Life-Size Dance: Improvisation, Somaesthetics, and the Practice of Toru Iwashita

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Abstract: *Toru Iwashita, born in Tokyo in 1957, is a dancer specializing in Butoh and improvisational dance. From the 1980s until 2024, he performed with the internationally renowned troupe Sankai Juku while also developing a parallel solo practice. He continues to be active today, presenting numerous improvisational works Since the 1980s, Iwashita has also led dance therapy workshops, including long-term work at a psychiatric ward in Saga Prefecture. He has explored improvisation as a form of empathetic communication—with oneself, others, and the world. His "life-size" dance is based on everyday movements such as lying down, rolling, or standing up, rooted in his own experience of overcoming a mental health crisis by reconnecting with his body. Evolving from "dance as a scream" to "dance as communication," his improvisation seeks states where the self emerges and is pushed out through the body, moving beyond choreographed form or representation.*

Keywords: *butoh, dance improvisation, embodied experience, middle voice*

Toru Iwashita has been active for over thirty years in *Butoh*[1], improvisational dance, and dance therapy workshops. After leaving the Butoh company *Sankai Juku*[2] in 2015, he has continued to explore improvisation as a way of connecting body, self, and world.

In May 2025, during his workshop at Sophia University, participants lay on the floor, sensing their bodies against the ground. As I rolled and stood to the beat of drums, the horizontal floor seemed to turn vertical, and the space itself shifted. In August, he performed in Shibuya with saxophonist Taiichi Kamimura and bassist Masao Tajima. Their improvisation, titled Rock-paper-scissors-swirl, unfolded as a dynamic interplay of attraction and repulsion, filling the small theater with an intensity. In September 2025, I met with Iwashita again to discuss his practice. I began this conversation by outlining my background and explaining how I came to focus on the body and somaesthetics.

1 *Butoh*, or *Ankoku Butoh* ("dance of darkness"), is a Japanese avant-garde dance that emerged in the late 1950s and was initiated by Tatsumi Hijikata. Known for slow movements, grotesque or distorted imagery, and explorations of bodily and existential themes, it also draws on movement patterns rooted in Japanese farmers' and common people's everyday bodily labor. In this interview, Iwashita quotes Hijikata a few times.

2 *Sankai Juku* is a Butoh company founded by Ushio Amagatsu in 1975. Since beginning its international tours in 1980, the company has performed in more than 40 contries and 700 cities worldwide, playing a major role in bringing Japanese Butoh to global audiences.

The Body That Hurts, the Body That Dances

BAE: I used to be an elementary school teacher, and I came to believe that before anything else—even studying—what matters most for a child's future is learning to face themselves through their "body." That's what sparked my research with "body" and "education" as keywords.

IWASHITA: Was there a specific situation that led you to think that?

BAE: Children often have difficulty controlling their emotions and bodies. When they get angry about something, they just burst out, like "Waaah!" I had to physically hold on to and respond to them. At that time, their bodies would become incredibly hot and sweat-drenched. I wondered what made the children react this manner.

IWASHITA: Yes. That reminds me, years ago, at the "AI HALL (Itami Municipal Theater Hall)" in Itami City, Hyogo Prefecture, an annual event called "Play," meaning both to perform and to play, was held. I was involved with it for approximately ten years. The AI HALL had a very avant-garde program in art, dance, and theater back then, and this was around that time. It continued before and after The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, but I couldn't continue my association because my physical stamina had declined slightly. My performance was usually about an hour, during which I would constantly interact and dance. Previously, under the guidance of another artist, the children would create an installation and set up the space. I would then enter the situation through dance. There were also musicians present; so it was improvised music and dance with children present. The children created all sorts of things, expressing themselves, their impulses reaching a peak. At first, they watched the dance from a distance but gradually drew closer, following me around. Then, rather violent behavior would start to emerge, such as hitting, kicking and smacking. I felt that the children were releasing something they must have been suppressing daily, letting it burst during that time. That is the feeling I got. Some children were very gentle; they patted, stroked, or spoke softly. However, I recall that the violence seemed to have intensified each year. This was particularly true after the earthquake. It felt like it grew stronger after the disaster. Even adults were affected. I think the trauma lingered, and it was an event that couldn't be easily resolved. Through the dialogue between the bodies, I sensed that the children's bodies were pushed to their limits.

BAE: You have been engaged in both workshops and solo dance performances for over 30 years. You have conducted workshops for a long time in the psychiatric ward of Konan Hospital. Did you feel any mutual impact or change in both patients and yourself, and what motivated you to continue?

IWASHITA: I believe there has been mutual interaction. I'm often asked if there are any specific impacts on the patients, but there is no concrete "evidence." I have written essays, but they are entirely in insider language and written in a very closed discourse. I sent them to my close workshop participants and dance therapists for reading.

When I was 25, I fell into a severely depressed state, and couldn't move forward at all. There was a turning point; I was able to accept my body for the first time. There was no doubt that my body had always been there, but I had not really felt it before. At 25, for the first time, I could positively recognize that my body was here, that I was alive here and now. I chose to pursue improvisational dancing to do what I could with only this body. There were no other options, so I didn't care if I could do it or not.

BAE: That was after you had met the "Sankai Juku" and started working with them, right?

IWASHITA: That was sometime around 1979-80. In March 1980, Sankai Juku went to Europe and France, and had a successful run in Paris. Right before that, I had left Sankai Juku

and returned to the university.[3] After returning, I played in bands and did theater for a while. But that didn't work out either. It was a period in which I completely lost any means of self-expression and fell into a slump. I couldn't do anything anymore—express myself or connect with the outside world. I had lost that ability.

At this point, Iwashita traces the roots of his depression and helplessness back to his earliest encounter with the world. He recalls being born with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck—an actual event that later became a life-long bodily metaphor for his enduring sense of disconnection. His reflections reveal how low bodily self-esteem, from being poor at physical activities, shaped a deep feeling of alienation from his body and the world.

IWASHITA: When I was born, the umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck, and I was in a state of near death. The doctor untangled the cord and tapped me, and I started crying. From the very beginning, my encounter with the world was a bit off. I remember an entrance exam for kindergarten where we had to do skipping. The other children skipped perfectly, but I couldn't. I guess that it was a real emotional wound. I wonder whether it still lingers inside me. Even now, I am bad at things such as skipping.

Returning to the story, once I had accepted my body from that depressive state—accepting that it was okay just as it was—I could finally realize that even if I couldn't do skipping, even if I was bad at physical education, it was okay to have a body like that. I may be exaggerating, but the turning point at 25 felt like I had died and been reborn. Without that experience, I wouldn't have been here now. About a year later, I finally managed to get through it and perform an improvisational dance. It was only for about 15 minutes. I still remember that feeling.

BAE: Fifteen minutes, all by yourself?

IWASHITA: I had a friend who played the piano with me. He's a composer now, but back then he was doing monthly concerts at a venue, and he let me join. That was my start. There were about five people in the audience then, all of whom were my friends. After the concert, everyone returned backstage to talk to me and share their thoughts. That was very heartwarming. My closest friend said, "Iwashita stood up, then your left leg moved really well," but I don't remember moving like that. My body had moved naturally. I think that spontaneous movements like those are the ideal state for improvisation.

Because of how it started, during my interaction with the patients at the Konan Hospital, I felt a strong sense of kinship, although it might have been my one-sided attachment. I had escaped my depression in this way. I thought, couldn't I share the kind of treatment or rehabilitation I had been doing for my own body with them? I wrote a letter to the then Director, and immediately received a reply saying, "Yes, please do." That was in 1989, and I have continued almost monthly ever since.

BAE: Do you get good feedback from the patients?

IWASHITA: It is difficult to say. Some patients may stop coming or leave midway, whereas others continue. Earlier, I mentioned the "standing up" movement. Recently, a woman with severe schizophrenia has been actively participating lately. During the workshop, she sat on a mat for the entire duration. She had knee pain and back problems and was unable to move. However, one day, at the very end—I always give patients a white fabric to move freely with—she took her fabric, twirled it around, and rushed right into the group. It was incredible. She'd been sitting the whole time but standing up like that at the end was amazing.

3 He rejoined the company in 1986 and continued performing with them until 2024.

BAE: Before participating in your workshop, I had fewer opportunities for improvisational dancing, and perceived it as something avant-garde, unfamiliar, and in a sense deviant. In your workshop, we carefully practiced basic movements such as lying down, rolling over, sitting, and standing up. This made me realize that these are the foundations of all movements, including dance. As a result, the fear I felt about improvisational dancing and the image I had of it being far from myself became more comfortable. Basic movements are truly important.

IWASHITA: I agree. In that sense, it doesn't matter whether you're a dancer or not; we're all the same. In terms of "being a body" and "being accompanied by the body," everyone is equal. That is where I always want to be. Then, disability or illness becomes irrelevant. The woman I mentioned earlier—her movements in themselves were not as beautiful or graceful as a so-called dancer's. However, even in the small, shrunken state of her body, a tremendous strength emerged, which was very moving. There are various types of dancing. However, it's okay to have this approach to dance that is not measured by high physical ability, large movements, speed, or beauty. I would like to dance this way. Moreover, not moving is also a form of dance; something is still being expressed there. You can feel that.

What Emerges, What Is Pushed Out

BAE: I was impressed by your story of how, during your depression, you learned to affirm your own body, which led to the beginning of your solo improvisational dance. I also want to highlight that the first actions you engaged in were "cleaning" and "walking." Have you ever experienced everyday actions like "cleaning," "cooking," "walking," "eating," or "washing your body" as dance?

IWASHITA: That is a very difficult question. "What is dance?" I do feel a desire to see various everyday actions—cleaning, cooking, eating, and washing the body—as dance in the broadest sense. But actually, what I currently perceive as dance is something that slightly deviates, shifts, oversteps, or distances itself from those everyday actions, movements, and gestures. Purposeful movements are movements done for a purpose, to accomplish something, but when you strip away that "something," the movement itself is what we should call dance.

BAE: So, for example, would you say that dance begins when one moves out of a state of lying down—being aware of the contact between the body and the ground, or focusing on various bodily sensations?

IWASHITA: No, that is the foundation. In doing so, something spontaneous and organic emerges from within the body. "What emerges, what is pushed out." This is what I refer to as a dance. To achieve this, relaxation, release, and letting-go are necessary. That's the purpose of this work. Doing this allows you to become aware of various sensations, not just within your body, but also externally—what's happening now, what you hear, and what you see. The body opens up.

"What emerges, what is pushed out." Iwashita cites this remark, along with other ideas of Hijikata, in this interview, in his published essays (Iwashita, 2001; 2019), and in several unpublished memos he shared with me. The expression forms the core of his philosophy of dance. Although he did not clearly remember the exact source, the phrase appears in *Utsuwa to Karada: An Approach to Hijikata Tatsumi's Ankoku Butoh Techniques*, a study by Kayo Mikami (1993), who trained under Hijikata from 1978 to 1981. Drawing primarily on training notebooks kept by three Hijikata's disciples, including her own, the book conveys Hijikata's ideas in his own words. According to Mikami, the essence of Hijikata's Ankoku Butoh lies not

in "expressing" something but in yielding and allowing oneself to *become* something. Among Hijikata's remarks, he emphasized movements that "emerges, that are pushed out" (Mikami, 1993, p.132), highlighting not movement produced by the will to express but movement that inevitably overflows when one reaches an expressive impasse. Iwashita's thinking resonates deeply with this philosophy of movement.

BAE: I believe that guiding people to experience this "what emerges, what is pushed out " is one of your goals in workshops. Do you use any specific methods for this?

IWASHITA: It is all about taking it carefully. Slowly, layer by layer, I want to create a situation, a space where participants can gradually focus on their own bodily sensations.

BAE: In the university session I attended, you also played the drum. Do you use that often?

IWASHITA: We do it in complete silence, but sometimes we deliberately use the drums or other instruments. However, I don't use ready-made songs. When live sounds are heard in real time, they create a co-equal relationship with the bodies present on the same plane. That is, where improvisation lies. It is not something premade; it is something performed for the first time in that moment, a sound emerging for the first time. The body encounters that, and I think that's incredibly important.

BAE: So, first, you carefully sense your body, and then spontaneous movement emerges, which leads to interactions with the surrounding space?

IWASHITA: Yes. The people around you experience the same thing, although there are different degrees and variations. Consequently, the entire space becomes very soft, open, and warm, transforming into a gentle atmosphere. Initially, the air may feel stiff or cold, but by moving your body, the space itself begins to move.

BAE: So, do you feel this way both when you perform on stage and when you're in a workshop setting?

IWASHITA: Yes. I listen to my body while I perform, but in a workshop, I accompany the participants' bodies. While observing their bodies, my own body reacts in some way. I am not actually moving, but it feels like my body is reflecting them in real time, receiving a kind of reflection.

Dance as Communication and Connection

BAE: I know that in general dance forms, such as ballet or Japanese classical dance, there are set practice styles and routines. What about improvisational dancing? How do you practice in your daily life?

IWASHITA: I do stretch as part of my daily routine, which is mainly influenced by yoga. Then, I move improvisationally for approximately an hour. Earlier today, before coming here, I danced for about 20 minutes under the station exit. Also, today I'm thinking I'd like to move somewhere for about 45 minutes. You see I prefer to be outside. Outside, there are all sorts of things—people passing by, the sky, cars going by, and all kinds of things. It is about moving while feeling these things. The movements themselves don't change that much, but the sensations in my body do. Today, I have moved into this corner space with square walls, and what I feel in that space influences my movement. If I have my back to the wall, the front is open, and I can see people passing by; if I face the wall, I can't see that but still see the sky. The interaction changes. It is interesting. However, this doesn't mean that I'm doing street performances; it's not about expressing something to the people or the place. For most passersby, it probably just makes them think, "What on earth is that person doing?" Or maybe they don't even notice at all. But very

rarely, would someone speak to me. That genuinely makes me happy. I am driven by the desire to be connected with someone, to become one with the world. I feel as if I can't quite encounter the world properly, can't really connect with it, and that's why I want to be connected. But this feeling is subtle. Even when I'm dancing, there are moments when I feel connected, but it's only for an instant. It vanishes immediately. That's why I keep dancing.

BAE: Seems to me that the feelings of "wanting to connect" and "being connected" come from an enormous sense of "not being connected." But maybe most people just are not sensitive enough to that feeling of disconnection?

IWASHITA: I think it's because most people live their daily lives without issues, just going about things calmly. I cannot do that. This might be my biggest problem, and perhaps that's precisely why I feel the urge to dance. So, in response to your earlier question about whether I ever feel everyday actions as danse—actually, I don't. This is a wish. I do want to feel so, though. If I did, then maybe I wouldn't need to dance the way I currently do. If I could find contentment in simply living each day, there would perhaps not be a special need to dance. Everything would be a dance. If I acquired the sensation of becoming one with the world, my desire to dance would probably fade.

Actually, there was a woman who had a difficult-to-treat form of chronic depression. She was told that it would probably never go away. Initially, she exhibited very powerful movements. However, as her life changed, she went through various things; now she doesn't dance in any special way. However, she says she sees her daily life as "a dance to barely survive." This phrase has become a shared language between us. She always replies with it in her emails. She still intends to live each day that way. That makes me incredibly happy. Even though she doesn't dance anymore, holding on to that feeling makes each day precious, doesn't it? I hope I can live like that. For me, it's a wish and an ideal. I cannot do it right now.

Another woman participant from the workshops at the Konan Hospital wrote a letter after she got discharged. What struck me was this line: "Back then, I could dance because I was so ill. But now my heart dances. After leaving the hospital, my heart began to dance. So, I don't need to dance like I did back then anymore." Indeed, some patients at Konan Hospital suddenly burst into dance when their conditions are severe. As their condition improves, they stop dancing. That happens quite often. It's strange, isn't it? I always wonder what dancing really is.

BAE: In your workshop, it was not like "dance freely," which differed from my original image of improvisational dance. The dance began with basic movements such as lying down and rolling over.

IWASHITA: Ultimately, this leads to spontaneous movement. I think that was also the case during that session; eventually, everyone ended up standing in a certain setup.

BAE: You used a couple of metaphorical images.

IWASHITA: Having one or two of these helps you get started. Even within a bounded framework, despite its limitations, I think there is freedom within that. Sometimes, I even think that it might be a way to become freer. Therefore, when working on a choreographed piece, you have to execute the choreography perfectly; but if asked whether there is no freedom within that, I don't think that's true. There is freedom within it. As you just said, even if someone says improvisation is being free, there's a kind of constraint where you think, "I don't know what to do."

This reflection on freedom within structure also resonates with Iwashita's experience in Sankai Juku, where he devoted himself to choreographed work—a practice that, at first, seemed irreconcilable with improvisation.

IWASHITA: I returned to Sankai Juku in 1986 and remained there until recently. When I first returned, I saw improvisation and choreographed pieces as completely opposed and mutually exclusive. Though I could say my body connected the two. Back in '86, there was a very painful period for me at Sankai Juku when it came to dancing choreography. It was because there were choreographers, directions, obligations, and compulsions to perform what they had created. I recall feeling terribly distressed by that; but looking back now, I realize that I chose that path myself. It was my free will. I wonder now, why I couldn't dance that way as I had chosen it, rather than as the choreographer's creation.

I have been involved with Sankai Juku for a long time after that. There was a piece called "*Toki* (the time)." Back then, the world premiere was always in Paris. It ran for a week. It was the final day of the world premiere. It was an extremely intricate piece which was meticulously crafted. Yet, mistakes would happen somewhere. Timing being off, a movement being wrong—subtle things, things only the performers and their partners might notice. But I just couldn't quite get into it properly. Only on that final day, after it ended, while I was showering and washing off the white makeup, I thought, "Ah! Today was perfect! A 100 percent performance." In that instant, I realized, "Ah, this is how it should be." Until then, I thought improvisation and choreography were completely different, even opposing things. But that wasn't the case. I realized that my dancing with Sankai Juku was all on the same stage and connected. At that moment, I wondered, maybe now I am free? It sounds dramatic, but until then, I had been feeling constrained by Sankai Juku's stage. However, by dancing without making any mistakes, I felt an immense sense of freedom within myself.

BAE: You mentioned practicing yoga, and you include bodywork techniques in your workshops. Do you practice any other somatic techniques?

IWASHITA: Just yoga and qigong. I learned about them when I was young. Now, I just keep doing them, interpreting them in my way. When I learned about them, they just felt right for my body. I might have tried other things but if they didn't feel right, I just couldn't stick with them. Other activities such as musical bands or theatrical drama neither did work. Bands require multiple people. You can't form a band without other members, right? That's where it stopped for me. If I truly had the desire to perform, to make music, I think I would have done it alone. But I have not yet reached that point. However, at the turning point at the age of 25, I started alone. It made a huge difference. It was about solitude and being a solitary individual. I think that standing at that point was important. Precisely because of that, I think the desire to "connect" became clearer. This is contradictory too, but I seek solidarity because I am a solitary individual.

Dance in the Middle Voice

BAE: Being alone is what allows us to connect—that's a powerful statement. You quoted Hijikata, "Isn't being born itself improvisation?" (Iwashita, 2001) Ancient Greek had a "middle voice" that was neither active nor passive, with "to be born" being a well-known example. Do you think "to dance" would take the same verb form?

The middle voice originates in ancient Greek grammar, which posits it as an intermediate category between the active and passive voices. Forms of the middle voice also appear in languages such as Sanskrit and Latin. Unlike the familiar active–passive opposition in modern grammatical systems—to act versus to be acted upon—the middle voice indicates a different

axis: it designates actions or states that are intrinsically attributed to the subject itself. While this usage is common in Greek, in Latin it survives only in a limited set of verbs, such as *nascor* (to be born), *morior* (to die), *patior* (to suffer/undergo), and *loquor* (to speak).

In the interview, Iwashita's notion of "dance" likewise does not arise from the dancer's explicit intention to dance, nor from being compelled to dance by an external force. Rather, dance appears when something within the self manifests of its own accord. It is neither active nor passive, but emerges in a space between the two. The concept of the middle voice may therefore offer a useful framework for articulating this mode of emergence.

IWASHITA: The state of dancing, as I reflect on it now, what would you call it? It feels like moving through these states—sometimes active, sometimes passive, or sometimes drifting through an undefined realm. A strange sensation, really. You can't pin it down to one position; it's always shifting. It makes me wonder whether living itself might be like that.

BAE: Being born is surely also about the baby having its own will while simultaneously being pushed out.

IWASHITA: Exactly. I think it's both. There must be areas we still don't fully understand. I sense that. Sometimes, you move actively (Iwata leans his body forward slightly while twisting and extending his arm), and other times, you're pushed like this (leaning his body back and retreating). Sometimes, it's unclear, and you can't tell which is which. However, what I can say for sure is that it's all about sensation. We need to look more closely into what state that sensation is in; but no matter how much we analyze it, that sensation is here now, existing as it is. I don't think that it can be analyzed. There's a saying that you can't understand or divide the world by splitting it up. You can't understand it; you can't divide it. That's where dance certainly operates—in the undividable. I think that's what it seeks. Segmenting, dividing, breaking things down endlessly into finer parts—I think that's how the world's becoming increasingly fragmented now. But that's not actually the case. It's about connecting those parts.

BAE: From your explanation, I can now see how dance moves between active and passive states. Do you think there are other examples of these verbs from daily life? For instance, "walking" is mostly active, yet there are moments when it feels like we're somehow "allowed to walk." In your view, are there other everyday actions that straddle both active and passive states?

IWASHITA: As previously mentioned, stripping away the purpose of an action changes everything. Everyday actions, movements, and gestures, are socialized gestures. These are movements within norms; therefore, any movement that deviates from social norms is suspicious. Suspicious person! Why suspicious? Because you can't tell what they're doing. You can't categorize it. You can't properly name it. It becomes movement that defies labeling. So it can be a bit frightening too. Even everyday movements such as walking are usually heading somewhere. However, what happens when you eliminate that sense of heading somewhere? Just walking. The next part is this: slowing down. If you reduce speed from the everyday pace to an almost unlimited degree, it ceases to be normal walking. In this state, your bodily senses become incredibly sharp. You feel all sorts of things through the soles of your feet. You can perceive information around you that you couldn't feel before. It's fascinating. Things you would pass by at everyday speed; you can now see again, right there. The world is speeding up increasingly these days, but this is the opposite—slowing down gradually. Even so, the middle voice is a wonderful discovery.

BAE: Well, yes, the existence of middle-voice verbs in ancient Greek grammar has been

drawing attention in Japan for several years[4] .

IWASHITA: I wonder if this aspect might not be limited to Greek but could also be present in our daily lives.

BAE: That's right. The classification system is limited to active and passive; therefore, we fit things into these categories.

IWASHITA: Yes, they end up being one or the other. But this is a truly remarkable discovery.

BAE: Finally, when you also quoted Hijikata in your memo, "What emerges, what is pushed out, that's what's important, " you described something embedded within us before socialization and institutionalization as a "vast darkness." The experience of that vast darkness surfacing and being pushed out might not necessarily be pleasant. What kind of experience is that? Also, do you think that practice or training is needed to draw it out?

IWASHITA: The "vast darkness" being pushed out. As I mentioned earlier about the patient who stood up, I felt that there was deep inner turmoil within that patient. Practice or training was not needed to draw it out. It just happened that way for that person, and that darkness was suddenly visible. Therefore, even if you practice or train, it's not necessarily guaranteed that such things will be drawn out. But I do feel that everyone carries great darkness within. I sensed it in that patient, but surely, everyone lives with something like that. When they die, they return to that darkness.

BAE: Do you sometimes feel that what emerges from within yourself is also darkness?

IWASHITA: Whether what emerges from within me comes from darkness... that's quite a deep question. I might not have reached that level yet. But what I feel isn't just from within my body, this skin bag filled with blood. Something I sense also comes from outside my body. For example, the sensation in the soles of my feet that I treasure now—it's a connection from the ground, something beyond, and outside. The movement comes from there. It "comes" "rises" "ascends," or "stands up." I imagine that, at its source, there must be a vast darkness.

Based on this interview, somaesthetics principles were found in Iwashita's approach to improvisational dance. His practice begins by de-purposing everyday movements—lying down, sitting, standing, walking—and slowing them to the point where one can focus on their felt qualities. From this state, interaction with the environment naturally unfolds: with the floor, the physical setting, the surrounding air, the situation, and the presence of others. Movement then emerges spontaneously in response to these relations.

The question "Why do we dance?" usually presumes a voluntary act motivated by emotion or intention. Yet in the interview, Iwashita emphasizes that he dances not because of an external cause but because movement inevitably overflows from within. This understanding resonates with somaesthetics, which highlights the body's intrinsic ambiguity (Shusterman, 2012). The body is both subjective and objective, sacred and animal, burdensome yet the very medium through which action becomes possible. Iwashita's dance also shares this ambiguity of the bodily experience.

Gibson's concept of affordances (1979) further clarifies this point. Affordances refer to the action possibilities that the environment allows to an organism; they neither reside solely in the environment nor solely in the individual, but emerge relationally. Thus, even when we initiate

4 According to Kinoshita (2016), the notion of middle voice in Japan was introduced in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly within human studies and anthropology, through interpretations of *das Mediale* in Walter Benjamin's language theory and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy of play. Nishimura (1989), for instance, argues in *Phenomenology of Play* that modes of existence in which subject and object cannot be clearly separated—such as "play"—are fundamentally intermediate. Since the 2010s, philosopher Koichiro Kokubun (2017) has offered a more precise account of the middle voice based on Émile Benveniste's linguistics, bringing renewed attention to the concept, especially in relation to the modern emphasis on will.

an action, that action is shaped, guided, and invited by the environment's structures, textures, and resistances. This relational dynamic complicates any simple distinction between active and passive modes of bodily agency.

As Iwashita describes in the interview, the origin of dance emerges in this relational, ambiguous space. By attending deliberately and closely to the sensations of basic postures and movements, one can embody subtle impulses that arise without intention. Dance begins with this heightened somatic awareness, but it becomes aesthetically refined when even thas focus softens and movement is allowed to emerge on its own. In this sense, dance is not something the dancer does but something that arises through the reciprocal interplay of body, sensation, and environment.

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