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Edited by Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario

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“WE NEED TO KEEP ONE EYE OPEN . . .”

Approaching butoh at sites of personal and cultural resistance

Jeremy Neideck

Introduction

This chapter will reflect on some of the complexities of transcultural performance making as manifested during the *Deluge* project, a long-term collaboration between Australian and Korean artists that aimed to combine aspects of butoh with *p’ansori* – a Korean form of epic narrative expressed through song and verse. Written from my multiple perspectives as director, performer, and researcher, this account draws on my analysis of *Deluge’s* development as a practice-led research project that investigated the nature of transculturally collaborative performance-making environments (Neideck 2016a).

Deluge was originally envisaged as a response to the devastating floods that caused widespread damage and loss of life in South-East Queensland in early 2011. *Deluge* also drew inspiration from *The Flood* (1947), a poem by one of Australia’s most celebrated writers and environmentalists, Judith Wright. As is common practice in the Australian context, this project was undertaken through a model of creative development, where iterative cycles of research, generation of performance material, public showcasing, and critical reflection and feedback are undertaken prior to the work being premiered. Twenty-one performing artists participated in these creative development cycles over the five years of the project, with artistic practices ranging from butoh and *p’ansori* to contemporary music, contemporary dance, physical theatre, traditional Korean dance, and martial arts all forming part of the fabric of the finished work.

Deluge premiered at the Brisbane Festival in 2014 before touring to Korea as part of the Seoul International Dance Festival (SiDance). The work was well received in Korea and enjoyed a second season in 2015 at the invitation of the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture. This return season was staged at the Namsan Drama Centre and was presented as a memorial for the 295 lives lost when the Sewol ferry sank in April 2014.

My two core collaborators on the *Deluge* project were Park Younghee and Tak Hoyoung, and they were the only artists who participated in every one of the six cycles of creative development. I first met Younghee while we were actors at LATT Children’s Theatre in Seoul, under the directorship of Roger Rynd. Growing up in New Zealand, and building his performance-making career in Sydney, Roger had by the time of his unexpected passing in 2010 established himself as

a leading figure in the artistic and cultural life of Seoul. Younghee joined LATT after spending six years in Oh T'ae-sök's Mokhwa Repertory Company, and from the age of 18 had trained in *p'ansori* with Han Seongho, an officially designated National Human Treasure,¹ and in *Bongsan talchum* – masked dance drama from the Bongsan province – with the late Kim Seonbong, also a National Human Treasure. It was through Roger that Younghee and I came to know Hoyoung, who served as LATT's resident acrobatics instructor. Hoyoung is a specialist in *kungjung musul*, the martial arts of the Korean imperial court, and was a founding member of the Sadari Movement Laboratory, where his performance training was in the corporeal mime of Étienne Decroux.

One day in 2006, Younghee was asked by Roger to workshop a vocal replacement for a musical theme composed for the *taegŭm* – the largest of the Korean transverse bamboo flutes. The feeling I had when listening to Younghee replicate the rasping, mournful timbre of the *taegŭm* was hard to describe – an overwhelming sense of sadness and longing broken up by soaring moments of hope. The sound of Younghee's straining vocal chords evoked in me visceral responses like those I had when first encountering butoh. It wasn't long until I had developed an unshakable hunch that the physicality of butoh, and the tortured and haunting vocal style of *p'ansori* had the potential to be combined in performance.

Locating my practice

For many years, Brisbane has been recognized as a popular destination for performers in Australia who wish to gain training and experience in styles of performance that originate in Japan (Gilbert 2001, 7), with butoh serving periodically as a subject for experimentation amongst the “Australian avant-garde” (2). As butoh started to infiltrate the artistic landscape of Australia in the early 1990s, warnings were sounded against using it as a “mysterious foreign spice thrown into Western theatre in order to give it a new and dynamic flavour” (Marshall 1992, 6). Despite this, butoh has continued to be presented in Australia as an expression of humanity's most “primitive” roots, by companies that display “fairly superficial philosophical engagement with the cultural contexts” which gave rise to the form (Gilbert 2001, 5). Gilbert and Lo see this “legacy of modernist orientalism” as often manifesting itself as unacknowledged orientalist intertexts, suggesting that the road to redress lays with attempting to understand “the connections between various disciplinary histories of the Orient and the ways in which such connections are mapped and/or resisted by the performing body” (2009, 165). Eckersall has proposed that the overuse and orientalised of butoh terminology has led to it being contested in Australia, with its “genealogy and stability as a modality of body performance” being “undermined especially with respect to radical and transgressive forms of experimentation” (2000, 145). This tendency towards orientalism has led to butoh in Australia being a recurring site of exoticism for artists looking to recreate the aesthetics of the form (Marshall 2006).

My first experiences of butoh were as an undergraduate student in Brisbane, watching the work of local artists. I eventually sought out training at home and abroad with practitioners with as diverse backgrounds as Yumiko Yoshioka, Lynne Bradley, Yumi Umiumare, Tess de Quincey, Semimaru, SU-EN, and Maro Akaji's Dairakudakan Temputenshiki. This led to the development of some of my earliest independent performance works: *Sketches of Blood* (2008, 2010) and *The Oak's Bride* (2010) in collaboration with Ellen Rijs and Polly Sara, under the banner of Red Moon Rising. In 2009 I studied *p'ansori* for several months at the National Theater of Korea with Oh Min Ah – a principle actress with the National Changgeuk Company of Korea.² At this time, I was also a resident at the National Art Studio, where I first began attempting to combine *p'ansori* with butoh in *Strange Earth*, a live dance and video installation in collaboration with video artist Park Junghyun.

“We need to keep one eye open . . .”

On my return to Brisbane, and as the *Deluge* project gained traction, I began reflecting on my experiences with butoh and I started approaching my practice with a more critical eye. I began to move past my initial flirtations with butoh, and the focus of my practice shifted towards creating performance that directly engaged with participants from diverse cultural and linguistic groups. As this happened I became aware of the importance of working on what Slimbach terms “perspective consciousness,” or the ability to “question constantly the source of one’s cultural assumptions and ethical judgments, leading to the habit of seeing things through the minds and hearts of others” (2005, 2006). It was hard, however, for me to escape the fact that my core collaborators on the *Deluge* project were not Japanese, but Korean, and that no matter how problematic I came to see my role as the primary butoh practitioner in the work, I had built a practice-led research project around the combination of performance practices and forms of expression outside of my own cultural heritage.

Clouds on the horizon

The focus of the earliest stages of the *Deluge* project was on the development of a unique performance practice based on broad concepts of physical and vocal transformation. The approach that I took to this relied heavily on skills sharing and cultural exchanges that drew on the creative practices of our large and diverse ensemble. Grau writes that this kind of reliance on a “juxtaposition of cultures” (1992, 9) has limited use in artistic practice, an observation born out during early cycles of the project as the goal of developing a new form of physio-vocal practice was undermined by the constant, but unintentional reinforcement of the boundaries between different performance practices and forms of cultural expression.

We exhibited the earliest version of *Deluge* in June of 2011 as part of a creative development program facilitated by Brisbane’s independent performance incubator, Metro Arts. Younghee, Hoyoung, and traditional Korean dancer Jung Minji joined five Australians, dancing in skirts



Figure 36.1 *Forest – Deluge Cycle 1* (2011), photograph by FenLan Chuang. Pictured (L-R): Kat Henry, Jana Penshorn, Terry Heskeith, Mark Hill, Tak Hoyoung, Park Younghee.

made of old curtains and bodices formed from fused shopping bags – human detritus floating, freezing, and flying across a studio shared with local folk-rock band Autumn Sun, who provided a sonic field in which we could explore the possibilities of combining physio-vocal transformation with live music.

As a director, I was not entirely happy with the work, being disappointed in presenting what I perceived as a compromising mosaic of performance practices when my goal was to generate original performance material as a result of a transformative physio-vocal practice. The work did, however, seem to strike a chord with our audience. Many English-speaking audience members reported that even though their emotional connection to the work was strong, they were not able to easily put words to their experiences. Korean audience members reported feeling *han* (한/恨).

Han is a complex term, and the difficulties of translating it are tied up both in the widespread perception of its ineffability, and the contested view of it as a culturally Korean phenomenon (Y. H.-. Lee 2002, 21). Descriptions of it range from dispassionate dictionary entries that employ terms such as “grudge,” “spite,” and “rancor” (Freda 1999, ¶12 and Willoughby 2000, 18); to personal accounts of a feeling “crystallized in sadness at an impasse in the throat” (Trenka 2005 in Chu 2008, 97); to being identified as one of Korea’s “national ethos” (Y.-S. Lee 2004, 47), a mythologized and valorized result of historical cycles of colonial oppression and liberation (Freda 1999, ¶12). The view of *han* as a discursive trope, or a “symbol that means diverse and divergent things to different people according to their varied perspectives and intents” (Willoughby 2000, 17), is well established in the literature. Kockel (2012) has written that no matter their origin, cultural forms and practices are only authentic so long as they fulfill their cultural purpose in a given context (63). In unpacking the notion of perspective consciousness as a core trans-cultural competency, Slimbach has insisted that “we are limited by the finiteness of our knowing, [and that] our very knowing is distorted by the claims and prejudices of our racial, national, and socio-economic identities” (2005, 214). In designing the *Deluge* project, I had created an environment where I, a white Australian with some training and experience with butoh, but no lived experience of its social or cultural contexts, was collaborating with Korean artists who had specific and transferable knowledge of their own culturally specific forms of expression. I was hyperaware of the complexity of this situation, and the likelihood that we were building our collaboration on problematic assumptions that had the potential to distort not only the work we were creating, but the relationships between collaborators.

In order to begin addressing this, I took Grau’s advice to allocate time for clarifying issues dealing with “cultural boundaries in aesthetic communication” (1992, 19). The intention was that by considering the aesthetic goals of the *Deluge* project from a place that considered our historical perspectives and sociopolitical concerns, the transition into a studio-based exploration of butoh and *p’ansori* would be grounded in shared experience. In this way the lived experience of Korean forms of spirituality, philosophy, and identity shared with me by my collaborators became a starting point for the next phase of our collaboration, and our work began to grow out of a reality that we were beginning to construct together.

Lightning strikes

In February 2012, Hoyoung, Younghee, and I embarked on an intensive period of laboratory-style exploration in a secluded Boy Scout hall in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland. Over the course of our initial conversation on the first evening of the laboratory, I became acutely aware that neither Younghee or Hoyoung enjoyed watching or performing butoh. During the first cycle of creative development, I had assumed that their circumspect attitude to butoh was founded purely on aesthetic preferences that they were willing to overlook for the sake of our personal relationships.

It seemed, however, that something much more complex was going on, as revealed by Younghee in an interview while reflecting on this period of the project:

Honestly speaking, I didn't know much about butoh at all. I had seen a couple of video clips, and I had heard about butoh from my seniors. But [not] the image [or intention] of butoh work and the training process about butoh work. Maybe also I had a big prejudice about Japanese traditional arts – I don't know. Honestly speaking, every information was mixed together and gave me a huge prejudice. So, I didn't know much about butoh and I didn't even want to know about butoh because I thought it looked very weird and strange, and I couldn't find any beauty from that. And I thought also that it would be very hard to communicate with the audience through that form of movement, because I couldn't find any contact moments with the audience.

Y. Park, in interview 17 May 2013

In late 2011 while in Brisbane rehearsing for another project,³ Hoyoung, Younghee, and I attended *A Dance for All Seasons*, a solo work by Helen Smith – a butoh dancer who has worked between Australia and Japan for many years. Whilst Younghee and Hoyoung had expressed their appreciation and enjoyment of the performance, we had not discussed our experiences of it at length. As we now reflected on Smith's work, Younghee and Hoyoung revealed their astonishment that she could draw the audience into her world and connect with them, all the while seemingly remaining cemented in the ethereal realm of butoh.

Her performance actually turned “upside-down” my prejudice. I mean, as a performer she was absolutely beautiful. Watching her, it was stunning. But even though when she made her internal gaze, I felt strongly connected with her performance. You know, many butoh performers – there are lots of abstract images, or feelings of abstract images there. So it is sometimes quite difficult for the audience. [It] puts the audience into a very difficult position. But I felt that, for the first time – even though [the work was] still abstract, it was understandable. I found that suddenly I realized my brain had started to pull out common themes, or similar memories? Or create an imagination that matched with her performance. So it was a very surprising experience. I thought “ah, it is actually possible, even though performers don't look at the audience in a direct way, we can still make a very strong connection together, and we can communicate with each other.” So, yeah it was a very good experience – it changed my thoughts about butoh.

Y. Park, in interview, 17 May 2013

Rather than holding opinions based on what I assumed was a subjective revulsion of butoh's aesthetic tropes, Younghee and Hoyoung's reluctance seemed to be embedded in a culturally specific consideration of the audience and a reading of butoh as a performer-centered practice that did not respect or consider the spectator.

Younghee repeatedly uses the word “prejudice” to discuss her early reactions to butoh. While in interview neither Younghee or Hoyoung go as far as specifically acknowledging tensions between Japan and Korea as factors in their reception of butoh, over the course of the *Deluge* project we often discussed the conscious and unconscious biases that influence transcultural performance making environments, including those biases that exist for many Koreans as a result of Japan's colonial legacy. Fascinating to me as an outsider to these historic and sociopolitical concerns is that the founding mythologies of Hijikata Tatsumi's *ankoku butoh* recount his “stillness, eroticism, intensity, facial disfigurement, and gestural distortion” (Sanders 1988, 152) as playing

against the backdrop of his memories of the aftermath of World War II. Although this interpretation of butoh as “postatomic spectacle” has – perhaps rightly – been identified as overly simplistic (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006, 1), as has its links to Japan’s animistic and shamanic traditions, these notions have become part of butoh’s narrative, and they have left clear marks on the nature of the collaboration between me and my Korean friends.

Building a vocabulary

Many Korean performance practices can trace a lineage back to *kut* (shamanic ritual), where supplicants are the ultimate focus of the singing and dancing shaman and audience members are actively encouraged to participate (B.-H. Lee 1997, 53). Lee Yong-Shik (2004, 1) points to shamanism as playing a key role as a “carrier of traditional Korean culture,” with Howard asserting that, regardless of their professed religious beliefs, many Koreans still believe that spirits ensure “peace in the world beyond” (1998, 4).

It was the idea that through butoh the human body may connect to an invisible realm that provided the first of the shared pieces of vocabulary for the *Deluge* collaboration, leading us to seize upon the possibility of drawing parallels between the roles of the Korean shaman and those of the performer in the theatre. We began to develop vocabulary with which to maintain a dialogue between my understanding of butoh and the knowledge Younghee and Hoyoung had of the ontological concerns that underpin the spiritualities, philosophies, and performance traditions of Korea. This reframing of our process around the dual tasks of communication and negotiation rather than the construction of an innovative physio-vocal practice meant that we could identify exactly which performance qualities we felt were important to pursue in the ongoing development of the *Deluge* project.

The first of these qualities related to our need to have the audience feel as if they were being “drawn into” the work without the existence of obvious signs that the performer was “reaching out.” Younghee used the word “hook” to describe the aspects of our performance that connected to the audience, providing what would become a touchstone for our collaboration. We began to notate vocabulary as it emerged, interrogating it in respect to historical context, connections to culturally specific ontological concerns, and concepts of space, time, body, and mind. This reoccurring task provided us with fertile ground for studio-based exploration.

Our discussions around butoh drew heavily on Maro Akaji’s essay *Creating Butoh Drama*, familiar to anyone who has participated in Dairakudakan’s residential training intensives in rural Nagano, Japan. The version of Maro’s pamphlet that I acquired while training with him in 2008 outlines three basic principles:

[The first] is collecting the elementary movements to develop one’s awareness of daily behavior. The second principle is the idea of a body that is possessed by something or someone. The last, but not least, important principle is that the body is not separate from the space around it. The qualities inherent in the surrounding space became part of the body.

Maro 2008, 1

As we explored these ideas in the studio, more concrete connections began to emerge between butoh and the concepts of possession and transformation that underpin Korean shamanic practice.⁴ Primary among these was a sense of the facilitation of communication between the physical and spiritual, or the visible and invisible worlds – a task that particularly resonated with Hoyoung,

who was intimately familiar with Decroux’s “struggle between the limitations of the body and the unlimited possibilities of thought” (Baylis 2009, 279).

Key to understanding Maro’s butoh for us was the relationship between *teburi* and *miburi*: characterized as the two possible forms of human movement. *Teburi* are those movements “led by our hands” – the logical, convenient and fundamental motions by which humans grasp tools, gesture to one another and carry out all manner of civilized activity. *Miburi*, however, is movement that is “unconsciously taken or led by us that does not possess any purpose or meaning” (Maro 2008, 1). I knew from personal experience that Maro often described a metaphysical dichotomy drawn between the conscious and unconscious world, the bright and the dark, the inside and outside, separated by a “crack” or a point of rupture. Pursuing these “crack moments” became of primary concern for us, and we devised performative experiments that drew on our diverse experiences in order to find efficient ways to find them.

As we proceeded, stronger parallels started to become evident between the butoh dancer who is able to prise open the doorway into the unconscious, invisible world, and the shaman who Eliade described as able to “see what is hidden and invisible” (1964, 509) and communicate with the supernatural world. We began to construct physical experiments that explored “repetitive vibrations,” “rhythmic motions,” “violent distraction,” and “intense absorption” (King 1983, 52) in an attempt to experience the ecstatic catharsis of *shimmyöng*, a phenomenon which Lee Young-Shik has described as having the potential of opening up connections to the spiritual realm (2004, 46).

The vehicle for this investigation was another of the metaphors central to the way we were beginning to understand Maro’s butoh method – that of the space body (*chutai*), the idea that “the body is not separate from the space around it” and that the “qualities inherent in the surrounding space become part of the body” (Maro 2008, 1). This metaphor hinges on the specifically Japanese concept of *ma*, a richly ambiguous term which dictates that spiritual power is revealed “in the gaps and intervals of time, space and being” (Pilgrim 1986, 266). Maro’s description of *chutai* detailed the idea that, rather than the body existing as separate from the space outside of it – both aspects of the body are identical and that the audience’s eyes are merely tuned see the human-shaped slice of space that extends on an infinite plane in all directions.

Making these links between butoh and Korean philosophy and performance culture was a major turning point in the process, and there was an overwhelming sense that I had finally captured the imaginations of my core collaborators, and in doing so, discovered points of interest that we all wanted to explore. The pursuit of ways to physically and vocally investigate this threshold between worlds became one of our primary challenges for the remainder of the laboratory.

The emergence of an image-based approach to the voice

One of the ideas that was continuing to drive the *Deluge* project was that butoh seemed to hold great potential as a template for *p’ansori* voice production for our ensemble. As we explored image-based methods of movement creation, and pursued ways to make “visible the invisible” – a turn of phrase of Decroux’s that Hoyoung would often employ – we could reimagine both breath and voice as physical materials being manipulated in space and time. Younghee seized this discovery and, in response to our environment, prepared a series of vocal explorations focused on finding ways to employ the imagination in activating the “breath held in the *tanjön* (the lower part of the abdomen)” (Jang 2014, 12), so that we might begin cultivating our own voice for the work. These vocal images, included the “steam breath” (the abdomen is a pot of simmering water that emits a steady and controlled stream that can extinguish a single candle at a distance); “river voice” (the voice is a mountain stream that gets ever wider and deeper, rushing through submerged tree roots), “the dam” (the water of a vast river is suddenly constrained by a large dam,

causing the voice to be swallowed and violently churned), and the “vomit” (the dammed-up voice suddenly bursts out of the body like a geyser). By using this image-based approach to vocal production, Younghee’s aim was to find ways to approximate *shigimsae*, or the “harsh and thick” *p’ansori* aesthetic (Howard 2006, 1:60) without necessarily going through the decades-long cycles of voice-breaking that are generally accepted as the norm for professional *p’ansori* singers. By taking into account the future inclusion in the project of performers who may not be familiar with these culturally Korean ideas, Younghee selected and continually refined images that she believed invoked human experiences of nature in order to work towards *kūnūl*, the complex vocal quality that has the potential to evoke *han* and stimulate the collective, transcendent aesthetic experience of *shinmyōng*.

I thought I should actually approach it in a slightly different way – not just using a traditional *p’ansori* method. I thought maybe I should just try it a different way. So, it was more like pulling or scratching each of you from the bottom of your heart, or the bottom of the soul. And it worked quite well. I remember the day that you two made a proper “vomit sound” for example. It was a big surprise moment for me because I know you, and I know Hoyoung. To make that kind of sound at that volume is not just breaking your voice – actually it is the moment [when you need to] break down the wall in your heart – it requires huge braveness.

Y. Park, in interview, 17 May 2013

These sessions took place both in and outside the Scout Hall. By venturing into the nearby Kondalilla National Park, we could take images from the natural environment to incorporate into the vocal and physical work we were exploring. It was also an opportunity for us to engage in the long-established tradition in *p’ansori* practice of singing at the base of a waterfall in order to attempt to project the voice above it (K.-H. Kim 2008, 53).

I-You-We

As a way of moving past the second cycle of creative development and bringing other artists back into the collaboration, Hoyoung, Younghee, and I began to develop a language around the way that we wished to position the audience, and strategies for reconciling what we individually perceived as models of best practices in performance making. The framework we devised took the title ‘I-You-We’, an approach to performance making which describes the dynamics of the relationships between performer, ensemble, and audience:

- I: The relationship the artist has with the self, built on physical awareness and discipline.
- You: The relationship between selves built upon a keen awareness and connection to the ensemble.
- We: The relationship between the ensemble and the audience.

The seeds of this approach lie in Korean performing arts and in particular masked dance dramas such as *Bongsan talchum* which are incredibly masterful in their rigor, but they have a history of being performed without clear distinctions between performers and their audience (M.-H. Kim 1997 24). *P’ansori* similarly exhibits an intimate relationship between the singer – who traditionally performs solo – and the audience, who are offer up *ch’uimsae*, or “stylized cries of encouragement” (Park 2003, 234) to the vocalist. This is not seen as a one-way relationship with the audience dotting on the performer. Instead, it is a way for the audience to identify more

closely with the work, opening themselves up to the cathartic process of *shinmyŏng* experienced by those on the stage (NCKTPA 2004, 53).

These traditions have found their way into contemporary Korean theatre practice through Oh T’ae-sŏk, regarded as one of Asia’s most original working dramatists and directors (A.-J. Kim and Graves 1999). Based on practices taken from *madanggŭk* (dramas performed in outdoor spaces such as courtyards and marketplaces) and *kamyŏn’gŭk* (masked dance dramas), Oh T’ae-sŏk has pushed this traditionally high regard for the audience so far that his actors deliver most of their dialogue directly facing them (11). This is not considered by Oh to be direct address, rather a re-imagining of the audience as a mirror through which the actors can calculate the angle of their gaze in order to connect to other members of the ensemble.

Keeping one eye open

Van Zile has observed that the Korean shaman walks a thin line between “two states of mind” (1998, 148). The shaman uses the structured movement of the *kut* as a “balancing pole” with which to enter into certain mental and spiritual states, as well as to determine if the desired effect is being achieved: that the person receiving the ritual feels as if the spirits have been placated (Y.-S. Lee 2004, 155). This dual-consciousness of being “in the moment” while trying to gauge the effect of one’s performance is seen by Gaskell (2011) as central to the actor’s experience. During the *Deluge* project, we referred to this phenomenon as “keeping one eye open,” a phrase that emerged during Younghee’s description of some shamans who quite literally undertake their rituals with one eye trained on their audience. In our work in the studio during our third cycle of creative development, “keeping one eye open” moved from the literal to the metaphoric, as the butoh-based physio-vocal practice we were developing required the performer to completely invest in complex layers of images, often leaving the body distorted and without the faculties of sight, hearing, or spatial awareness.

As a way of counteracting what she saw as the problematic inward gaze of butoh, Younghee encouraged the ensemble to use the image of “making space” inside themselves for the audience to “come in” and experience the work. This required performers to imagine themselves as avatars for the performance – beings that not only embodied the components of the work, but connected to something greater. The act of inviting the audience into this gestalt also served the purpose of inviting them into the world of the work. Whilst the later cycles of this project did not focus on capturing data related to audience reception, this approach proved an incredibly useful way of fulfilling the “We” relationship at times when it was not appropriate to connect obviously and directly to the audience.

A metaphoric approach

My choreographic process is heavily reliant on the deconstruction of text into images that can be employed in the transformation of the body. A search of Australian literature to use as stimulus for the third cycle of creative development led to the discovery of Judith Wright’s poem “The Flood” (1947), a text full of rich imagery that shifts between the effects of a flood on a community in the Australian bush, to a story of a woman mourning the death of her lover.

O descent of archaic darkness. O sun gone out.
To us who stare through the darkness into the long rain
no sun returns again.

I introduced fragments of “The Flood” as stimulus for the generation of voice and movement in the studio, and as the cycle progressed, similarities began to emerge between the structure of the poem and the five-part structure of certain sequences of *kut*, or Korean shamanic ritual.⁵ Mapping the five stanzas of Wright’s poem onto this structure became a significant dramaturgical frame for *Deluge*, adding an imaginative layer over the work that the performers could use to ground their performance – a layer of connection between flooding as natural disaster, and the humans that are affected by it. Another influence of the dramaturgical framework of the work became the pursuit of “crack moments” which we took to imagining as the interface between the conscious and the unconscious worlds of *butoh* and Korean shamanic practice.⁶

Our working vocabulary, consisting of fragments from diverse performance practices and forms of cultural expression, began to take shape as a rich series of conceptual metaphors falling into three broad, but connected categories. The first of these categories are the philosophical metaphors; those which had to do with the cultural and social context of the work. In this category are the I-You-We device, that of the existence of parallel conscious and unconscious, or visible and invisible worlds, and the ideas surrounding the connections to be made between the roles of shaman and performer. Second are the embodied metaphors; those that pertain to the physio-vocal practice as it is experienced by the performer in the contexts of training and performance. These are the metaphors that it was possible to explore in action and provided the starting point for the generation of performance material. Finally, were the dramaturgical metaphors; those that dealt with the energetic or narrative structure of *Deluge* and framed the audience’s experience. These metaphors (included in Figure 36.2) became the foundation to approaching the creative concerns of the project as we moved toward the large-scale premiere of *Deluge*.

The relationship between the philosophical, dramaturgical, and embodied metaphors in the act of performance is not a simple one. With relatively predictable and repeatable physio-vocal responses to imagined stimuli, the embodied metaphors are those easiest to “rehearse.” Once these are learned by the performer and refined by the director, the focus starts to shift back to the overarching philosophical and dramaturgical metaphors. By relying on the vocabulary and processes of the new and emerging culture that underpinned our collaboration, I could confidently communicate my vision as director, and I could function throughout the remainder of the project’s creative development cycles without necessarily having to claim special knowledge of or ownership over forms of cultural expression such as *butoh* and *p’ansori* that were not supported by my own historical contexts, sociopolitical concerns, or lived experiences.

PHILOSOPHICAL METAPHORS	I-You-We <i>Miburi-teburi</i> Crack moments Performer as <i>mudang</i> (shaman) Keeping one eye open Making space for the audience
EMBODIED METAPHORS	Space body Voice and breath as physical material Swallowing and vomiting sadness
DRAMATURGICAL METAPHORS	<i>Kut</i> structure The Flood

Figure 36.2 Some of the metaphors developed during the *Deluge* project and described in this chapter.

Balancing cultural, relational, and aesthetic concerns

Interweaving diverse performance practices and forms of cultural expression relies not only on exchanges of skill and the sharing of technique, but on understanding the cultural and historical contexts, and ontological concerns that underpin them. This process of understanding is built on a foundation of complex relationships between individual participants. One of the most important discoveries of the *Deluge* project was that by shifting attention to the health of the collaborative environment, the act of performance creation gave way to an active negotiation of our relationships to each other and to the form and content of the work. Rather than requiring all members of the ensemble to acquire masterful competence in the techniques of butoh and *p'ansori*, we were attempting to, in the words of Fischer-Lichte (2009), describe a new performance reality that interweaves elements from both practices.

While working together for a week in isolation in the Sunshine Coast hinterland during the second cycle of creative development, Tak Hoyoung, Park Younghee, and I discovered ways that we might connect butoh and *p'ansori* through their links to shamanism, and concepts of space, time, and the body that are common to Korean and Japanese philosophies. These findings allowed us, as the project's three primary collaborators, to connect as an ensemble, laying the groundwork for the development of a shared vocabulary of metaphors and an emergent physio-vocal technique. By engaging in open and honest conversations that addressed our culturally and socially based assumptions we could establish communicative protocols that helped to ensure that cultural and linguistic differences were not interfering with the daily realities of collaborative art production. We were also able to clearly define the performance qualities and aesthetic hallmarks that we deemed as essential to the performance of *Deluge*. Many of these performance experiments involved embodying and vocalizing the channeling of invisible forces such as energy, images, and emotions. This led to a palpable sense of excitement amongst the participants as we found ourselves, in the words of Fischer-Lichte “co-determining the performance, and being determined by it” (2009, 392).

The interweaving of diverse performance practices and forms of cultural expression cannot rely solely on exchanges of skills and technique between members of an ensemble. Time needs also to be devoted to generating shared understandings of historic, sociopolitical, and ontological concerns. In transcultural performance making environments, each collaborator threads their way through sites of resistance and potential, co-creating a negotiated space in which they meet their audience.

Epilogue

We'd had three hours sleep, which wasn't too bad . . . just a few hours shy of our nightly average over the last months. We were recovering from hosting a double-bill the night before: the final showcase of the latest round of our Australia Korea International Cultural Exchange, and a work-in-progress showing of our new work *שמחג* <*Shimchong*>: *Daughter Overboard!* Fifteen artists had worked at the Brisbane Powerhouse for over two weeks, half of whom had already put in two weeks of remount rehearsals for *Deluge*. And now, at 8:35 a.m. on Sunday, 12 April 2015, five Koreans and five Australians from three different projects were flying out of Brisbane for Seoul.

A strange sense of déjà vu had set in over the last week. It had only been six months since our last international adventure. The winter of 2014 had seen us developing *שמחג* <*Shimchong*>: *Daughter Overboard!* for two weeks in regional Australia, on the border of New South Wales and Victoria, before launching into three weeks of rehearsal for *Deluge*, followed by a one week season at the Brisbane Festival. We closed *Deluge* on a Saturday night, and flew to Seoul two days later in

order to load in a 40-foot shipping container's worth of second-hand furniture and bric-a-brac into a function space under City Hall. This was the set of *지하 Underground*, the queer, bilingual, speakeasy cabaret that we had been invited to present at the HiSeoul Festival. *Deluge* opened at SiDance five days after *지하 Underground* closed, after which we embarked on a series of "one venue one show" engagements. We were flying by the seats of our pants, unable to shake the feeling that our old friend and mentor Roger Rynd was watching on, laughing maniacally.

As Chan E Park has noted, "striving for cross-cultural aesthetics is one thing, but measuring it is another" (Park 2003, 100), and one of the most significant challenges of the *Deluge* project was the attempt to measure the impact and value of the work on our audiences. The last of our performances in 2014 was in the Box Theatre at Seoul Art Space_Mullae, a space almost half the size of the Brisbane Powerhouse theatre, a space in which our technical manager was forced to completely recreate David Walter's striking lighting design, and our cast shaved minutes off the show simply because there was not enough room for them to run. However, it was in this space that we were the closest to our audience since our first creative development in the Whitlam Studio at Metro Arts in 2011. From the tiny stage in Mullae, we could see and hear the emotional impact the work was having, the gravity of which was only revealed in a post-show talkback. Our final questioner posed a series of questions that revealed a depth of understanding that none of us were quite ready for:

- Do you know *han*?
- Do you know about Sewol?
- Do you know the story of Simch'öng?
- Do you know about *kut*?

Afterward the elegant, smartly dressed questioner introduced herself as Cho Sunhee – the CEO of the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture. We sat in the front row of the theatre as our team pulled



Figure 36.3 *Elements – Deluge Cycle 5* (Brisbane Powerhouse, 2014), photograph by FenLan Chuang. Pictured (L-R): Park Younghee, Sammie Williams, Jeremy Neideck, Amy Wollstein.

the set down around us, and Ms. Cho talked passionately about what the work had meant to her, how important she thought it was. She asked us if there was any way for us to present it in April 2015 as a public memorial to those who had lost their lives in the sinking of the Sewol Ferry. Our producer had to run to stop our composer from making souvenirs out of the work’s fragile plywood pylons.

Stepping out of the cab and onto one of Seoul’s busiest streets six months later was a surreal experience – and not just because we were greeted by our own faces on banners flying from every street lamp. Families of the victims of the Sewol were leading mass demonstrations at City Hall, demanding answers to what they insisted was a series of government cover-ups before being dispersed by water cannons, the same kind of mass civil disobedience that would see the Korean President impeached two years later. Some family members were huddled under clear plastic tarps in front of the statue of King Sejong, sleeping in the driving rain of the Korean spring. Some were on hunger strike. Some had taken their own lives.

The importance of having our work programmed as the only publicly funded performance speaking to such a deeply felt national pain was hard to comprehend. It felt like no matter how much exploration of the impact of water on the body we had done in a studio on top of a mountain on the Sunshine Coast, we couldn’t possibly have anything useful to offer here, in a historic theatre in the shadow of Namsan tower, wedged between a radio station and a cartoon museum on the side of Seoul’s sacred southern mountain. It was hard to explain the feelings that flowed from repeating movements we had practiced for five years. Roger once wrote:

As I watched you all yesterday – working, eating and playing – I was struck, not for the first time, by the extraordinary nature of what we do. I imagined if some alien anthropologist were to observe you at work they would see one of the most distinctive aspects of humanity.

That we contrive to depict our existence through an aesthetic organisation of movement and sound; that we dance and sing in harmony, and that the juxtaposition of these two things is endlessly and rapidly mutable.

It is apparent that other creatures also dance and sing; and like us they do it for sex and territory. Perhaps migrating whales sing for deep companionship. But we contrive to do it. Imaginatively and logically; and we also do it for the transcendent spirit of the act itself. To express from deep within, our joy and sadness, our han and jong.

R. Rynd, *personal communication*, 10 April 2009

Like *han*, *chǒng* (정/情, romanized by Rynd as “jong”) is said to be a complex and difficult feeling to grasp for the non-Korean. It is a sentiment knotted with the full range of human emotion (Yang 2006, 285), an embodiment of the connections between individuals. It is a human experience that cannot be manufactured, conditional on existing in the same place and at the same time, and generated through recurring and shared experiences.

On the night of the one-year anniversary of the sinking of the Sewol, an ensemble of performers born in bordering time-zones thousands of kilometers apart, sat with their audience, folding paper cranes and boats. We collected shoes and books and empty vessels and navigated our way through terror, pain, and loss – attempting to weave a glimpse of hope out of the tattered remains of what was left behind.

Notes

1 In 1964, the Republic of Korea’s Cultural Heritage Administration (formerly the Cultural Properties Administration) began the process of appointing distinguished artists as holders of intangible cultural heritage (Park 2013, 100). This was an attempt to preserve and promote traditional Korean art forms that

- had only barely survived obliteration under Japanese colonial rule, and that risked falling into decline in the period of economic and social reconstruction after the ceasefire that paused the Korean War – a conflict that is technically still ongoing.
- 2 *Ch'anggük* is the presentation of the traditionally solo form of *p'ansori* using a large cast with sets and costumes on a grand scale. For three months in 2013 I once again trained intensively with Oh Min Ah and observed The National Changgeuk Company of Korea in rehearsal as part of an Asialink residency, and as a recipient of the Brisbane Lord Mayor's Young and Emerging Artists Fellowship.
 - 3 *지하* *Underground*. The first creative development of *Deluge* set a precedent for Younghee, Hoyoung, and an ever-expanding family of artistic collaborators to travel periodically between Australia and Korea. For a more detailed account of this, read Neideck (2016b).
 - 4 Korean shamans are often understood as conforming to two distinct types, which Ch'oe (1989, 225) defines as the “god-descended shaman,” for whom ecstasy and possession are seen as a reality, and “the hereditary shaman,” who “learn their calling from their kin” and “generally do not enter into ecstatic possession trances”. However, as Ch'oe goes on to note, their rituals have a “common basis and matrix of belief,” and their ceremonies conform to a “general pattern,” which “leads to a replication of the possession experience and the renewed ability to communicate with gods” (225).
 - 5 Lee Yong-Shik's description of a *Chaesu kut* of the Hwanghae region, for example, details several sequences (*kōri*) that follow a five-part structure: ushering of deities, transition, spirit possession, transition, and sending of deities back to where they came from (2004 96–155). As Ch'oe Kil-sōng notes, however, insertions and deletions in the structure of *kōri* lead to a great diversity in the length and makeup of Korean shamanic ritual (1989, 221), and in many respects, the deliberate confluence of “structure and anti-structure” is implicated in “the ability to communicate with the gods” (222).
 - 6 See Neideck (2016a) for a more complete discussion of these connections.

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