The Global Majority Performing Memory

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THE GLOBAL MAJORITY PERFORMING MEMORY

Kenneth Keng

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ABSTRACT

Artists in the Global Majority offer a unique and vital perspective on the act and the art of performing memory onstage. A number of theatrical works have been selected to represent the broader field within and around New York City over the years 2019 to the present 2023. These works are discussed as experienced by the author, as well as how they are in conversation with one another thematically and dramaturgically. This survey of contemporary work within the field concludes with an in-depth interview of the artist Aya Ogawa discussing the role representation and formation of memory plays in their own theatrical work.
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I wish to thank Kelsey Cheng for being that one person who believed in me until enough other people did;

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and finally my classmates, for all their emotional, artistic and material support, and for making joyful work that will continue to inspire me until the day I die.

Thank you all for showing me what peace can feel like.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAIN BODY</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED ARTISTS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

N/A
INTRODUCTION

The following is a survey of theatrical artists of the Global Majority performing memory in and around New York City, as well as an in-depth interview I personally conducted with Aya Ogawa. It is written in the interview format option for eventual inclusion in the contemporary performing arts publication Currents.
The Global Majority Performing Memory
by Kenneth Keng

“Memory comes with personality. Or they’re the same thing.”

-Arkady Martine

How long will it be before we are the only ones who are allowed to remember? This was a question asked during a drunken evening’s commiseration among Philippine scholars studying theater in New York after the election of Ferdinand Marcos’ son in 2022. The current Philippine president and his family have for years called for the erasure of his father’s crimes from our country’s historical record (Cabico). The ascension of Bongbong Marcos to power has thus spread fears among Filipinos of oncoming government censorship (Lema). This is not to discount the brave efforts of theatre makers that created subversive work while suffering under the Philippine Martial Law period (“Teatro Testimonio”). But as someone who has benefited from the freedoms my forebears fought and died for, I wondered how long it would be before the only way to elude censorship safely would be to stage work an ocean away from my own shores?

My fears imparted a dire urgency to this contemporary exploration of memory performed by members of the global majority in and around New York. As Diane Taylor (XVIII) writes in The Archive and the Repertoire, ‘embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities… not everyone comes to “culture” or modernity through writing.’ While to an extent all memory is performance (Plate and Smelik 2), the work concerning memory detailed here takes the form of a performance on some sort of stage in front of a live audience.
I am limiting the works surveyed here to those created by members of the global majority, both to center our narratives and because I am interested in how, as Plate and Smelik (3) paraphrase Paul John Eakin’s book Living Autobiographically, ‘memory can be an act of identity formation that serves to narrate and produce the self’. I am curious as to the degree in which cultural assimilation affects the artistry of those of us in the global majority who come or have been forced to come here to the United States. Speaking for myself, living in the US has changed my own artistic practice. Before I came here, the very idea of a solo show smacked of Western individualistic self-indulgence, and I was raised to believe that issues with one’s family were to be buried with as many secrets as possible. I have since crafted and performed a solo show centered around the memories of my Hokkien grandmother’s deathbed.

While acknowledging the value of non-English productions as well as the particular pleasures of plays built from the ground up to be bilingual (Baines et al.), the majority of the works surveyed here will all have been predominantly performed in English. This is less to do with its prevalence in New York theater and more to do with my class privilege and particular order of colonizers leaving me with fluency in only Tagalog and English.

I have also selected works that avoid the potential traps of memory as outlined by Viet Thanh Nguyen's Just Memory: War and the Ethics of Remembrance, endeavoring to note what they are remembering against as much as what they are remembering for. While there is always the danger of paving over a group’s collective voice by highlighting an individual’s memory, the following works are particularly deft in posing questions as opposed to prematurely ‘reconciling the pains of a past when the historical conditions that produced such pain have not yet
themselves been resolved’ (Nguyen 148). I recall my elementary education extolling the virtues of the American colonial period in the Philippines, with those decades being depicted as righteous reconciliation after the barely- (if at all) acknowledged Philippine-American War. The fact that I am writing this in English while the son of Richard Nixon’s pet Philippine dictator (Bonner) is president demonstrates that the effects of the violence the US has inflicted upon my country are ongoing and constant.

The first play I’d like to discuss, KISS, originally written in 2014, has been described by its Chilean author Guillermo Calderon as ‘a play about how theatre aims to reach out across cultures in a sort of earnest and genuine way, but at the same time fails at doing it’ (Dodgson). When I saw its latest iteration at Philadelphia’s Wilma Theater in February of 2023 and directed by Fadi Skeiker, everything from the lively Syrian pop music being piped onto the street to the provocatively romantic poster made it seem like it was a translated adaptation of a lighthearted Syrian romantic dramedy performed and staged in the style of a Syrian daytime TV soap opera. The play’s entire first act did nothing to dissuade me of this, from its onstage depiction of an almost luridly pastel affluent Aleppo apartment to the cast’s overly exaggerated physicality evocative of clowning played to comedic effect.

For the second act however, the purported original author of the play is brought into the space for a talkback session with the cast. It is revealed that they have drastically, disastrously misunderstood the play; many of what they thought to be comedic tropes turned out to be allusions to the many brutal abuses of the Assad regime. The play itself was set in a living room not so much to evoke a soap opera but because almost all their theaters had been destroyed; one
character’s zany behavior was a result of having been exposed to the government’s nerve gas. The play’s third act begins with the cozy living room spectacularly being blown apart before our eyes thanks to Jian Jung’s exceptional scenic design, with its furniture and walls scattering to the corners of the theater to reveal the war torn ruins of Aleppo as it exists today, all while the actors desperately attempt to depict the kind of horrific tragedy they never expected to have to embody.

The way KISS moved through a pastel farce and into what was, to the actors onstage, nearly unspeakable atrocity brought to my mind the particular way I’ve had to learn to recount events in the Philippines to people from the US. The everyday horrors that I and my friends have grown inured to are considered too upsetting to casually discuss or make light of. Thus a memory which I would, among Filipino friends, freely bring up to process and laugh about together is usually something I’ve found I’ve had to be cautious in bringing up if Americans are around, so as to spare their sensibilities. I mention this not to express any kind of imagined superior emotional fortitude on my part— if anything, I’m jealous— it is only to note that in the Philippines we’ve had to learn to laugh at our country’s unending ills, because otherwise we’d be crying all the time.

If KISS opened gently and ended with figurative and literal devastation, Kaneza Schaal’s KLII went in the opposite direction, beginning with a deeply unsettling depiction of the brutal colonizer King Leopold II of Belgium and ending with beautiful stories about the creator’s immediate family. Upon entering the space at the Chelsea Factory in January 2023, we in the audience were invited to wash our hands with soap. We then sat in front of Kaneza, resplendent in regalia and fake beard, embodying King Leopold II upon his throne, feeling as though he was
holding court. I felt both awe at the spectacle and apprehension at the implied potential for authoritarian violence. Schaal as King Leopold then ascended a high staircase to loom over us and then began a dictatorial tirade reminiscent of the kind of totalitarian that the US government would prop up during the Cold War. After this, Schaal then descends, removes her makeup and tells us about the soap that King Leopold II would force the people of the Congo Free State to make on pain of amputating their hands. She then ends with a story of her grandfather and his legacy of courage and kindness in fleeing Rwanda and establishing a safe haven for refugees in Burundi.

We are invited to share in the comforting ritual of drinking tea, and to take home the teacups. At the bottom of the teacups however, visible only once we’ve left the darkness of the theater, are small painted red hands. This is the final rejoinder in Schaal’s piece, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging both the kindness and the evil that leaves its residue in our colonial history, never letting one fully erase the other in our practice of collective memory.

Going off of the intimate familial recounting of Kaneza Schaal’s family life we move onto a decidedly less than ideal family situation as depicted in Hansol Jung’s *Wolf Play*. Where Kaneza’s grandfather created a path and place of safety for those who very much wanted it, *Wolf Play* is about the phenomenon of US couples ‘re-homing’ adopted children through online message boards. US couples who had adopted internationally but, later regretting the decision for various reasons, attempted to pass off their adopted children to other US homes via Yahoo and Facebook groups. The Wolf in question is a small Korean boy named Jeenu, whose original adoptive father, Peter, sells to the married couple Ash and Robin. Peter states that the boy is
simply too much for his family to handle given that he now has a biological child on the way. Once Jeenu becomes more comfortable with Ash and Robin, Peter then begins to display a despicable sense of seller’s remorse, made all the more gross by his obvious homophobia directed towards Ash and Robin. Towards the end of the play he initiates a custody battle with Ash and Robin, and the play concludes with neither side winning as Jeenu is declared a ward of the state.

In the lobby of the MCC Theater where I saw it in February of 2023 was, as I have previously mentioned, an exhibition detailing the phenomenon of how legally sketchy online adoptions were taking children away from the cultures they were born into. If, as Maurice Hawlbachs asserts, ‘it is in society that people normally acquire their memories’ (38), and memory is such a vital part of one’s identity, what will happen to the memories of this child, taken as he was from the society of his birth? What kind of identity can he then form for himself once he must ultimately grow out of the Wolf he has created to protect himself as a child?

While there is obviously much more to unpack in the play, with regards to performing memory I am struck by the inherent privilege of Pete, Ash and Robin, and the power of their combined narratives to render Jeenu, with all his opinions, identity and desires, faceless. I mean this literally- Jeenu is depicted as a faceless puppet. Every other character spends the play projecting their identities and desires upon his blank wooden face.

By the end of the play I too was projecting my own fears and wants onto the puppet Jeenu, even as I realized how the puppet emphasized how little power Jeenu had over his
situation- he literally could not move without the puppeteer, and later even needed the help of Robin and Ash when the puppeteer became too upset to move the puppet.

Another example of attempting to reconcile filial love and echoing Nguyen’s ‘competing claims to justice’ (150) in the act of remembering would be Adil Mansoor’s Amm(i)gone. In this piece, most recently staged at the University Settlement’s Speyer Hall in New York City in January of 2023, Mansoor attempts to connect with his mother by inviting her to share her insights from the Quran and Hadith to help inform Mansoor’s analysis of the play Antigone, which at its core is about conflicting ways to show love. While I have been told that one is not supposed to bring up religion in polite conversation here in the US, I was raised to see religion as the fundamental way to understand how the universe works, and therefore how all your relationships would be contextualised. To fail to reconcile differing religious opinions is to fail to agree upon how to be good to one another. This effort at connection originally stemmed from Mansoor’s mother’s turning toward her Islamic faith in an attempt to save Mansoor’s soul in the afterlife when she learned of his queerness. As he has stated in an article by onStage Pittsburgh:

“With Amm(i)gone, I am working to center my own queer, Muslim, and intersecting experience. I believe the work resonates with anyone who has loved someone with resoundingly different beliefs. I realize that because of my mother’s beliefs, it is improbable that she will ever see this work. However, I am working diligently to create something she would struggle to hate.” (“OnStage Pittsburgh Adil Mansoor’s New Work ‘Amm(i)Gone’ Explores Conflicting Experiences at the Kelly Strayhorn Theater”)

Glenn Potter-Takata’s piece Yonsei F*ck F*ck takes on a more abstract but no less affecting form of performing memory through the medium of Butoh and then, delightfully, a late night TV talk show. If Butoh itself was originally created by Tatsumi Hijikata as a means of
reconstructing Japanese dance in the face of encroaching post-WWII Western influences (Menon), Potter-Takata describes his work as imagining ‘a future where the cultural erasure stemming from Japanese internment camps has been overcorrected and distorted into a value system where anime and Japanese junk food have been assimilated into the pantheon of buddhas and bodhisattvas’ (“Yonsei F*ck F*ck Pt. 13”).

This overwriting and overcorrecting of memory culminates in a massive inflatable Pikachu that invades the space of the American late night TV talk show (that other celebrity culture-inspired ritual serving to advertise and valorise further consumption of empty entertainment), complete with pointless games involving, among other things, tossing tiny squeaky Pikachu toys into a distant hoop.

Speaking of pointless games but with deadly consequences, Amalia Oliva Rojas’ play How To Melt ICE, which I saw performed in New York’s Julia de Burgos Performance and Arts Center in February of 2023, depicts the cat and mouse game of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents working to raid the homes of undocumented individuals. Based on Rojas’ lived experience as a child of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival law or (DACA), it details the harrowing precarity of people trying to make a life in New York within a society that cannot decide whether it was to exploit them for cheap labor or for cheap political points. The play deals with the role memory plays in imagining what one believes to be one’s actual homeland. Tatiana Mirabent’s intense portrayal of the Dreamer who has been led to believe that her place in the US is more legally secure than it actually is was particularly affecting.
Another piece dealing with relatively recent immigration is Modesto ‘Flako’ Jimenez’s new play, *Mercedes*, which I had the pleasure and privilege of being invited to an in-progress preview showing in April of 2023. As it is still unfinished I will not go into too much detail. I do wish to emphasize that even in its current form I was brought to tears due to how effectively Jimenez weaved the experience of being cared for by his dearly departed grandmother with the historical backdrop of US supported dictatorial oppression in the Dominican Republic. This further reinforced in me the feeling that, as a citizen of a weak country, it is impossible to remember our personal relationships outside of the influence wrought by more powerful nations. Trujillo’s atrocities were as inextricable from Jimenez’s memories of his family as Marcos’ atrocities are to the memories of my own family. Upon entering, myself and my companions were swiftly recruited by Mercedes into preparing a meal to share with the rest of the audience, which constituted the culmination of the piece for that evening. Chatting with Flako afterward, he talked about the necessity of making sure everyone had dinner after. “You’ve gotta provide food for the people, because look now- they’re all eating, they’re all chatting. Best way to slow down New Yorkers, and get a bit of community going. Otherwise they’d all leave to go on to the next thing. Unless you give them a reason to stop and appreciate what’s right here, they’ll always be focused on the next.”

That was not the only play in which I had the pleasure of getting to smell good cooking while watching it, as on that same weekend in April I went to see Christine Eve Cato’s play *Sancocho*. In it, a heavily pregnant Renata visits her much older sister Caridad to discuss their dying father’s will. Caridad refuses to engage in meaningful conversation unless Renata pauses
her fast paced lifestyle as an East Coast attorney to help her make traditional Puerto Rican sancocho, a hearty beef stew that requires many ingredients and a lot of time. As the stew cooked, a series of family secrets were brought out into the open as the sisters dealt with the stark differences in their memories of their abusive father, who it seems only tried to clean up his act after the younger sister was born, leaving Caridad and their mother to bear the brunt of their father’s brutality.

The smell of the sancocho permeated the theater as they were actually cooking down the ingredients on a working stove onstage. My desire to partake in the stew was tempered by remembering how difficult a simple communal sharing of food can be here in the US, where it can feel like every other person is allergic to something. In contrast to Flako's piece, the larger WP Theater that housed *Sancocho* placed a number of prominent signs assuring people that the stew being cooked was absent the nine major allergens. I did not, until that point, know that there were that many allergens, major or otherwise.

A work that I feel played brilliantly upon what an audience may or may not know is Shayok Misha Chowdhury’s *Public Obscenities*. When I saw it staged at Soho Rep’s Walker Street theater in March of 2023, it had a run time of nearly three hours. While I’ve seen many plays that can be improved by cutting out about twenty minutes, I did not want *Public Obscenities* to end. It’s simultaneously focused yet sprawling narrative about a Bengali-American doctoral candidate Choton returning to his native Kolkata with his boyfriend Raheem in order to conduct research on gender and sexuality gripped me the whole time through, despite, on reflection, almost nothing of hugely dramatic significance happening. The
couple stays in the home of Choton’s aunt and uncle, talking and eating and carefully setting evening mosquito nets as they look to contact queer locals to interview. Hovering in the background is their stay at home servant Jitesh, easily ignored by everyone except Raheem who did not grow up with a servant.

While the New York Times’ review euphemistically refers to Jitesh as a housekeeper, myself and the other Filipinos who watched appreciated the depiction of the stay at home servant we had all grown up with, only realizing later how the concept of a servant in the home seemed to make many of our American friends uncomfortable. That Chowdhury was able to bring across this detail so effortlessly to fellow Asians who are nonetheless unfamiliar with the additional caste dynamics that the Bengali characters bring up is most impressive.

*Public Obscenities* does eventually deal with the unwelcome evidence of potentially unsavory family history, but even this is handled in a matter-of-fact, decidedly nondramatic manner that I almost never see in depictions of Western family secret revelations. The memories the play evoked in me were a result of its totality rather than a specific plot point or singular dramaturgical device. From the set being so realistically rendered that I felt I could smell the humidity of the tropical clime to the family that took life’s inequities in stride (for better or worse), it was almost as though I was back and home and itching to leave.

Finally, Aya Ogawa’s play *The Nosebleed* was what originally inspired this article. In it, Aya portrays their son while a number of other actors portray multiple versions of Aya as they attempt to relate to and connect with their deceased father. *The Nosebleed* was originally
conceived as a play about failure in general, set against the context of the results of the 2016 US presidential elections. Ogawa’s devising participants would be asked to share their stories about failure as part of the generative process. Upon further development, it later became a play about what Ogawa considered their greatest failure up to that point— their inability to connect with their father before he died (American Theatre). When I saw it at the Lincoln Center in July 2023, the play ended with a funeral ritual where Ogawa invited members of the audience to participate by contributing messages that they wished they had relayed to their own fathers. While the play definitely did not shy away from exploring the potentially less savory aspects of Ogawa’s father’s character and history, the author did write in an ending with him being escorted into the afterlife by Princess Diana.

When I first interviewed Aya Ogawa in September of 2022, they expressed to me what they considered to be the value of heritage and cultural memory. They stated that despite their conflicted relationship with Japan, particularly with the misogyny that still permeates its contemporary culture, they are making an active effort to connect to the culture as a whole for the sake of their children. Ogawa hopes that by exposing their kids to Japan that the kids might form their own relationship to the culture and the country, which they would have the choice to take or leave. “I want them to know where they come from so they can own that. In Japan, they would be part of the dominant culture, and here, they would be a minority. I want them to experience that identity is a shifting thing, but armed with context, they can assert a measure of control.”
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Kenneth Keng: In your experience, what are the differences in how you experienced the acquisition of your memories while you were living in Japan as opposed to acquiring those memories when you're living in the US? How do you think the two countries' societal differences shaped your formation of memory within each of them?

Aya Ogawa: [laughs] I laugh because this seems like an impossible question to answer. And also, I'm not like a neuroscientist, so I don't really know how memories are formed. I've done a little bit of reading around the recall of memory and how every time you recall something your brain is creating or recreating or reinforcing certain neural pathways, but there's no guarantee that it's actually the same pathway or the same triggers. So that memory itself is this reconstruction every time you remember something and therefore is imperfect, essentially.

The way I characterize differences in memory have more to do with my own state of childhood development rather than maybe a societal context because the visual or sensory memories that I have are from my childhood, from age zero to ten. I've never even really thought about this. From age zero till around six I was living in America, in Texas and Georgia. And my memories of that time begin with things that are physical, like how my body felt in that outfit, or very strong sensory touch and taste. And they're really based in the home and family.

When I was in Japan, a lot of my time there, that is, the things that stayed with me are primarily social relationships, relationships with friends. Memories of environments too—my memory of certain environments are very, very clear and specific, such as the layout of my house or the texture of this wall or the color scheme of the living room, or, you know, the backyard and what kind of trees were there and digging holes in the ground, that kind of thing. Whereas earlier [in America], they’re much more fragmented. It's really like flashes of moments and experiences, but I have to extrapolate from that in order to piece it together or to create an environment or world.

KK: I suppose the question then becomes, do you find that when you translate that to your work, do you then find that you do more of that extrapolation depending on the period of time that you are mining or bringing forward?

AO: Well, in terms of The Nosebleed everything that I'm recalling or recreating as memory scenes are all from recent history. They're all from my adult life. Regardless of whether I was in Japan or whether I was in California or whatever. And so I recall these events very clearly, in great detail, specifically around that time of my life, from how I felt internally to the circumstances around that environment. And the thing is, while I think I may have talked about this before, when I finally arrived at the point where I was going to write this play, and it was
going to be around my father, somehow the moment that I started writing, I already instinctually knew that what themes what episodes I was going to write about, and so it came out very, very quickly. In my thought process, I wasn't like, did it happen this way? Or did it happen that way? It just was like, this is the way I remember it. This is the way I'm putting it down.

KK: Yes, I remember reading about you talking about that process. Once you went from, if I’m not mistaken, the original conceptualization of failure around 2016, then you decided, well ok this is about my father, then it kind of flowed out of you.

AO: Right? So in that initial path of writing, I feel like it was a pretty pure recounting of memory. But the thing about memory is that I don't know what I don't know. I feel like this is probably tied to my identity and my identity in relation to society. As soon as I say something, or make a statement or tell a story, I begin to doubt it. I begin to doubt the truthfulness of what I just said. Like even if I'm just talking to a friend about something stupid, you know, I'll say something. And then I'll be like, wait, is that really true? Is that really the way it happened? Is there a side of the story that I'm not seeing or didn't see?

KK: Where do you think that that comes from?

AO: I really think that it comes from being constantly gaslit.

KK: I'm so sorry.

AO: It's true, though. I just feel like nobody believes me. Like nobody. Like my experience of the world is constantly cast in doubt by American society or white patriarchal society or however you want to quantify it. And it's terrifying. And that's why working in autobiography like this is doubly terrifying for someone like me, because I'm scared that someone's going to come out and be like, that's not the way it happened! You know what I mean?

KK: Sure, just from the side characters in The Nosebleed, like if you did have a scene where one of them just jumped out and said that's not how it happened, I’d be like yeah that tracks.

AO: It's kind of like skirting the edge. I’m obviously trying to advocate for myself and my experience, and I think it does color the way the narrative is presented, because what happens with the multiple narrators is that they aren't always in agreement. Like the hospital scene, for example. One is like, I think she was pregnant. And because I remember there was a doctor who was super pregnant working at the hospital who was constantly using the ultrasound machine on her own belly, but that might not be the same doctor who was in the ICU, I have these memories of the same hospital but I'm not sure which was real, and there’s an argument around that. Which doctor was it? And was it the pregnant one or the not pregnant one?
I would like the embody the doctrine of like, it doesn't fucking matter. We're just gonna make a decision right here and we're gonna move forward. In that constant second guessing around the details in the script, I feel like it's partially a way for me as an author to be like, this is a memory play. This is flawed. There's no objective score. This is the way I remember it. And I acknowledge that my memory is flawed and incomplete and it's just highly subjective.

**KK:** Given that, could we jump into the question of what you feel is the difference between depicting events strictly correctly, versus depicting them truthfully?

**AO:** What is the difference between correctly and truthfully?

**KK:** In this sense, do you think there’s a difference between the approach of well here are all the facts versus what do we need to highlight certain parts since ultimately you’re staging this thing? Obviously in making theater you can’t just put everything up onstage, so to what degree does correctness come up as opposed to aiming for presenting the truthfulness of something? Or do you even think there’s a difference?

**AO:** I think that's the difference between a documentarian and an artist, or like when I'm writing I'm always also exercising my editing skills. And, you know, there are lots of different reasons that I might choose to include or omit something in terms of *The Nosebleed*. I would say that most of the time it has to do with like, what is the main thing that I'm trying to convey and is that detail critical to your understanding of it or not? Obviously, that in and of itself is really subjective, but I'm exercising my own kind of authorship by making those choices.

One thing that I think about in terms of this play is that I have an older brother, who is alive, who I mentioned in the obituary [section of the play], but he's essentially absent from the play. I never embody him and I never really discuss him. Part of the reason is that he was living in Japan for most of the time that I was living in California, so he wasn't actually present for a lot of those events. You know, in the moment the episodes that are being recounted, well, I can talk about these dead people. Both of my parents are dead, and this is like, well who else was going to memorialize them, if not me? Whereas my brother is very much alive and has his own memory and his own existence. That I want to protect. So I deliberately made the decision to omit him.

**KK:** Thank you for sharing that. Since we’re talking about memorializing, I was hoping to ask about your recent work *9000 Paper Balloons*, which I wish I had caught. I’m familiar with the history around the late WWII Japanese balloon bombs and the children that helped make them, but the question for you in this case is when you write about the events of an empire, what are the guidelines or guardrails that you set for yourself when you’re covering that kind of grand history as opposed to more personal history? You approach your work with personal history with
a degree of care and sensitivity that I find honestly really impressive and inspiring, but how do you transfer that into the history of what an empire did?

AO: You didn’t see 9000 Paper Balloons?

KK: No, I didn’t get to.

AO: You will find that yes, it is about big empire history kind of stuff. But all that really is the background for the personal narrative. I was working with two artists, Maiko [Kikuchi], who was the animation artist, the visual artist who created the aesthetic of all the things that you see in the piece, and Spencer [Lott] who is the puppet artist. They're both incredible. Also the piece is not specifically geared towards children. It's a puppet piece, but it's not necessarily specifically for children, although I think it's fine for children to watch it. I don't think there’s any swearing in? I don't think so.. oh, no, there's a little bit of swearing in it.

Anyway, so my goals were, here Maiko’s and Spencer’s grandfathers both fought in World War Two, obviously on opposite sides. Really when I joined the project you know, I think that my greatest task in the project was, as the dramaturg, to create a script. They generated enough material for like five hundred plays, so I’m like, ok what's the script? What's the one story? They had all these great ideas, but we can hang them on a really solid story. So it was really anchoring them into their narratives around their grandfathers. The grandchild is trying to reach back across time and across generations and across cultures to understand their grandfather's grandfather's experiences of the war. Also following this story around a Japanese girl who was part of the making of a paper balloon bomb, and the journey of that particular balloon that traveled across the Pacific Ocean on the jet stream, and landed in Oregon and ended up killing an American boy. Isolating that to make something different from a news coverage story, but really just about this one girl, this one balloon, this one boy. That was that was the approach, really. To make the history of empire, we retell that through a very personal grounded lens.

So that means that, if we’re talking about World War Two, specifically through the lens of the United States and Japan, it’s really hard to not talk about the atomic bomb, for example. But [in the play] we don't talk about the atomic bomb, because that's not the part of this history that we wanted to tell that we wanted to focus on. There was a moment where we were like, should we? Is there an uber narrative around the war and the president and what each country was doing and saying and when? But all of that really fell away. Because I was really pushing us to uplift the personal narratives. So for example, Pearl Harbor does come up because that was the moment in time that compelled Spencer's grandfather to enlist. So it's mentioned as a catalyst for this personal decision, but it's not discussed as kind of a central plot point or anything like that.
**KK:** Thank you so much for your time. I feel that so much time has passed since the first time we talked, but your work and hearing you talk about it last year pushed me to see a lot more like it in the city, which has been very inspiring. Thank you for that as well, and break a leg [for *The Nosebleed*’s touring run] in DC!

**AO:** Thank you, and congratulations on getting through grad school!

**KK:** [laughing] Well, give me another month.
SELECTED ARTISTS EXPLORING THE FIELD OF PERFORMING MEMORY (in & around New York City):

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<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
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