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Bulding Among the Ruins: Contesting the Space of Everyday Life in Postwar Okinawa

The notion of the negative commons can be applied easily to the American military bases that Okinawa Prefecture is required to house. My paper will address that problem, but I will also consider another collectively shared burden: that of the guilt and trauma associated with colonial domination, wartime genocide and American occupation. I will consider it as an oppressive weight to be borne by the Okinawan people as well as a resource that allows them to envison and create new possibilities.

Umiyakarā—The Seafaring Rogue

How can you live in a world in ruins? What can be saved, what is lost? In the aftermath of the war, Okinawans confronted a world in which they had been attacked by the United States, abandoned by Japan, destroyed by both. Each day was a struggle to recall and to rebuild. Some tried to recreate familiar patterns of daily life in the damp canvas tents and muddy streets of the internment camps. Dressed in fatigues and combat boots, others gathered each morning for working parties. Organized by the soldiers of the American Occupation, they would clear away the wreckage of burned buildings, the scorched hulks of tanks and trucks. They looked for traces in the shattered landscape, for intimations of the streets and homes, shops and fields that no longer stood in their familiar sites. They searched for the missing and buried the dead, the sense of loss heavy in the air like an

impending storm. The uncertainty of the future was always before them as they waited uneasily for American soldiers to deliver supplies to their temporary shelters. Soldiers who were already building a new world of barracks and runways for themselves in the ravaged fields and shattered villages, a world where Okinawans could work but never dwell.

It was a time to labor and to mourn, but it was also a time to dream. Dreaming of laughter, of an escape from sadness. Onaha Buten and Teruya Rinsuke used these dreams to create the *nuchi nu sūji*—the celebration of life. It was their genius to bring music from the detritus of war: taiko cut from fifty-five gallon drums; sanshin crafted from empty cans, parachute cord and scraps of lumber; happiness from despair. A moment of celebration recovered from days of labor and nights of exhaustion and sorrow. Far away in mainland Japan, Terurin's friend Kohama Shūei[1] dreamed of returning to Okinawa and reuniting with his family. For a year, foraging in the fields and hills around Zushi[2], he waited and hoped. Could he have survived the jungles of Indochina and the arduous trip back to Japan only to idle away his life like this?

When he finally returned to Okinawa, he found his wife and infant son alive, waiting for him. Slowly, his family came together—his brothers from Palau and Ponape, their families from the camps and from their hiding places in Yanbaru—the mountainous forests of Northern Okinawa. Unable to return to their homes in Nishizato[3], they decided to settle in Saundabaru, shuttled by American trucks to the

uninhabited wooded hillocks and swampy lowlands to the south of Goya in Goeku[4]. Other refugees from the *yādui* in Moromisato, Yamauchi and Yamasato gathered in the same place, living in tents left for them by the Americans, cutting roads and trails, building small houses. Sometimes they returned to the fields around their old villages, building barracks and paving roads and runways under American supervision in the space where they once gathered fodder or cut cane.

Work was difficult, supplies were scarce. Even when work was available, Shūei was concerned that it would not be enough—people needed more than money to rebuild their world. During the war, the Japanese State had policed the pleasures of the people, banning public gatherings and suppressing Okinawan music and dance. After the war, under the indifferent occupation of the Americans, Shūei worried about this absence. Many of the musicians who once performed with him were lost or dead. Theaters were burned to the ground, the fields where revelers once danced had been swallowed by the bases. In this time of hesitant recovery, in the summer evenings after work, Shūei decided to gather the young men of his new neighborhood together in the Quonset hut that served as their community center. There, he taught them the *yakimāji eisā.*[5] Together they worked to master not only the steps and the songs of the eisā, but the style that marked the performances during the festival of the dead in the streets of Nishizato. Until Shūei decided to resume the dance after the war, it was inconceivable that outsiders would be allowed to join. Shūei broke with tradition, disregarding the objections of many of his

friends who had lived in Nishizato. Shūei not only allowed but encouraged everyone to dance. If the disparate group that had come together in his neighborhood were to survive the aftermath of the war, he was sure that they would need the eisā.

[1]Hana nu Kajimayā—*Pinwheels in the Wind*

On a summer evening in 1998, I stood on the stairs of the Sonda Community Center. [6] A focal point of neighborhood activity, the community center stood in the midst of a group of turtleback tombs atop a ridge overlooking Moromizato Park. As I had done every night that summer and the summer before, I joined dozens of men and women in the pounded clay courtyard as we prepared to dance *eisā.*

In fields and parking lots across central Okinawa, thousands of young Okinawan men and women practice *eisā* throughout the summer, preparing for three nights of dancing during *obon*—the festival of the dead. Eisā, is easilyt the most widespread modality of public memorative practice in the islands, although it has received little critical attention. As my friends often told me, *eisā* was necessary so that they could respond to the demands and desires of the ancestral spirits, to the hundreds of thousands who were killed during the war.

It's said that Eisā is danced to escort the spirits of the dead from their tombs back to their homes and to entertain them during obon. To narrate and embody the

history of impoverished Okinawan courtiers sent down from the capital. To express and sustain the pride and honor of these neighborhoods, the power and the artistry of the dancers. To create and share karī, the gift of happiness and belonging produced in performance, necessary for life. Koza—Okinawa City—has emerged as the focal point of *eisā* performance, and Sonda became the most famous of the groups within the city.

At almost every public performance I've attended, *eisā* is introduced as an ancient Okinawan performing art. The members of the youth group are interested in these accounts and often discuss them; however, for the most part, it is not eisā's dimly-remembered origins that captures their imagination. Their concern is with recollecting their own past, with recreating their own dance.

The Sonda *kōminkan*—Sonda's community center—is saturated with traces of this past. Its straight, simple lines evoke the construction of the family tomb, the traditional Okinawan home, and the palace of the Ryūkyūan King at Shuri. Generally rectangular, one long side is open, and several steps lead down to a large rectangular courtyard. Of course, there are obvious differences: squared, institutional poured concrete rather than the ubiquitous turtleback shape of the tombs or the gleaming red lacquered timbers of the palace at Shuri; a pounded clay courtyard instead of the tightly fitted paving stones of the *nā*[7]; chain link fence rather than an ornamental stone wall.

Nonetheless, the echoes of the tomb are compelling. Before the war, dancers and musicians from Nishizato gathered on summer evenings in courtyards of the crypts that lay on the edge of their hamlet. Night after night, they danced and sang before the spirits of their ancestors, practicing for the day that would bring *eisā* again to the streets of their villages and the courtyards of their homes. Pleasurable and demanding, away from the fields where they labored each day, from the discipline of the home, from the regulation of the state, resisting the pressure and the lure of labor migration to the mainland or the South Pacific. In the company of their friends and the spirits of their ancestors, farmers and laborers became dancers and musicians.

Those tombs and villages are gone. The material presence of the ancestors, so painstakingly ordered and attended by their families, was fragmented and dispersed—destroyed along with many of the lives of those who memorated them. And yet, for those who survived, relationships with the spirits of the ancestors were too precious to lose, obligations to the dead too great to ignore. Rebuilding the tombs and recollecting the ancestors was one of the first priories of Okinawan households in the postwar reconstruction. However, tombs and household altars are not the only places in which the spatial fields of the ancestors were reinstalled. The kōminkan itself is a site of repeated daily labor to situate and recall the dead. It is a space that is filled with the creative activity of dancers who struggle to express their desire to to understand—and to change—the world around them.

Virtually every inch of available wall space is covered with the graphic traces of Sonda's past. Row after row of framed photographs showing generations of dancers; certificates noting the youth group's performances in decades of annual *eisā* competition in Okinawa City and their appearances throughout Japan; letters of appreciation from prominent Japanese politicians, performers and admiring fans. Group pictures for every year of the seinenkai's history. Their famous appearance at Expo '70, at festivals throughout Okinawa, at performances across mainland Japan. With Japanese rock stars, television news anchormen, Olympic skaters and former Prime Ministers. To the right of the most recent pictures, a full-length mirror is bolted to the wall: aspiring dancers can anticipate and enjoy their own inclusion into the archive of representations. Huge embroidered banners hang from the rafters, commemorating youth group victories in the *Zento Eisā Konkuru,* the island-wide *eisā* competitions that have been held since 1958.

The oldest picture, a framed black and white group photograph above the door shows a group of men, lean and sunburned, staring gravely at the camera. They are dressed in short, working kimono and wearing farmers' woven conical hats. One or two men hold sanshin[8] and several drums are lined up in the foreground. These are the first dancers to come together to dance eisā after the war.

As I walked around the room, I saw more recent photographs, black and white giving over to color. In the late 1950's, women began to join the youth group. The clothing of the dancers also changed. When they were all déclassé nobles, they

proudly wore the modest kimono of the farming village where their families were born. When participation in the seinenkai was opened to everyone, noble or commoner, native or outsider, men began to wear the garb of a stylized Okinawan samurai while women continued to wear the kimono of rural commoners.

Kohama Shūei told me that he and his friends were inspired to select costumes that would help the young men and women of the neighborhood to create a dramatic impression on the audience and judges at eisā performances, particularly the *Zento Eisā Konkuru*. One cannot help but notice the powerful representations of gender and class in these images, in contrast to the conditions of Okinawan daily life. To imagine the attraction that representations of strong, handsome Ryūkyūan warriors have for a cook at a base club or a servant in an American household; to think of the possibilities that a graceful, laughing rural dancer presents to a maid at a cheap hotel or a prostitute in a crowded club. And yet, the gendered assignment of class seems puzzling. In a neighborhood so proud of its samurai heritage, why should the women be consigned to the status of commoners?

Shūei provided the answer. The costumes that they chose were not unmediated representations of the Okinawan past; rather they were selected from the most popular plays and dances of the Okinawan theater—the *Uchinā Shibai*.[9] Thus, costumes not only referred to favorite images and idealized qualities of the past; they also suggested the protean expressiveness of theatrical performance. Regardless of the attire that performers wore in the world of labor, on the streets of

Koza, they could claim the right to transform themselves in the dance. They were free to choose, regardless of the burden or the privilege of their heritage. However, in doing so, they also opened themselves to the judgement of the audience gathered for performances: an appropriated image could only be maintained if the dancers demonstrated that they were equal to it.

In the photographs, men wore white trousers with a short-sleeved jacket; a blue silk vest trimmed in black and tied at the waist with a golden sash. Black and white leg armor strapped to their legs, long sashes of red or violet tied around their heads. Women were dressed in conservative indigo kimono, splashes of white crosshatching on the dark field. Their kimono tied with violet sashes, hair pulled back with violet ribbon.

The images displayed in the kōminkan are important elements in mediating the transmission of the varying versions of the seinenkai's past. They provide visual linkages between the interior space of the kōminkan and other people, places and events distributed over space and time. Traces of other moments, graphic reminders that figure practices of recollection. In the quiet hours of the afternoon, during the hurried moments before a rehersal, in the long hours of talking and drinking after a performance has ended, they are looked at, pointed to, used as a touchstone for the storytelling that is as much a part of *eisā* as the dance. Young members listen attentively to the stories told by their seniors. One evening finds the OB's[10] talking about *yakimāji*[11] and the moashibi—the illicit parties where the young men and

women of the surrounding villages gathered while Kohama Shūei and Kadekaru Rinshō entertained them. [12] At the same time, it is not some kind of pristine refuge from the world of work, from the space of the nation. Several old men from the neighborhood sit around a table and talk about their experiences in the Pacific War or during the Occupation. On another evening, OB's repeat their older brothers' stories about burning American cars during the Koza Riot, helicopters overhead, tanks in the street. Conversations also often embrace business and politics—negotiating jobs, recruiting supporters. And yet, discussions always seem to return to *eisā*: this year, last year, the great years of the *eisā* competition. *Eisā* is an endlessly interesting, inexhaustible subject: the proper way to hold a drumstick, the meaning of a lyric, the merits of another neighborhood's *eisā*, a recent performance, a performance yet to come.

Outside, we prepared for rehearsal—just as we did every evening during the three months preceding obon. Most of the dancers came to the kōminkan directly from work. From the dress of the members of the youth group, it was clear that Sonda was a working class neighborhood. A majority of the young men were in *sagyōfuku*—the uniform of the construction worker, the painter, the general contractor. Baggy, calf-length trousers in vivid pastel colors, white t-shirts, towels knotted around their heads. High school boys still in their school uniforms: black trousers and white shirts. The remaining young men were dressed in current hip-hop fashion: shiny sweats—Adidas but not Nike; baggy denim shorts or pants, large,

blocky sneakers, oversized jerseys: Fubu, Mecca, the Japanese National soccer team.

Young women in fashionably tight blouses with wide collars and flared pants. A few in matching knee-length skirts and vests, the uniforms of local banks and offices. None of the high school girls still wore their school uniforms. Younger girls in wide-leg jeans, clunky, thick-soled sneakers or sandals, undersized GI T-shirts (Seabees and Hellblasters). Style means attention to detail: the right jewelry, a cool G-Shock wristwatch, good haircut—bleached or dyed. Color contacts—green or variegated blue best of all.

Two rows of folding chairs had been set up at the top of the stairs, microphones in front of each. The jikata—sanshin musicians— sat there with the other OB's, tuning their instruments, warming up their voices, running a soundcheck, catching a last smoke before practice. Ten to twenty years older than the younger members, their dress and manner was notably different. Joking with one another in *uchināyamatuguchi*—a conversational fusion of Okinawan and Japanese that is far more dependant on Okinawan than the speech of the younger members.[13] Punch perms, crew cuts, the "all back" pompadour. Dressed in jeans and polo shirts, designer sweats, aloha shirts and chinos. The flash of gold—gold watches, gold jewelry, gold teeth.

Remnants of cigarettes were stubbed out, empty water glasses stacked. Cellular phones, pagers, watches, lighters, cigarette packs and wallets were removed

from wrists, belts and pockets, lined up along the steps and windowsills. Everyone moved down from the steps or out from the inside of the building and filed down onto the watered clay surface of the courtyard. The lead jikata laughed, shouting to the new dancers: "Unless you decide that you're going to try to do this better than everyone else, your dancing won't ever amount to anything!"

Dancers came to the kōminkan to play, but it is a form of play that has its costs as well as its rewards. The dancers have shrugged off many of the more conventional chances for recreation that contemporary Japanese society offers, even in Okinawa. They have—if only for the moment—refused the distractions of mass culture, of television, bars, games, parks and films. At the same time, they have refused certain kinds of work: more profitable employment in the dense urban areas of Naha or Urasoe, mainland Japan or America; labor in the remaining bars or brothels, nightclubs and snacks of nearby Nakanomachi**.** They cannot meet the demands of employers for overtime, for different hours, for selfless devotion to their jobs. For the most part, they have also turned their backs on the intellectual labors of the *juku*—cram school—and the university.[14] The dancers have also sacrificed one of the most treasured goals of a worker—sleep. The toll taken on laboring bodies is inescapable, but sleep offers a daily refuge from work, a chance to recover one's strength, to heal. Perhaps even the opportunity to dream. Instead they commit themselves to hours of arduous and demanding activity that, until recently, marked them as hooligans and lowlifes in the popular imagination.[15]

Standing in the courtyard, drummers adjusted the carriage of their instruments and dancers shifted their bodily hexis to that of the dance. Men lowered their hips, turned their knees out and sank into a wide stance. Head up, shoulders back, hands on hips, a look of quiet confidence on their faces. Women feet together, legs and back straight, hands at their hips, faintly smiling. The men's position is hard; the women more relaxed. The older members continue to work their way through the formation, physically moving dancers into the appropriate stance.

To the front, the jikata counted out the beat and drove into *Nandaki Bushi—The Ballad of the Southern Grove*, the first song of the eleven pieces that make up their *eisā*. After the first measure, the drums joined in. With the simultaneous sound of fifty drums being struck, the dance began. The song is sung in unison, the lyrics in Okinawan. For twenty minutes or more, the songs continue and the dancers dance. Women work to make the stately grace of the dance seem effortless. Along with the male dancers, their performance draws heavily on Okinawan folk and classical genres, creating the figure that organizes the eisā, elegant and controlled. The drummers dance a counterpoint to this. Leaping and turning, beating out a rhythm that is sometimes straight, sometimes syncopated, they struggle to maintain Sonda's reputation of speed and physicality. Dancers whose bodies are already exhausted and injured from long hours of harsh, physical labor. Dancers for whom this evening's exertions are a respite before another day of work. Sweat from the dancers splashes the ground—some people say that if you scratch

away the clay, it's salt all the way down to the roofs of the tombs at the bottom of the hill.

During their performance—the orchestration of drumming, song and dance—they conjure the account of a journey, assembled and sung from narratives of the past. A complex secondary genre, eisā is a cycle of narratives that recount the diaspora of the Ryūkyūan nobility[16]—more than a century of travels encompassing life in the days of the Ryūkyūan Kingdom, their impoverishment and exile to the mountainous northern forests, their struggle to return to the capital once more. Each of the songs narrates the experiences of a particular time and place where the former nobles lived along their journey. Some are songs that were composed during the period that they represent; others are later representations of that time and place. With their own particular chronotopes, their own narrative organization of space and time, the songs are bound together by the formal structure and the performative production of the dance. Together they compose the unity of the work, the utterance. All are woven together, harmonized in performance by the powerful rhythm of the drums that opens the dance. Eisā's heartbeat, say the dancers. These songs also fitted together by the similar stylistics of the dance: stepping and spinning, first clockwise, then counterclockwise. The way that *shimedaiko*—the small, hand-held drums—are extended at arms length, then swung in dramatic underhand arcs.

The initial songs are elegiac accounts of the past, narrating what could be called Ryūkyūan mythic time—a powerful fusion of time and space. Even the titles

of the songs—*Nandaki Bushi*, *Chunjun Nagari* and *Kudaka*[17]—are redolent of the Ryūkyūan past. The past to be sure, but a past that differs significantly from conventional historical representations. There is no more than a glimpse of the everyday world that gives shape to festival and ritual. There is no definite sense of the conditions of agricultural labor, trade, courtly governance or war. There are no suggestions of hardship or loss; only mastery, pleasure and plenty. The moment recounted in the song eschews any reference to the expected subjects of Okinawan history: diplomatic relations with China, military expansion into the Amami islands, Satsuma's invasion of Shuri, Japanese colonialism.

The performance is organized by a chronotope of cycled, not cyclic time.[18] The practical repetition of festivals such as *obon* and *tanabata* is emphasized as if it is entirely natural. These festivals are disconnected from any larger cycles—agrarian or political—with which they were usually associated. What's more, the spaces that are depicted are virtually inseparable from the rituals that they contain—shrines, sacred groves, village clearings. There is a strange compressed immediacy to the performance. As Bakhtin has written, *this is a dense, fragrant time, like honey.* The singers' voices are filled with the reported speech of nobles, their gender unspecified, the time indeterminate. Singing of eisā today in the words and voices of eisā from the past. In this transposition, the performers sensuously experience the narratives of the past as they create them again in the moment.

Midway through the cycle of songs, the performance changed. Before the Pacific War, the songs that followed continued to advance the sequence of spatial representations of the courtiers' diaspora. Songs like Nakijin Bushi and Goeku Bushi[19] were markers on a path that led from the wilderness of northern Okinawa, then south to the fields and hamlets surrounding Nishizato. In the aftermath of the war, musicians like Kohama Shūei felt that there was something incomplete about the old cycle of songs. Why should the manifest form of the dance express sentiments—the bitterness of exile, longing for a return to the capital—that the performers no longer shared? They decided to shift the emphasis of this part of the performance to songs that more closely expressed the desires and experiences of neighborhood youths. In the postwar world, a courtier was no longer dependent on the backward glance to Shuri or their lost villages. Instead, they created their place, producing it in their confident, expressive actions.

The movements of the performers also became more dynamic and complex. The pattern of earlier dances was taken and transformed by changes in rhythm and tempo, pauses, dramatic shifts in the level of the dancers. The new songs were exhuberent compositions characterized by syncopated rhythms and intricate sanshin fingerwork—a departure from the stately pace and pastoral lyrics of the first section. The anonymous narrators of earlier songs were also replaced with the distinct, individual voices of young men and women. They recounted their experiences of anticipation and hope, of desire that is intensely and explicitly sexual. The feverish

need for the return of affection, yearning for the evening's revelries and a passionate embrace.

> *I'm in love with a seafaring rogue and I can't even eat. In the middle of the road I stand, transfixed. My parents are heartbroken*.

Here, in the words of a young Okinawan woman, the singers describe the intensity of their emotions—they are entranced, immobilized by longing. The moment that the narrator describes, that they have created, leaves no room for anything else. They also sing of defiance and transgression—refusing to accept an arranged marriage demanded by Japanese convention,[20] rejecting dutiful labor and the submission to authority in favor of creative performances, drinking and romantic celebrations. Reality and imagination are woven together in interesting and complex ways. Dancers choose to create narratives of uncommodified sexuality and personal choice in the time that they might otherwise spend in bars and clubs. Who is to say which is more real or more fulfilling? At the same time, the moments recreated in the peformance suggest that their determination has a cost. Autonomy has its bounds, and desire cannot always be fulfilled. A powerful tension emerges in the performance—the tension between hope and loss

Like the voices heard in these songs, the dancers also face the consequences of their dance—fatigue, disappointment, the sacrifice of opportunities for material advancement. Still, they throw themselves into the moment. Struggling to equal—to exceed—the standards set by the their predecessors thorugh half a century of

performances. Determined to master the most forceful strikes, the most furious arcs of the drums, the most spectacular spins. Dreaming that they will build on the forms of the past, adding something new, something of their own creation. Hence the lead jikata's comment, "Unless you decide that you're going to try to do this better than everyone else, your dancing will never amount to anything!" Close to exhaustion, their voices horse, uniforms dripping with sweat, they conclude the danced with an exultant burst of energy.

Eisā speaks in many voices. Of course, it calls out to the audience present—friends and family, ancestral spirits, tourists. It speaks to others as well, absent parents, companions and lovers, drawing on the captured speech of singers represented by jikata of long ago. It would also be possible to think of another level of address to the song, what William Hanks has called the covert addressee.[21] The singer speaks to herself in her words and her actions, repeating again and again these narratives of what she can do, of who she is. Through this repetition, the singers bring the world of eisā, the world of the work into themselves, into their everyday lives.

Writing of the existential problem of ethics, Paul Ricoeur has said that to recall the objects of memory opens the possibility of astonishment for the remembering subject. The recognition of the relationship between act and actor can be profoundly disturbing. One is no longer able to dissociate the general idea of a personal history that led to this moment from the memory of a particular event that

was performed in the past. How is it that the "I" that I am now was capable of the specific act of the remembered "I?" Can I feel that feeling again in this moment? Eisā compounds this by transposing the words and gestures of others into direct speech and action, into performance. The experience of each moments represented in the work is embodied by the dancers. The past is mobilized in a manifold of experiences in the present. The singers feel the authority of these voices in their own song, the power of the dances in their own bodies. They are challenged by the familiarity and the strangeness of the performance. *Can I feel the experience of others in the performance that I am now creating? Am I also the narrator to whom I give voice?*

These questions are important to the members, a sign of their determination to transform themselves from the young men and women who began learning the eisā together into those who are fully capable of the dance. To become those who are able to produce *karī*.

Karī is often described as a gift of happiness and belonging produced in performance and necessary for life.[22] As Okinawan performing artists such as Teruya Rinsuke have said, the role of a performer is to convey—to attach this portion of happiness to their audience. When I discussed the idea of *karī* with the jikata and the older members of the youth group, they often explained the importantace of karī for the well being of the community as well as the happiness of the individual. All events unfold according to the relationship between things: *karī*

enables human actors to create and maintain these relationships. It strengthens and renews the bond between the living, the ancestral spirits, and those yet to be born.

In Okinawa, significant effort and artistry is expended to transform the corporal remains of the dead, to craft a place for the ancestral spirits, and to incorporate them into social relations distributed across space and time. Eisā is an important part of this process. Eisā does not simply pass along a portion of happiness to the audience that they would otherwise be without. In eisā, the dancers draw upon their aesthetic, productive powers to recollect and recreate the very relationships that make life worth living, in which the living and the dead can join each other in happiness. *Churaku nashun*, people say—to make beautiful. In the moment of the dance, filled with the complex patterns described by their bodies in movement, their voices raised in song, the rhythm measured out by their drums, they create place and a time, a community of beauty.

Can this beauty obscure as it creates? As Paul Ricoeur has written, there are consequences to representations of the past if they put history at the risk of forgetting.[23] Is this true of the time and space filled by eisā? Certainly, the cycle of songs eschews any direct reference to the abjection, the horror of the eras that they depict—although minyō that take up these themes certainly exist.[24] Nonetheless, as I have suggested, any reference to the past always carries the charged ambiguity of a beauty underwritten by the memory of pain and loss, a joy tempered by sadness and despair. The beauty of the performances begun by Kohama Shūei and his friends

was driven by the need to renew life in a shattered world. The dancers who still gather to learn and to perform the eisā know this well. They do not need sympathetic native ethnologists, advertising executives or popular musicians to explain to them the value of their dance. They do not need to be told of the burden of Okinawan history—of war, colonialism and oppression. They feel every day it in the ache of their tired limbs, their joints bent and twisted by labor long before the ravages of age take them, their skin burned and dried by long hours in the sun. They feel the shame of occupation in the long detours that the bases impose on their travel to work, in the way an English word like "houseboy" rolls off their grandfather's tongue, in the crops that they can neither plant nor harvest, in the money from base leases that fills their pockets after trickling down through grandparents, uncles and parents. They know it in the longing for a lover who is away searching for work in Osaka or Kawasaki or is spending the evening pouring drinks for some businessman in Nakanomachi, in the desire for a new car, a comfortable house, a private room that they will never own. They see it in the faces of their mixed-blood siblings, in the tears that streak their grandmother's cheeks as she kneels in prayer at the family tomb. They hear it in the laughter of drunken Marines and affluent Japanese tourists. They taste it in the awamori that they drink through long afternoons and evenings of boredom, frustrated by the lack of work. How can it be completely forgotten in the dance?

Instead, they have the courage to put aside memories of horror and abjection, to allow these inescapable fears and anxieties to slip into a kind of oblivion during the performance. In the courtyard of the community center, in the space soaked with the sweat of generations of dancers, they create something of beauty in the shadow of the horrors of the past. This is why today's dancers no longer need to be of noble ancestry. They have learned to do the things in practice that were once the exclusive provenance of those of noble birth. Hour after hour, night after night, they have developed the skill and artistry to dance the eisā, to create karī, to rebuild what has been broken, to make a place for the living and the dead in the world that they have been given.

Kūdākā—The Ballad of Kūdākā Island

In 1998, the youth group planned to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of their incorporation as Sonda. The summer would be marked with celebrations—benefit concerts, dances, a reunion—culminating in Sonda's performance to close the 1998 Okinawan Eisā Festival. Early in the summer, several of the older members began to discuss the possibility of returning to perform in Nishizato—in the heart of Kadena Air Base. Although it was possible to enter the base singly or in small groups to care for a shrine or tomb, to consult with a local deity or with ancestral spirits, no one had thought to do so to dance. However, the decision was not as simple as it seemed. Bitter divisions remained among base landowners, and between Okinawans in general after the shocking defeat of the anti-base movement

during the previous year. Strong undercurrents of hope and anxiety emerged in the discussions that followed—concerns with awakening memories that people thought had been worked through long ago. In the end—after long debate—the visit seemed to be quite easy to arrange: a letter, a sympathetic official at Kadena's Public Affairs Office, the American calculus of costs and benefits. After all, it was only a dance.

On an oppresively hot July afternoon in 1998, I found myself on a bus taking other members of the youth group the three or four kilometers from Sonda to Nishizato. We were accompanied by their families—wives and girlfriends, children, siblings, parents, grandparents—as well as photographers and reporters from local newspapers. It was a short trip—but one that could also be measured in decades, in thousands of miles. One of my friends—a former head of the youth group, now a jikata—sat next to me, his six-year old son on his lap. As we passed the Kadena USO and entered a residential neighborhood, everyone was pressed to the windows of the bus. My friend pointed outside, saying to his son: "Look out there—that's America!" All around us, people talked about the contrast between the straight, wide boulevards, broad lawns and massive banyan trees of the base and the cramped streets of Okinawa City. Behind me, another veteran member of the youth group in his forties laughed: *Sasuga Amerikā*—after all, it *is* America.

After some confusion about the route, the buses stopped in the parking lot of a large self-service gas station. To the southeast, a sloping berm about two meters

high led to a large, grassy field. The field was level and roughly square, perhaps fifty meters on a side. To the east, the field rose sharply to a tree-covered knoll. Fifty or sixty members of the kyōyūkai were already there—some had spread blankets at the edge of the knoll and were having a picnic before the performance. The younger members of the youth group pushed a heavy cart carrying the sound system up the berm; others carried extra drums, sanshin cases and boxes filled with drumsticks and spare equipment.

I could see conflicting emotions in the faces of the members of the kyōyūkai. Several elderly women led their grandchildren around the crest of the hill, pointing out absent sites in the landscape. Others stood together, holding each other for support, some wiping their eyes as they wept quietly. It is difficult to imagine the riot of memories and emotions that they must have experienced: to stand once again in a place you knew as a site of labor and daily life, to watch eisā in the fields where you once danced, to find yourself again in the place of wartime horror and abjection. To confront the complex and contradictory rush of emotions—the pain of loss returned, the joy and guilt of survival, the gratitude and shame of ownership. To reclaim—if only for a moment—the right to determine the use of a place which you own, from which you have been excluded, which provides the income that sustains you in times of hardship, where perhaps you have labored as a gardener, a maid, a waitress.

My friends were also confused, forced to confront a place that they had heard so much about, that was so central to the reputation of the Sonda eisā, and yet had never been so real, so present. Questions spoken quietly, discussed through the next several evenings. *Is this America? Is it our home? Does a place belong to us—do we belong in a place—where we have never been, where we may never return? What will it mean to make ourselves visible—like this, hear, now? Can we simply come here to dance and then forget the other storied and struggles into which this place is woven?*

While the crowd and the dancers intermingled, the leaders of the seinkai and several of the OBs climbed to the knoll, following a trail around to a small clearing on its north side. At the center of this small area was a small concrete structure shaped like a house, probably no more than a meter high. As I looked to the east, across rooftops of the Banyan Tree Club and the Base library and towards Okinawa City, I could see a series of gently rolling hills stretching out to the base perimeter fence. One of my friends, standing next to me, told me that most of them were surmounted by similar structures marking the sites of the original shrines or sacred groves of the yādui in the area.

Mrs. Kohama was laying out sticks of black Okinawan incense, a round lacquer tray of fruit and several piles of tissue weighted with fragments of coral—spirit money—as offerings to the shrine. While she and several other ladies arranged these objects to their satisfaction, I noticed that there were other offerings

already present—mostly coins placed at the edge of the concrete platform on which the shrine was constructed. When they were finished, they knelt to pray. The youth group leaders spread hand towels on the ground to protect their white trousers from grass stains before joining them in prayer. After a moment, Kajū walked over to the sound system and asked everyone to join the members of the kyōyūkai in *wuu tuu tuu*, prayer to the ancestral spirits. The newspaper photographers moved around the shrine, snapping pictures, while the reporters hovered at Mrs. Kohama's shoulder, waiting for her to finish with her devotions.

When the prayers were finished, the dancers gather on the edge of the field, adjusting their clothing, tentatively striking the drums. The jikata had all put on short blue jackets with the characters for Sonoda Youth Group emblazoned on the back and collar: they were tuning their sanshin and warming up their voices. The leaders of the youth group walked the field, checking its surface and thinking about the space available; Kajū then had a brief discussion with the leaders of the kyōyūkai before returning to the clustered dancers and drummers.

Because of the restricted space, he announced that we would dance in a box formation similar to the way we practiced at the community center. Drummers were divided in two large groups on the flanks and a single line across the front and rear; the men and women dancers were arranged in alternating colums in the center. The whole formation faced the shrine and the assembled members of the kyōyūkai.

Everyone got into place, made last minute adjustments, looked around at their friends. Afterwards, people talked about the tremendous excitement and energy that they felt. As the jikata struck the opening notes of Nandaki Bushi, the dancers erupted in a wild laughter—something that I had never heard before. As we began to dance, my legs felt astonishingly heavy. Perhaps it was the combination of long nights of practice, days of work, the anxiety of performance in this place? I was conscious of every movement, the uneven ground beneath me, the thick grass. Before the kyōyūkai, in this place, I focused intently on the dance. Both participating and watching, doing and seeing. Conscious of lowering my hips, of raising and positioning my hands and arms, controlling my turns. The faces of the audience, expectant, elated. Kō-chan and Shingo dancing next to me—anxious, exhilarated—calling out responses and whistling. The striking pattern produced by the dancers turning in massed formation. The pounding of the drums thundering in my ears. And then, shouting, dancing, I was swept up in the performance—the twenty minutes that followed passing in an instant, an eternity.

Can we speak of a boundary between audience and performers? As much as the performers themselves are working to understand the narratives that they produce, their audience is made up of those who have already mastered it, who understand and anticipate it. As we danced, I saw the elderly women of the kyōyūkai also dancing atop the hill. The faces of children singing, clapping, energetically beating small drums. Everyone whistling, joining in the shouted

responses. In the parking lot, Okinawan workers emerged from kitchen of the Banyan Tree Club, cheering—an old man dancing. Americans joined the Okinawans gathered around the field. Some were friends of the dancers, co-workers from offices and stores on base. Others like a group of young Marines, were drawn by the sound and cheered enthusiastically. And then, all too soon, the dance was over. Tired dancers greedily gulped down drinks offered to them by workers from the club, others collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. One of the drummers sat on the slope, his head in his hands—sick from the heat.

Kajū took the microphone from the jikata and thanked everyone for coming. This was Iha's second year as the leader of the youth group, and he ran the performances with a quietly commanding presence. Although he was only in his mid-twenties, he had been dancing for more than a decade. The OBs had been impressed by his youthful persistence—he came to watch every practice, every day—and they let him join well ahead of his friends. He had become something of the public face of the Okinawan eisā—his photograph was featured prominently in Okinawan tourist brochures and posters, and even in a number of Japanese popular magazines such as *Mono*.[25]

Speaking in the formal Japanese commonly used in public address, he detailed all of the people who had contributed to the performance, from the base workers who had signed us in, to the Kyōyūkai for providing the buses. Next, he introduced Takamiyagi Jitsuei, the leader of the community organization. Bowing

formally, Takamiyagi also spoke in polite Japanese, thanking everyone for attending. After fifty years, he said, it's wonderful to get back and show everyone what Sonda has done. His voice thick with emotion, he said that he was proud to see that what was considered impossible for so long could be done so well.

A number of the other young men and women of the youth group—assistants to the leader—stood and offered their brief greetings to the kyōyūkai and expressed their appreciation for being able to participate in this memorable event. Then Kajū announced that we would dance again. Breaking out of the static formation, we would perform the *michijunē* or *muramawari*[26]—encircling the village with our dance. Regardless of fatigue, dancers pulled themselves to their feet, straightened their clothing, took up their drums once again. One of the veteran members of the youth group grabbed the youth group's green and gold banner; led by the drums, the rest of us formed a long double column behind him. Like the dances that wove through the alleys of Sonda during obon, the dances that once encircled the yādui that stood in this same spot. Here, there were no streets to follow, no buildings to give shape to the dance; instead, it was our dance that gave shape once more to Nishizato. Our column turned and turned, forming a wide circle, filling the cleared space before the knoll. As the ring advanced and reversed itself again and again, we danced and sang, working once more through the eisā.[27]

The anthropologist Marc Augé has written of the interplay of remembrance and forgetting in ritual—what he calls the three figures of oblivion: return, suspense

and beginning (or rebeginning).[28] A lost past is found by forgetting the present; the present is intensified by cutting it off from the past and future; the future is reclaimed by forgetting the past. I find these figures provocative, and yet somehow inadequate to understand the Nishizato eisā that I have just discussed. In the small field at Kadena, in Nishizato, the moment is charged with the memories of the past and the emotions that they invoke—complex, intense, personal and ambiguous. While the mundane concerns of the present may fade, there is also excitement and anticipation for the dance that is about to begin. With the dance, all of the memories that have flooded the consciousness of the dancers and visitors are brought into a relationship—a constellation—with the embodied memories of the eisā, their alternative images of the past. A melancholy return to the lost yādui arrayed against the memories, the experience of creative, dynamic samurai. And yet, the constellation does not imply resolution—I cannot believe that the pain and ambiguity of remembrance is subsumed in the joyous experience of eisā. Ultimately, these constellations are deeply personal and vary greatly—living with, thinking through the tension, the contradiction fusing communion and dissensus.

At the same time, the dancers and their audience are drawn together, coordinated in the experience, the production of eisā. Dancing under the gaze of the kyōyūkai, another relationship comes into play. Ancestral spirits, so densely present in the neighborhood tombs, the household altars, the community center in Sonda, so weak and unremembered in this place, are called to the dance. The karī produced in

the eisā weaves these relationships together once again. Between the dancers and their elders; the Sondanchū and the Americans who watch, wonderingly; the living and the dead. The spatial field of ancestral spirits, engaged at the shrine, in the tentative cycle of the first dance, in the confident michijunee that followed, is renewed. The divided flame—used by nativists to represent the manifold presence of the spirits of the dead—is rekindled in the space of the ruined village, in the heart of an American Air Base. To think this through in Henri Lefebvre's terms, the space of Nishizato is only available as a field of action—a space in which rituals take place—for a moment. Renewed in memory, it continues as a basis of action, a reservoir of power from which the strength of the individual, the household and the community derive and into which they invest their energies

And the dancers? They remain mechanics and construction workers, farmers and clerks caught up in the details of everyday life; they are rural nobles, the children of courtiers and cane cutters, tormented by memories of a village that is kept just out of their reach. And in the eisā, they are also artists and warriors, powerful and creative. They are all of these, yet never fully any one of them. It is in the tension between these roles, these positions, that holds out possibilities for the dancers and their audience to reconsider their world.

[1] Shūei was the third son of one of the leading families of the *yādui* Nishizato, a family that traced its origins to the Kingdom of Nanzan in Itoman. Following WWII, he rose to prominence as the leader of a group of active young musicians who studied with Teruya Rinzan, among them his frequent collaborator Kadekaru Rinsho.

[2] A rural community near Kamakura. Repatriated Okinawan soldiers and laborers were quartered in an internment camp near Uraga; Shūei left and lived by his wits in the Zushi area until he could arrange return passage to Okinawa.

[3] Nishizato was a yādui of about twenty-four households, wooden farmhouses with thatched roofs. Along with other small yādui, Nishizato was administratively attached to the long-established farming hamlet of Moromisato. In contrast to the clustered pattern of commoner communities, the houses of the *yādui* to the west were dispersed throughout the fields. As dispossessed members of the former court nobility, they had no priestesses; they established only a small sacred grove on a hilltop at the center of their village and maintained a small clearing where people could gather for community rituals, for performances, or simply to play. The residents of the *yādui* were not attached to the communal landowning practices of the commoners in the rural villages and took advantage of Meiji land reforms to buy parcels of land from either the local villagers or from the central government. Most of village income came from the sugar cane that they grew in their fields. There was a small *satoya* or sugar press in the yādui; it was also possible to haul cut cane via a narrow gauge railroad network to Kadena for processing and sale

[4] As part of the postwar administrative reorganization of central Okinawa, the two villages of Goeku and Misato would be joined together in 1950 to become Koza City. Koza would, in turn, be renamed Okinawa City with reversion to Japanese sovereignty in 1972.

[5] Yakimāji is an Okinawan expression meaning "burned all around." It describes a fire that occurred before the war in the Nishizato *yādui* in which all of the fields surrounding one of the residents' stable were burned but the stable itself survived. Even now, it is occasionally used to denote the Sonda *eisā*. One could understand it a metaphor for the providential survival of something important when all around it is destroyed.

[6] Although Okinawa returned to Japanese sovereignty nearly thirty years ago, there remain some distinctions between the administrative designation of Okinawan and mainland Japanese communities. In the urban administrative structure of mainland Japan, Sonda would likele be a ku or ward, or perhaps only a subdivision of a neighboring ward. In fact, this system of designation has been used in the past in Okinawa City. However, communities such as Sonda are now referred to as *aza*, a rather archaic sounding designation for a section of a village.

[7] In Ryūkyūan architecture, the courtyard of a home. It is a mediational zone between the interior space of the home and the space of the community beyond the household wall.

[8] The Okinawan shamisen, a three-stringed instrument.

[9] For thoughtful reflections on the Okinawan stage, see the work of activist and photographer Ishikawa Mao, esp Ishikawa Mao, *Okinawa Shibai: Nakada Sachiko no Ichigyō Monogatari*.

[10] "Old Boys." Older members or former members of the seinenkai. Most no longer perform, or no longer do so as dancers or drummers.

[11] Another name for Nishizato. Yakimāji is an Okinawan expression meaning "burned all around." It recalls a fire that occurred before the war in Nishizato in which all of the fields surrounding one of the residents' stable were burned but the stable itself survived. Even now, it is occasionally used to denote the Sonda *eisā*. One could perhaps understand it a metaphor for the providential survival of something important when all around it is destroyed.

[12] The late Kadekaru Rinshō was famous for his expressive vocal style as well as his sanshin artistry. A prolific recording artist, he was well known throughout Japan and his recordings are popular among roots music aficionados outside Japan as well. Kohama Shūei and Kadekaru Rinshō were close friends, performing together before the Pacific War and reuniting to form a trio with Teruya Rinsuke after the war ended.

[13] Patrick Henrich , "Language Planning and Language Ideology in the Ryukyu Islands," 153–179.

[14] This is not uniformly true. One former leader of the youth group became a local high school teacher after graduating from Ryūkyū Daigaku or the University of the Ryukyus. Two of my friends also graduated from Ryūdai: one working for a high-tech company in Sapporo, another an apprentice with an Okinawan independent filmmaker.

[15] In the 1980s, the Japanese tourist industry turned its attention to Okinawa, valorizing the possibilities of Okinawan culture. Since then, many Okinawan popular and folk performers have risen to national prominence and mainland tourists throng to Okinawan festivals. Still, until recently local teachers groups encouraged young men and women to focus on their studies, to work to become both politically aware and socially mobile. For many of these teachers, hanging around at the kōminkan exposed students to the drunken troublemakers and apprentice criminals that they believed populated the hardscrabble neighborhoods of Okinawa City.

[16] Ryūkyū identifies both the archipelago and the Kingdom that stretched from Kyūshū to Taiwan until conquered and colonized by Japan in 1867. Japanese authorities disposed of the name, creating Okinawa prefecture; American authorities resurrected the term during the Occupation. After reversion to Japanese rule in 1972, the region became Okinawa prefecture once again.

[17] *The Ballad of the Southern Grove, The Chunjun River Flows,* and *Kudaka Island*, respectively.

[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 103.

[19] Nakijin is a rural region near Nago; Goeku was a Central Okinawan village now integrated into Okinawa City.

[20] Okuno Hikorokuro. *Okinawa Koninshi*.

[2121] William Hanks, *Intertexts: Writings on Language, Utterance and Context* .

[22] Teruya Rinsuke, *Terurin Ziden*. When Kohama Shūei wrote the characters for *karī* in the margin of my notebook, he chose a pair that means "a portion of happiness." *Karī* is often paired with the verb *tsukeru*—to attach. When I've discussed the idea of *karī* with the jikata and the older members of the youth group, they often explain *karī*, while specific to Okinawan performances, as having an equivalent meaning to the Japanese *engi*. *Engi* is conventionally understood to mean good luck or good fortune. Realized in the same action

tsukeru, *engi* can be distributed to bring good fortune to its recipient. However, *engi* has more complex, historical meanings as well. Grounded in Buddhist philosophy, engi is defined as destiny or relatedness—a concept clearly related to notions of karma.

[23] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History,* 456.

[24] James Roberson, "Uchina Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music," in *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, 192-227.

[25] *Stuff*—a glossy men's magazine about style and the consumption of fashionable objects such as vintage watches, designer furniture and hi-tech electronic equipment. In addition to material goods, the magazine also details desirable experiences, from dining in an exceptional restaurant to observing the most meaningful folk festivals. It was in this context that Iha appeared.

[26] The term *shimamuui* is also used occasionally.

[27] I am reminded of Terence Turner's account of Kayapo performances in Brazilian relocation camps. Despite the rectilineal organization of the camps, Kayapo performers danced in a circular path that recalled the form of their abandoned villages. In the case of Sonda, the remembered form is resuscitated in the space that once gave it shape more than fifty years earlier. See Terence Turner, 285-313 (esp. 289-291).

[28] Auge, *Oblivion*.