

Tell Me Your Name: Audience's Communal Responsibility as Ethical Witness

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Abstract

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Tell Me Your Name is a participatory solo performance which explores trauma rooted in the Japanese Occupation of Korea through humor and communal healing. Myeong, a mystical contemporary Korean “Pet Shaman,” summons and embodies the souls of deceased pets, playfully encouraging audiences through interaction and improvisation to invoke memories of their dead fur babies—how they moved and ate, sounded and played, lived and died. Each spiritual solicitation culminates in a ritual release, speaking the beloved soul’s name and saying goodbye.

In the middle of Myeong’s healing rites for grief, care, and vulnerability, a human soul insists on breaking in. Audiences meet Grandmother—an energetic, talkative, affectionate old lady with a thick Korean accent—who arrives to tell her story as a “Comfort Woman,” a Korean girl sexually enslaved during the Japanese Colonial Era, and finally have her story witnessed and her name spoken so she can be released. Humorous, provocative, and playful, this piece explores the absurd ways we hide from generational trauma and how some stories lie in waiting until we are brave enough to stop them from being forgotten. This intimate and tender play uncovers the legacy of survival and resilience carried through storytelling and memory.

Yeonshin Kim

Graduate Thesis—*Tell Me Your Name: Audience's Communal Responsibility as Ethical Witness*

Jeffrey Fracé

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Acting is not masking. It is an extension of myself to another character. It reveals the truth about the human world because it starts from an actual human being, a truth. We emphasize volatility and transformation as an actor, and how actors should be lifting the lines off the pages, making the words and characters come alive. That all comes from being myself; from who Yeonshin Kim is.

My training at UW was a process of realizing that I had to start from an inquiry about myself. What is my instrument's design, and how can I move in a way so that it agrees with the design and my desire: Alexander Technique. How would I react to those stimuli at this very moment if I were never told no?: Play and Clown. What is my voice without inhibition due to socialization, and how can I extend the spectrum with the essence of me?: Linklater.

To start the journey for my solo show, the first thing I asked myself was, "What do I want to do?" Thanks to the three-year training, which I thought was designed to teach me how to act and make theatre but turned out to be an in-depth research on myself as well, I had to simply look back at my journey till here.

In the very first quarter, we had Play class, and as a metaphor, Brad would always tell us that if we put our feet on his hands, he would throw us into the fire. But he would not force us to put our feet on his hands. Putting my feet on those hands so that I get thrown into the fire as many times as possible was the goal in my first year. Before my defense mechanism could say no, I programmed myself to just go first. If it's scary, do it. This informed many

choices on stage, in rehearsal, and in life during the program. As Val would say, I didn't die after all, whatever the choice was. As I practiced this raw forward motion, I became more comfortable throwing myself into the unknown.

The forward motion needs a center and direction, which comes from myself; in the Dialect class, we researched our own idiolects, which reflect our biopsychosocial histories. The "accent" reflects my Korean but wandering self. In the same vein, the mythology project I worked on in Bridget's Voice class allowed me to lean more into my roots and ancestry. So rather than transforming myself into a totally different character as if I'm someone else, I started to grasp the concept that characters start from myself. I can't deny my lived experience. Then I started to change the frame I viewed myself; what if all the characteristics that are constitutive of me are not constraints, but what make me unique? I can tell this story in my way because I'm me. Ironically, acceptance of myself allowed more "transformation." What makes me Yeonshin were not limitations to overcome, but sources to draw from.

But one can't keep going forward forever without any stops. It's not drama without any conflicts; as I was getting comfortable with the relentlessly moving forward, "politeness" and "scrutiny" came in. I started to hear that I was being selfish, taking up too much space, blah blah blah. Before as an actor, I'm a human who can survive only among other human beings, and the primitive survival instinct came back—the very response acting training is trying to calm down. The second year was a lot of confusion between being an artist and being a likeable person.

In the Viewpoint class, Jeffrey sometimes commented that our cohort was striving to maintain good relationships with one another. While supportive, this sometimes negatively affected our Viewpoint work because everyone was being overly polite and careful. To put it simply, we were abandoning our impulses for the sake of politeness. After my evaluation with Adrienne in Spring 2025, I came to understand that there cannot be a "polite artist," and

that a “selfish” artist can still be a polite person. As an actor, generosity means making committed, clear choices so that scene partners have many options to respond to. Following a strong impulse—even if it momentarily disrupts “harmony”—can ultimately serve the creative discovery of the group. I began to see that we often shrink ourselves to maintain “harmony”, even though we know we are looking for exciting discoveries, just like in Viewpoint sessions. Politeness can mute artistic impulse. Art, however, is not about muting or maintaining the status quo. Art is to raise our voice, to shake and awaken the world.

When I later brought up this question of selfishness, Cathy introduced the concept of “selffullness.” Selffullness means taking care of oneself first so that one can take care of others. Rather than being a strict dichotomy, the two are connected. When I train myself to listen to my own impulses instead of muting them out of politeness, I also become better able to listen to others.

I saw all the fruits blooming in *OMNIA Breakroom*. I experienced what happens when I freely explore the stage and take up space as much as I want, as much as I can. I could also listen and respond to others more easily and openly. I was making bold, raw choices that are mine and thus alive. I was unapologetically mischievous, snacky, Korean, dancy, and unhinged. I was me.

So it was easy to answer “what do I want to do for the solo show?”: Clown and audience interaction. Sibyl. Turbulent moment of stillness informed by Suzuki. And something Korean. In other words, I wanted to take up the stage by being me and having fun, which are closely related.

I used Bridget’s Individual Research class in Autumn 2025 to create a foundation for my solo show and to experiment with ideas. One of the most important lessons I got from the Solo Show class with Val and *OMNIA Breakroom* was that I write on my feet much more freely and creatively, rather than at a table with a pen. I had to get up and do it, and I needed

an audience. I brought this project to Bridget's class to workshop it, while also deepening the Sibyl work.

As a person who was born and raised in Korea, both my cultural background and personal upbringing have been deeply shaped by the lasting impact of the Japanese Colonial Era. So I wanted to explore how ingrained the generational trauma is. I pondered the main effect of colonialism on individuals, and my answer was that it carves a scarcity mindset into the bones. I applied the River Story exercise from Bridget's Archetype class to trace the journey of a Korean woman living through the Japanese Colonial Era. The body is smarter than the brain; gestures emerged from these workshops, and I used those images to symbolize colonialism and its impact.

Around that time, Peter Sellars came to a class to give a talk. He mentioned Korean shamans, and later, I got to talk to him about my solo show. The main point he emphasized was that it has to be personal. "Colonialism" doesn't mean anything if it stays as a big word. I had to ask what it really meant to me. I realized I was focusing on images and symbols, treating colonialism as a concept rather than a concrete, personal experience. I listed everything down on what colonialism meant to me. Then I had someone jokingly ask me why I (or Koreans in general) still hold grudges against the Japanese government when it's all in the past. I had a visceral reaction to this "joke" because it was not at all in the past. There are so many unresolved issues and ongoing suffering, and generational trauma reverberates powerfully into the present.

This led me to focus on Comfort Women: not symbolism, but a living, breathing human being's story that is at risk of extinction. Comfort Women refers to the system of sexual slavery organized by the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces before and during World War II. These girls and women were subjected to sexual exploitation through coercion, mass recruitment, deception by the Japanese military, or were abducted, purchased, or trafficked by

human traffickers and brothel operators, and then forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers.

I watched documentaries and interviews with survivors of the Comfort Women. Even decades later, they remembered every detail like an HD video. The graphic details, however, were starkly different from the way they were spoken. Unlike what I imagined, rather than reliving the trauma, they spoke in a matter-of-fact way. Only after telling their stories did they finally shed tears over their lost youth. There was not much movement on the outside, but the immense turmoil inside was palpable. Ironically, it felt closely connected to Suzuki, a theatre training that was developed by a Japanese director, which infused a lot of Japanese culture, such as songs and martial arts. As a Korean performer, my body responded to these forms in complex ways. During the Japanese Colonial Era, many Korean cultural practices, including music and language, were suppressed or replaced with Japanese forms. Some songs used in Suzuki training reminded me of how Korean songs in the 1930s were changed because of colonialism. The March exercise, which has a storyline of soldiers going to a war, reminded me of numerous invasions of Japan. I decided to make a piece about Comfort Women because, without even knowing, I already had a biopsychosocial response just because I am a Korean woman. History does not remain in the past. It continues to live on, branching its way into the present.

While grappling with how to incorporate the interviews, I returned to the central question: what do I want? The interviews, in whatever form, would give gravity and turbulence. Now I wanted clowning and audience interaction. More than that, I wanted to reframe the idea of “victims.” They were simply girls who would have danced and sung with their friends. Even after the trauma, they lived full lives and must have had dreams and desires.

“My youth was stomped on before even getting a chance to bloom,” Ok Soon Jung said in an interview. I wanted to give them back that youth—literally, inside a youthful body, doing everything she wanted but couldn’t because of the wounds. I created three beats related directly to her Comfort Women experience that are revealed in the second half of the piece. First, she experiences Tinder and online dating culture, reclaiming sexuality. Then she goes through the shaman’s—her granddaughter’s—closet, trying on revealing clothes like shorts and crop tops, confronting how she hid her body because of scribble tattoos. Lastly, she learns dance moves from audience members and throws a dance party under a disco ball. She just wanted to have fun, dancing the night away as a girl.

To include clowning, I had to redefine the relationship with the audience. A structure first emerged was a shaman and the participating audience as the “customer.” Unlike a shrine, where it’s a one-on-one interaction, and ritual happens in private, the theatre had multiple audience members. I couldn’t ignore them nor define the difference between the current customer (participating audience) and other audience members. So I turned the possession ritual into a live show, where the shaman demonstrates her skill live in front of a crowd.

At first, the clowning beats were only through grandmother’s soul. Therefore, the first interactions as a shaman with the audience were largely scripted, while functioning as a comedic element. The shaman would ask the audience to think of the beloved, and there were sets of ghosts I was going to bring. For unexpected fun, I made the first customer’s ghost a dog and added a beat about charging extra for animals for a special skill.

Then, bringing an animal soul became a whole concept when I was considering the why’s; why does she do a live show in the USA? Who is this shaman? Why does she stay and go through the whole possessions, even when the grandmother interrupts? I drew from my research on *mudang*: Korean shamans who function as spiritual mediators between the human and spirit worlds, communicating with deities and ancestral presences on behalf of the living.

Through ritual practices known as *gut*, the *mudang* may invite a spirit to enter their body, allowing the spirit to speak, move, and interact through the shaman. This temporary embodiment enables communication, healing, or resolution between the spirit and the living community. Often, a person realizes that she has to become a *mudang* after becoming severely ill with no medical explanation. This illness, *shinbyung*—the god disease—means they are destined to become a vessel for spirits. Refusing causes mortal sickness; the only cure is ritual initiation. For Myeong, there was no other choice but to become a *mudang*.

Like acting—bringing a whole person into our instrument and embodying them deeply—being possessed by human souls is exhausting. Human spirits that are refusing to go to the afterlife but are determined to stay on earth are full of sorrow, anger, and resentment. Since Myeong still has to continue her destined job as a shaman, she chooses pet souls; they just want to see their owners one more time. Much less trauma to go through.

While channelling the contents of the interviews (especially the torture part) as Sibyl, Adrienne asked me, “Why does this have to be theatre? People could just watch interviews.” Making Myeong as a “Pet Shaman” answered the question of why this piece has to be theatre more clearly: it embodies the tension between “let’s move forward” and “it’s still unresolved.” But she has to confront and resolve to move forward. I had a beat where Myeong actively rejects the possession of the grandmother and has a physical fight with the grandmother’s soul in her body, trying to get control of the body; who gets to swipe and choose clothing? It was to embody the conflict between the current generation wanting to move forward and unresolved trauma from the past generations. However, due to time constraints, I cut down all the beats where the grandmother enjoys youth in Myeong’s body and two souls fighting over one body. Since there was not enough time to explore the conflict between moving forward and unresolved trauma, I focused on how contemporary Koreans acknowledge the wounds from the past and seek ways to move forward together through the

Wednesday Demonstration, where people gather in front of the Japanese Embassy, demanding the Japanese government to acknowledge the war crimes they committed and apologize to the victims.

Cutting out those beats also meant I lost the clowning moments. So I brought the audience interaction and clowning to the first section, the “Pet Shaman.” After workshopping, I realized that it’s not just for the fun, but it also prepares the audience to emotionally lean into the soul Myeong was embodying. It also stretches the discomfort of the audience; a beloved pet would definitely lie on the person’s lap, paw them to insist on playing, and purr on them. Testing the water, I shortened the mental and physical distance between the pet shaman and the audience, so that when the grandmother’s soul comes in, the audience is already used to the emotional proximity.

At one point, I was getting too myopic to each beat, so I went back to the big picture question: why do I want to tell this story, and what do I want to say through this piece? I was going about fancy, philosophical, kind phrases about the intention of my piece, which got me nowhere. I had to be raw and honest. Then my actual desire and frustration were revealed; I want the audience to know that Japan is the Asian version of Germany, and the Rising Sun flag is equivalent to the Hakenkreuz. You don’t need to know everything. But I am here to tell you the ugly truth. And once you hear it, don’t ignore it.

The spine of the piece became clear: how do we move forward while acknowledging and actively healing past wounds? We hold the memory together so everyone can see. Art is not comfortable. You don’t come to the theatre to be comfortable. You come to be awakened. What became clearer was that I want to put responsibility on the audience’s shoulders. I made a version where I end the piece by blaming the audience for not joining the Wednesday Demonstration after the pet shaman asks, chastising them for not doing anything after knowing everything. The audience was left bamboozled in the workshop because it felt

unfair; they just got to know about it and were not actually given the chance to participate in anything, but they are now feeling guilty. I needed to be responsible for that part, to give the audience sufficient beats to really know what is happening nowadays. I added more information about the demonstration and left the stage for less guilt; you can still participate in the demonstration on Wednesdays, but anyway, thank you for listening to the story, because that alone means a lot. By listening to the story, you help preserve the story.

How can I make the story linger in the audience through this theatrical form? Brad suggested not saying the torture parts of the interview at all—letting the audience imagine, rather than confining the atrocity in words; what if the audience just hears a scream in the dark, or sees bloody hands against the glass door? In both Play and Clown classes, our warm-up was to form a circle and have an anger, laughter, and tears session. Contemporary American acting training often emphasizes starting from thoughts and emotions and then allowing the body to follow to achieve realism. While this approach can be effective, it can also lead actors to become overly thinky.

My training at UW encouraged flexibility in how we approach the truths. We analyzed texts, built biopsychosocial histories from given and imagined circumstances, responded to stimuli, and sometimes simply moved first. Brad's warm-ups trained the body to lead so that emotion could follow, developing a muscle where the physical impulse precedes psychological explanation. Over time, this exercise expanded access to a broader spectrum of human emotion.

Returning to physicality became essential in this piece. Instead of narrating violence verbally, I focused on allowing the body to express it. One theatrical device that emerged from this exploration was screaming, a delight I had discovered during those warm-ups. The scream felt primitive, instinctual, and theatrical. Because of its intensity, it needed to function

as a climax. To support this build-up, I incorporated gestures discovered during workshops in Bridget's class, such as wringing a towel and cleansing motions.

I was worried if this would take the audience out. Screaming is very out of the daily life scale, and I didn't want it to be just a catharsis experience for me, but a way in for the audience to experience how horrific it would have been for the grandmother. I showed this iteration, and Jeffrey agreed that screaming can pull the audience out; the audience would think about how the actor is working so hard, pouring themselves out, rather than empathizing with the character and her story. The transition to the grandmother's story after the possession was too abrupt, and the audience hadn't leaned in yet. Since I had cut the three beats of grandmother experiencing the youth (Tinder, clothes, dance party), the audience lost a chance to get to know her and just got thrown into her traumatic story. The solution was to add tangent stories. She would get so excited about being surrounded by so many young people, so she would detour and slip out some stories and thoughts. That way, the grandmother still has the urgency and mission of telling the story, but the audience gets to know her as a human and feels closer to her. She talks about the importance of being polite to the elderly and teaches them how to say hi in Korean in a formal way. She would chastise the "people of these days" for wasting food, while also dramaturgically giving more information to the audience about the Japanese Colonial Era on resources being stolen and taken out. Then she would go back in time to reminisce on her crush back in the village, which shows her personal side, humanizing her.

Back in my undergrad, I took a class called "Making Theatre" and was given a box to show what my theatre is like. I glued pastel-toned paper and decorated the box with candies. Inside, I put salt and pepper and scribbled with black and red markers. That was to say, I will allure the audience with sugar-coated entertainment, make them lean in, and then open the Pandora's box that's full of ugly truth that people have been avoiding either intentionally or

without even knowing. Five years later, my piece was exactly that. With pet shaman and comedic beats of grandmother, I let the audience's guard low; the play's grounding in humor allows audience members to learn a difficult history in a safe and more malleable state. I built enough steps so that when they open the box, it's not just trash, and they are willing to taste the salt and pepper.

Another piece of feedback I got from Jeffrey was that there was not enough information about the demonstration; I just gave the surface value information on what it is. However, what I shared after the workshop session was much more interesting, he said, such as it being on Guinness World Records as the longest rally on a single theme, or that it is actually still ongoing. As I was adding that information, I changed the speaker of that part from the pet shaman to the grandmother. I wanted to use the rapport grandmother built with the audience through the tangent story and the traumatic story she revealed.

As the dramaturgy and the script were getting into a clearer shape, I worked on my physicality with Cathy. My initial questions were how to embody the otherworldliness and how to seamlessly include the bell, which was way heavier than I thought, as an extension of my body. Cathy suggested simplicity. I was using the bell like nunchaku, but simply holding it was enough. Reaching the limbs out to the world as if I can reach the other realm (ghost world) and can touch the ghost was enough to convey the otherworldliness. Simplicity was applied effectively in other aspects of the piece as well; for the intimacy of the grandmother's story, I could just sit in one of the audience seats, and the only prop I needed was the bell.

A happy accident occurred; I intended to have a blackout for the scream so that the audience could fill in the image with their own imagination. However, while workshopping with Cathy, I couldn't turn the light off at the penthouse, so Cathy saw me grappling with the wall and climbing up. She suggested having the light on since the physicality was telling the story of trying to get away and resistance against the force, without invading the imaginary

space of the audience. Then I had to figure out how to go from sitting to climbing up the wall while being seen by the audience. Cathy suggested that the strength of the story would pull both the pet shaman and grandmother to the past, like a PTSD flashback, and then back to the current reality. Another beat I added was a chastising pose (putting hands on the waist) to link the grandmother and the pet shaman. It is an echo of an everyday gesture that the grandmother would do to her daughter, and thus to the pet shaman. They all know instantly what would happen when that pose is made. I inserted the biopsychosocial history link through that gesture, which was passed down the generations.

Furniture can easily suck the energy of an actor when it is not used wisely, and it can be tempting to compensate by pushing or exaggerating the performance. However, Jeffrey often talked about the importance of a sense of stillness, where the performance is distilled to its essence, and the language directly meets the audience. When I sat in the audience seat, I trusted the power of the survivors' words. The story itself carried immense gravity, so I simplified the movement and took time to deliver the story in order to hold space for a sense of stillness and silence. It was the most condensed version of the moment, allowing the audience to feel the weight of the story and even intensify their imagination through the space of possibility they were invited into.

In the last few workshops, Brad and Adrienne emphasized the believability of the pet shaman. She must be good at her job, and the audience should be able to believe her transformative power, not only through the ritual but also even from a simple look; I needed a costume and makeup. For the costume, I wanted to convey the Korean traditional clothes vibe; if she's on the street, everyone would know that she is from another world and time. The UW costume shop had literally one piece of clothing that's in Korean traditional clothing style: the way sleeves get widened and how the ties work. Starting from that Korean traditional style yellow clothing, I added other pieces to match the color scheme of Korean

shamans. I added an orange sleeveless jacket, a blue waistband, and a red hair tie. While modernized and reinterpreted, it still definitely gave the otherworldly Korean shaman vibe.

For the ritual, I used a bell, the kind that is actually used by Korean shamans, and I recited a Buddhist chant, “Om Aranam Arada,” which is from *Yeongga Cheondogyeong*. The term *Yeongga* (靈駕) refers to the spirit of the deceased, particularly those who have not yet been released due to attachment, resentment, or unresolved trauma. *Cheondo* (薦度) means “to guide across,” emphasizing care, safety, and release rather than coercion or exorcism. In the context of this piece, the chant serves to calm conflict and agitation on both sides of the ritual—preparing the shaman while also creating a safe and compassionate guidance for the spirit.

Two days before the performance, I was still grappling with the connection between the pet shaman beat and the grandmother’s story, and the logic of ghost (both human and pet) being free. Then I had an Eureka moment; the missing link was a name! Naming releases both pets and humans. Pets never learned their human’s name; they must learn it to say proper goodbye. Humans want to be remembered. There is even an old saying in Korean, “Tigers leave leather after death, and humans leave names after death.” When the audience agrees to remember and speak the grandmother’s name, she is released. It is also related to how the Comfort Women story is at the brink of extinction since the victims are passing away, but citizens come together to pass along their name and story. When the audience says her name, she is released, because she then knows that she and her story won’t disappear in vain.

The spine of the piece crystallized; the audience witnessing and remembering the story is an active resilience. While I call upon the need to act, I primarily emphasize the importance of being ethical witnesses. Yes, the piece alludes to a traumatic event, and it will be uncomfortable. However, art is not comfortable. Theatre is not about comfort; don’t come

to the theatre to be comforted. It is about awakening and shaking. Responsibility rests not only on the performer, but on the audience—to listen, to remember, and to carry the truth together.

This added to the visual of the pet shaman, as well. The face tattoo worn by Myeong was inspired by the image from the movie *Exhuma*, where a shaman covers her face with Chinese characters to protect herself. I researched Buddhist sutras to find language that supports the story and message of this piece.

The tattoo includes the following passages:

人命雖滅 名不可滅 — <Ekottarika Āgama>

“Although a human life may perish, a name cannot be extinguished.”

While bodies disappear, names endure. In the context of historical violence, it affirms that victims’ existence and memory cannot be erased even after death. Speaking and remembering a name becomes an act of preservation and resistance against erasure.

若人作惡 不即現報 後必隨影 — <Dhammapada>

“If a person commits evil, the result may not appear immediately, but it will inevitably follow them like a shadow.”

Responsibility is not limited by time. Even if consequences are delayed or denied, harmful actions continue to follow those who commit them. Within this piece, this line connects historical atrocity to ongoing accountability.

見惡不止 是名同罪 — <Nirvana Sutra>

“To see evil and not stop it is to share the same guilt.”

This line expands responsibility beyond direct perpetrators. It implicates bystanders and those who choose silence or inaction are also guilty, asserting that witnessing without intervention is a form of complicity. The audience, therefore, is asked to be an active, ethical witness.

Additional lines drawn from the <Āgama Sutras> appear in the tattoo:

色無常 “*Form (the body, material existence) is impermanent.*”

無常即苦 “*Impermanence itself is suffering.*”

苦即非我 “*Suffering is not the self.*”

This acknowledges that physical bodies and material events inevitably pass. It is not to deny the existence of suffering, but to announce that suffering cannot define who the person is.

In this piece, I wanted to say that the victim’s pain is not formless nor light. However, that wound is not the whole of the victims. Their existence cannot be defined by the atrocity.

I added the following idiom:

無我之境 “*The state or realm of no-self*” (*Beyond individual self*)

In the context of this piece, this phrase reframes responsibility. Remembering and speaking a name is not an act performed only for someone else, but an act that implicates the speaker as part of the same ethical field. When the audience says the name, they step into a shared space where memory, grief, and responsibility are no longer owned by a single person. This is the moment when private witnessing becomes communal witnessing. By entering a state of no-self, the audience moves from passive observation to collective participation, holding the memory together so it does not disappear.

These texts acknowledge that bodies and events disappear, yet suffering and historical residue remain. Pain is not confined to an individual “I,” but moves beyond personal identity into collective memory and responsibility. A life may end, but a name persists. Harm follows those who commit it, and silence in the face of violence is itself an ethical failure. Within the context of this work, this philosophy allows trauma to be understood not only as personal grief, but as something held—and therefore healable—by a community. This face tattoo connects historical atrocity, memory, and ethics. Accountability is not bound by time nor individuals, and witnessing carries responsibility. By placing these inscriptions on the pet shaman’s face, the performance insists that remembrance is not passive: remembering and

speaking a name is an active, embodied responsibility shared by the community. The tattoo functions not just as decoration but as an ethical framework carried on the body of the pet shaman—making memory, responsibility, and witnessing visible.

“We rehearse until we don’t have time,” Scott would always say; the performance date came, so I changed my hat from deviser to performer (or I thought so, until I realized that there is no hard distinction). Because I wrote the script not at a desk but on my feet—testing ideas through improvisation, audience interaction, and continued iterations—the devising process itself became rehearsal. All the work as a deviser, including the research, movement exploration, and script development, was simultaneously part of constructing the characters’ biopsychosocial history. To deepen my relationship with the characters, I repeatedly watched interviews with Comfort Women survivors and revisited the passages used for the face tattoos. Rather than separating performer preparation from research, I trusted that the devising process itself had accumulated in my body as a performer, as well.

Throughout this process, I realized how much freedom and joy deep preparation can bring to a performer. In the Play and Clown class, I discovered the joy of interacting with the audience and making them laugh simply by being present and responsive. Working on this solo show taught me that freedom on stage comes from knowing the character thoroughly enough that the body can respond in the moment.

This was true not only in the opening section, which relied heavily on improvisation and audience interaction, but also in the grandmother’s section, where the lines were mostly scripted. Even within the structure of the text, I experienced the same range of freedom. Trusting my preparation allowed my desire in each moment to explore a wide palette of choices, and that sense of discovery kept the performance alive. In both improvisation and scripted sections, I was able to sustain my joy by trusting the process and the choices that emerged in the moment.

Thus, for the warm-up immediately before performance, I focused on making my body and mind resonant and responsive to the audience. I did several burpees to activate my physical energy and used one of the Alexander Technique warm-ups, where I look at each part of my body and move according to its design: each side of the feet, lower legs, whole legs, fingers, wrists, lower arms, whole arms, torso, and neck. Then I imagined reaching for “ghost world” to prepare the movement language of the pet shaman.

I originally expected the performance to be cathartic primarily because of the screaming section. However, the act of having the audience witness the story and speak the grandmother’s name produced a different kind of catharsis. Rather than a volcanic release, it felt like a warm light with a lingering resonance.

In the performance, the pet shaman bows to the released soul of the grandmother and expresses gratitude to the audience by ringing the bell. This moment functions not only as a ritual closing as a character but also as a step-out process for me as a performer. Therefore, immediately afterward, when the lights went out, and I stepped into the hallway, feeling the carpet under my bare feet instead of the cold stage floor, I experienced a clear transition back to myself. I didn’t need an additional cool-down process.

On the first day of performance, I had unexpected tears from the audience. I was aware that this pet shaman beat is not just for fun but also functions as preparing the audience to emotionally lean in for the latter half. However, this reaction taught me that this beat itself had an emotional impact on the audience member and evoked something inside them. I carried this preciousness to the next performance, so that I don’t focus only on laughter, but genuinely care deeply about the pets and their connection with the humans. The beat was no longer a step nor a tool, but it existed for itself, as well.

A beat that was added in the second performance was the link between the pet shaman and the grandmother; they are, in fact, not blood-related. It was in the beats I had cut out that

the grandmother, due to the impact on her body during Comfort Women, could not have a baby. The background story I created was that she adopted the pet shaman's mom, her daughter, in her 40s. It was also another device to ensure that the link between the victim and the people living in this world is not just through the blood but through shared lived experience. I added this information in the second performance, that she adopted her daughter but didn't tell anything about Comfort Women because of the social stigma.

For the future iteration, I intend to have the pet shaman not remember what happened during the possession, and thus, the audience must inform her, uttering the grandmother's speech in their own words. It requires the audience to actively listen, chew on it, and digest it in their own way to highlight the function of this piece: carrying and holding the truth together.

I would also love to bring back the three comedic beats of the grandmother, creating more space to explore the tension between a younger generation that seeks to move forward and an older generation still carrying unresolved trauma. At the same time, I want to share more personal aspects of her through direct interaction with the audience, building a deeper rapport so that the audience can feel closely connected to the grandmother.

In addition, to further stretch out the difference between the pet shaman and grandmother, I will lean into the otherworldliness of the pet shaman. It would include further research on costumes and a detailed set of possession rituals. This would include expanded research on Korean shamanic practice, its world view of the spirit realm, and what it takes to be a shaman. I aim to build a more intricate set of rules of this theatrical world: how the audience functions within this space, what happens in the liminal space between worlds, where the pet shaman's soul resides during possession, and what occurs if a spirit remains in the body for too long.

Tell Me Your Name

Written by Kim Yeonshin

Adapted from interviews with Jung Ok Soon, Lee Gyung Saeng, Kim Young Sook

MYEONG comes in with the shaman bell [light]

1. OPENING

MYEONG:

Pet shaman (bell) [x n times around the aisle]

Do you have a dead pet?

Sorry for your loss.

Do you know where your dead pets go? Rainbow star. They need to cross the rainbow bridge, but they are refusing to go. Because they miss you. They want to say a proper goodbye. But they can't because they don't know your name.

Your pet needs to learn your full name and say your full name to be released.

But I'm a PET shaman. Don't put human souls inside me. [POSE]

2. PET SHAMAN GAME

First pet: Name. pronoun. Species. Breed. Favorite food/spot. What made them special. How did they die? How old were they? What toy? How did they play? What sound/move? When they were angry or happy, how did they express it?

Enjoy the happy moments. Have fun with your pet. When you are ready, tell your pet your name. Then they will be released.

Shaman does a ritual. Pet is in. Released with "[NAME], goodbye"

In the middle of bringing in the second pet...

3. SHAMAN SEES HER GRANDMA

Shaman stares into the wall for an extended period of time

MYEONG:

Grandma?

I AM a pet shaman. but I can't deny my ancestors since they are my source and they are my power. YOU don't get to put a human inside me.

Shaman does a ritual. Human is in

4. HUMAN SOUL COMES IN

GHOST has a zoomie

GHOST: [in heavy Korean accent]

OH MY!!! It's so good to be in a young body!!! Hi!! I almost forgot why I came here. I'm Oksoon! This body, my granddaughter, and soul is me, her grandmother. Thank you for coming to my granddaughter's show! I was watching over there, and she's doing great! Sorry I had to interrupt, but I need to tell story to people so that I can be free and go to the underworld. At first, I die, and then I like looking around. I'm very fast. Ghost world travel free. But now I'm ready to move next chapter! So I'm here to tell you a story. OK?

5. GHOST TELLS THE STORY

So! I born in 1920. Yes, I'm very old. By the way, you need to be polite to old people. [POSE] In Korea we say hi like this (bow) *Annyeonghaseyo*. And for you English speakers, I studied English and made easy for you. Onion, like teary eyes when cutting, Ha! Say yo!! "Onion, ha! Say yo!" Yes, yes very good. Very polite. It's important.

Anyway! Where was I, yeah, I born in 1920. My parents both work in the field. Oh by the way, people these days not grateful for food [POSE]. Even one rice is so precious. We almost die every winter because no food. We even ate tree bark. Even after hard work, all the rice taken to Japan!! So know that every food is so precious and delicious. Each and every rice is the blood sweat and tear of farmer! Ok?!

Oh, anyway, right. Yeah! My parents are farmers. We live in a small town surrounded by mountains, and there are rice paddies in the middle. And everybody in the village work together. Ohhhh there was this OPPA who was 2 years older than me and was very good at farming and chopping wood. These days people call... gym rat? Back then, everybody so muscle! Because physical work. And you know, it gets very hot. Yeah... I could watch him work all day..

No! Nonononono! I should focus. Ok. Ok. My parents work in the field. I am good cook. Very delicious. And I make food for them and bring them lunch. But on June 3rd, that was the last time. Because

1)

On my way to bring lunch to my parents, I was kidnapped to the Japanese police station. The chief of police told me to sit.

GHOST goes to the audience seat

He told me to take off my clothes and went on top of me. I screamed. He stuffed a rag in my mouth.

GHOST wrings her clothes

I really missed my mom and dad. And my sisters. And my friends. I thought I could see them soon.

2)

10 days later, I was taken to a military unit. There were about 400 girls who were 12-18 years old who could have been the Japanese soldiers and officers' daughters' and granddaughters' age. We collected small pebbles to do *gonggi*. You saw squid game? (she gestures the game) Yeah very amazing everybody in the world know this! We bonded through those games. We had to focus on something else because Around 40 men would come in and out of the room everyday.

GHOST repeats cleansing gesture over her body

I thought and asked myself everyday what kind of sin do I have to go through this.

GHOST stops cleansing gesture

The only sin we had was that we lost our country.

3)

4 years later, I escaped with other 11 girls, best friends but two days later, we were caught and brought back. Japanese soldiers told us to say the name who started it, and then they would spare our lives. But we are best friends! We did *gonggi* together everyday! So we didn't say the name

Strength of the story pulls both MYEONG and GHOST into the past

Now standing against the wall

GHOST starts a muffled scream, trying to get away

But we still didn't say the name.

Scream

MYEONG and GHOST get out of the flashback

10 girls died. I never said the name.

There's this Wednesday Demonstration where the victims, my friends, gather in front of the Japanese Embassy in South Korea to demand the Japanese government to acknowledge their war crimes and apologize to us. It started on January 8, 1992 and reached its 500th event in March 2002, and was listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest rally on a single theme, a record that continues to be renewed every week. People are still gathering, even this very Wednesday. The only exceptions were during 1995 and 2011 when a great earthquake happened in Japan. The rally was replaced with gestures of condolence for the earthquake victims.

I never went there. Later in my life, I adopted one boy and one girl. I was scared if I said something, if there will be any disadvantage to my kids. So until I die, I never say this story. But now I see the Japanese government is just waiting for us to die. Most of us are old, more than 100 years old. But now, citizens heard our stories and come gather at the demonstration for us, and even young students.

If you go on about your life and think, 'oh, it's Wednesday' and happen to remember my story, I won't disappear. Then we live forever. Will you remember my story and my name? My name is Jung Ok-soon.
Can you say it out loud? It's Jung Ok-Soon.

Audience says her name

Jung Ok-Soon leaves the body of MYEONG.

MYEONG looks at the north and does full a bow twice.

*MYEONG leaves. Just before putting her foot out the door, she looks back at the audience.
She rings the bell*

MYEONG exits

Blackout

End of Play

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