

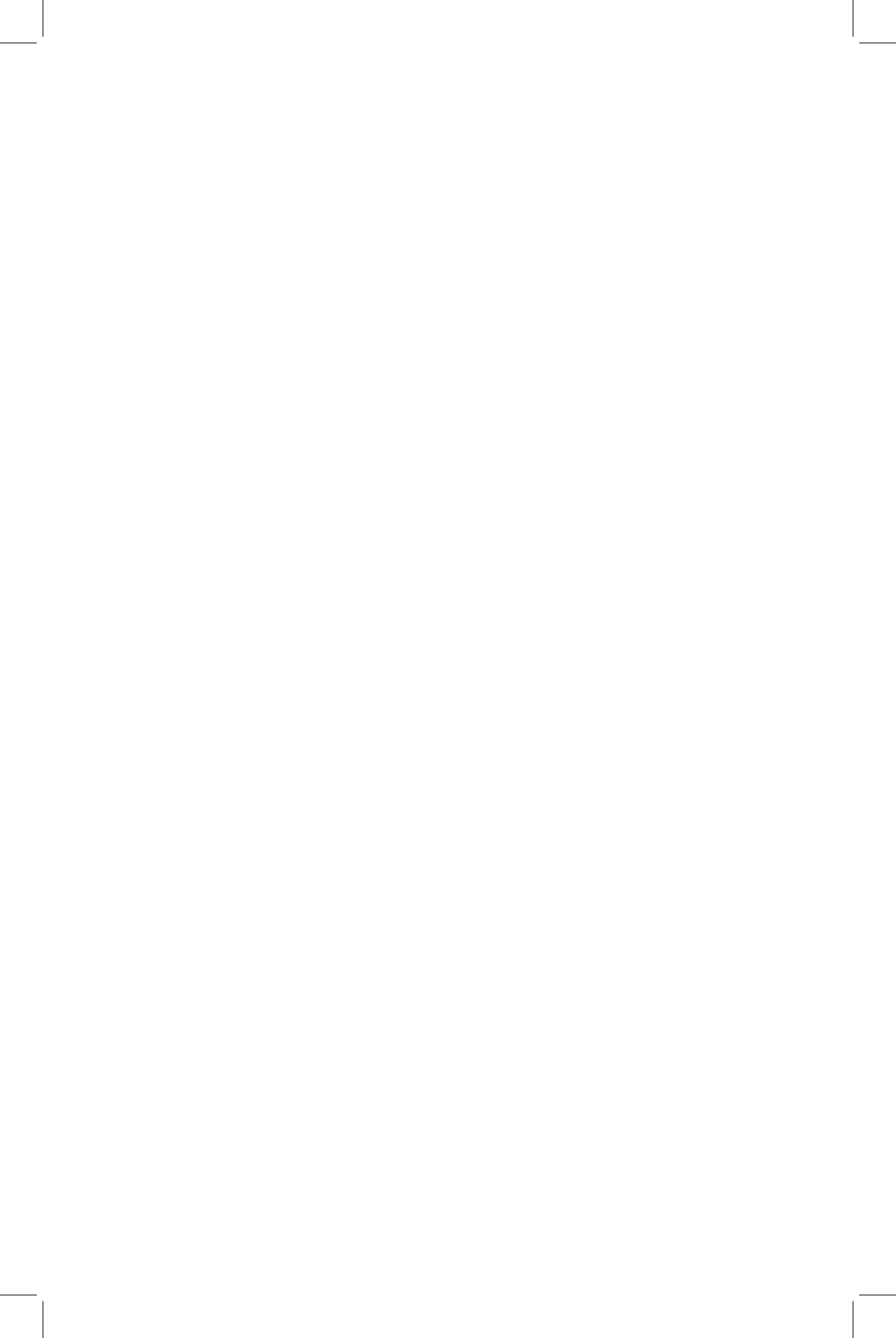




ORCHIDS

Dormancy and Becoming

by Mitsu Salmon

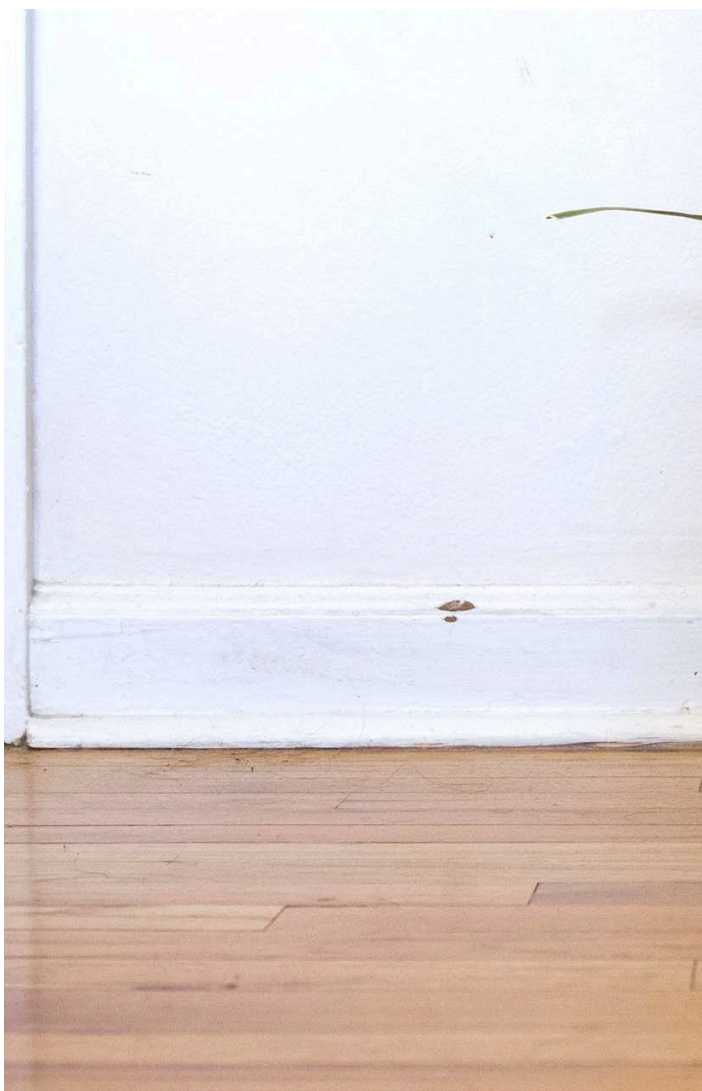


This project was made possible through the support of the Chicago Dancemakers Forum Lab Award, residencies through Sitka Center of Art and Ecology, Ragdale, Ruth Page, and Columbia Dance Center.

Editor and co-designer of book
Mána Hjörleifsdóttir Taylor

Dramaturgy
Christine Shallenberg

Thank you to Amelia Charter, Phil T. Nails, Rebecca Ladida, Kate Mattingly, Ellen Chenoweth, Andrea Chu and Milad Mozari





Dormant oncidium orchids

Dormancy

My friend collects orchids from dumpsters. At the music school where they teach, there is always a blooming orchid in the lobby. However, as soon as the blossoms begin to wilt, the staff throws them in the dumpster behind the school. The old orchid is then replaced with a fresh, blooming, new one. When my friend finds the old discarded one in the dumpster, they add it to their collection of orchids. Most of the time the orchids sit dormant, just existing as high maintenance leaves and stems. Once or maybe twice a year, the orchids bloom, but most of the time, they have come to enjoy them as latent.

I have several orchids in my home. Although they are bought, and have not been collected from a dumpster. Currently, they all sit dormant. I also sit dormant, like them. Since, like many artists, my teaching, trips, and performances have all been canceled due to the pandemic. I am not blooming or thriving; I am mostly surviving. Yet in this state, the orchids still require much care, light, water, humidity - just as surviving for me is taking much more care and energy than makes sense. I am trying to allow myself and the orchids to be in this state.

But what is dormancy? We think of it as an unwanted plant or an unwanted time period in our life. A flower is only valued when it is blooming and us only when we are productive. Dormancy is thought of like a lull, a latency. Most plants use this time to recharge, to rest, but we have become so detached from this way of being that we seek a never-ending blooming, forever lasting fertility and output. Is our disconnect with the environment what has put us in this mess?

Jane Goodall states that the pandemic emerged because of our lack of care for nature and its animals - that we have seen this before and yet we have not changed. Is our lack of connection with the environment what causes us to seek constant productivity, without considering waste or rest? Or is it our need for production that has led us further from nature?

Jan Verwoert writes in *Exhaustion and Exuberance*:

The fatal consequence of a continuous pressure to perform is the exhaustion of all our potentials precisely because the current social order denies the value of latency, the value of a potentiality that remains presently unactualised and quite possibly can't ever be exhaustively actualised. It seems that we have to learn to re-experience the value and beauty of latency¹.

Moth Orchid

The species of orchid that my friend collects is the *Phalaenopsis*, the Moth orchid. This flower was initially found in the Philippines and during the Victorian era, was heavily imported and cultivated in Europe. In 1901, an expedition of eight men entered the jungles of the Philippines in search of orchids. Within a month of their journey, one was eaten by a tiger, a second was doused in oil and burnt to death, and five more were never seen again. The lone survivor of this dangerous mission emerged with an enormous haul of *Phalaenopsis*². This flower was once a rare organism, worthy of risking one's life. However, the Moth orchid is now the most common orchid you can buy. If you have an orchid in your home, it is most likely a *Phalaenopsis*. Eighty-five to ninety percent of orchid sales in mainland US are *Phalaenopsis*. It is so accessible because many varieties have been hybridized to be sturdy and then reproduced through cloning to be cheap³. It is the orchid you find at Whole Foods or Trader Joe's or even God forbid Costco.

Orchids are among the largest and most diverse flowering plant families, with over 800 genera and 25,000 species. Yet with all these varieties, there are only two orchids commonly recognized and cultivated; *Phalaenopsis* and *Vanilla*⁴. Why, if there is such a vast diversity of orchids, are we only familiar with these two?

Both in Michael Pollan's *Botany of Desire* and Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the authors critique monoculture's commercial use in farming. Pollan, with our dependence on russet potatoes (fast food fries)⁵, and Kimmerer with corn. In order to mass-produce, it is usually one or very few plant species that are grown and cultivated in mass. This kind of production requires more pollutants and damages the land. Instead, if there was variety in a crop, other plants could be used as insect repellents and could additionally nourish the land. In Western ideas of conservation, humans are thought of as extractors of resources, while in indigenous knowledge humans can actually help the land. Kimmerer uses the example of sweetgrass as a plant that survives best when cultivated, not overly-harvested, but not just let alone. She writes that it is about an exchange with the land and, at times, allowing the land to be.⁶ For example, instead of trying to get as many yields from a crop as possible, which depletes its nutrients, letting the land lay barren at time. Dormancy enables its strength.





Phalaenopsis
Photo by Maria Ten



Jian Guo Market, Taipei 2018
Photo by Mitsu Salmon

Jian Guo Market and Rhizomes

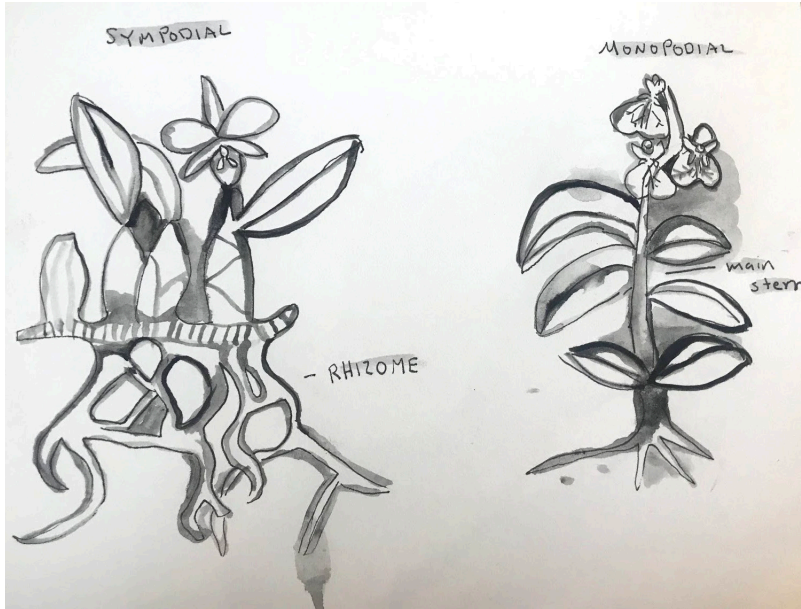
My interest in orchids began pre-pandemic, but it has deepened and developed through this excruciating time. It started a couple years ago while I was participating in an artist residency in Taiwan. While collecting materials for an exhibition, I was walking through the Jian Guo flower market, a massive outdoor spectacle sprawling for blocks and blocks. There, I was bombarded with the vibrant colors and diversity of orchids. There were very tiny orchids with ruffles, ones that looked like monkey faces, and multicolored petals with dots. There were rows and rows of orchids hanging upside down from poles. I knew many orchids are epiphytes, which means they prefer to grow off of something rather than be in the soil. But that was the first time that I really understood it, looking at stalls and stalls of orchids attached to bark, rocks and other odd wooden fixtures.

It was while in Taiwan that I also found out that my great-grandfather, Ryoza Kanehira, conducted botanical research on “Orchid Island,” a small island off the southeast corner of Taiwan. Being that I create performance work, I soon began conceptualizing a piece about orchids. This research, which began as a sensual experience in the market, expanded to touch upon the histories of imperialism, posthumanism philosophy, and environmental issues.

I later learned that there are monopodial and sympodial orchids. Monopodial orchids such as the *Phalaenopsis*, have one “stem” from which they grow, with leaves following on opposite sides. Sympodial orchids, such as *Cattleya*, have multiple shoots from which other shoots spring which are rhizomes. This essay is structured much like the growth pattern of a sympodial orchids, connecting various ideas and loose associative rambling shooting from orchids.

In a *Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write about the rhizome to describe a theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points. From one rhizome springs another shoot, a network of roots with no explicit center.⁷ Mycelium is rhizomatic, the underground fungal network, that is needed in order for orchids to exist in the wild. Sympodial orchids are rhizomatic. This coronavirus is a rhizome. The internet is a rhizome. The way imperialism connects to current issues of racism and environmental justice is not one-off shoot but rather a series of interwoven connections. Orchids depictions in everyday life and popular culture are also entangled roots, at times contradicting one another.

I am also inspired by Cathy Park Hong’s book *Minor Feeling: An Asian American Reckoning* as a template for weaving together memoir, with theory and history.⁸ I am primarily an artist and performer, and my work usually come from autobiography and family history to talk about broader issues. I begin with myself and my family as the base for this essay, as well as a performative lecture in conjunction with the writing you are currently reading.



Sympodial and Monopodial
By Mitsu Salmon



Xylamen treated
免 腐 字

102735

臺灣總督府中央研究所林業部植物腊葉
FLORA OF FORMOSA
HERBARIUM GOVERNMENT OF FORMOSA
(Department of Forestry, Government, Tainan, Taiwan)

Cirrhopetalum flavisepalum Hayata

採集年月日: 1927 年 月 日
Date: Oct. 8, 1927
產地: Mt. Arian
Locality: Mt. Arian
採集者: R. KANEHIRA
Collector: R. KANEHIRA
S. SASAKI
6,000ft.

Annotation *Ochridaceae*
Bulbophyllum retusiusculum Reichb. f.
Det. by Zhan-Hua Tsai: 張華和 date 2000/12/15

Bulbophyllum retusiusculum Reichb.
Herbarium of Taiwan Forest Research Institute Specimens
Collected by Ryozyo Kanehira and Syunichi Sasaki 1827

Orchids named after Ryozo Kanehira

(Orchidaceae) *Arundina kanehirae* Yamam.

(Orchidaceae) *Epidendrum kanehirae* Hágsater

(Orchidaceae) *Phreatia kanehirae* Fukuy.

Collected by Kanehira Kanehira

Bulbophyllum retusiusculum Reichb.

Oberonia arisanensis Hayata

Goodyera velutina Maxim. ex Reyel





Takako Moriyama
Los Angeles

Family Heirlooms

My grandmother, Takako's house was always full of orchids, both blooming and latent. She also had tropical parakeets that lived in the sunroom but would often be let in to freely fly around the house. Her interior was covered in antiques from Japan and Taiwan. The orchids, the furniture, and the birds would transport her home from the desert landscape of Los Angeles to the tropics of Asia.

My grandmother is Japanese, but she was born in Taiwan. Taiwan was a colony of Japan from the late 19th to mid 20th century. During that time, her father, Ryoza Kanehira, was a well-known botanist who researched Taiwan plants. One of his assignments was working on Orchid Island, a volcanic island off Taiwan's southeastern coast. It was named after the wild orchids that grew there, the oldest inhabitants of the island. Native also to the island were the Tao people, an Austronesian ethnic group. The land was untouched by settlers before the Japanese occupation. But the Japanese government only allowed ethnological research on the island and it was heavily monitored so that the Tao people's lifestyle would be unchanged. This is not to romanticize Japan's colonial rule, it was extremely mixed in Taiwan from both preserving and destroying indigenous people and the environment.

When Japan lost WWII, the island was taken over by the Republic of China, which allowed the island to be open to the public, including tourism and later becoming a nuclear waste site. The nuclear waste was dumped on the island without the Tao's people's knowledge; they were told it was a food canery. There were increased cancer rates, and the environment had drastically changed to the point where wild orchids could no longer grow.⁹ The lack of care for indigenous people and knowledge is linked to the devastation of our environment.

Animism and new materialism

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer explains this indigenous knowledge beautifully. She writes about planting corn, beans, and squash the three sisters in agriculture. They work together to protect and strengthen each other and the land. She compares this to the manufacturing of mass-produced GMO corn her neighbor is managing.

Our different ways of planting reflect not only the different scales and goals of our work, but also our fundamental relationships with the plant.

In the western worldview, the plant is understood as a photosynthetic machine of sorts, without perception, will, or personhood. The seeds my neighbor drills into the ground are thought of as objects, hardly different than the fertilizer or herbicide, another cog in the farm-become-factory.

In this worldview, plants are placed at a low level in the hierarchy of life—

a perception which is flipped upside down in Indigenous ways of knowing.

Over the hill at the heritage farm, plants are respected as bearers of gifts, as persons, indeed oftentimes as teachers.

Who else has the capacity to transform light, air, and water into food and medicine—and then share it?

Who cares for the people as generously as plants?

Creative, wise, and powerful, plants are imbued with spirit in a way that the western worldview reserves only for humans.¹⁰

Recently in Western philosophy, there has been a move away from anthropocentrism (human centeredness) through posthumanism and the most freshly coined "new materialism" through the writings of Jane Bennet and Elizabeth Grosz. Posthumanism and new materialism are crucial contemporary philosophies in terms of how we interact with our environment (natural and human-made) and the perception and making of art. Posthumanism challenges the western belief of placing humans at the center with animals, plants, and things as resources to be used and exploited. New materialism seeks to no longer center the human and rather to see our environment and "thingness" as conscious and alive, active participants. It advocates for the harmonious co-existing and horizontal playing field.¹¹

In many ways, both philosophies criticize a colonialist and capitalist way of approaching our surroundings by dismantling our notion of anthropocentrism. Yet numerous contemporary indigenous thinkers are questioning why their voices have not been credited in conversations of this theory, considering the agency of objects and non-humans has existed in their cultures for centuries. For example, Zoe Todd, a Métis anthropologist, critiques the word "new" in new materialism as if this idea has been discovered. For instance, she recalls a lecture by Latour she attended, waiting for him to acknowledge indigenous ideas on animism. It never came.¹²

In her article, *Decolonizing Posthumanism Geographies*, Juanita Sundberg writes about both the necessity and critique of posthumanism in terms of its two Eurocentric "performances." She speaks about posthumanism's mistake of not specifying place, such as presuming that the divide between culture and nature and culture is universal. When in indigenous and other cultures have not historically existed with this duality.¹³

Being Japanese American and spending most of my twenties in Asia, I was exposed to animism and the understanding of the liveness and power of the animate and inanimate. As a child, my mom would talk to me about the feelings of my tattering clothes and later introduced me to the self-help guru

Marie Kondo. Marie Kondo was a former Shinto shrine maiden¹⁴, and her ideas of caring for one's things was to reflect their presence, such as writing about the sadness of an uncared-for purse. I partook in similar ceremonies in Japan and Bali, centered around, say, the worship of a stone or a holiday for a tree. Needless to say, I was surprised when arriving at grad school for art in the US and noticing these same ideas but presented through the language of posthumanism. Yet when I tried to enter the conversation with my knowledge of animistic beliefs, I was often sidelined and rejected as talking about outdated spiritualism.

Spiritualism and Art

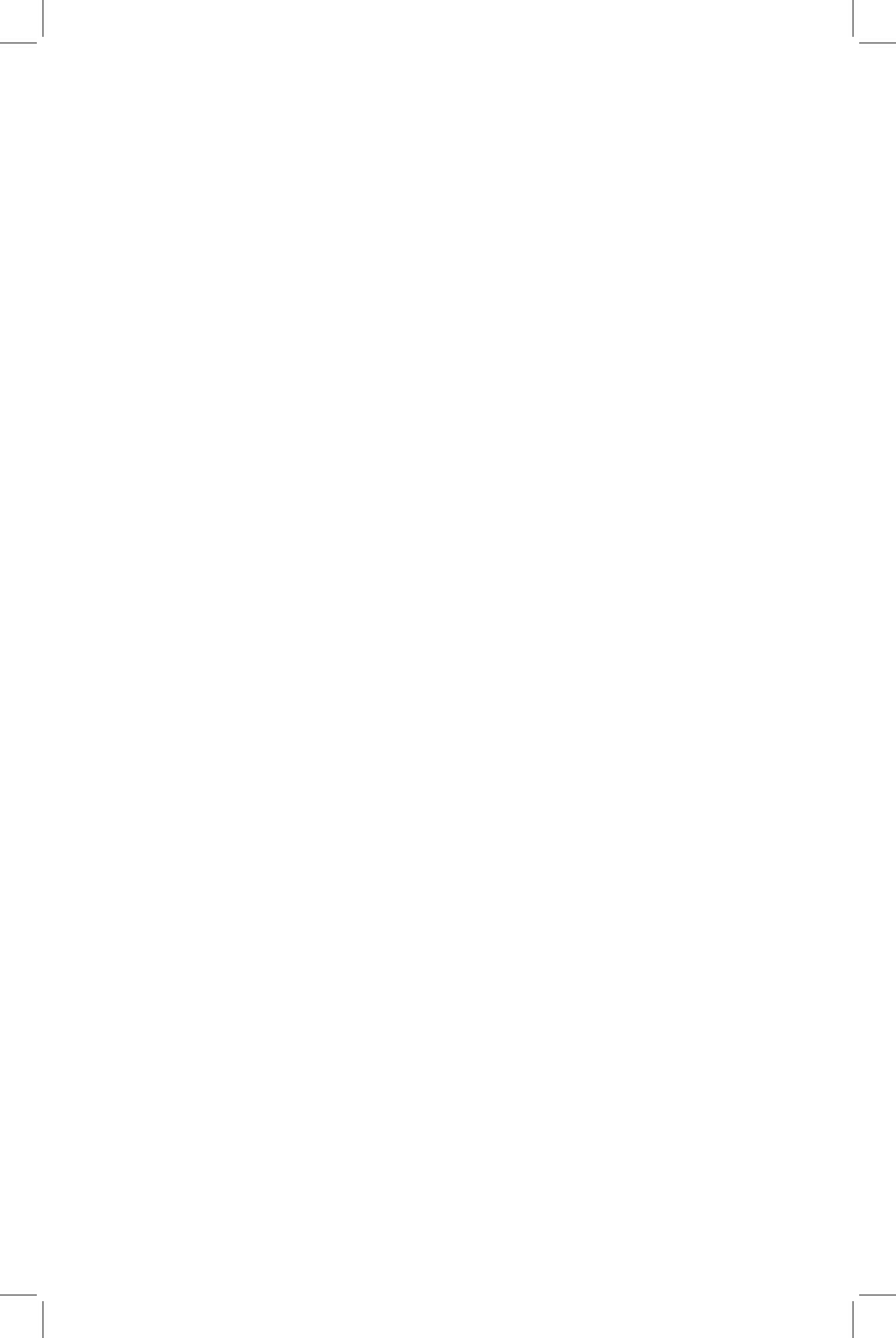
On my first day of grad school, I arrived in my *Spiritualism and Art* class, excited to finally have conversations I had been stewing over while living the last few years in Asia. In the center of the class sat the teacher, an older white disgruntled gentleman who complained the whole time how spiritualism was now passé in art. He mourned the work of Gauguin and Kandinsky and other white male dead artists, never mentioning the potential problematic legacies. This was utterly confusing to me; I had spent time with contemporary Indonesian painters, where the spiritual was an extremely relevant and current topic in art. Yet, they were not mentioned in this class, and their work was not shown in the museum. I quickly switched out of that class, wondering why Kandinsky represented spiritualism in modern art. The only art I saw from Asia in the museum was made hundreds of years ago.

Yes, at the Art Institute of Chicago, as in most "Encyclopedic museums," the Asian, Middle Eastern, and Africa sections only or primarily contain ancient art. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely adore this art, but still, there is something very troubling that non-Western art exists only in this past. Yet Western and Contemporary sections are filled with European and American "inventions" and innovators. Edward Said speaks about Orientalism, as "it views the orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West." Asian art and animism exist in the past tense and tend not to exist in current relevant conversations.

Over the summer, I teach art to elementary students, where we visit the Art Institute of Chicago. One day I lead the students to the Chinese Han artifacts of tomb relics. One student, before we sat down to draw, said, "Excuse, but why are

they in the museums? Shouldn't they be with the tombs in China?" Another few students then refused to sketch the objects; afraid they would get cursed. I was taken back and impressed by these eight and nine-year-old reactions. If only the colonists who stole these objects would have been so thoughtful. They had a point, and I said: "Yes, you are right, these objects should not be here. And yes, let's not draw them". These children had deep insights both in terms of the unethical acquisition of this art and the agency of the objects. They recognized that the objects did not want to be there and could thus enact their anger on us.

Not all art needs to be seen, and not all landscapes need to be entered. Not everything has to be available to us, from the tomb relics of China, the Dine sacred dances, the rituals I was barred from seeing in Bali to most of what sits in the British Museum, as well as a wild orchid that should never have been picked.



Orchid

delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium delirium

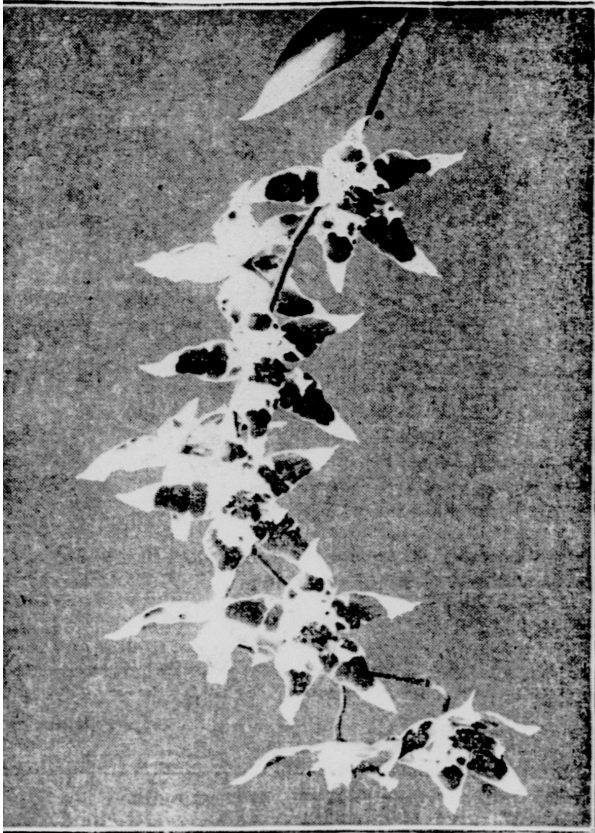
delirium

delirium

delirium

delirium
delirium
delirium
delirium delirium
delirium
delirium
delirium

FRAIL FLOWERS FOR WHICH



A GALAXY OF STARS.

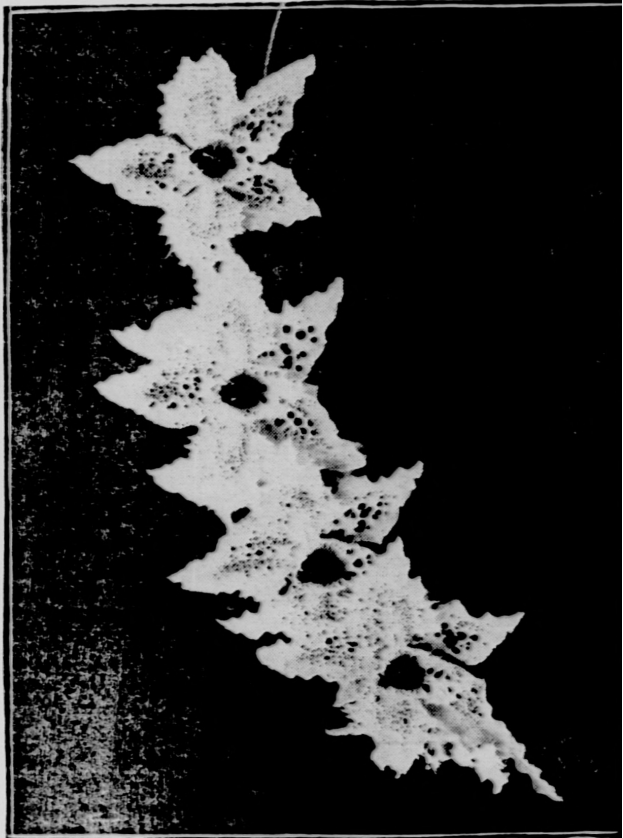


VALUE FROM \$3,500

MEN RISK THEIR LIVES.



TO \$5,000.



A STRING OF BEAUTIES.

New-York Tribune
June 26, 1904

Orchidelirium

In the early 1800s, British naturalist William John Swainson was gathering rare tropical plants in Brazil. While sending them back to England, he used bulbs as packing material. When the package arrived in England, the bulbs had blossomed into a colorful and unusual shaped flower, the *Cattleya* orchid thus starting the Orchidelirium. Orchidelirium was the madness of collecting orchids that emerged in England during the 19th century. Wealthy orchid fanatics, including queen Victoria, spent fortunes commissioning orchid hunters to collect and search out new and exciting varieties of orchids. Sometimes it would cost \$1,000 per plant, equivalent to \$24,000 today¹⁵. Orchid hunters traveled to tropical and "exotic" locations, lands newly colonized or freshly "discovered." In order to secure that the collector was the only one with access to a particular rare orchid, they would sometimes scorch the land in which they found the orchid.

The name Orchids came from the Greek word *orchis*, meaning testicles. Orchids were also believed in many cultures to be aphrodisiacs from contemporary Turkey to ancient Mayans. The sexual and romantic symbolism of the orchids also fed the seekers' desire.¹⁶ The danger of collecting only escalated their high fee. Orchid hunters faced tropical diseases, wild animals and poisonous snakes, floods, murder, and sometimes while reaching for an orchid on a cliff, just slipping. Also, stories about the lands and inhabitants were often fabricated to make them seem more "savage" than they were in reality, claiming stories of cannibalism, rituals, and other tales of intrigues. The more grandiose the tales and violence, the capture, the more valuable the flowers.

In *Orchid: A Cultural History*, Jim Endersby writes:

The orchid's sexy, deadly reputation is in turn linked to the fact that Europeans have (for better or, more frequently for worse) been the world's most active travelers, conquerors, and colonizers; orchids are a good example of the exotic riches that Europe -and would kill for- and which shaped their vision of the new world they set out to annex.¹⁷

The orchids were then later housed by greenhouse which enabled tropical plants including orchids to survive and thrive. It is why so many of us have only the highly durable Phalaenopsis, because other varieties need a very particular climate. Greenhouses came about in the Victorian era thanks to the industrial revolution, producing affordable steel and glass.¹⁸ It's ironic that so much of what allows us to enjoy nature was created through structures that destroy our environment. For example, the public parks and conservatories in Chicago were funded by the railroad and meat packing industries. National Parks were created through the removal of native populations. Yet it is through these structures that make people appreciate nature and fight for its conservation. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said, drawing from Abdel Malek's ideas, states that the nineteenth-century desire to accumulate power and "the hegemonism of possessing minorities and anthropocentrism allied with Europe centrism."¹⁹



The Flowering of the Strange Orchid
Drawing by B.E Minns
Pearson's Magazine, April 1905

Othering

In the midst of *Orchidelirium*, H. G. Wells wrote a short story titled "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid." In it, a very expensive orchid tuber (a not yet flowering rhizome) is auctioned, attaining its high price through the stories of its many collector's death. An orchid enthusiast, Wedderburn, is so enthralled by the tales of adventures and violence of this orchid that he purchases it without even knowing how the flower will look. Once the orchid blossoms, the tentacles of the plant choke and murder Wedderburn.

This story speaks about the flower's agency and also embodies the colonial subjects revenge. Orchids initially came to symbolize the romance of England's imperial empire, the fantastical places that one wished to visit, which consisted of the tropics of South America, Asia, and the South Pacific. Later on, the tropics turned into dreamt-up scary places where the white man was unnumbered by flowers, animals, and the "other." Well's story conjured this through the fear that the subjugated tropics would seek revenge by invading their colonizer's home. This tale was not an outlier but rather in fashion with other stories at the time where the literary device of the orchid was employed to represent the anxiety of the unknown. Later these orchid tales began to include women linked to the orchids as *femme fatales* as women in England were gaining the right to vote. The orchids then came to represent the seduction and imagined danger of the "other," whether that be people of color, the environment, or women.²⁰

Gayatri Spivak describes othering as a process by which the English empire defines itself against those it colonizes and marginalizes. The creation of the enemy helps to define itself. She states "The clearest available example of such epistemic vio-

lence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial other”²¹

During colonization of the 19th century, the orchid came to be a way to possess the other and display one's wealth. The orchid, much like certain people at the time, was an object representing the other that could be classified, studied, and possessed. bell hooks write that “to not understand *neocolonialism* is to not fully live in the present.”²² This past of imperialism is the foundation of many structures that still exist today, from racism, sexism, and how we treat our environment.





Anna May Wong
Stars of Photoplay 1930

Yellow Peril

Growing up, I often associated orchids with female Asian beauty; from pictures of Anna May Wong with orchids in her hair, my grandmother's orchid collection to Yves Saint Laurent perfume *Opium Orchidicee de Chine* with orchid extracts.

The perfume's linking of opium and orchids is not arbitrary and holds within it a sad past, that the brand insensitively romanticizes. The Opium wars came about at the same time as Orchidelirium and very likely funded many of the expeditions. Considering Queen Victoria was an avid Orchid collector and the opium "trade" with China brought Britain today's equivalent of almost a billion dollars. During the 18th century England was in large debt to China because of its imports of silks, ceramics and teas²³. To even the score board, they grew opium in their colony of India and then smuggled it into China. Despite China outlawing the drug, it ravished the country. The Opium Wars began when China tried to stop the illegal importing of Opium and England fought back and won. Yet in English press at the time, Asians were depicted as "barbarians" because of their addiction to Opium that the British pushed. It was around this this time that the concept of "Yellow Peril" emerged. Yellow peril is a racist notion that East Asian people are a threat to the Western World.²⁴

In 1882, American created the "Chinese exclusion act", which outlawed the Chinese from immigrating to the states. Chinese were a huge labor force for the dangerous and deadly job of building railroads. Yet white Americans were afraid of Chinese taking their jobs though so few of them wanted that kind of arduous and precarious work. Yellow peril became a scape goat for lessening power of England's empire and USA domestic policy failures. This anxiety has persisted from the in-

ternment of Japanese Americans to the current surging of hate crimes against Asian Americans in the time of coronavirus.²⁵

As Dr. Gary Y. Okihiro describes “Margins and Mainstreams,” “the fear, whether real or imagined, arose from the fact of the rise of nonwhite peoples and their defiance of white supremacy. And while serving to contain the Other, the idea of the yellow peril also helped to define the white identity, within both a nationalist and an internationalist frame”²⁶.

Noam Chomsky, speaks about how yellow peril exists today in the USA because of Trumps inability to take responsibility for the poor decisions that cost lives. The former president instead blames it on China, such as labeling the various Kung flu.²⁷ Actor John Cho puts it beautifully when is states: “Coronavirus reminds Asian Americans like me that belonging is conditional”²⁸



Opium Orchidee De Chine by Yves Saint Laurent

Unemployment

Looking over at all my dormant orchids, I deeply relate. In March 2020, I was in Chicago preparing for to share a work-in-progress of the performance *Orchid*. I had received a grant through Chicago Dance makers forum and had invited friends as well as curators from spaces that I hoped would produce the final presentation. My partner, Milad, at that time flew from Utah to Chicago to see the performance as well as set up his own exhibition in town. The morning of my performance March 13th, I received an email about the beginning of the coronavirus and the importance of social distancing. The performance was cancelled. Soon after, Milad's exhibition was cancelled. My dance studio was closed. My sublease was ending by the end of the month. With all this, my partner suggested I fly to Utah with him till this all blows over, both of us thinking it would be just a couple of months.

In Utah, I was unmotivated and unsure of how to continue with the orchid piece. What was I working towards anyways with no presentation in site? Still, I tried at times to rehearse in our one-bedroom basement apartment, in our living room/dining room/office/dance studio. My partner taught online from the bedroom.

I was hoping to return to Chicago in the summer to teach and finally present *Orchid*. I was speaking to people at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), where I taught every summer. But the talk kept changing; from classes in person, to online, to less hours, to no responses at all. I finally emailed them the day I was supposed to begin teaching, asking what was happening. They replied that they didn't know. A few weeks later, I got an email that my boss, the head of continuing studies had been laid off with another over 100 staff members

at SAIC. I was officially unemployed along with many others, with only cancelled performances and nothing coming up in the near future. Two-thirds of artists during this pandemic face unemployment.

Looking over at my orchids, not blooming yet alive, I was grateful that I was surviving, even if I was not blooming. I was given the gift of free time much of what an artist dream's of, but I found it hard to focus given the lack of deadlines and also the unconscious grief. The grief of unrealized projects, loss of loved ones, and loneliness. While I was struggling to find structure and meaning with my time, my partner worked harder than ever. He was figuring out how to move classes online, constantly checking in on students, and joining committees at the university to help with pandemic relief and social justice. His dormancy was not lack of work then, but rather the latency of his own creative projects and self-care. I saw this in others as well who are essential workers and friends who have full time jobs while taking care of their kids' education from home. They are not thriving but rather persevering as creative and personal dreams lay in the backburner, waiting.



Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid
Janet Marinelli
Conservation Apr 01, 2020

Mycelium

Nearly half the orchids in the wild within North America are endangered. Orchids are like the canary in a coal mine, they show us how our environment is damaged. The engendering of orchids is happening due to overharvesting, logging and climate change. This destroys the mycelium as well as the insects that orchids are dependent on.²⁹

Mycelium is a fungus, an underground network that feed and communicate with each other, other plants, and their surroundings. Mycelium is a way to re-imagine mutual effort, its rhizomes reaching out and connecting with its community in a non-hierarchical way. Orchids in the wild are reliant on this mycelium, they cannot grow without it. If a wild orchid is dormant it needs these fungi to reawaken it.³⁰ Dormancy is essential for sustainability but it can also be incredibly painful. As we see in the performing arts community, our unemployment has made survival precarious and challenging, yet it has also enabled us to rethink systems and structures.

Much like the wild orchids, to come out of this dormancy and to grow, we require connection. Connection is difficult in this time when we cannot physically be in the same space. How do we remain together and linked to one another limited to not only our field or even in our own species?

During the Summer of 2020 emerged the document *Creating New Futures: Working Guidelines for Ethics & Equity in Presenting Dance & Performance*. It is an in-progress document collectively authored and compiled at currently 117 pages and growing. In the document, performing artists, curators and other workers in the field discuss of how we are dealing with pandemic as well as how to build new systems that are anti-racist and sustainable. I was not alone in my pre-pandemic life of

jumping from residency to residency, with no security and no saving. It was not sustainable. Other performing artists were facing similar realization from no health insurance and dependence on the gig economy. The document also confronts structuralism racism, sexism and classism that exists in our society and also in the performance sphere. The document brainstorms how we can use this time to come to gather and build new sustainable equitable systems within the performing arts.

Because our systems were never working, and we all knew it. They are unsustainable, and we know it. They are inequitable, and we know it. They rely on a scarcity mentality and on the precarious labor of freelance artists working with no safety net. COVID-19 has only revealed the inequities inherent in the system. It is time for radical change, to dismantle structures that we have inherited in our field from colonialism/ slavery/ capitalism/ neoliberalism and to rebuild.

Because this dismantling extends beyond our field into the broader culture, this work needs to be done collectively by the entire field. This is not the work of artists alone. It is the work of institutions, theaters, funders, libraries, schools, colleges, art centers, universities, residency centers, studios and more. We must lead together to work and act towards equity and shared risk in our field. This is and must be a mutual effort to radically reimagine our ecosystems.³¹



Three Pillars of White Supremacy

The discrimination and fear of being an outsider is not limited to Asian Americans. It also extends to Middle Eastern and Latinx from our “War on terror” to building the wall. Yet different communities of people of color experience different kinds of oppression which are sometimes opposed to one another. For example, the terms of BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color) were created to differentiate from POCs in how the exploitation and violence of BIPOC peoples is foundational to the formation of the US. In the article “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing” by Andrea Smith, she writes about the danger of the three pillars of white supremacy. She argues that communities of colors have been affected by racism in different ways and how this knowledge can enable us not to oppress other minorities. She breaks it down into Slavery/Capitalism, Genocide/Colonialism and Orientalism/War. Slavery/Capitalism looks at the anti-blackness racism as beginning with slavery and then continuing through the prison system. Because this system is based on labor, it is important that as many people be marked as “black” as possible. Genocide/Colonialism is then destruction of indigenous population and their lands. It is based on erasure, so it is important that as few as possible people be marked “Native”. So even though BIPOC are linked in their painful histories the agendas and enactments are opposing. She then writes that in Orientalism/War looks at the othering and foreign threats of Middle-Eastern, Latinos, and Asian Americans.³² It is the reason behind the Muslim, migrant cages, and “yellow peril”.

In 2020, the poet Cathy Park Hong released the book

Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning. It filled the feeds of many of my Asian American friends and was discussed as one of the most important books to come out about Asian American identity in a while. In the book she shares her Korean American upbringing and experience of racism. She also confronts the model minority myth. For example, she points out that the model minority myth was created to hurt both Asian Americans and other minorities. It again like orientalism, blankets all Asians Americans together without looking at for example the huge financial dispersity between different ethnicities. It also paints the picture that we are all fine, even while Asian Americans in college have the highest suicide rate. But also, it was created in order to put other minorities down. While in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, only allowed already high achieving Asian Americans to come to the states, such as doctors and engineers. Also, the myth was perpetuated as anti-blackness by pitting Asians against blacks when Asian Americans didn't have to face a history of enslavement as well as property ownership and loan discrimination.

Cathy park Hong poignantly states:

When I hear the phrase “Asians are next in line to be white,” I replace the word “white” with “disappear.” Asians are next in line to disappear. We are reputed to be so accomplished, and so law-abiding, we will disappear into this country’s amnesiac fog. We will not be the power but become absorbed by power, not share the power of whites but be stooges to a white ideology that exploited our ancestors. This country insists that our racial identity is beside the point, that it has nothing to do with being bullied, or passed over for promotion, or cut off every time we talk.³³

Grandmother's Livingroom Part Two

Sitting in my grandmother's orchid filled living room as a child, I understood the contradiction of needing to be an American and holding onto one's heritage. My mother was born in Japan but came to the states around the age of eight. She rarely spoke at all in school and if she did it was Japanese. Her teacher then came to my grandparent's home and told them only to speak English to their children, even in their own home. Seeking to belong, they complied and my mother lost her Japanese so I didn't grow up speaking it.

My family was not interned. My grandmother was in Japan during the time. My grandfather grew up as a Japanese American in Hawaii, where there was only one internment camp for those most "suspect", because so much of the labor in Hawaii depended on Japanese Americans. However, many of their friends were interned and I listened to their stories of leaving behind homes and business to live in a shed with one's whole family. I understood at a young age how my belonging was indeed conditional. This was only affirmed by the encounters I had growing up.

While in kindergarten, the older kids would taunt me by pulling their eyes and puffing out their shirts to imitate boobs, reciting the chant "Chinese Japanese look at these". But then I showed them differently by growing bosoms as an adolescent. This only caused more taunting. On the street or waiting for bus stop, men would catcall me on the street as saying "hi china doll!" I wasn't even eighteen. I remember being in an elevator and a man asked if I gave massages. I was so unfamiliar with the stereotype that I really had no idea what he was speaking about.

My dream as a child was to be an actress. I never really

pursued it professionally mostly because of racism. As a high school senior, I was cast as the Chinese waitress in *Gypsy*. A very small part for a senior, and also a stereotypical part given I was the only Asian female in the theater department. In the play, mama rose dropped a fork and the waitress picks it up. On stage, I was feeling so upset about being asked to play this role that when mama rose dropped the spoon, I rolled my eyes and slammed the spoon back on the table. There was an uproarious laughter by the audience. This then gave me hope, seeing how I could funnel my rage into acting and I continued to pursue it in college. However, after graduating from college in New York, the only parts I got called back for were the following; a Korean stripper, Geisha, and karate kid. I stopped pursuing professional acting and started to make my own work.



Spring

In the spring, like the wild orchids, I was beginning to come out of my dormancy. I was offered an online teaching gig and an online residency. I was about to begin my first in-person residency since the pandemic. My partner and I drove out to the residency, Sitka in Oregon from Utah, a 13-hour drive with a stop in Baker's City. At our Airbnb, my partner told me he had some bad news. He told me about the Atlanta shooting of eight people, most of whom were Asian American women. He looked at me with worried eyes and held me. But the news didn't sink in. I then feverishly read articles, friends posts, but it still wasn't registering. I then passed out at the grandma decor Airbnb, exhausted from the drive.

The next day we arrived a Sitka, which is on the coast. It is the center for art and ecology full of ancient Sitka trees, moss covered ground, many wild flowers and even the home to an endangered silver spot butterfly. The perfect setting to once bloom and pick up working on the orchid performance.

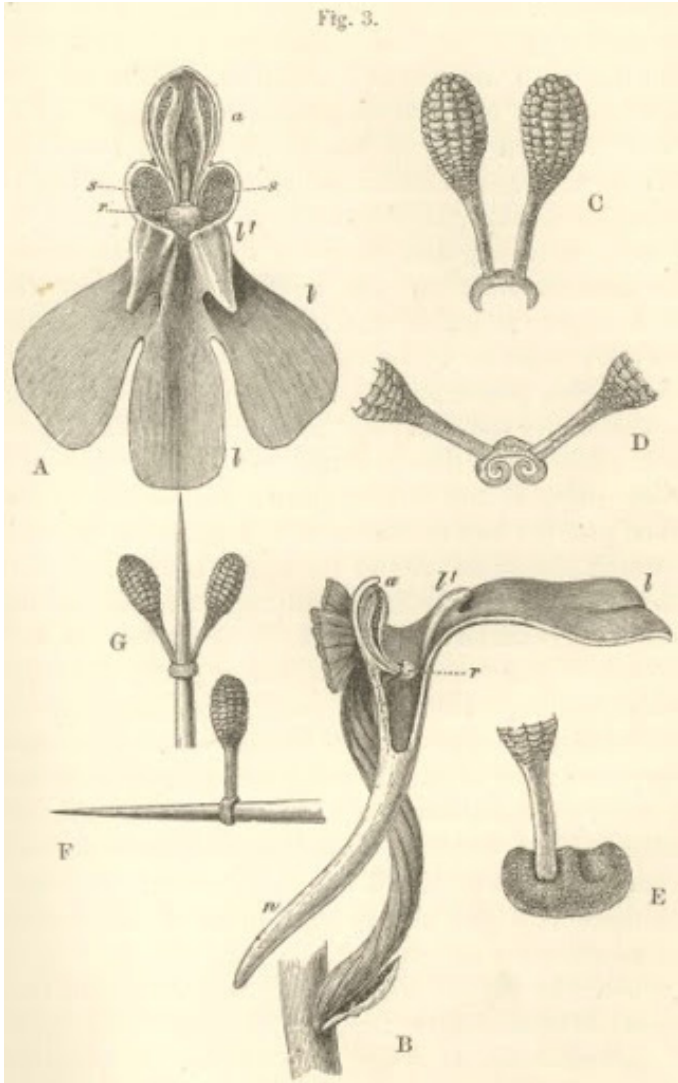
The studio was what I dream of in a studio. Wood floors for dancing and wide windows with a gorgeous view of the forest. The first day in my studio was when the news finally hit. I just sat there crying. I had various impending deadlines, from the presentation of my online residency, teaching and also the beginning of this Oregon residency. But I just sat there, weeping in my studio.





Movement practice for Orchid
Sitka, Oregon 2021

Fig. 3.



Structure of a *Orchis pyramidalis*
Illustration by Conrad Martens
British and Foreign Orchids by Charles Darwin, 1862

Desired orchids

Orchids are the most smuggled plant in the world. The illegal wild orchid trade devastates the environment from which they were found. Orchids are delicate creatures, so even just harvesting a few of a particular kind can wipe out a whole species.

Perhaps they are desired for their medicinal benefits ranging from cancer cures to impotence, culinary uses such as in various Turkish desserts, and of course, their beauty. They are, might I add, also simply sexy flowers. If a movie has orchid in the title, you can assume you will get your quota of violence and sex such as in *Wild Orchid*, *The White Orchid*, *Blue Orchid*, and the list goes on. Georgia O'Keeffe painted orchids and, like most of her work, came to represent female genitalia despite her protests.

Hysteria

During the pandemic, I had a myomectomy, a surgery that removes the fibroids (like cysts) on the uterus. I chose to do this because it was the first time since I had been diagnosed seven years ago, that I had a few months to recover with no upcoming performances, residencies or teaching. It's crazy that it took a pandemic to give myself a few months off for a vital surgery. It was while recovering that I began to write this article. Waking up from the surgery was one of the most painful moments in my life. My doctor recommended that due to the size of fibroids that it would have been easier and less painful to remove my uterus, to have a hysterectomy. Hysterectomy comes from the Latin *hystericus* "of the womb" and so does the word hysterical. A condition thought to be exclusive to women – making us uncontrollably and neurotically insane owing to a dysfunction of the uterus. The cure for which was an insane asylum and or Hysterectomy and later in the 20th century, the myth that it was treated by orgasm.³⁴ A female doctor of course prescribed the latter and it would have been my preferred treatment.

After watching the film *Promising Young Woman*, I was shaken to the core. It is a revenge film about sexual assault and it looks at how as a society we value promising young men over women. I began thinking of the case of Chanel Miller and Brock Turner, and how his swim times were posted at the end of newspaper articles. The lawyer and newspaper kept highlighting what a promising young man he was, and because of that should not be held accountable for rape. But what about his victim who for years chose to be anonymous. What about her promise? She wrote an incredible and devastating letter about

about her assault. Later the woman came out as Chanel Miller, a BFA writing major and Chinese American. In an interview between her and Cathy Park Hong,³⁵ Park Hong points out the statement by the police that the shooter “had a bad day” recalling the narrative around Miller’s assaulter. The painting a picture of the attackers as good normal people makes them seem less responsible for their crimes.

My ethnicity, gender and sexuality (or rather being sexualized) was often linked together growing up. My cat-calling felt different than what my white friends experienced, and often my Asianness was pointed out as part of the harassment from the fantasy of a small vagina or geisha ways.

In my 20s, I tried to dress as grungy as possible so to become invisible to men. But invisibility is dangerous. It is the disappearing that Cathy Park Hong spoke of in terms of “We will not be the power but become absorbed by power.”³⁶

Sexuality is not the same as being sexualized or sexualizing. In being sexualized there is the creating of the “other”, making someone separate, an object as literally in the case when being called “china doll.”

Sexuality is more of an internal feeling, an internal desire and sometimes a coming together, a mutualism, an empathy, a becoming.



Bee and orchid
Photo by Nicolas J Vereecken

The Wasp and the Orchid

In the case of the *Ophrys* orchid, it looks like the body of a female wasp. The male wasp will then hump this orchid, collecting pollen on its body. It will then jump to another orchid and make love to it, leaving pollen behind from the previous orchid.

In a *Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write about this pollinating process of the orchids and the bee, through the idea of becoming.

Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.). But this is true only on the level of the strata – a parallelism between two strata such that a plant organization on one imitates an animal organization on the other. At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid, and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.³⁷

Deleuze and Guattari do not believe the orchid is “imitating the wasp”, instead, it has become the wasp, and the wasp has become the orchid. This becoming is the forming of mutualism and a rhizome. The orchid is not tricking the wasp, but rather it is an empathy and a joining. Most orchids have both male and female parts. Ana Roxanne an ambient intersexed musician spoke about the empowering of the symbol of the

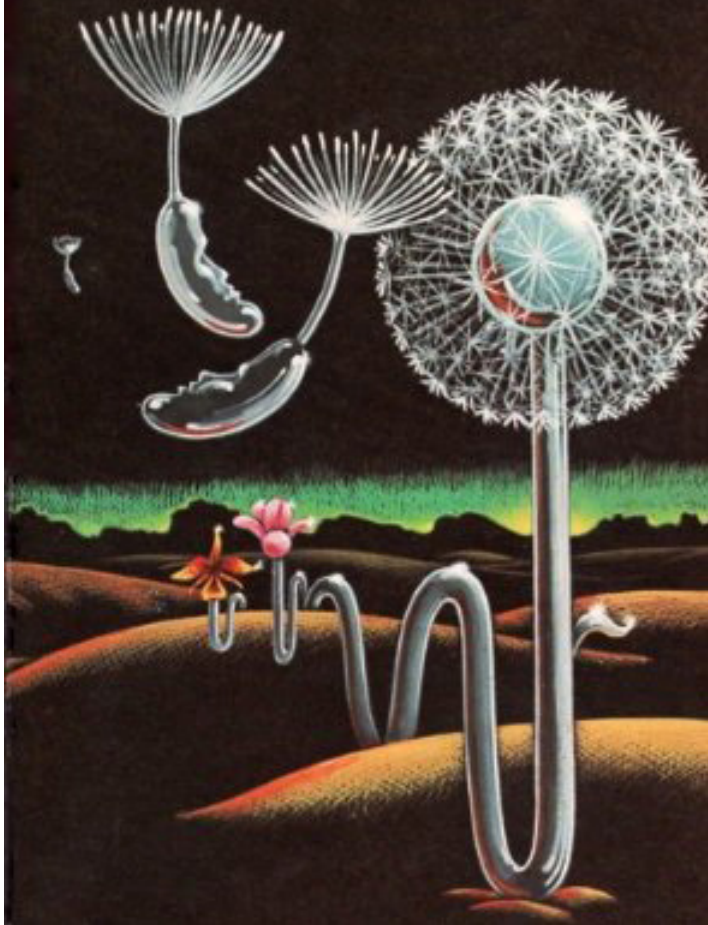
orchid in her album about a flower. An orchid having both parts could possibly self-pollinate but rather chooses interspecies procreation.

In the *Pollinators of Eden*, a 1970s sci-fi orchid novel, a planet is filled with seductive orchids which manages to mate and use both female and male humans as pollinators.³⁹ Growing up both my identity and sexuality or rather sexualization was put on me. I had to leave the US to understand my sexuality and my Asianness. I lived in Berlin in XB Liegstrasse: a lesbian, women, transgender squat where things began to open up for me. I felt like the orchid in the novel at the time seeking through my desire to pollinate and create hybrid human plant babies.

JOHN BOYD
The Pollinators
of Eden



SCIENCE
FICTION



The Pollinators of Eden
Peter Cross (Illustrator)



シシタケノキコク 大正十二年六月十八日



Dendrobium Erythroglossum Hayata
Taiwan Research Forest Institute
Collected by Ryoza Kanehira

Ancestors

Living in Japan, my Asianness was no longer commented on, but rather my whiteness, my English colonist roots. Then, in Taiwan, I became aware of my Japanese colonist roots. Inside me was both the colonizer and the colonized, human and plant.

My grandmother grew up in Japan during World War II, was occupied by the US military. My grandfather was part of the Japanese colonial workforce and occupied Taiwan. My ancestry contains both being occupied and occupying.

Orchids are a way I connect my family to myself. For my grandmother, her orchids were companions from Asia who reminded her of family history. They were the epitome of beauty she sought to embody, elegant, refined and vibrant. For her father, my great grandfather, working in Orchid Island was connected to his passion for conservation. Yet, because he worked under a colonialist agenda and through the lens of science, it was also a way to classify and control. For me, orchids spoke to my identity as a connection to heritage, dormancy, and sexuality through a complex linkage to imperialism and spirituality. It also speaks to the future, both in terms of care of our environment as well as sustainability of the performance art sector, of which I am a part.

There is an ongoing debate in the science community of whether orchids are 26 or 112 million years old. My mind can't fathom that vast scope of time, I can barely decipher the difference in weeks at this moment well enough to a discrepancy of 80 million years. Biologists from Harvard, in 2005, identified the fossilized remains of bee carrying orchid pollinia, placing the flower than to be least 85 million years old, co-existing with dinosaurs.⁴⁰

So, in sense these flowers are also my ancestors. They co-existed with ferns and dinosaurs. They have an understanding of time and deep reliance that I cannot begin to comprehend. A few months of latency is perhaps nothing to them, after you've existed for millions of years.

Endnotes

- 1 Verwoert, J. (n.d.). *Exhaustion and Exuberance* [Pamphlet]. Boston: Center for Advanced Visual Studies MIT.
- 2 Orlean, Susan. *The Orchid Thief*. New York: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2014. Page 56
- 3 “Plant of the Week.” Phalaenopsis; Moth Orchids. Accessed December 14, 2020.
- 4 Petruzzello, Melissa. “List of plants in the family Orchidaceae”. Encyclopedia Britannica, 29 May. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/list-of-plants-in-the-family-Orchidaceae-2075389>. Accessed 17 May 2021
- 5 Pollan, M. (2014). *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World*. New York: Random House.
- 6 Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- 7 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 8 Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. New York: One World, 2020.
- 9 Wu, C.-J., & Lay, J.-G. (2013). Colonial Powers and Geographic Naming: A Case Study of Orchid Island (Lanyu), Taiwan. *Lecture Notes in Geoinformation and Cartography*, 181–194.
- 10 Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- 11 Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter a Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- 12 Todd, Zoe. “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 4–22.
- 13 Sundberg, Juanita. “Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies.” *Cultural Geographies: Special section: Indigeneity and Ontology* 21, no. 1 (January 2014): 33–47.

- 14 Doyle, Mika. "How Shinto Influenced Marie Kondo's KonMari Method Of Organizing." *Bustle*, 24 Jan. 2019,
- 15 Cock-Starkey, Claire. "The Dangerous and Highly Competitive World of Victorian Orchid Hunting." *Mental Floss*, November 18, 2016.
- 16 Ibid
- 17 Endersby, Jim. *Orchid: A Cultural History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- 20 Endersby, Jim. *Orchid: A Cultural History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- 21 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Colbert B, 1998.
- 22 Hooks, Bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Pluto Press, 2000.
- 23 "How Britain Got China Hooked on Opium I Empires of Dirt." Hosted by Zing Tsjeng, *Vice World News*, 28 Aug. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbHAWNQRV70.
- 24 Mishra, Pankaj. *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia*. Picador, 2012.
- 25 Wei Tchen, John Kuo, and Dylan Yeats. *Yellow Peril!* New York: Verso Books, 2014.
- 26 Okihiro, Gary Y. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. University of Washington Press, 2014.
- 27 Noam Chomsky: Trump's Attacks on China Are a Continuation of 'Yellow Peril' Fear-Mongering." Interview with Noam Chomsky, *Democracy Now*, 18 Apr. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0KsN4ijdFQ&t=216s.

- 28 Cho, John. "Op-Ed: John Cho: Coronavirus Reminds Asian Americans like Me That Our Belonging Is Conditional." *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Apr. 2020.
- 29 Hand, Justine. "Everything You Need to Know About North American Native Orchids." *Gardenista*, *Gardenista*, 1 June 2018
- 30 Rasmussen, Hanne N., and Finn N. Rasmussen. "Orchid Mycorrhiza: Implications of a Mycophagous Life Style." *Oikos*, vol. 118, no. 3, 2009, pp. 334–345.
- 31 Creating New Futures: Working Guidelines for Ethics & Equity in Presenting Dance & Performance. 29 June 2020, drive.google.com/drive/folders/1F-PfkWYNuOMtRzyvLKXOABKUIXhTx2sz.
- 32 Smith, Andrea. "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing." *Color of Violence: the INCITE! Anthology*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- 33 Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. New York: One World, 2020.
- 34 Mankiller, Wilma Pearl. *The Reader's Companion to US Women's History*, Boston: MIT Press, 1998.
- 35 Kahn, Mattie. "Cathy Park Hong and Chanel Miller on Making Art Out of Grief: A Conversation", *Glamour*, March 24, 2021.
- 36 Hong, Cathy Park. (2021). *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. New York: One World, 2020.
- 37 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 38 Kim, Michelle. "How Ana Roxanne Made the Most Soothing, Meditative Album About Being Intersex." *Them*, 26 Jan. 2021.
- 39 Boyd, John. *The Pollinators of Eden*. Wildside Press, 2017.
"First Orchid Fossil Puts Showy Blooms at Some 80 Million Years Old."
- 40 "First Orchid Fossil Puts Showy Blooms at Some 80 Million Years Old." *ScienceDail*. August 30, 2007.





