

30th May 2016

A Body in a Farmer's Market

Witnessed: May 14, 2016. 11 AM

Written: May 30, 2016

By Linda Belans [<https://www.blogger.com/>]**Holding the Gaze**

[<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-A1OrD3Zcpe4/V0u-LA4YdUI/AAAAAAAAAPA0/D2bdF8gg4F8SJxdMSVmCRU-0lIXXyieaQCK4B/s1600/woman%2Bholding%2BEiko%2527s%2Bgaze.JPG>]

Eiko (L) with a Durham Farmer's Market shopper

There's a fragile body moving ever-so-slowly through time and a space, where it doesn't seem to belong. Shoppers stop. Shoppers stare. Shoppers move closer. Shoppers avert the Body's presence.

There's a Body moving through space and time, stopping to seek another body's eyes, as if needing to belong. A shopper holds the Body's gaze. An older woman in a white hat suddenly dances with the Body. A boy smiles. A shopper weeps. In these moments, the Body becomes HER.



[<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-O5ODltmywTg/V0u-f6jrKml/AAAAAAAAAPA8/XQgPNWWgIKQVZgjGN1HZG0yRJSpi45xXgCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Band%2Bme%2Bfarmers%2Bmarket%2B5-14-16.jpg>]

The author receiving a peony from Eiko. Photo:Ron Janssen

The Body/HER intermingles with children, adults, vegetables, vendors, families with their out-of-town visitors, musicians on the lawn, sign posts, artisanal cheeses.

New building construction looms as backdrop where a giant red crane seems a curious witness to this moment.

How we observe, participate, indeed experience this Body's intrusion, depends upon whether we are in [Brian Eno's Long Now](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sSJPh5D6m_sJ:longnow.org/essays/big-here-and-long-now/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us) [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sSJPh5D6m_sJ:longnow.org/essays/big-here-and-long-now/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us] – "... the recognition that the precise moment you're in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future," or the Short Now – this moment, this second that we are in has no connection to any other. Like a digital watch -- what I refer to as flat time-- that tells us which second and minute it is, as opposed to round time, an analogue watch that shows us what part of an hour or day this moment resides in.

The Body moving through the Durham Farmer's Market both fuses our own mind, brain, heart and body, and separates them into disparate parts. Sorts them in and out of focus and alignment, from concrete to metaphor. This dissonance of fusion and dislocation seems congruent with how [Eiko makes work](http://www.amazon.com/Eiko-Koma-Time-Space-Empty/dp/0935640975) [<http://www.amazon.com/Eiko-Koma-Time-Space-Empty/dp/0935640975>] (page 65).

I often go to Japanese
language – to poems. All
the Japanese language uses Chinese
ideograms, each
of which
visually embodies
a meaning,
practical and abstract.



[[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ll-](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ll-cR1FX4gAV0u_bx-KT11/AAAAAAAAAPBY/GxMq5T17g3MBnczRr2W4Ndr2GluQ3LI6gCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Bwith%2Bconstruction.JPG)

[cR1FX4gAV0u_bx-](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ll-cR1FX4gAV0u_bx-KT11/AAAAAAAAAPBY/GxMq5T17g3MBnczRr2W4Ndr2GluQ3LI6gCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Bwith%2Bconstruction.JPG)

[KT11/AAAAAAAAAPBY/GxMq5T17g3MBnczRr2W4Ndr2GluQ3LI6gCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Bwith%2Bconstruction.JPG](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ll-cR1FX4gAV0u_bx-KT11/AAAAAAAAAPBY/GxMq5T17g3MBnczRr2W4Ndr2GluQ3LI6gCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Bwith%2Bconstruction.JPG)]

That sense
of the double
image of practical and abstract
gives us a fertile ground for our imaginings
beyond language's
communication use.

This duality is constantly present during her performances, placing them at odds with one another. At least that was my experience, and has been my experience over the past 32 years that Eiko has been holding my gaze each time she has appeared as Eiko & Koma, and in the past year as Eiko.

One could write reams, or a haiku, about the experience of Eiko's work. I won't do either.

I hadn't thought about Eiko holding my gaze until she named it later that evening, with what felt like a sense of urgency, before leaving an impromptu dinner table (*see side note*). Like a shift in intention during performance, her body turned toward me, her spine elongated, her voice lowered to a solemn tone. She now held *my* gaze, woman to woman. The others at the table seemed to disappear. "You turned 71 today, Linda, and I have to tell you this." Eiko, in her heavily accented voice, then unfolded a story about a poet friend who, after attending seven consecutive performances, died suddenly the following day.

"I realize that I held her gaze for seven days. That I hold people's gazes. And that's important. And I need to tell you this."

It felt profound, heavy and deeply personal when she made that offering. And like her work, I received it both abstractly and practically. Several beats of loaded silence hung in the air.

"Do you think I'm going to die?" I asked. "No." She responded. "I just need you to know that I am aware of you watching me over these 32 years that I have been holding your gaze."

I am still digesting this. It still makes me weep.



[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-_ZIHVGLIW98/V0u_6mxyKEI/AAAAAAAAAPBk/5MsjdNISR-w2ky7Dpez2PqoyXEUqDCOmgCK4B/s1600/holding%2Ba%2Bpeony.JPG]

Side note: *It was a gloriously improvised day: a sudden decision to go to the Durham Farmer's Market that morning; an impromptu invitation by Eiko to join her and her friends for lunch that spilled over into an impromptu invitation to join [Jim Lee](http://bambooturtle.com/) and me for my 71st birthday dinner.*

Questions



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-B_dm9gk9NZg/V0vB-FgptJI/AAAAAAAAAPB0/I6YigPV1BFEJpShfyg0logGSv4tvoCQnACK4B/s1600/Chris%2BVitiello%2BEiko.jpg]

[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-B_dm9gk9NZg/V0vB-FgptJI/AAAAAAAAAPB0/I6YigPV1BFEJpShfyg0logGSv4tvoCQnACK4B/s1600/Chris%2BVitiello%2BEiko.jpg]

Photo: Chris Vitiello

It might be tempting to place the shoppers in a box: privileged, kale-eating (when did kale become the vegetable that describes a demographic?) and mostly white. They were described that way by one writer, with an accompanying image on his FB page: “Eiko in the midst of happy white people building their condos and buying their kale.” (It got a lot of likes by a lot of white, kale-eating people I know.)

But this description is dismissive of the Stories each of these bodies carries, and by extension, what they bring to the Body in the farmer's market.

Why did one woman weep when Eiko set her gaze on her? Where did that young boy's deep empathy and kindness come from when he offered Eiko's dropped flower back to HER? What experience drove the elderly couple to walk behind the Body, yet somehow ignore HER, as she made her way down a car-barricaded road? What prompted a mother and father



[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-WNYTzLH-_Mo/V0vCSTNKp2I/AAAAAAAAAPB8/ZXEc1gtBoJkh7477HRz8fpd8M31STofKACK4B/s1600/boy%2Bhanding%2Bflower%2Bback%2Bto%2BEiko.JPG]

to suddenly pull their free-wheeling children close to their own bodies when they saw this tiny Kimono-draped Body, nearly obscured by arms full of kale, approach? Why did some people actively ignore the Body while others, especially children – and dogs – were magnetically drawn to HER?

Was the Body merely an oddity that offered a momentary interruption to the flow of the weekly shopping and community experience? Or was it a metaphor for interrupting the binarism that social media and news media have spawned?



[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-hOZAc3lf4mg/V0vCtzecMol/AAAAAAAAAPCI/auCl2B7tRZomebmo78Sr_nzG469ofqaTwCK4B/s1600/parents%2Bholding%2Bchildren.JPG]



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-7PpFv9A7Sks/V0vCw8F_kkl/AAAAAAAAAPCQ/VYQYw0Da85UQbjs6lfKqgSgRoZeU-jKBwCK4B/s1600/dog%2Bsniffing%2Beiko.JPG]

Whose Story might shift as a result of seeing or interacting with this apparition? Is face value enough or do we have to find deeper meaning in order to seem, well, smarter and more erudite? What if the Body slamming into a sign post makes a
inawomansvoice.blogspot.com/2016/05/a-body-in-farmers-market.html



[[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-bl_EWpDKF1g/V0vDADHI78I/AAAAAAAAAPCc/M-j3iVSf3tY-QkqduYi5WgxdTmTycCW0QCK4B/s1600/eiko%2Bslamming%2Binto%2Bsign.JPG)

[bl_EWpDKF1g/V0vDADHI78I/AAAAAAAAAPCc/M-j3iVSf3tY-QkqduYi5WgxdTmTycCW0QCK4B/s1600/eiko%2Bslamming%2Binto%2Bsign.JPG](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-bl_EWpDKF1g/V0vDADHI78I/AAAAAAAAAPCc/M-j3iVSf3tY-QkqduYi5WgxdTmTycCW0QCK4B/s1600/eiko%2Bslamming%2Binto%2Bsign.JPG)]

child laugh? What if it makes an adult laugh? Is it OK to laugh in the presence of conceptual art? And what did it mean that the dog felt compelled to investigate this Body draped over a bolder-like sculpture? Does it really matter that there was a Body in the market?

Responses

Yes, it does matter. It matters if the fact that as time telescopes May 14 further into the distance, the work itself seems to come closer, assume more prominence and meaning. (I had not planned on writing about A Body in a Farmer's Market, but the imagery and associated feelings got louder and smelled stronger over time, and I found myself needing to write about it.) And as flat time replaces round time in our psyches, art has a vital place in our lives.



[[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-TUaj2v5SMpM/V0vDUU1N28I/AAAAAAAAAPCo/wFctVDSchHEwxqkqbFB-hva2PMXvMwHACK4B/s1600/city%2Bsigns%2Band%2Beiko.JPG)

[TUaj2v5SMpM/V0vDUU1N28I/AAAAAAAAAPCo/wFctVDSchHEwxqkqbFB-hva2PMXvMwHACK4B/s1600/city%2Bsigns%2Band%2Beiko.JPG](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-TUaj2v5SMpM/V0vDUU1N28I/AAAAAAAAAPCo/wFctVDSchHEwxqkqbFB-hva2PMXvMwHACK4B/s1600/city%2Bsigns%2Band%2Beiko.JPG)]

In a post that just slid by my FB screen, [President Obama](https://www.facebook.com/newshour/videos/10154228096603675/) [https://www.facebook.com/newshour/videos/10154228096603675/] said in response to a young girl's rap during his recent visit to Viet Nam:

One of the important things about art is that it teaches you not to just think about yourself, but it puts you in the head of other people. So you start realizing someone else's pain or somebody else's hopes. And you start realizing that we have more in common. If I listen to a Vietnamese rap, and it connects to the things that I'm feeling, now I feel closer to a country on the other side of the world.

As [Eno says](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sSJpN5D6m_sJ:longnow.org/essays/big-here-and-long-now/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us) [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sSJpN5D6m_sJ:longnow.org/essays/big-here-and-long-now/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us] :

And what is possible
in art becomes
thinkable in life.
We become our
new selves first
in simulacrum,
through style
and fashion and
art, our
deliberate
immersions
in virtual worlds. Through
them
we sense what
it would be like
to be another
kind of person
with other kinds
of values. We
rehearsed new



[<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-CwLSLZQbqrw/V0vDn5M79QI/AAAAAAAAAPC0/fttjuEYKxbAVDMcT1Ofx2TLEL-HkIMAhgCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2Bamong%2Btrees%2Bwith%2Bonlookers.JPG>]

feelings and sensitivities.
We imagine other
ways of thinking
about our world and
its future.

That's the abstract of what happened with A Body in a Farmer's Market. Or, was it just a body in a farmers' market on a Saturday morning?

Author's End Note



[<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-vp44N13IVPc/V0vEJOyE5rI/AAAAAAAAAPDA/fcuc-TbUFnQGAGC9zVNpTWWHJadFZ4QlgCK4B/s1600/Eiko%2527s%2Bcrane.JPG>]

I'm writing this at my outdoor table where Eiko sat on the evening of May 14, 2016, with [Jim Lee](http://bambooturtle.com/) , Hofstra Professor Ron Janssen, [Jody Cassell](http://www.movingoutolearn.com/) , and Dana Livermore. The space is arranged here today with a crane Eiko made for me that evening, now peering into [Eiko & Koma: Time is Not Even Space is Not Empty](http://www.amazon.com/Eiko-Koma-Time-Space-Empty/dp/0935640975) . The [crane](https://books.google.com/books?id=iBSDddO-9PoC&pg=PA114&dq=crane+symbolism&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjqnJiQv4DNAhWI5SYKHSk0BHEQ6AEIHjAA#v=onepage&q=crane%20symbolism&f=false) , a symbol of longevity and enlightenment, sat in witness to our rich conversation, and as I write this piece.

Linda Belans, writer/poet/dancer, wrote about dance for nearly 40 years starting with the NC Anvil, The Spectator, WUNC radio, and finally the Raleigh News and Observer. She created the *Talk About Dance* series that coincided with ADF seasons and was a Fellow in and directed two seasons of ADF's Critics Conferences. She lives in Durham, NC.