

FLOWERS CRACKING CONCRETE



Eiko & Koma's Asian/American Choreographies

ROSEMARY CANDELARIO

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For Karl

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments	<i>ix</i>
A Note About Japanese Names and Words	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction	<i>1</i>
1. From Utter Darkness to <i>White Dance</i>	<i>22</i>
2. "Good Things Under 14th Street"	<i>52</i>
3. Japanese/American	<i>82</i>
4. Dancing-with Site and Screen	<i>105</i>
5. Sustained <i>Mourning</i>	<i>129</i>
6. Ground Zeroes	<i>156</i>
7. "Take Me to Your Heart": Intercultural Alliances	<i>183</i>
In Lieu of a Conclusion: "Step Back and Forward, and Be There"	<i>211</i>
Notes	<i>223</i>
Bibliography	<i>257</i>
Index	<i>273</i>

INTRODUCTION

Walking into Wesleyan University's Zilkha Gallery for the launch of Eiko & Koma's Retrospective Project, I almost feel as if I am backstage at a theater rather than at the opening of an exhibition. A massive, sand-colored canvas hanging from the ceiling reinforces my perception of being behind the scenes. Upon closer inspection, the burnt surface offers me small windows through which I may catch glimpses of the gallery beyond. Students, many of them from Eiko's Delicious Movement for Forgetting, Remembering, and Uncovering class, busily rush past me, taking care of last-minute tasks. Small attentive groups, including then American Dance Festival director Charles Reinhart, Retrospective Project producer Sam Miller, and former Japan Foundation director of performing arts Paula Lawrence, gather in front of video screens behind me displaying the video compilation, *38 Works by Eiko & Koma*, which cycles through documentation of the duo's dances since they came to the United States from Japan in 1976. The energy of the crowd pulls me further down the hallway, past a table set up with a computer displaying Eiko & Koma's new Web site, and toward backdrops from *Cambodian Stories* (2006) that grace the walls. Just as the paintings by students at Reyum School of Art in Phnom Penh begin to tower over me, I notice my feet are crunching dry leaves; am I supposed to be walking here? Instead of ending at a wall, this hallway has led me into the leafy, dimly lit cave that is the set of *Breath*, Eiko & Koma's 1998 live installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Although I feel I could stay in this environment for hours, sounds from the main gallery draw me back toward the scorched and scarred canvas. Stepping around it, I find myself literally onstage, facing rows of empty chairs, soon to be filled by the more than one hundred attendees. I am standing on the black-feather-and straw-strewn set for *Raven* (2010), which will have a preview performance in just a few moments. Gazing around the high-ceilinged, long

room, I am first struck by the media dances filling the near wall. In one, Eiko & Koma's naked bodies seem to float midair, sorrow dripping from their bodies, in *Lament* (1985), while on a nearby cracked and peeling screen, Eiko & Koma raise a white flag of surrender in documentation of *Event Fission* (1980). Opposite, the wall is all glass, providing a view of the trailer from Eiko & Koma's *Caravan Project* (1999); standing open as it did during site-specific performances all over the United States, its fiery interior is mirrored by a blanket of crimson leaves on the ground and the sun setting through bare trees. Beyond the chairs at the far end of the gallery hangs a mysterious, speckled black canvas, in front of which Eiko & Koma will end the evening with a revival of their first piece of set choreography, *White Dance* (1976). Wending its way around the perimeter of the gallery is a thread of snapshots at eye level. This literal time line is paradoxically not linear; when I reach the end, I have somehow returned to the beginning. In addition to images of well- and lesser-known works by Eiko & Koma, I spot photos of the dancers with Kazuo Ohno, Manja Chmiel, and Anna Halprin. One photo from the time line also circulates around the gallery on homemade T-shirts worn by Irene and Paul Oppenheim, the producers of Eiko & Koma's very first performance in the United States in 1976.

Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty opened on November 19, 2009, and launched the three-year Retrospective Project through which Eiko & Koma aimed to examine their body of work for its continued or shifting resonances for contemporary audiences. The Retrospective gave Eiko & Koma the opportunity to rigorously examine their own practice through the collection (and sometimes production) of archival materials and the creation of new works from earlier dances. Aspects of the Retrospective included museum exhibitions of photographs, sets, and screen dances; a new living installation, *Naked* (2010); the reworking of older pieces into new dances, for example *Raven* from *Land* (1991); the revival of older works; the publication of a retrospective catalog by the Walker Art Center; and a new collaboration with Kronos Quartet, *Fragile* (2012).

For audience members, the Retrospective showcased the remarkable scope of Eiko & Koma's body of work. Since meeting at Tatsumi Hijikata's Asbestos Hall in Tokyo in 1971, Eiko & Koma have choreographed dances that for all their simplicity grapple with monumental matters: destruction and regeneration, relationships among humans and

between humans and nature, and the stakes of being an artist in challenging political times. Their work is deeply informed by their participation in the 1960s Tokyo student movement; formative encounters with Hijikata and Ohno, key figures of the avant-garde postwar dance form *butoh* in Japan; relationships with Mary Wigman assistant Manja Chmiel, Jose Limón dancer Lucas Hoving, and San Francisco iconoclast Anna Halprin; and participation in the New York City arts community. These touchstones—radical politics in postwar Japan, *butoh*, “Neue Tanz,”¹ and downtown dance—are the foundations of Eiko & Koma's more than four-decades-long collaboration. From these influences, Eiko & Koma developed a singular performance technique and approach to choreography. Though they are considered part of a generation of American dance artists that includes David Gordon, Bebe Miller, and Ralph Lemon, their unique movement style, unrelated to modern dance or ballet; rejection of a company model; insistence upon choreographing almost exclusively on their own bodies; and do-it-yourself practices set them apart from their peers in American concert dance. The Retrospective drew attention to their impressive intersections with dance history on three continents and highlighted the skill with which they move from proscenium stages, to outdoor sites, to museum installations, and in front of and behind the camera.

Eiko & Koma's Retrospective Project also issued a vivid reminder that the two dancers have been central figures in the American concert dance scene since they moved to New York from Tokyo in 1977. But it also raised important questions, such as why so little academic research exists on Eiko & Koma, despite prestigious recognition by the MacArthur Foundation and the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, among many others; international renown; and overwhelming critical acclaim.² Dance reviews constitute the largest body of writing on the pair, including early and sustained attention from noted American critics including Jack Anderson, Suzanne Carbonneau, Jennifer Dunning, Deborah Jowitt, Anna Kisselgoff, Janice Ross, Lewis Segal, and Tobi Tobias. Another important collection of writings is by Eiko herself, comprising choreographer's notes available in programs and on their Web site, and published essays.³ Academic writing is limited to two master's theses⁴ and my own published materials. A couple of books include chapters on Eiko & Koma in the form of interviews or expanded encyclopedia entries.⁵

The Walker Art Center's 2011 catalog, *Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty*, is the most significant text on Eiko & Koma to date, comprising a comprehensive biography, artistic essays, and descriptions of every piece made by the pair from 1972 through 2010. Richly illustrated with photographs and including writings by some of the photographers who have worked with them for decades, the catalog is a major document. Useful appendices include information on funders, commissioners, and presenters from 1972 to 2011.⁶

Flowers Cracking Concrete: Eiko & Koma's Asian/American Choreographies does not attempt to duplicate the contributions of previous texts, but instead provides the first book-length critical analysis of the Japanese American duo's body of work, examining in detail more than half of their sixty-plus stage, outdoor, video, installation, and gallery works created over more than four decades. This long overdue study argues that Eiko & Koma's dances, like the flowers of the title, effect a gradual but profound transformation that has significant political implications. I trace the elaboration over time of the concerns that have become central to Eiko & Koma's work: the linkages between humans and nature, sustained mourning for personal and historical traumas, and the sometimes-fraught alliances among humans. My goal is to intervene in how these dances are viewed by providing historical and political contexts for the development of Eiko & Koma's choreography in Japan, Europe, and New York City. These contexts place Eiko & Koma firmly in American dance history even as they reveal the necessity of considering the duo as both Japanese and Asian American.

Adagio Activists

An extraordinary — and defining — facet of Eiko & Koma's work is the slowness with which they unfold their bodies and their dances, a pace less human and more geologic. Moving at a speed significantly decelerated from daily life, Eiko & Koma's dances shift attention to the ways that seemingly fixed elements of our world — trees, mountains, continents — are also constantly changing. The title of this book, *Flowers Cracking Concrete*,⁷ signals the profound corporeal and affective work of Eiko & Koma's dances. This impossible-seeming image conveys a slow yet violent process effected through persistent and insistent micromovements and embodies the contradictions inherent in Eiko & Koma's work. Though

commonly described as slow and subtle, the effect of Eiko & Koma's performances is like water eroding rock or tree roots displacing a sidewalk: the sometimes imperceptible movements of two bodies over time have a profound impact physically and emotionally on one another, their environment, and their audiences. Watching them perform, one may think that nothing in particular is happening until — gasp! — one is hit with a realization that something significant — a major shift, a rupture — has transpired. Not only have their drawn-out moving images compelled audiences to pay a different kind of attention, but they have also effected a transformation: slowly, imperceptibly, and then suddenly all at once. Although the dances do include moments of explosive movement, stuttering limbs, and sudden shifts, overall they are marked by an extraordinary insistence on taking time and an attention to the importance of the smallest of movements.

Slavoj Žižek argues persuasively that it is a political choice to do nothing, and that doing nothing is in fact still doing something.⁸ For Eiko & Koma it is a striking choreographic choice. Of course Eiko & Koma do not do nothing. Even when they seem to an audience to be utterly still, for minutes or hours on end, they are always active. Eiko & Koma's appearance of doing nothing, of taking their time, of taking space to take time, results in the central mission of their dance slowly revealing itself, both over the course of one performance and over the forty-plus years of their danced collaboration. Slowness then is not just an aesthetic for the stage, but also a method of working over the long term. Moreover, in that they are often doing the same thing, it may appear as if they are doing nothing (new). And yet their stubborn persistence, their insistence upon returning again and again to the same themes and the same movements, demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to taking their time to find out what is important to them and giving that issue physical form.

What stood out to critics who first saw Eiko & Koma's choreography in the mid- and late 1970s, and continues to be the case into their fifth decade of work, is the surprising effect of their minimalist movement. Critics may have disagreed about the meaning of various performances, but they agreed on the work's impact. Unfortunately most critics have not probed the dancers' slowness further, often leaving it at the simple fact of slowness. ("Eiko and Koma Slow Time Down" and "The King and Queen of Slow Get Busy" are representative headlines.⁹) Their speed, or

lack of it as it were, moreover leads some to make Orientalist associations with noh or Zen rock gardens. Many audience members assume Eiko & Koma meditate before performing, as evidenced by the regularity of questions about meditation and yoga at after-performance talk backs. Reviews often neglect to mention the moments of absurdity or outbursts of speed or violence that frequently puncture their dances, leaving unexamined the implications of taking longer than expected to start dancing, to stop mourning, and to form connections.

In order to intervene in the prevailing misreading of Eiko & Koma's aesthetic of slowness, I emphasize Eiko and Koma's backgrounds as student activists and the context of the Japanese avant-garde. As I discuss in chapter 1, Eiko and Koma each came to avant-garde performance as student activists in the early 1970s in Japan. Searching for an alternative to what they saw as the dead end of the leftist political scene, they found in dance a compelling way of acting in the world. Rather than seeing their transition from protesting in the streets to performing in galleries and theaters as a break with activism, I see it as a continuation of their critical stance in a new medium. Thinking about Eiko & Koma's choreography as a kind of activism requires a shift from focusing on what the dances signify to paying attention to what they do. I am not suggesting that Eiko & Koma's work is beyond representation or signification. Nor am I suggesting that the meaning of these dances cannot be expressed in words. On the contrary, this book challenges such beliefs, insisting instead on articulating the specific ways Eiko & Koma's choreography actually effects something in the world. Eiko & Koma do not represent mourning, I argue; they do it. They do not just represent new kinds of alliances with nature and across difference; they generate them. Very slowly.

Previously I wrote about the ways Eiko & Koma's work generated what I called "spaces apart" through the choreographed relationship among moving bodies, sites, and technologies.¹⁰ I argued that it is in these spaces apart where alternatives to the dominant society may be rehearsed, and entrenched binaries such as nature/culture and East/West may be challenged. In this book I focus on time as a foundational concept, particularly the passage of time as conveyed through the concept of slowness. Specifically, I frame Eiko & Koma's choreography as an *adagio* activism. This term is inspired by Žižek's insight into what slowing down can achieve.¹¹ He writes,

"Do you mean we should do NOTHING? Just sit and wait?" One should gather the courage to answer: "YES, precisely that!" There are situations when the only truly "practical" thing to do is resist the temptation to engage immediately and to "wait and see" by means of a patient critical analysis.¹²

Looking back at Eiko & Koma's body of work over the past forty years, it becomes evident how they have used their dances as an opportunity to continuously analyze with their bodies the issues most important to them. In a 1986 interview, Eiko shared, "We do not want to jump into working on a dance with a concept which is just hunted. It should be some theme that slowly comes up as a concern, which we cannot help but deal with. Making the dance is one way to deal with our concern."¹³ In other words, *adagio* activism is a decelerated, durational process compelled by a deeper searching, a patient and corporeal discernment that reveals matters of great importance. Eiko & Koma's body of work is evidence that the themes of their dances are not random but are ones with which they deeply connect, with the result that those things they choose to explore, they explore exhaustively. Moreover, their dances do not signify these matters of importance but realize them.¹⁴ That is, dance for Eiko & Koma is not only a way to come to understand something, but a means to give it physical form, to actualize it in the world.

Slowness for Žižek, and for Eiko & Koma, is therefore not a benign aesthetic but a political intervention, like a labor slowdown when workers intentionally decrease production on an assembly line to demonstrate their centrality to the success of capitalism.¹⁵ Slowing down enables analysis of a complicated and bewildering situation, like the function of violence, which Žižek categorizes as subjective and objective. Subjective violence includes acts committed by an individual or group of individuals that visibly disturb the status quo; crime and terror are two obvious examples. Objective violence, on the other hand, is the necessarily invisible violence — both symbolic and systemic — that sustains the very status quo from which subjective violence so graphically stands out. The urgency (Žižek calls this a "fake urgency") with which we are prompted to respond to subjective violence actually serves to mask objective violence and prevents us from comprehending how objective violence in fact begets subjective violence. Ultimately, for Žižek the most profound act is

one “that violently disturbs the basic parameters of social life.”¹⁶ It is at its heart “a radical upheaval of the basic social relations”¹⁷ that could disturb the functioning of objective violence.

Eiko & Koma’s dances over the past four decades—generating connections and change over time and across borders—offer an alternative model for how art can reflect and transform society. Avant-garde art need not only cause radical breaks; it can also effectively engage in a slow, sustained process of change. Slowness as choreographic method provides the time to learn how to develop alternative ways of working in the world, including tactics that may allow one to pass outside the visibility of subjective violence, reveal the functioning of objective violence, and create alliances that could prove effective in countering objective violence. Eiko & Koma say they make work about something they need to discover, not something they already know. Their concerns, the things that they “cannot help but deal with,” require repeated and careful analysis, which they conduct through their choreography.

In both Eiko & Koma’s body of work and in this book, slowness is foundational without itself being the point of the dance or the analysis. It is a consistently used tool, but its results are not always the same. For example, Eiko & Koma use slowness in their dances for different ends: it may be a way to prolong mourning or to facilitate connections among humans, nature, and technology. Slowness can also draw attention to cycles of destruction and regeneration, making the long duration of cycles over lifetimes comprehensible over the course of one dance. Similarly, slowness in this book provides the foundation for viewing Eiko & Koma’s work; it is a prerequisite that must be understood before the analysis can proceed. As such, aesthetics as politics is not the focus of this book, but it is the foundation. The focus instead is on the variety of ways that Eiko & Koma employ their aesthetics and to what end.

Asian/American/Dance

When I was doing research in Japan, people would say to me, “Well you know, Eiko & Koma are really American.” They are simply not considered part of Japanese dance history, even though they began performing while briefly living at Hijikata’s Asbestos Hall and studied with Ohno early in their careers. This view is understandable given that the dancers have had their primary residence in New York since 1977 and — not counting their

experimental performances in the early 1970s—have only performed in Japan a handful of times. On the other hand, Eiko & Koma’s significance in American dance history and their ongoing role in American concert dance is often elided by a popular discourse that persistently categorizes them as Asian. Rather than pointing to specific political, historical, or cultural markers that might be relevant to Eiko & Koma’s work, “Asian” too often slips into an Orientalism that says far more about Asian American racialization and the legal and discursive regulation of Asian bodies in the United States than it does about the dance at hand. Moreover, these perspectives that would have the dancers be either generically American or Asian foreclose consideration of the complex personal, political, and dance historical webs that form the foundation of the work.

In this book I situate Eiko & Koma both as Japanese artists who began performing through their encounters with butoh but who have never called their work by that name, and as Asian American artists in American concert dance who have had international success. This orientation to their choreography has theoretical and methodological implications that require me to cross boundaries of dance studies, Japanese studies, and Asian American studies, and take into account theories of transnationalism, diaspora, and Asian American racial formation. In the process, I seek to expand critical understanding of the radical nature of Eiko & Koma’s body of work, while also demonstrating how that work—of which the artists themselves sometimes question whether it is indeed dance or choreography—influences the field of dance studies. The book contributes to the nascent body of literature concerned with Asian American dance and expands American dance history to include the contributions of Asians and Asian Americans.

By insisting on thinking about Eiko & Koma as part of American dance history, I join Asian American scholars who examine the ways Asians have or have not been included in the idea—and state—of America. This thinking is reflected in the book’s subtitle, *Eiko & Koma’s Asian/American Choreographies*. I follow David Palumbo-Liu’s use of the *solidus* to signal a simultaneous connection and separation, inclusion and exclusion, between Asian and American.¹⁸ The addition of the slash points to the repeated exclusions of Asians from America, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1872, even as the punctuation simultaneously resists the nationalist project of the subsumption of Asians into America,

particularly as model minorities after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The slash furthermore highlights the unsettled state of both terms, acknowledging repeated and historically changing international as well as intranational contact. This is a particularly appropriate approach for Eiko & Koma, who have been permanent residents of the United States since 1979 and whose career is inextricable from American concert dance, but who maintain their Japanese citizenship.

Unlike Asian American theater and performance, Asian American dance remains woefully undertheorized.¹⁹ Dance studies is itself a relatively new discipline, and while an analysis of race, class, and gender has been central to its formation, Asian American choreographers and dancers have remained largely invisible. I lean heavily on the work of Yutian Wong, a scholar at the forefront of Asian American dance. She is joined by scholars such as Priya Srinivasan and SanSan Kwan in developing a nascent body of literature on Asians dancing in America, the meaning of dance in diasporic communities, and the contribution of Asian Americans to American dance history.²⁰ As Wong established in the essay "Towards a New Asian American Dance Theory: Locating the Dancing Asian American Body" and expanded on in her book *Choreographing Asian America*, Asian American contributions have been largely erased from American dance history, despite the fact that, as she asserts, "American modern and postmodern dance forms are always already Asian American."²¹ Her argument is strongly influenced by Brenda Dixon Gottschild's efforts to expose the ways that African American culture, via the presence of Africanist movement qualities, infuses American dance to the point that American dance *is* African American.²² Wong persuasively demonstrates that Asian American bodies form an invisible foundation of American modern and postmodern dance. For example, modern dance "pioneer" Ruth St. Denis based many of her early twentieth-century Orientalist dances on work by Nautch dancers from India she met in New York, sometimes even using their bodies onstage as backdrops to her solos.²³ Merce Cunningham famously began employing the *I Ching* in the 1950s in his chance operations, which separated dance making from narrative and even the express intent of the choreographer. Steve Paxton later drew heavily from aikido, among other movement forms, in his development of contact improvisation in the early 1970s. In each of these cases, the unacknowledged appropriation

of Asian bodies and concepts is regarded as the product of individual (white, American) genius.

It is not a matter, however, of simply inserting "forgotten" dancers back into the dance history canon. As Wong deftly demonstrates with the case of Michio Ito, a Japanese dancer who enjoyed enormous success in the United States before being deported to Japan during World War II, repeated revivals and retrospectives of his work have never quite remedied his absence from the canon.²⁴ An examination of American legal, political, and popular discourses reveals that the pattern in dance history of alternately emphasizing or erasing Asian Americans is in fact a fundamental condition of American national identity formation. Karen Shimakawa explicates this condition as a process of abjection—à la Julia Kristeva—in which Asian Americans are both "constituent element *and* radical other"²⁵ of the nation. In other words, "America" is defined through the (ongoing) exclusion of Asian (American)s, who nonetheless constitute an essential part of that same identity. It is important to note that the abject is always internal to the deject, even as it is excluded. This ambiguity or contradiction is reflected in the literal, material, legal, and symbolic abjection of Asian Americans. For example, Japanese internment excluded Japanese Americans from "America" by drawing them further in. Another example is the alternation between legal exclusion and model minority status. Abjection is, after all, an unstable process, requiring continuous reinforcement.

Asian American studies has proven invaluable for teasing out the complex forces that impact Asian American dancers in general and Eiko & Koma in particular. This book asserts that what Eiko & Koma do onstage—their choreographic decisions—can be productively analyzed as Asian American cultural critique. In addition to guiding my orientation to the dancers' body of work as a whole, the discipline is also a source of scholarship on mourning, melancholia, reparation, intercultural performance, and multiculturalism that helps me analyze Eiko & Koma's predominant themes. However, I must acknowledge that the discipline's focus on art as a source of legible stories of immigration, oppression, and resistance has meant that text-based productions like literature and theater have been favored, while body-based or abstract work runs the risk of not being visible as Asian American. This is not unique to Eiko & Koma, but is a larger issue faced by many Asian American performers. Wong

discusses the same phenomenon in relation to work by Sue Li-Jue and Denise Uyehara, noting that pieces lacking an explicit Asian American critique become “unidentifiable in terms of inhabiting a thematic Asian American niche.”²⁶ In other words, content rather than form is where politics becomes comprehensible within the field.

This book takes as a given that choreography is inherently political, that aesthetic choices reflect political investments, and that dancing bodies are formed within regimes of discipline and viewed by their audiences in the context of the politics of representation. Though these statements may seem self-evident, this kind of thinking about dance only became possible with the rise of dance studies scholarship beginning in the mid-1980s and has not fully made its way into other disciplines.²⁷ In bringing together dance and Asian American studies I, like Wong, seek to racialize and politicize aesthetics. In particular, I aim to demonstrate how the US Orientalism inherent in American modern dance has obscured the politics of Eiko & Koma’s dances, even while awarding those dances the highest honors. At the same time, I argue for the choreography itself as Asian American critique; in doing so, I assert that dance is not merely a vehicle for telling stories, but more important, is a way of enacting a particular politics.

Methodology

My goal to elucidate the politics of Eiko & Koma’s choreography is best achieved through choreographic analysis, through which I critically unpack the dances to demonstrate what these unique works effect in the world. My primary sources, then, are the dances themselves. I draw on extensive observation of Eiko & Koma’s performances, rehearsals, and workshops. Live performances I was not able to see in person I watched through video documentation and studied through photographs, promotional materials, newspaper previews and reviews, and program notes available in Eiko & Koma’s personal archives and in collections at The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library and the San Francisco Museum of Performance + Design. Media dances created specifically for film or video I have watched on my computer, on gallery walls, and in university and museum screening rooms.

Eiko & Koma’s dances challenge an easy separation between choreography and performance. Because they are both choreographers and

usually the only performers of their dances, it can be difficult to separate Eiko & Koma’s movement style and choreography from their individual bodies. Furthermore, the vocabulary often appears deceptively simple: small, subtle, continuous movements that contain none of the virtuosity or proscenium-oriented, presentational qualities of many other dance forms. Nonetheless it is possible to construct a choreographic analysis based on the following questions: What choices have the choreographers made in the creation of each piece, including the title? What is the site of the dance? How do the bodies move through time and space? What is the quality of their movement? Where are they in space? Are there other bodies in addition to Eiko & Koma? What is the relationship between the bodies onstage? How do the costumes, music, and sets relate to the moving bodies? What meanings accrete to this series of decisions? The writing of Thomas DeFrantz in *Dancing Revelations* is a particular influence in this sense.²⁸ His richly descriptive prose paints a detailed picture of each dance, including movement vocabulary and quality, music, structure, and spacing. In each paragraph DeFrantz shows his readers what is happening in the dance and then, based on the evidence he presents, tells them what the choreography means; his analysis of many of Alvin Ailey’s eighty works forms his arguments, rather than merely supporting them. DeFrantz’s specific and evocative writing style employs the very same Africanist aesthetics that he detects in Ailey’s choreography, which pushes me to elaborate the aesthetic principles that undergird Eiko & Koma’s movement vocabulary, such as slowness.

Even as I foreground the process of choreographic analysis, I must acknowledge that my analysis could not have developed without an embodied perspective based on my experiences studying with Eiko & Koma, whom I first met in 2006 when I was a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Indeed, Susan Leigh Foster asserts in *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*—arguably the first text to outline choreographic analysis as a methodology—that developing a visual, aural, and kinesthetic knowledge of movement is a prerequisite to discerning a dance’s codes and conventions.²⁹ In addition to taking Eiko & Koma’s movement class, *Making Dance as an Offering*, I also worked with Eiko to produce a written record of that class and served as an unofficial teaching assistant for her undergraduate seminar, *Delicious Movement for Forgetting, Remem-*

bering, and Uncovering. Although I had seen one or two of their dances prior to meeting them, it was only through dancing with them twice a week, seeing how they contextualized their work with other artists and thinkers, and talking to them in their temporary office that I came to appreciate the full force of the choreography. At the same time I began to notice how Eiko & Koma's dances were frequently misread as foreign and mystical: a type of meditation, or something akin to the process of tending a Zen Buddhist rock garden. I puzzled over the lack of critical and scholarly writing about their significant body of work that dared probe beneath the slow-moving surface. Why were their acclaim and success, both richly deserved, accompanied by such a superficial consideration of their choreography rather than a deep engagement with what the movement was actually doing? Through my experience working closely with Eiko & Koma, I became compelled to develop the kind of analysis I felt was lacking. As the daughter of a Filipino American father, I have a personal stake in challenging the way Asian bodies in the United States are rewarded as exceptional but at the same time are never quite allowed to be "American."

Although this book is not an ethnography of Eiko & Koma, I did employ the ethnographic method of participant observation to continuously deepen my knowledge of the movement I analyze. Since 2006 I have spent many hours with Eiko and Koma at their home in New York City and have traveled to their performances, workshops, exhibitions, and residencies across the United States and in Japan and Taiwan. I have also participated to varying degrees in their work. For example, in addition to participating in numerous Delicious Movement workshops, I have done a range of tasks, including stage managing performances, mending props, assisting backstage, handing out programs, and more. In 2012 I worked as a Mellon Archive Fellow with the Dance Heritage Coalition to inventory, assess, and organize Eiko & Koma's personal archives, alongside Eiko and Patsy Gay, a specialist in archival methods. I also worked with Eiko to help her conceptualize their Archive Project, consistent with their artistic vision and practices. This hands-on approach to research has given me enormous insight into individual choreographic projects as well as the entire span of Eiko & Koma's career.

In addition to analyzing Eiko & Koma's choreography, it is important to pay close attention to how Eiko and Koma's early years in Japan,

their time performing in Western Europe, and their decision to settle in New York influenced both their movement style and concerns. This contextual information is not always available from the dances themselves and must be acquired through supplemental historical and archival research and interviews with people who were there and can give first-hand reports. I have interviewed Eiko & Koma numerous times in addition to spending hours simply hanging out and chatting. My relationship with the artists has given me access to their longtime friends, collaborators, presenters, and critics, who have generously shared their thoughts, memories, and materials with me through formal interviews and casual conversations. These interviews provide vital background information and form part of the evidence to support my argument about Eiko & Koma's choreography.

I furthermore examine archival materials about Eiko & Koma to ascertain the extent to which changing discourses of race, multiculturalism, and identity in the United States have impacted how their choreography is viewed. How was contemporary Japanese performance received in the mid-1970s in the wake of the Vietnam War and in the midst of a nascent Asian American political movement? What does it mean that butoh performances by Kazuo Ohno and Dairakudakan proliferated alongside performances by New York-based Japanese artists Eiko & Koma and Kei Takei at precisely the moment that the Japanese American redress movement, which sought reparations and an official government apology for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, gained traction in the 1980s? How have Eiko & Koma benefited from multicultural policies and practices of the 1990s? Have those same multicultural policies and practices also obscured the force of Eiko & Koma's dances? Furthermore, what does it mean during this time period to be performing "modern" Japan in the form of an avant-garde movement practice and yet to be read in Orientalist terms, which generally tie the "Orient" to traditions fixed firmly in the past?

Some of the same questions I ask of the archive can also be asked of Eiko & Koma, presenters, dance critics, and the dancers' artistic collaborators through interviews. For example, Beate Sirota Gordon, the former performing arts director of the Japan Society and the Asia Society and the first presenter of Eiko & Koma's work in the United States in 1976, has provided me with invaluable information about the cultural con-

texts in which Eiko & Koma began to perform in the United States.³⁰ At that time, Gordon's programming decisions in New York City played a large role in determining what "Japanese" meant in America, as artists she booked for shows at the Japan Society often subsequently toured all across the country. Similarly, presenters such as Charles Reinhart of the American Dance Festival and Jeremy Alliger of the now defunct Boston-based Dance Umbrella played a large role in defining Eiko & Koma's work through the contexts in which their dances appeared, establishing the choreography (often commissioned as well as presented by these agencies) as American in the former case and as part of a cutting-edge Japanese dance community in the latter. These brief examples are illustrative of the ways presenters, critics, and collaborators have participated in the construction of Eiko & Koma's work before it is choreographed, as it is performed, and after the performance is over. Conducting interviews allowed me to get the details and nuances of this information, often not available in archives and not evident in the dances themselves.

The result, I hope, is that my engagement with Eiko & Koma and their choreography mirrors their own engagement with their work. Like them, I do not want to approach their work "with a concept that is just hunted," but I want the analysis to develop out of a sustained engagement with the dances themselves. My goal is to employ their choreographic method in my analysis in order to offer readers a more complex and slowed-down experience of Eiko & Koma and their work. Taken together, these varied experiences, along with analytical, archival, and ethnographic methods, suggest the major themes, or concerns, of Eiko & Koma's body of work.

Overview of Chapters

Flowers Cracking Concrete places Eiko & Koma's dances in their political, dance historical, and cultural contexts and analyzes those dances for their individual and collective impact. The first two chapters pay particular attention to establishing Eiko & Koma's influences and early history in order to intervene in the Orientalist discourse that too often defines them as singular and timeless. It is true that their work is unique, but it developed through particular life and artistic decisions and encounters, not through some inherent cultural or national essence. The examination of Eiko & Koma's early career in chapters 1 and 2, for example, provides an alternative view of three crucially important periods of dance history,

but from the perspective of marginal participants in these moments. What was it like to study with the key figures of butoh for short periods of time in the early 1970s, but not be in the inner circle of disciples who worked with Hijikata and Ohno for years to develop their unique butoh expressions? What did it mean to study dance in Germany with Chmiel at a time when her Wigman-influenced style was out of favor, but *Tanz Theater* had yet to predominate? How was it possible to be integrated into the New York downtown dance scene as newcomers to the United States whose performance style differed from the predominant white abstract and pedestrian postmodern dance? And how did each of these encounters shape Eiko & Koma's body of work?

Chapter 1, "From Utter Darkness to *White Dance*," traces the development of Eiko & Koma's political commitments, aesthetics, and dance style from their time growing up in postwar Japan through their early "cabaret" performances in Japan and their initial dances in Europe and the United States. The chapter focuses particularly on the years 1971 to 1976, during which the pair moved from the "utter darkness" of not only their *ankoku butoh* teachers but also the political situation in Japan to the premiere in New York of what they call their first piece of set choreography, *White Dance* (1976). I argue that for Eiko & Koma choices about how, where, and at what pace to move have from the beginning always been both choreographic and political decisions.

After their American debut, Eiko & Koma returned briefly to Japan before moving to the United States permanently in 1977, where they immersed themselves in the New York downtown dance scene, creating one new piece each year and establishing themselves as critically acclaimed mainstays of American avant-garde dance. Chapter 2, "Good Things Under 14th Street," considers Eiko & Koma's experimental choreography—*Fur Seal* (1977), *Before the Cock Crows* (1978), *Fluttering Black* (1979), *Trilogy* (1979–1981), and *Nurse's Song* (1981)—in relationship with their new home in New York City, placing the duo's work in the larger contexts of American postmodern dance, the downtown dance scene, and 1970s politics. From this point on, I claim, Eiko & Koma's work was deeply engaged with participating in and responding to American—and particularly New York City—influences. My analysis of these early dances shows that despite a sometimes radical change in style from piece to piece, Eiko & Koma demonstrate a consistent commitment to

choreographing oppositional politics. This consistency notwithstanding, I suggest the dances that were most successful with critics were those that employed slowness as a choreographic method.

Chapter 3, “Japanese/American,” shifts the perspective from the contexts in which Eiko & Koma began to make dances to the discursive contexts that impacted the reception of their work. Specifically, the chapter examines a change that took place between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s in how Eiko & Koma’s work was represented and understood by producers and critics. At precisely the time when Eiko & Koma’s work was becoming more integrated into American dance, the pair – initially called “avant-garde” and “postmodern” – became increasingly presented as “Japanese” and “Asian,” particularly after Japanese butoh companies began to appear on American stages in the early 1980s. Through an analysis of dance reviews in the *New York Times* and other New York papers covering dance, I argue that Eiko & Koma have not been legible to US audiences as Asian American, or even American, because discourses that interpellate them as Japanese or Asian have been too dominant. I discuss multiple discourses that impact Eiko & Koma’s work, including what Barbara Thornbury has called a “kabuki discourse,” something I have identified as a nuclear discourse that is particularly entwined with the American reception of butoh, and an Asian American discourse.

Having discussed in chapters 1 through 3 the cultural, dance historical, and discursive contexts of Eiko & Koma’s early work, in chapters 4 through 7 I abandon chronology in favor of analyzing recurrent choreographic and kinesthetic themes evident in dances from across Eiko & Koma’s body of work, including nature, mourning, and intercultural alliances. These chapters individually and as a whole demonstrate how the duo’s artistic concerns cycle throughout their repertoire, extending over long periods of time and sometimes overlapping with other themes. Just as Eiko & Koma’s choreography and career constantly return to earlier projects to mine them for further significance, my analysis, too, cycles through temporalities to get at what the dance is about and what it does. Individual works cannot be discussed in isolation, but must be understood in relation to other dances that grapple with the same ideas or produce the same effects. For example, when analyzing a particular cycle within Eiko & Koma’s body of work, I focus first on one dance in particular, then compare and contrast that dance with others that pre-

cede and follow it in order to articulate what remains constant over the decades and what changes, to what effect. Moreover, these cycles do not necessarily take place in a defined span of time and then give way to another theme. Rather, Eiko & Koma may return to an earlier concern years later. Chapters 4 through 7 thus overlap in terms of chronology. Furthermore, no one theoretical approach could account for all of the cycles. Each theme calls for its own unique frame of analysis.

Chapter 4, “Dancing-with Site and Screen,” explores the prominence of human-nature relationships in Eiko & Koma’s body of work, as exemplified in *River* (1995) and as seen in stage pieces like *Grain* (1983) and *Night Tide* (1984), site dances like *The Caravan Project* (1999), screen dances such as *Husk* (1987), and the living installation *Breath* (1998). Specifically, I home in on the relationships choreographed in these pieces between nature and culture, bodies and technology, that are not based in binaries or mutual exclusion but in interconnection, or what I call interface. I argue that Eiko & Koma practice in these dances a choreographic methodology of “dancing-with” nature and technology that enables the generation of interfaces through a slow and concerted process in which all active participants, including potentially the audience, are altered. This body of work is a recurring reminder of the potential for creating alternate ways of being in the world, in which the relationship between nature and technology has many complex possibilities beyond an either/or binary.

Chapter 5, “Sustained *Mourning*,” examines Eiko & Koma’s decades-long investigation of mourning as a choreographic practice. Here slowness refers not only to the movement in a particular dance, but also to Eiko & Koma’s long-term focus. In works including *Elegy* (1984), *Lament* (1985), *Wind* (1993), *Duet* (2003), and *Mourning* (2009), the duo prolongs mourning such that it acts as a stubborn, even resistive melancholia. I draw on psychoanalysis, Asian American studies, and art analysis to provide a context for my theorization of the labor of Eiko & Koma’s prolonged mourning and its effects. I argue that this group of dances theorizes mourning as not merely a private, individual process, but a societal, public melancholia that highlights issues and events that can never be resolved but must nonetheless be grappled with. Their choreography, I suggest, accomplishes this with performances of a sustained mourning through which Eiko & Koma evidence the ability to dwell

in a space of heightened emotion without necessarily effecting a transformation of those strong feelings, both over the course of one dance and throughout the decades of their work. Grief in this case becomes a physical labor—sometimes even a battle—on endless repeat. This corporeal theorization of mourning is a crucial reworking of the concept that rejects the beginning-middle-end ideology of Freudian psychology in favor of a postwar temporality in which such a linear resolution is no longer possible.

Chapter 6, “Ground Zeroes,” demonstrates how Eiko & Koma’s post-9/11 dance, *Offering* (2002), drew on their long-term engagement with sustained mourning. Together with other dances, including *Event Fission* (1980), *Land* (1991), *Raven* (2010), and *Fragile* (2012), *Offering* calls attention across time and continents to a shared history in Trinity, New Mexico, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and New York City. I argue that this collection of Eiko & Koma’s dances generates a critical transtemporal and transnational space in which divisions between here and there, now and then, us and them are called into question. I further suggest that these pieces differ from the melancholic choreography of the previous chapter, in that they transform rather than sustain mourning. These dances display a process of metamorphosis that occurs over the course of a piece, in which the bodies become something new through interacting with the other elements in the piece. I understand this transformation of mourning through the notion of reparation, a concept derived from psychoanalysis and adapted by Asian American studies scholars, that offers the possibility of creative action to productively address crisis and loss.

Chapter 7, “‘Take Me to Your Heart’: Intercultural Alliances,” centers on a group of dances beginning with *Cambodian Stories* (2006) that points to an important attention to intercultural alliances in Eiko & Koma’s work. Made in collaboration with young painters from the Reyum Art School in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, these intergenerational and interdisciplinary works among Asians and Asian Americans—including *Cambodian Stories Revisited* (2007), *Quartet* (2007), the revival of *Grain* (1983/2007), and *Hunger* (2008)—were presaged by the duo’s collaboration with Anna Halprin in *Be With* (2000). In particular, this chapter engages with the history of intercultural performance to demonstrate how Eiko & Koma’s work, focused on what I call choreographing intercultural alliances, differs from other noted intercultural

collaborations that often remain mired in Orientalist discourses or uneven power structures. Unlike the interfaces of chapter 4, intercultural alliances do not attempt to create a new entity, but instead seek to enact strategic ways of working together, undoing in the process assumptions that separate East and West, modernity and tradition.

The concluding chapter, “In Lieu of a Conclusion: ‘Step Back and Forward, and Be There’”³¹ takes a long view of Eiko & Koma’s body of work through the lens of their Retrospective Project (2009–2012) and ongoing Archive Project. I discuss the live installation *Naked* (2010) as an emblematic work of the Retrospective and Archive Projects that explicitly engages Eiko & Koma’s core choreographic practices of site-adaptivity and (re)cycling, which extend their concerns across time and space. In this way I demonstrate that Eiko & Koma’s archival practices are in fact a continuation of their choreography. I then review current debates about performance archives in order to highlight Eiko & Koma’s intervention in the understanding of what it means to archive. I argue that Eiko & Koma’s ongoing engagement with their own choreography—in the form of continually revisiting ideas and recycling movement, costumes, and sets—challenges the future-orientation of archives and interrupts the body-documents binary that has developed between those favoring the body as an archival site and those advocating for the document-as-performance. In contrast, Eiko & Koma’s site-adaptive and cyclic choreographic practices show that archiving is an ongoing activity that generates connections among bodies, objects, and sites.

CHAPTER 1
FROM UTTER DARKNESS
TO WHITE DANCE

Eiko & Koma had their New York premiere with *White Dance* at Japan Society's Japan House on May 6, 1976. The delicate yet tension-suffused dance featured periods of extended stillness punctuated by moments of absurdity: a slap, a cry, a cascade of potatoes. Although only a one-night engagement, the performance enabled a six-month sojourn in the United States, including subsequent performances at The Cubiculo, The Performing Garage assisted by Dance Theater Workshop, and the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center (the latter under the title *The White Moth*). Prominent dance critics at *The Village Voice*, *Dance Magazine*, and *Soho News* called the work "shocking in some way I can't articulate"¹ and "profoundly exciting,"² in part for the way it "coheres and engages our interest because we watch Eiko and Koma [*sic*] repeatedly enter, inhabit, and leave the inextricably linked states of fragility and determination."³ How is it that two Japanese student activists turned dancers were able to create such a stir in New York, both uptown at the venerable Japan Society and NYPL and downtown at venues known for producing avant-garde and postmodern performance? Where did this dance come from? What was it about their dance that left dance critics unable to articulate meaning yet captivated nonetheless?

This chapter examines the development of Eiko & Koma's political and aesthetic commitments during their early years in Japan and their initial forays into dance performance in Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States. I contend that their choreography evidences from the very beginning an oppositional stance that although devoid of explicit activist messages nonetheless proposes ways of being in the world that challenge structures of power. It is also during this time that Eiko & Koma can be observed making decisions about what is important to them and how to incorporate it into their dancing. As Eiko said in a 1988 interview, "The question is: How shall I continue? What do I preserve

From Utter Darkness to White Dance

and what do I not take in? What do I fight against in consideration of keeping something that I care about?"⁴ I open with an introduction to Eiko and Koma's background growing up in postwar Japan and coming-of-age as activists in late 1960s and early 1970s Tokyo.⁵ The focus then turns to their formation as dancers and dance makers from 1971 to 1976, first in Japan with the key figures of butoh, Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, then through more than two years of performance and study in Europe, including with Mary Wigman dancer Manja Chmiel, and ending with their first performances in the United States. This period of movement from one continent to another parallels the pair's movement away from the "utter darkness" of their ankoku butoh teachers toward their own *White Dance*. At the same time, their trajectory provides the opportunity to retrace some of the paths of twentieth-century modern dance history.

The Dance of Utter Darkness

In a time line Eiko & Koma created for their Retrospective Project, the dancers constructed a chronological representation of their lives and career.⁶ With this document, the pair situated their body of work historically, culturally, and politically, including not only notable moments from their career, but also significant events such as the Beatles' first concert in Tokyo, the beginning of the Vietnam War, and their own participation in Jimmy Carter's 1980 presidential campaign. Notably, the time line begins not with Koma's birth in provincial Niigata on Japan's northwestern coast in 1948 and Eiko's in Tokyo in 1952, but with the defeat of Japan in 1945. By marking their own beginnings with this decisive ending, an act of aggression and destruction unparalleled in human history, they acknowledge this moment as a major rupture, a turning point after which nothing can be the same. With this deliberate staging of their relationship to history, Eiko & Koma demonstrate how their sense of time extends beyond what we normally think of as beginnings and endings, a quality that has become characteristic of the sense of time in their work. The time line also places the dancers' births in the context of the end of the US occupation of Japan and the duration of the Korean War, and therefore subject to and implicated in geopolitical entities and events well beyond the local.

Though this act of staging their relationship to history is a recent one,

there is no doubt that aftershocks of war and occupation resonated in both of their lives. Eiko and Koma were small children during the period of reconstruction after the intense destruction of World War II. Hiroshima and Nagasaki of course were devastated by the atomic bombings, but many other cities, including Tokyo, were firebombed and had to be rebuilt. Evidence of the war lingered, through broken infrastructure, the visible evidence of wounded war veterans, and US military occupation. Even after occupation officially ended in 1952, US military bases in Japan served as supply stations for the Korean War and later for the war in Vietnam, keeping armed conflict in the forefront of people's minds, even as Korean residents of Japan were relocated to North and South Korea.

Takashi Koma Yamada's parents split up when he was still small.⁷ His father, reportedly haunted by the war, took Koma's brother, while Koma remained with his mother. Their life together in the often snow-covered port city of Niigata was modest. Koma talked in a movement workshop about how his mother would split an egg with him during his childhood, giving him the yolk to eat with his rice, taking only the white for herself.⁸ In contrast, Eiko Otake was the only child of a banker and homemaker. Though based in Tokyo, her family spent a number of years living in Tochigi Prefecture in rural central Japan for her father's job, which gave Eiko an early appreciation for nature. In the midst of this solid middle-class foundation, arts and politics were also strong currents in the Otake household. Both of Eiko's grandmothers were geishas (indeed, Eiko has worn one of her grandmother's silk kimonos as a costume for years), and her grandfather was an artist. And despite her father's profession, he was also a communist.⁹ In this politically active and creative environment, Eiko took three years of modern dance classes as a child and played the piano, but reportedly did not have an affinity for either.

The mid-1950s through the early 1970s in Japan was a time of intense change, including rapid industrialization and urbanization coupled with enormous economic growth. These developments were not disconnected from postwar US involvement in the country, a relationship concentrated in (but not limited to) the US-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty, referred to in Japan as "Anpo." The treaty came up for renewal in 1960 and 1970 and in both cases was driven through by the ruling party and riot police, despite massive protests against it. In the wake of the treaty's renewal, the government promoted what William Marotti calls

"a depoliticized everyday world of high growth and consumption and a dehistoricized national image"¹⁰ in order to defuse the opposition. By the time of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, this strategy appeared to be successful. All evidence of postwar destruction was gone, and in its place was a modern, regulated, thriving version of Japan for the world to see.

In the midst of such radical changes, many Japanese struggled with how to negotiate and express their relationship to those changes. As Marotti eloquently states, "Artists in Japan discovered hidden forms of domination in the everyday world and imagined ways in which their own practices might reveal, or even transform, such systems at their point of articulation in people's daily existence."¹¹ In other words, even as structural and societal changes were implemented, a vibrant avant-garde was on the rise, eager to develop and implement contestatory and interventionist practices that could impact the new status quo, both during the Anpo protests and in the deflated aftermath of the security treaty's passage. The Neo Dada Organizers, for example, were a group of nine artists including Genpei Akasegawa, Ushio Shinohara, and Masunobu Yoshimura who came together for anti-Anpo protests and a series of three exhibitions in 1960. In both protest and art (or more precisely, anti-art), they favored physical and sometimes violent action with everyday objects and rubbish: throwing stones at the Diet, slashing canvases, karate chopping chairs. Akasegawa then went on to found Hi Red Center (Hai Reddo Sentā, active 1962-1964) with Natsuyuki Nakanishi and Jirō Takamatsu. That group created public events that commented on and critiqued the sanitizing of Tokyo even as they conspicuously participated in it. Their event, *HRC shutoken seisō seiri sokushin undō ni sankā shiyō!* (Let's participate in the HRC campaign to promote cleanup and orderliness of the metropolitan area!, 1964), featured Hi Red Center members in white lab coats and surgical masks sweeping and scrubbing sidewalks in the Ginza neighborhood of Tokyo shortly before international attendees of the Olympic games arrived. These artists took the changes in society, politics, and the city and performed them to their extreme and absurd, if logical, conclusions.¹²

Not all artists of the avant-garde were interested in direct action, however. In the midst of pervasive anxiety about urbanization and industrialization, there were also frequent attempts to reconnect to or re-create tradition. This instinct sprang at least partially from the reality of rural to

urban migration and the sense that rural traditions were being lost. The reach for tradition was, however, more connected to a modernist interest in indigenous art, rather than a form with which rural folks would have identified. In this case, rather than being an opportunity for an encounter with the strange and foreign, as with European surrealism, the turn was to Japan's own indigenous and folk practices. For many Japanese artists, including architect Kenzō Tange, visual artist Tarō Okamoto, and designer Kiyoshi Awazu, this was evident through their turn to the prehistoric Jōmon period for figurative and conceptual inspiration. This served two ends. First, as Michio Hayashi so elegantly put it: "The primitive cultural force is summoned as the dialectical other vis-à-vis modern technology."¹³ Second, the turn to the indigenous and the folk gestured to a people unsullied by the consequences of the nationalist-modernist ideology that drove the state for almost a century. The idea of a prenational Japan provided an alternative model to both Japanese empire and industrialization in the midst of midcentury upheaval and restructuring.¹⁴

Eiko and Koma, like many young people in Japan, confronted the fundamental changes in society by joining the vibrant student protest movement that swept Japan, and much of the world, in the 1960s. Although aware of the dynamic spirit of avant-garde experimentation, Eiko says, "We were too busy with anti-government and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations to pursue art seriously."¹⁵ Koma joined the movement when he arrived in Tokyo as a political science student at Waseda University in 1967. Eiko, following her family's example, had been involved in activism from an early age and even led the first strike by Japanese high school students in 1969. When she entered the law department at Chuo University in 1970, her activism continued.

The 1960s Japanese student movement had its roots in the postwar years. The 1947 Constitution, though drafted by an American team led by General Douglas MacArthur, concentrated Japanese optimism about liberal changes in Japanese society, including individual rights, a democratic government, and a commitment to international peace.¹⁶ Many people, however, felt betrayed by the Japanese government's military relationship with the United States as concentrated in Anpo, which they felt contradicted Article 9's renunciation of war.¹⁷ By 1968, the resurgent New Left student protest movement had expanded its concerns to include Vietnam, Okinawa (which remained under US control until 1972),

and the very nature of universities and education. Noting the relationship between the Japanese government and higher education, students resisted indoctrination into state ideology, which they linked to capitalism and militarism. The groups Zengakuren (the All Japan Federation of Students' Autonomous Bodies, founded in 1948) and Zenkyoto (Joint Struggle Committee, 1968–1970) were at the center of this unrest, a mass movement employing direct action, riots, strikes, and occupations. By the early 1970s a lack of effective unity at the time of the 1970 renegotiation of Anpo as well as police suppression and violence led to splintering of the movement into factions. Finally, the public and bloody United Red Army fiasco in 1972, in which a revolutionary armed group killed some of its own members and engaged in a drawn-out standoff with police, signaled the end of the student movement.

In 1971 both Eiko and Koma had begun to feel the effects of the dogmatic and increasingly violent student movement, and they began to seek other outlets for their oppositional beliefs. Eiko explains the transition in this way:

While numerous political theorists — none standing out any more than the others — presented us with logic, idealism, and tactical thinking, somehow these things led us to despair. By contrast, [artists such as filmmaker Oshima Nagisa, playwright/theater director Kara Juro, artist Kudo Tetsumi, and designer/artist Yokoo Tadainori, as well as European filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Federico Fellini] showed us how they built their lives upon their confusion and frustration. In their works, we sensed that the means and the end are inseparable, that being revolutionary means being radical, and that the body is our vessel and foundation for exploration, experimentation, and expression.¹⁸

For Eiko and Koma, then, the move from the barricades to the dance studio was not about abandoning their political ideals but about finding a new, sustainable way to practice them.

Given the close associations between art and protest in 1960s Japan, Eiko and Koma's transition from one movement to the other is not so unusual. Marotti notes that members of the new avant-garde made "an attempt to conduct politics directly out of artistic performance, neither as an adjunct to protest nor through the conventional forms of agit-

prop but rather through the political potential of their practice itself.”¹⁹ Though the methods of protest were different, the goals were often aligned. For example, the policy statement of the 1969 conference of the student body of Waseda University declared: “We start from individuals . . . There should exist neither sectarian nor bureaucratic logic. We must start speaking with ‘words’ from inside of ourselves. . . . Let us found a radical struggle based on self-reliance and individualistic conceptions.”²⁰ This call for individual determination as opposed to dependence on institutions or ideology echoed the turn to personal, immediate experience already present in the new avant-garde, particularly through performance, installation, and even painting that evidences the involvement of an active body. These practices were especially evident in the Gutai Art Association, including Kazuo Shiraga’s *Challenging Mud* performance (1955) and his method of painting with his feet; Shōzō Shiramoto’s paintings made by hurling glass bottles full of paint; and Saburō Murakami’s *Passing Through* (1956), in which he propelled himself through twenty-one paper screens.²¹

For Koma, leaving the student protest movement and New Left politics meant leaving behind the entrenched hierarchies and leader-follower roles of the old society.²² For both Eiko and Koma, withdrawing from the student movement was about opposition to dogmatism and violence. Throughout their work in the 1970s, they repeatedly rejected the black and red flags of their movement days in favor of the white flag of surrender. One could also see their rejection of a single meaning in their work as an ongoing reaction against dogmatism. And yet, they also seem to be perpetually working through these early experiences. The themes of joint struggle and interpersonal violence, for example, repeat over and over across their body of work as part of a cycle of violence, remorse, mourning, and new beginnings.

As Eiko and Koma each made the transition from activist to artist, each dove into the thriving Tokyo avant-garde art scene. They did not have far to go. The Shinjuku area of the city was home to both Waseda University and underground theaters. It was there that they each came upon performances by Tatsumi Hijikata’s dancers. By this time, the “new” avant-garde had been active for over fifteen years (in fact, some would say it ended by 1970). Dance and performance were integral parts of the Japanese avant-garde, significantly through Hijikata’s dance experiments

that pushed the boundaries of the form.²³ Hijikata was born in 1928 in Akita prefecture in northern Japan, where he studied modern dance with Katsuko Masumura, a student of Takaya Eguchi, one of Japan’s modern dance pioneers who had traveled to Germany in the 1920s to learn from Mary Wigman. Upon settling in Tokyo, Hijikata studied ballet, jazz, and modern dance with Mitsuko Andō, where he became acquainted with Kazuo Ohno, who along with Hijikata would become a major figure in butoh. The two performed together in Andō’s dances while working on other projects. In 1959 Hijikata had his formal choreographic debut with *Kinjiki* (*Forbidden Colors*), which he performed with Ohno’s son, Yoshito.²⁴ Taking its title from a Yukio Mishima novel, the dance caused a stir with its shocking homoerotics and violence. Reaction to the dance prompted Hijikata, his wife Akiko Motofuji, and the elder Ohno, among others, to split from the mainstream All Japan Art Dance Association, which had presented Hijikata’s dance. At the same time, the notoriety that the piece attracted led to Hijikata being introduced into the avant-garde arts scene by Mishima himself. From then on, Hijikata’s work took place not in the context of modern dance but in the avant-garde arts community.

His experiments were known at first by the English term “experience,” then ankoku butoh 暗黒舞踏, and later simply as butoh. The word butoh (from bu 舞 “to dance” and toh 踏 “to step, to tread”) originally meant “stamping dance,” but that sense had long fallen out of use. Instead it appeared more commonly as butohkai 舞踏會, meaning a Western social dance ball. In the early 1960s the term ankoku buyo 暗黒舞踊 (“dance of utter darkness”) was coined to refer to Hijikata’s dance experiments, but was soon switched to ankoku butoh. Some people point to the word butoh’s signification of Western dance as a gesture to the intercultural influences on the dance, but I follow Baird’s suggestion that the sense of “foreign” implied by the term was employed not to reference specific dances, but rather to signal that this was something entirely unfamiliar, something that had not been seen before.²⁵ The use of butoh rather than buyo allowed the group to clearly delineate themselves from Japanese dance (buyo), just as they had already drawn a clear line between their work and modern dance by leaving the All Japan Art Dance Association. As dancers such as Ohno, Akira Kasai, Akaji Maro, and others struck out on their own, they continued to call their work butoh, but the

“utter darkness” qualifier was dropped along the way.²⁶ Eventually the word came to encompass all the iterations and adaptations of the form developed by Hijikata and Ohno.

There is a tendency in the West to connect the “utter darkness” of *butoh* to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, effectively ending World War II, but this link is simply not evident in the work of Hijikata and Ohno.²⁷ Eiko & Koma do directly connect themselves to this moment, although this connection came explicitly many years later, only after Eiko witnessed the fall of the Twin Towers from their apartment window.²⁸ Although the “utter darkness” of *ankoku butoh* was not in explicit reference to larger societal conditions, it may be useful to think of the postwar period broadly as one of utter darkness. While there are certainly aspects of this time unique to Japan, including a massive epistemological shift from understanding the emperor as divine to his being merely human, there are many ways this period in Japan is analogous to what was happening around the world. It was a time in which societies and economies were being rapidly transformed through large-scale industrialization and urbanization, the arts were being deeply questioned in part for their association with fascist ideologies, and radical politics spilled into the streets.

In its first decade, *butoh*’s search was for what could be expressed through the body and how. Marotti points out that from the start *ankoku butoh* lacked a recognizable style precisely because of its anti-formalist nature.²⁹ Throughout the 1960s Hijikata experimented with how to fundamentally alter the uses, techniques, and significations of the body, often through collaborating with other artists.³⁰ In a series of “Hijikata Tatsumi DANCE EXPERIENCE Gatherings,” he shared the stage with dancers, writers, and artists, including Masunobu Yoshimura, Isao Mizutani, Shūzō Takiguchi, Tatsuhiko Shibusawa, Tadanori Yokoo, and Mishima. In the publicity materials, the programs, and the gatherings themselves, movement was but one aspect of the multilayered and multivalent productions, which drew heavily on surrealism and neo-Dada. Miryam Sas argues that intermedial practices like this not only led to unprecedented cross-genre collaboration and borrowing, but also “reconceived relationships among art, technology, and environment.”³¹ This kind of relationship is evident throughout Eiko & Koma’s body of work, particularly in the way they bring together their moving bodies

with natural and built environments, video, musicians, and other elements.

Despite *butoh*’s resistance to explanation and interpretation, identified by Baird,³² there have been countless attempts to define the form by describing its aesthetic elements, categorizing major themes, or outlining creative processes or methodologies. Nanako Kurihara, who wrote one of the first in-depth examinations of *butoh* in the United States, defines the dance, in typical fashion, as a “contemporary dance form. . . . Typically performed in white makeup, with shaved heads, ragged costumes, slow movements and crouching postures.” She goes on to say that “*butoh* portrays dark emotions — suffering, fear, rage — often by employing violence, shocking actions and mask-like facial expressions that transform instantly from one extreme of emotion to another.”³³ Her description of the form is a common one, but while it is frequently associated with the “original” *butoh*, I contend that these descriptions stem from later works, particularly those by Sankai Juku, an idea I expand on in chapter 3.

Eiko and Koma found their way separately in 1971 to Hijikata’s Asbestos Hall in the Meguro neighborhood of Tokyo. Koma says that Hijikata “had a big house and free groceries. I had nowhere to stay and no money. I was lucky and Mr. Hijikata said, ‘Okay, tomorrow you can come to my house.’ Sometimes very nice things start from coincidence, not your own determination. Three months after I moved into his house, Eiko, whom I had never met before, came into that same house for food and lodging.”³⁴

Hijikata’s wife Motofuji established Asbestos Hall in 1950 as a live/work space with a bright, high-ceilinged studio and plenty of room for other dancers and students to stay. In 1974 the studio was transformed into a theater space, but until then it was used primarily for training and rehearsals. In exchange for room and board, Eiko and Koma and others trained with Hijikata and performed with other students in cabarets and theaters one, two, and even three times a night. Since 1959 Hijikata and Motofuji had been producing cabaret shows as a source of income that also provided financial support for Hijikata’s “real” dance work. These lucrative shows featured scantily clad men and women performing “artsy” dances for American GIs and Japanese men.

At this point, twelve years after his groundbreaking 1959 performance, Hijikata was a well-known and even notorious member of the Tokyo avant-garde arts scene. As such, it is no surprise that he would

have attracted student activists and questioning young people, drawn to his daring acts and wild charisma. And yet 1971 was a peculiar time to be with Hijikata. His dance experiments throughout the 1960s, fueled by close collaborations with other avant-garde artists, had culminated in the 1968 performance *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* (*Tatsumi Hijikata and the Japanese: Rebellion of the Body*).³⁵ That solo represented a major shift in his choreography, with its constantly transforming personas from a weary and diseased old man to thrusting, large golden cock-wearing virility, to young girl enthusiasm, but it was not yet the style for which Hijikata remains best known. That technique, a tightly choreographed and specific method of layering images to produce a movement vocabulary, announced with 1972's epic *Great Dance Mirror of Burnt Sacrifice—Performance to Commemorate the Second Unity of the School of the Dance of Utter Darkness—Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons*, had not yet congealed. Some of the dancers who had been with Hijikata since the 1960s, such as Ko Murobushi and Bishop Yamada, were leaving to start their own projects. There is also a sense that women like Yoko Ashikawa were becoming more important in Hijikata's work at that time, whereas his dances in the early and mid-1960s had been quite male centered. Although Hijikata's dancers continued to perform between 1968 and 1972, both in "high art" venues and cabarets, this period is often overlooked by Hijikata scholars, in part because in retrospect *Twenty-seven Nights* overwhelms what came before it, and in part because Hijikata's cabaret dances have for the most part not been taken seriously by scholars.³⁶

Bruce Baird suggests that changes over time in Hijikata's cabaret, in which his high and low art performances more and more came to resemble one another, can be attributed to a competitive cabaret marketplace. In that context, his shows got a reputation for being a kind of "weird, funky cabaret" in which female nudity appeared along with surrealist and Dadaist images. For example, Hijikata borrowed ideas from works such as Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–1923), with its iconographic, geometric figures and accompanying mythic writings. Baird also attributes the growing similarities between the cabaret and stage works to Hijikata's choreographic push to be two things at once, for example beauty and ugliness.³⁷ In this context, it is not odd to think about avant-garde bu-

toh and commercial cabaret in the same bodies. And while these performances remained dependent on women's bodies being on display and still attracted older Japanese men wanting nothing more than to ogle young, nearly naked women, they also attracted young radicals like Eiko and Koma, who were interested in art that was challenging the political and social status quo. Both Eiko and Koma ended up at Asbestos Hall after having seen a performance at Shinjuku Art Village, one of the numerous underground theaters that populated the Shinjuku neighborhood of Tokyo at the time. Eiko in particular mentions being impressed by the way the women performers were willing to make themselves look ugly. This rejection of Japanese standards for female appearance and comportment likely presented an exciting alternative for someone already committed to challenging the status quo.

From all accounts, Asbestos Hall was an open and fluid environment at the time, where no one was turned away. In addition to apprentices who were committed to working with Hijikata for the long term, like noted dancers Yoko Ashikawa and Saga Kobayashi, there was a steady stream of students, radicals, and young artists coming and going at any given time. According to butoh scholar Caitlin Coker, "People would somehow get introduced to Hijikata, or they would just find the studio and show up."³⁸ There they would have an interview, or more likely a conversation with Hijikata, who would at the end of the talk tell them to come to *keiko* (training) the next day. At a time when frequent student strikes meant no school, young people needed something to do with their free time or something to help them recover from the intensity of the barricades. Moreover, the good economy meant that many young people could afford to float around from place to place without worrying too much about how they would eat or where they would stay.³⁹ In a climate in which many young people were unsettled and searching for an alternative way of life, Asbestos Hall provided a viable, and likely exciting, short- or long-term option.

When Eiko arrived at Asbestos Hall, Koma had already been there for three months. They started working together after they were assigned to dance what was called an "adagio" at a cabaret. Neither Eiko nor Koma had studied dance seriously growing up, so they acquired dance and performance training on the fly. From all indications, this was a completely typical experience. According to multiple sources, people who showed

up at Asbestos Hall were typically sent out to dance cabaret right away, sometimes even their first night at the studio. They would be given simple instructions, often by fellow performers, such as “hold this position,” or “move slowly,” or “if something goes wrong, take off your shirt very slowly.”⁴⁰ As the performers gained more experience and improved their performance, they would be given more complicated choreography.

Asbestos Hall residents would dance in both cabarets and more “artistic” performances in small theaters like the Shinjuku Art Village, where they would typically wear a small thong-like garment with white makeup covering the body. Photographs taken by Tadao Nakatani in 1971 show a small stage with what looks like white sheets casually hung up at the back and stage right.⁴¹ The photos show frequent partner work, with a couple of patterns. In the first, one partner is on hands and knees while another partner sits atop the first. In a variation of this position, four dancers kneel side by side, flanks touching, to provide a base for a fifth dancer to recline, head thrown back, abdomen tensed, feet floating in the air. Other partner work took place in the vertical plane, as a man standing tall and straight held a woman with her legs wrapped around his neck, facing him, his face obscured by her pelvis. Another photograph shows a person laid back, rear lower ribs balancing on the supporting partner’s shoulder as the legs arc forward and toward the floor. Although the photos show static poses, one can imagine the performers slowly morphing from one position to the next, as Eiko & Koma do in their 1983 work *Beam*. Other photographs show slides projected onto Ashikawa and Kobayashi’s near-naked bodies as they kneel downstage center, calling to mind later work by photographer Eikoh Hosoe (*Ukiyo-e* projections, 2002–2003, and *Butterfly Dream* with Kazuo Ohno, 2006) as well Eiko & Koma’s 1976 *White Dance*, in which a drawing of a moth is projected onto and over Eiko.

After the late-night cabaret shows were over, the night was not yet at an end. Motofuji talks about everyone going to a local bathhouse to wash off the makeup, before rushing to catch the train home for a few hours of rehearsal before bed (see figure 1.1).⁴² Some people recall they were not given enough food to eat. And while the cabaret shows were quite profitable — payments averaged 10,000 yen per performance — the dancers turned over all their earnings to Motofuji and received only 500 yen back.⁴³



FIGURE 1.1 *Late night rehearsal at Asbestos Hall, Tokyo, 1972.*

Photo: Makoto Onozuka.

Eiko has described the studio as a temporary hideout from the chaos on campus and in the streets that characterized Japan, like much of the world, at the time. Three months after meeting, Eiko and Koma decided together to leave the autocratic environment under Hijikata to pursue their own projects. If as part of the student movements they were trying to challenge power, why would they stay with a man with a singular power? Although their time with Hijikata was brief, it is clear that Eiko and Koma absorbed his basic approaches to performance, the foremost being that it was possible to make a living dancing cabaret. Baird goes so far as to call cabaret, rather than a high art approach, constitutive in the development and spread of butoh and butoh-related movement beyond Hijikata, in that “acquisition of a kind of fundamental cabaret style is an

important avenue” for dancers to make a name, and a living, for themselves.⁴⁴ Certainly the experience dancing cabaret with Hijikata gave Eiko and Koma and other dancers like Ko Murobushi, Carlotta Ikeda, and Yumiko Yoshioka a way to market and support themselves when they first went to Germany in 1972 and France in 1977, respectively.⁴⁵

Even though Eiko and Koma had less than a year’s training between the two of them, they were clearly excited by the possibilities performance offered and felt empowered to make their own dances. They put together a cabaret show under the name Night Shockers to make money to fund a trip abroad. At the same time, they put together “artistic” shows for which they created their own sets and costumes. The pair gave their first performance of original work at Waseda University in 1972, an event captured through four extant black-and-white photographs.⁴⁶ All four images show Eiko, naked or perhaps wearing a small thong, her skin covered in clumped and flaking white makeup or rice flour. Koma is only present in two of the images. In one he wears a dark, knee-length kimono, and his skin is also covered in the white, flaking substance; in the other, he is in a side lunge, all in shadow, while she is captured mid-movement, head in profile, torso forward, the light from a projected image of a still life spilling over her skin. In these images, Koma is low to the ground, his kimono blending with the shadows and dark floor, whereas Eiko is upright, frontal, and often splayed open to the audience. Even when she kneels, she towers over Koma’s curled form. Though her skin appears to be peeling off her body, and her joints, ribs, and hip bones protrude, she is no fragile creature, but a concrete and rooted body, confronting her audience with a barely contained urgency.

In these images, elements from Hijikata’s cabaret shows are evident. For example, white body makeup and using the body as a screen for projections were common in Hijikata’s dances at Shinjuku Art Village at the time. On the other hand, the use of a kimono as a costume (which became a frequent element of Eiko & Koma’s performances) seems unrelated to Hijikata. Although he does wear a kimono in *Rebellion of the Body*, its specificity as a white bridal kimono suggests he is using it to play with gender, an idea furthered by the fact that he dons it backwards. In contrast, Koma never uses a kimono to cross-dress, and though gender is often obscured or blurred in Eiko & Koma’s body of work, this is often effected through nakedness, rather than clothing. Nor does Koma’s way

of wearing the kimono resonate with the way Hijikata playfully misuses *geta* sandals in *History of Smallpox*. Instead, the kimono is simply something to wear that is easy to move in. Some of the kimonos that Eiko has worn over the years from her geisha grandmothers are markers of cultural context. They are worn simply and loosely (and sometimes backwards), without the conventional undergarments and belts.

At the same time that Eiko and Koma worked in cabarets as Night Shockers to save money to travel abroad, they started to make artistic work as Eiko & Koma, and took a twice-a-week improvisation class with Kazuo Ohno. Whereas the atmosphere under Hijikata was highly controlled—from what one should do onstage, to what one earned and ate offstage—the scene at Ohno’s home studio, high on a hill in the Kamohoshikawa suburb of Yokohama, could not have been more different than the urban Asbestos Hall. Ohno never told students what to do or how to dance, and in fact he often claimed that he had nothing to teach. He did not lead movement exercises or phrases, but rather talked about metaphysical concepts, art and artists, and dancers he had seen. From these inspirational words and image prompts meant to inspire movement, students were expected to find their own dance.

As a young man in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Ohno saw dancers such as La Argentina and Harald Kreutzberg perform, experiences he returned to again and again over the course of his life, including through the dance that made him world famous at age seventy-three, *Admiring La Argentina* (1977).⁴⁷ However, it was not these experiences that prompted him to start taking modern dance classes; rather, it was his life-long job as a physical education teacher at a Christian girls’ school that led him to study with the founders of Japanese modern dance, Baku Ishii, Takaya Eguchi, and Misako Miya, the latter two of whom had studied with Mary Wigman in Germany. Ohno had only just started to perform with Eguchi and Miya when he was called up for military service; he served for eight years, including one year as a prisoner of war. Upon his return to Japan in 1946 he resumed performing, and in 1949 he had his solo choreographic premiere. That same year he opened the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio. For the next ten years, he made his own dances while participating in other people’s works. While dancing for Mitsuko Andō, Ohno met Hijikata. For most of the 1960s, Ohno stopped choreographing his own dances in favor of participating in Hijikata’s dance experi-



FIGURE 1.2
*Eiko & Koma
with Kazuo Ohno
after a performance
in Tokyo.
Photo: Courtesy
of Eiko & Koma.*

ences. By the time Eiko and Koma met Ohno in 1971, he was performing live only occasionally and was making a series of experimental films with filmmaker Chiaki Nagano.⁴⁸

Even though Hijikata and Ohno had long collaborated, leaving one to study with the other was still an unusual move, even in the avant-garde world of *butoh*. Given Eiko and Koma's political background and the general antiauthoritarian atmosphere among student protestors and young avant-garde artists, the attraction to someone who says, "I cannot tell you what to do, you have to figure that out for yourself," must have been undeniable. Still, it was not easy work. Eiko remembers the trek from Sagami-Ohno, where she lived with her parents, out to Yokohama for Ohno's twice-weekly class: the train ride followed by a walk up the hill, and the extra effort it took when it was cold. One night she arrived to find she was the only student. She describes the sweet awkwardness of receiving his full attention. He taught her how to bloom and wilt, placing his hand behind hers. She never forgot this first (and last) experience of Ohno's one-on-one coaching.⁴⁹

But even this self-driven, more open environment was not enough to keep Eiko and Koma rooted. Though they openly and lovingly credit Ohno as a teacher and had frequent contact with him until his death (see figure 1.2), they acknowledge that they were not among the disciples who worked intimately with him for years, if not for decades. Indeed, some of Ohno's closest disciples became his caregivers and constant companions through his death at age 103 in 2010. Eiko and Koma's early political

activism instilled in them a fierce independence and an insistence on a "do it yourself," or DIY, approach to art making, which made them bristle at the idea of being someone's disciples. (Nor have they ever wanted to have their own disciples, thus their resistance to codifying a technique or transferring their repertoire to other dancers.) So, after studying with Ohno for less than half a year, Eiko and Koma left Japan together. Having already left school, they had a drive to do their own thing and felt that they needed to get far away in order to have the space to do that. Eiko once suggested to me that extended proximity to greatness results in just serving that greatness. Obviously they would not be who they are or be making the work that they do without the formative experiences living at Asbestos Hall or training with Ohno, however briefly. But they also craved experiences beyond the islands of Japan, and in late 1972 Eiko and Koma set off to continue their movement research elsewhere.

White Dances

The early 1970s was a period of major departures for Eiko and Koma, who were at that point on their way to becoming Eiko & Koma. They left school, two major figures of avant-garde dance, and finally even their country. Suzanne Carbonneau emphasizes that Eiko & Koma were not traveling in order to perform. "Performing was, rather, a strategy for discovering the world . . . while they 'researched [their] lives.'"⁵⁰ Although she seems to mean this quite literally — dance was a means for the pair to see the world and travel beyond Japan — her phrasing quite nicely points to the way that Eiko & Koma have since used their dance to understand their relationship to time, history, humans, and nonhumans. In a manner prescient of their future movement style, in which a specific beginning or end is less important than noticing and participating in the ever-evolving moment, the pair embarked on a slow journey whose destination was not entirely clear at the outset, departing Japan on a boat bound for the Soviet Union. The one thing they knew for certain was that they had made a conscious decision not to go to the United States. On the one hand, their opposition to the Vietnam War precluded the United States as a destination; going there, they felt would signal an implicit acceptance of the government's actions. On the other hand, they had a sense that everyone was going to the United States at that point, and indeed a number of Japanese avant-garde artists, including Yoko Ono and Yayoi

Kusama, had been welcomed into the New York art scene in the 1960s. Spain was one possible destination—Eiko remembers studying Spanish on the ship—however, they ultimately rejected that option because of their political opposition to Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship. After their ship docked, the pair then took a train to Moscow. Somewhere along the way they decided to go to Germany, and in Moscow they boarded a plane to Vienna, where finally they took a short train ride to Munich.

Ending up in Germany was not random, however. In a discussion about this period of their lives, Koma pointed to the long history of artistic exchange between Japan and Germany, and in particular to the links between their teacher, Ohno, and Mary Wigman's modern dance style.⁵¹ Cultural exchanges among Japan and European countries had in fact been commonplace since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the Japanese began a concerted effort to show their country, policies, and products to be on a par with those of the Western powers, often through the adoption or adaptation of Western practices and conventions. At the same time, all things Japanese enjoyed an enormous popularity in the United States and Europe, prompting artists there to themselves adopt or adapt Japanese techniques. For example, the aesthetics of *noh* circulated to Europe and were incorporated into the practices of playwrights and theater directors such as W. B. Yeats, Jerzy Grotowski, and Samuel Beckett; in turn, Japanese theater practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s were themselves influenced by some of these same European artists.⁵² It was not unusual then that the Japanese pioneers of modern dance studied in Europe in the 1920s, some with Mary Wigman herself, and introduced German "new" dance to Japan. Koma remembers Ohno talking to them about Kreutzberg and Wigman. Koma and Eiko themselves discovered pictures of Dore Hoyer in the Music Library at the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan 東京文化会館. Of these German dancers Eiko says, "They were like kind of romantic figures for our soul. We couldn't romanticize our own teacher because we were too rebel [*sic*] ourselves. We were always questioning; and there was some senior students who look at Hijikata and Ohno like this [looking at them as if they were god]. . . . I just couldn't get involved in that because we were always questioning. But those photos became instead my kind of romantic . . . where my romantic idea can go forth."⁵³

There was something in these dancers, whom they only knew through photos and stories, which resonated with the political focus on the individual, that contributed to Eiko & Koma's worldview. They had seen Martha Graham and had read about Merce Cunningham, which gave them the sense that they knew what was happening in American modern dance. But at that point, Wigman's style was out of favor and even disappearing, and Koma says that in that context they were interested in searching out the roots of what was by then called *Ausdruckstanz*.⁵⁴

Arriving in Munich soon after the 1972 Olympics, the city had a vibrant young people's culture that attracted the dancers. Almost immediately, they self-produced a two-month, late-night run at a small theater called ProT, while also continuing to support themselves with cabaret shows.⁵⁵ Upon arriving in Germany, Eiko had written to Mary Wigman about the possibility of studying with her and had received her response that she was too ill to teach.⁵⁶ At their performances they distributed a flyer asking for leads to where they could study Wigman's technique. One day an audience member suggested that they contact Manja Chmiel in Hannover. Chmiel, a longtime assistant to Mary Wigman, had developed her own career as a solo dancer and had a school there. Eiko wrote to her immediately, and when they received a letter in return inviting them to Hannover, they packed up the old car they had acquired and moved north.

Upon meeting, Chmiel asked them to dance for her. Eiko reports, "Whether she liked it or not, I don't know, but she did say immediately after that that we shouldn't be learning about choreography from her."⁵⁷ Despite this recent statement, Eiko said in a 1998 interview with Deborah Jowitt that Chmiel gave them feedback that helped them "maximize the visual and emotional impacts" of their dances by paying attention to lighting and paring down their movements.⁵⁸ In addition, Chmiel "encouraged them to train their bodies for expansion and life so that they could transmit movement on a larger scale."⁵⁹ She arranged for the dancers to take ballet classes for free at the Stadthaus in the mornings and to take her modern classes in the evenings. In the afternoons, she gave them access to her studio to rehearse for their regular late-night cabarets and for occasional campus and museum performances at the Studentenheim and the Kunstverein.

According to Eiko & Koma, however, the most important thing



FIGURE 1.3

White Dance, *Young Choreographer's Competition, Cologne Opera, Germany, 1973.*

Photo: A. Löffler.

Chmiel taught them was not dance technique, but their power as a team; until that point they had viewed their partnership as merely a tool for survival and a step to becoming solo dance artists. She gave the duo the time and space to develop their work and pushed them to take their partnership seriously by entering them in a noted competition (alternately referred to in materials by and about Eiko & Koma as the Kölner Preis, the Young Choreographers' Competition, and the Cologne Choreographers' Competition), with Kurt Jooss as one of the judges. Eiko & Koma were among the three finalists in the competition and were invited to perform at the Cologne Opera (see figure 1.3).

That show, like all of their performances in Europe, was called *White Dance*.⁶⁰ The title acts as an expression of independence from their first dance teachers, Hijikata and Ohno. Eiko & Koma's dance, the title suggests, is specifically not the "utter darkness" of their butoh teachers, nor that of the failed student movement. The color white moreover provided

a powerful contrast to the black and red flags of various political movements. In Eiko and Koma's activist histories, as well as in the times in which the piece was made, there was a significant resonance of political allegiance with the color white, especially in opposition to black (anarchism) or red (communism). White also calls to mind the act of surrender, death, and ritual. Suzanne Carbonneau suggests that in "embracing whiteness as an antidote to the black uniforms of anarchism they had worn in the student movement, they meant whiteness to signal their decision to leave their pasts behind in order to create anew."⁶¹ The choreographers explicitly took up the white flag of surrender almost a decade later in *Event Fission* (1980), an act that calls to mind John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1973 declaration of the conceptual country, Nutopia, with its white flag of surrender to peace. While calling their dance "white" implied a strong sense of rejection, it also provided continuity, for example through the white makeup used in both traditional Japanese performance and butoh. In this way, the literal whiteness of their dance provides a connection, like that sought by some other avant-gardists, reaching back beyond recent history. Indeed, one of the few books the dancers took on the road was Zeami's late fourteenth- to early fifteenth-century treatise on noh, the *Kadensho*.⁶²

The movement in these *White Dances* was not set, although Eiko & Koma did have a loose score of movements to draw from and an order of the movements agreed upon in advance. According to Joan Rothfuss, "The events combined moves they had learned from their various dance teachers — Kazuo Ohno, Tatsumi Hijikata, and others — with such Dadaesque actions as cutting their hair, throwing raw eggs, cooking fish, dragging a bundle of carrots, and painting their bodies with dough."⁶³ In Koma's words, "We were just trying to do something strange."⁶⁴ Remnants of these dances remain in photographs from performances in theaters and museums in Germany and the Netherlands, and in a recently discovered twelve-minute color film — minus sound track — made in Amsterdam circa 1973, which is the earliest known footage of Eiko & Koma (see figure 1.4). The film alternates between performances and scenes of Eiko and Koma in their kitchen, revealing the closeness of their communal relationship in life as well as in dance. While their words are lost, their dancing includes movements strikingly similar to Hijikata's early 1970s choreography for Ashikawa and Kobayashi as well as origi-



FIGURE 1.4
Still from first known video footage of
Eiko & Koma, Amsterdam, circa 1973.
Courtesy of Eiko & Koma.

nal vocabulary that would later appear in Eiko & Koma's *White Dance* (1976) and *Fur Seal* (1977).

Despite Koma's seeming dismissal—"just trying to do something strange"—in fact they were clearly doing something radical and shocking, and even profound, with their bodies, evidenced in the enthusiastic reception that greeted them in Europe and North Africa from 1972 to 1974. Those performances moved easily among late-night theaters, opera houses, museums, and performance festivals, echoing the way that Hijikata's radical dances could also read to multiple audiences, both high art and bawdy at the same time. Certainly in Europe there was an added layer of Orientalism impacting the reception of their work, in the sense that "Oriental" read as high culture. Eiko concedes that "the fact we grew up in postwar Japan remains significant and essential in the ways we think and work, more so than the fact we studied and worked in Germany briefly. You know, sometimes you are reminded of what you have absorbed early on when you are away from where you grew up. But we were not cultural exports and we didn't play for exoticism. I think we are careful not to."⁶⁵

In negotiating their cultural and national differences through dance, the pair found themselves having to work with and against being received as the Other, no matter where they were. In any case, their singularity as Japanese dancers in Germany in the early 1970s, drawing from an as-yet-unseen-outside-Japan movement style, helped them stand out to audiences and mentors alike.

Their high-profile performance at the Cologne Opera resulted in other artists seeking them out and led to further performance and teaching opportunities beyond Hannover. For example, Lucas Hoving saw Eiko & Koma perform in Amsterdam and invited them to teach a mas-

ter class at the Rotterdam Dance Academy, where he was then a director. Hoving, famous for his years spent dancing with José Limón, strongly suggested that they go to New York. At the time Eiko & Koma were not even sure they would continue to dance beyond their time in Europe, due in part to Eiko's persistent ankle injury. Hoving, however, convinced them not to give up dancing until they had been to New York. Though the time with Chmiel and Hoving was brief, their influence, like that of Hijikata and Ohno, would continue to resonate throughout Eiko & Koma's career.

During their time in Europe, Eiko & Koma were constantly on the move. They had a cheap car, and as soon as they heard about a new opportunity, they would head off. After spending some time in the Netherlands and forming the Linden Gracht Dance Laboratory with Mitsutaka Ishii, the pair toured in France, Switzerland, and Tunisia. In Tunisia one of their audience members urged the pair to perform in New York and suggested they contact her cousin, who turned out to be Beate Sirota Gordon, then performing arts director at the Japan Society. Gordon is a significant figure in US-Japanese relations.⁶⁶ At age twenty-two, Gordon participated in the drafting, translating, and negotiating of the Japanese constitution and was instrumental in enshrining equal rights for women in that document. In addition to the Japan Society, Gordon also served as performing arts director at the Asia Society. In her role at the Japan Society beginning in the 1950s, Gordon was responsible for introducing both traditional and contemporary performing artists from all over Asia to American audiences. Both the cousin and Eiko wrote to Gordon, who was hesitant to present performers whom she had not seen and chosen herself. Despite her reservations, she decided to proceed with booking Eiko & Koma based on her cousin's recommendation, provided they had round-trip tickets and money deposited in an American bank account for living expenses.⁶⁷ The dancers agreed, then returned to Japan to work, raise the required money, and deal with Eiko's ankle injury. During that time, they studied again with Ohno and began to work on a piece to perform in the United States the following year.

White Dance

Eiko & Koma arrived in the United States in April 1976, ready to premiere *White Dance*.⁶⁸ By this time the Vietnam War had ended, and the

pair were no longer conflicted about entering the country. Although the dance they made for their American premiere shared a name with their European performances, the dancers consider the 1976 piece their first set choreography. They felt that a high-profile venue like the Japan Society called for “a little more choreographic effort,” which included “actually deciding on music, costumes and program notes.”⁶⁹ The dancers spent their time in Tokyo processing the movement, choreography, and expression lessons learned during their years in Europe, both through formal instruction and through their extensive performance experiences. Premiering five years after the pair met at Asbestos Hall, *White Dance* was the culmination of the duo’s first period of movement and life research.

A sense of momentous transition between their first five years working together and their arrival in America was captured in a version of their biography frequently used in programs in their first few years in the United States:

EIKO & KOMA began working together in 1971 while members of Hijikata’s company in Tokyo. After a Tokyo debut they traveled to Hannover, Germany, in 1972 where they met and studied with Manja Chmiel, a disciple of Mary Wigman. For the next three years EIKO & KOMA performed throughout Europe and Tunisia. A year’s added study in Yokohama with Ohno Kazuo prepared them to continue their dance in America.⁷⁰

Indeed, the teachers and mentors enumerated in this biography remained consistent from this point forward in Eiko & Koma’s career, although mentions of Hijikata did diminish over the years, a fact Eiko explains by noting that their relationships with Chmiel, Ohno, and even Hoving were ongoing, while the one with Hijikata ended when they left Asbestos Hall. They never saw him or were in touch with him again.⁷¹ While the pair would continue their choreographic experimentation through the early 1980s, a process discussed in detail in chapter 2, their arrival in the United States was a major turning point in their work.

Two years of performing around Europe had taught them valuable lessons about how to generate opportunities for themselves. Before departing Japan, Eiko sent letters to all the *Dance Magazine* correspondents across the United States, letting them know of the duo’s impending visit and asking if anyone would help them set up a performance.

Irene Oppenheim, then a West Coast reviewer for *Dance Magazine* and a critic for local Bay Area papers, responded, inviting the pair to contact her once they arrived, so they arranged a layover in San Francisco on their way to New York. Oppenheim recalls trying to figure out what their work was like during that first meeting: “I would ask them, ‘does it use kimonos?’ And they would say, ‘Yes, but it’s not traditional.’” The critic was quite taken by them, despite the dancers’ halting English, remembering, “They were very young and very charming and very beautiful.”⁷² By the end of the meeting, Oppenheim agreed to arrange an invitation-only performance in a former garage of a small private school the coming weekend in order to accommodate Eiko & Koma’s New York schedule. In addition to securing the venue and recruiting her friends and acquaintances to attend, she recalls being given the peculiar task of purchasing two hundred pounds of potatoes for use in the performance. Did the dancers really like to eat potatoes?

As a transitional piece in Eiko & Koma’s career, *White Dance* reflects the style that characterized the experimental dances they performed in Europe while introducing new choreographic elements. The dance also represents their efforts to connect with an entirely new audience whose context for what they were seeing was different than that of audiences in Japan or Europe. “When they first came [to the US] they really were pioneers,” says Oppenheim.⁷³ Indeed, the pair arrived in the United States, and even Europe, before butoh or any similar movement practices were known outside of Japan, with the exception of a handful of photographs in William Klein’s 1964 book, *Tokyo*. For American audiences, the context for Eiko & Koma would have been Japanese performance artists like Yoko Ono, or American avant-garde performance, such as what Oppenheim talked about seeing in San Francisco at theaters such as the Theater of Man.⁷⁴ Others found a context for what they saw in the “early moderns.” Janice Ross, for example, in a review of Eiko & Koma a year and a half after their San Francisco debut, describes their work as “an honest and forceful amalgam of the raw beauty and violence of Mary Wigman’s expressionistic theater and the metaphorical density and fragility of Asian art.”⁷⁵ This view was likely shaped by press releases for the pair that described their work “as avant-garde dance in the Japanese manner, [showing] the influence both of Japanese traditional and German modern dance.”⁷⁶ Whatever the context of the individual viewer, Oppenheim

says, "I think that a lot of their appeal, at least in the early days, was that they were so exotic to us."⁷⁷ At that time, there was still a strong division between "ethnic dance" and "modern dance"; as Japanese people performing avant-garde dance, Eiko & Koma were perceived as a rarity.

Like their embrace of the political meanings of "white," Eiko & Koma incorporate other gestures of opposition as part of their attempt to figure out how to further their own political questioning through dance. The US premiere of *White Dance* was supplemented by the appearance of a loose adaptation of Mitsuharu Kaneko's uncredited 1948 poem *Ga* 蛾 (Moths) in the program. Written during the American occupation of Japan and postwar reconstruction, the poem speaks to glimpses of beauty and determination amid the overwhelming inevitability of death. Eiko's adapted translation reads in part:

To live is to be fragile
So is it a fault to nurture a dream?
Oh moth! what is life to you?
You've been exhausted ever since you lost your cozy pupa,
You've carried the weight of time upon your back
And gasped for breath
While taking a rest
After such a short journey,
Then started on another voyage
Into an unknown future.⁷⁸

Kaneko (1895–1975) is noted as the only Japanese poet to write anti-war poetry during World War II, including "Bald," an account of his attempts to help his son fail his draft physical. Kaneko is also considered an outsider in Japanese society, due not only to his extensive travels abroad, but also to his writings, which eschew and outright reject societal conventions. Taking up these words, in English translation, over a quarter of a century later, Eiko & Koma signal their own desire to "nurture a dream" with their dance, even as they acknowledge the ongoing violence and absurdity of life at the end of the Vietnam War.

Absurdity and opposition are both evident in *White Dance's* opening scene. A version of the madrigal "The Agincourt Carol" plays as Eiko sits slumped forward in a printed casual kimono center stage, and Koma

strikes a flouncy pose upstage left.⁷⁹ No one moves for what seems an eternity, and then Koma begins to carefully pick his way around and across the stage, stepping lightly on his toes and occasionally flicking his foot back with a flourish to reveal his bare buttocks through a slit in the back of his bright red short kimono, worn backwards. Satisfied with his trip around the stage, he exits purposefully, having never acknowledged Eiko's presence. In Kaneko's poem, "Opposition" (not quoted in the program), the poet lists all the things to which he is opposed, including school, work, and "the Japanese spirit." "I'm against any government anywhere / And show my bum to authors' and artists' circles," he writes.⁸⁰ For those familiar with Kaneko's poetry, Koma's mischievous reveal of his own bare bottom in *White Dance* recalls the poet's desire to challenge every element of society. This cheeky behavior is furthered in publicity materials and programs for the dance. A photograph of Eiko shows her suspended midair, leaping yet posed almost as if she is seated in a chair. Her torso is bent all the way forward, feet flexed, knees bent, her whitened buttocks and legs revealed by her kimono as it floats above her body. Another frequently reprinted photo shows Koma facing away from the camera, his butt sticking out from a slit in his mid-calf-length kimono donned backwards, legs in wide parallel.⁸¹ This "showing of the bum" resonates with Eiko & Koma's days as student activists, but here it is more playful than militant, more sassy than offensive.

But *White Dance* was not limited to absurd and cheeky moments. Eiko's slow-moving solo, which makes up the middle section of the dance, ushers in a contemplative mood. Balancing on her tailbone, she reclines midstage, allowing her four limbs to billow around her until it seems there is nothing else happening in the world except this small dance. Eiko developed this solo when she was suffering from her ankle injury, so the movement was initially functional. The solo, however, demonstrates the value of rootedness in their work, not only as a visual anchor, but also in terms of duration of time. Even when she eventually rises to the vertical plane, allowing projections of photos of medieval Japanese patterns to suffuse her and her surroundings, her sustained movement-in-stillness is captivating.⁸²

In contrast to Eiko's intense, grounded presence in the center of the stage, Koma often bounds across the space. When the two are reunited onstage, they move not in unison but rather in tension with one another.

Their taut muscles bristle even as their joints bend in unexpected angles, only to rebend in other configurations again and again. A kick or a slap explodes out of stillness. Then, near the end of *White Dance*, it suddenly becomes clear why Oppenheim had to buy all those potatoes. Koma rushes onstage, a huge sack over his shoulder, as potatoes cascade to the ground in a series of rolling thumps, kicking up small clouds of dust as they fall. The tubers have scarcely rolled to a stop, scattering across the stage, when Koma scurries back with another sack over his shoulder, repeating the dramatic potato drop once, twice, before throwing the canvas sack in a wide arc toward the wings and careening into the back wall. Meanwhile, Eiko holds the center of the stage, her deep stance rooting her in place as she pulls her hands into fists at her hips, elbows jutting backwards, as if ready to fight. Robert A. Fredericks, reviewing the Japan Society debut performance for *Dance Magazine*, wrote of the potatoes: "After recovering from the initial shock, I found it profoundly exciting. Not only the sight of those potatoes rolling around and spilling over the edge of the stage but the dust that flew from them, the sounds they made as they slipped from the bags and thudded on the wooden floor, all contributed to the effect."⁸³ The multisensory engagement demanded by the potatoes — how they looked, sounded, smelled — draws attention to Eiko & Koma's neo-Dada-style use of these everyday objects.

Even as it revels in the nonsensical — "Why potatoes? What have they got to do with moths?"⁸⁴ — *White Dance* also signals an attention to cycles of living and dying and the attendant violence thereof that later became a central concern for the choreographers. Deborah Jowitt saw struggle and combat in the dance: "But their work isn't pretty or sentimental; it's pervaded with horror, studded with moments of violence."⁸⁵ Fredericks noted how Koma "swatted [Eiko], and not gently."⁸⁶ Oppenheim saw a violence in the piece that was less shocking than it was moving. For her *White Dance* evoked a deep sadness that felt linked to Vietnam, a war that had ended only the year before.⁸⁷

Perhaps more significantly, the work shows Eiko & Koma trying to determine what their choreographic project will be. The piece stages modern dance influences such as Koma's enthusiastic leaps and Eiko's striking side attitude alongside a startling cascade of potatoes and alternately meditative and disturbing minimalist movements. Shoko Letton suggests that the "ugly" movements can be traced to Hijikata and the "beautiful"

ones to Ohno;⁸⁸ this binary interpretation is in line with many analyses that contrast Ohno's "angelic" works with Hijikata's "demonic" ones. Rather than staying with this dichotomous view, Kaneko's "Opposition" offers another way to approach these contradictions. Kaneko writes: "[T]o oppose / Is the only fine thing in life. / To oppose is to live. / To oppose is to get a grip on the very self."⁸⁹ In this way we can see the oppositions in *White Dance* — the ugly and the beautiful, the sublime and the absurd, the meditative and the explosive all together in this one piece — as not merely an amalgamation of previous influences, but rather a way of coming to understand Eiko & Koma.

By the time Eiko & Koma ended their trip to the United States, they were no longer just using dance to see the world, but were making a concerted decision to become artists. Their bodily research had led them beyond experimenting with Hijikata and Ohno's movement approaches to finding their own unique combination of extended stillness with moments of absurdity that unfold over time into a profound engagement with existential matters. Their experiences in New York in particular led them to see a place for themselves in that city's experimental downtown dance scene, a possibility they had not seen for themselves in Tokyo. When they returned to Japan, it was to arrange cultural exchange visas, with Gordon's help, for their return to New York, where they settled in 1977. The following chapter examines Eiko & Koma's first five years as residents of New York City, with a focus on the dances they created during that time, one new piece each year, and the various artistic influences they absorbed.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. In conversation Eiko & Koma sometimes refer to “Neue Tanz” to mean the German modern dance style of artists like Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, Dore Hoyer, and Manja Chmiel, who influenced them or their teachers. This grammatically incorrect declension of *Neuer Tanz* in spoken English likely comes from the Japanese ノイエダンツ (“noie tantsu”), a phonetic spelling of “neuer Tanz” in the Japanese alphabet *katakana*, reserved for loan words. Takaya Eguchi and Misako Miya, pioneers of Japanese modern dance, studied with Wigman in Dresden in the 1920s. I speculate that “Neue Tanz” was the term Eguchi and Miya encountered in Germany and later promulgated in Japan, although further research would be necessary to confirm this. According to Kate Elswit, “new” was just one of many adjectives used to describe early twentieth-century German dance styles; other words included artistic, free, modern, and expressionistic (personal communication with author, October 27, 2014; see also *Watching Weimar Dance* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014], xxiv–xxv). Wigman’s style, via Eguchi and Miya, influenced the development of modern dance in Japan and across East Asia. Eguchi and Miya also directly influenced the founders of butoh, Hijikata and Ohno. See also Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio, *Kazuo Ohno: Chronicle of a Lifetime 1906–2010* (Tokyo: Canto Co., Ltd., 2010).

2. For a full list of awards Eiko & Koma have won, see <http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=2666>.

3. Eiko Otake, “A Dancer Behind the Lens,” in *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, ed. Judy Mitoma (New York: Routledge, 2002), 82–88; and “Feeling Wind,” in *Site Dance: Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*, ed. Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 18–198.

4. Nanako Kurihara, “Eiko and Koma: Movement Approach and Works” (master’s thesis, New York University, 1988); and Shoko Yamahata Letton, “Eiko and Koma: Dance Philosophy and Aesthetic” (master’s thesis, Florida State University, 2009).

5. Rose Eichenbaum and Aron Hirt-Manheimer, “Eiko and Koma,” in *The Dancer Within: Intimate Conversations with Great Dancers*, ed. Rose Eichenbaum and Aron Hirt-Manheimer (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 266–71; and

Joyce Morgenroth, "Eiko Otake," in *Speaking of Dance: Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117–36.

6. Joan Rothfuss, ed., *Eiko & Koma: Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011).

7. The title is inspired by the Sonic Youth song, "Small Flowers Crack Concrete," on the CD *NYC Ghosts and Flowers* (Geffen Records, 2000, 069490650-2).

8. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

9. Jack Anderson, "Eiko and Koma Slow Time Down," *New York Times*, December 7, 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/07/arts/dance-view-eiko-and-koma-slow-time-down.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%7D>; and Gia Kourlas, "The King and Queen of Slow Get Busy," *New York Times*, May 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/arts/dance/26eiko.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%7D>.

10. Rosemary Candelario, "Eiko & Koma: Choreographing Spaces Apart in Asian America" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2011).

11. Žižek employs tempo-related titles from Beethoven's *String Quartet no. 14* ("Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo," "Allegro moderato — Adagio," "Presto," etc.) to frame his discussion of subjective and objective violence.

12. Žižek, *Violence*, 7.

13. Paula Josa-Jones, "Delicious Moving," *Contact Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2005): 57.

14. In an interview with Leslie Windham, Eiko said, "We do not make a piece because we're trying to express something. We make a piece to realize something. That's as selfish as it could ever be. You read a book trying to find out what interests you. That's the same way we make a dance — trying to find out about it. Hopefully, that way we are at least showing our interest, our concern, to the audience" ("A Conversation with Eiko & Koma," *Ballet Review*, Summer 1988, 49).

15. For examples of how other scholars write about the aesthetic of slowness in performance, see Mari Boyd, *The Aesthetics of Quietude: Ota Shogo and the Theatre of Divestiture* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 2006); and André Lepecki, "Choreography's 'Slower Ontology': Jérôme Bel's Critique of Representation," in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 45–64.

16. Žižek, *Violence*, 207.

17. *Ibid.*, 217.

18. David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

19. For more on Asian American theater and performance studies, see James S.

Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994); Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Deborah Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Esther Kim Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

20. See, for example, SanSan Kwan, "Performing a Geography of Asian America: The Chop Suey Circuit," *The Drama Review: TDR* 55 (2011): 120–36; SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Priya Srinivasan, "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History," *Discourses in Dance* 4, no. 1 (2007): 7–48; and Priya Srinivasan, "The Nautch Women Dancers of the 1880s: Corporeality, US Orientalism, and Anti-Asian Immigration Laws," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 1 (2009): 3–22.

21. Yutian Wong, "Towards a New Asian American Dance Theory: Locating the Dancing Asian American Body," *Discourses in Dance* 1, no. 1 (2002): 81.

22. Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1998).

23. For more on Ruth St. Denis, see Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010); Priya Srinivasan, "The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What's Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History," *Discourses in Dance* 4, no. 1 (2007): 7–48; and Srinivasan, "Nautch Women Dancers of the 1880s."

24. Yutian Wong, "Artistic Utopias: Michio Ito and the Trope of the International," in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144–62.

25. Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

26. Wong, *Choreographing Asian America*, 37–38.

27. It would be nearly impossible to include a full listing here. Key early texts include Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Gender," *Signs* 24, no. 1 (1998): 1–33; Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395–412; Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*; and Randy Martin, *Performance as Political Act: The Embodied Self* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1990).

28. Thomas DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
29. Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 58–59.
30. Eiko & Koma's relationship with the Japan Society and the Asia Society continues to this day.
31. Inta, Inc. (Eiko & Koma), The Retrospective Project, April 12, 2008.

1. FROM UTTER DARKNESS TO WHITE DANCE

1. Deborah Jowitt, "In Their Dance No Wind Blows," *Village Voice*, August 9, 1976.
2. Robert Fredericks, "Perspectives: New York," *Dance Magazine*, October 1976, 69.
3. Mona Sulzman, "Moth Comes to Life as Eiko and Koma White Dance," *Soho Weekly News*, July 29, 1976, 13.
4. Quoted in Windham, "Conversation with Eiko & Koma," 59.
5. My use of the conjunction "and" rather than the ampersand in this chapter differentiates the pair's early work together as students and novice performers from their professional artistic identity as Eiko & Koma, which began in earnest upon their arrival in Europe.
6. The time line was displayed during Eiko & Koma's performances at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2012.
7. Koma took Eiko's surname, Otake, in the 1980s.
8. UCLA course, fall 2006.
9. The postwar Japanese Communist Party was strongly linked with the labor movement and has held seats in the House of Representatives since 1946. The JCP broke with the Soviet Union and China in the 1960s.
10. William Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 3.
11. *Ibid.*, 3.
12. See also Thomas Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); Doryun Chong, ed., *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012); and Peter Eckersall, *Performativity and Event in 1960s Japan: City, Body, Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
13. Michio Hayashi, "Tracing the Graphic in Postwar Japanese Art," in *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde*, ed. Doryun Chong (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 104.
14. See also Shawn Bender, *Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Mo-*

- tion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), especially ch. 2, "Genealogies of Taiko I."
15. Doryun Chong, "Even a Dog That Wanders Will Find a Bone," in *Eiko & Koma: Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty*, ed. Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 59.
16. For more on postwar Japan, see John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000); and Eiji Takemae, *Allied Occupation of Japan*, trans. Robert Ricketts and Sebastian Swan (New York: Continuum, 2003).
17. In 2014 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe bypassed Parliament with a cabinet resolution that allowed Japanese troops to participate in "collective self-defense." The move was seen to gut Article 9. Linda Sieg and Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan Takes Historic Step from Post-war Pacifism, OKs Fighting for Allies," *Reuters*, July 1, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/01/us-japan-defense-idUSKBN0F52S120140701>.
18. Chong, "Even a Dog That Wanders," 59.
19. Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines*, 192.
20. Translation by and quoted in Kurihara, "Eiko and Koma," 5.
21. See Alexandra Munroe et al., *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013).
22. Koma, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
23. As Bruce Baird points out, Hijikata was not alone in pushing the boundaries of modern dance, but he did become a leading representative of dance in the avant-garde. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butō: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
24. In retrospect *Kinjiki* has come to be considered the first butoh performance.
25. Bruce Baird, "Butō: Dance of Difference," in *A Processive Turn: The Video Aesthetics of Edin Velez*, ed. Jorge Daniel Veneciano (Rutgers, NJ: Paul Robeson Galleries, 2007).
26. Nario Gōda, an eminent Japanese dance critic, has called ankoku butoh the avant-garde of butoh. "On Ankoku Butō," trans. Susan Blakeley Klein, in *Ankoku Butō: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness*, by Susan Blakeley Klein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 1988), 83.
27. See chapter 3 for an analysis of this phenomenon.
28. Eiko & Koma's engagement with nuclear issues is discussed in chapters 2, 5, and 6.
29. William Marotti, "舞踏の問題性と本質主義の罠 'Buto No Mondaisei to Honshitsushugi No Wana'" [The problematics of butoh and the essentialist trap], *Shiataa Aatsu*, no. 8 (May 1997): 88–96.

30. Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butō*, 2011.
31. Miryam Sas, "Intermedia, 1955-1970," in *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, ed. Doryun Chong (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 139.
32. Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butō*, 2011.
33. Nanako Kurihara, "The Most Remote Thing in the Universe: Critical Analysis of Hijikata Tatsumi's Butoh Dance" (PhD diss., New York University, 1996), 1.
34. Windham, "Conversation with Eiko & Koma," 47.
35. The subtitle can also be translated as "Revolt of the Flesh."
36. I thank Bruce Baird for his insight on these points (e-mail communication with author, January 21, 2015).
37. Bruce Baird, Skype interview with author, October 1, 2013.
38. Caitlin Coker, Skype interview with author, October 1, 2013.
39. I thank Caitlyn Coker for this insight.
40. Coker, Skype interview.
41. I thank Bruce Baird for showing me these photographs.
42. Akiko Morofuji, *Hijikata Tatsumi to Tomo ni 土方巽と共に* [Together with Tatsumi Hijikata] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1990).
43. Coker, Skype interview.
44. Baird, Skype interview.
45. I thank Bruce Baird for his insights about Ko, Ikeda, and Yoshioka's initial time in France (personal communication with author, July 7, 2014).
46. The photographer is credited as Mizuho.
47. In fact, Eiko & Koma were part of the impetus for this dance, having sent Ohno a packet of information about La Argentina that they gathered at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
48. *A Portrait of Mr. O* (1969), *Mandala of Mr. O* (1971), and *Mr. O's Book of the Dead* (1972).
49. Eiko, e-mail communication with author, November 26, 2014.
50. Suzanne Carbonneau, "Naked: Eiko & Koma in Art & Life," in *Eiko & Koma: Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty*, ed. Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 27. Brackets in original.
51. Koma, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
52. See Boyd, *Aesthetics of Quietude*.
53. Shoko Yamahata Letton, "Eiko and Koma: Dance Philosophy and Aesthetic" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 2009), 30.
54. Kate Elswit discusses the term "Ausdruckstanz" as a postwar development in *Watching Weimar Dance*.
55. Eiko clarifies: "Cabaret didn't last—we got fired. We were too artistic!" Interview with author, June 15, 2008.

56. Wigman died in 1973.
57. Eiko, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
58. Deborah Jowitz, Interview with Eiko & Koma, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, New York Public Library, January 6, 1998.
59. Carbonneau, "Naked," 27.
60. The title was in English.
61. Carbonneau, "Naked," 27.
62. Western authors influenced by Zeami include W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Makoto Ueda, *Zeami, Basho, Yeats, Pound: A Study in Japanese and English Poetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).
63. Joan Rothfuss, "White Dance," in *Eiko & Koma: Time Is Not Even, Space Is Not Empty*, ed. Joan Rothfuss (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 86.
64. Koma, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
65. Eiko, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
66. Born in 1923 in Austria; died in 2012 in the United States. See Beate Sirota Gordon, *The Only Woman in the Room: A Memoir* (1997; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). See also Eiko's tribute to Gordon, "Beate: Thank You from Eiko & Koma," <http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ek&id=3754>.
67. Beate Sirota Gordon, telephone interview with author, September 2008.
68. The piece was billed variously in 1976 and 1977 as *White Dance*, *White Dance: Moth*, and *The White Moth*.
69. Eiko & Koma, program note for *White Dance Revival*, 2010, <http://eikoandkoma.org/notesonwhitedance>.
70. Program for *White Dance: Moth* at American Theatre Laboratory, September 15-18, 1977.
71. Eiko, interview with author, June 15, 2008.
72. Irene Oppenheim, interview with author, December 9, 2009.
73. Ibid.
74. Oppenheim clarifies, "I do remember at least two other contemporary Japanese dancers. One performed with Martha Graham; the other was a solo performer whom I saw in San Francisco before Eiko & Koma, Suzushi Hanayagi She was a radical dancer in the Anna Halprin mode. I say this just to point out I (we) were not totally unfamiliar with Japanese dancers though Eiko & Koma were/are true originals" (e-mail communication with author, November 23, 2014).
75. Janice Ross, "Tension in the Cocoon," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, October 27, 1977.
76. In retrospect, Eiko questions this one-to-one weighing of their influences from Japan and Germany (interview with author, June 15, 2008).
77. Ibid.

78. *White Dance* program, 1976. An official translation of the full Kaneko poem is not available in English.
79. Other music includes J. S. Bach's *Concerto for Harpsichord* and "Sarabande" from *Suite for Solo Cello no. 5 in C Minor*, as well as Tibetan horn and cymbal.
80. Mitsuharu Kaneko, "Opposition," in *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite (London: Penguin Classics: 2009), 192.
81. Both photos by A. Löffler.
82. According to Oppenheim, the initial San Francisco performance included other images—she remembers one of a Japanese bath—but reviews of subsequent performances only mention projections of moths.
83. Fredericks, "Perspectives," 69.
84. Ibid.
85. Jowitt, "In Their Dance No Wind Blows."
86. Fredericks, "Perspectives," 69.
87. Oppenheim, interview with author, December 9, 2009.
88. Letton, "Eiko and Koma," 2009.
89. Kaneko, "Opposition," 192.

2. "GOOD THINGS UNDER 14TH STREET"

1. Christopher Mele describes these processes in detail in *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Of particular interest to this time period are chapter 6, "Urban Malaise, Community Abandonment, and Underground Subcultures of Decay," 180–219, and chapter 7, "Developing the East Village: Eighties Counterculture in the Service of Urban Capital," 220–54. See also Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
2. Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, 217.
3. Chong, "Even a Dog That Wanders," 63.
4. Koma, speech presented to the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, April 18, 2012. I was working on Eiko & Koma's Archive Project at their apartment at the time. As he was getting ready for the LMCC event, Koma asked me to type as he rehearsed what he wanted to say, and that document became his speech.
5. See Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
6. Susan Manning identifies this same transition as one from modernism to post-modernism in "Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes' 'Terpsichore in Sneakers,'" *TDR: The Drama Review* 32, no. 4 (1988): 32–39.
7. Marcia B. Siegel, *The Tail of the Dragon: New Dance, 1976–1982* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xiii–xiv.

8. Eiko, interview with author, January 25, 2014.
9. This uncredited text appeared in *Fur Seal* programs under the title "Fur Seal." On Eiko & Koma's Web site, they clarify that the poem was "adapted by Eiko" from Mitsuharu Kaneko's 1937 poem "Seals" ("A Poem from the Program of Fur Seal [1977]," <http://eikoandkoma.org/index.php?p=ck&id=3016>). The full Japanese poem, accompanied by a 2008 English translation by Hiraoki Sato, is available at <http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/12103>.
10. Daniel Webster, "Eiko and Koma: 'Fur Seal' Explores the Essence of the Animal World," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 9, 1978.
11. Eiko & Koma's focus on their own trunks in *Fur Seal* had the added bonus of providing a distinct break from their teachers' movement vocabularies. In a class at UCLA, Eiko said that they made a conscious decision not to use arms for many years, as part of their move away from the influence of Kazuo Ohno. Author's personal notes, November 8, 2006.
12. The set piece bears a striking resemblance to the set for Hijikata's *Hosotan* (1972).
13. Jennifer Dunning, "Flying, Waltzing, Walking and Jogging in Place," *Dance Magazine*, August 1977, 25.
14. *Wallow* is discussed in detail in chapter 4.
15. Jan Halsey, "'Fur Seal' Boring, but Intriguing," *Daily Democrat*, August 11, 1978, 11.
16. K. S. W., "Fur Seal," *Daily Telegraph*, November 6, 1981.
17. Bonnie Sue Stein, "Butoh: 'Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty and Mad,'" *TDR: The Drama Review* 20, no. 2 (1986): 112.
18. Anna Kisselgoff, "Two Dancers from Japan in 'Fur Seal,'" *New York Times*, February 28, 1978, 16.
19. By the fall New York premiere presented by Dance Theater Workshop at American Theatre Laboratory, the title had been shortened to the equally evocative but less directly determined *Before the Cock Crows*. Performances at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art fit into the pattern Eiko & Koma established in Europe, where they appeared at black box and proscenium theaters, museums and galleries, and universities. As they became more established in the US dance scene, they performed less and less in museums. The past five years have seen them returning to museum and gallery spaces, especially with the Retrospective Project. Mystifyingly, Eiko & Koma accompanied the evening premiere performances of *Before the Cock Crows* with a weekday matinee of *Fur Seal* (described as "a fable for our times") aimed at children. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art calendar listing described the dance in this way: "Although inspired by biblical quotation, the dance program to be premiered at the Museum is not religious in nature. Instead, the title is used thematically. Eiko and Koma work