Preface

In the sweltering summer heat of a July afternoon over two years ago, I found myself trying to formulate a response to the theme, "Uncomfortable Attachments: Feminism Across Cultures," for a session organized by the "Feminist Working Group" at the International Federation of Theater Research Annual Conference. Researchers and artists from Europe, Australia, South America, and the U.S. gathered in Osaka to engage in dialogue about contemporary works of performance and theater art by artists working all over the globe. I recall feeling that there was too much and too little to say. On the one hand, more than two decades of dialogue and collaborations with artists, scholars, curators and writers in Japan filled me with the urge to share and explain even a small part of the story about work that is still little known outside of Japan; at the same time, in the aftermath of the triple disasters in Northeastern Japan only a few months earlier, the sharp sense of "precariousness," loss, inexpressible trauma as well as new and old forms of "silencing" left me feeling at a loss for words, particularly the kind so often privileged at academic conferences. At that juncture, it seemed even more critically important to look for the space between verbal explication and silence and ask how the works of contemporary artists might help facilitate dialogue about a range of "uncomfortable attachments" across and within cultures from a feminist perspective. In the brief paper I submitted, I attempted to outline some of the questions and approaches that have come out of collaborations and "translations," particularly those I have been fortunate to engage with through the Asia, Politics and Art Project. More specifically, I spoke about the ways in which the "performative" video works of Okinawa-based artist, Yamashiro Chikako help elucidate "uncomfortable attachments/complicated bodies of memory" in the context of post-disaster Japan and that of contemporary (performance) art in Japan and beyond.

The first section of this paper is a slightly revised version of the original; some of the comments have been expanded to reflect more recent works by the artist and new critical writings about them.
In the "Afterword," I draw on new critical writings that have been published since the artist’s 2012-13 exhibits at Yumiko Chiba Associates Gallery and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo to briefly discuss some of the artist’s more recent works. The Performance Studies International Annual conference held at Stanford University in June, 2013, afforded an opportunity to learn about and reflect on such questions as “precarity and performance” and “performance time,” themes that are now becoming widely discussed in the field of performance studies. Such areas of inquiry suggest interesting ways of reading this artist’s works and inform some of the tentative comments made here. As Yamashiro Chikako was inspired by video recordings of British performance artists Gilbert and George, and her “performance art strategies” continue to play an important part in her work, it may be useful to recall some of the characteristics of performance art and the difficulties facing the scholar who attempts to write about performance or performance-based video art, issues that have been powerfully articulated by Peggy Phelan.

Phelan reminds us that “performance’s life is only in the present,” and notes that critical writing about performance is often entangled with the writing of “performance art history” in a way that is more pronounced than other art forms because performance is experienced in the moment and then disappears. “In this sense,” she writes, “performance theory and criticism are instances of writing history.” At the same time, Phelan rightly admonishes, “the desire to preserve and represent the performance event is a desire we should resist.”

In my view, Yamashiro Chikako’s video works are imbued with a performative sense of the present; they share a quality with innovative works of performance art that resist participation “in the circulation of representations,” and in this sense, like performance works, clog “the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary for the circulation of capital.” The experience of viewing her works is like that of viewing live performance that “plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, in the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control.” It is in the face of this challenge—and perhaps the impossibility—of writing about works that elude us and that cannot be fully preserved or represented, that I make an attempt in this essay.

1. Bodies of Memories, Memories of Place

Such art renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ is part of the necessity, not the
nostalgia of living. 9

Over the last two or more decades I have been privileged to work on a number of projects that bring together artists, scholars, curators, translators and musicians concerned with intersections between art and politics, feminism and cultural critique, post-colonialism and transnational dialogue. 10 These projects have led us again and again to questions about memory and history, and the critically important role played by contemporary women artists, including performance artists, in shedding light on both the past and present. As Homi Bhabha has written, this looking back to the past and the vitally important contribution of the “borderline artist” is not about nostalgia, but rather helps us to innovate and interrupt our “performance of the present.”

Our aim at the session of international scholars at the Feminist Working Group session at IFTR, was to articulate to one another particular “uncomfortable attachments” that continue to exist in each of our respective geographical locations, and to find ways to communicate to one another about the poetics/politics of the works we discussed.

Like so many others working in an “international frame,” it was necessary for me to locate these “bodies of memory” and the “uncomfortable attachments” in the context of specific histories and places: “Mainland Japan,” the Ryukyu Archipelago, the Korean Peninsula and the East China Sea. At the same time, we wanted to explore ways that the expressive power of these artists’ works can reach across cultures and reverberate with practices of other artists who are exploring intersections between personal and public memory in their work. Yamashiro Chikako, and the other artists who participated in the Asia, Politics and Art Project are engaging in dialogue with the specific histories of particular places where the ongoing effects of colonization, war and military occupation are still strongly felt. These artists are developing innovative “performative” strategies that link memory and corporeality, as they traverse contested borders and uncover tensions between personal and collective experiences. It is because the artistic interventions of artists like Yamashiro Chikako are helping to create new ways of understanding and acting in the contemporary world that we write about their work. 11

2. Countering the “Tourist Gaze” in Yamashiro Chikako’s Early Works

Yamashiro Chikako was born in Okinawa Prefecture in 1976 and received a B. A. from Okinawa Prefectural University of the Arts in 1999. In 1998, she formed the group, “Nyotai taiso” (Gymnastics
for Ladies) and worked with other women arts students to create improvisational live performances. In 2000, while a graduate student at the same university, she was able to spend a year at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design where she saw videos of live performance art works by Gilbert and George. She soon began to experiment with video and performance pieces and since completing her studies has exhibited work in both solo and group exhibitions.

In a number of early works, Yamashiro and other members of a group of young "artist/activists" performed in public spaces, as well as in the gardens and spaces around Okinawan tombs, places for the commemoration of the dead. She began "staging" solo or group performances, and in 2002 still photos and videos of these actions/works were exhibited in the solo exhibit

*Woman at Graveyard* at the Maejima Art Center in Okinawa. These performative "interventions" continued to evolve in series such as OKINAWA Tourist, Anyway and Garden Talk.

In OKINAWA TOURIST—I like Okinawa Sweet (2004), the artist's playful interventions take her to the fence marking the border of a U.S. military base and in OKINAWA TOURIST—Trip to Japan (2004) she stands in front of the Diet building in Tokyo holding up photo of an Okinawan graveyard as she cries out, "Okinawa ha daijobu ja nai yo!" (Okinawa is NOT OK!) in response to the "Okinawa IS OK?" campaign launched by the government after 9/11.

Yamashiro’s playful "interventions" in public spaces aim not only to disrupt the commodifying gaze of tourism in a style that produces powerful images of "girl power," but also to disturb or "haunt" our complacency and state of amnesia, raising

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*Image #2: OKINAWA Tourist—Trip to Japan (2004)*
questions about Okinawa’s traumatic past and militarized present (approximately 75% of all facilities used by U.S. Forces in Japan are located in Okinawa today).

Yamashiro continued to pursue ways to give expression to artistic aims with an increased awareness of the complex histories and contested geopolitical “present” of Okinawa. Her 2003 still photograph “Border,” originally part of a screening event in Okinawa, shows a barbed-wire fence that disappears into the sea—a seen and ‘unseen’ boundary—introducing a theme that she would return to in later work. The fence that slowly disappears into the sea at this location marks the border between land and waters designated for use by the U.S. military near the village of Henoko. Such visible and invisible boundaries, the “tacit” recognition of some land and sea areas and the surveillance and control of others would become a central theme in the artist’s investigations.

I first saw Yamashiro’s video installation, *Aasa Onna* (hereafter, *Seaweed Woman*) at an exhibition at the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art, *Okinawa Prisma. 1872-2008* (2008). At the time, we had been hearing about the protests and “sea-sit-ins” at Henoko village in central Okinawa where local citizens were joining with environmental and anti-U.S. Base activists to try and prevent the construction of an offshore landing strip that would also destroy the natural habitat of a community of endangered *jigong* (Asian manatee) living there. This U.S. military airstrip was to be built off the coast near Camp Schwab and would replace the controversial Futenma air base.13

The larger than life-size video images of Yamashiro herself performing as Seaweed Woman in the sea offshore near Henoko were as powerful as they were disturbing. These were images unlike any I had seen before: stunningly beautiful, disconcerting as well thought-provoking. The still photos on the side walls and the full-screen video seemed to propel the viewer into an uncertain state, making it impossible to stand back and look from an easy or safe vantage point. Drawn into the world of the works, listening to the sound of the waves and seaweed woman’s gasps for breath, I too felt as though I was suspended in the water, mid-breath, tossing in the currents, gulping air one...
moment and sinking beneath the waves the next.—and then looking back at the shoreline of Henoko with her.

It was later, during a seminar that was part of the Asia, Politics and Art Project that I learned more about how Yamashiro came to produce this work. In an interview by Soni Kum, the artist explains that she became interested in unincorporated coastal areas where Okinawans still go—places that are not yet appropriated and fenced off for use by the U.S. military or Self-Defense Forces or private developers. These little inlets, remnants from the past, are places where locals are “tacitly” permitted to spend time on the shore that once belonged to them. The artist’s “fieldwork,” led her to explore a number of these places and interview the people she met there. She began filming, but knew that her aim was not to make a documentary. She pondered the borders marked on land (by the state, by the U.S. military, etc) and ways to express questions and contradictions through her art. In the process, she discovered the “Iyara” (character), Seaweed Woman. Yamashiro explains,

When I began working on Seaweed Woman, I had no pre-conceived idea of such a character...I just thought I would somehow like to incorporate this “invisible” borderline into a work. I found another angle of vision, that of a being other than myself. I wanted to look at things from her point of view, a creature who is always in the sea, a little offshore, adrift on the waves.¹⁵

In Seaweed Woman, Yamashiro used her own body to perform on invisible borderlines in the sea as images were recorded on film and in still photos. She becomes the character she herself discovered or invented, one rich with ambiguities. Seaweed Woman is neither male nor female, neither human nor sea creature (though the artist has hinted that she was thinking of the endangered manatee). ‘she’ is somehow also floating in a state of suspension between life and death. Yamashiro made video recordings for Seaweed Woman in 10 locations in central Okinawa, including Henoko. In Image#5 on the right, we see a still shot of the moment when the Japanese Coast Guard came upon this creature, peer at and photograph her and then move on. There, in close proximity to sea “sit-in” activists, one can only imagine what border-patrolling authorities must have thought of this “happening.”

In order to complete the video work, Yamashiro herself edited the many hours of film taken. She reflects on that process, explaining some of her editorial choices.

The images of the sea that I chose to leave in...for example of Henoko. Maybe because it had rained a few days before, and red earth had flowed into the sea, but it is a red sea. I chose to use
These reddish images of the sea. I suppose this was also an intuitive choice, but there is no link between what I wanted to express and the "beautiful Okinawan sea." I wanted images of a sea that is clouded, where it is a little hard to see where you’re going. It may be the same blue sea, but there is something about it that makes it hard to see ahead. That muddied blue sea actually becomes something like a wall. That is the kind of image I was trying to create.  

Image #4  Seaweed Woman (2008, photo)

Image #5  Seaweed Woman (2008, still from video)

Later in the interview with Kum, Yamashiro explains that all of the sites she visited and filmed had been designated "umetate yoteiçu," or sites scheduled to be incorporated and appropriated by military or civilian developers. With this added bit of information in mind, we now realize that these images will some day be all that remain—as memories—of these places. Through this performative video work, Seaweed Woman herself has "plunged into visibility only to disappear into memory."

In her interview, Yamashiro comments that the term "mokunin hama," tentatively translated as Shore Conivance, is one that occurred to her during her field investigations. In his essay, "Mizu no shintai : senkakusu kara shimasu" Higashi Takuma notes the connection between the "mokunin kosaku chu" and Yamashiro’s use of "mokunin hama." He notes the "multiple meanings" embedded in referents in the work, some of which are more evident to viewers knowledgeable about the situation in Okinawa than others. He situates the artist’s investigations and the visually powerful art works that result from them in relation to both resistance "movements" and cutting edge art practices; that is, "movement=filmic image" —the metaphor and means of representation simultaneously convey artistic and political meanings. He writes,
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(The artist) documents both the landscape and people of 'Mokunin hama' (Ibano Shore, Urasoe City), bringing into relief the multiple meanings of that place in what can also be called, ‘movement=film.’ Like mokunin no kōsaku chi (lands officially under U.S. military control where local residents are tacitly allowed to engage in agriculture), Mokunin hama is a place where people can come and go, but only with the tacit approval of the authorities. The place Yamashiro has ‘discovered’ is in a precarious and constantly changing state. At the same time, it can be understood as a space of ajī—or asylum.17

In his discussion of Seaweed Woman, Higashi notes the “first person gaze” of Yamashiro’s creature that is conveyed so powerfully in the video. Through this innovative metaphor and camerawork—including the creature’s encounter with the Coast Guard—we come to view the scene from “her” point of view. As Higashi writes, even though we don’t really know what sort of creature Seaweed Woman is, “we can be certain that she is a different species who will respond with a question of her own.” 18

Interestingly, when the word “mokunin” is translated into English the words used to convey its meaning place emphasis on slightly different perspectives. While the term “tacit” suggests the viewpoint of the authorities who grant “tacit approval,” the term “connivance” places emphasis on the subjectivity of the local people who “connive” to use spaces designated as “off-limits.” It is such “multiple meanings” that the artist aims to convey in these works. Through them, we also come to understand that this relationship of tacit approval and connivance is a precarious one—at any time the space can be can be taken away and the “occupiers” targeted as illegals.

Since this paper was first presented, other critical essays have appeared, primarily in conjunction with two exhibits held at Yumiko Chiba Associates Gallery and Mori Museum of Art in 2012-13. MAM exhibition curator Kondo Kenichi notes that Yamashiro’s 2006-7 fieldwork at “Mokunin no hama,” marked a turning point in her work:

In 2006-2007, there was a turning point for Yamashiro. One of the examples of this transformation can be seen in Shore Connivance—Shore of Ibano, Urasoe City (2007). In this video work, she shifted away from themes that were straightforward such as the U.S. bases issue and graveyards and (focussed) on interviews of men visiting Shore Connivance (tacit shore), a relatively unknown part of the Okinawan coastline. 19

According to Kondo, this trajectory in her imagination and creative work helped her to create the
powerful and provocative image conveyed through *Seaweed Woman*.

By giving up to the motions of the moving of the waves and the pull of the seaweed, in *Seaweed Woman* Yamashiro is using her own body to express the way that Okinawa is tossed around at the whims of Japan and America.\(^{20}\)

Yamashiro’s imaginative and performative explorations of the precarious situation of Okinawa and ways in which “bodies of memory” in Okinawa are perceived and represented led to another powerful series of photographic, video and performance works in 2008-10.

### 3. Performing ‘Transgenerational’ Memories

In *Atana no koe ha watashi no nado wo tota* (*Your voice came out through my throat*, 2009) and *Shizumu koe, akai iki* (*Sinking Voices, Red Breath*, 2010) Yamashiro went on to probe the question of transgenerational war memory, again using her own body in performative video works. In these works she gives powerful expression to “unspeakable bodies of memory”—and here, I use “unspeakable” both in the sense of “beyond expression in words” and “not to be spoken” (because of the pain of trauma or social taboo) in these bodies of memory.

As Laura Hein and I have noted elsewhere, Yamashiro became interested in the topic of war narratives and memory after June 2007 when the Japanese government eliminated passages from history textbooks that made reference to the “mass suicides” in the Battle of Okinawa.\(^{21}\) In the last weeks of the war the Japanese military had encouraged and sometimes ordered Okinawan civilians to kill their families and themselves in order to avoid capture by the advancing American forces. The subsequent protests against the changes in the textbooks prompted Yamashiro to interview senior residents in a nearby care center in Okinawa, which she then transformed into works she exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in 2009 and 2010.

Yamashiro has described the exact moment when she felt that each speaker was transferring the burden of remembering the past in her interview with Soni Kum as follows:

> When talking about the war there was a moment when the elderly people would stop speaking. Details that were too painful to put into words became blank moments in their stories. They fell silent, and began to shake or weep. ...so then I just asked them to touch me and express what
they were feeling in some other way. This made me keenly aware that I was, without doubt, on the side of listening to them, and that no matter how I stretched my imagination, their experiences would never be mine. This led me to the idea of having a performance. I said, ‘it is very important for people like me who did not experience the war to think about it, please touch my body. Let me sense the things you were unable to tell me in words through your touches.’

Yamashiro recorded this ‘performance’ with the seniors in a series of black and white photographs, one of which is shown here (image #6). In her next video work, *Anata no koe ha watashi no nodo wo tota* (*Your voice came out through my throat*) (Image #7) the artist experimented with the juxtaposition of voice and image—as the voice of one of her informants literally passes through her throat and comes out of her mouth, we watch an image in which a video recording of his face overlaps and merges with hers. But again, even though the formal and technical elements allow the voices and images of Yamashiro and her informant to merge, the artist can still only listen, and make an inevitably impossible attempt to understand and give voice to another’s memory and trauma. This more literal attempt to “embody” memories through performance led Yamashiro to create another, more abstract work, *Shizumu koe, akai iki* (*Sinking Voices, Red Breath*). Of this work, Yamashiro writes:

After I had layered my own voice on top of the tales of the memories of others, and swallowed them (with a gulp) down my throat in *Your voice came out through my throat*, those voices (words)
seemed to sway back and forth at the bottom of my belly, as if they would never dissolve. I realized that I am being kept alive by a thread that links me to the memories of others.\textsuperscript{23}

To address the dilemma of how to engage with these “uncomfortable attachments,” and bodies of memory that cannot be easily expressed, the artist takes another imaginative leap. The work begins with the almost indecipherable monologue of an elderly woman—then, the microphones used to record the voices in Your voice passed through my throat are seen sinking into the sea. As the bundle of microphones, like a bouquet of weighty kelp, is swallowed and sinks deeper and deeper into “the body” of the sea to the sea floor, only the sound of red-hot bubbles of air floating back to the surface can be heard.

4. ‘Other Ways of Telling’ and Reading Her Body on the Borderline

The place where the desire to speak, the desire for healing becomes possible is a place where there is actual dialogue, a place of encounter. In such a place, these gazes come alive for the first time.\textsuperscript{24}

Yamashiro Chikako’s works reveal multiple moments of dialogue and encounter. As I have noted, she explores both visible and invisible borders and places her own body and those of her informants and collaborators on the borderlines between past and present, as well as contested geopolitical territories in present-day Okinawa. The bodies in her works “are constantly inviting in memories lived by some other person or some invisible thing, and experiencing pain in the process. For this reason, there are times when they are painful to watch.” \textsuperscript{25}

Lee Chonghwa, coordinator of the Asia, Politics and Art Project, has played a vitally important role in shaping discussions of ways in which visual and performance art help create new spaces for dialogue about residual “uncomfortable attachments” and ongoing questions surrounding the complex histories of colonialism, militarization and violence against women in East Asia. Her works Tsubuyaki
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no sei j shiso (Murmerings as political thought, 1998) and Motome no sei jisoku (Toward a politics of hope, 2002) have had a profoundly significant impact on these discussions, inspiring both artists and scholars to explore "other ways of telling" that might give us a new, "postcolonial sense of direction."

Lee's "theoretical/poetic/political" work through the Asia, Politics and Art Project has helped open up such a space for dialogue among transnational feminists trying to negotiate "uncomfortable attachments" in Japan, Korea and in Okinawa. She asks,

Is there a ‘gaze’ that can see that all of these dimensions/aspects (contested histories, gender, militarization, ethnicity) are twisting and turning, intermingling in each individual's attempt to create meaning?  

As we have seen here, Yamashiro Chikako is an artist who is continuing to respond to this question with innovative and visually powerful works. Led by her visceral and visual sensibilities as she explores "bodies of memory" in the Okinawan context, Yamashiro brings renewed meanings to the past and helps us to imagine multiple gazes and vantage points for negotiating a precarious present and future. In the concluding chapter of her book, Contemporary Art and Memory, Joan Gibbons reflects on the importance of cutting edge contemporary artists who probe such complexities:

...it is the skill and creative, sensibility with which the artist returns to the past, gathers it in, binds it and puts its parts together that bring moment and give renewed meaning to the original experience or event. The artist's ability to set the past within a social or collective framework is also vital to the success of memory, but, above and beyond this, it is the willingness to explore often difficult or sensitive subject matter and new forms that has given the works that I have discussed a cutting edge.  

As Gibbons writes, it is "a willingness to explore often difficult and sensitive subject matter" that makes the work by artists she discusses particularly interesting and relevant. And as Lee Chonghwa reminds us, it is in a place of "actual dialogue and encounter" that the multiple gazes necessary for healing and finding new direction can come alive. Yamashiro Chikako is without doubt one such artist whose works help us re-imagine the past, present and future in radical new ways.
5. Afterword: Precarity and “Connivance” in Yamashiro Chikako’s Recent Works

A little over a year after this presentation was made, two exhibitions of Yamashiro’s work were held in Tokyo, one at the Yumiko Chiba Associates Gallery in Shinjuku and the other as part of the MAM Project 018 at the Mori Art Museum. With these exhibitions came the publication of other important critical essays and interviews about the artist’s work. As both the new works and critical writings about them shed further light on Yamashiro’s earlier series such as *Seaweed Woman*, I will comment on them briefly here.

In the fall of 2012, Yamashiro exhibited an extraordinary group of black and white photographs titled, *Mokunin no Karada* (*The Body of Condonement*; but another translation might be “Conniving Bodies”) at the Yumiko Chiba Gallery in Tokyo. At the same time, the Mori Art Museum featured her newest work, *A Woman of the Butcher Shop* in its Young Artist’s program. Still concerned with the notion of “bodies of memory” in Okinawa, particularly in relation to ambiguous spaces that may be tacitly-approved, but where local people “connive,” the artist creates rich imagery of underground caves and weekend flea markets held near U.S. Bases. She had begun working on this series when she was photographing another provocative series titled, *Choros* (2010), and returned to it early in 2012.

In a catalogue essay/interview, “Open Wounds: What Yamashiro Chikako Portrays,” Shinjo Ikuo notes the significance of the notion “mokunin” (“tacit” or “connivance”) seen both in Yamashiro’s earlier and the new series on exhibit in Tokyo. Just as Yamashiro herself has followed the visual and visceral metaphors and images that appear in one powerful series of works after another, as viewers we gradually come to see how this concept plays out in her works. Shinjo writes,

The word connivance is extremely important in the context of the post-war history of Okinawa, as seen, for example in the use of the term “connivance farmland” to describe the plots of cultivated land that have sprung up along the fences around U.S. military bases. In a matter of speaking, these areas are like cracks in the law.*

In *A Woman of the Butcher Shop*, Yamashiro again chooses a location where local people gather, this time to engage in commerce in a temporary flea-market. *Mokunin no karada* is set in underground/undersea caves where the sandstone formations take on an eerie presence reminiscent of human (female) bodies. Shinjo comments further on these works as follow:
Areas akin to tacitly approved autonomous spaces where the law and government and so on actually have no power have come into existence like enclaves. I get the feeling that the image of connivance shore corresponds to the time people in Okinawa spend secretly defending and building their livelihoods. One of the reasons I’m attracted to Yamashiro’s artwork is that there’s something about it that gives form to the things people connive at, the things that are noticed but not noticed by everyone, that are blanked out. I sense in Yamashiro’s work the power of art to create spaces where people can connive with each other and live together in the very
places where people have been robbed of their living space.  

Here, I cannot help but recall recent discussions of "precarity and performance" in relation to the rich associations Shinjo points to in Yamashiro’s emerging and evolving practice and performance of “connivance.” In their call for papers in a recently published Special Issue of The Drama Review (TDR) titled Precarity and Performance, Nicolas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider note that performance art comes out of a history of artists using their own bodies to make interventions in public spaces, interventions that inevitably entail risk as they challenge the status quo. They note that "Precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely on the past. Precarity undoes a linear streamline of temporal progressing and challenges "progress" and "development" narratives on all levels."  

Making reference to a piece by the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), they note potential connections between risk and precarity (in relation to both human communities and the environment) and the idea put forth in a CAE statement that there are both positive and negative forms of precarity. More specifically, they note that some contemporary performance artists are in fact deploying precarity in a "positive" way to intervene in and work against “negative” forms of precarity proliferating in our increasingly globalized, militarized world. It occurs to me that while Yamashiro Chikako’s works are deeply rooted in the complex historical and present-day geopolitical context of Okinawa, they at the same time can be read as making an extraordinarily powerful gesture in the direction of what the CAE collective calls "precarity’s positive potential," articulated in the group’s recent statement as follows:  

...leaning away from habit, stepping outside of comfort zones, claiming the speculative and uncertain act of critical thinking. (This positive precarity) can be used to undermine neoliberalism’s negative, fear mongering mode of precarity that imposes insecurity on the many in the interest of enormous wealth for the few.  

As Shinjo so aptly points out, Yamashiro Chikako’s works help us to “step outside of comfort zones,” and to engage in critical thinking. The artist’s ongoing explorations of actual and metaphorical spaces where local people can “connive,” where painful and uncomfortable memories are invited into bodies in the present, and where we sense viscerally and intensely an inescapable state of precarity, continue to open up new possibilities for dialogue and lead to other ways of “telling and seeing” Okinawa. Shinjo writes,  

It is as if Yamashiro’s work is fiercely resisting understanding Okinawa. I get the sense that
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while in the process of fleeing Okinawa, at the very moment of the desertion, there’s a moment when an Okinawa that no one has been able to notice before materializes, or becomes visible as something physical.

Shinjo discovers in Yamashiro’s works a kind of ecstasy that is both erotic and subversive, and that makes possible the materialization of an Okinawa “that no one has been able to notice before.” At the same time, these elements coexist with a powerful and inescapable sense of precarity. For the moment, Seaweed Woman drifts on the currents off the coast of Henoko with the tacit approval of the authorities, but her future is not secure. Yamashiro Chikako’s powerful works help us imagine both this precarious present and other ways of glimpsing what might lie ahead.

Notes
2 The Asia, Art, Politics Project received generous support from the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, Seikei University, Tokyo. Sections of this paper have been presented at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, Hawaii, April 2, 2011, “Performance, Art and Activism in Contemporary Japan,” London, Jan. 2012, and the British Association of Japan Studies, Sept. 2012.
3 Peggy Phelan and Una Choudri addressed the question of “performance time” in relation to such current issues as climate change, globalization and environmental destruction in a Plenary Session at PSI 19, Stanford University, June, 2013.
4 In 2000-2001, Yamashiro attended the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and was inspired by a video of Gilbert and George’s In the Bush (1972) to explore performance and video art.
5 Peggy Phelan, Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memory, 1997, p. 3.
6 Ibid., p. 3.
8 Ibid., p. 148.
9 Homi Bhabha, “In Between Cultures,” NPQ (New Perspectives Quarterly), Winter, 1997 (http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2013_fall/19_bhabha.html)
10 These projects include “Gender and Performance Studies in East Asia” (Ritsumeikan University), “Asia, Politics, Art Project” (Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, Seikei University, Tokyo) and “The Art of Intervention: Critical Enquiries into Intersections of Private and Public Memory”
11. Ikeuchi Yasuko also presented a paper at this conference about the work of Soni Kum, another young artist who participated in the Asia, Politics and Art Project.


13. This and other video works by Yamashiro Chikako were recently exhibited in *Women in Between: Asian Women Artists, 1984-2012*, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts.


15. Yamashiro Chikako, interview by Soni Kum in *Zansho no oto II* (DVD), author’s translation.

16. Ibid.


18. Ibid. p. 171.


20. Ibid. p. 41.


29. Ibid. p. 70.

31 Ridout and Schneider, Special Issue on “Precarity and Performance,” TDR (The Drama Review), 2012, p. 6.
32 Ibid., p. 5.
33 Ibid., p. 9.

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