Umi interview_English transcription_TS Tell Tales

What's interesting about this project to me is, it's a pursuit of memories. I'm not wanting to privilege the fully formed memories; in fact, I want to give space to be able to access the fragments—the feelings, ambiances, and flashes. The things that are non-narrative and nonlinear. In part I think those are the things I've been experiencing, of the memories of the places I used to live in. They're often this sort of amorphous type, the textured type. The ones that are a little bit harder to grasp, harder to retell the stories of.

It's sort of this weird labor, weird obsession to relive these mini-experiences. They're not full experiences. They are just mini experiences, the feeling that you get in the corner, just sitting there somewhere, just letting things soak in, and feeling and sensing. That's what I'm doing. Maybe I'm like a, not a fly on the wall, but like a gecko almost. Geckos have these suction cups on their limbs. I am like that, feeling the vibrations of these spaces. I'm tuning into the buildings, the built materials, and how they interact with humans, the organisms, just kind of sensing into the environment.

In order to access something in the past, I need to be able to tune into it. I almost have to trick my own body, get into a meditative state, activate, to feel safe. First of all, feel comfortable. I do all this work before I start remembering things: like I drink tea; massage my neck; I make sure my voice are feeling strong, I can feel full in my chest so I can vocalize. In doing that, all I'm trying to do is to really access my own self in the present moment, just so I can feel safe enough to go to a different time and space. Part of feeling safe is to be able to sense into what's here and now. That's the gecko. Like I am sinking into the walls, and feeling the vibrations. I have to quiet down my mind.

Before the project I noticed I have this kind of unrest quality, almost like a disquieting mind. Going into the project, I just have all these memories cluttering. They're everywhere in these disparate formats and forms. Once I sit down and really relax into an architectural space, I am able to sort out the things that are what I feel as constituting my memories. So, I have to access the here and now in order to go backwards or forwards in time.

There was one time, back in November, when I was here recording. I was downstairs. I was recreating a scene where my grandmother would do house chores. As a kid I would hang out in the living room, just listening to her doing house chores. She would be doing stuff in the kitchen, in the living room. She'd be watering plants on the balcony, making green bean soup, and then sweeping. All those sounds became the ambiances of my memory. I was recreating some of that. On top of that she would sing and hum. So I was sweeping your living room downstairs and I was humming. I recorded that and I listened to it immediately after. Because I was testing, I was being technical at that moment. I was wanting to make sure I got the sound that I wanted. Once I sat down and listened to that I totally lost track of where I was and WHEN I was. It was like I was hypnotizing myself, and didn't know I was doing that. I had to close my eyes and open my eyes back up to reset my own mind. I had to touch the tabletop, just to make sure I was still in reality, a physical reality I

could see in front of me. That was when I realized I did something to my brain, I was hacking my brain so much that I probably became disassociated - probably the clinical term.

But I wanted that. In fact that's what I was doing. I just went a little far into that process. I knew I could just step back and not listen to the recording immediately after I made it. Just because the sounds I was capturing were so close, they were proximal sounds, so the brain was confused. That was kind of like I hit the threshold but I knew that method works. So I have been doing that, just in various different spaces— like in your living room downstairs, and the bathroom over here. This bathroom reminds me of the bathroom I grew up using. I remember talking to myself in that bathroom, so I've just been doing that in this bathroom.

The timbral quality of how I use the sound is so different from how I sound today. That's like a hard instrument. I think of myself as not only the person as who I am today, but also the accumulation of time that's led me to become who I am today. When I vocalize the things I used to say to myself, I sound different but the same. There is kind of a double consciousness happening. The things that I used to say come back to me when I start to chant those, what I remember. I start to piece them together in a repeated way.

Today I was just in the bathroom saying to myself the things I used to say to myself, "me today, me tomorrow, me the day after tomorrow, me the day after the day after tomorrow. For each iteration I am imagining just what I would look like. But I remember also imagining I would grow up to be different, I would look different. So I would sit in front of this mirror, in my grandparents' bathroom, just visualizing my features while staring into the mirror at myself. I did that today in your bathroom. It was the strangest feeling. [chuckle] I was able to go backwards in time, in thinking about that little 12-year-old version of me. But also, I started to imagine going forward from the 45-year-old version of me. The day after tomorrow... What's happening next week... I totally broke down because next week at this time, I'll be at the airport again. I will be starting another arrival-departure loop, saying goodbye to my family to go back to LA.

It's this constant loop of being displaced and re-embedded in place. Projecting myself into the future, to imagine each iteration of me, where am I gonna be, the 2025 version of myself, the 70-year-old version of myself, the 80-year-old version of myself. In each one I was literally trying to imagine where I was going to be. There's just a lot of uncertainty and liminality, in this time-space projection. I think that comes down to why I am doing this: to re-embed myself, either into the past or into the future.

Having lived in the U.S. for over 30 years... 32... 33, anyway, good God, that's a long time... having to condition myself, either vocally or physically, to be an individual that comes with all this baggage. There are all these ideas about gender and race that sort of get projected on me when I show up in

places. You know, that's part of being an Asian person living in America, a person of Asian descent. For that reason I have kind of built myself to be defensive, to blend in, to not stick out so much. To find ways to protect myself in potentially dangerous places. Because there are all these ideas about Asian-ness that's associated with vulnerability and weakness.

Coming to Taiwan to re-embed myself, not only through this project through the acoustic hunting for sound, but also just being here as a person, as a social being without having to explain myself too much. I can blend in, not have to be defensive. I can just be a person here. That's a really basic thing, a basic set of human rights that I don't often feel like I have entitlement to. To a large degree, re-hearing myself, re-vocalizing my own body, re-embodying my own history of having this sort of going back and forth between two places, all of that is manifesting in this project in surprising ways.

A lot of memories could be so subjective, that's not a bad thing. Subjective feelings are just as important as the objective thing. What I am finding is that, each time I have a conversation with a family member, somebody I thought would share the same memory by embodying a similar experience with me. Somebody who would elbow to elbow with me, like my brother, next to me where we were running down the stairs, and screaming. There were in fact some very same feelings, and that has this beautiful amplification effect. It's actually more like resonance, you can get into the same frequency, and it just sort of explodes in a beautiful way.

But also there are some dissonances, like differences, discrepancies in how we remember things. Certain things are prioritized over other things. I remember this thing, he remembers another aspect of this thing. We could have very different opposite experiences because we come into the experience with different roles and experiences, and different identities. That's why I realized, we don't need to have the same feelings. Each feeling is just as valid. In fact, what I am noticing is that memories are associative. They get clustered and grouped based on similar things.

For my mom, the walk we used to take with my grandfather, we felt a sense of safety from him. That was something we shared, and no one else could feel that other than the four of us, who are on that walk together, my brother, my mom and I, and my grandfather. There is sort of scarcity too, to memories in how they could be shared and intimate. I like that. I think that's in fact why I am doing this project.

When you put things on tape, it becomes an object. Then it has its own life. It's out there. Other people can listen to it, and resonate with it, I hope. This sort of time-space collapse, and the feeling I have of being split between two places and times, I would imagine it's quite common. I think there are lots of people with experiences like me in the world. Always having to catch up. Each time when I come home, or each time I come to Taiwan, I imagine what it would be like if I had stayed here. So I try to do all those things, I try to catch up.

When I came here when I was 14 years old, I went to school with my friend because I wanted to see what it was like for her to go to school. I was trying to catch up. I want to catch up to be like you, I want to have friends like you. Of course you know you can't, but I can't really stop that feeling.

This project has taught me, that's just the way it is. There is a part of life that's always gonna be like that and I've come into some sort of acceptance about just that. There is a beauty to being able to live in both worlds; but not fully, kind of in between. There's kind of a geographical split in time and space, geographical consciousness. Somehow maybe it can translate into different social worlds. There are lots of people who live between different social worlds, being bi-racial, multi-racial, bilingual.

In my case, it also gets expressed in terms of gender. Being a non-binary person, I'm able to access both worlds. There is a lot of value to being able to say that it's okay to be like that. To be going between worlds, and to be able to translate across different worlds. We don't have to be so fetishistic to a purity so much, like national boundaries are a thing but it's all made up too, race, gender, all those things.

I've just come to kinda embrace myself, and to say, "Okay. Fine. It's fine to be between worlds. I'm a medium. And that's fine." I hope that my experience being on tape, putting stuff down, recording, will first affirm that identity. It's an affirmation. I'm also hoping that this recorded affirmation can live and travel to other places, and to find other people who are like me. Maybe some kinships could be developed in different parts of the world.