

Afterwards:
Yasuko Yokoshi
& mayfield brooks

Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (ICPP)
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Emma Clarke: Thank you, Yasuko and mayfield, that was really great and rich. And thank you for this extra time. Some of the things that I was reflecting on during your conversation were these two parallel tensions, one being performance's preservation, and then the other being historical figures and the notion of decomposition and deterioration. Within that context, something that feels present to both of your practices is the idea of transmitting information through choreography and performance. I'm curious on your thoughts on this and if you think there are limitations to what can be transmitted through performance, or if those are just perceived limitations?

mayfield brooks: When you say information, do you mean knowledge?

Emma Clarke: Maybe something experiential, something specific, such as "I want to transmit this experience that I had, and I want others to understand this experience."

Yasuko Yokoshi: With information, there's a value of, say, accuracy. Performance work is not a good device for that, because contemporary performance or dance is best when it's surreal and non-narrative, when it's abstract. Considering that, complex information—the more complexity the better—that's the kind of information that performance can offer. Maybe that's how I can frame it.

mayfield brooks: There may be a kind of transference of something that happens for the audience, or the viewer, or whoever is present, with the artist. I'm not so interested in informing anyone of anything. I'm interested in being with people, or being with dirt, or being with compost, or being with you. There's a way in which communication might happen, or a transference that perhaps cannot be named, especially with Viewing Hours. I write zines for all of my pieces, most of my work, specifically writing about what's coming up for me with the work. For example, with Viewing Hours, I created a fake funeral prayer card, but my guests were all the ancestors who

I felt I was communing with in the performance, like Marsha P. Johnson, Julius Eastman, Mahalia Jackson, Nina Simone. In that way, I'm definitely sharing specific information. And something that is a part of the piece that wasn't shared is voice. When people come into the space, before they see me, they hear my voice asking them, or, sharing with them that I know that they're not going to be able to see me. But I'm just asking them to try and witness, to be witnesses of this moment.

Yasuko Yokoshi: When I showed shuffleyamamba last year, I made a dictionary in which I logged all the key words for this work and I explain the historical or cultural context or how my personal background relates to certain details. People might read it after the performance, but they don't have to read it. It's a booklet, a dictionary. It's not the main material, but a supplement to contextualize and frame the work. It's a device that I use to inform the audience. But the main thing is, something happens on stage, in my case, when I make work in a theater, I like to have people as vacant as possible, shall I say, when they look at the work.

mayfield brooks: Same with my zine. I use it as a supplemental object. But I like the idea of the zine as a way to disseminate information in the vein of a punk zine, with the whole "photocopy it and just put it together"-attitude, and share it with whoever, your friends. I have some of that in my background, so zines were always a part of my life.

Emma Clarke: I have a big interest in dance preservation and I'm curious, for both of you, how you approach preserving your repertory, what factors into documenting the work and how you might revisit it?

mayfield brooks: I created a decomposition score, a decomposing dance score. I was commissioned to do it, but it was a great excuse to do it. It had to be hand-drawn, so that I was able to use a pen and paper and put in images. That

was a really great experience. But I wish that I was a better archivist. It would be my dream to find someone to help me with that aspect of my work.

Yasuko Yokoshi: The question that comes up for me is, for whom? For whom do I want to archive my work? I also use my archives for my own work. In that sense, it becomes a form of..., perhaps I could say “recycling”? At the moment I’m recycling my piece *SHUFFLE*, which I made seventeen years ago. It’s a solo, and now I’m making a work called shuffleyamamba. A yamamba is a woman who lives in the mountains, who is said to be the original form of a female performing artist, traveling the mountains, singing, and selling her body. In Japan, this mountain goddess is an iconic identity for a female goddess. SHUFFLE is also a folk tale that I based on a Japanese creation myth, like an Adam-and-Eve kind of thing. With shuffleyamamba I’m recycling my own work, which is my own way of archiving, for my own creative purposes. But if I wanted to archive it for others, for the future, after my death, way ahead, then I suppose it’s up to them. They can find me on YouTube or Vimeo, or whatever it is then, and they will recreate what I made from their own perspective, in that era, in 2075—the whole world will be very different then. I would just leave it up to them. But I do at least try to make a good archival video because I make work for the stage. It seems like mayfield’s work is more conceptual, and the concepts behind the work need to be scored.

Joshua Lubin-Levy: I also think, and correct me if I’m wrong, you both share some resistance to this demand to archive. I am thinking, mayfield, about your work with improvisation, and how improvisation may be one way of having to work from the archive, but also resisting the capacity to anticipate what the archive’s categories will be. And then, Yasuko, at the end of Hangman Takuzo, you reveal that all these artists really resisted having their work documented, but they were also enthusiastic about participating in this film.

Yasuko Yokoshi: Talking about Mika and Takuzo, they died at such a premature age, so they never thought about the archive like this, that he lives on in the form of the film and he travels around the world. And you get to know them, which would be impossible without this archival footage. There's a sense of necessity here. There's absolutely some value to that. But how do I want it? I don't know. I don't think they knew it, those artists anyways. It's an interesting subject, who wants it for whom?

mayfield brooks: Right. But I also think that you are an archive, Yasuko. Just from listening to you and hearing how you were able to bring these artists into your work, that felt like you're building an archive of your own, but with others.

Yasuko Yokoshi: I see. Probably you're right. Yes, I think so.

mayfield brooks: Archiving is interesting because there's something about the archive that's so violent, in terms of how one might think of a mainstream archive. But there's another way in which the archive just doesn't really exist. You know what I mean? What is an archive? And yet there are these objects, there are these videos, they all deteriorate. It's an interesting tension. I, as an artist who wants to get it together and put the archives together... it's like you said, for whom? But also, for what, for how long? It's something that we're also living, and we're breathing it.

Yasuko Yokoshi: So true. Well, there's an information overload and with COVID, everybody is live-capturing their productions now, right? Everyone's focus at the moment is on archiving everything. This mega-information. It's like, "Oh shit."

mayfield brooks: Is there an end to the overload? This mode of accumulation is now very much a part of our reality because so many emails get lost. I had a Tumblr account and it just disappeared. I'm like, "Where did it go? How do I get my Tumblr account back?"

Yasuko Yokoshi: Making the Hangman Takuzo film I kept shooting so much video on this island—ten hours of footage. I didn't know how to make a film. I just learned how to use a tripod. It was like, "Oh, there's a tripod. I don't have to hold the camera all the time." Then, on these two days, I think, Mika interviewed Takuzo on how to suspend oneself, how to hang correctly and then he starts hanging and once he is suspended he can't talk. It's a long scene of hanging, many minutes long. Usually, film people get bored by that, because then you'd start editing. But I just decided not to edit it. Then again, there's so much other footage that was really fascinating and beautiful, but I just decided not to show it. The idea is, of course, that people want to know what happened on this island, but I'm going to select these specific forty-five minutes. And is it better? That is the question. So much of archiving is about accumulating facts—what happened, what was discovered—but then the absence of information is important.

Constanza Armes Cruz: I have a question that points in a different direction from what we were just talking about. I'm responding, visually, to the image of death—both with Hangman Takuzo and with Viewing Hours—and how death is there, death is the image, but death is not the thing. There are all of these other things that are happening. I wondered if you both could touch on that a little bit, or maybe on speaking to, or calling in ancestors or conjuring spirits?

Yasuko Yokoshi: In SHUFFLE, I literally did channeling on stage. I worked with a shaman in New York City. She opened up my chakra and that's how I trained myself to be able to channel and that is actually something I have been doing since I was a very small child; maybe already at six or seven, I would go on stage and before going onto stage, I tried to channel my ancestors. That might come from my cultural background; in this Japanese religious culture that I grew up in, every year in August the dead come to meet you. I would

see my grandparents every year, through this day, and also my own background. I was told I was born because of the death of my family—it is odd to say that— because of a ship accident. Most of my family on my mother's side died and she was adopted. Her marriage with my father was an arranged marriage, and I was born. If this family didn't die in this boat accident, I wouldn't be here. So thanks to the deaths of many people, I am here talking to you. Their deaths are related to my birth and this concept has been so much in my brain since I was a very small child. It's my personal history as well as my cultural background. I was just wondering, mayfield, you were raised in a church environment, so religion must have been a strong influence for you as well?

mayfield brooks: Oh yeah. I grew up in a fundamentalist Pentecostal church. It's interesting, because I don't really think about it, I don't really think about death in relation to growing up in the church as much, but it is an important part of the cosmology of Pentecostalism because the death of Christ is this huge thing. And then he rises from the dead. There's so much focus on his death, you know, that's the blood of Christ. Maybe something that stayed with me is the idea of supplication. Supplication is when you just cry and cry and cry because somebody died and you basically never stop. I think that's true actually in a lot of religions or spiritual practices where there's a commitment to grief as a result of things dying, or people dying, or of the self dying—the old self dying and then being born again. I grew up with that. My mom, when she joined the church and became a member, she got saved. Her old self died and her new self, whatever it was, came to be. I always grew up with that. So there was always this communion with those liminal spaces that allow for openings where I'm not afraid to talk to the dead. The other aspect related to death has to do with being an urban farmer, or farming in general, because you see death all the time. Animals die, you have to kill animals, plants die, it's a cycle

of life. That became really central to my work as an artist, and not so intentionally, but I think just as my work develops it's a recurring space that I need to be in. Yasuko, you said earlier that "it's not about you."

Yasuko Yokoshi: I was referring to a traditional form of Noh or Nihon dance training—it's called metshi. Mets means "delete" and shi means "myself." Deleting yourself is just a fundamental thing. I'm not me, it's this form I'm in, this form is my body. It's such a relief that I don't have to be me anymore. It's such a relief in my practice, perhaps similar to Takuzo who wanted to whip boredom out of his life. It's like he's suspending his identity in the air so that he doesn't have to be himself anymore, just release. And that was something he wanted every single day.

mayfield brooks: I feel that so strongly with the development of my work. I'm not interested in me being the performer. When I last did Viewing Hours at JACK no one saw me. I wasn't even there. They came into a space where I didn't exist. And then they were led to me under the materials, but again, they didn't even see all of me. I think that might also be related to this idea of death and rebirth. How do we get past this binary of life and death? It's a very Western construct. Is it possible to just not have that binary be so present as a space of fear of the unknown?

Yasuko Yokoshi: In the case of *Hangman Takuzo*, he referred to his performances as garden theater. I once asked him, why he called it theater. And he said, "because there's drama." He was really aware of this dramatic frame that he was making. He was performing a theater play. It's not like it's a religious pursuit of meditative hanging. No, he was doing it in the theater and he wanted to perform every single day, even when there was no audience. And for many years, no one would come to see his theater. He had to perform in front of nobody for many, many years. He said to me when

I was interviewing him that it was his pride, that he could do that without an audience, you know, as he was not doing it for anybody. But he added that this pride will betray you sometimes, this pride of “I can do it without anybody watching.” It’s such an honorable way to think of performance, but the desire to be seen is so strong too. And even this guy, who was very devoted to performance art, he longed for being seen by an audience. There’s a certain collision between selfless performance and then wanting to have an audience. That’s the interesting thing we as artists always have to think about when we make certain works—including myself, you know? Why do I want to show it in this context?

mayfield brooks: I stopped performing for two years at one point. I was in New York and I was performing and doing all kinds of great things. It was a lot of fun, but I just felt kind of a void. I felt I was going through a crisis, and I decided to go work on this farm. It was a turning point. I didn’t know if I was going to keep performing. But then after being on the farm, I realized that I didn’t want to become a “farmer farmer.” I couldn’t afford the land... and all these white people... it was just not possible, like, how am I going to be a farmer? So I went back to San Francisco, I got started doing it there, and then I went back to dancing and everything like that. But it was definitely a moment of questioning my purpose.

Alex J. Matthews: Building off of what’s been said, I’m just thinking about the contradiction between being selfless and needing or wanting to be witnessed. I’m curious if you could both pull at the tensions of that a little bit more, about how being solitary relates to your audience?

Yasuko Yokoshi: When I make stage work, I’m constantly with dancers. I work with their bodies, therefore communication is a must. I think dancers are the work. When I go to the studio, I don’t have a plan, and usually I will look at the dancers and talk to them, and then I think about what to do that day.

This goes on for days and days and days, and that's how I accumulate the work. But when I am the performer, things are different. Training in contemporary dance or postmodern dance in my generation promoted the idea of performing as though nobody was there. That's the training. You don't acknowledge a viewer, you know, it's this idea of a distance between you and the viewer. It is as if you were at a meeting point and you stand and you just perform, you never smile at the audience and wave, like, "Hi, I'm here." You know, people were really strictly trained to behave like that. That's how I was trained. And even the ballet training, you pretend nobody's there. "I'm a fairy tale." There's no communication in that sense. Hmm. To reach out to the viewer was a "no-no" in my training, so this must have strongly influenced my practice too. That's the only way I can think of solitude or isolation.

mayfield brooks: Yeah, solitude. For my work I definitely need solitude. I need to go away and be alone in the studio, or outside, or something. But I also invite other people. There's something about being in a garden that can be solitary in a sense, if you're the only one gardening, but then you're gardening with so much other life. I had a very different kind of training. I was trained more all over the place with performance artists who were in the audience, in people's faces, and peeing on stage and stuff. So I had other kinds of training. I was in an aerial dance company for a while, it was contemporary dance, but it was all off the ground. We danced on buildings, and on different apparatuses. But now, because I'm mostly just doing my own work and performing a lot of solo work, I like to think of what I'm doing as creating an environment that I can invite other people into. And that's been consistent probably over the past eight years. I don't even have a real time frame on it. But solitude is important to me because I do like to have time away from people and time in nature.

Choreographies of the Archipelago: Artists in Conversation, a series of online exchanges between artists who work across a variety of geopolitical and disciplinary contexts, was hosted by the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance, December 3-6, 2020. Artist pairings included Yasuko Yokoshi and mayfield brooks, Tanya Lukin Linklater and Okwui Okpokwasili, Arkadi Zaides and Ligia Lewis, as well as Eleonora Fabião and Jelili Atiku. The event was co-curated by Noémie Solomon and Joshua Lubin-Levy, and organized in collaboration with Rosemary Lennox. Generous support for this event has been provided by the Ford Foundation. Immediately following these public presentations, discussions continued through an invite-only forum.

Afterwards: Eleonora Fabião and Jelili Atiku is an edited transcript of a private conversation that took place over Zoom on December 6, 2020, between the named artists, ICPP students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Editors: Joshua Lubin-Levy and Noémie Solomon

Copy Editor: Magnus Schaefer

Project Manager: Rosemary Lennox

Academic Intern: Maya Hayda