

Since 2006, I have taught intensive studio courses titled *Delicious Movement: Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty* at Wesleyan University, New York University, Colorado College, and the University of Tokyo. Accommodating my performing schedule, I teach in different lengths at each school with an average of two, eight-week courses per year. All are with similar content and the same style, though I always adjust to what is happening in the world and with each particular group of students.

Commissioned to be included in the book *Art That Inspires and Communicates*, soon to be published in Japan, I first wrote this text in Japanese. One of the book's editors hosted my course at the University of Tokyo and asked me to write how I teach as practically as possible. He is one of three professors who took my course as full participants.

Encouraged by such curious, open-minded teachers, I decided to offer its English version to teachers, students, and movement practitioners in my community here. After Shingo Umehara translated the original Japanese text into English, I revised it. I hope you find an idea or two to ponder.

Eiko Otake

## Memo on Teaching Delicious Movement: Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty

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The only exceptions were Anna Halprin's one-day workshops and Elaine Summers' Kinetic Awareness classes.

When I experienced 9/11 in New York, I was about to turn 50. We had a studio throughout the year 2000 on the 91st floor of the North Tower of the Trade Center. Seeing the towers fall from my apartment window, I was shaken. I realized that by disregarding the terrorists' attack eight years prior, my guard to the world was completely down. I shivered thinking I had put my assistants' lives in danger. The sense of regret pushed me to go to graduate school to study the history of massive violence, in particular artistic representation of the human experiences of the atomic bombings. My thesis was on writer Kyoko Hayashi, a Nagasaki A-bomb survivor. I translated her short novel *From Trinity to Trinity* and published it along with my essay. The same year, I started teaching a course that combines learning about the atomic bombings with the study of body and movement. Though I had often taught dance workshops since the early 1980s, teaching an interdisciplinary, graded course at a university brought me a different sense of responsibility and gravity.

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in which the students use their bodies to think, rejoice at their "Aha!" moments, and actively linger at their "whmmmm" moments.

- I teach in a studio without chairs, desks, or shoes. We also work a lot outside. We do not avoid undesirable conditions. We have to learn how to expose our bodies to heat, cold, wind, noise, and strangers' gazes. We work on uneven and dirty surfaces. However, I am mindful of my students' safety.
- Students move feeling their own bodies. One, two, or three people perform in front of others. Watchers feel their own bodies and those of the movers. Being watched and watching others are often challenging but profound experiences.
- Through hard-to-swallow reading, intimate discussion, journal writing, and movement work, students also uncover what has been stored in their bodies. The body is conservative. There are times when the brain knows but the body does not, and other times when the brain forgets but the body remembers. Past traumas or unsolved nuances may be stored somewhere in the body.
- I dissect my working-artist-self and share my sources and influences. I show my videos and perform in class. We eat together, and they read books and articles I am enthusiastic about.

[6] SUMMER/FALL 2023

In every class, my students moved me to tears. I have so much to learn from a generation as many as fifty years younger than I. And they make me feel that I, as an analogue generation, have something to offer them, and that I cannot afford to be nihilistic. To my delight, I often find my former students when I perform. Some students become young friends and collaborators, not by my choice but by theirs. Loving them makes me want to die before them. I do not want to break the order. Having students in my life has changed my sense of positionality to the larger society and brought different notions to why and how I create and perform.

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- Students can learn not only from studying with academic scholars, but also from working with field professionals and artists, who have particular, practical experiences and layers of episodic knowledge. Being with these practitioners, students hear their voices, sense their tones, and see their bodies in action. Those are valuable, personal experiences.
- I do not teach art-making, choreography or dancing. No previous movement work is required. I say so clearly in my course description. This is not that I discourage art-making. Whether my students become professional artists or not is not important to me. I want to help them in becoming whom they wish to become. I ask students whether they have been moved by art, and if so, why and how. What were their physical and emotional states when they were moved? What do they remember? I think when we are moved by an artwork, we tend to feel positive about ourselves. It is hard to hate oneself when one is being moved by beauty in art or by strength in an artist. Seeing, hearing, and experiencing art is a process of discovering and nurturing one's own sensibilities.
- I actively seek diverse participants and students from various majors, so we can learn from each other. Moving together, students

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We reside in our bodies. My work as a performing artist is physical as well as mental. I am interested in observing and feeling many kinds of movement, not limited to that of human bodies.

As an artist, I resist any label, particularly Butoh, since it happens to be the one people want to use for me the most. When I was 19, I lived in Tatsumi Hijikata's studio for three months and left it with Koma. Later we went to Kazuo Ohno's improvisation class twice a week. They were differently amazing artists and their oddness was liberating, but we left both of them quickly, to their puzzlement. Practicing autonomy has been more important for me than being a good student.

My partner Koma and I left Japan in 1972 when I was 20. While we studied with Manja Chmiel in Germany for about nine months, we began performing in Europe. We moved to New York in 1976 and immediately presented our own works and kept making new pieces. I am in the New York downtown dance community, but I do not use techniques from American modern dance, because I hardly took classes in the U.S.

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### How I teach

- Teachers do not choose students; students choose teachers. I am interested in knowing why and how each individual student comes to my class and chooses to stay. I want to be useful to them.
- No one can or should trust others at their first meeting. I say so to my students in my first class. Deep learning happens when students and teachers work hard toward gaining trust from each other. I want my class to be where my students discover longtime friends.
- I ask my students to learn voraciously, using their bodies, brains, and all their senses. I want their learning to be radical, physical, and memorable.
- I think a lot about how I can help students to acquire knowledge and thoughts that they will remember. If easily forgotten, it is not learning. I want students to choose what to remember and how to use what they remember. We forget easily what we are told and what we read, but we remember strong physical and/or emotional experiences. We also remember our own discoveries and thoughts we worked hard on. Hence, I try to create time and space

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get to know their classmates. Observing each other, they learn to respect plural bodies. By sharing journals and conversing, students learn different experiences, voices, backgrounds, and sensitivities. In the process we find and challenge our assumptions. Society will not change just because some people become smarter. How can we help each other so we all learn but differently?

- The class is a place to practice democracy that does not rely solely on majority rule. For democracy to function, there must be a mechanism that listens to the voices excluded by majority rule. The laws and restrictions that win majority votes should not be automatically imposed. Before doing so, we need to imagine and debate who is hurt and what is lost. Only after that, we vote again or find alternative ways of decision-making. Students and I learn that democracy requires many steps and efforts.
- Nonviolence does not mean to not fight; it is to fight while forbidding ourselves from harming lives of others. It requires our commitment and effortful communication. Debate, movement work, just being with and getting to know "others" can be effective training.
- Rules can and should be broken when necessary, but carefully. We should avoid being overtly restricted by rules. However,

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we cannot break too many rules at once. We must consider the consequences of ignoring rules. We practice physical sympathy through movement work in the studio where we must be mindful of everyone's safety and hurtful consequences.

- I create my syllabus in a way where I lead the class activities at the onset, but as the course progresses, the students are expected to contribute more to the class. By the end, students should own the course and their learning. I adjust my online syllabus before and after each class, so I tell my students to never print it.
- Students read and discuss time, distance, history, the environment, nuclear issues, war, other massive violence, democracy, and fragility of life. My syllabus focuses on nuclear issues: human experiences and environmental damage of atomic bombings, the Manhattan Project, and nuclear meltdowns. This is not because I am Japanese, but because I think nuclear issues are universally, existentially threatening.
- By collapsing our sense of distance to people far away from difficult subject matters, we can alter our chronic indifference.

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#### Movement Instructions

- Lie on the floor, eyes closed, and move slowly. Observe your body. Allow yourself to not be productive. Actively forget your name and your plans.
- Move your body without a need to express yourself. Rest and sabotage are also movements.
- Move on the floor for a very long time. Let your perspective, from which you observe society and other beings, change.
- Move on the floor. Free yourself from the assumed notions that dance requires healthy, able-bodied, and rhythmic movement.
- Explore animals, plants, minerals, things, and the environment through the body. Move closer to them and discover similarities and differences between yourself and other beings. Experience limits and boundaries of being human.
- Do not move in symmetry. The body is not symmetrical. Free the body from appearance and form. Think of it from the inside.
- Move to think, move to know. Feel movement even in the midst of what seems to be stillness. There is no stillness in the living body.

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- Move to grasp the different movements of time. Feel the unevenness of time.
- Think of the body as a place and a landscape. Places and landscapes are also bodies.
- Work in pairs and trios. Support each other's body and movement. Afterwards, just as important: work alone. That aloneness is rich with memories.
- Do not use music. To move in silence is to leave one's reliance on music. Free movements from the so-called "dance." Take in movements of society, leaves, rivers, clouds, time, et cetera.
- Move in front of others, be seen, and be aware of being seen. Learn to observe yourself from the outside and to understand your own relativity to others.
- See how each classmate moves differently with the same prompt.
- When seeing others move, imagine what's happening inside them. Feel involved but not to the whole person. Observe body parts and particular segments of time. When feeling involved, you might experience some discomfort or disappointment. That is okay. That person who is moving is not you. Involved seeing helps you notice and nurture your own aesthetics.

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- Say or show "No" when necessary. People can be differently hesitant about being seen, being touched, or touching other bodies. It is possible for you to not want to participate immediately but feel more comfortable doing so after you observe others do the work.
- I do not teach existing dance techniques nor choreography. What I teach is largely what I made up, so I can say to my students: Please take what you want and reinvent it. Please do not credit me. I do not want to be responsible to your invention. Students are accountable in elaborating their learning.
- Dance alone in a safe place to review movement prompts and create new ones for yourself and to share with others.

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#### Talking and Listening

- I often ask students to talk in small groups about their experience of moving, without me joining their conversation. I just observe the atmosphere of the room and the expressions of students during their small group discussions. I want them to notice without my guidance that after movement work, conversation becomes nuanced and wording more precise. That is profound. How to communicate in words what we have learned without language?
- It is always okay to talk or to not talk. Talking is not obligatory. We all have to learn how to enjoy silence in discussion and use it for our own reflections.
- At times, they talk to each other immediately after the movement. At other times, I ask them to take time alone before talking to each other. Every routine should have variations.
- When we shift from small groups to a whole class discussion, I ask students to share with the class what they have heard and what has stayed with them, not what they have said or thought. This is to avoid only a handful students dominating the discussion. We learn

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- to listen more actively and intently when we are tasked to report back to the whole class. To become a conduit and effectively introduce the thoughts and opinions of others is a powerful skill that supports democracy.
- Students individually and collectively find possible connections between the assigned readings and movement work. I do not make that explicit or clear. I ask them to not pay overt attention to the particular reading assignment and particular movement work of the week. Instead, I ask them to connect among all accumulated readings and movement experiences. And without a particular "answer" to connect parts, they could learn a lot from each part.

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#### Homework

- Students read assigned literature (Kyoko Hayashi, Kenzaburo Oe, Michiko Ishimure, et cetera.) and watch films (*Atomic Café*, *my A Body in Fukushima* et cetera)
- Reading is an experience. I also assign a particular task to each reading to select and read aloud, handwrite, or memorize passages; point out some details that connect or reveal the core of the work, and draw scene(s) of their choice. Why and what do you choose to remember? These tasks are shared in class.
- Students will reflect on what they learn in class by writing a journal entry between each class. The journal is freeform. There is no set format or word limit. I ask them to write their journals until they find themselves writing something they have not planned to write.
- Students share their journals as much as they are comfortable to share. They learn from each other by reading classmates' journals. People notice different things.
- I ask students to not end their journals with a question. Doing so might feel stylish, but I want them to put some effort into answering their own questions with their own words, even though

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doing so might feel clumsy and less smart.

- I read through all journal entries and respond. It is quite a task, but I feel it is important for students to know I read them.
- All students write one Op-Ed during the course. They develop opinions from what they have written in their journals. Working with a small group, they revise and rewrite, making sure opinions are clear and persuasive. How to be persuasive to others yet open to new possibilities?
- All students write a letter to one of the authors of the assigned readings. I encourage students to write to an author who is no longer alive.

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#### Final Projects

- All students will work on their own final project to deepen and expand the syllabus, and contribute to the learning of their classmates. The subject matter should be relevant to the syllabus; students set up their own questions, research, and plan how to use/place their bodies.
- Deciding on a title creates direction, though one can always change the title. A title works as a compass and an anchor in pursuing one's own project.
- I ask students to share their research questions and present findings in creative and captivating ways. They have to learn how to advocate for their projects and raise interest from others.
- Presentations should be low-cost and low-tech.
- They must prepare and practice their presentations.
- Everyone must be present for everyone else's presentations.
- Everyone shares individual responses to each presenter by talking and/or writing. That is not to make any work better, but for self-expression and mutual discoveries.

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- After the last class, I hand out my movement manifesto below.

- I do not allow students to call me a professor. I instruct them to address me by my first name, Eiko.
- I ask my students not to use “interesting,” “cool,” and “I can’t (even) imagine” in class discussion or in their journals. The first two are so overused. The last expression is usually used in sympathy but allows little effort in knowing and imagining others. Students and I bang the floor whenever we hear these words in class, and the speaker has to rephrase them, which sometimes takes some time to ponder. Over the course, students become aware of how often these words are used to spare us the effort of articulation and imagination.
- I avoid having too many dancers in my class. People who have learned to move like “dancers” could discourage others to move on their own terms.
- My classes are open to visitors—past students, their family members, and guests.
- I give all students my cell phone number and encourage them to call me without an appointment. I try to pick up whenever possible. I am aware I can do this because I teach for only part of the year.

Born and raised in Japan and a resident of New York since 1976, **Eiko Otake** is a movement-based, interdisciplinary artist. After working for more than 40 years as Eiko & Koma, she now performs as a soloist and directs her own projects collaborating with a diverse range of artists. Eiko regularly teaches at Wesleyan University, NYU, and Colorado College. She received an honorary degree from Colorado College in 2020.

**Shingo Umehara's** interest lies in education, art, and words. He lives and works in Tokyo, Japan. Over the last few years, he has committed to providing support for Japanese high school students who wish to study in America. He is passionate about demystifying how we interact with words, facts and understandings on a social level.

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### DELICIOUS MOVEMENT MANIFESTO

Move to linger, rest, sleep, and dream.

Move to taste and share.

Move to forget and remember.

Look at dance as a flower that grows, blooms, wilts, to be noticed, and be savored.

Appreciate life as movement (even in relative stillness).

Feel everyone's life as an unrecoverable, transient, precious process.

Nurture kinetic imagination to others living or dead.

Be with others (present or lost), find a way to enjoy conflicts.

Be sensual. Be beautiful and inviting in ways that are not necessarily sexual.

Dance a solo as a duet with a shadow. Dance a duet as a solo remembering a shadow.

Enjoy the flow of life but also enjoy being stuck. There is always something that can move even when one is stuck.

Do necessary things well, but more importantly do unnecessary things passionately.

Think about what dead people might want from us.

Honor silence.

Distance is malleable.

Time is not even, and space is not empty.

Please add your own.