Performing the History of *A Body in Places*

Eiko Otake and William Johnston

Submitted to ASAP journal June 2018

**Bill:** 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:** 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 of 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 20, 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 Juro Kara) and Black Tent (directed by Makoto Satoh), which sometimes incorporated the stories and the styles of traditional art forms, particularly those of kabuki. 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 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 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**

**Eiko:** 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 my writer friend and the atomic bomb survivor Kyoko Hayashi’s footsteps, 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.² 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 be good for me. The Met being the Met, I was worried 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 hesitated 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.

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

**Bill:** 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, 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 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 30 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 accumulation 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**

**Eiko:** Now that we have completed our fourth semester co-teaching and have had over 16 photo exhibitions of our collaborative work, would you review our history?

**Bill:** 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 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 farmlands were 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 16 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.

**Eiko:** 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 the 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.

**Bill:** Working with you really changed the both 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 with 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, 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, 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 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 both 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, or the idea of the “emperor” in Japan, one of my goals is to make visible the forces of power at work.3

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.”

**Bill:** 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.

**Eiko:** 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 art works 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.

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

**Eiko:** 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, 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 and sabotage to 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

Bill: 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?

Eiko: 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 40 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 relativeness 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 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 5 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 the 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 “later work” in the way Kenzaburo Oe talks about, quoting Edward Said. An artist’s “later 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.

**Bill:** 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 co-mingle.

1 “Red Tent” was the nickname for the Jy ky Gekij theater company, derived from the signature red tent that the group performed in.
2 For performance excerpts at the Met Museum, see https://vimeo.com/260905331
3 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.