimed the Ifa divination system in Nigeria to be a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage for humanity. The contextual themes of this intangible heritage are social practices and ritual. Themes of social space and ritual are significant regarding the Yoruba's production of space. Susanne Wenger in her book 'A Life with the Gods: In their Yoruba Homeland' says of Ifa:

If this jungle-arcanum is metaphorically compared to a mighty, mansion-like giant tree, with all its innumerable forms of animals and plant tenantry, Ifa

would be neither root, trunk, branch, twig, leaf, flower nor fruit of this tree, but the unimaginably complex network of veins and channels that permeates it throughout (Wenger, Chesi 1983: 74).

As I am indigenous to the UK and with Yoruba ancestry, I felt compelled to reclaim this heritage from a contemporary transcultural perspective. I use a 'practice as research' methodology in order to develop a critical framework for interactive situations, as a way to unpack and reconstruct narratives imprinted on me from my early childhood. Specifically, I do so in order to explore my different identities and how various personas would visualise and perform in different environments. At the heart of all these differences is my inherited experience of rhythm acting as a passive point of resistance with its self-similar fractal structure and underpinning my experience of temporal space.

The fractal structure will be easily identified when we compare aerial views of these African villages and cities with corresponding fractal graphic simulations (Englash 1999: 4).

Ifa: An African Knowledge system

Now that UNESCO has declared Ifa as one of the 86 traditions in the world to be recognised as a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage for all of humanity, it was beholden on me to explore its theological and philosophical structure with my colleague Olalekan Babalola. However, I needed to understand Ifa's number system, which is based on the number two:

Some accounts report that Africans use a "primitive" number system in which they count by multiples of two. It is true that many cases of African arithmetic are based on multiples of two, but as we will see, base-2 systems are not crude artefacts from a forgotten past They have surprising mathematical significance, not only in relation to African Fractals, but to the Western history of mathematics and computing as well (Englash 1999: 89).

Ifa has symbolic associations that are attributed to numbers and their algebraic operations, which, in this case, inform the sequential concepts of creation and the various divinities called Orishas. When considering the number sequence generated from Ifa, there is a complex formula of 'squares' and 'roots' that contains a matrix of possibilities. Let me explain: if we take the process of bifurcation, the spiralling process through a progression of fractals, by taking a single unit that splits into two, it gives birth to twins. If we then take this process and iterate it with the resulting two units, splitting them and so on, it will give a number series 1. 2. 4. 8. 16. 32 and so on, towards an infinitesimal point similar to the iterations in the Mandelbrot set. However, the mathematical series that informs the matrix of the Yoruba oracular system Ifa is based on square sets of two binary numbers within a matrix of possibilities:

1.   Sqr(2)   = 4
2.   Sqr(Sqr(2))   =16
3.   Sqr(Sqr(Sqr(2)))   =256

The three numbers 4, 16 and 256 are extremely significant in Ifa. These numbers frame a progressive nested narrative concerning a comprehensive body of poetic oral literature. These poems, called Odus, can be described as providing a complete volume of poetic verse; a repository for the complex discourses surrounding the creative metaphysics of Yoruba peoples and our relationship to life and the universe. These sets of poems underpin Yoruba culture, both in Yoruba land and her diaspora. The substance of these complex contents will not be discussed here. The matrix both reveals and conceals the entire poetic wealth and practical beauty that informs the spiritual tradition within Yoruba culture. Mathematically, Ifa uses a symbolic system that has a geomantic base of 16 characters with a binary root for divination; where 1 (the smooth surface of a cowrie bead) symbolises that which has been revealed and 0 (the split surface revealing the interior on the other side) symbolising what is concealed. In the random generation of divination, the Ifa priest can arrive at the symbolic configuration, which triggers a verses/poems associated with the sign. Let me unpack this sequence further. The template for the first symbolic character is a set with 4 possibilities like 2 bit in a classical computer which consists of 2 digits with each digit having 2 possibilities, 0 or 1. This creates four possible pairs of binary digits. However, unlike a classical computer, which can only select one number at a time in sequence, this set of eight numbers act as if in a super-positioned cubit state (Morello).

1.   Sqr(2) = 4 pairs
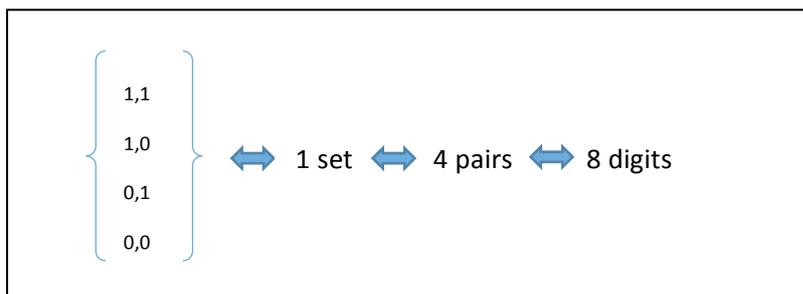
The second iteration takes the set of four pairs, which is then squared to create another symbolic set with 16 permutations; *Sqr(Sqr(2))*. The 16 permutations in this geomantic set each have names and symbolic values, which I omit because I am particularly interested in the article with the matrix. Notice that in the first iteration, the two vertical columns are different, whereas in the second iteration of the two, vertical columns are duplicates.

2.   Sqr(Sqr(2)) =16 sets of 4 pairs

```
    ⎧ 1, 1    0, 0    0, 0    1, 1
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    0, 0    1, 1
    ⎪
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    0, 0    0, 0
    ⎪ 0, 0    1, 1    0, 0    0, 0
    ⎪ 0, 0    1, 1    0, 0    1, 1
    ⎨                                    ⟷  1 set  ⟷  16 sets of 4 pairs  ⟷  128 digits
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    0, 0    0, 0
    ⎪ 1, 1    1, 1    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎪ 1, 1    1, 1    0, 0    1, 1
    ⎪ 0, 0    1, 1    0, 0    0, 0
    ⎪
    ⎪ 1, 1    1, 1    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎪ 0, 0    1, 1    0, 0    1, 1
    ⎪ 1, 1    0, 0    1, 1    0, 0
    ⎩ 1, 1    1, 1    0, 0    1, 1
```
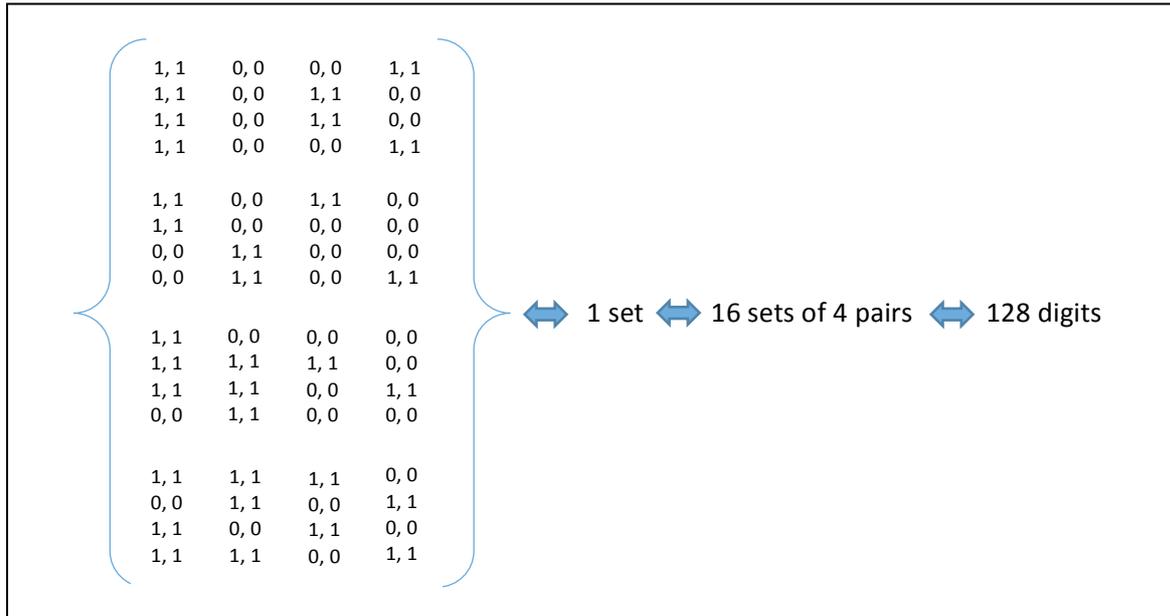
In the final iteration, the 16 twined permutations are squared again to generate further sets of potential symbols giving a symbolic collection of poems that consists of a 256 poetic set of verses.

   3.   *Sqr(Sqr(Sqr(2)))*.

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    ⎧     1,1      1,0      1,0      1,1
    ⎪     1,1      1,0      1,1      1,0
    ⎨  1  1,1   2  1,0   3  1,1   4  1,0        ⟷
    ⎪     1,1      1,0      1,0      1,1
    ⎩
```
… Etc. Up to 256 sets of 4 pairs each with particular meanings held in a super-positioned cubit state within the memory of the Ifa priest (Babalawo)
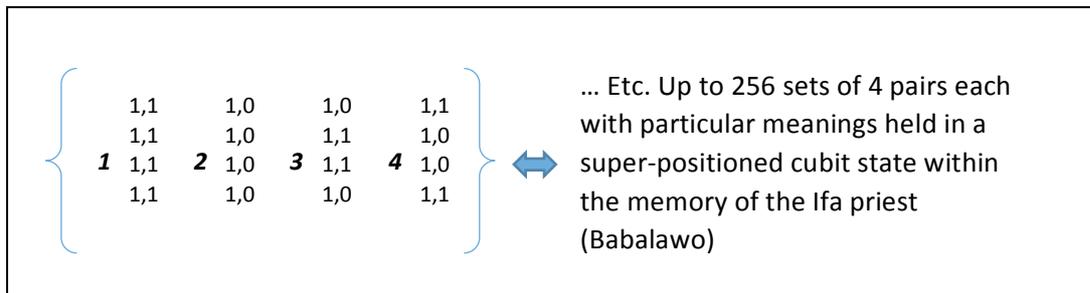
The significances concerning all these poetic verses are beyond the scope of this article. However, I wanted to highlight the importance of understanding all the patterns rhythmically where the recursive iteration in the super-positioned state entangles all its perceived possibilities (Morello). In order for the Ifa priest to locate one set of four binary pairs, he performs an act of random generation; for example, they throw an Ifa chain of eight cowrie bead called an 'Opele' (Wenger, Chesi 1983: 79). There seems to be a fascinating and potential correlation between the processes of Ifa and Morello's concept of the quantum bit or qubit. This will require further research.

Approaching a definition of Urban Butoh

The speed of change leaves no time for ergonomic or ecological adjustment, regarding human metabolic and psychological functions. A desire to rescue and

redefine effort by decelerating the movements of our human bodies by re-engaging with the experiential framework of our physical journals is the starting point for understanding the practice of Urban Butoh as I have defined it. By slowing down, fragmenting and rearranging improvised movements associated with urban living, we can create more space/time for our metabolic adjustments.

In order to articulate some principles behind the term Urban Butoh, we must first define words Urban and Butoh by looking at their respective concepts.

- **Urban** has two meanings and are both relevant. The first relates to social characteristics concerning cities as distinct from rural environments. Social spaces constructed in urban environments give rise to particular social practices associated with civil engineering. Streets in the city have multiple social uses with different daily and yearly cycles (Lefebvre 2003: 139). The concept of cycles, repetitions or recursive iteration in temporal space brings us to the second meaning, which relates to popular dance music that has emerged from African, Afro-Caribbean and African American social dance music (Gilroy 1993: 106); a music that emphasises the return beat within a rhythm. The Return Beat is an experience of a curved rhythmic experience. It is a cyclical embodied experience of returning to an existential centre within the performer's physical journal.
- **Butoh** is a Japanese dance theatre practice that blends performance art and movement with visual statements. The subject of Butoh draws from themes that resist literal meaning, where there is an active courtship of grotesque imagery and taboo topics. Traditionally Butoh works with slow movements with the performer's body covered in white makeup. The dynamics of the movements are driven by psychodynamic processes. The practitioner is in constant contact with a perceived potent nothingness as their movements emerge and metamorphose through change in temporal space (Fraleigh 2010: 101).

As this is a newly defined term, the two words of Urban Butoh uniquely describe my praxis of an embodied sublime flux in movement; a state encountered through improvised acts that fragment perceptions of mundane movements, reconstructing them in phase with urban perceptions of rhythm. Essentially, Urban Butoh seeks to challenge how effort is applied to a percipient's movement in temporal space.

The four levels of effort below are my choreological explications of how we can employ different levels of effort:

- Energy: Application of effort towards levels of force, dynamics, speed
- Rhythm: Application of effort towards timing and recursive iteration
- Posture: Application of effort towards gravity and alignment
- Stances: Application of effort towards expressing emotions and gesture

In our age of digital acceleration, how we manage our digital and creative efforts with the ecology of our environment is an important question for our era. The urge to perform something is a crucial moment at the start of the devising process: a feeling of confronting a blank canvas. At that moment, I perceive the presence of a divine sublime; a nothing-ness. It is only a fleeting feeling, decelerating into a meditative state of now-ness.

Dancing while Walking

My first encounter with Butoh led me to explore its improvisational riches, as I had already developed my own practice called 'the dance of the Return Beat' (Taiwo 2013: 491). It was with the movement practice of Hironobu Oikawa and his transcultural Artaud method; at his studio Maison d'Artuad in Tokyo that I clarified the technique of mindful embodiment underpinning improvised movement practice. I came across this pioneering movement artist whilst working on Ukiyo, an interactive performance installation directed by Johannes Birringer with DAP LAB. The choreographic installation fused dance, sound, design and digital projections. We went to Tokyo as a team to research and we studied with Hironobu Oikawa, who during 1950s, explored a new performance style by combining ideas from Artaud's theatre of cruelty and the aesthetics that emerged from philosophies within Buddhism. He did this while studying Decroux method in France; this was the beginning of his Artaud Method. Hironobu Oikawa's methodological approach has inspired many artists including Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, who both develop Butoh.

The literal definition of the term Butoh is similar to Yoruba's translation of Alarinjo (Soyinka 1993) and is equally as complex within its own evolutionary cultural context. In a conversation I had with Dr Dennis Eluyefa (2015), the term Alarinjo is defined as being a traditional dance-theatre troupe who use 'carved masks and other representations of ancestral spirits' (Soyinka 1993: 135). According to Eluyefa, Alarinjo is literally a compound of three words - Ala, Rin, Jo.

1. **Ala** is a prefix when addressing a person that simply means 'someone' who owns, has or does something. It depends on its use in a particular word or phrase.
2. **Rin**, shortened from nrin; which means walking.
3. **Jo** is also shortened from 'njo', dancing.

Putting the three words together therefore is ala nrin njo (A person who is dancing while walking). The shortened phrase forms the compound word alarinjo. The origins of the word Butoh has a similar meaning:

> *Bu* means dance *to* means step. Simply speaking, butoh is a dance step: also known as Ankoku Butoh; darkness dance (Fraleigh & Nakamura 2006: 1).

Hijikata tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo were two of the foremost pioneers of Butoh, both emphasising different aspects of the performance practice. Hijikata's practice was structure and choreographed while Ohno had a more spiritual and delicate improvisational style. However, both pioneers resisted the aesthetic hegemony of Western influences:

> During a frustrating period in his dance career, Hijikata saw Ohno, twenty years his senior, dance. He was captivated with Ohno's expressiveness: "for years the drug of Ohno stayed in my memory", Hijikata wrote. Together Hijikata and Ohno would reject the ballet and modern dance of the west and champion a new dance that rescued "the Japanese body" on ethnographic grounds, also showing odd ticks, shaking, and exposing facial transformations, from the sublime to ridiculous. Metamorphosis became a butoh signature (Fraleigh & Nakamura 2006: 2).

This sentiment of rescuing the Japanese body on 'ethnographic grounds' was similar to the intentions concerning the development of social dances regarding the emancipated and post-colonised peoples in the African diaspora.

Meditation: Deceleration as progress

The classical phrase 'Festina Lente' (Ball 2015) presents us with an interesting oxymoron, as it means to make haste slowly. The phrase suggests that actions should be performed with an appropriate balance between urgency and careful mindfulness. If actions are hurried without due meditation, mistakes may be made and long-standing goals missed. Sociologist Fritz Reheis offers a similar concept that develops this idea of a creativity of slowness (Rosa 2013). He advocates not to capitulate to the compulsions of constant acceleration, but to instead discover its antithesis; a decelerated and self-determined social paradigm that promotes: Native time, rhythm of our lived bodies, our culture and sense of ecology. Meditation creates an internal space for me to consider personal struggles, whilst maintaining the different practices I am engaged in, contextualised by a cultural life in England. This is not only the performance of representation, but the performance of my existence. It wasn't until I was 17 that I discovered meditation as part of the martial arts practice of Wu Shu Kwan that I began to comprehend the difference between observing and being. This was when I first experienced the paradox of dilation in duration; of watching the day go by, while experiencing the nature of sitting. I experienced my embodied psyche slowing right down, simultaneously feeling duration speeding up. I am careful not to say time, as this is a concept of measuring duration that meditational practice seeks to dispute. This transcended state is what we were training for. It wasn't until I was 22 when I started T'ai Chi Ch'uan with Paul Zabwodski that I start to understand the deeper significance of meditation. T'ai Chi Ch'uan, a martial form, uses slow attentive movement as a way to understand meditation within the flux of motion. When I meditate, I decelerate by temporarily disengaging from the wind resistance of worldly priorities. When we examine what is meant by deceleration (Higdon 2011) we find it means to decrease an object's rate of

velocity regarding the rate of an advancing activity. We use the word acceleration to describe the changing rate in speed, the increasing rate of velocity. Physically, however, the change in direction of velocity, as in angular acceleration, results in the rate of change in angular velocity creating a 'centripetal acceleration' (Higdon 2011). This is a force directed toward the centre while the rate of change in angular velocity is described as a 'tangential acceleration' (Higdon 2011). I argue that the tension from this physical angular acceleration, both inward and out, can act as a cultural metaphor. Metaphorically speaking, this is a balance between the centripetal force towards dominant cultural patterns of habitual behaviour within our collective subconscious, and stability maintained through the tangential force of artistic practice that seeks to break free and challenge the centripetal pull of cultural assumptions. Both forces are balanced in this way, figuratively creating a stable gyroscopic motion in temporal space. This is a motion that produces a dynamic state oscillating between momentum and stasis within contemporary culture's temporal structures. Consequently, there is a potential danger when our minds become resistant to change, resulting in being drawn towards dominant modes of thinking:

> The extent to which time becomes a problem on this plane also depends upon the degree of routinization and habitualization, which in the late modernity seems to decreasing again. Nevertheless, everyday time has had to this day a mostly repetitive and cyclical character, since it is, as Giddens emphasizes, constitutive for the reproduction of social structures (Rosa 2013: 8).

When cultural deceleration in a material sense is seriously entertained, the actions and efforts required are on a whole different level! When working reflexively to decelerate actions, assumptions and the actions of others, I have found that it is effective when performed through workshops and regular classes: in other words, repetition is what decelerates habit. I feel strongly that 'practice' and 'meditation' are important ingredients when learning the art of Festina Lente.

What do I mean by Cultural deceleration?

We tend to attribute all our anxieties, franticness and a general lack of time on the immense technical acceleration we are experiencing at this time, which, 'at first glance appear to be the most powerful drivers of a ubiquitous social and cultural acceleration' (Rosa 2013: 67). The paradox is that our temporal scarceness is happening in spite of the fact that enormous gains have occurred as a result of technological advancement with its promise to create more time. Tools only provide new facilities; it is a change in social values that bring about social change.

> Even with respect to the tempo of social change, one should assume that a progressive quantitative escalation can lead to quantitative shifts in the constitution of social reality when critical threshold values are reached (Rosa 2013: 109).

We can see that in recent history, the actions of individuals and groups can have a profound effect by facilitating cultural deceleration, which, from my perspective, is as progress on the then dominant state policies of their time. Examples being:

- Rosa Parks, who became a powerful icon for the civil rights movement due to the fact that when she decided not to vacate her seat and move to the designated coloured section of the bus, she started to decelerate the psychological effects of demeaning segregation policies on the Afro-American sense of identity.
- Picasso's Guernica became an icon, not only for depicting the human tragedies resulting from collateral damage and bringing the horrors of the Spanish civil war to the world's attention, but also because the painting heralded the potency of an aesthetic perspective called Cubism in Western Art practice, therefore decelerating the dominance of a singular perspective.
- Nelson Mandela's achievements in deceleration, which facilitated in changing the policies of apartheid through democracy, by standing firm against racist policies that were culturally accelerating at the time.
- Emmeline Pankhurst's efforts decelerated the assumption of patriarchy that women should not have a vote. As the leader of the British suffragette movement, she helped women secure the right to vote.

Conclusion

For me, Urban Butoh creates a performance framework that celebrates the nature of deceleration as progress. It has allowed, through praxis, to critically reflect on the moment, enabling a process of researching untold stories of identity to reassess dominant cultural assumptions. One can argue that although underlying attitudes have not really changed with respect to the historical figures mentioned above, cultural policy has for those subjugated by institutional prejudice; as a result, some progress was made. Deconstructing recent history is important when we interrogate the performance of value, whether for the environment or global profit. Who speaks for the natural world? Who speak up for the voiceless? The controversial Dakota Access pipeline is part of a global economic model that has contributed to current conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The same was said for Saro-Wiwa Jr and Sr – who led the movement for the survival of the Ogoni People – they accused Shell oil of destroying the environment in their home region of Ogoniland in South Eastern Nigeria. In the face of such malevolent destruction, the movements of indigenous braves gave voice to the voiceless, potently asking questions to power.

The practice of Urban Butoh offers me a philosophy where I can slow down and take stock of the pace of digital acceleration. This is a place where cultural inheritance, which includes all nature's children, is not thrown away in search of the next youthful change. The practice allows me to attend to the moment, reflecting deeply about my multiple identities, whilst keeping a blank region in temporal space for future possibilities. The most important implication concerning this practice is giving myself the permission to take back critical ownership of my narrative discourse by engaging

in post-traditional research, from different and varied sets of ancestral resources not included in the dominant westernised academic and artistic cannons.

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Biography

Olu Taiwo is a senior lecturer in Outdoor performance and Performing Arts at the University of Winchester. He has a background in art, physical theatre, and martial arts. He has performed internationally, pioneering how PAR can explore the relationships between 'effort', 'performance' and 'performative actions'. Publications range from: The Return Beat in Wood (ed.), The Virtual Embodied (Routledge), Music, Art and Movement among the Yoruba in Harvey (ed.), Indigenous Religions in Cassell (2000), and to Art as Eudaimonia: Embodied Identities and the Return Beat in Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon (eds), Identity, Performance and

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