

Title: Talking through What is Lost: A Post-Performance Rumination

Following *The Lost Twelve Years*, composed and performed by Chun Hua Catherine Dong at Defibrillator Gallery on Friday, June 12, 2015 during Rapid Pulse Performance Art Festival, I invited my colleagues Colleen Daniher, Jasmine Jamillah Mahmoud, and Soo Ryon Yoon, with whom I audienced the performance, to participate in a conversation that would entail our immediate responses to it. Copied below is an excerpt from the conversation, which I recorded on my cell phone as we walked up Ashland Avenue from the gallery. It touches on themes ranging from empathy to revulsion, nostalgia to Diaspora, racism to beauty, silence to power. The collective performance analysis that emerges throughout is rudimentary and contemplative, rather than polished and authoritative. It starts, stops, swerves, and stagnates as we both critically and intuitively engage Dong's work. In some moments, the conversation coalesces into a shared understanding of the performance; Colleen and Soo Ryon enthusiastically finish one another's sentences, we erupt simultaneously with a "Yes!" when in agreement with a poignant statement. In other moments, the conversation highlights our cultural and embodied differences via conflicting interpretations of different gestures and symbols in the performance. In a sense, this conversation is a performance, and I invite you to engage it thusly, to come with us on our evening stroll, to read/feel/envision what we found, what we might have missed, what is yet to be explored in *The Lost Twelve Years*.

\* Colleen holds a PhD in Performance Studies from Northwestern University and her research interests include investigating performance's address of the visual, especially as it relates to Asian North American racial formation and multiraciality in contemporary art. Jasmine is a PhD Candidate at Northwestern University in the Department of Performance Studies and her research and teaching interests include contemporary performance practice, race, and political economy. Soo Ryon is also a PhD Candidate at Northwestern University in the Department of Performance Studies and her research interests include globalization, performance, racial politics, and nationhood in South Korea.

C: So, I actually thought I was going to vomit during part of the performance...

R: You thought you were going to vomit during the last performance? Why???

C: First there was that sound--

R: Oh my god! *That sound!*

J: Was there blood on her?

C: Yes.

J: That's what I thought.

R: She was pinching her nose...

C: ...the bridge of her nose.

J: And she made herself bleed.

C: And then that sound made me want to vomit. I was just like, I *can't* look right now.

SR: I looked around, and it was really interesting, people started to touch--

C & SR together: their bodies...

SR: ...while watching, and towards the end some people had to cover their eyes.

C: I had to look at the wall.



R: When she was pinching her nose?

C: No, I could look [at that]...

SR: Toward the end of the performance...

J: I thought it was interesting because I was on the periphery, and I thought it was blood, but I didn't know if it was blood, I couldn't tell. I didn't know if it was blood or paint.

C: I wasn't sure either, but then I knew from that sound...

J: She was tearing her skin.

C: ...I was like, that is not pleasurable, that fucking hurts.

R: Yeah, because she started to cringe and bend over.

J: And that was interesting because while she was doing that and cringing, because I couldn't tell if it was blood, the cringing motion [made it] really visceral.

SR: I was really fascinated by, is there a word for this part? [*gestures to bridge of nose*]

C: The bridge.

SR: So this part, in Korea, has a lot of meanings. In a Chinese Diasporic context, perhaps it is similar. If you are uncomfortable, or discontented, we [Koreans] have an expression -- you cringe, or you sort of like, fold [the skin] in between the eyes, over the bridge. There is the sense that you can tell a lot of things about a person by looking at the bridge.



C: Yeah. So for me, I don't know about Koreans, necessarily, and the bridge of the nose, but I do know that often [...] Chinese people, Asian people, don't have much of a pronounced bridge, and "flat face" is a racial slur, so that's what I was thinking about.

R: And I was thinking of chakras, like where she was pinching or scraping herself, on the bridge of her nose, on the chest and on the throat.

J: Isn't that your third eye chakra? [*points at the bridge of her nose with a finger*]

R: Kind of...I don't know. I feel like I can relate to doing violence against those parts of the body when they feel stuck. But that's interesting that that area of the body is related to a racial slur, so then to be pulling on it, or hurting it--

C: And then also, in my mind, because I saw her in profile at first, this [*mimes pinching the bridge of her nose*] almost looks like plucking her eyebrows.

J: Yes, yes!

C: Or her eye lashes. So I was like, is she pulling out her eyelashes? And then I was like, no, it's the bridge of her nose. And then I heard the sound.

SR: That actually reminds me, and I did that personally, and I still do that I think, it's like we have this weird idea as Asians, as children, that you could start--

C: Manipulating your face?

SR: Because the bone here [*points to bridge of her nose*] is a malleable part. So, I still have the habit of actually doing this. [*pulls on bridge of nose*]

R: Another thing that was so strange to me, is that as she's standing on this scroll, and she's a nude woman, and since she's not looking at us, it gave me permission somehow to look at the rest of her; I was constantly looking at the rest of her body for meaning.

C: Like as a landscape?

R: For me it wasn't so much as a landscape, as much as I felt like I was trying to read some kind of affect though her body, because her face was kind of guarded. But then it made me totally uncomfortable to look at this naked lady's body.

J: For me, I felt like it gave me permission to look, but also she was doing so many uncomfortable things [*with her body*]...

R: Yeah, like scraping her chest with the spoon was making her kind of jiggle, it was making her body do what you might characterize as not very pretty or aesthetically pleasing things, and the sound of her pinching, even painting that red hole on her navel, was just kind of gross!

J: I have a thing about belly buttons, and when she started on the belly button, it repelled me, and I was happy that it got bigger and bigger.

SR: There's a phobia about that, the belly button.

C: So the thing about the scroll though, I think it was really evocative because, this is also why I asked you the landscape question, she was echoing aspects of the scroll on her own body. There were the pinks and the reds on the scroll itself, but also when she poured the ink, it was like, Chinese calligraphy.

R: It made me think of waterfalls.

C: But that's why I asked you about the landscape, because I feel like those romantic scrolls are usually of mountains, or there's a poem, or a beautiful landscape, and she kind of did that on her back, because the ink created these rivulets, this sort of nature landscape, on her...

S: Actually, that's how the mountains are drawn.

C: By pouring?

S: Not that, not pouring; there's layers. Layers are drawn with the brush to signify the actual layers of mountains.

C: She did so many cool things before pouring the ink. She purposely was like, look at my hair-- J, R, & S together: Yeah!

C: Look at my ponytail, and then the ink elongated her hair.



J: It was really beautiful that the ink pooled at her feet and there was this puddle...

R: Yeah, it was almost menstrual.

C: It also reminded me of Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* [1975], so it's like, *Interior Scroll* revisited from this totally different cultural perspective.

SR: So I had initially thought, oh my god, she is now going to pour hot tea on her head—

C, J, & R together: Yes! Yeah!

SR: So the black ink is also very nostalgic, because we were all required to learn how to do calligraphy in elementary school. And, one thing I remember I was so careful of--

C: Is to not spill!

SR: To not spill anything, because it is not going to be...

C & SR together: Erased.

SR: It is not washable. So once you stain your shirt or something, you're mom will yell at you--

C: [*laughter*]



J: The performance was interesting sonically from the beginning to the end. I was thinking of the pinching sound and the clicking sound as she shot ink at her heart and her head. One [sound] was made organically, or naturally, and one was this machine gun--

C: Rounds.

SR: Wasn't it interesting though, she never made any sounds herself.

C: Of pain...

J: Yes.

SR: I was trying to think of the effects that the lack of or repression of sounds [...] produces.

C: Except that the crashing of the teakettle, I feel that--

SR: It was willful.

C: Yeah.

SR: A willful sound.

