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JOURNAL

INTERVIEW

*"Being Ready for What You Don't Know":
A Conversation with Beatriz Santiago Muñoz*
Ren Ellis Neyra and Beatriz Santiago Muñoz

DOSSIER

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or Drooling (Perspectives from Contemporary
Japanese Performing Arts)*

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Miki Kaneda

DOSSIER

PERFORMING HISTORY: SWALLOWING AND SPITTING, OR DROOLING (PERSPECTIVES FROM CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE PERFORMING ARTS)

The title of this dossier, “Swallowing and Spitting,” comes from a passing remark made by the dancer EIKO OTAKE.¹ Sitting across a table from me by the window in her home, overlooking the streets of Hell’s Kitchen in New York City, she was describing her thoughts on the idea of “performing history” over a bowl of cherries. As I understood it, the cherries nourish the body and delight the taste buds, but at times there are bad fruits that disgust. This is how the body performs history as a relationship between partial acts of incorporation and purgation, modulated by taste and other survival mechanisms. Performances do not merely represent history. They are also constituted by it. In KAREN SHIMAKAWA’S words, “the stories of the past that we tell not only produce the present but produce the subject in the present; the way that you feel in your body is [also] produced by the story of the past that you come to tell.”² History in this sense is not so much an account of the preserved past as it is an accumulation of social relations articulated through everyday practice, discipline, resistance, and flights of imagination.

Performance renders these history-making relations personal, precarious, and vulnerable. Eiko’s analogy of swallowing and spitting outlines an understanding of history as an entanglement, that is, an unavoidable form of relations of “proximity and affinity,” as Joshua Chambers-Letson has described it.³ To unpack how “swallowing and spitting” connects performance and history, it’s important to first note that Eiko said swallowing and spitting, not swallowing

or spitting. "Spit or swallow" characterizes a sexualized relation of dominance where spitting implies a form of violent rejection, while swallowing signals submission. By contrast, Eiko explained that in her analogy, "spitting is not so much a fast, violent act," but rather a kind of "droooooo-ling."⁴ Her description hints at the leakiness of historical transmission as a kind of elicit yet liberating entanglement, which betrays the false dilemma of "spit or swallow." Put another way, borrowing a phrase from Audre Lorde, the dual actions of swallowing and spitting transform the relations of power absorbed by an erotically vital body into a "replenishing and provocative force."⁵ Yet, the slippage between the two kinds of erotic affect present here are worth appreciating. Both "swallowing and spitting" and "spit or swallow" deal with the ways in which socially and historically legitimized power operates on the moving, performing, and listening body. Examining these relations of power through the lens of performance reveals how that same body may also resist power. From the acts of "everyday resistance" that Saidiya Hartman has described, to *butoh*, punk, kabuki, improvised music, and contemporary dance, performative practices have repeatedly demonstrated how bodily gestures channel both domination and resistance, often simultaneously.⁶ Through the idea of swallowing and spitting, with drooling in between, Eiko's analogy suggests that registering history (as both incorporation and selective rejection) in practice rarely presents an easy choice between one story or another. But where words fail, Eiko embraces the ambiguity, vagueness, and even meaninglessness that constitute the very gestures of her sense of performance as history.

This dossier foregrounds the work of dancer/choreographer Eiko, composer and sound artist Miya Masaoka, and experimental theater director Brooke O'Harra. Readers familiar with their practices may wonder about the juxtaposition of these three artists together, because, frankly, their approaches to "performing history" could not be more different from one another (Eckersall's essay in this dossier aptly describes their differences). Yet in grouping them together for the sake of this dossier, I draw on a methodology of "critical juxtaposing," Diane Wolf's and Yén Lê Espiritu's useful formulation for a purposeful juxtaposing of very different contexts or approaches in order to reveal interrelated points of connection that would otherwise have remained unregistered.⁷ Thus, the grouping of the three artists, while provisional, posits "performing history" both as a critical engagement with the past, and as the "history of the present"—in the sense of an ongoing performance moving into the future—without the two being mutually exclusive possibilities.

The present dossier grows out of a workshop between a group of artists and thinkers that included Miya Masaoka, Brooke O'Harra, Eiko Otake, Marilyn Ivy, Katie Brewer Ball, Peter Eckersall, Tyran Grillo, Ellie Hisama, William Johnston, Thomas Looser, and Karen Shimakawa.⁸ The texts assembled here partially document, and partially expand on these conversations about bodily ways of knowing history. Insofar as "Japan" served as a key rationale for the particular grouping of artists and scholars, the polysemic performances of Masaoka, O'Harra, and Eiko offered starting points to question, rather than affirm, a unified notion of Japan (as nation, as empire, as heritage, as tradition, and as aesthetic framework). In the spirit of "performing history," the relationship between this forum and the event takes up Philip Auslander's notion of "performative documents." Auslander notes, "Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance."⁹ Instead of merely records that describes the event as a thing of the past, these texts in their own ways *are* the event as well—an ongoing work in process as they continue to move between follow-up conversations, writing, citation, editing, re-reading, and circulation.

Each text here stands on its own, but they also relate to one another. The forum begins with three conversations, collaborative exchanges of ideas that weave together multiple voices. In this first section, dialogue as a method performatively demonstrates the centrality of relationships in entwining meaning and historical narrative.

Eiko and William Johnston exchange ideas about the history of their work together on *A Body in Places* (2014–), a performance-based project that combines dance, photography, video, and other forms of collaboration. Their discussion demonstrates how their work together unfolded as a process of documenting, editing, and refining, as they negotiated and dialogically worked through each other's ideas over months and years. At the same time, their conversation also reveals points of productive divergence in their methods, which are not as readily visible in live performances or photography exhibitions. Brooke O'Harra speaks with performance scholar Katie Brewer Ball about a 2007 production of playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* (1707) by Theatre of a Two-headed Calf, a group co-founded by O'Harra and composer Brendan Connelly. While the production gained notoriety as a punk-inflected modern American pop culture expression of kabuki, misunderstandings about cultural appropriation and authentic performance by scholars and critics were

not uncommon. In conversation, O’Harra and Brewer Ball discuss “American fantasies of adaptation,” a redacted performance invitation, and the body-to-body process of learning from a host of historical “masters,” which include YouTube videos of Preston Sturges films and punk as much as kabuki tropes. In the third dialogue for this dossier, composer and sound artist **Miya Masaoka** discusses her concept of “the vagina as the third ear” and embodied listening histories in relation to her project *Vaginated Chairs* (2016–). At first, Masaoka’s sound-emitting chairs might be taken as a regular sound installation. But the chairs and the provocative title encourage listening and dialogue between those who encounter them. The conversation between Masaoka and **Miki Kaneda** in this forum responds to *Vaginated Chairs* through a dialogue about listening, vibration, and the power of naming body parts.

Following these conversations, four individual contributions engaged in continued dialogue with the three artists’ work. **Tyran Grillo** offers a series of theses-in-motion about history as an ongoing performance, responding to, or rather “moving with,” Eiko’s performative practice. **Peter Eckersall** reflects on the artists’ projects to consider processes of “crossover from the medium of history into the body” in *butoh*’s complex relationship with its history of radical politics. **Thomas Looser** builds on Miya Masaoka’s thesis of “the vagina as third ear.” He introduces the idea of the “tenuous body” to counter the notion of history as a discipline of certitude: “It leaks, it’s unstable, and it interacts with its environment in ways that aren’t always reducible to known languages.” **Ellie Hisama** responds to Brooke O’Harra’s production process for *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa*. She reads O’Harra’s production as a feminist enactment of traditional kabuki, reckoning with the layered histories of domination over women’s bodies, both in Japan, and in the form of “postorientalist domination” by white Americans in the United States.

Embodied history is necessarily a living, pulsating history. Swallowing, spitting, and drooling—this is a history that moves, making visible, audible, and sensible the “enabling entanglements” of connection and collectivity it gathers as the preconditions for survival.¹⁰ There’s no way to contain it. It leaks out of the porous body, skin and orifices and all. While remembering the past, this history also projects into the future. As José Esteban Muñoz has theorized through concepts like queer futurity and his take on the “utopian performative,” the perspectives in this forum animate the possibility of performance to rouse a

“collectivity that is actualized or potential” in ways that are “relational to historically situated struggles.”¹¹ Creating history in this present thus involves a double movement. Each piece in the dossier also testifies to disciplinary and intellectual histories swallowed, which is to say, embodied as pleasure, as burden, as necessity, as violence, and as vital connection.

As the convener of this forum, I acknowledge that the framework—to consider the idea of “performing history”—is necessarily open-ended, perhaps vertiginously so. Yet to prescribe a more rigid framework for discussions about “performing history” would counter its potential as a call for—rather than against—entanglement and contending with the drooling mess of history. My hope is that this forum might make a case for a performative historiography that draws its present force from embodied knowledge and memory in combination with uses of the imagination as a form of ethical and political practice. This particular power of performance seems worth staying with, as a site where memory, histories, and the present can be entangled and complex, and at which new possibilities for productive coalitions and new forms of caring might emerge.

Notes

¹ Eiko is the given name, and Otake is the family name. In this text, I refer to Eiko using her first name, following the ways in which writers, curators, and journalists usually refer to the artist.

² Karen Shimakawa, in conversation during “Swallowing and Spitting History: Performing History as Experimental Practice / Perspectives from Japanese Performing Arts,” October 10, 2017. In a similar vein, Vilém Flusser’s framing of the relationship between history and gesture is also useful here. He writes, “not only does the gesture exist in history but history exists in the gesture.” Vilém Flusser, *Gestures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 66.

³ Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 185. While I cite Chambers-Letson here, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Jocelyne Guilbault, Sarah Nuttall, and Anna Tsing are recent scholars whose writings on tangles and entanglements in various ways have also influenced my thinking about the richness of the term.

⁴ Eiko Otake, in conversation during “Swallowing and Spitting History,” October 10, 2017.

⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2015), 54.

⁶ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

⁷ See Y en L  Espiritu and Diane Wolf, "The Appropriation of American War Memories: A Critical Juxtaposition of the Holocaust and the Vietnam War," *Social Identities* 19, no. 2 (March 2013): 188–203. By "grouping," I am thinking of Benjamin Piekut's useful distinction between a "group" and "grouping," in his study of experimental music. "Experimentalism is a grouping, not a group," he asserts, stressing how grouping is the result of an act. Piekut highlights the genealogical perspective of any act of grouping that begins by first asking, "How have these composers been collected together in the first place?" Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 6.

⁸ The original event, titled "Swallowing and Spitting History: Performing History as Experimental Practice / Perspectives from Japanese Performing Arts," took place at Columbia University on October 10, 2017. The program was organized by Miki Kaneda and Lemon Guo, supported by the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture, the Department of Music, Visual Arts Program, and Sound Arts Program. Special thanks to Alexander Barnett, Daniel Becerril, Susan Boynton, Kamari Carter, Kim Brandt, Katherine Forshay, Joan Hacker, Pamela Rodman, and Mengtai Zhang. For support at the publication phase of this project, I thank editors Michael Gillespie and Jonathan Eburne for their productive feedback, and I am deeply appreciative of Jonathan's enthusiasm, encouragement, and openness to experiment.

⁹ Philip Auslander, "Surrogate Performances: Performance Documentation and the New York Avant-Garde, ca. 1964–74," in *On Performativity*, ed. Elizabeth Carpenter, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180223204943/http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/surrogate-performances>.

¹⁰ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), vii.

¹¹ Jos  Esteban Mu oz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 3.

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The Unexpected Collectives of Japanese Intermedia Art, is forthcoming from the University of Michigan Press. The book takes intermedia (a kind of multimedia art) as a vehicle to examine artistic transactions and relations of power through the work of 1960s Japanese and American musicians. She is currently Assistant Professor of Music at Boston University.

Brooke O'Harra and Katherine Brewer Ball

NOT SO AUTHENTIC KABUKI

AN INTERVIEW WITH BROOKE
O'HARRA

I first saw BROOKE O'HARRA's work in 2008 with *Room for Cream*, the hilarious and shame-filled lesbian serial that she directed and co-wrote with the *Dyke Division of the Two-headed Calf* (founded by O'HARRA, JESS BARBAGALLO, LARYSSA HUSIAK, and LAURA BERLIN STINGER). Set in a coffee shop in Sappho, Massachusetts, RFC was a collaborative work that pulled from the queer, feminist, and avant-garde downtown performance crowd. I remember LEA ROBINSON and JIBZ CAMERON as dirty agro lezzie cops, FAYE DRISCOLL as a hypersexed vampire with crotch dance moves, and SACHA YANOW with her perfectly aligned bangs and giant



Brooke O'Harra. Photograph by Katherine Endy.

circular glasses. Room for Cream felt simultaneously fresh and anachronistic. And while there was a theatrical precedent for the serial theater form—with works by JEFF WEISS and others—the serial, like a TV program, struck my twenty-something brain as so unusual and delicious. RFC was like a homosexual Cheers, a place where everyone knows your name. But this was the collaborative, broken-down, queer version of Cheers where things rarely, if ever, find resolution. However, the irreverent humor and exposed quick-change styles that characterized Room for Cream were not new for O'HARRA. In fact, O'HARRA's production of the 1707 kabuki play Drum of the Waves of Horikawa, written by CHIKAMATSU MONZAEMON, which O'HARRA had developed and directed the year before, used similar tactics, only this time they were focused on the traditional Japanese form. Drum featured American actors performing an English translation of the Japanese play. Yet, instead of reproducing the movements and styles of kabuki masters, as is traditional in kabuki, O'HARRA and the company chose to study and repeat the gestural vocabulary of punk rock masters such as IGGY POP, DARBY CRASH, NINA HAGEN, and THE SLITS. Accompanied by the music of her Theater of a Two-headed Calf cofounder BRENDAN CONNELLY, O'HARRA's production maintained the highly dramatic kabuki form even as the English and American punk style yanked on kabuki's structural integrity. Drum premiered in 2007 at HERE Arts Center and won an Obie Award for acting. For the occasion of this interview, I sat down with O'HARRA to discuss Japanese performing arts, American fantasies of adaptation, and embodied practice.

—Katherine Brewer Ball

KATHERINE BREWER BALL/ *You were saying that the reason you like theater is because you like Japanese theater?*

BROOKE O'HARRA/ I played sports before college. I wasn't a theater kid. But I did have the opportunity to study Japanese language and culture at my public high school in Oregon. I continued studying Japanese in college; that's when I was introduced to Japanese theater. I also started studying Western theater around that time and directed a production in college that was deeply influenced by formal structures of Japanese theater. It was an American play by Jules Feiffer called *Little Munders*. My production had extra performers that functioned like a version of Japanese stagehands [*kuroko*]. The play was performed like a typical Western dramatic comedy—except these *kuroko* would enter the stage at emotional or dramatic moments and manipulate the actors to alter the stage picture. They would do things like literally flip the actor completely upside down. The current Broadway play *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child* actually uses a similar technique for some of their stage magic—but their stagehands are well concealed.

So, I had been planning to move to New York City and pursue theater after college, but then I thought, *I should go to Japan*. So I went to Japan with a job for the Japanese Ministry of Education and studied *kyogen* and *aikido*, and joined a *butoh* company. I also attended kabuki theater and experimental Japanese theater regularly. That was the true beginning of my theater training. In Japan, I was so

stimulated by the theater—both the experimental forms and traditional. Before being introduced to Japanese theater (and some experimental theater), I liked theater, but with trepidation. I felt plays were kind of tacky, or kind of phony. It felt as if there were a laugh track, but the laugh track was not my laugh track. I'm trying to describe a kind of alienation. And though Japanese theater is big and almost over the top in its presentation, it's also acute. The extreme specificity gave me a kind of permission to give in to it. It created openings in me, connections. I connected to it in ways that I could not connect to Western theater.

KBB/ *So when you refer to Western theater and acting, do you mean realism?*

BO/ Yes, I mean realism. But realism, what is that? It's not realistic, it is kind of stylized.

KBB/ *Yes, totally. But it pretends that there is an emotional transparency between audience and actors.*

BO/ Engaging Japanese theater profoundly affected the way that I think about theater in general. It opened my perception to the embedded codes of Western theater. Theater makers take for granted our heavy reliance on the "rules" of staging and dramatic structure. I would posit that the average spectator is blind to the conceits, codes, and conventions of theater. And because I became so invested in the codes and conventions of Japanese theater, I was able to revisit Western theater through

an appreciation for the exceptionalism of our own codes and conventions.

What also struck me was that traditional Japanese theater is codified to the extent it is today for political reasons. Kabuki plays were not always so codified. Kabuki was initially radical, open, and licentious. The art went through many changes and was subject to constant new laws, often as a result of intervention by shoguns and rulers. It was American intervention that forced kabuki theater toward extreme codification. Kabuki families were forced to protect themselves from American censors, but some argue that through self-preservation they also lost a lot.

KBB/ When did the American political intervention happen?

BO/ Kabuki has a long history of political intervention, but I am referring to changes after World War II. Kabuki was originally sexual and violent. In its earliest form, it was used to advertise for prostitution. It was also the first Japanese theater practice to incorporate true stories of regular people. But what matters is that kabuki narratives were developed during, and are about, imperial Japan. After World War II, the U.S. occupied Japan and we were insistent on erasing the imperial power of the emperor. General Douglas MacArthur's SCAP administration in Japan perceived that kabuki celebrated imperial ideas. A kabuki board was created, and censors came in and worked to codify the system and make it into a national treasure.

KBB/ The Japanese created a kabuki board?

BO/ Yes, they were advised by Faubion Bowers, who served as Gen. MacArthur's aide-de-camp. Bowers is credited as "the man who saved kabuki." He's also credited for introducing kabuki to the West. The plays that we have access to today are translations of plays written in the late 1600s and early 1700s made for academic purposes. Originally, they were passed on through companies of actors, from actor to actor (through the memorization of a role). Each actor family had a unique acting style and interpretation and superstar actors arose. Because the form was learned body to body, there was always a strict continuation of performance choices. Western theater education is also devoted to structure and rules.

KBB/ Like the well-made play?

BO/ Yes, or acting rules, like the three-quarter stance: that's where actors are told to turn their bodies slightly toward the audience. It makes no sense. It's like, why are you doing that? Like, stop standing like that. Can you just turn your body toward the person you are talking to? Actors do it because it's the first thing they learn about being on stage; they learn it in high school. Another "rule or code" I don't accept is the blackout between scenes, or like the blue-out. I could spend all day describing crazy things that people do in tech without asking because *that's how you do it*. Then there's our insistence on Aristotle; it is a given that we teach Aristotle as the dramatic code. But Aristotle was not setting terms for drama, he

was not prescribing a series of rules. He was a philosopher—plus we have cherry-picked the ones we like.

KBB/ Right, there is a desire to create a taxonomy and then stay faithful to it.

BO/ Yes. Kabuki is seductive because at its core are radical impulses toward social change. The visual aesthetics of kabuki were taken from the *kabukimono*—this was the name given to free roaming shogun-less samurais, who were living on the edge of society. They were often violent and were extreme in their presentation of themselves: they took to wearing women's kimonos, or wearing extreme hairstyles. They were punk rock. People were excited by them and feared them. The first kabuki shows were performed by women who costumed themselves in the style of kabukimono. So kabuki is bound to the aesthetics of outcasts and radicals.

KBB/ I am curious what American plays you were reacting to as kind of phony. Your work, and especially Drum, makes me think of postdramatic theater, of Reza Abdoh, the Wooster Group, work that emphasizes the visual over the literary. Is there something about literary that feels phony to you?

BO/ You know, I think it is not so much the literary, but the emotional landscape and this idea of characters and emotions bearing the fundamental power of the story. We have this idea in American culture that emotions are unwieldy and possibly unhinged. I refuse to

use the word "character" because character is trapped in this idea of your emotional world, or your background. With so many young actors, I say, okay, this is what's going on in the scene. And it is very clearly what is happening in the scene, and they would be like, but my character wouldn't do that. And I would be like, I don't know who your character is, but that person in this play is doing it.

KBB/ During the panel at Columbia, you showed an image of Jimmy Smits acting in a kabuki play at Brooklyn College.¹ Can you talk a little bit about why you showed that image?

BO/ Ahh! That photo! I struggle with talking about this because I have so much respect for the director of this production, Samuel Leiter. He is one of the few people who has written thoroughly about kabuki theater. While teaching at Brooklyn College, Leiter created this production of the kabuki play *Tenakoya*. The photo caption explains that Smits is "striking a *mie*" (a kabuki pose held to emphasize heightened dramatic effect) and is costumed and made up to look Japanese. This production is described by Leiter himself in an essay published in *Asian Theatre Bulletin* (1976) and is described in a book by Shirō Okomoto.² In order to make this show, Leiter went to Japan and recorded a soundtrack of a professional kabuki production live. He then translated the script and made notes of everything happening on the stage. He reconstructed the production with student actors at Brooklyn College, and the students performed with

the soundtrack of the Japanese performance underneath them. They basically imitated kabuki acting by inventing the gestures that Leiter had described in his notes. They imitated the vocal intonations. It was an experiment in mimicry. I find it misguided and . . . laughable? Horrible?

KBB/ *Like it's a fantasy of kabuki as something that you can just kind of put on your body.*

BO/ Yeah. It looks like kabuki, so it must be kabuki. But it undermines the core of kabuki, which is training and body-to-body transfer. It's crazy. But this wasn't the first attempt to have American actors imitate kabuki. In 1968, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Theatre Arts (IASTA) planned a production of an English language version of the kabuki play *Kanjinchō*, directed by the professional kabuki actors Matsumoto Kōshirō VIII and Nakamura Matagorō II. American actors would perform kabuki. The actors were trained quite hard, but the IASTA were so obsessed with the aesthetics of the Japanese form, including the costumes, that they had the actors do all kind of things beyond their physical capabilities like sitting *seiza* on their knees. If you do that from childhood, you can grow up and do it, otherwise it's painful. The day of the show, they brought these traditional costumes from Japan and the dressers came in and really dressed people in the kabuki costumes. But the costumes are typically worn very tight. The American actors were made to wear very tight wigs and costumes, so when they went out to perform they were in great

physical pain and couldn't really breathe. So a couple of the actors were vomiting on the stage and some fainted from the pain and lack of oxygen. Amazing! Was this kabuki? What would you call that event?

KBB/ *Right, it's more performance art than kabuki. And what you were going for in Drum of the Waves of Horikawa seems formally or representationally more complicated.*

BO/ Yes. Ahhh, but . . . that reminds me. . . . This thing happened with the Brooklyn museum that was so telling. What happened was that a person contacted us to ask if we could perform live at the museum in the spring while they had a Japanese art show up. We had been getting a lot of good pre-press for our show. There was even a mini documentary on NHK, which is like Japanese PBS. It would have been quite difficult to rebuild a show six months later for one event at the museum. We're all working artists, so to have everybody available to rehearse again is no small thing. But it was an exciting prospect to play at the museum, so we spent a ton of time negotiating fees and a schedule with them and our artists. This all happened before the show opened. Eventually the museum rep came to the show. They were carrying this little pocket guide to kabuki. You've seen these things; they're mini reference guides with pictures.

KBB/ *Like, they needed a guide to see kabuki?*

BO/ Yeah, they were picturing Japanese kabuki theater. Anyhow, we chatted before the show

and I explained a few things. But after the show, they just took off and purposely avoided me. I saw them, and I was kind of like, "hey," but they just pretended not to see me. They couldn't get out of the theater fast enough, and the next day they e-mailed me and to say it was not going to work out. They just cancelled everything.

KBB/ *Where was the performance supposed to be?*

BO/ At the museum. But what they saw was not acceptable. What did they want? Did they want something like in Jimmy Smits's picture of kabuki? I'm sure that was completely what they had in mind, this other production, which somehow looks and feels traditional.

KBB/ *It sounds like they wanted a little taste of Japan and not to have something be formally or representationally complicated. But you were working through a process and were in conversation with the form.*

BO/ Yes. Developing *Drum* was a long process. It took over two years. We worked on it in small sections through a series of residencies. We chose that specific play because it has been called the first feminist play. I'm not sure about that, but the storylines are about women being entrapped by men. And though the female protagonist is killed, we understand that the men in their sloppy passion, selfishness, and vengeance destroy their own chances at happiness. The play is definitely violent and sexual, but it also manages to be kind of funny. We were

going for process as opposed to product—and the process was about discovery, about playfulness, about engaging history and form in an open way, and about translating this story for an American audience. We were sometimes just so over the top. Like we changed the names just slightly to make them easy for English speakers to hear. Like the main characters became Eesogay Yougayman (Isobe Yugaimon), Hecouldkillyou (Hikokurō), and Get-it-on (Gen'emon).

This was mimicking the way Americans speak Japanese. English language speakers are so sloppy in their use of vowels. When speaking Japanese, you can't have sloppy vowels. We were essentially misvoweling, mispronouncing Japanese characters. It was stupid—I know—but it also made the names memorable and made the narrative easier to follow.

KBB/ *It seems like a question of translation, like, what does it mean to bring kabuki sounds and form to America? The mimetic strategy obviously doesn't work and is highly offensive in its own way. So this is another strategy that has to do with punk as a form. And you were trying to include a queer and feminist culture, while maintaining a deep respect for kabuki as a form that is attuned to sound and text.*

BO/ In a lot of kabuki plays, the characters don't even speak that much, so most of the text is spoken by the narrator. *Drum* has more dialogue than most English-translated kabuki plays. Also, kabuki music scores are not written down. There are specific counts

and techniques used by the musicians. Our composer, Brendan Connelly, created a sophisticated score. He wrote what he called "boxes of scores," which were groups of notes that could be played for each moment. There were 360 boxes total. And the actors and the musicians constantly triggered or cued each other. The movement and the music were intricate in a way that kabuki is intricate. It wasn't like, I play this note, this note, this note, and it ends exactly here. But instead the musician is watching an actor and responding to the actor and their interactions affect the sound and that affects the movement. It was an amazing way to work—immediate and alive. And this relationship that happens live on the stage is at the core of the performance of kabuki.

KBB/ *Maybe you could talk a little bit about what brought you to make Drum and how you're thinking about and reflecting back on the play eleven years later?*

BO/ I proposed a class to NYU, I feel embarrassed by the title now which was: "How does the Western actor enter the Eastern Play?" I would never call a class that now. But that's when I chose that play and began to engage it and all of its possibilities. Jess and Laryssa were in that class as students.³ It was very clear from the beginning that I am not a kabuki master. Kabuki is taught body to body by a master. The way I direct is actually like creating a language to create a way into the process. It's not like, *we do it like this, this is what this play means and this is how we're going to do it.* It's really like:

what is our approach? What is our language? How do we get inside of this work and find something? It was a slow, playful, methodical, and self-critical process with the whole company of actors and musicians and the composer Brendan Connelly. We worked for over two and a half years on building the show. First, we were like making up kabuki moves. But immediately we were like, this is bad. Faking kabuki moves is a bad idea! From there, we decided there would be no movement in the show that is not derived from the moves of a master, but we felt we needed Western masters, and that our masters should be accidental masters. The is how we got the idea of punk rockers. So, it's like this accidental vocabulary that we learned and codified, and made repeatable. And it was never I'm making kabuki. It was like, I'm creating a physical score from Iggy Pop doing that thing, or I'm learning the moves of Darby Crash of The Germs. So every move is taken from concert footage. A lot of it from the punk rock documentary The Decline of Western Civilization (1981).

The process was excruciatingly long and specific; I'd even call it precious. So after two years of making *Drum*, I was thinking about how to make a work that was the opposite in every way. That had almost no rehearsal, that did not depend on great skill or demand great specificity. This is how *Room for Cream* was born. It was a soap opera that depended on plot and the physical representation of queerness. And most importantly, it was a piece about something that I could claim to be an expert on. I had a special freedom.

Just last semester I taught a class called Advanced Performance Studio: Japanese Practice & Theory." This is a radically reconsidered version of the original NYU class. We start with the history of Japanese theater, and then study the treatises of noh master Zeami from the 1400s. He penned the core ideas of noh acting, ideas like learning "the true path to the flower." The flower [*hana*] is the core of your skill and your essence on the stage; he uses "essence" instead of presence. Zeami describes the elements of acting as skin, flesh, and bones. Zeami isn't prescriptive in his teachings. He isn't saying like, *do this, do that.* He's poetic and theoretical. When translating the concept like becoming the flower, I ask my students to consider these ideas through an understanding of Stanislavsky's system, or Grotowski's, or Artaud's. We're not asking: what is Japanese? But it's more like, what is the craft of the actor? How do can one transform their body? I ask my students to create a process for using Zeami's proposals on acting to approach a Western canonical play. I ask that they imagine another system where the rules of the world are based on these a new set of codes. Their work shouldn't be Japanese; they should imagine a different set of codes and parameters. But we also must interrogate the significance of cultural precedents and histories. It is important to remember that history, politics, and religion are embedded in form and the coding of stage languages.

KBB/ *So, thinking about ideas of cultural appropriation and American adaptation of*

Japanese forms today, how are you thinking about Drum?

BO/ There are certainly ways we failed—maybe mostly in how the work was described. I am excited about the process, but I think in the way I "language it" would be more thoughtful. I would have used the overriding term kabuki more thoughtfully. I also would have pushed back on some of the costume design choices that use Japanese style and clothes. But I also think that the piece was extraordinary in its own right. The demands it made on our collaborative process were profound, and I imagine they have informed each of our practices—because they allowed us to dismantle our codes and reconsider how we build a shared language with each other and with our public.

/ Notes /

¹ The image is from a Brooklyn college production of a play called *Terakoya* (1740s Japan). This production was done in the mid-1970s. Jimmy Smits is a professional actor known for his starring role in the American legal drama *L.A. Law*, which ran for eight seasons beginning 1986.

² Samuel L. Leiter, "Terakoya at Brooklyn College," *Asian Theatre Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (1976); Shirō Okamoto, *The Man Who Saved Kabuki: Fabion Bowers and Theatre Censorship in Occupied Japan*, trans. Samuel L. Leiter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

³ Jess Barbagallo and Laryssa Husiak performed in *Drum* and are cofounders of the Dyke Division with O'Harra.

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BROOKE O'HARRA co-founded *The Theater of a Two-headed Calf*. O'Harra developed and directed all 14 of *Two-headed Calf's* productions including the OBIE Award winning *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* (2007 *HERE*). O'Harra conceived, directed, wrote for, and performed in the Dyke Division's live serial *Room for Cream* (Four seasons—28 episodes) at *La Mama, ETC* 2008–10 and at the *New Museum* 2017. She is also the co-creator of a collaborative performance with artist Sharon Hayes; they are currently creating an eight-hour performance called *Times Passes* to be performed in Philadelphia in February 2019. Brooke O'Harra is full-time faculty at University of Pennsylvania.

Eiko Otake and William Johnston

PERFORMING THE HISTORY OF A BODY IN PLACES

Since their first meeting in 2004 at Wesleyan University, dancer and choreographer EIKO OTAKE and photographer and historian WILLIAM JOHNSTON, a historian of disease, public health, and environment in Japan, have, as of this publication, co-taught four semesters of a course on the history of the atomic bomb in Japan at Wesleyan University, and have traveled together to Fukushima four times. They have now also now presented over sixteen exhibitions of their collaborative project, *A Body in Places*. What follows is a dialogue about their work together. As JOHNSTON says to EIKO in their conversation below, “You and I have talked a lot over the years, but as our collaboration deepened talking became less necessary.” At times, it seems that BILL really can read EIKO’s mind. EIKO inserts a comment in a draft-stage document: “PHOTO OF ME DANCING LIKE KAZUO OHNO.” Out of the tens of thousands of images they have created together, she trusts BILL to know which that image is. In 2017, EIKO began a new phase of their project together with the *Body in Places—The Met Edition*. Introducing the new element of video, she performed pushing a cart projecting a seven-and-a-half-hour-long video that she created for each of the three locations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (*The Met Fifth Avenue*, *the Met Breuer*, and *the Met*). Such new phases once again prompt EIKO and JOHNSTON to enter into new discussions.

Dialogue foregrounds their process of co-creation. While a *Body in Places* began as a dance project, the photographs by Johnson take on new life in curated exhibitions or publications, long after Eiko's live performance. These images are created together, and *Body in Places* is both a dance project and photography series. The photographs are not merely "representations" capturing an ephemeral performance that would disappear unless caught on camera. Instead, they are world-making practices in action, as Eiko and Bill choreograph and photograph ways of knowing together. Bill writes, "in the process of our collaboration both of us have been influenced by the other. Eiko has changed the way I see possibilities of placing a body in a landscape or other environment in a particular historical context with the goal of evoking a particular reaction from the viewer."¹ In turn, Eiko says to Bill: "You observe many details that I do not even notice until I see your photos. I understand now how close observation is necessary in order to frame the objects thoughtfully." Eiko and Bill's conversation for this journal is now the second in a growing record of published dialogues between the two—they have more planned.²

These documents trace their collaborative process as it develops and changes over time. They also highlight contrasting opinions and diverging perspectives. For this iteration, the conversation takes the topic of "performing history" as a starting point, as they discuss *A Body in Places*. Eiko is the dancer, and Bill is the historian/photographer. But their discussion makes it clear that they share in the work of performance and the making and chronicling of history. "Performing artists work for 'now,' but by doing so they create history," says Eiko. Bill adds, "In a way, we are always history performing itself. It is what makes the study of history so compelling to me. What we are is a culmination of many historical forces, major and minor, all coming together in the ever-changing present." This conversation took place over several afternoons at Wesleyan's College of the Environment during which they talked over the subjects included here, and then edited their transcribed conversations to make a whole. As it took shape in the late spring and early summer of 2018, it too became a document of dialogue and change that took place over dozens of email messages, phone calls, and meetings.

—Miki Kaneda

WILLIAM JOHNSTON/ Since so much of our collaborative work together unfolds as a kind of dialogue, although not always in words, it seemed to me that it would make sense to write this piece in the form of a conversation. You and I have talked a lot over the years, but as our collaboration deepened, talking became less necessary. But at the event at Columbia University, you started something new with the photographs we created together in Fukushima. Can you describe how you made certain key decisions?

EIKO OTAKE/ When the curator and producer Miki Kaneda invited me to participate, I understood the theme of the event, "Performing History," as performing with eyes on and attention to history. I regard history as the timeline and accumulation of significant events and changes that happen to people and affect how they live. In the working group for this event, I also learned that in the academic field of musicology, the term "historical performance practice" implies "traditional" performance; "Performing History" in this case would refer to performing traditional works. Indeed, the two other participating artists, Brooke O'Harra and Miya Masaoka, had studied Japanese traditional art forms, including kabuki and koto, before, respectively, creating a contemporary theater and playing and composing contemporary music. It seemed to me that Brooke, Miya, and I, while sharing the notion of being contemporary artists, have had different relationships with the traditional

performing arts and different ways we related to history through our work.

Differences are good when multiple artists are present, so first, I wanted to be clear that I never studied any traditional performing art forms. When I saw kabuki, noh theater, and bunraku puppet theater before I left Japan at the age of twenty, I saw them only as aesthetic art forms that had little relevance at the time in my quest to grapple with the ills of the world. I was more familiar with the works of avant-garde theater groups such as Red Tent (directed by Jūrō Kara) and Black Tent (directed by Makoto Satoh), which sometimes incorporated the stories and the styles of traditional art forms, particularly those of kabuki.³ Seeing them made me realize that many founders of these art forms that were later called traditional were avant-gardists of their time, experimenters who created new art forms. Later generations established rigid rules and sclerotic styles from what used to be innovation. This is why I was not interested in the aesthetic value of the traditional forms beyond laying my eyes on them as I happened to come upon them. They did not need me, and I did not need them. In my youth, I was in a hurry being a rebel and busy in pointing out the wrongs of prewar, wartime, and postwar Japan.

However, I might have been subtly and unconsciously influenced by Japanese traditional art forms by just having been exposed to them

as I grew up in Japan. Channel 3 (NHK's educational channel) broadcasted traditional performing arts from time to time, and that distinct slowness was poised as an antidote to the popular, fast-paced programs by commercial networks. Though that difference was not meaningful enough for me to engage with, I recognized that a certain thing needs a certain length of time and a particular sense of time in order to fully happen. Thus, my motto is to perform as if I have all the time in the world but not taking any longer time than necessary. Leaving Japan at a young age, I always emphasized to our presenters that neither Koma nor I ever studied traditional work because I did not want our work to be seen as Japanese exports.

MOVING LIKE AN AMOEBA ON THE FLOOR OF A MANHATTAN PROJECT LABORATORY

EO/ Speaking of history, I was excited to learn that Prentis Hall, the space scheduled for this planned event, was a laboratory used by the scientists engaged in the initial steps of a massive, secret operation to produce the atomic bomb, which was named the Manhattan Project because of its initial location. For many years, I have been researching and teaching about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the artistic representations of the human experiences of those atomic bombings. I have long considered nuclear issues the most fundamental problem in the world in which we live. Following in the footsteps of my writer friend and atomic bomb survivor Kyoko Hayashi, I had visited the Trinity site, where the first

nuclear bomb was tested three weeks before the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Standing in the desert, I realized that the blast there on July 16, 1945 was not the beginning of the nuclear age. That day would not have come if a large number of scientists and engineers had not worked intentionally and tirelessly to produce that blast. The space the participants of "Performing History" would occupy was part of the very same space in which this nuclear age of unrelenting fear began.

The body is the vulnerable home of everyone's lives and the base of our creativity and perceptions. The body is also our measuring stick, visually and kinesthetically. So I was grateful when Miki asked me to teach a movement workshop as part of the event. The invitation came from her own experience of taking my workshop in the past. I usually start workshops by asking the participants to move like an amoeba on the floor with their eyes closed. People from different backgrounds becoming vulnerable together in this historical place would be profound.

Movement is essential for our living bodies. But it is not only our body that moves, but everything else, too. The Manhattan Project and the development of nuclear technologies, as well as the anti-nuclear movement, are also movements of knowledge and its application. In all movements, both individual and collective, momentum becomes a crucial element to which humans need to pay attention. I think it is important to question and hesitate while considering the power of momentum. Giving

a workshop in this particular place meant I could invite others to "chew," not swallow, those thoughts by lying down and moving slowly on the floor of that particular room, where scientists gifted us the grave weight of being human.

As for my presentation, I realized that I could try firsthand what I had been working toward, which were the performances at the Metropolitan Museum of Art a month later.⁴ My plan was to create a museum-day-long video from the photos you took of me in Fukushima during our four visits, project it, move its frames onto different walls, and perform with the projected images. My intentions were to "stain the Met's wall all day with the images of Fukushima" and to "perform beyond (overstay) my welcome." I wanted to intersect the histories of Fukushima and of my body with that of the Met. I wanted to paint the picture of "human failure" on the glorious walls of the Met.

Trying these ideas in front of a live audience before the Met performances was urgently necessary for me. Yet I did not want to use the occasion only to rehearse for the Met dates. Presenting my performing body as a conduit between New York and Fukushima in this humble-looking but historic place of the atomic age would make the significance of the Met as performance sites relative, which would



Figure 1.
Workshop at Prentis Hall, Columbia University, October 10, 2017. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

be good for me. The Met being the Met, I was worried about whether the audience and I might feel the fame and glory of the place would frame the performance as "important." A reputation built on branding, however, would not have been helpful for the quiet insistence that I wanted to bring into the full-day performances. Performing Fukushima in the place where the Manhattan Project began would connect the development of the atomic bombs and that of nuclear power plants. Doing that is performing history; it would enable me to address nuclear matters as the fatal "progress" that humans should have thought twice about before developing. And that would make the Met relative, another place where I would expand my experience. This is how I arrived at the event with the same costume I wore in Fukushima.

EO/ How was it for you to attend the event? You had seen the video I have been editing



Figure 2.
Eiko at The Met Fifth Ave, November 19, 2017. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

from your photos, but not the part from 2017. You also had never seen me performing with the video of your photos. And the event was new in its format, including the workshop, two other artists' works, and a group discussion.

WE ARE ALWAYS HISTORY PERFORMING ITSELF

WJ/ By training as a historian, I tend to think of things in terms of multiple layers and networks all acting simultaneously. The title "Performing History" immediately implied at least two things at once: the history that performs itself, and the performance of history by engaged individuals.

In a way, we are always history performing itself. It is what makes the study of history so

compelling to me. What we are is a culmination of many historical forces, major and minor, all coming together in the ever-changing present.

Our bodies are a performance of the genetic contributions we have inherited from uncountable ancestors. A game I used to play with myself while listening to academics I failed to find of interest was to imagine how many generations back our ancestors would have to go before the number became larger than the possible number of persons who had been alive at that time. If we have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, etc., after thirty generations we end up with over a billion ancestors. Of course, there weren't that many people alive at that time, around 900 years ago, so many of our ancestors have to have been related to each other. But in any event, our bodies

are the ongoing performances of all that ancestral history. Similarly, the objects in our world, our technologies, our cultural meanings are all the cumulation and mixing of our histories.

But performances also can consciously enact history. They often are events in which performers engage with a particular historical moment or practice from the past and make it into something new. In this way, performances can engage an audience with the past, and in doing so bring new meaning to the present; the hit musical *Hamilton* is a recent example of this kind of performance.

Performance can also engage critically with cultural history. I had known Miya Masaoka's work from her recordings of Thelonious Monk's music arranged for koto, of which she is a master player, and imagined that she would somehow be creating a musical piece in which history would be addressed in an original way. However, her conception of the vagina as a third ear was more historical in its discontinuity with musical history than with its continuities. I was less familiar with Brooke O'Harra's work, but soon discovered that she had seen into the origins of kabuki by integrating it with punk. Both reflected histories of rebellion in their inception, although kabuki's origins tend to be obscured by its grandiose performances today.

But for myself, the opportunity to engage in a project that called for a reconsideration of history through performance at a site where the Manhattan Project had started, at least in part,

was intriguing. It was with this in mind that I watched your performance in which you interacted with images we made in Fukushima and the space itself. History had come full circle, with the arts reflecting on nuclear history in a way that allowed the audience to be part of that history. By moving the projector, at times you projected the images onto members of the audience, bathing them in a historical light, while at the same time they stood in a space where nuclear power changed from an idea to a practice. The Met Fifth Avenue performance opened up other historical dimensions. Your performance was in a space surrounded by an exhibition that included drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, Dürer, Rembrandt, Tiepolo, Ingres, Seurat, and Matisse—all artists whose work I had long admired and whose historical importance is beyond question. It was moving for me to see our work projected on the other side of those walls, "staining," as you put it, the Met with our images of Fukushima and becoming a space in which you contrasted those works on paper with a day-long performance. In the end, we can say that our work was shown at the Met, if not quite "exhibited" there. But in my mind, which tends to think in the historical long term, there isn't a lot of difference between a day and a few weeks. And we do have the images of the performance.

CO-TEACHING, CO-TRAVELING

EO/ Now that we have completed our fourth semester co-teaching and have had over sixteen photo exhibitions of our collaborative work, would you review our history?

WJ/ We first met in 2004 at the Center for Creative Research meeting at Wesleyan University when you were among the artists looking for ways to forge relationships with institutions of higher education and their faculty. At that time, I wasn't sure who I was meeting since I didn't know your family name. But when I found out that you were Eiko of Eiko & Koma and you were completing your master's degree at NYU in atomic bomb literature, I proposed co-teaching a course. After we taught one semester together, you began teaching your own course at Wesleyan while we also continued to co-teach from time to time.

When the Triple Disaster of the Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima meltdowns happened, we both were deeply shaken, and you told me about your visit to Fukushima that summer. It came as a surprise to me, however, when in December 2013 you invited



Figure 3.
Plastic bags filled with radioactive materials surrounding a house in Maeda. Photographed on January 15, 2014. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

me to come to Fukushima to photograph you there. I did not hesitate a minute to accept that invitation, and within three weeks we were in Fukushima's evacuation zone.

That first trip was a real eye-opener. Much of Fukushima's once-proud farmland was covered with thousands of one-ton plastic bags filled with radioactive materials. Houses that the tsunami had damaged three years earlier stood with their radioactive contents still sitting where the waters had left them. The sight brought both of us to tears.

Our collaboration unfolded naturally while there. You had proposed that you perform in abandoned train stations while I photograph you, but on our first full day in Fukushima we found that the stations were not always either available or photographically promising. We did find that other locations seemed to invite your performance, and the project then morphed from "A Body in Stations" to "A Body in Places."

Since then, we have returned to Fukushima three more times. After sixteen exhibitions and the Met-commissioned work for which you created a seven-and-a-half-hour video from my still images and performed with it all day at each of the three Met locations, it seems safe to say that it has been a fruitful collaboration. Still, I sometimes wonder why you

wanted to work with me when you could have worked with any number of well-known photographers.

EO/ I have seldom liked to be photographed as I had this rather romantic notion that the work of performing artists is ephemeral. Dance in one sense is a part of the visual arts, but it also has many other elements working together. But it is not a verbal work or the kind of artwork that constitutes an object. And what really happens in dance performance as a whole is an incalculable total that lives only in the impressions of multiple viewers and performers—and there are always other people who help make the performance happen—before, during, and after the event. In my youth, I enjoyed thinking that what we leave is only the memories of the people who saw the performance and possibly in the faint sense of a body lingering at a place that can only be felt by those who saw the performance. But in this digital age, internet access changed my notion of a faint memory. Even if we minimize the number of digital images in circulation, there are many un-curated materials out there already on YouTube and social media. This is the world I have had to acknowledge and deal with.

Seeing this, the late Sam Miller (noted presenter, curator, thinker about performing arts who served as director of Jacob's Pillow, the New England Foundation of the Arts, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council) challenged Koma and me to create a self-curated artistic archive in collaboration with other

artists and curators when he produced Eiko & Koma's photographic collaboration with Phil Trager (1992) and our Retrospective Project (2009–2012). Accepting these projects meant to work with artistic rigor on the still images and video footage that we left behind. As a result, even though I do not enjoy seeing my own images or videos, I have developed a certain yearning to self-curate and self-produce these works. Performing artists work for "now," but by doing so they create history.

But I have always worked in collaboration. So if I were to work with a photographer, it would be important for me to work with someone not only whom I trust both as an artist and a friend but also who can honor my decisions and with whom I can truly collaborate. I very much resent and do not need the photographer-model relationship. I need to trust the eyes of someone with whom I could collaborate, but I need to be able to select images and make decisions on my own. Yet I also want to be able to listen to my collaborator's opinions throughout the process. And you were there right by me already as a photographer whose work I knew and quality I appreciated. And by co-teaching, I knew you were an aesthetic and ethical person. In my long years of approaching potential collaborators, I have also developed a good sense of who can also take on working with me for his or her own growth or exploration. I do not ask someone to work with me only because that person is a great artist or a nice person. If the timing is right for each artist, a collaboration clicks and opens new doors for both.

I have learned so much by working with you. Your being a historian fluent in the Japanese language and knowledgeable of its history in general and particularly the history of public health was only a plus.

And there is one other aspect. We have been teaching about the atomic bomb both together and separately. I thought it was important for you to see Fukushima. At the very least, I wanted to include Fukushima into our conversation and our co-teaching. I was genuinely interested in whether we could

develop our historian-artist relationship into a different dimension. And this is what really happened.

Now even some people in your field of history know of your work as a photographer. And I noticed by working with you that you consider how to frame things, both as a historian and a photographer. You observe many details that I do not even notice until I see your photos. I understand now how close observation is necessary in order to frame the objects thoughtfully.

A BODY IN FUKUSHIMA (SELECTED IMAGES FROM 2014-2017)



Figure 4.
Shinmaiko, 23 July 2014, No. 176. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

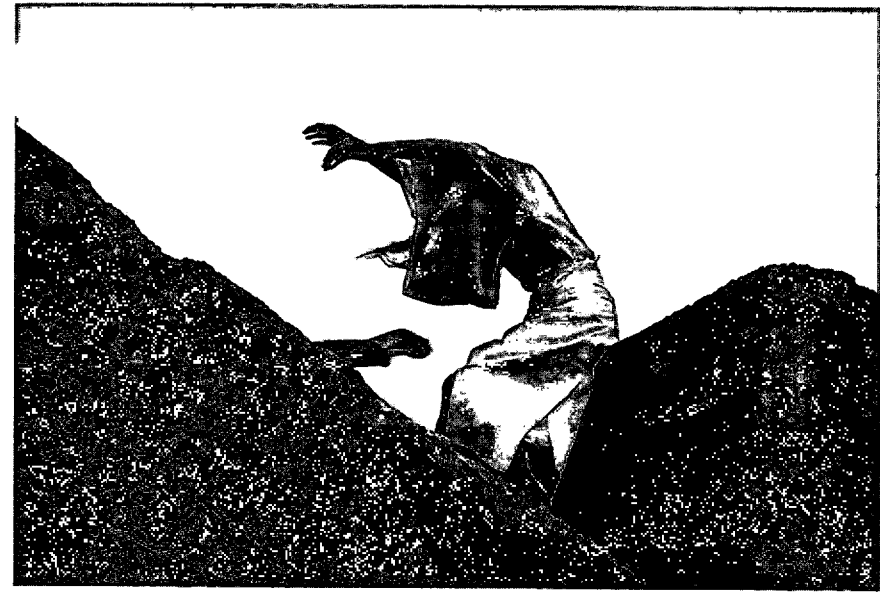


Figure 5.
Eiko dancing like Kazuo Ohno. Tomioka, 22, July 2014, No. 742. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.



Figure 6.
Yaburemachi, 15 January 2014, No 217. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

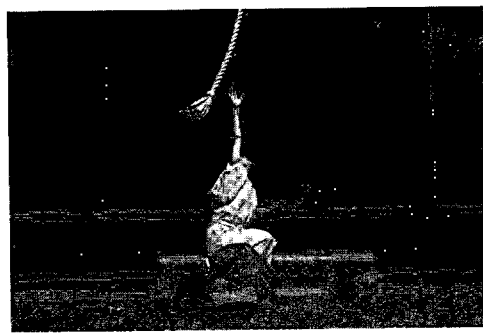


Figure 7.
Minami Soma, Shiogama Shrine, 3 August 2016, No. 426.
 Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.



Figure 8
Namie Yachihata, 27 June 2017, No 104. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

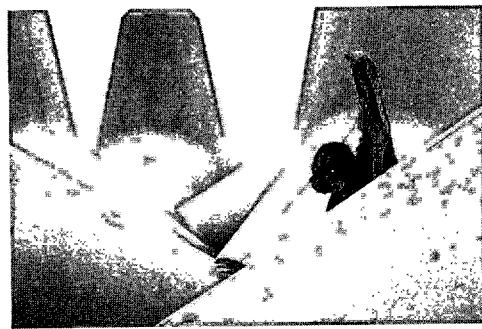


Figure 9.
Hisanohama Fishing Harbor, 25 June 2017, No 398. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

WJ/ Working with you really changed both the ways I photograph and the ways people see me. While being a professional historian, there are now a lot of people who know me primarily through my photography, although a few people know that I do both.

It is funny that I wanted to develop as a visual artist when I was in high school. My mother was supportive, but my father ridiculed the arts. When I went to college, I remained interested in the arts and became friends with the painting instructor Gandy Brodie, an Abstract Expressionist who had previously studied dance with Martha Graham. But the serious pursuit of the arts would probably have resulted in an excommunication by my father. He all but excommunicated me for wanting to become a historian, and that was bad enough. And so while I continued to draw and occasionally paint on my own, I never pursued it seriously until after I finished my PhD and got my job at Wesleyan. During the early 1990s, I was doing a lot of abstract paintings in watercolors and acrylics but also started shooting photographs seriously while in Kyoto in 1993. It soon became clear that I could keep up one medium while working as a history professor but not multiple mediums, and in the end chose photography. I took workshops with Ralph Gibson, George Tice, Sal Lopes, and others, and mastered darkroom skills, including the making of platinum-palladium prints by hand. Photographers such as Phil Trager and Rex Hennessey who saw my work, as well as other artist friends, were supportive, but I



Figure 10.
Namie Ukedo Beach, 27 June 2017, No. 230. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

never had the time to market my work and so never made much of a name for myself outside local circles. In retrospect, that was a kind of apprenticeship.

While doing large-format photography using cameras with negatives up to twelve-by-twenty inches, it became vital to frame the image as best as possible and to get the image with one or at the most two shots. While walking anyplace, I was constantly framing shots in my mind. It would drive friends crazy when we would be walking along and suddenly I'd stop and start framing an image with my hands. Framing became such a habit that I still do it all the time but without making a frame with my hands. You obviously appreciated that because you told me that after looking at a twelve-by-twenty-inch print of a

street scene in Middletown, you wanted me to photograph you performing. The apprenticeship paid off, as people look at the images of you and recognize that they are primarily landscapes or streetscapes.

At the same time, I think of photographic images as historical documents. They are "objects," but at the same time they are processes that carry the cumulative weight of their history and reflect the history of the subjects. Nothing exists outside fields of power, and in this way my historical work, whether it be focused on the history of disease and public health in Japan, the history of the atomic bombs, the history of sex and violence as refracted through the Abe Sada incident,⁵ or the idea of the "emperor" in Japan, one of my goals is to make visible the forces of power at work.

The subject of Fukushima, however, is overtly political, and I am motivated and excited by the political implications of our work there. I am very explicit in saying that for me, not only the Fukushima project but all of *A Body in Places* is political. For me, the politics is an issue of the distribution and management of power. Political and economic power were used in ways that endangered people simply by building, maintaining, and running nuclear plants. As the scientists who are honest have pointed out, we cannot build zero-risk nuclear power plants. Charles Perrow's book *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* makes the case that accidents involving highly complex mechanical and electronic systems are inevitable. As long as we continue to build and run nuclear reactors, accidents will happen, resulting in extremely dangerous consequences not only for humans but also for all living creatures in the environment. Even when operating normally, nuclear plants create dangerous radioactive waste for which there is no permanent solution; that waste will remain dangerous for thousands of years. So if there is anything I can do to bring people's awareness to nuclear issues, I want to do it. For me, creating the photographs which people find compelling is a political project that I embrace completely.

"I DO NOT THINK OF MYSELF AS A POLITICAL ARTIST."

WJ/ This is also a point where we have had contrasting approaches. In the past when we talked about the politics of the project, you

said, "I do not think of myself as a political artist." I understand that you, as a full-time performing artist, do not want to paint yourself as having one particular position and suggest that is all what you care about, or to make your audience feel you are always trying to put an agenda onto them. In fact, our work is very much also aesthetically driven. Yet, I think it has a clear political direction and has emotional appeal to bring people face-to-face with the issue. But you sort of shrug at the mention of "political." I feel that is sort of disingenuous of you because I know how politically you have been inclined and how strongly you object to nuclear weapons and power plants.

EO/ I remember many such moments of shrugging like that, and I am sorry if I sounded a bit dismissive. In my youth, I aspired to be a political activist and I failed. That sense of failure lingers. So by looking back, I have this notion that I have escaped from the political world into the art world. Though I do not regret that and embrace the path of being an artist, for me it is also a little bit traumatic and guilt-inducing that I might be prioritizing art-making over helping others or correcting injustices. I do not consider our work as motivated by political activism, at least not in my case. I do feel strongly that our lives and environment would be far better without nuclear energy, but I would be lying to myself if I say I do this work believing it will result in a good outcome.

Though I think I need to participate more in political work as a citizen, in reality I have to

prioritize my performance commitments. For me, being political means one has a clear political objective and creates the tactics to achieve it. Yes, I have been against atomic weapons and nuclear energy, but I have never thought that our work together could achieve anything significant in abolishing these two awful things. In performing and also in attending anti-nuclear marches, I feel often powerless and clueless. The reality seven years after the nuclear meltdowns in Fukushima is grim and depressing, both in Japan and in the rest of the world.

Every time I perform, whether as Eiko & Koma or lately as a soloist, I only realize I am so much less than I wish I could be. I am untalented both as a performer and as a choreographer. I chose a career for which I was least prepared. In my childhood, I had always assumed I would become a writer, but I had nothing important or imaginative to say. At the same time, I began to feel like the radical political activism I was engaged in was choking me. I wanted to be antagonistic, but I did not know how to be effective at it. So I tried a medium I would not be good at. As a failed rebel, I was not looking to succeed in this world. Just trying and finding errors all the time felt radical to me, so I made that into the practice and reality of my being a movement artist.

The work I do as a performing artist does not stay. Stage set, lighting, sound, and the combined effects all disappear. All that is left remains in the minds of audience members and myself. I could never look at things and say this is good or that is bad. So I am

conditioned not to give too much credit to my work. My focus has been going and doing, not being or becoming good. For that reason, it is impossible for me to think my work as politically effective.

Unlike theater and literature that deal with words or visual artworks that the artist can look at and examine, the results of my work are always unknown to me before, during, and even after the performance. In fact, I am the last person to know if my work affects people and, if so, how. I want to be rather stoic when discussing what my work is about or what I mean. It is important for me as a performer that I can fully concentrate on details, be spontaneous in my movements, and be able to betray my own choreography. Even though I prepare the work, I still want it to feel like anything can happen. I do not want to be bound by my own objectives or goals. Saying I have a political motivation destroys my core as a performer.

It might be possible that people find in our work something of an entrance from which they can imagine, think about, and thus remember the nuclear meltdowns. But I do not think it is good to state that to viewers. Art is affecting when a viewer is moved on her own, not in a way that others have suggested or planned. When does art move a viewer? It is often when a viewer can be left alone to feel, enter, question, then discover something in the artwork that connects to oneself; that is what it takes for it to be an artistic experience. If an art is over-prescribed or over-explained, it often makes people passive.

WJ/ But it was your decision to go to Fukushima. You did not have to go there. No one asked you to do that.

EO/ In 2011, I went to Fukushima because I felt I had to. I had no clear agenda or goal. There are certain places where it is necessary to visit, to smell, feel, and remember. We all forget things, so we individually need to willfully decide what one should not forget. I went to Fukushima perhaps because I instinctively had to, but also perhaps because I wanted to distinguish myself from those who do not go to such places. I imagine many people felt as regretful as I did. Many of us knew and said that nuclear meltdowns were bound to happen, and they did. Attending an anti-nuclear rally and performing at such occasions do not leave me blameless. I went to post-meltdown

Fukushima because I regretted that in my teaching a college course about the atomic bombings, I had failed to raise the direct connections between the atomic bombings and so-called peaceful nuclear energy.

I have long thought that merely living in a contemporary world does not prepare one to work as a contemporary artist. So I went to Fukushima as an artist who wanted to face, physically grapple with, and *swallow* both the serious contemporary issues and her own regrets. In order to do that, I dance. It is my way of knowing. I make more decisions when I dance. It is through making decisions that I observe and remember, however minor such decisions might be—such as where to stand, what to wear, and how I bend my body. Looking at myself in your photographs,



Figure 11.
Eiko dancing like Kazuo Ohno. Tomioka, 24 July 2014, no. 1180. Image courtesy of Bill Johnston.

I realize a body that is dancing holds nothing useful or practical. It is playing with air. A dancing hand does not carry a weapon or brush teeth. It is not ready to do such things. I confirm in your photos that the uselessness of dancing is human. That can be an antidote to and act of sabotage against overt productivity.

By doing so, I have also wished that my regrets might evoke other people's regrets. We all regret so many things; we have not been careful when we deal with what we think are not important matters. We know so many things are wrong, but we leave them as they are because we do not know how to fix them. Through regrets, I can imagine and relate to the people in the past with their thoughts and regrets. Some people think regrets are negative thoughts and we should not linger on them. I disagree. I think regrets bring to us a will to act.

REACHING, AND CARRYING FUKUSHIMA THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS OF MOVEMENT

WJ/ You wanted to go there with me a second time in 2014. This time we set out with a clearer idea of what we would be doing. What was different about this second visit?

EO/ As I began imagining myself performing my first solo work at Philadelphia's Amtrak 30th Street Station, commissioned and presented by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), I realized I needed something that would almost act like Koma. The reason I have worked with Koma so long was

that I was never interested in *my* expression of *my* story, with a beginning, middle, and end. In my working with Koma for over forty years, both my audience members and I saw my body changing its distance from Koma's body. On stage, even when each of us was moving on our own, the choreography and drama people saw the changing distance between the two bodies. And through them, I saw that and was always aware of where Koma was. Thus, my mind was only important to a degree. That relativity was fitting to my perception of me in the world. In Eiko & Koma's theater events, even when Koma was off stage, people saw my body with the absence of Koma who would return before long.

So though I was excited to try working solo and not as half of Eiko & Koma, I found myself with little motivation to choreograph myself alone. I was having a hard time imagining my lone body performing in the giant 30th Street Station. The place was monumental, but I was afraid that in itself was not enough. And if it was not significant enough for me, then what could it be for viewers? I thought that to perform in a station is to place a body among people in transit, going from one place to another. But where am I supposed to have come from and where am I supposed to go? It was then that I remembered the deserted stations in Fukushima that I saw when I went there five months after the meltdowns. It was then that I sensed the possibility for me to carry Fukushima somehow. The regret I have carried since 3/11 was the emotion I trusted, and not addressing that emotion seemed

wrong. All of a sudden I had a desire to put stations in Fukushima in parallel with that of Philadelphia. In the middle of the elegance of the Philadelphia station, I wanted to remember Fukushima's desolateness and the sense of wrongness. I decided I would present my body as both having been to, and going back to, Fukushima.

How would I do that? I thought of you taking photos of me in Fukushima. With your photos, even if I cannot make that idea of reaching and carrying Fukushima evident to the viewers, at the least they can sense I am carrying something with me—a weight, a sorrow, and an experience. It was important for me to carry *something* rather than choreographing movements onto my body. And I instinctively felt that your framing both as a photographer and as a historian would be not only helpful but necessary. Luckily, when the PAFA director Harry Philbrick saw our photographs, he immediately decided to present them in an exhibition at the PAFA gallery. The exhibition's opening on October 3, 2014 coincided with the day of my first solo performance at the Amtrak 30th Street Station. So my solo performances of past four years have been linked and contextualized with Fukushima from the very beginning. At every subsequent performance since, I have brought Fukushima with me to my audience members and the communities I visit. Our photos have been seen in so many ways—in photo exhibitions, at the Fukushima memorials I've taken part in, video installations, lectures, online links, interviews, and in posters and

brochures, too! You have been so generous in allowing that.

A Body in Fukushima is my "late work" in the way Kenzaburo Oe talks about "late style," quoting Edward Said. An artist's "late work" continues to connect with the desires of why one has ever become an artist first place, yet recognizes one's limited time in life and decreasing ability. I think you understand this well.

For these reasons, I am not opposed to offering knowledge to contextualize our work. Just the opposite. It is important for people to know that the body in my live performances is the body in the photographs taken in Fukushima. I want my body to be a conduit for audience members to feel and imagine Fukushima. Though I have been conditioned to being more restrained, I recognize the possibility that people who saw the works we made in Fukushima might become more interested in reading articles on post-meltdown Fukushima when such headlines come into their view. In creating this lengthy video, first for the Met performance but now for a stand-alone installation, however, I have begun exploring how I would phrase the knowledge and emotions that I find important to share.

WJ/ The information included in the videos you have made of the still images works very well: dates, place names, distances from the Fukushima Daiichi reactors, sometimes the height of the tsunami. When people know that kind of basic information, the impact of your performance in the images is enough.

It is why in this instance I think of the photographs themselves as manifestations of the performance rather than pictures of the performance. When you stood in front of the camera, the audience wasn't there yet. Only with the unfolding of space and time in front of the photographs, once they become prints or video images, can the audience appreciate your performance. They become the site in which history, performance, and the audience can commingle. Whether in the future they will continue to speak, however, is beyond our control. Only history will tell.

Notes

¹ William Johnston, e-mail message to Miki Kaneda, March 26, 2018.

² William Johnston and Eiko Otake, "The Making of 'A Body in Fukushima': A Journey through an Ongoing Disaster," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, Issue 10, No. 2 (2015): 1–8; see also William Johnston and Eiko Otake, "A Body in Fukushima Artists in Conversation" (Wesleyan University, Middletown CT, 2015); Eiko Otake and William Johnston, "Experiment and Experience: A Historian and a Dancer Co-Teach Courses on the Atomic Bomb and Mountaintop Removal Mining," *Contact Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2016): 21–26.

³ "Red Tent" was the nickname for the Jyōkyō Gekijō theater company, derived from the signature red tent in which the group performed.

⁴ For performance excerpts at the Met Museum, see <https://vimeo.com/260905331>.

⁵ This incident was a murder that occurred in 1936. A woman named Abe Sada strangled her lover, cut off his penis, and disappeared for several days. The incident immediately became a *cause*

célèbre and later became the subject of multiple films, books, and magazine articles.

Born and raised in Japan and a resident of New York since 1976, EIKO OTAKE is a movement-based, interdisciplinary artist. She worked for more than forty years as Eiko & Koma but since 2014 has been performing her own solo project, *A Body in Places*. In 2017 she launched a multi-year Duet Project that she will direct and perform with a diverse range of artists. Eiko & Koma were honored with the first United States Artists Fellowship (2006) and Doris Duke Artist Awards (2012). They are the first collaborative pair to share a MacArthur Fellowship (1996) and the first Asian choreographers to receive the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award (2004) and the Dance Magazine Award (2006). As a soloist and co-curator of Danspace Project's 10th Platform, a month-long activity that focused on her *A Body in Places*, Eiko was honored with a special Bessie citation, an Art Matters grant and the Anonymous Was a Woman Award.

WILLIAM JOHNSTON was born and raised in Rawlins, Wyoming. He received his BA from Elmira College in Elmira, New York, and his MA in Regional Studies East Asia and PhD in History and East Asian Languages, both from Harvard University. Other institutions where he has studied include Nanzan University and Nagoya University, both in Nagoya, Japan, and Tokyo University. In addition, he has spent a year as a Visiting Professor and Research Scholar, The International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, Japan. He is Professor of History, East Asian Studies, Science in Society, and College of the Environment at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. During the 2014–15 academic year he was Edwin O. Reischauer Visiting Professor of Japanese Studies at Harvard. He is the author of two monographs and numerous articles. Most of his publications focus on the history of disease and medicine and on the history of the family and sexuality in Japan. At present he is working on one book about atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in world history and on another, with Eiko Otake, on the "A Body in Places" project that started in 2014.

Miya Masaoka and Miki Kaneda

LISTENING HISTORIES

MIYA MASAOKA IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKI KANEDA

“KOTO-monster,” is how MIYA MASAOKA describes the wired-up and electrified Japanese zither that she’s known to play and compose with. Her instrument is a “Japanese Frankenstein, a mutant Godzilla, a deformed hybrid.” A cultural amalgamation, traditional and contemporary, MASAOKA’s koto is not just a cross-cultural hybrid, but also a temporal mutant: “it has its foot in three millennia.”¹ The koto was also her way into gagaku, which is typically described as traditional imperial Japanese court music. But the idea of gagaku as the music of the nation is actually a modern concept. (It was in fact a strategic move during the Meiji restoration in the late nineteenth century that an emphasis on gagaku’s continuity now served to bolster the image of the uninterrupted power of the Japanese emperor.) In contrast, MASAOKA wants you to know the story of gagaku repertoire that was a part of lively transcultural jam sessions sometime around



Miya Masaoka. Photograph by Heike Liss.

the seventh or eighth century, when “musicians from Persia, India, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and China performed and improvised together.”² Whether as a composer, improviser, practitioner of traditional Japanese performing arts, sound artist, or a “vibration artist” as she recently called herself, MASAOKA’s practice over the past few decades has consistently troubled the borders and the violence of national and other impositions of identity in projects like *Ritual for Giant Hissing Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches* (1995), *What is the Sound of Naked (Asian) Men?* (2001), and *Triangle of Resistance* (Innova Recordings, 2016). Paired with this pursuit is an investigation into the workings of sound and vibration propelled by a genuine joy in finding out ways of communication between bodies across species through projects like *Pieces for Plants* (2007–) and *the Bee Project* (2000).

Since 2016, Masaoka has been spending time with her project *Vaginated Chairs*, which she has presented internationally in several iterations. But “presented” is not quite the right word. The project is at once a musical composition, a sound art piece, and an array of chairs to seat a group gathered for a conversation. It’s as much an open score, or guide to improvisation, and an invitation for any number of participants, as it is a sound installation piece. It has also been growing, in conjunction with a theoretical manifesto of sorts that proposes ways of reconceptualizing the vagina as a site for *listening* and *perception*. Masaoka asserts that “the vagina is the third ear,” challenging the idea of the vagina as the symbol of sexualized reproductive female bodies.³

Like many of Masaoka’s projects, *Vaginated Chairs* defies conventional categories that divide artworks and musical practices by medium and genre. This has some implications for attempts at representing her practice that privilege experience and participation. Her work resists representation. This is because communication between participants and the conversation they generate—the sensory perception of the vibrations of the chairs against the “concentrated nerve endings in the vagina,” and the act of imagining the possibility of listening with the vagina—are constitutive of the piece, not latent effects or mere “responses.”⁴ Photo, video, and audio documentation are not enough, and verbal and written descriptions also have limits. For this reason, while *Vaginated Chairs* is the starting point, this

dialogue aims at conversing *with* the piece, rather than necessarily talking *about* it. We began speaking of the power of naming, then virtuoso sitting, interspecies communication, and listening as survival and performance. Wrapping up, we discussed how Masaoka continues to embody the history of forced dislocation and the internment of her family in concentration camps during World War II. As it stands, recognizing that “for people of color, the body in a social context is the racial body in a hierarchy” is no less urgent in 2019 than it was in 1942, as she explains in the conversation below. And yet, in almost every utterance, as in her creative practice over the years, Masaoka exudes humor, delighting in composing, naming, performing, and sensing new ways of being in the world, while refusing to accept present givens without a very close listen first.

—Miki Kaneda

ON NAMING

MIKI KANEDA/ *I wanted our conversation to orbit around the world of your recent sound installation and composition, Vaginated Chairs (2016–), but I understand the title has changed over time.*

MIYA MASAOKA/ Right, the name originally was *Vagina Dialogues*, and the idea was that listening with the vagina wasn't a passive organ, but an active one. I created vaginal inserts containing small microphone pickups, to record the sounds of the vagina, and then send the sound to my computer and out to the loudspeakers in the room. The idea was that there would be an output and input of data as an emblem of alternative ways of thinking about the vagina and listening, notably that the vagina is potentially a site for listening and perceiving, as well as a source for information. Due to the concentration of nerve endings and extreme sensitivity of the

area, this should be no surprise. Certainly the ability to sense vibration and tactile activity is heightened in the area. Then, coincidentally, a few months after I first did *Vagina Dialogues* in early 2016, all the Trump business hit the news, and there was an oversaturation of the term “vagina.” I would see the word “vagina vagina vagina . . .” everywhere. It just became so mundane and numbing. So, I eventually started pivoting toward the term “vagination,” in the Jacques Derrida sense of “in vagination.”

MK/ *It was your way of responding to a cultural and political moment.*

MM/ Yes, and all that frenzy around the term. It was and continues to be a really important cultural moment. That the piece preceded the new wave of feminism—the Me Too movement, the Women's March—cast a political context that didn't exist so overtly before. I love the fluid nature of public work, and how

the outside world exerts itself on the work in odd and unexpected ways.

MK/ *You've presented this piece in many iterations at different institutions over the past couple of years—Bard College, the Fridman Gallery, the Park Avenue Armory, Columbia University, the Kunstmuseum Bonn, and MoMA PS1. These are commercial galleries, museums, and university spaces. The iterations share a similar set-up—a group of ten or so folding metal chairs of different colors are arranged to form an arc.⁵ A web of wires spilling onto the floor from transducers attached to the chairs, and other electronic equipment, are also part of the set-up of the piece. Each chair emits a sound at a different frequency. If I choose to sit on one of the chairs, I might perceive the subtle vibrations coming from the chairs. At the same time, it seems to me like each iteration, like a performance, would also be very different. I'm curious to know how those different contexts might have changed the shape of the piece.*

MM/ For the first one, in 2016, I did the piece with students at Bard College. There was a lot of interest in the piece, especially among young women. This was before the Trump pussyhat moment, and I think in some ways each generation redefines their terminology, concepts, and thoughts around female sexuality. With the assistance of Danielle Dobkin, a graduate student where I teach, I created a newer version of the vaginal insert made of non-toxic silicone that turned out to be very popular. These were used a few months later at the Fridman Gallery. Everybody was

interested in wearing one, and we didn't have enough for everybody! For that one, the sounds from the vaginas were brought into the mixer, then out into loudspeakers. The Park Avenue Armory event was part of the event Remembering Pauline Oliveros.⁶ Ione, Pauline's partner, wrote and read a poem for us called “Vibrating Women.” One of my students read it at the Fridman, and Ione read it herself at the Armory, creating a beautiful tribute to Pauline Oliveros. The iteration at the Armory had a more abstracted quality, as there were vibrating and tuned chairs, but no vagina inserts. The most recent one was at MoMA PS1, and we went back to having the vaginal inserts. But even though every case was very different, I always made the effort to have members of the trans community and to be very inclusive for nonnormative and nonbinary vaginas, etc., in the calls.

PERFORMING-LISTENING-SITTING

MK/ *I want to turn to the idea of performance in your work. Is that a useful term to think about in terms of what we are doing when we sit on the Vaginated Chairs?*

MM/ That's an interesting question. Performance implies that there's an audience, and when we're sitting on the chairs, even if there's no audience, we ourselves are the audience of our own selves evaluating the experience. If someone is hesitant or skeptical and they go up to the chair, they can sit on it. Maybe they will experience one chair that is vibrating more than the other. They can go

and try different chairs. They are being their own audience because they sit in the chair and they're auditioning what their evaluation is of the experience. In a sense, they're performing with this object because their body is interacting with the vibrations and changing very audibly and very immediately the pitch and the timbre of the chair. And they're able to feel it and relax with it too. In that sense, all the participants end up participating in an event where they are performing that broader idea of what is a performance.

MK/ You've presented your Vaginated Chairs a number of times in different contexts, and you're now revisiting the Pieces for Plants. How do these pieces grow when you engage with them over a long period of time like you are doing?

MM/ It manifests in different ways—people say Brahms really only wrote one piece. I just did a piece for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Glasgow Chamber Choir, and I used some of the same ideas in terms of oscillator-type sounds and algorithmic models, broadly defined. For me, it's very connected; there is a common thread to the Chairs piece, with a different kind of manifestation of ideas that are in some ways similar throughout the time of when I began making work. Right now, it is a tremendous time to create; the level of musicianship is excellent. I am able to find musicians to play my pieces using nothing but harmonics and partials. Years ago, I depended on Joan Jeanrenaud from the Kronos Quartet to do such things. It is much easier to do many

of my pieces, due to the advances in technology. It is all cheaper, easier to use, and of course there is the presence of the microcomputer, and even the laptop, which didn't exist a few decades ago.

MK/ Do you think about how your training as a composer, performer, and improviser might inform the way you engage with these pieces over time? For example, can we think of the chairs as a kind of score that act as a prompt or invitation to performance at each of these locations?

MM/ Absolutely. I think "chairs as a score" is a very interesting way of framing it. Each chair has a unique frequency associated to it. When there are ten chairs, for example, if no one is sitting in them and you walk quickly along the arc of the chairs, there will be a gradual arpeggio. If you go the other direction, or run, you can control how fast the arpeggio is going, or whether it's going up or down. In that sense, there's a very active listener part, and an active psychoacoustic aspect to it. When someone sits down on the chairs, the pitch and the timbre changes very audibly. When they stand up again, it goes back to the original sound and timbre. Whether someone sits on it, or a seated group has a discussion among themselves, or whether someone is just resting, or looking at their phones, it's all good! But there is a very immediate interactive, responsive element to someone sitting on the chair that they might notice, or not. Different people notice different things. When it comes to the so-called "Vagina Listening Sessions," I've

found it interesting that whether or not you have the vagina insert in you, just the fact of talking about it makes one think about their own listening potentiality that exists in their own body. That can be an abrupt awareness to the body, and to listening, and different parts besides just the cochlear listening that we're so used to thinking about when we talk about listening and ways of perception.

MK/ When we were planning for the Performing History event at Columbia, I initially—cluelessly—suggested that we might just install one or two of your Vaginated Chairs, since the workshop was such a short event. At that point in time, I was thinking of the chairs as a kind of stationary "sound art" kind of object. But you insisted on having eight to ten; and in the end, we had ten. I am so grateful to you that you pushed for that. Because listening to you discuss the piece, I see how it is so different from what I'd call an "object-based" sound art piece, for example, something like Sergei Tchernin's Motor-Matter Bench (2013). Visually and technologically, Vaginated Chairs and Motor-Matter Bench are quite similar. His piece also uses transducers, which are placed under a decommissioned New York City subway bench. If you sit on the bench, you can feel a low vibration.

MM/ There is a host of people and history of chairs with sound. Among my friends and colleagues, there is Camille Norment, who did a piece where people sit on wooden benches, with sound vibrating in the benches. Hugh Livingston, a sound artist, has a piece with

sound transduced into the seat of the chairs as well.

MK/ But the thing is, it's not the sounding chair itself that's the most interesting part of your piece. When I actually experienced sitting on your chairs, I was struck by how your chairs were not so much a "work" of sound art, but something more like an invitation to sit, listen, and chat with others. Vaginated Chairs was deceptive to me because it is visually compelling, with the rainbow-colored chairs in an arc, but you can't get a sense of it just by looking at it, or even through an audio or video recording. It's really hard to "represent" your piece because it's so much about the conversation and the active participation. In some ways, just looking at the chairs is like looking at a musical score mounted on the wall. Of course, you can appreciate it visually, and conceptually as well, but there's so much more to the piece that comes alive through performance and a visceral sensory experience.

MM/ Right. Each chair has a unique frequency, and one needs to sit on it and experience it; although walking along the chairs, one can hear arpeggio going up one way, and descending the other way. Sitting on one chair is a very different experience from sitting on another. I would add that using inexpensive folding metal chairs is a kind of tribute to the mundane, day-to-day-living proletariat effect. They are "ready-mades" and very accessible and an invitational gesture to invite participants. The everyday practice of sitting down is something I talk about a lot because we find

ourselves sitting down so much in contemporary living. It's constant. The whole day, we're sitting down, in cars, or subways, etc., and sensing vibrations through sitting.

MK/ *You mention in your writing that we are all "virtuoso sitters" these days.*

MM/ We sit down so much. There's got to be a way of developing that area of our body that has some kind of evolutionary potential through all that sitting. Certainly, like the ear and the mouth, it makes sense that these large orifices can have some kind of potential that we can imagine.

MK/ *I'm accustomed to hearing about how bad for you all this sitting is. I don't doubt those findings. But I love that you are also trying to find some kind of refinement or purpose in our present condition.*

MM/ Different ways to think about ourselves as we go through the day can be an interesting proposition for people. I feel like I've been successful if people leave the piece thinking about their body, ways of listening and sensing, or about sitting in a different way than when they first approached the piece, even a few minutes prior. I guess these are nudges in considering, reinterpreting, and being more thoughtful and aware in our bodies in our everyday lives.

LISTENING BODIES

MK/ *Vaginated Chairs makes the activity of listening much more involved than just a*

direct path from "sounding" (as active) to "listening" (as passive). It seems interactive in the sense that the "listener" is asked to work, to take an active part in the process.

MM/ The body and interactivity have been part of my work for twenty-five years or so. I did a piece called *Sounds of Naked Asian Men* in the 90s, where I took hospital equipment and repurposed it to get different kinds of EKG readings. I then used different kinds of analyzers to sonify the brainwaves into audio signals. In *Ritual for Giant Hissing Madagascar Cockroaches*, I had insects crawl on my body to trigger samples of different sounds. There is also the *Bees Project*. These kinds of insects work socially. Individually, they are nothing, but together they create these amazing colonies and this amazing behavior. I've also worked with biological response of plants in my *Pieces for Plants*. Plants respond to people etc. and vice versa. There is a kind of symbiotic, situational thinking and communication that we encounter in plants.

It's much easier to talk about these kinds of things now. It used to be that there was an expectation to anthropomorphize plants. But now there is more advanced research into the communication systems of plants. There is an amazing book titled *The Hidden Life of Trees* by the German forester Peter Wohlleben, who talks about how trees communicate with each other. For example, adult trees parent their younger saplings. This kind of thing is really fascinating for me. I see the *Vaginated Chairs* as being a further development of

ways of thinking about biological relationships. . . . Between people talking among themselves on the chairs and feeling the different kinds of sounds and vibrations through their bodies, through their orifices, of their seats where they're sitting, and also, the recorded sounds coming out of the vaginas through a wire, and into the sound of the gallery or space. The sound of the body feeding into the chairs and the chairs feeding into the body. . . . All of these elements create and take part of a loop, or cycle. We have relationships not only with these biological elements but also with inanimate objects. Clearly, the chairs are inanimate. But because of their ability to resonate vibrational sound, they can be very responsive. The sounds pumped into them at various pitches, as well as people sitting down on them, change the response of the resonant metal immediately.

MK/ *Bodies of naked Asian men, roaches, bees, plants, chairs—these things range from barely audible to inaudible to the human ear. Yet you are interested in their sounds. Is it accurate to say that you're thinking about sound as vibrations rather than as an "audible" signal?*

MM/ Instead of saying "sound artist," I might just as well call myself a "vibration artist"! I distinguish vibration from sound in general because to sense vibrations, the body uses a different kind of pathway to the brain compared to the cochlear pathway. Our mechano-sensory functions overlap and interconnect in interesting ways with our cochlear, our inner ear. The vagina is an organ that perceives what

we know as vibration. The ear registers what we think of as "sound." Both are functionally related. The vagina could be thought of as an ear that registers vibrations. But I am also crossing the line with *Vaginated Chairs*. It's a sonically gray area that is murky, dark, and metaphorical. For example, the words "hearing" and "listening" have a connotation of "understanding" and "comprehending" in English, and other languages too. So the vagina is the part of our body that "knows," listens, and comprehends, and in my pieces, the vagina speaks.

This is how I've been thinking about the vagina as being the third ear, and as this orifice that's located in our genital area. It looks physically like an ear, minus the rigidity of the cartilage. The fleshy folds are a site for various modes of perception. I became very interested in the sensory perceptions of the body in terms of bone conduction and different kinds of conduction that take place when you're sitting down feeling the vibrations. I eventually interviewed some scientists at Columbia University. One of them was Elizabeth Olson, Laboratory Director and Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Auditory Biophysics. I wanted to get more information about what is happening with mechano-vibrations and hearing. At some point, we ended up talking about elephants. Elephants have something called "acoustic fat" in their feet. They have this sensibility to hear and perceive other elephants walking on the ground literally hundreds of miles away. I later also read that other animals like

whales have acoustic fat that is conducive to a kind of conductive listening. There are these interesting ways that animals listen that are incredibly complex. There are insects that listen through slits in their legs. Others use echolocation.

MK/ *In terms of the vagina, it's not an arbitrary resonant bodily orifice, but it's especially sensitive to sound for the various physiological reasons you just mentioned. And the vagina in particular is significant because its ties to the ways of naming and claiming the functions of what we think of as the workings of the female body. It's not just a polemical argument, but a multilayered proposition about the vagina as a listening organ.*

MM/ Yes, and in some iterations that involve the vaginal pick-up microphone inserts, a voiced organ. There is historical precedence for the connection of hearing to the female reproductive system. As it happens, Falloppio, the anatomist who "discovered" and named the vagina, placenta, etc., also discovered the Fallopian canals—which eventually were his namesake—the tubes in the inner ear going toward the cheek area, as well as the Fallopian tubes in the female reproductive system. My theory that the vagina is the third ear makes an argument for these connections between the reproductive system, the cochlear, the vestibular system, and intuition. For example, how do we know what we know? How do we know that an elephant is coming, or that the rain outside the cave could pose danger? The vagina creates a triangle with the axis of the

two ears on the head, and potential for spatial hearing and perceiving of sound and vibration. The vagina has a new role outside the function of reproduction and sexuality. So it's another option for the female body, and for rethinking and reclaiming female sexuality.

MK/ *You are saying that the vagina becomes a creative space that's not exclusively tied down to these histories of control of female bodies.*

MM/ Absolutely. The trans community and their choice of pronoun usage, to the naming and renaming and reinventing of our genitals, is inspirational. The trans community has been reinventing the body and renaming things and deconstructing things for some time now. There is a sense of empowerment that comes with being able to think about our bodies how we want to think about them. Terri Kapsalis had mentioned to me at a party recently that the clitoris is as large or larger than the penis if the surrounding structural and muscular apparatus is considered. That's very powerful and inspiring to think about how we understand our vaginal listening apparatus. Because historically, women have not named our own body parts.

THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

MK/ *While the workshop at Columbia was titled *Performing History*, in addition to "performing" history, I have been thinking about what "listening" might add to the way we think about "performance" and "history." I wonder what history, taken as a sounded experience and an accumulation of listenings,*

might add to the conversation. Or, when is listening a kind of performance? But perhaps more concretely, are there particular people, or works, or ways of listening from your past that you consider to be important to the history of the Vaginated Chairs?

MM/ I would say that my life and work as an improviser has been an education for me. For improvising, it's very important to listen. Because it's very much responding spontaneously to the sonic environment that other musicians are making or to the other environment sounds that are being created. Active listening and responding in a way that is interesting for an audience in the performative setting is what's required for improvising. The kinds of acute and high-level responses that take place for an improviser is real groundwork for how to listen in different ways. There are different kinds of improvisatory listening engagements, even within classical musicians, in terms of the kind of instruments they're playing, and the situation they're playing in. For example, a group of musicians in a string quartet tend to tune their instruments to reach a commonality and a blending point that reaches more of a just intonation tonality. It's very interesting how that takes place. This is not so possible in a symphony because you have instruments like brass and woodwind instruments that can't move their pitch as readily from their tonality organized around 440 Hz. For fixed-pitch instruments like the piano, the constraints are set by the instrument, but then listening takes place on another level. The practice of listening is vast.

The term "listening" is actually very inept and inaccurate. We need new words and terminology for ways of listening, and that's something I'm working on now—developing a different kind of taxonomy of thinking about listening and hearing.

MK/ *It's interesting that you mention classical musicians, who of course do so much listening, but the kind of in-the-moment listening that happens through interaction during performance is rarely talked about in explicit terms, or specified at the same level as other elements, like pitch and rhythm, represented by standard notation.*

MM/ You bring up an interesting point. Something like a notation that's based on ways of listening rather than on ways of playing could be a starting point. But these ways of hearing and listening are so important because they are part of our survival as a species. For example, the twelve boys and one coach that got trapped in the cave in Thailand during the rainy season in 2018: they didn't hear any rain happening. As a result, they didn't know how dangerous the situation had become. They didn't know how much water had accumulated. And then it became a deadly situation for them.

MK/ *That's very true. What about how your musical training and listening histories connect to the Vaginated Chairs? For example, the central significance of the active and inquisitive participant reminds me of what Pauline Oliveros was doing with her *Sonic Meditations*. As a text, *Sonic Meditations**

are a set of instructions inviting participants to perform, to sing, and to listen in certain ways. But crucially, they are really about performing for themselves and each other in the group, rather than having a set of performers on a stage being watched by audience members.

MM/ Right, and Pauline Oliveros is of course my very dear friend and colleague and mentor. With all this attention on listening now, it should be of great note that Pauline Oliveros was someone who foregrounded listening in ways that changed the way that people think about listening now. I haven't thought about *Sonic Meditations* in relation to my *Chairs*, but it makes total sense. They share the element of a group of people together. In *Vaginated Chairs*, even though the participants are not singing the humming sound as in Pauline's pieces, the chairs sing it for them. There's also a kind of community of the chairs themselves, as there would be in a community of people singing the *Sonic Meditations*. So the chairs are taking the place of people in a certain way. That's interesting—I like that! [Laughs]

BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

MK/ In a broader sense of the idea of an embodied historical knowledge, I also wanted to ask how you might connect this to your training in traditional Japanese music. In your essay on "Plants and Deep Listening" (2012), you write about learning to play the *koto* and the *gagaku taiko* drum.⁷ I was struck by how two different teachers, on two separate occasions, told you something along the lines of how you should strive to become the *koto* or

become the drum that you were playing. It's as if the instruments are already animate. They are not merely objects waiting to be activated by a person. Does this experience connect to the *Vaginated Chairs* as well? To me, it seems that the chairs become an extension of the body and the body is an extension of the chair, and the clear-cut line between the roles of each thing disappears.

MM/ I hadn't thought of it that way, but that is apropos to this discussion! Everything is mediated by something else, and the way that mediation is expressed is how we think about and perceive these things. A Shintoist reading of the piece is certainly possible, and in fact a Shintoist reading has some relevance, but was not a part of conceptualizing the piece. Yes, the fact that sound as vibration is moving through the chairs, and moving through the body, and sounds are coming out of the vagina, and then going back into the chairs, back into the sound space of the area, and then back into the chairs; this impacts our perception that we have in our cochlear ears and bone conduction in our body as well. There's a recursive mix, and the recurring and ever-changing loop processes that transpire. From one minute to the next, it's never the same because of the changes in the environmental sounds, the changes in the space, in our own bodies, and who happens to be sitting next to you, or if another person comes and goes. . . . The tuning of the chairs also changes over a period of time, so they're not static either. There's an element of the river: you never step into the same river twice, like the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus said. Our bodies are sensorial perceptors,

receptors, and senders and are throughways of life essences. There's also a sense that the ego is not present because the energy from other sources goes through you and to the instruments. This means there's not as much of an association with the personality or the person and with whatever is going on in the acoustic space or the musical space.

MK/ Recently, on the same day, the Supreme Court overruled *Korematsu* while defending Executive Order 13769, aka the "Muslim travel ban." . . . Both of these are rulings that imposed on racialized bodies. This news has been making me think of the very personal embodiment of history in your practice. You've written about how your family was interned in the Japanese American concentration camps during World War II. And recently, you mentioned grieving the loss of your mother, who lived through the ordeal of the camps, around the time of the presentation of *Vaginated Chairs* at MoMA PS1. Your work as an artist has been deeply committed to critically examining the ideological structures of power. In projects like *Triangle of Resistance*, which was released during the same year that you first released *Vaginated Chairs*, you reckon very explicitly with the history of resistance and state-sanctioned racialized management of Asian American bodies. *Vaginated Chairs* deals with issues of power in a much broader historical scope, based on the myriad ways in which the vagina has been an organ that has been under so much scrutiny and so carefully regulated. Can you describe how the themes in projects like *Triangle of Resistance* and others, like

Ritual for Giant Hissing Madagascar Cockroaches, connect and perhaps overlap with *Vaginated Chairs*?

MM/ My mother was a survivor of the Japanese American prison camps in Utah and California. *Triangle of Resistance* was very much part of being a child of a survivor. She recently passed away, and watching your mother go through the different stages of the death process, this is very, very painful. It was also a passing of that generation who experienced the camps. Had I been born fourteen years earlier, I would have been born in the camps. Nothing can prepare anybody for the death of a parent. On the other hand, it's a different view of death that we can take from it. For example, the biological aspect of the physical body is something to behold when you've just experienced a loved one's death. It's a very different view toward the body and toward that biological transience.

Power and politics are always there, whether I want to think about it or not. For the sound sources of *Ritual for Giant Hissing Madagascar Cockroaches*, I hacked into RadioShack burglar detectors, which would then trigger playback of recordings of the roaches hissing. Their hissing is a remarkably loud white noise, sounding more like electronic synthesis rather than coming from a lowly insect. The movement of the insects created the structure for the piece, as the more insect movement, the more intensity of the sound. As a composer, I relinquished these compositional decisions to the agency of the insects. This reversal of roles and control was a comment on power in our societal structures. My

mother and father and aunts and uncles and my grandparents . . . more than thirty-six of my relatives were in the camps. If you were even one-sixteenth Japanese blood, you were required to go to one of these prison camps. *Ritual for Giant Hissing Madagascar Cockroaches* was based on this idea of the blank canvas upon which constructions of race and gender and power are being projected.

To discuss the discursive notions associated with the body in the absence of race and implications of race is to be lacking in the whole, or making selected screening and filtering. For people of color, the body in a social context is the racial body in a hierarchy. That's the lens, and for some of us, we can't take those lenses off. I don't think we can talk about the body without talking about other kinds of bodies besides white heteronormative bodies. For the *Vaginated Chairs*, it was important for me to have people of color, nonbinary identities, and LGBTQ communities as participants. Because when we talk about anything related to social interaction, or how we are people in the world, or bodies with chairs, in any situation, we are all part of this larger stream of society.

The authors send their thanks to Chaeyoung Lee for transcribing the recorded conversation.

Notes

¹ Miya Masaoka, "Notes from a Trans-Cultural Diary," in *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, ed. John Zorn (New York: Granary/Hips Road, 2000), 153.

² *Ibid.*, 154.

³ Miya Masaoka, "The Vaginated Chairs; A Way of Listening: 16 Chairs Tuned to Specific Frequencies," *KunstMusik* 18 (2019): 41.

⁴ Miya Masaoka, "Re-Imagining Sound, Perception and the Vagina: The Vagina Is the Third Ear," presented at the workshop, *Swallowing and Spitting History: Performing History/Experimental Practices* (Perspectives from Japanese Performing Arts), Columbia University, 2019. It's important to note that Masaoka stresses that the "vagina" she is talking about is "inclusive of vagina-identified, non-normative and queer vaginas and those that have been surgically or medically created. . . . the term vagina is broadly defined and includes the inner and outer vagina, and is held in common and colloquial use practices, medical nomenclature notwithstanding." *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* The chairs were all black in the first iteration, at Bard College. Subsequent iterations used chairs of a range of colors.

⁶ A public commemoration of the life and music of Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016), held at the Park Avenue Armory on Feb. 6, 2017.

⁷ Miya Masaoka, "Plants and Deep Listening." *Sound American 7: Artist Essays on Deep Listening* (2012). http://soundamerican.org/sa_archive/sa7/sa7-artist-essays-on-deep-listening.html.

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THE TENUOUS BODY OF HISTORY

THOMAS LOOSER

History, as a discipline, has tended to offer us certitude, promising to explain who we are, and how we have become what we are, in assured terms; history is the discipline that claims to unite all other humanities. And the basis for modern certitude has been our bodies themselves—a kind of base of empirical experience, as well as the starting point for the inscription of ourselves into the world. But art (itself a mode of materializing worlds, and therefore related to history) has long known that bodies and their relation to the world are more tenuous than they may seem.

Using performativity as a means for considering the possibilities of a critical history is thus not a new idea—but it is an ongoing project. Some of the work I have recently undertaken is focused on sound as a potentially alternative or even radical mode of conceiving cultural history. Sound, that is, as a relatively fluid medium of interaction and influence, that might point toward formations that among other things escape the kind of linear histories by which we still tend to identify ourselves.

Miya Masaoka's proposal that we might think of the vagina as a "third ear," and that this might somehow model a radical, dialogic social being, is therefore of immediate interest, and

serves for me as an ideal entry into a discussion of the varied takes on the relation between body, performance, and radical history that this dossier opens up.

Masaoka's third ear is meant in some ways to be taken fairly literally, and her work offers us real, performative experience: sitting on metal chairs fitted to vibrate at different frequencies for the audience to feel as we moved from chair to chair; and a set of silicon vaginal inserts, similarly set to vibrate differentially to create a kind of sensation and communication. Already, one might see the elements of not only a kind of performative structure of connection—this is not just about performativity—but also the micro-elements of history: along with social connection, there is inscription and transmission; there are the specific materialities of transmission (both inorganic and organic); and there are grounds not only for reproduction but for origination and creation (although Masaoka avoids the more literal connections of the vagina with reproductivity and creation, she underscores its capacities to not only feel or "hear" sound but also to create it). And perhaps because this is a mode of listening that functions only abstractly through felt vibration (there is transmission of vibration more than hearing of words or meaning), Masaoka is explicit in saying that it refuses any kind of monumental concretizing of meaning. Perhaps the vagina might serve as a more radical ear, a different medium both for connecting person to world, and the past with present and future structures of meaning?

Part of the reason Masaoka turns to the vagina is its sensitivity that in some ways mimics the ear. Setting aside the question of whether you could actually come up with any kind of sociality at all if you entirely give up on semantics—on meaning itself, in favor simply of transmitting vibrations and sound—it's worth further considering the vagina as, in a sense, a uniquely sensitive medium. For me, there's a clear comparison one could draw with the very first machine created to record sound. Called the phonograph, this too was designed to mimic the ear, with the ability to capture sound ultimately residing on a delicate organic medium—a single pig bristle, attached to the tip of the chamber of the "ear." This too was based on pure vibration, and simply transcribed that sound vibration onto a drum. It was therefore nonlinguistic, and in fact at the time (the 1860s) could not even be used to reproduce the sound that it captured; that would have to wait until very recently, when digital programming was designed to turn the visual sound waves back into the historical voice that was captured by the phonograph. So we could look at the phonograph as similar to the radicality of Masaoka's vaginal ear: tremendously sensitive to sound itself, it captures and even transforms that sound as it transcribes it, but it doesn't fix it into a specific structure of meaning. But one could look at it in opposed terms as well: it uses the delicacy of the organic body in the service of an urge to capture sound, and capture a moment, even if it does not yet have the ability to return that sound. It could thus be considered an early medium or technology

used to capture and fix history, putting a moment into a set and permanent form. It is thus potentially part of a monumental history, and the ability to return the specific voice, singing a specific song ("Au clair de la lune"), only had to wait a while to be returned from its visual transcription to its aural form.

Masaoka's project involves no such monumentalizing point of transcription. The emphasis on pure sound vibration is in some ways more open even than some of the 1960s ideas of performativity, which in some cases sought to open up a more authentic self, or a more authentic meaning; there is no such claim to authenticity here. Yet this model too is haunted by its opposite. Bodies have their structures, and a vagina is inevitably a gendered organ. How is a male listener supposed to "hear" the vibrations of the metal chairs that had been set up? Or what about those silicon vaginal inserts? Is this, in other words, an essentialized mode of hearing, and history, available only to female "listeners"?

At the same time—just to carry this a bit further—perhaps by sitting on one of those chairs, a male "listener" is in fact engaging at least partially in a "female" mode of interacting with the world? Perhaps gender itself is made more fluid? And Masaoka was careful to say she's thinking of a surgically create-able vagina, meaning that in principle, any body could have it. Even the concrete materiality of the body is thus rendered less monumental, less fixed. Lastly, Masaoka described this third ear act of listening as an interaction of

bodies, surfaces, and contexts (organic and mechanical), implicitly creating a communication system, and therefore a subject position, that itself is fluid and working across not only social categories (gender) but even across materialities.

Even with Masaoka's work, then, there is a kind of tension that seems to be inescapable when dealing with bodies and performance. There are ways to focus on the open indeterminacy of our place in the world, and to employ that as a critique of the forms that tend to capture and fix that place. But bodies also have an essential form that may also return essentialism itself as part of the dynamic. Masaoka has convincingly argued that her "third ear" presents a nondialectical relation to the world (dialectics also tend to entrap meaning and identity within a set relation of conflict)—but it is nonetheless dialogic. And this dialogism involves an ongoing interaction not only between human subjects, but also within materiality itself. Contrary to even a new materialist position, the very objectivity of the body is inherently uncertain, or in play. But it may also retain the force of a monument.

In their dialogic contributions to this dossier on "Performing History," both Brooke O'Harra and Eiko Otake take up the relation between body, monumentality, and history, and the same kind of tensions or dialogue emerge as a frame in their work. Both acknowledge not only that Japanese theaters have used the body itself as the centerpiece for transmitting cultural form, but also that kabuki quickly

molded acting styles into rigidly unchanging *kata* (poses that come to define acting families and remain stable through time), so that even the originally rebellious kabuki theater is premised on a kind of monumentalizing of body and tradition. But O'Harra then plays with this idea, allowing her actors to create their own poses based on characteristic images of other popular cultural figures, and then using these *kata* as bits of creative matter that might be woven into new performative statements, and new structures of meaning. By these terms, even mass culture's tendency toward image capture becomes the source of open creativity.

Eiko Otake thinks of this in more concretely consumptive terms, looking at *kata*-like forms as not only monumental but imperial structures, and "other peoples' history"—with the critical question for her being, how is one expected to swallow this? Rather than O'Harra's bricoleur-like creative appropriation of the *kata*, Eiko instead sees a dynamic between swallowing and spitting (or dribbling)—a kind of uncertain fluidity of history that seems to lie somewhere in between the polar opposition of enforced monumentality and open creativity, but that calls up that dynamic nonetheless.

If history and culture are the media for organizing human social life, the body is really the central medium for realizing history and culture—that is what these works seem to remind us. But we are also reminded that the body, both as medium and as a sign of history and culture, is a messy thing. It leaks,

it's unstable, and it interacts with its environment in ways that aren't always reducible to known languages. I remain surprised that none of the artists dealt with the erotics of body and history—a place where one might combine both the physical desires of bodies themselves (surely that could be part of the tactile sensitivity of a vaginal organ?) with the more culturally specific structurings of human desire (while O'Harra mentions the erotic origins of kabuki, that seemed to fall by the wayside—surprising especially given the erotics of mass culture that O'Harra's work invokes), but that would be another story. As with the phonograph's single pig bristle, it is the delicate, tenuous sensitivity of the human body that allows it to record and fix and define the world (to become part of the monumentality of life), but that also puts it into an open and creative relation with the world. Each of these artists offer different ways that this battle might be played out, in performance, in a clear statement of a larger performative project that is ongoing, varied, and will change, even while it will not be resolved.

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EMBODIED HISTORIES AND OVERLAPPING MEMORIES IN THE BODY

PETER ECKERSALL

History is always connected to *butoh* but not in any way that we might easily understand. In 1960s Japan, *butoh* artists were often trying to interrupt history as if they struggled to prevent the seeming inevitability of capitalist dystopia seeping through the everyday memories of war. Writing during the turbulent 1960s, also a time of radical artistic practice, the *butoh* pioneer Hijikata Tatsumi said that his work was “human rehabilitation, which goes today by the name of dancer.”¹

The 1960s generally was a time when “direct action” [*chokusetsu kōdō*] was a goal that brought artists and radical student protestors into the same circles of embodied politics. Historian and former activist Suga Hidemi calls this a dynamic corporeal vision of culture [*bunka ni taisuru doutai shiryōku*] designed to smash orthodoxy.² History was swallowed in the sense that to immerse oneself in an experience of action and mixing things up was definitely a sixties thing. But spitting also came into its own.

Now even the memory of a radical past has faded and our embodied experiences of the everyday world are very different, but some

links remain. In fact, by taking us into experiences that might echo the past, performance itself is an effective way to express the cross-over from the medium of history into the body. This is done as a dramaturgy of sensation, referents, and showing the expressive pathways of an idea into practice.

In the “Swallowing and Spitting History Symposium,” the three artist presentations did this in different ways.

Miya Masaoka showed a work called *Vagina Dialogues* that consisted of chairs transmitting sound as vibration and evoking physical stimulation as the act of listening. The title of the work is a play on Eve Ensler's popular performance text *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) that gives voice to women's experiences of sexual desire, relationships, and violence. Ensler's verbatim-style text is usually performed by a celebrity female actor. In contrast, Masaoka's work showed how a feminist-Artaudian sensory approach to these themes might directly affect the body. As the artist explained, the vagina “listens” and becomes a way of activating the sensorium.

Brooke O'Harra, cofounder of the Theater of a Two-headed Calf, showed scenes from the company's “kabuki-punk” adaptation of Chikamatsu's *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa*, a story of adultery and vengeance written in 1707. In the Two-headed Calf version, the inspiration of kabuki as something verging into exaggeration and melodrama was explored. The company took the *kata*, the proscribed

character-based movements of kabuki, as a basis for making their own uniquely queer and exaggerated physicality that was intended as an expressive politics of radical selfhood.

Finally, Eiko Otake's lecture-performance, “Swallowing and Spitting History”—that also lent its name to the event—gave us a good sense of what the contemporary embodied moment of protest and performance might involve. Her ongoing performance against the loss of memory of the conflation that is Fukushima that she showed documentation from is a kind of rehabilitation project. In her presentation, she moved around the space while moving a projection of her work—constantly interweaving these two performances and shifting our viewpoints while making spectators embodied agents in the work, both live and remediated at the same time. I think of the idea of witness and the performance of mourning, but Otake's presentation is more activist, interventionist, and humorous. Even given the serious business of addressing memories of the dead, there is a profound joy in her work. Otake marks place with an artistic presence in a way that recalls the idea of slow dramaturgy: a performance that foregrounds “ecologic-material dramaturgical intensities . . . towards slowness, ambience and connectivity.”³

I relate this to *butoh*, especially in the sense of there being an aspect of *butoh* that gives attention to the environment. *Butoh* is not an eco-critical movement in a direct sense, but its processes that explore alternate states of

corporeality and extending sensory awareness into the environment are a good foundation for thinking about artistic practice and ecology. A number of butoh practitioners do in fact stress deeper connections to the earth and environmental awareness so much so that eco-critical theory can be applied to their work. Tanaka Min's idea of the artist-farmer and his annual training camps and earthy outdoor performances at the village of Hakushu in the 1990s and early 2000s are a good example of this development in butoh. He describes his Body Weather training sessions as something almost akin to swallowing the earth: "The body that measures the landscape, the body in intercourse with weather, the body kissing mass of peat, the body in love-death relation to the day. For me the dance has been a symbol of despair and courage."⁴ I think it is more than a coincidence that two of the main centers of Body Weather practice are now on the East Coast of Australia and the West Coast of the United States, both places that are deeply impacted by global warming and the eradication of natural habitats.

I remember that a performer in a project I was working on as a dramaturg told the director that they could not perform the movement as instructed but instead would be directed by the collective sense of being in space. This decentering of artistic agency is comparable to new materialism: giving attention to the transforming experience of being in space and drawing on memories of place as kind of atmosphere, as a way of thinking about how the world moves

us. We saw something similar in Otake's lecture-performance. Her work draws attention to the materiality of the body in space and the visuality of performance as a material thing. She also showed us history—her own as a Japanese artist based in New York—and the painful sense of distance and separation from the trauma of Fukushima. She is insider and outsider, and her performance shows this reality. What the performance gives us is distance, connection, and disconnection, a history of fragments shown in the body.

/ Notes /

¹ Tatsumi Hijikata, "To Prison," *TDR: The Drama Review* 44, no. 1 (2000): 44.

² Hidemi Suga, *1968* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2005): 3–8.

³ Peter Eckersall and Eddie Paterson, "Slow Dramaturgy: Renegotiating Politics and Staging the Everyday," *Australasian Drama Studies* 58 (April 2011): 179–80.

⁴ Min Tanaka, "Body Weather Database," accessed Dec 12, 2017, <http://bodyweather.blogspot.com>.

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A RESPONSE TO EIKO OTAKE IN FOUR MOVEMENTS

TYRAN GRILLO

Every moment happens twice: inside
and outside, and they are two different
histories.

—Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000)

1

History is telepathy. It externalizes the internal, balancing affect and prescription. History is a performative enterprise, and as such requires the comingling of directors and viewers. It is a clash of ocean and continent so destructive that only relics remain to memorialize those who produced them.

Few artists more acutely understand that history begins and ends with the body than Eiko Otake, whose dancing feeds on awareness that biographies are at once written across and erased from skins by frictions of possibility. Whereas history attempts to atone for violence, only to taint itself with illusions of seamless distraction, Otake finds herself profoundly dislocated. She upsets the dangers of universality, severing the tidal pull of whole-sale philosophies. To place herself *somewhere* is to participate in the formation of collective experience.

In her 2014 piece *A Body in Fukushima*, Otake traveled to post-3/11 landscapes before revisiting them in 2016. Her interventions undermined documentary impulses with quiet theory. When re-presenting this work to an audience, she treats herself as projection screen, reconfiguring the still image as it hugs itinerant surface, thereby challenging the notion of a stagnant archive.

If the body is one link in a chain of scars, then history must be alive, bearing witness to deaths of things. Its choreographies necessitate languages of preservation; its decay slowed to rates undetectable except in retrospect. Otake removes a layer, and with it a barrier to personal experience. She drags her clothing, which like the past leaves her when she lets go.

Otake's movements whisper, "I was never alone when I did not exist, for I was omnipresent." She is rescuing her own memory from this state of nothingness, using her comportment to delocalize the flesh. We are caught in her net.

2

History is an unfinished symphony. It thrives on thematic recapitulations, each divergent from those preceding it. History makes time tangible, slotting events into quantifiable sequences to be shaped and moved around in storyboard fashion. It reminds us that invisibility is vital to manifesting survivals of the visible. A flame needs oxygen to burn, and it's

all the body can do to flicker noticeably before its pilot light goes out.

Human beings are tenacious when it comes to remembrance. In response, and unraveling any allegiances to the speed of thought, Otake engages with after-images of herself, bodily and spiritually plastic. She knows that depths of expression go as far as the technology of muscles will allow, and that memory is a traumatic clockwork of mortality.

Birth is not the beginning of life, but the end of death. It is the resurrection in miniature of every event leading to it, a harbinger of things to come. Even as listening is a form of support, so is remembrance the scaffolding of motion. Things shimmer when recalled, internal organs rippling with the excitement of self-projection.

If Otake flits at the edge of poetry, she also toes the line of exposition. Laying her body on a horizontal plane is akin to committing words to page. Both acts position her at a temporal crossroads where speech lets the blood of future compilation. (Even yesterday is drawn with pigments different from today's.) The idea of witnessing pervades nonetheless, as if one could stand beneath skies of the past and feel present in the making of future text.

3

History is an ongoing conversation within and around a body whose parts have tricked themselves into thinking they are independent.

Otake has shown us that footprints are more distinct than fingerprints, because they are explicitly part of their environments—proof that ambulation is achievable only *in tutti*.

Every gesture has baggage, its byproducts the indeterminate effluvia of politics. Our discomforts are inherited through shared awareness of finitude. Pressures of human contact are inherent to the voice. Simplicities of details beg for explanation by the very means of their production.

We are our own informants, neurons in a greater brain, struggling to build the strongest pathways possible before we forget ourselves. We are a typesetter's blocks, waiting for that final press to the mortal page. Any laughter born of ignorance on this point has brought about more bloodshed than the foulest curses.

Lift a hand to your brow, Otake says, and know yourself as the palimpsest of reason. Don't sign your name at the end, however. Let it sign you.

4

History is, above all, a form of translation. In the same way that Otake's actions translate dead sparks into living flames and back again, history is the conveyance of instability. Otake is therefore a storyteller—not a keeper of knowledge but a bringer of it. Whether passing through irradiated zones or letting the sound of waves abrade expectation until

it sinks, she suggests that no echo is eternal when framed in perception.

History is not an imitation of reality, but the reality of imitation. It is the trembling of losers registered by the instruments of those who fool themselves into thinking there are such things as winners. For either side of the equation, the most destructive variable is "truth." Stories afford what is read into them; they are the raw materials of life. Every animal whose dying eyes have reflected nothing but weaponry has known this. The body, then, is a solo improvisation in a tangle of through-composed scores, painfully mired in the agency of following. As a branch, it is the extension of a tree, while those pruning it have forgotten what lies beneath. Our roots, buried in soil, may be difficult to see, but will eventually push through even the thickest pavement of denial. When we trip along that sidewalk, we stumble into potholes of origins. History is like this—recordable only when jolted out of context. Otake wants us to eat of those roots in recognition that the discomforts of pathos are also its greatest rewards

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SEEING & HEARING ANEW ON THEATER OF A TWO-HEADED CALF'S DRUM OF THE WAVES OF HORIKAWA

ELLIE M. HISAMA

A song, as distinct from the bodies it takes over, is unfixed in time and place. . . . A song while filling the present hopes to reach a listening ear in some future somewhere. It leans forward, further and further. Without the persistence of this hope, songs, I believe, would not exist. Songs lean forward.

—John Berger¹

Experiencing the Theater of a Two-headed Calf's dazzling reading of Chikamatsu's *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* (1707) was a revelation. In viewing representations by white Americans of Asian theater and artistic practices, my everpresent concern about practices of postorientalist domination continuing unabated into the twenty-first century in new manifestations and altered forms was immediately allayed by this illuminating and unflinching production.²

Director Brooke O'Harra and composer and sound artist Brendan Connelly approach

Chikamatsu's text—first staged in 1707—as a living document, one that can be molded and modernized rather than frozen and fetishized, held sacred and untouchable.³ O'Harra brings together kabuki and punk in retelling the centuries-old tale of Otane, a woman who is assaulted by the samurai Eesogay Yougayman [Isobe Yukaemon in Chikamatsu's play] while her husband, the samurai Ogah Hecouldkillyou [Ogura Hikokurō], is in service at Edo. She notes:

[W]e actually build all of our dance movements; like our kabuki movement in our play right now *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* is actually taken off YouTube. Everything is

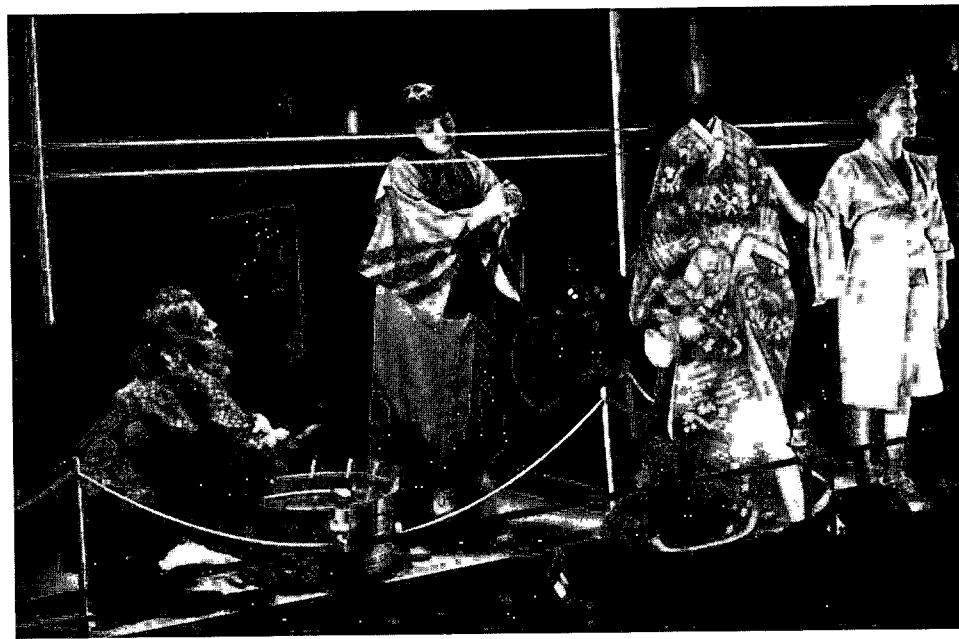


Figure 1. Otane (Heidi Schreck) and her sister Ofuji (Tatiana Pavela) doing the laundry. With the maid (Laryssa Husiak) narrating. From Brooke O'Harra, *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* (2007). Photo by Nina Hoffmann. Image courtesy of the artist.

directly gleaned from YouTube. So it's all of this old footage of *The Slits* and then we pull out what looks formal and what looks like kabuki and it looks like everyone's doing kabuki, but our source material is all from YouTube. So we're not making up any of our moves and we're not inventing kabuki.⁴

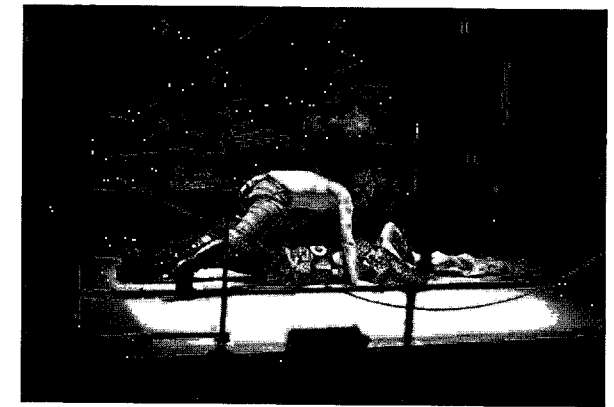
Two-headed Calf's production is forged from many disparate elements: footage of punk and rock concert performances; dialogue from some of Preston Sturges's films from the 1940s (*Hail the Conquering Hero* and *The Lady Eve*) interposed in Chikamatsu's text; and white actors dressed in a mix of modern

and traditional garb (Otane wears a modified yukata with a mini-kilt, stockings, and thigh-high boots). Connelly's score for two drum sets, electric bass, keyboards, and voice provides a rich resource for the drama. Written as 360 "boxes of scores," or a collection of notes that could be performed as needed according to the movement on stage,⁵ the music can be stretched out as a vamp according to the timing of the actor, pushed and pulled in dialogue with the live stage action. Alternately anxious, confident, jaunty, propulsive, and dark-hued, the score precisely matches the production's modern texture.

O'Harra's work on *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* evoked for me Agnès Varda's conception of artistic gleaning. In discussing her film *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse* [*The Gleaners and I*], in which she collects stories and images of gleaners at work picking up and recycling various objects, Varda observes, "there's another kind of gleaning, which is artistic gleaning. You pick ideas, you pick images, you pick emotions from other people, and then you make it into a film."⁶ From a collection of variegated materials, O'Harra deftly stitches together a distinctly feminist enactment of the play, one that allows the audience to view critically the brutality of the sexual violence Otane experiences while she was

intoxicated. In their portrayal of Yougayman's assault of Otane and, in its aftermath, the swift closing in of Otane's world, Two-headed Calf joins other feminist dramatic productions of resistance depicting sexual violence on stage.⁷

Apart from the depressingly high heap of post-modern artistic practices that exemplify a process Virginia Dominguez identifies as "domination through appropriation,"⁸ O'Harra's production of *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* constructs



Figures 2 and 3. Yougayman (Jess Barbagallo) assaults Otane (Heidi Schreck). Brooke O'Harra, *Drum of the Waves* (2007). Photograph by Nina Hoffmann. Image courtesy of the artist.

a welcome dynamic of white Americans' active engagements with kabuki theater while thankfully avoiding the familiar move of freezing Japan and Japanese people in an aesthetic of *difference*—of time, place, and gendered ethnic Otherness. Two-headed Calf transposes Chikamatsu's work to the bodies of white American actors and musicians while remaining resolutely aware of the complex dynamic of twenty-first-century transnational productions. They do not attempt to replicate traditional kabuki theater but instead securely tie together punk rock's and kabuki's core features of "outcasts and radicals."⁹ As Steve Luber notes, Theater of a Two-headed Calf "discards the universalism of intercultural performance and acknowledges the impossibility and political complexities of hybridity."¹⁰

John Berger's notion of a song's "leaning forward," leaping from characters populating a story in eighteenth-century Japan to a twenty-first-century feminist retelling by a New York theater company, is given flesh in Two-headed Calf's modeling of gesture and movement of punk rockers, whom O'Harra identifies as "accidental masters."¹¹ The production's use of *mie*, traditional poses in kabuki struck by the actors that capture an intensity of emotion, replicate poses by punk performers captured from the YouTube source material.¹²

With the new national public reckoning with sexual harassment and assault, art that dominates and subjugates Asian women and re-fetishizes what was routinely identified as "the Orient" must be considered anew. Take, for

example David Bowie's 1983 song "China Girl" and his now canonical status, evident in the blockbuster retrospective exhibition *David Bowie Is*.¹³ The massively popular exhibition regrettably did not critically assess his sometimes problematic representations of China and Japan even as it included them in its panoramic gaze.¹⁴ Musician, improviser, and composer John Zorn continues to receive accolades for his representation of Others, now for his inclusion of women instrumentalists and vocalists and his attention to female filmmakers and artists; his 2018 performances at National Sawdust garnered the prestigious designation of an "NYT Critic's Pick."¹⁵ Zorn's longstanding insistence on domination through appropriation of sexualized Japanese bodies and voices in his recordings and performances has been normalized and lauded; decades after a wave of criticism from Asian American artists and activists in New York and the Bay Area about these practices, he has still not been fully held accountable.¹⁶

That Yougayman is played by Jess Barbagallo, a trans actor, rather than by a cis male actor, adds another layer to the sinister scene in which he finds Otane alone and vulnerable after she drank a good deal of sake. Perhaps the substantial feminist and queer efforts in Two-headed Calf's bold and reflective *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* will join the fierce tides of the #MeToo movement, prompting other theater companies to enact without dominating, and reaching ears in Berger's "some future somewhere" that are willing to listen.

I extend my thanks to Yoko Suzuki for her assistance.

Notes

¹ John Berger, *Confabulations* (London: Penguin, 2016), 95.

² The production may be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/261054025> (accessed December 29, 2018).

³ Monzaemon Chikamatsu, *Drum of the Waves of Horikawa*, in *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, trans. Donald Keene (1961; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 57.

⁴ Eric Dyer, Brooke O'Harra, and Alex Timbers, in conversation with Steve Luber, "In Media Res: Why Multimedia Performance?," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29, no. 3 (September 2007): 25, <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/paj.2007.29.3.15>.

⁵ Brooke O'Harra and Katherine Brewer Ball, "Not So Authentic Kabuki: An Interview with Brooke O'Harra," *ASAP/Journal* 4, No. 1 (January 2019), 36.

⁶ Melissa Anderson, "The Modest Gesture of the Filmmaker: An Interview with Agnès Varda," *Cinéaste* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 24.

⁷ One example of feminist stage direction is the production at the Juilliard School of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* directed by Mary Birnbaum, February 2015. A colloquy on sexual violence in opera, convened by Suzanne G. Cusick and Monica A. Hershberger, appears in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 1 (April 2018): 213–53 and includes my discussion of the 2015 Juilliard production ("A Feminist Staging of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*," 237–43).

⁸ Virginia R. Dominguez, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm," in *Discussions in*

Contemporary Culture 1, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 132.

⁹ O'Harra and Ball, "Not So Authentic Kabuki," 31.

¹⁰ Steve Luber, "The Theatre of a Two-Headed Calf: Simulacral Performance and the Deconstruction of Orientalism," *Theatre Survey* 54 no. 1 (January 2013): 88.

¹¹ O'Harra and Ball, "Not So Authentic Kabuki," 36.

¹² See Roger Babb, "Rape, Shame and Suicide: Theatre of a Two Headed Calf Makes Kabuki/Punk Waves," *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics, and Culture*. October 3, 2007, <https://brooklynrail.org/2007/10/theater/rape-shame-and-suicide>.

¹³ See *David Bowie Is the Subject*, ed. Victoria Broackes and Geoffrey Marsh (London: V&A Publishing, 2013). For a curatorial perspective on *David Bowie Is*, see the essay by Kathryn Johnson, Assistant Curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum, "David Bowie is," in *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane, and Martin J. Power (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1–18.

¹⁴ For discussions of Bowie's song "China Girl," its effects, and Asiophilia in popular and postmodern music, see my "Postcolonialism on the Make: The Music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie and John Zorn," *Popular Music* 12, no. 2 (May 1993): 91–104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/931292>; Ruth Tam, "How David Bowie's 'China Girl' Used Racism to Fight Racism," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/01/20/how-david-bowies-china-girl-used-racism-to-fight-racism/>; and Shelton Waldrep, "The 'China Girl' Problem: Reconsidering David Bowie in the 1980s," in Devereux, et al., *David Bowie*, 147–59. Helene Marie Thian explores Bowie's interest in Japanese fashion and aesthetics in her essay "Moss Garden: David Bowie and

Japonism in Fashion in the 1970s," in the same volume, 128–46.

¹⁵ Seth Colter Walls, "Review: A Tour through the Hyperactive World of John Zorn," *New York Times*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/02/arts/music/review-john-zorn-national-sawdust.html>. That Zorn has signed the We Have Voice collective's open letter "against sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the performing arts" requires further conversation. The collective is "14 musicians, performers, scholars, and thinkers from different generations, races, ethnicities, cultures, abilities, gender identities, economic backgrounds, religious beliefs and affiliations. Together, they are determined to engage in transformative ways of thinking and being in their creative professional world, while being ingrained in an inclusive and intersectional analysis." See <http://wehavevoice.org>.

¹⁶ For a chronology of the events of the 1990s in which Asian American artists, musicians, and activists publicly criticized Zorn's representations of

Asians and articles about the controversy appeared in the Asian American press (*AsianWeek*, *Asian New Yorker*) and general media with wider circulations (*Oakland Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*), see my "John Zorn and the Postmodern Condition," in *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, ed. Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 72–84.

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Mieke Bal in collaboration with Jeannette Christensen

AN AESTHETICS OF INTERRUPTION

STAGNATION AND ACCELERATION

LOOKING AND THE TIME IT TAKES

If the thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object, not on its category, the very objects would start talking under the lingering eye [of thought].

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966)¹

I encountered this quote in a book on "artistic research" by a colleague, in which the author commented thus:

Noteworthy in Adorno is that thoughts and concepts are still always needed—thoughts and concepts which, as it were, assemble themselves around a work of art, in such a way that *the art object itself begins to speak under the lingering gaze of the thought*. Herein may lie a key to exploring the relationship between the discursive and the artistic in artistic research.²

I have not yet seen a more precise, concise formulation of the primary issue in the project presented here. This view is close to what I have promoted all through my teaching career as "the object speaks back," congenial to Henk Borgdorff's "the art object itself begins to speak under the lingering gaze of the thought." At the moment I read this, I was deeply involved in making art objects "speak" specifically about temporality. Therefore, the main protagonist of this essay is time: time interrupted, disturbed, and thereby made experiential; and time interrupting, in positive and negative ways, leading to critical and felicitous situations. Life is defined by time passing. In this essay, written in close collaboration with Norwegian artist Jeannette Christensen, we consider a few experiments with time robbed of its self-evidence—robbed, that is, of its capacity simply to be there all the time. Both Christensen and I probe the question of what happens