

Belonging and Solo

Roko Kawai: An Artist's Workbook



Produced by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

This is an archival version of *Belonging and Solo, Roko Kawai: An Artist's Workbook*, which originally appeared as a Flash publication in The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage's *Danceworkbook* series. The presentation of the original Flash publication has been altered to fit this PDF format.

Danceworkbook was a series produced by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, between 2009 and 2015, to document the creative practice of living and working with dance.

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One day, I know I need to stay longer.

This in-between space of both belonging and being alone is the creative frisson which my time in Japan provokes and which draws me to explore these contradictions as the central content in my work.

When I visit Japan I feel just as keyed up tackling technique in a Japanese classical dance lesson or a butoh workshop, as I do trying to explain myself to a train station clerk who can't quite place why a 40-year-old, Japanese-looking woman with seemingly perfect spoken Japanese can't read any of the signs to get onto the right platform. I think: "Oh, wouldn't it be cool if I could do all those things like a real insider!" Yes, I would love to become virtuosic in classical dance, down with the cutting edge, literate in the written language, imperceptibly merged with my fellow Japanese.



ESSAY: MUZUKASHII
BY ROKO KAWAI



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GALLERY

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We Should Bring Our Muzukashii

by Roko Kawai



"Introduce yourself as ロコ.カワイ, 'ro-ko ka-wa-i,' using the katakana alphabet. Your name, written in *katakana*, will signify immediately that you are a special visitor. This will protect you from 'appearing too Japanese.' Trust us, this will help you while you're here. Your position is 微妙 (bi-myoh): weird, delicate, uncomfortable, nuanced, odd though possibly exquisite—or, just untenable."

—Advice from Japan–United States Friendship Commission upon my arrival in Tokyo for a seven month fellowship, March 2005.

Themes of identification and sourcing, belonging and soloing, comfort and battle, and who-sees-who-interpreting-whom have continued to drive, plague, carry me forward in my dance/culture work. (*Improvisation in Kimono*)

MUZUKASHII

What is untenable? It's my own translation of the Japanese word *muzukashii*, which is usually translated as "difficult" like a math problem or "complicated" like a divorce. But neither difficult nor complicated really captures the coded non-answer, the elipses to the enduring questions that come up when I am in Japan, such as: Well, why? Why do funny consequences occur when I use official Japanese characters on my business card? Why is it important to pretend to speak only English (and no Japanese) in conversations with my landlady or with the contemporary choreographer I interviewed? When I am introduced to important contacts in Tokyo, why does my Japanese parentage, my coming of age in both countries, my extended interest in Japanese classical dance, occasionally get eclipsed by a more exotic American modern dancer narrative? Why am I being urged (silently) to simplify who I am by feigning foreign-ness? I suspect I'm being protected from an unspoken danger that arises when one overcomplicates a Japanese identity.

In 2002, for two whirlwind weeks I toured with a group of Pennsylvania cultural practitioners in and around Tokyo. We met



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Japan is 微妙 though

Katakana—Hiragana—Kanji

...are the three alphabets used in modern Japanese—in combination and with clear rules about when to use which in a given sentence. As a pre-schooler, we first learned hiragana—all 48 phonetic symbols. By the end of kindergarten, we also learned the corresponding katakana to each hiragana. So when do you use hiragana to spell out a word and when do you use katakana? I was taught that katakana was used for words that were foreign in origin—like kissu (kiss) or pan (bread). To me this made katakana a "second class citizen" of alphabets. Visually, too, katakana wasn't as graceful as hiragana. It was very square and block-like, boring and not very Japanese-looking. As an adult, then, it came to me as a surprise when I read that katakana had actually preceded hiragana, migrating from China via Buddhist and scholarly texts around the 4th-century AD.

Themes of identification continued to drive, plag

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Japan is 微妙 though

Katakana—Hiragana—Kanji

Starting in the first grade, I began to take on the more complicated kanji. Because the early Japanese had no written language of their own, they adopted China's alphabet—sometimes referred to as "Chinese characters"—which is known for its multi-stroked complexity. While Chinese and Japanese pronounce the characters differently, they can often communicate just by writing because the hieroglyphical (pictorial) meaning of each character remains largely the same.

Themes of identification continued to drive, plag

As a young Japanese-outside-of-the-homeland, kanji was the ultimate test. In the Japanese system, a kanji character may have from one to five different pronunciations depending on context and from one to twenty-two strokes to master in penmanship. To be considered literate in Japan (i.e., able to read a newspaper), I would need to know between 1000–2000

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system, a kanji character may have from one to five different pronunciations depending on context and from one to twenty-two strokes to master in penmanship. To be considered literate in Japan (i.e., able to read a newspaper), I would need to know between 1000–2000 of these kanji. At my peak, through intensive memorization during summer vacations, I was somewhere between 250–350. That would make me a third grade reader at best.

Still, to me, kanji was the prize, the test of being truly Japanese—if you could read a novel in kanji, if you could beautifully pen those complicated strokes—you really had arrived. I still struggle with the idea that I must give up using the kanji characters of my name, bestowed upon me by my parents, when presenting my public self on a business card in Japan. I write more about this identity-bending in a [journal entry](#) from this same fellowship in Tokyo.

Themes of identification continued to drive, plag

MUZUKASHII

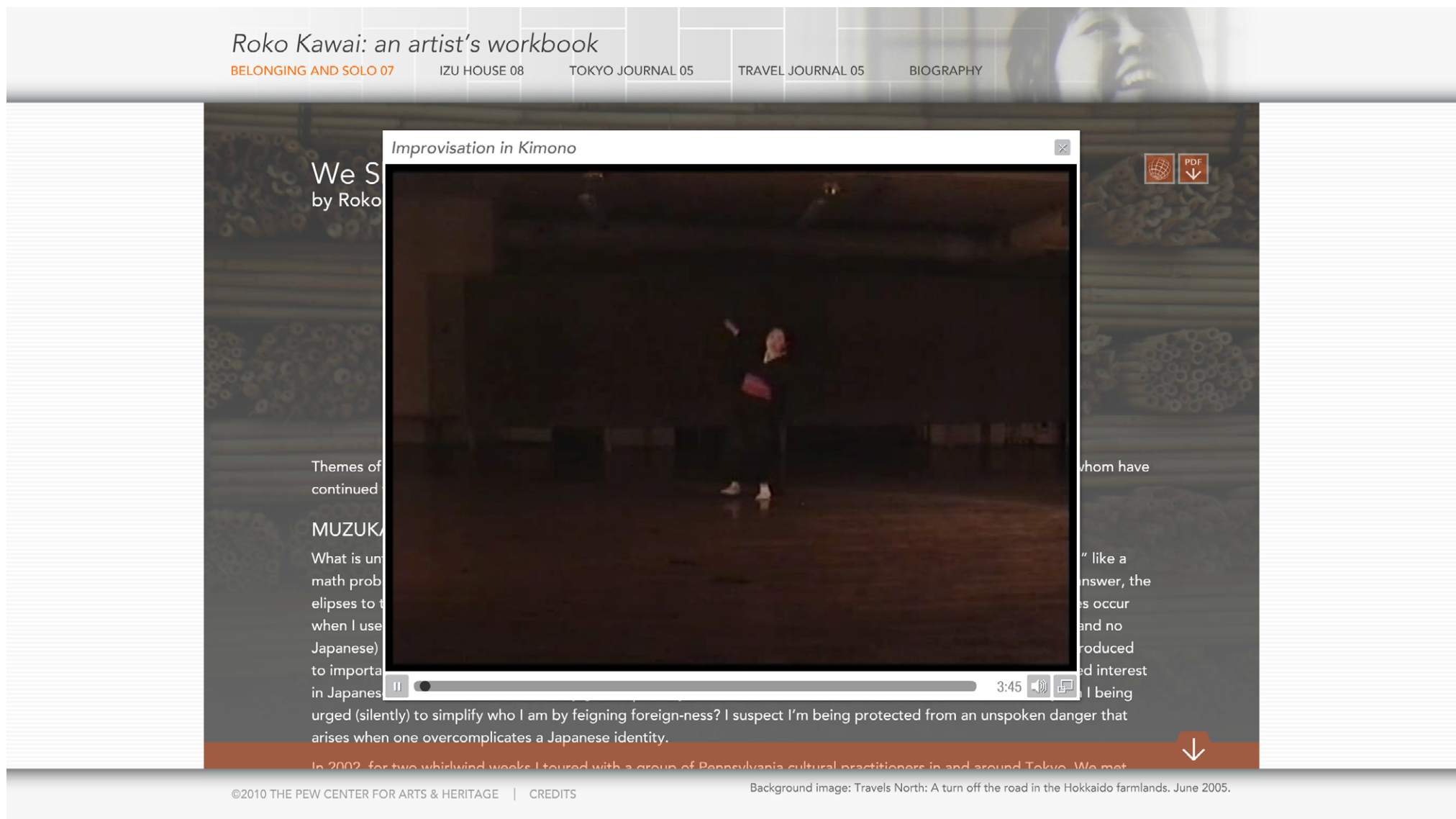
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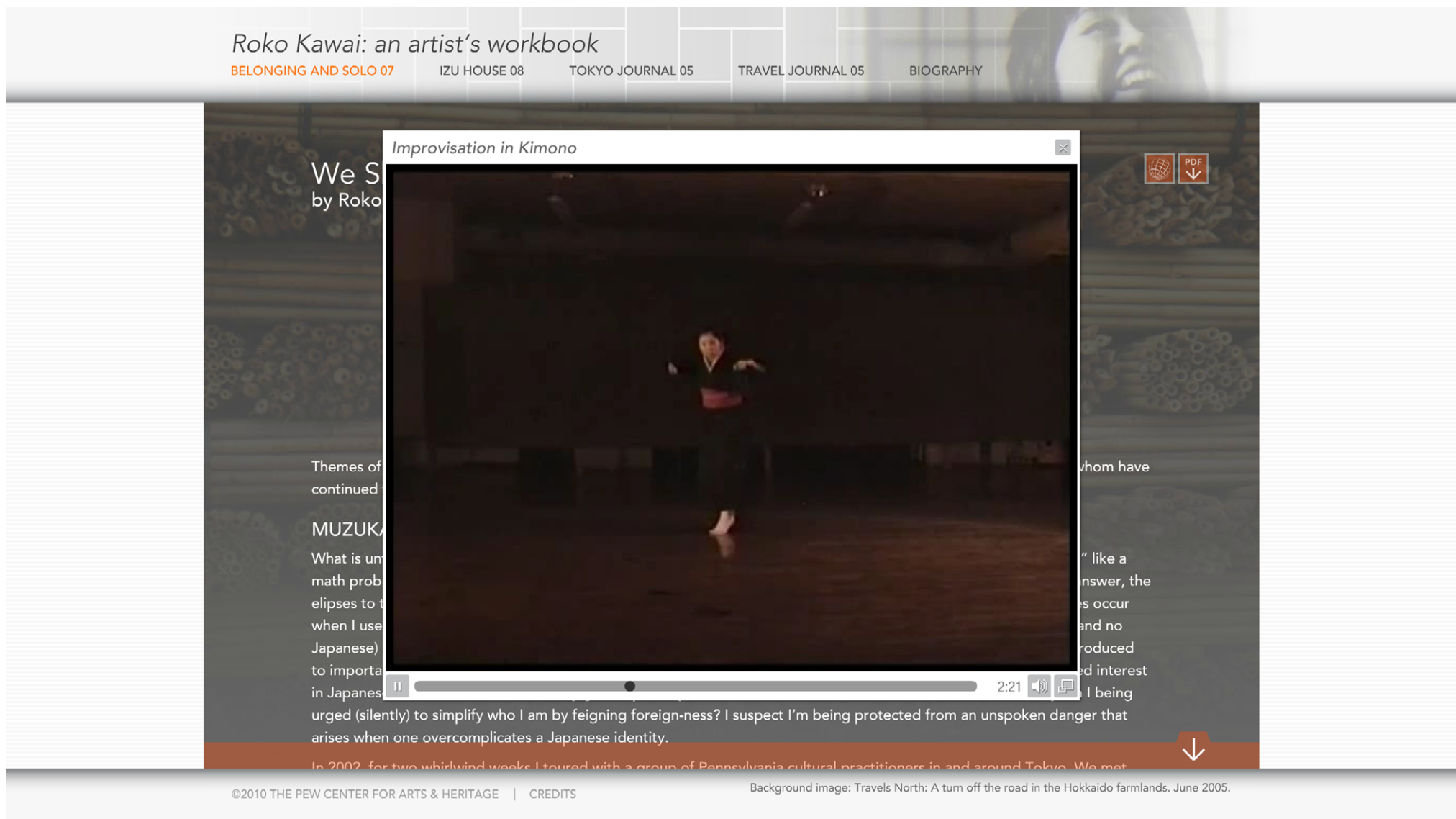
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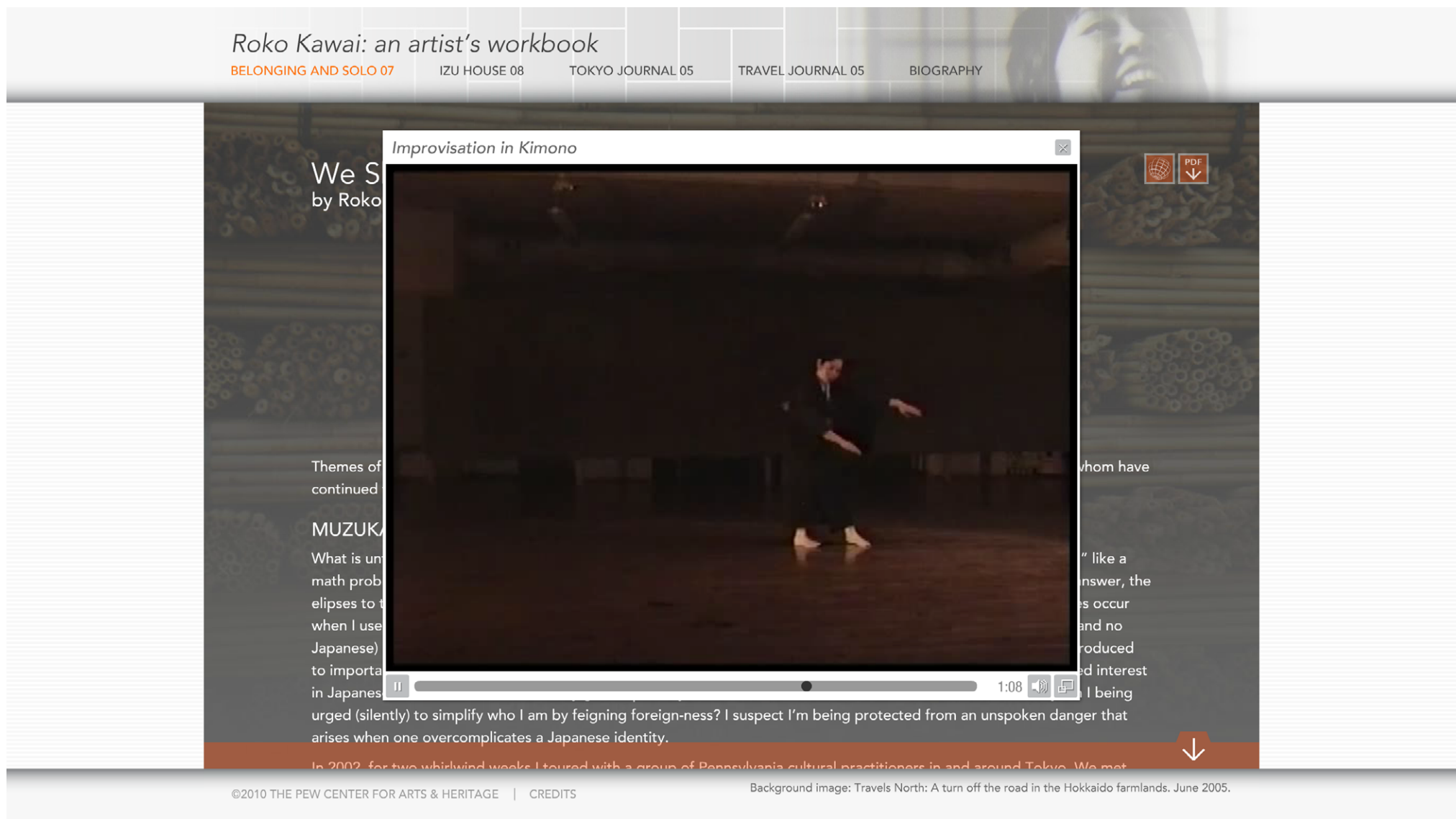


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Improvisation in Kimono



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Themes of continued

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arises when one overcomplicates a Japanese identity.

In 2002, for two whirlwind weeks I toured with a group of Pennsylvania cultural practitioners in and around Tokyo. We met with choreographers, presenters, and critics who were working on the edges of the contemporary dance community. I recall a sheer connection between the city's high-tech intensity and the defiant, absurdist freneticism of the contemporary work we were seeing. During the tour, I also grappled with one more tension. While I was intellectually thrilled by the provocative urban contemporary work, I felt a deeper affinity to the physicality of classical Japanese dance.

In Japan, I have often heard the complaint that the classical dance world is elitist, scorned as a hobby for privileged children and retirees who are loaded with savings. In order to perform in a fully produced recital (with professional costumers, stagehands, make-up and wig masters, and live musicians), apprentices might put out the equivalent of a down payment on a house. On top of that, apprentices must prepare gratuity monies for the teacher, the teacher's mentor, that mentor's headmaster, the headmaster's association, the backstage staff, and even one's own invited guests. Japanese classical dance also emphasizes extreme etiquette. Apprentices are required, for example, to bow to everyone at precise times in precise ways, according to hierarchy. To many, learning such complicated customs is seen as a distraction from nurturing artistic excellence.

Abiding by such a system may feel too anachronistic to contemporary artists. Moreover, for postmodern dancers especially, I imagine that the Japanese classical dance repertory is terribly problematic. The choreography thrives on predictable and cathartic narratives, emotive and outdated gender roles, glorified technique, and fantasy and entertainment.

But from where I was standing in the diaspora, I couldn't help but also note the exciting commonalities between the classical and contemporary performances we saw during that tour. Examples include: hyper-crystallized visual moments, the juxtaposition of the monumental to the miniscule, the use of 'ma', and the compositional build-up from restraint to accumulation to climax. However, when I asked our Tokyo hosts about this intriguing correlation, their reactions were so cold. I was taken aback. Our lively conversations would suddenly be chilled with a drop in energy, a grunt, and a single word: "hmmm... muzukashii"—difficult to explain, untenable.

Okay, I get it: having been thrust into westernization in the late 19th-century, Japan struggled to put out a signature national art form. Kabuki and classical dance seemed to fit the bill. But then with the war, industrial collapse, and the emergence of new socio-political movements these traditional arts, some vehemently argued, would detrimentally over-exoticize Japan's growing international profile. Critics complained that Kabuki and classical dance, despite its roots as a 16th-century street theater for common people, have since been re-positioned as a national theater, an expensive tourist draw and a pastime for the wealthy and nostalgic. Or that is one theory. But what makes this so hard to deconstruct openly in dialogue? We did not

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So, it was a godsend when, in 2005, I received a Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Fellowship, which provided me the opportunity to live in Japan for half a year to carry out artistic research.

For seven months I absorbed the visceral, physical energy of today's Japan, which is so different than when I was there as a child. I was born in Tokyo, but my family immigrated to Pennsylvania when I was three. In many ways, my life has been a continuing dance between these two countries, subliminally shifting how I carry my torso, how I project my voice, how I weight my touch, how I use my eyes, how I see myself, how I interpret others interpreting me. I returned to Japan at the impressionable age of 12 but left again at a tumultuous 17. It had always been a dream of mine to go back as an adult, as a professional dance artist. I wanted to discover how my own views were—or are—still naïve. Before this trip, it had been 23 years since I last lived there.

My Fellowship focus—Japanese classical dance master Hanayagi Kazu: teacher, dancer, fire. Charismatic, eloquent, and unconventional, she emphasizes that all movement must be researched, deconstructed and understood—in the body, by the body. As fierce a preservationist as she is a passionate performer, *Kazu-sensei* pushes her apprentices to transcend assumptions about perfect form, and to let go into the rough and the gruff, the humor, the surprise, and the breath. I was delighted by an anecdote she once told. She was once at a wedding that, by coincidence, Kazuo Ohno was also attending. "Out of nowhere he stood up and started to dance [without recognizable form]; it didn't matter at all, it was so real."

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Kazu-sensei

Kazu-sensei is what her apprentices affectionately call her. Sensei is the suffix for master, teacher, doctor, scientist, lawyer.

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17. 40.

2005: Before beginning my training with Kazu-sensei, I had written:

each repetition in japanese classical dance practice offers me a vehicle through which i can find new depth in stillness, new sophistication in transition, and new clarity in phrasing. the discoveries have been rich and infinite. like a yoga practice, re-visiting over and over the exacting, 'non-negotiable' forms and sequences of classical dance has allowed me to find greater nuance in each moment, expanding my range from intense focus to ease in carriage, refining and refining awareness of my front and back, my inside and outside, the dance moment just past and the gesture about to come. it remains a mystery somewhat. why should such a traditional form, so sentimental, narrative, and entertainment-focused (not to mention utterly politicized!) open me to this new depth of technique and presence? i continue to muse on that question.

So calm and philosophical then; however, one month into the fellowship I am writing:

4/3/05 - can i stop acting like a fugitive? a nervous wreck? important realization today: i need to stop feeling so ashamed. the last time i really lived here was when i was 17. now i'm 40. i can't believe i'm still terrified enough that i would rather get on the wrong train (to god knows where) than to let on to the station staff that i can't read the signs and schedules.

17. 40. these ages mean totally different things in japanese society. it's no longer everybody's business to put me in my place, as a japanese child-in-training-to-become-a-perfect-japanese-citizen. i am returning as an adult and an artist/researcher with some U.S. credentials to boot. but i'm still operating like i'm 17, an embarrassment. in the past, i always started each visit with a robust sense of self, a 'multicultural right to exist.' but the longer i stayed, i would lose it and inevitably get sucked into the vortex of i-suck-ness, never-enough-ness. but now (gasp), i'm 40 (exhale), and an invited scholar/artist! (sweating bullets). i'm still just getting used to every little thing.

but i recently discovered a new strategy that's working better - i re-vamped the important self introduction - even with strangers at a train station or department store. after a friendly, light-hearted and confident bow and smile, i say upfront in Japanese - 'i'm so sorry to bother you. i'm visiting from america and my japanese isn't as good as it should be, but i have a question and wondered if you might help me... please forgive me.'

i've always cherished this text because it felt like such a shout - like i failed at being a regular japanese - a

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disembodied ghostly hand that slid as sliding doors slid. I was the most grounded, like the physical house itself, enduring with gravitas and pathos, accumulating memories.

A language of us began to coalesce.

It was important to constantly evaluate what felt or did not feel authentic while working in a context already laden with so much family, local, and national history. We would dig further into these concerns in October 2008 with the exciting addition of Philadelphia percussionist Toshi Makihara. In a lighthearted email just prior to our return in 2008, Mika wrote: "For the second part of our exploration we should bring our different selves, having changed within the year."

WE SHOULD BRING OUR MUZUKASHII

This next time I wondered: what if I disclose my actual body state, post-murder? Will it be *untenable*? Our collaborative explorations were so playful as well as daring, open and rigorous. Was this, though, contingent upon keeping my emotional implosion and physical vulnerability out of view? In the final phase, will I overburden my Japanese collaborators if I call too much attention to myself? Or, should I "work a fiction" that maintains a safe, uncomplicated place to have relationship? "Murder and guns," my in-laws sternly warned, "are too shocking here in Japan. It will be untenable and, most importantly, it will irreversibly impact how people can see you and interact with you. If you have to mention it at all, call it a car accident."

In such a state how do I dance a fiction—a negotiated, facilitated self, all crafted and monitored? How odd to be excavating this house filled with hidden objects and sense memories, a birthing room and an altar for the deceased. Yet all the while I am cautioned by others against bringing my most vivid experience into the process. After all, my past research has strongly suggested that it's just so much safer to keep your inner world out of public view. I want to ask: which things are best left tucked away, or re-presented as something more palatable? Why is my experience so untenable to others? At what cost is this denial to me, my family? My sanity? Who is the authority that makes something untenable?

I long for stillness.

Mika wrote: "For the second part of our exploration we should bring our different selves, having changed within a year..."

Kazu-sensei always told us during lessons: "*Kuh-ki-o tsukuru*"—to create *kuh-ki*. *Kuh-ki*, literally, is "the air." But in this case, it's more like the atmosphere in the room, the tangible invisible, our living collective experience in the here and now. All of us needed to help create the right *kuh-ki*—not only the attentive student in front of Kazu-sensei, but also those who were still changing, those who were observing, even those who were leaving for the rest of their day.

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isn't as good as it should be, but i have a question and wondered if you might help me... please forgive me.

i've always eschewed this tact because it felt like such a cheat – like i failed at being a regular-japanese. a japanese-japanese would think it cheap to call attention to oneself. politically, i never wanted to lean on 'america' as a power-symbol. but by frontloading, this prelude has helped the other person comfortably place me, instantly. they feel less tense (they don't have to worry that i'm mentally disabled). and, by 'setting up the scene,' people even feel invited to chat me up – to compliment my japanese (which i deny) and inquire about my fellowship and research. paradoxically, this 'conceit' has given me a more workable re-entry. 'working the fiction' and 'facilitating the truth' may not be as evil as i'd originally thought. perhaps this is the way to establish a ground that is more – tenable – in order to engender long-term trust and dialogue.

USO-MO HOHBN: A LIE IS ALSO USEFUL

yokohama: at nibroll's open rehearsal at the gallery space yesterday, we had a comical little stint around 'uso-mo hohben.' 'a lie is also useful.' or, 'lying is a temporary expedient.' a proverb. a social tact. when the dancers went on break, the receptionist suggested we use the time to go check out another gallery where they were having a photo exhibit. normally, i would be non-committal upfront: thanks, maybe we will. But my friend says, 'yes, we definitely will!' I gave him a look. the receptionist spells out detailed walking directions. we ask clarifying questions. we took the walk but blew off the photo show. as we head back to the rehearsal, my friend is also rehearsing – 'sample lies.' like: 'we didn't make it to the gallery because we ended up having tea and lost track' or... 'we saw the show and particularly liked the one photo in which there was a ...' (!!) it was all very funny as our 'creative lies' got more preposterous.

at the same time, in my recent quest to live 'more accurately' (y'know, face your fears, discover what you truly enjoy), i had to think. the so-called truth is slippery. to me, this was such a no-brainer: we weren't interested so we won't lead her on. no love lost on the receptionist. what i got, though, was that it behooved us to engage, to effort. the japanese would argue that this is truth. that what's really being danced here is that we are helping her maintain a comfort-equilibrium. she plays her role as the friendly receptionist and we accept her intention full-heartedly. anyway, after all that, we got back and the receptionist was gone for the day!

That was 2005.

A GROUND

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Background image: Travels North: A turn off the road in the Hokkaido farmlands. June 2005.

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A GROUND

2008: returning, revisiting, researching, belonging, striving, driving, musing, battling, conflicting, colliding. WAIT. Stop. Be still now...

It is impossible to look back on—or forward to—my dance and autobiographical explorations without disclosing the one thing that now defines me most. On June 18, 2007, my 40-year-old sister and her daughters (eight and six years old) were murdered point blank by her husband, who then shot and killed himself. Needless to say, the understanding of body and self-hood has now forever changed.

My continuing dance between two countries suddenly feels like a past project, important but dimmed. Belonging—and the will to tease it out as a concept—is dependent upon a center from which to orient and reach. A ground: A ground inextricably created with my near-twin, my sister, who had co-lived my crisscrossed history.

Through this new viscosity, this absence, this shattering, I reflect on dancing. I feel a longing to be still, and to have things come to me now.

IZU HOUSE

Chihan-an, named after Nobuko Awaya's maternal grandfather Chihan, is the 200-year-old traditional house of the Suganuma family, located in the tiny town of Ohito on the Izu peninsula two hours south of Tokyo. Historic enough to be an architectural museum, Nobuko decided to keep it in the family and to revive her grandfather's tradition of using it as both a home and a place where artists could gather and workshop.

I met Nobuko toward the end of my 2005 fellowship, and she invited me to create a dance piece at Chihan-an. In October 2007, just three and a half months after the murders, I decided to go ahead and work as scheduled with longtime collaborator Leah Stein, a Philadelphia-based choreographer known for her site-specific work. From Tokyo, we invited dancer/performance artist Hideo Arai and vocalist Mika Kimura for a three-week workshop that would eventually culminate in a premiere in December 2008. In this initial process, we spontaneously explored the architecture of Chihan-an, Nobuko's oral



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All four artists plus Nobuko and the two video-artist photographers slept, cooked, bathed, and played together at Chihan-an. By modern Japanese residential standards, the house is vast—a single-story structure with a thatched roof and a foyer with an earthen floor. The expanse can be subdivided by a grid of sliding door-walls, both wooden and *fusuma* (paper screen-door/walls), from the Edo (1600–1868) to Taisho (1912–1926) periods. Most of the house is a stretch of unfurnished *tatami* (straw-based) floor space. A good chunk of it, like the kitchen and bath areas, is modernized for everyday needs.

In Ohito, we greeted elderly farmers who were squatting low, tending tidy fields. We joined neighbors in an autumn festival, dancing late at night to disco infused *o-bon* music on loudspeakers. In daylight, we discovered Shinto customs still observed by local residents. Along roadsides across the front of their houses, for instance, people still hung ceremonial rope with white paper foldings during rice harvest time. Every few blocks, unavoidable even here, there were the ubiquitous vending machines, punky teenagers, and diesel-spitting mini-trucks. Just one train line connects this cozy valley to the larger cities. Down below the tracks, golden rice fields lay like brilliant mats between generic box-buildings. APITA, the crayola-neon red and yellow home grocery complex, the Ikea of Izu, stood like a sibling next to the town's other landmark—the rugged and beautiful Mt. Joh.

My work often asks: "Who are we in this place? Who are we with one another?" Leah worried if she, a strawberry blond, fair skinned American, looked weird or out of place in this cast, in this setting. But did any of us look matched to this historical space? Even Nobuko herself, a descendent of 450 years of the Sukanuma line whom neighbors still call *Non-chan*, is a feminist scholar and journalist of intercultural studies, based primarily in Tokyo's cosmopolitan Jiyugaoka district. Hideo and Mika are longtime residents of Tokyo's congested working class neighborhoods, existing far from the relaxed greenery of Izu.

And me? I have lived and worked most of my adult life in the United States, absorbing parts of contemporary and classical Japan through visits. How do I belong here? How can any of us speak to this place?

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Edo (1600–1868) to Taisho (1912–1926)

From Edo through Taisho, an extremely rich swath of Japanese history. The Edo Period, ruled by the Shogunate, transitioned Japan from a medieval to a pre-modern society. Tightly ruled by Shogunate generals and fiercely resistant to foreign influences, the Edo Period gave birth to much of what is today considered culturally Japanese—Kabuki, ukiyoe prints and the geisha quarters. After two and half centuries, however, American warships in 1853 were able to penetrate Japan's sea coasts and demand an opening of trade negotiations. The weakened Shogunate were unseated by a new government that decreed an overnight westernization campaign, which became known as the Meiji Era. Samurai swords were outlawed while the new elite strived to master how to wear Victorian dress, play violin, bake bread and wage imperial war outside its borders. The Taisho Era launched Japan into its first world war.

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O-bon

O-bon, next to New Year's, is one of Japan's most important celebrations of the year.

Occurring in mid-August, it is a festival in which most Japanese return to their hometowns to honor their ancestors through massive gatherings in public spaces, folk dances, food, drink and ultimately a respectful prayer. Each region prizes its own o-bon traditions, including its particular set of folk dances and songs. In modern times, the song Soran Bushi, originally from the northern island of Hokkaido, has become a favorite for young people to set a faster beat and create their own moves to. We saw one of these disco-ized versions in Ohito and later included our own Soran Bushi in *Izu House*.

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Authentic movement

Based on journal entry from 09.05.05

Authentic Movement is a profoundly simple form in which a mover moves with eyes closed in the presence of a witness. Movement may begin from an impulse, sensation, gesture, image or memory and develops following the inherent logic of the body. Thus, the mover begins to open to unknown aspects of the self and to experience his or her personal, spiritual or creative truth as it manifests and becomes conscious through movement. The witness is present simply to observe the mover without judgment, attending fully to both the mover and his or her own inner experience. The meeting of mover and witness in a space of authenticity and integrity provides both the potential for healing and a return to one's true self. Originally called Movement-in-Depth by its founder, Mary Starks Whitehouse, the method grew from her roots

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The sliding doors/walls are movable *and* removable. In the vastness, a tiny room can be sectioned off, enclosed; the birthing room where Nobuko and her ancestors were born, for example. Inside this cubicle, women participated in the bloody red, chaotic messiness of birth while, on the other side of the *fusuma*, the men-folk concentrated on a game of *go*: gridded, calculated, black and white. To create an expansive public space, these same doors could be removed entirely for ceremonial events such as weddings or funerals. The outermost doors can be thrown open, offering those inside a cross-breeze or a borrowed, framed view of the mountain or the moon. Tokyo relatives fled to Chihan-an during the incendiary bombing of the capital in World War II. It was also a place of return for Chihan's divorced sister and her son. One night we found turn-of-the-century tax records by accident. As the local landowner, Chihan had collected rice duties from tenant farmers.

The road that passes in front of Chihan-an is named Shimoda Kaido. Today it is fume-filled and noisy with traffic, a constant presence in our soundscape that is also syncopated by dove cries and Mika's vocal scales. The road is named after historic Shimoda port, located at the southern tip of Izu. It was there that the U.S. *Black Ships* first landed in 1853 and forced Japan to open for trade, catapulting the society into rapid westernization. To negotiate the terms with the Shogunate in Edo (now Tokyo), the American emissaries traveled up Shimoda Kaido. To imagine American emissaries walking right by this house! I cannot ignore the magnitude of working in a site so close to such history. Had the U.S. ships not arrived and Japan not become westernized, albeit with great internal conflict, would my family have immigrated to Philadelphia?

A LANGUAGE OF US

If I hadn't left Japan, and found myself at this diasporic distance, would I have been drawn to, would my body have found a home in, Japanese classical dance? Would I have this lifelong socio-anthropological-artistic interest in Japan? Leah, Hideo, Mika and I moved and removed doors, we staged views near and far, we set out and we came home. Multiple bodies shifted from one space to another. We created vignettes: of a family spat, a shadow-play behind translucent screens, a figure who ran behind a grated doorway seeking refuge, a head birthing out from behind a *fusuma*.

Dancers looped through the house in folkdance-like agricultural movements, a time lapse of generations. Drunken stories around the *irori* (fire pit) late at night came alive. At the same time so many were gone, deceased.

By discovering movement qualities that connected to our experience of being there with each other, we started to belong. Hideo often took on character-like personae (Grandpa Chihan, or a mythological *kappa*-creature). Leah was more ethereal, a disembodied ghostly hand that slid as sliding doors slid. I was the most grounded, like the physical house itself, enduring with

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Background image: Travels North: A turn off the road in the Hokkaido farmlands. June 2005.

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WE SHOULD BRING OUR MUZUKASHII

This next time I wondered: what if I disclose my actual body state, post-murder? Will it be *untenable*? Our collaborative explorations were so playful as well as daring, open and rigorous. Was this, though, contingent upon keeping my emotional implosion and physical vulnerability out of view? In the final phase, will I overburden my Japanese collaborators if I call too much attention to myself? Or, should I "work a fiction" that maintains a safe, uncomplicated place to have relationship? "Murder and guns," my in-laws sternly warned, "are too shocking here in Japan. It will be untenable and, most importantly, it will irreversibly impact how people can see you and interact with you. If you have to mention it at all, call it a car accident."

In such a state how do I dance a fiction—a negotiated, facilitated self, all crafted and monitored? How odd to be excavating this house filled with hidden objects and sense memories, a birthing room and an altar for the deceased. Yet all the while I am cautioned by others against bringing my most vivid experience into the process. After all, my past research has strongly suggested that it's just so much safer to keep your inner world out of public view. I want to ask: which things are best left tucked away, or re-presented as something more palatable? Why is my experience so untenable to others? At what cost is this denial to me, my family? My sanity? Who is the authority that makes something untenable?

I long for stillness.

Mika wrote: "For the second part of our exploration we should bring our different selves, having changed within a year..."

Kazu-sensei always told us during lessons: "*Kuh-ki-o tsukuru*"—to create *kuh-ki*. *Kuh-ki*, literally, is "the air." But in this case, it's more like the atmosphere in the room, the tangible invisible, our living collective experience in the here and now. All of us needed to help create the right *kuh-ki*—not only the attentive student in front of Kazu-sensei, but also those who were still changing, those who were observing, even those who were leaving for the rest of their day.

As a constantly evolving phenomenon, we were always "reading the air" for any drops in the *kuh-ki* and for cues on how to then react, behave, engage. As beautiful as this can be, it is also quite *muzukashii*.

Where is the ground in *kuh-ki*? Bounced back and forth between the old and the new, between these pre-scripted roles and my recent catastrophic shock, between all of these multiple selves in the same body, I long for stillness and ground.

We bring our different selves forward, changed.

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Background image: Chihan-an: grated door, Edo period. The sliding doors/walls are movable and removeable. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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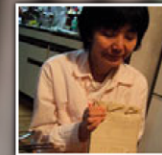
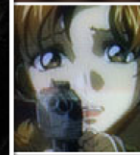
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Cherry blossoms at Inokashira Park, Kichijoji, Tokyo. Kichijoji is the station stop where Kazu-sensei lives and teaches. April 2005. Photo by Eiko Kawai.



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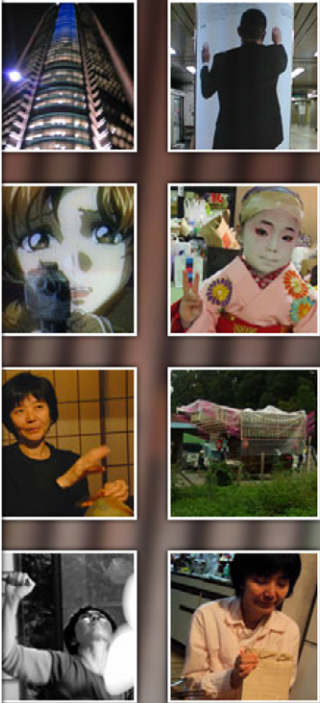
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Winnie the Pooh and Anime Girl: "AU" cell phone company promo, Kichijoji, Tokyo. Kichijoji is the station stop where Kazu-sensei lives and teaches. April 2005.

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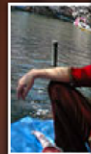


Photo of a photograph: a younger Kazu-sensei. May 2005.

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Okeiko/lesson: Kazu-sensei demonstrates the Hyottoko (buffoon) alongside Roko.
May 2005. Photo by Karen Shimakawa.

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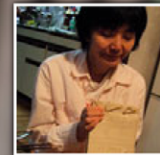
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High school girls, Kichijoji, Tokyo. Kichijoji is the station stop where Kazu-sensei lives and teaches. April 2005.



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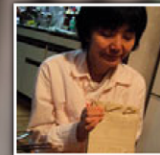
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Mori Tower, Roppongi, Tokyo. March 2005.



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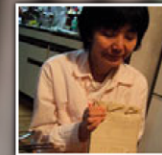
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Ide Shigehiro poster in the Sendagaya subway, Tokyo. Ide Shigehiro who is best known for his popular contemporary dance company "Idevian" was presenting a solo performance that was so captivating I went to see it twice. May 2005.



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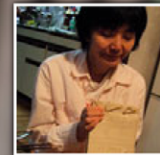
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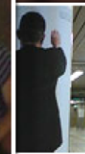
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Awa Odori Festival, a well-known summer folk dance extravaganza from the island of Awa. This folk dance is so popular it's often transplanted to many other locales such as this one in Koenji, Tokyo. August 2005.

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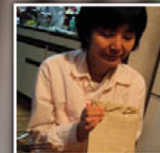
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Beer vendor at Koenji Awa Odori Festival, a well-known summer folk dance extravaganza originating from Tokushima prefecture on the island of Shikoku. The largest dance festival in Japan, it is so popular that it is often adopted by other cities. Koenji, Tokyo. August 2005.



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Skyscraper, Tokyo, en route to take vocal lessons. When I told Kazu-sensei that I wanted to learn about the music and lyric behind *Mitsumen Komori*, the classical piece she was teaching me in 2005, she introduced me to the master musician Tokiwazu Mojibei. Tokiwazu-sensei takes his stage name from the Tokiwazu song style in which this music is composed. September 2005.

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Girl with gun, a photo taken from a program on cable TV featuring anime classics from 1990s such as this one, *AfterWar Gundam X*. August 2005.

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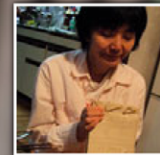
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Oyama Project contemporary dance ensemble at the Kazuo Ohno Festival, BankART Gallery, Yokohama. October 2008.



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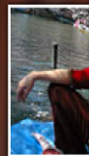
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Saving a spot at the summer fireworks festival in Asakusa, Tokyo. July 2005.

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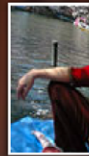
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Koenji Awa Odori Festival is a well-known summer folk dance extravaganza originating from Tokushima prefecture on the island of Shikoku. The largest dance festival in Japan, it is so popular that it is often adopted by other cities. Koenji, Tokyo. August 2005.

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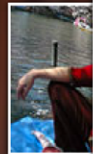
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Chinatown, Yokohama: "Uso mo Hohben/Convenient Lies." September 2005.

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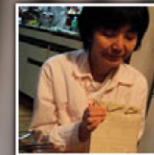
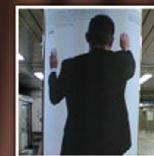
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Peak of rice season along the Izu Hakone Sunzu rail line. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.



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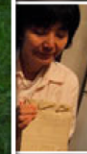
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Ohito Farmer, tidy fields. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.

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Nobuko Awaya telling oral histories at Chihan-an. October 2007.

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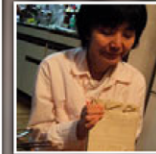
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Next door to Chiha-an: Prepping the float before the rice harvest festival. Mika talks to the local residents. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.

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We discovered Shinto customs still observed by local residents. Along roadsides across the front of their houses, people still hung ceremonial rope with white paper foldings during rice harvest time. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.

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Chihan-an: Rehearsal with Hideo, Roko, Mika, Leah. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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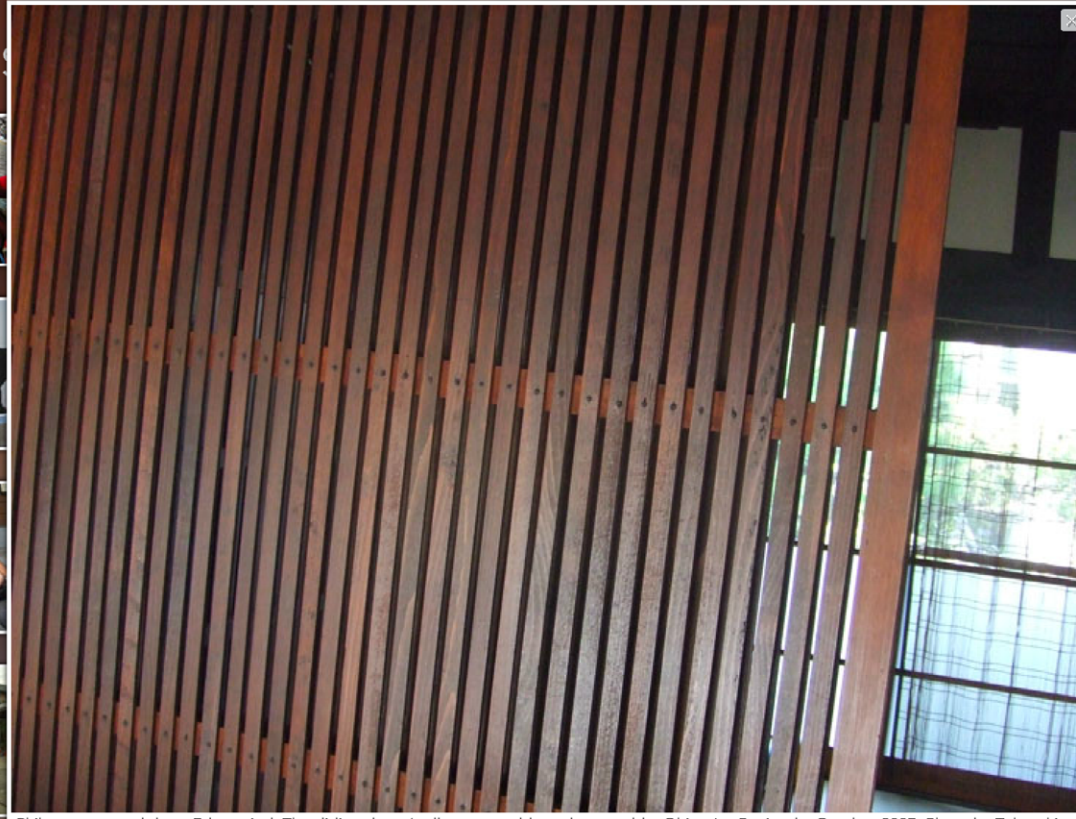
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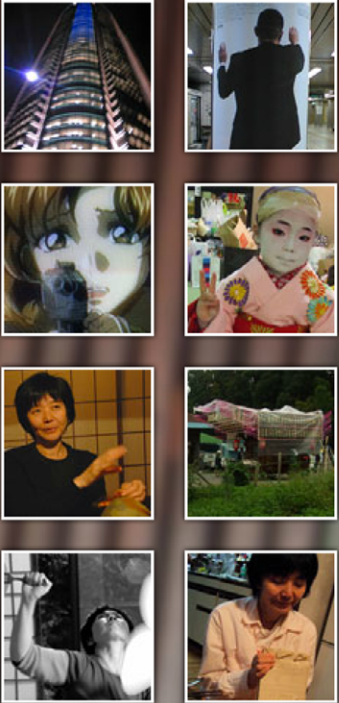
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Chihan-an: Roko in foreground, Hideo and Leah in shadow. "Through this new viscosity, this absence, this shattering, I feel a longing to be still, and to have things come to me now." Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Eiichiro Iwasa.

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Chihan-an: Leah in front of grated door. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Chihhan-an: Uchiwa (fan) improvisation with Roko & Hideo. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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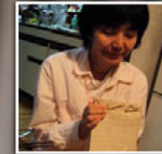
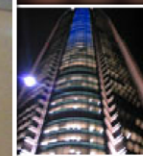
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Chihan-an: Nobuko holds up a turn-of-the-century tax record that we unexpectedly pulled out of a hibachi drawer during dinner one night. As the local landowner, Chihan had collected rice-duties from tenant farmers. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.



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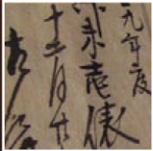
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Chihan-an: Close up of old tax records. Slash marks indicate "paid." Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007.

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A language of us began to coalesce. Leah, Hideo, and Roko at Chihan-an. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Chihan-an: Doma (earthen floor) in foyer. This hibachi was found underneath floorboards, possibly used to keep the interior space warm. "How odd to be excavating this house—its hidden objects and sense memories—while being cautioned against bringing into the process my most vivid experience." Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2005.

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