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Yuriko Doi's Teaching and Transmission of Noh and Kyōgen in San Francisco

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Article abstract

Yuriko Doi founded the Theatre of Yugen in San Francisco and taught American students noh and kyōgen for more than thirty years. Noh theatre, in living practice in Japan for more than six hundred years, incorporates music, dance, acting, and singing. While noh is serious and sombre, kyōgen is a comedic form traditionally performed within or between noh plays. Starting in the late 1970s, Doi's Theatre of Yugen performed new works inspired and informed by noh as well as kyōgen in English around the US and also in Japan. Noh training ideally begins in childhood as one-on-one study with a teacher and continues into adulthood. The transmission of noh is considered to be from body (teacher) to body (student) without verbal explication. To teach students in an ensemble theatre company in California, Doi adapted aspects of the transmission process as well as aspects of the form. Doi taught the exterior qualities of movement and vocal technique and, at the same time, tried to instill a sense of noh's interior qualities, which include time, aesthetic intensity, and art practice as a life path. While teaching noh and kyōgen, Doi wants her students to draw from all of their training and influences. She explains that trying to hide other performance traditions held in the body, such as Western acting technique, will deflate the energy of a performance. She argues that if an actor can develop a complex sense of noh they can integrate it with all of the other knowledge structures in the body, which will lead to a masterful performance. Based on a series of interviews with Doi, the treatises of noh founder Zeami Motokiyo, and recent scholarship on noh, this essay examines the practice and transmission of noh and how the art is continued and revised through Doi's work.

Yuriko Doi's Teaching and Transmission of Noh and Kyōgen in San Francisco

Judith Halebsky

In 1967, Yuriko Doi moved from Tokyo to the San Francisco Bay Area to pursue a career as a director. She founded the Theatre of Yugen and taught *noh* and *kyōgen* to American students for more than thirty years. In its original mission statement, Theatre of Yugen emphasizes drawing from traditional forms as well as contemporary influences: "Theatre of Yugen's . . . innovations are grounded in traditional Japanese theatre techniques and its experimentation in music, dance, mime, chanted English, and the use of masks represent a fusion of new and old, discipline and inspiration" (qtd. in Ehn 2004, 7). What was articulated as *fusion* in this mission statement from 1978 changed over time into what can now be seen a process of pollination. Doi's Theatre of Yugen offered an active learning and engagement with Japanese theatre forms and explorations of new work influenced by these practices. Under Doi's leadership, Theatre of Yugen performed locally and nationally, often at universities and art festivals. Their physical theatre space, NohSpace, hosted performers and theatre artists with some connection to Japanese performance forms. Through her work teaching US students, performing kyōgen in English, and making new productions informed by the aesthetic concepts and performance techniques of noh, Doi has shaped the artistic landscape in San Francisco and brought a familiarity with Japanese theatre to northern California.

Doi's transmission of noh to her students in the United States passes on an embodied aesthetics of art practice through the techniques of noh and kyōgen and, in broad mentorships, cultivates her students as creative artists. This process of transmission reflects established modes of teaching noh and perpetuating artistic lineage. Transmission is a means of instruction and learning that is not based in written or verbal information and guidance; rather, it is a passing on of an embodied aesthetic practice. Examining Doi's teaching of students in the United States reveals that culture not only lives in historical and social knowledge but is also held within the body and transmitted from body to body. Doi's vision for noh and kyōgen in San Francisco requires a "give and take" with the form (Doi 2019). Adhering solely to the form as it is traditionally practised mutes the actors and diminishes the creative energy of the performance (Doi 2019). While maintaining central aspects of noh and kyōgen, Doi negotiates ways that actors need to adapt the practice to their personal experience and training in order for the form to maintain a vibrancy in this new location. Doi offers the concept of "extra-creation" to describe the embodied synergy of actors who draw from their training in noh and kyōgen along with spoken drama and other physically embodied trainings.

In *America's Japan and Japan's Performing Arts: Cultural Mobility and Exchange in New York 1952–2011*, Barbara Thornbury examines how performers and performance works from Japan were received in New York City over a period of almost sixty years. Her research is based on press articles and published reviews of the New York City performances of groups and companies from Japan. These

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reviews reveal assumptions about Japanese theatre that audiences and reviewers bring to performances. She points out how these assumptions shape interpretations of what people see onstage and names this gaze "America's Japan." She writes: "Through their writings we can identify major modes of audience reaction to the unfamiliar. Critics' published reviews and related essays form the historical archive of intellectual engagement with and reception of theatre (as well as dance and music) from Japan—in other words, the body of writing that constructs the narrative of America's Japan through the performing arts" (Thornbury 2013, 265). Much of what Thornbury finds in the reception of productions from Japan in New York City echoes the reviews and reception of Doi's work in the San Francisco Bay Area. Doi's work, however, differs from many of the productions that Thornbury examines. Thornbury examines productions that are one-time events, short runs, or return performances. Doi's work is based in the United States and extends over time, in ongoing relationship with audiences. She trains US-based actors to perform in her productions and as ongoing members of her theatre company. This essay offers a practice-based investigation of how Doi draws from noh and kyōgen in her San Francisco–based theatre company and how she adapts and changes these forms to the skills of her US students and to the tastes of San Francisco theatre audiences.

Thornbury (2013) describes how US audiences of performance works from Japan expect to find traditional or timelessness qualities in the work: "An assumption of America's kabuki-Japan is that the traditional arts represent inviolable practices that have been—and continue to be—maintained intact" (159). While Thornbury frames this through audience expectations shaped by perceptions of *kabuki*, it is clear in the larger context of her writing that this includes audiences coming to see work related not just to other traditional forms such as noh and kyōgen but to any work from Japan more broadly. She describes one critic as "predictably compelled to find within the play evidence of Japanese cultural continuity" (160). She also points out how Teshigawara Saburō's warm reception in Europe was not replicated in the United States because his contemporary dance did not always have an overt connection to Japanese performance forms. She writes that "he had cultivated enthusiastic audiences in Europe but in a way was shunted aside by American presenters wary of booking even the most serious and sophisticated artists from Japan whose work did not appear distinctly 'Japanese'" (157).

Doi was aware of these limits and constraints and positioned her work accordingly. Performing English-language versions of kyōgen and teaching Japanese theatre in elementary and junior high schools became the mainstay of the theatre company's income (Ehn 2004, 12). Teaching multiple times a week gave the company many opportunities to practise their skills. This stability allowed the company to mount productions that drew from noh and other performance traditions. Doi had experience acting in spoken drama productions but was interested in pursuing work that drew from Japanese forms. This also gave her a position of authority. Even though she does not have professional status within a noh or kyōgen school in Japan, in San Francisco she is considered an expert on these forms, with knowledge to impart and share. In this way, she navigated the expectations of the theatre community and brought aspects of traditional Japanese theatre to new works.[1]

I came to study noh as a PhD student at UC Davis. Previously, I had lived in Japan for eighteen months on a scholarship from the Japanese government to study at the Kanazawa College of Art. While in Japan, I had studied *butoh* with Motofuji Akiko and with Ohno Kazuo and Ohno Yoshito, and I had stayed at Tanaka Min's Body Weather Farm. I entered the PhD program intending to study butoh, particularly how it lives in Japan and how it is understood and practised in San

Francisco. I was never really a dancer; I did dance as a body-based aesthetic practice from which I could enter a creative state to write poems. To me, poetry is a physically active somatic practice, despite how overwhelmingly it is presented as the quiet, desk-sitting work of the mind. To lay a foundation to study butoh, my professor advised me to start by studying traditional Japanese performance forms and then to chronologically work up to modern and contemporary dance. I began by studying noh theatre and reading Zeami Motokiyo's treatises on the art of noh. I never returned to butoh as a primary focus. Instead, I got more involved in trying to understand noh theatre and its aesthetic concepts. In the winter of 2005, I took a six-week training course in noh and kyōgen at Theatre of Yugen taught by Jubilith Moore. Moore was Yuriko Doi's student, a longtime member of Theatre of Yugen, and she later served as its artistic director. The course culminated with a recital on February 26, 2005.[2] I went on to train in noh song and dance with Richard Emmert in Tokyo and to study at Hōsei University's Noh Research Institute from 2007 to 2010 on a MEXT scholarship. My research developed to include how noh is changed in its employments outside of Japan and how new locations (San Francisco and Vancouver) ascribe new meanings and values onto the art.

Doi began training in theatre by learning noh dance and song from her great-grandmother, who taught in the Hōshō school of noh. As an undergraduate at Waseda University, Doi studied *shingeki,* a modern Japanese drama form based in the techniques of spoken drama. In 1965, through a Waseda University professor, Doi began to study with kyōgen master Nomura Mansaku. Two years later, she moved to the United States, aspiring to be a director. She maintained strong ties with Nomura Mansaku,[3] and despite living in California, she continued to train with him for twenty more years. There were opportunities for training when Nomura Mansaku was performing in the United States, and during Doi's many trips to Japan.

Noh is a sombre and serious performance form that integrates music, dance, poetry, and acting. Kyōgen is a comedic form performed along with noh. For more than 650 years, noh has been in living practice. Noh actor and playwright Zeami Motokiyo codified the form of noh in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. His art carried on and developed the artistic lineage of his father, Kan'ami (1333–1384). Zeami drew from his father's innovations to the precursor of noh, *sarugaku* noh, to create a highly structured, stylized, and refined performance form. There are 200–250 plays within the current active repertoire of noh that have been passed down from teacher to student for generations. There are five surviving schools of noh that continue to perform these plays. There are also groups in Japan creating new noh plays, as well as occasional collaborations with scholars, in efforts to perform the surviving plays as they might have been performed in Zeami's time. Kyōgen is performed in between noh plays and, more recently, independently in day-long kyōgen performances. Kyōgen has stock characters and readily accessible humour, which has made it easier for Doi to translate and perform kyōgen successfully for new audiences.

Ideally, noh is taught through transmission that begins in early childhood and continues in a one-on-one mentorship until the student becomes a professional performer. There are two general aspects to the concept of transmission in noh. One aspect reflects how knowledge is conducted from teacher to student. This encompasses all aspects of the physical, aesthetic, and compositional structures of noh. It includes the *kata* (units of noh practice) such as movement and vocal technique, noh performance philosophy, and the broader cultivation of the student as an artist onstage and in daily life. The other aspect of transmission reflects how status and recognition of authority are awarded to a student as they become a master or professional. The awarding of physical objects such

as documents, costumes, and props and the assignment of partial or full management of a performance troupe mark the transmission of status.

The transmission of noh has been described as a mind-to-mind or body-to-body transfer. It involves three general and overlapping stages of learning. The first and most basic centres on training of the body in the external, surface qualities of the art form. The next stage, which goes on concurrently with the first stage but gains in depth and importance as technical proficiency increases, is the embodiment of the aesthetics of noh. These aesthetics include a *jo-ha-kyū* (introduction, break, conclusion) timing structure, *yūgen* (dark or obscure) beauty, and a cultivated inner intensity (these will be discussed in greater detail below). The third aspect of transmission is the broad cultivation of the student to reach a point of agency over that form to such a degree that the student makes their own connection with and contribution to the practice. At the higher levels of transmission, the most important feature of this third aspect is that it requires personal insight connecting the art form to broader issues of existence. Doi calls this "being real." This encompasses the stages of learning, from external qualities to an embodied form to the luminosity of form and cultivation of spirit.

For more than twenty-five years, Theatre of Yugen performed works informed by noh and kyōgen in San Francisco. Doi's work includes English versions of traditional-style kyōgen, projects that join noh with Greek tragedy, and projects that join multiple performance traditions. Doi stepped down from running Theatre of Yugen in 2002 and passed on the leadership of the theatre to her students. However, she has continued to direct plays. Most recently she directed *Mystical Abyss*, excerpts of which were performed at Colorado State University in 2015.

To plant noh in San Francisco, Doi sought to create, maintain, and nourish a fluency of form in noh and kyōgen within her company members. Her vision faced many challenges. It is particularly difficult to teach aspects of noh acting technique such as face and body expression, and the time structure of noh, within a context informed predominantly by the performance traditions of Western Europe. Her students started training in noh and kyōgen as adults, which made it difficult for them to make up the years of training they missed out on by not starting as children. They also lacked the language skills, and the historical and cultural framework, that would help them to engage with noh and kyōgen directly. Not only did Doi need to educate her students about noh, but she also needed to educate her audiences. Some of the compromises she made to the production aspects of noh for Theatre of Yugen's early performances in San Francisco were no longer required by the late 1990s, due to a growing understanding of noh (Zilber 2008, 158). The impact of Theatre of Yugen is the result of Doi's sustained training and cultivation of dedicated students, who through a process of transmission have come to embody the internal practice of noh and the substance of its aesthetics and of her cultivation of audiences.

Actor Training in Traditional Noh: Function and Substance

The cultivation of spirit that Doi teaches reflects Zeami's concept of the "full flower." Zeami uses the metaphor of a flower to discuss many aspects of acting technique. An actor achieves a full flower only with the highest levels of acting technique, and once a full flower is reached, the actor can access it for the rest of their career. Zeami predicts that an actor can attain a full flower sometime in their thirties. This full flower is an established route within the body for reaching a sophisticated and immediate level of creative engagement. This degree of attention requires great sensitivity on the part of an artist and is evidence of a level of mastery that not all students will attain. Zeami, of

course, conceives of the full flower in terms of the noh he created during his lifetime. There has been a great deal of change in how Zeami's teachings have been understood and employed over time.[4] This essay reflects on the meaning that Doi (along with other contemporary practitioners) draws both from her physical training with her teacher, Nomura Mansaku, and from Zeami's written treatises. Doi's aesthetic goals for her students include a full embodiment and integration of the form. Doi teaches that Zeami's full flower includes an artist's malleability in personal location, their ability to expand frames of knowledge, and their commitment to drawing broadly from multiple influences in their creative practice.

Within Zeami's many writings on the secrets of his art, he differentiates between the external and internal aspects of noh, or what Rimer and Yamakazi translate as "Function" and "Substance" (Zeami 1984, 71). Zeami's treatise *Teachings on the Flower* (*Fushikaden*) outlines the stages of learning from an initial surface imitation of the teacher to an embodied form. Zeami stresses that the richness of noh lies in its internal aspects: it is this deep engagement with the internal form of noh that defines its mastery. It takes years of training to develop even a basic level of proficiency in the external qualities of noh. These external qualities are a minor part of the art of noh and a building block to higher levels of skill. As Zeami writes in *The True Path of the Flower* (*Shikadō*), "Art that remains external is to be despised" (66).

Kita school noh instructor Richard Emmert similarly separates noh into external and internal elements, arguing that it is the internal elements that define noh. While the masks and kimono of noh are in themselves works of art, they are not definitive of the art form. A noh performance without a mask, in different costumes, or on a different kind of stage can still be noh. A performance requires the internal elements, such as the beauty of *yūgen*—and the structure of time and intensity in the introduction, break point, and conclusion of *jo-ha-kyū*—to be within the tradition of noh. Emmert (1997) writes: "[One can] divide the various elements of noh into internal and external elements. Internal elements are those which, if changed, make noh something else: 'noh-influenced' perhaps, but certainly not 'noh.' External elements, on the other hand, are those which are usually associated with noh in its traditional form but in fact are capable of being changed" (171). It is difficult to clearly differentiate between aspects of noh and equally difficult to determine whether these aspects, such as movement or jo-ha-kyū, are exclusively either internal or external. It is helpful in discussing Doi's work to make a general separation between external markers of the noh tradition and internal philosophical and aesthetic aspects of the practice that also have an external presence. This makes it possible to examine degrees of influence, from surface borrowing to embodied practice. Of course, this is complicated, particularly when training begins with mimetic copying of external aspects of song and dance.

Zeami (1984) set up a separation between "Function" and "Substance" in *The True Path of the Flower* that can be understood as the aspects of noh that are either external or internal for the actor (71). Function refers to the surface qualities and markers of the form such as costume, movement, and vocal technique. Substance is the philosophy, energy, embodiment, and mastery of form. Zeami writes:

> When it comes to observing the noh, those who truly understand the art watch it with the spirit, while those who do not merely watch it with their eyes. To see with the spirit is to grasp the Substance; to see with the eyes is merely to observe the Function. Thus it is that beginning actors merely grasp the Function and try to imitate that. Although they do not understand the real principle of Function [that is,

> the fact that it derives from Substance], they attempt to copy it. Yet Function cannot be imitated. Those who truly understand the noh, since they grasp it with their spirit, are able to imitate its Substance. Thus in a performance, Function comes of itself from a successful attempt to assimilate Substance. (71)[5]

Here Zeami alludes to a learning journey of noh that begins with the function and develops into learning the substance of noh. Grasping the spirit of noh then informs the function of noh, creating depth and beauty in a performance. Doi's vision of translating noh for San Francisco relies on engaging with the internal aspects, which are the substance of noh. It is the integration of proficiency in noh's external aspects with an actor's cultivation of spirit, their cultural location, and a mastery of noh's internal aspects that allows an actor create a powerful performance onstage.

Yuriko Doi's Goals in Function and Substance

The most important aspect of Doi's work in performance that employs noh and kyōgen is an embodied understanding of these traditional forms. Actors not only need to study these forms but also must strive for a depth of knowledge in the practice that includes its cultural roots and influences. Doi required company members to develop a proficiency in the function aspects of noh, such as movement and vocal technique. But, more importantly, she stressed the embodiment of the substance of noh in its aesthetic philosophy. Doi is willing to adjust aspects of noh's function, such as adapting the facial expressions of noh and kyōgen to the acting strengths of her American students. At the same time, she rigorously defends the substance of noh and is unwilling to change the timing and pacing of the art of noh, even when faced with direct criticism from theatre critics.

Doi's vision is for her students to embody noh, and to have a sensitivity to noh's aesthetic goals, in creating the beauty of yūgen and performing with the timing and intensity of jo-ha-kyū. Doi refers to actors who have a deep understanding of the substance of noh as having the form "digested" in their bodies. She contrasts them to theatre groups in North America who employ aspects of the function of noh, such as costume, mask, or movement, without connecting these elements to the broader art of noh. In a roundtable discussion on fusion theatre at the Theatre of Yugen, Doi differentiated between thoroughly understanding the art of noh, which she called "digesting" the form, and taking surface elements from noh out of context and layering them onto new work, which she called "borrowing." Borrowing relates in part to the idea that it is relatively simple to make something seem like noh by using noh costumes or staging techniques, while it is much more complex to understand and engage with the aesthetics that inform noh. Doi explains:

> First thing is, you really have to respect the form. Digest the form, and then create it a new way. If it's not digesting the form, you are borrowing. . . . You should go into the form, as much as [you can] know and understand culturally, everything [all aspects that you can] understand. Digest through your [own] way and create. Very often I see that a group is just borrowing the form, just borrowing for no reason . . . that means it is not digested at all, [there's no] connection to your heart, to the movement, or the dance. (Theatre of Yugen 2007)[6]

This dichotomy between borrowing and digesting is similar to the divide between the external and internal aspects of noh discussed above. Costumes, movement patterns, and vocal technique are part of the external aspects of noh, which can be copied in a relatively straightforward manner. The

internal aspects, such as the cultivation of concentration within the actor and creating a performance with yūgen beauty, are much more difficult to understand and to recreate.

Jo-ha-kyū, yūgen, and moments of no-action are particularly difficult to access for an audience new to noh. Jo-ha-kyū (introduction, break, conclusion) has a slow introduction that builds into two ha phases of extended introduction. The third phase of ha is when the sequence reaches its highest point of intensity. Kyū is the resolution of the sequence. Jo-ha-kyū shapes the broader structure of a play but is also found in much smaller units within all aspects of a noh performance. The slow introduction of jo is the part of jo-ha-kyū that contrasts most directly with popular structures of spoken drama and is one of the more challenging aspects of noh for a new audience. This timing does not rely on speed, or fast-paced aspects within a stage performance, but instead creates intensity and contrasts within the sequence of jo-ha-kyū. While a noh performance might seem slow overall, a noh-educated audience is looking for shifts in the timing and intensity within the jo-ha-kyū structure. They are not comparing stage time with social time.

Yūgen is a complex and mysterious beauty created through suggestion. Clouds obscuring a view of the moon, or mist drifting over huts in the distance, are images that could evoke yūgen. The image is somewhat hidden and the viewer needs to create it with their imagination. One example of how yūgen is created in noh is through blocking a direct view of the lead actor. At the highest movements of emotional confession, or the revelation of personal struggle or true identity, the lead actor recites lines with a fan blocking a direct view of the mask. Rather than showing the character's conflict, this blocking asks the audience to create within themselves the emotional conflict of the performance.

Yūgen and noh's moments of no-action are interrelated. Yūgen can be found in Zeami's concept of "feel ten show seven." The actor holds intense emotion internally and reveals only part of that emotion to the audience, striving to bring the audience into the internalized emotion. The actor not only needs to internalize this sensibility but also must strive to obtain a strength of inner focus and concentration that the audience can access. This intention creates subtlety and suggestion within the performance. Moments of no-action are when this inner focus is at its strongest and there are no other sounds or movements onstage to detract from this concentration. The performers strive to create an attunement between the focus of the audience and the inner focus of the *shite* (main actor). This relies on a powerful internal concentration that is cultivated over years of actor training. It is called "no-action" because it does not have external action. Rather, it has internal tension, concentration, and the movement of energy. Doi has striven to create new work that shares these qualities of noh in ways that allow new audiences to engage with them.

Limitations and Opportunities for Doi's Career

Doi came to the United States intending to pursue a career in contemporary theatre, not traditional Japanese theatre. She aspired to be a director; this role does not explicitly exist within traditional noh or kyōgen. The potential of going abroad as a means to develop a professional career was intensified by barriers women face in gaining respect and inclusion within Tokyo theatre circles. In a 2003 conversation with Erik Ehn (2004), Doi explained:

> More and more, I wanted to direct. In Japan then (and even now), there are only marginal directing opportunities for women. Theatre workers had the status of

> beggars—even going a long way back, they called an actor a "river-bank beggar." And a woman in theatre was considered more like a prostitute. It is really tough to do theater as a woman. . . . So I thought, in that case, I am just going to learn theatre technique and go abroad. There was something of an inferiority complex about foreign culture, back then. There was only one successful woman directing in Japan: she had come back from Paris. Well then, I thought, that's what I'll do. (9–10)

As a woman, Doi found that avenues for leadership in the theatre world in Japan were closed to her. Once she was in the United States, her training in noh and kyōgen became an asset for creating an entryway into the San Francisco theatre world.

Nomura Mansaku, Doi's kyōgen teacher, strongly encouraged Doi's directorial vision—to join noh with other performance forms—and her aspirations in the United States. The strict lineages of performance forms and the barriers she faced as a woman severely limited the possibilities for Doi to do innovative work within traditional forms in Japan. Doi explains her teacher's advice to her: "Mansaku Nomura really encouraged me. 'You are a woman and in the United States you can do creative things beyond tradition, you can break it up'" (Theatre of Yugen 2007). Doi primarily specialized in kyōgen, but noh has a greater influence on Theatre of Yugen's fusion and contemporary productions. The opportunities to create new work and the interest in Japanese traditional theatre shaped Doi's productions and drew her to build a career in the United States rather than return to Tokyo.

Doi studied under James Graham at San Francisco State University. For one of her classes, she directed the noh play *Momijigari* (*Maple Leaf Viewing*). This was the beginning of Doi's work producing theatre based in Japanese forms in the San Francisco Bay Area. Soon after, Doi began teaching Japanese theatre at San Francisco State University. She directed a kyōgen piece, *The Melon Thief*, at the Japantown Cherry Blossom Festival. Doi started to take on kyōgen students, and her group began doing performances, calling themselves the Oriental Mime Troupe. This name, now dated, intended at that time to root the group in Asian Drama and to situate it in the San Francisco Bay Area, in relation to the San Francisco Mime Troupe. As the professional troupe began to take shape, they changed their name to Theatre of Yugen to reference the centrality of yūgen in Zeami's noh.

As Theatre of Yugen grew, Doi had to manage multiple issues of adapting noh and kyōgen for San Francisco audiences. The multicultural emphasis of the arts community in the 1980s and 1990s brought increased interest in theatre from outside the Western tradition, particularly fusion theatre (Moore 2005). Many of Doi's works, such as *Jaku and the Beanstalk* and *Antigone*, are based on plays and stories from outside the noh tradition. She was particularly interested in employing noh to create new versions of Greek tragedy. Despite eagerness by funders and patrons, audiences, and the theatre community to have theatre works and traditions from outside the Western canon, Theatre of Yugen—and Doi as a director—were criticized in reviews for not addressing conventions of Western theatre.

Doi was flexible in adjusting the function aspects of noh, such as masks and facial expression, for her US students. At the same time, she maintained a steadfast commitment to the substance aspects of noh, such as jo-ha-kyū, in the training of her students and in her productions. Noh plays do not use expressive facial gestures. The acting is communicated through the actor's body, sound, and codified gesture and movement. In noh, only the lead actor and the supporting lead actor wear

masks. The chorus, musicians, and other actors do not wear masks. The masks of lead actors generally have neutral expressions, with the exception of the demon masks. The masks are carved with a very subtle expression that changes slightly with movement, placement, and shadow. For example, looking up creates a frown and looking down creates a faint smile in the young woman mask. Doi tried to train her actors to have neutral faces onstage. However, she found that for her American students, a lack of expression in the actor's face also led to a kind of reserve in the actor's body. In noh, the opposite is desired: a neutral face and an expressive body. While Doi felt that a neutral expression was desirable for her American actors, she needed to compromise. Doi explains: "I tried having our actors work with neutral masks to develop and focus on body movements. However, I soon discovered that restraining facial expression for American actors often ended up restraining the rest of their physical expression as well. Their bodies got stiffer. So I then told them that you can use your faces, but do not depend too much on your faces as an emotional telegraph" (qtd. in Ehn 2004, 14). With this concession, Doi negotiated between her vision of noh and kyōgen in North America and the cultural context within which she had to work. Muting facial expression runs counter to the physicality of social codes and conditioning in her American students. Doi connects the mask in noh with the conditioning of the medieval elite in Japan to not show extreme facial expressions (14). Actor training in North America draws heavily on emotions as communicated through the face as well as the body.

In critiques of Doi's productions, the central issue was the use of different aspects of timing on stage. The stylized speech of noh, and Doi's choice to employ this stylized speech, were also criticized. Critic Bernard Weiner's review of Doi's noh adaptation of *Antigone* illustrates the difficulties of pacing and time within a noh performance for an American audience: "In her dedication to authenticity, Doi risks coming up with a production that 'reads' like an academic exercise. Long pauses, excruciatingly slow entrances and exits, poetically declaimed speech—such are not ingredients for drawing a (mostly) Caucasian audience into a noh rendering of a Greek Drama. I don't think she'd sacrifice authenticity by being more conscious of western "theatre time": having her actors pick up cues faster, speaking a bit more realistically, choreographing their movements a bit more exciting[ly]" (Weiner 1983). This highlights the struggle faced by Theatre of Yugen to find a balance between creating theatre work that is informed by Japanese performance and requires a specialized knowledge to engage with, on the one hand, and making that work accessible to a San Francisco audience, on the other. Over time, Doi's artistic struggles developed into a negotiation among three issues: educating the audience, maintaining aspects of performance central to noh and kyōgen, and creating performances that can appeal to an audience with little previous exposure to these forms.

In her noh performances, much more than in kyōgen, Doi struggled to maintain traditional structures in timing such as jo-ha-kyū, as well as sparcity of plot development and stage movement. Doi writes: "A defining struggle my whole artistic life in the United States with audiences and critics has been how much to adjust the pace for the audience. This is a much larger problem in our noh productions than in our kyōgen. If I train actors to perform at a faster pace, they will never understand the original noh and kyōgen theatre forms" (Doi and Theatre of Yugen 2007, 249). Pace, time, and intensity are structures central to noh that are found in yūgen, jo-ha-kyū, and moments of no-action, as discussed above. These are part of the internal elements of noh. While they are tied to the external practice, they rely on an embodied sensibility of aesthetics to succeed on stage. The importance of maintaining these aspects in the training of Doi's students also reflects her understanding of how fusion work can succeed; it depends on the embodiment of the tradition, the need for the work to be fully "digested" before it can be employed in a meaningful way in new work.

Doi describes her creative vision, of drawing from noh and kyōgen and other performance lineages such as Greek drama and spoken drama, as a "collision." Her aim is to have two things that she calls "real" collide onstage to make something that is "extra-creation." Realness, for Doi, is not authenticity or an exactitude of the form; it is the actor drawing from and performing from their embodied cultural location. An American actor's performance of noh or kyōgen needs to connect to their other training and life experiences for the performance to be successful. If they try to hide the American influence, the performance will lose its power. In Doi's work, it is not that an American is performing noh but that an American is performing noh in a way that is shaped by their Americanness. When these two or more performance traditions shaped by cultural location collide, they make Doi's "extra-creation." It is the energy released in this collision that can make a dynamic performance onstage.

According to Doi, to fully digest noh means to connect noh's substance with a depth of practice and the personal cultivation of the artist. This needs to develop out of the artist relating to multiple influences, such as migrations and shifts in their cultural location. Doi's productions foreground these migrations in that the actors perform from complex identities, or what Doi calls the "real." This requires an artist to investigate their embodiment of cultural location and personal history through many influences outside of and beyond noh and kyōgen. Doi's "full flower" makes broader connections and is open to expanses of vocabularies. Substance is cultivated within noh. This mastery is cultivated through an endless array of influences that shape and propel the artist. In Doi's San Francisco noh, Zeami's "full flower" becomes "being real." As Doi's students strive to master the form, she asks them to embody noh and at the same time to draw from all of their training, experiences, and forms of knowledge.

Transmission and Change at Theatre of Yugen

In tracing transmission at Theatre of Yugen, one issue of interest is the roles of the teacher and the student in other contexts and how the practice is passed between them. Doi brought with her to San Francisco a family line of noh and an extended training in a historical lineage of kyōgen. The majority of her students did not have previous exposure to noh or kyōgen. The Theatre of Yugen offered San Francisco actors sustained training at a time in their lives when they had "finished" American actor training. Doi auditioned company members and welcomed them on the basis of interest and skill. Unusual to the San Francisco theatre world was company membership that could offer ongoing professional relationships and creative dialogue.

Jubilith Moore and Libby Zilber came to the company through an open call for actors and trained with Doi for many years. Zilber explained that as a company, they are not interested in doing "straight" noh. This refers to creating and performing noh in a way that is formally and aesthetically consistent with traditional noh. Into the early 1990s, the company did not have the proficiency in noh to perform traditional noh (Zilber 2007). Over the years, company members have increased their skills in noh. By the 2000s, it became possible to mount productions more in keeping with traditional noh plays; however, that is not the vision of Theatre of Yugen (Zilber 2007). Zilber (2007) explains, "A noh play needs to have the *hayashi* and actors who are trained in noh and dedicated to the form. Before, we didn't have actors with the needed training. Now, we're at a point where we have the actors. We don't have the musicians [to do a formally traditional noh play] but also it's not our aesthetics and it's not our mission." They do, however, perform kyōgen plays in a

more strictly traditional way. In their productions of kyōgen classics such as *Busu*, they perform the script in English but with the stylized vocal techniques of traditional kyōgen. They also wear kyōgen costumes. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, they adapted stylized versions of American movements into their kyōgen. In the early 2000s, company members improved their kyōgen skills and performed kyōgen that was closer to the form in Japan. Kyōgen does not have a musical component, so they were not hindered by a lack of trained musicians in their kyōgen works.

Theatre of Yugen has staged a number of productions based on works of literature well known in North America, such as *Frankenstein*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and *Don Quixote*. By drawing on familiar stories and characters, Theatre of Yugen can explore an image or a few moments in time and dispense with a linear narrative. This play selection reworks a central device in noh: the reliance on the audience's prior knowledge of the story. With familiar stories and characters, Theatre of Yugen finds creative leeway to limit exposition and use nonrealistic portrayals of characters, settings, and events. In Jubilith Moore's production of *The Old Man and the Sea*, she was able to cast parts in the play without matching the gender and age of the actors with the gender and age of the characters they portrayed. Lluis Valls, in his mid-thirties, played the old man, and Max, a female Theatre of Yugen company member, played the young boy.[7] Casting two people of roughly the same age to play an old man and a young boy, as well as casting across gender lines for one of these characters, succeeded in two ways. First, the audience came to the production already knowing the characters in the story, so they could quickly assimilate and remember which actor was in which role. Second, this casting complemented the noh tradition, which casts men as women across gender lines. Also, in traditional noh there is little concern about the age of the actor corresponding to the age of the character they are creating. The nonrealistic casting of the production succeeded both because it was in keeping with noh tradition and because the audience knew the relationship between the characters and was already familiar with the storyline.

The 2007 production of the *Cycle Plays* was a significant milestone for Theatre of Yugen. It honoured Doi's retirement from the company. Noh was traditionally performed as a day-long series of plays. Currently, day-long series are produced most often to celebrate the New Year. They begin with a ritual performance called *Okina*, followed by a god play, a warrior play, a woman play, a mad woman play (also called miscellaneous category), and concluding with a demon play. In 1984, Theatre of Yugen produced Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei's *Medea: A Noh Cycle Based on the Greek Myth*. The Medea noh plays, written and created in the United States, connect the Greek myth of Medea with the structure of noh. The *Cycle Plays* are similarly based in noh's play categories but set within a US historical and social context. Erik Ehn wrote and directed the plays, which included the murder of Polly Klass as the demon play and the story of Helen Keller as the woman play. Ehn strove for a jo-ha-kyū throughout all aspects of the performance, from structuring devices within the plays to the broader shape of the day-long series. The day began with a ritual performance based on noh's Okina featuring Doi and Theatre of Yugen founding members Brenda Wong Aoki and Helen Morgenrath. Okina is a noh ritual that is performed on special occasions prior to a full cycle of noh plays; usually, the most senior members of a noh troupe perform the main roles. The ritual is a prayer that asks for longevity, good fortune, and the continuance of noh song and dance. This performance was a staged passing on of the leadership and artistic lineage of Theatre of Yugen from Doi to new artistic directors (Aoki 2007).

The aesthetic depth of Doi's teaching style drew Zilber to the company. Speaking of Doi, Zilber explains, "I still remember the first project we worked on, *Komachi Fuden*, we always started with a dance to warm up. She talked about, 'you don't see with your eyes, you see with your heart.' That

captured my spirit and I fell in love with the Theatre [of Yugen]" (Zilber 2007). This comment from Doi to Zilber reflects Zeami's underlying approach to noh, as discussed above. Zeami (1984) writes, "When it comes to observing the noh, those who truly understand the art watch it with the spirit, while those who do not merely watch it with their eyes" (71). With the *Komachi Fuden* production, Zilber began many years of sustaining and nourishing study with Doi, finding an embodied aesthetic practice that she had not encountered in her previous theatre work (Zilber 2007).

When I first began to watch and study noh, I felt that I could not access the performance because I did not understand the words of the play. The more I studied noh, however, the more I began to see that the language of the play was only one small part of the greater knowledge of Japanese performance, culture, and history I lacked, limiting my ability to engage with the form. Doi has tried in different ways to bring noh and kyōgen a little bit closer to the knowledge and frame of reference that North American and English-speaking students and actors bring to their studies of Japanese performance. While she has made concessions in noh and kyōgen to make them accessible to her students, she vehemently protects the parts of the tradition she sees as most important: the substance and internal qualities of noh.

Doi trained San Francisco actors in noh and kyōgen for more than thirty years, teaching them external and internal aspects of noh. It is the connection to an actor's embodied experience and knowledge that shapes this San Francisco version of noh and achieves Doi's "extra-creation" onstage. Doi passed these arts to her students and has seen them make it their own. Although Doi officially retired in 2002, she has since then staged new productions and performed internationally. Members of the theatre community in Japan have celebrated her work as an example of the global reach of Japanese art forms. For example, she was invited to stage her play *Moon of the Scarlet Plums* at the Aichi World Expo in 2005.

Without Doi's direct oversight, Theatre of Yugen has struggled to find its footing. While Theatre of Yugen continues to teach students, mount productions, and perform locally, it has yet to regain the momentum that it had under Doi. Many of Doi's students have continued to share this lineage of San Francisco noh in vibrant performance careers. Two of Doi's students perform with an international English noh company called Theatre Nohgaku. While Doi sought to draw from noh and kyōgen to make new work, Theatre Nohgaku aims to bring audiences to traditional noh by performing in English. They create new plays that adhere to structures of traditional noh but present contemporary stories often set outside of Japan. Lluis Valls continues to teach kyōgen at Theatre of Yugen. Another of Doi's students, Brenda Wong Aoki, has built a strong career on stage working in multiple forms, including new work influenced by noh and kyōgen as well as contemporary storytelling. Kyoko Yoshida and Miwa Kaneko currently codirect the theatre. Yoshida has long standing ties with Theatre of Yugen and they both have expertise in arts management (Theatre of Yugen, n.d.).

When Doi's former company members go on to perform work that is largely within the frame of spoken drama or new experimental work, their training in noh and kyōgen risk going unmarked. Lluis Valls recently performed Cyrano in a jug-band version of Edmond Ronstand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In a 2022 review, Alexa Chipman described Valls's performance as "instantly impressive. . . . He has sensational stage presence, rapier-sharp dialogue and elegant ease during fight choreography." Chipman stresses Valls's stage presence and elegant choreography, which were at least honed during his many years of training in noh and kyōgen with Doi. However, unless the performance makes an overt connection to Japanese forms, this influence goes unmarked. In this

way, Doi's ripples of influence—in performance techniques and approaches to time and intensity—may go unacknowledged.

Noh offers a depth and complexity of practice that can enrich theatre in the twenty-first century and can also be a point of resistance to demands for an easy realism and mass reproduction of a theatre product. There is a need and a thirst for art forms that do not live between commercials but rather engage body-to-body and dance within a shared energy between actor and audience. Doi departed from the function of noh but strove to maintain the substance of noh in the training of her students in the United States. She asked them to learn the external qualities of noh and to fully digest and bring into their bodies its internal qualities. Through a sustained mentorship, students worked toward a mastery of form. At the higher levels of acting, once the student has an embodied sensibility of the internal and external aspects of noh and the function and substance of noh, they can interpret noh through the other forms of knowledge that shape and inform their cultural location. Doi strove to pass on these art practices to her students in San Francisco and created a San Francisco lineage of noh. While the context of noh has changed, and many of its surface details have been adapted to a new location, generation, and body of cultural knowledge, the internal practice of noh, its aesthetics, and an embodied art practice live on through Doi's transmission.

Notes

1. In founding her theatre company, Doi saw her artistic goal as creating an aesthetic experience based in the concept of *yūgen*, which she describes as "a spiritual sense of flowering" (Ehn 2004, 11).

2. On March 2, 2005, I wrote this reflection on studying at Theatre of Yugen: "I came to the study of noh at the Theatre of Yugen wanting verbal instructions and spoken explanations of the form. I was much more interested in hearing about the meaning and philosophical ideas of noh than I was about learning it through physical practice. In workshop I was waiting for verbal gems while showing significantly less commitment and attention to learning about noh through my body. However, through the weeks of my study at Theatre of Yugen, I was drawn into the physical practice of noh as taught by Jubilith and came to see the movements as not just movements but a broad embodiment of the practice of noh."

3. In theatre circles Nomura Mansaku is known by his given name, Mansaku, to differentiate him from the many other well-known actors in his family. I use his full name throughout this article for clarity.

4. See Takemoto (2008). This article details the concept of jo-ha-kyū in terms of its origins, Zeami's understanding of the concept, and contemporary interpretations.

5. Bracketed explication is that of translator Thomas Rimer.

6. I have made slight adjustments to some of the verb tenses within this quote to make it read smoothly.

7. Max is the full stage name of this actor.

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