

INTERVIEW WITH YVES B. GOLDEN

Published on August 20, 2020

This interview is intended to be experienced audibly on the Danspace Project online journal. This text transcription was originally produced by Otter.ai automated transcription and has since been edited by Seta Morton, slightly modified, and condensed for clarity and accuracy. Please excuse any grammatical errors.

Interviewee: Yves B. Golden

Interviewer: Seta Morton

SM: Okay, hi.

YBG: Hey. What's up?

SM: I know we discussed earlier that we're going to avoid asking each other, "how are you?" Well, first, maybe we should just introduce ourselves.

YBG: Absolutely. You first.

SM: Yeah.

(Both laugh)

SM: I'm Seta Morton, I am the Assistant Curator, Public Engagement at Danspace Project. And I'm talking today to Yves.

YBG: Yes, I'm Yves B. Golden. I'm an artist and organizer. I'm currently battling the slings and arrows of outrageousness in these streets (laughter) and I am one third of the recent [video, sound, dance, text] project called *Petrichor* that was released at Danspace [Project].

SM: Yes. All right. So, I thought instead of saying how are you? I've been thinking about, well, one, where are you? Because you're not in New York right now.

YBG: Yes, I'm in LA. I miss the rain, which is like...you know...*Petrichor*, for one—to just kind of skip ahead a little bit—comes from how much I adore, and always adored, the rain and knowing when it will rain, and knowing when it will end, and waiting it out. But I'm in LA. I'm like, in the desert. I'm in the simulation, y'all!

SM: Hmm, what's the weather like in LA today?

YBG: LA is funny because when every day is just pretty, you know? It's just bright and no clouds...I'm a New Yorker, I have moods, you know, I have seasons. So, I'll just say that...LA has no seasons...and I'm just going to leave it at that.

(both laugh)

SM: I was telling you that when we released *Petrichor*, which was a couple of weeks ago now, that it rained in New York and today we're getting whatever end of this tropical storm—it was just pouring this morning and things are shutting down and there are heavy winds. And then I kind of was cataloguing and tracking/looking back at every time we've been in conversation around this work. I feel like it's been raining every time. It's raining for you in New York.

YBG: And I can tell it is. For one, a tree fell not far from where my friend lives, because of the storm—everyone's safe. It's funny, just before he was recording the rain whipping through the trees outside his window I was saying to him, “Oh gosh, I wish I could just run into the storm's arms” and he was like, “no, it's kind of going crazy right now Yves” and I was like, “no, I need it” and then like five minutes later he says, “yeah, a tree fell like not far from me.” I was like, “ahem, yeah, that's probably from [my] wanting it a little bit too much...maybe I got a little too eager! (laughter)

SM: I very purposefully moved away from the window earlier. I love that feeling of the storm against the window. But you know...I don't need all that drama today. (laughter)

YBG: Yeah, let me step away. You know, it's about it's about taking pause, you know. And observing, you know...you take it in other ways.

SM: Well, before we get into it all, just want to make sure that you're situated. You know, another thing I've been thinking around, “how are you” is also, how are you feeling? Do you need anything right now? Should we pour some water?

YBG: Actually I'm good right now on my libations. I mean, there's some stuff I need, but they're not things that are achievable in this moment. But I have been thinking about that as well. And I'm gonna get those things because all good things come to me. It's just, you know, I think that part of “adulting”—which is another thing that kind of parallels with the poems in that piece [Pertrichor]—is being able to tell yourself “no” sometimes or “not right now.” Even better, my new favorite is, “now's not a good time” because it's just so applicable and it's like a good way of dismissing a lot of shit tbh (laughter). But personally within me, it's like, I have needs, right? And I have to take care of myself. But sometimes you have to be able to tell yourself “now's not a good time.” Those things are coming to you. So, don't do something irrational, or like, will it towards you? And like, it's also about taking pause and taking inventory of what you have. The universe is providing and ushering things to you. So, sometimes it's about parenting yourself

through that universal connection that we all have that just says, it's coming to you. All good things come to you. The universe has you. But now's not a good time for you to be... now's not a good time for you to, like reach for an adornment or like, I don't know, leap into someone's arms or something..." (laughter)

SM: I've been thinking about this. In preparing to come into our conversation today I've been thinking about, what have we've been talking about already, lately? That mantra, "all good things come to you" that you've been really saying [to me] for months now, it's really stuck with me. These ideas of abundance and these conversations about abundant mindsets over scarcity. That's kind of what I'm hearing from you now. Like, what it is that you have and what can wait?

YBG: Right. There is an abundance.

I think that scarcity, as you know, as we've learned, and through collectivism and through like, you know, mutual aid, we discovered that we have a hell of a lot of stuff. A hell of a lot of resources. Even when we consider the scarcity of what the 99%—not to resurrect that term—but when you think about the 99%, not having a lot or even enough and the 1% having abundance. Somehow we're re-thinking about what abundance looks like, how to achieve abundance, and also taking inventory of what we all have to share. I think that it's kind of setting the framework for others who just are not so cognizant of it, to participate in it.

I've been working a lot in some charity efforts that include sales of things to generate funds for stuff. I pray that we'll be able to move away from that at some point, when folks realize that, you know, your charity doesn't require that you get anything. We've all been conditioned to thinking like, you give to receive.

SM: The exchange.

YBG: Yeah, it's like an exchange. That's so warped, to say the least, because there are plenty of people that have been granted a lot off the backs of others. They didn't give any thing for that. (laughter)

So that model is, you just have to give and share and think collectively. You also have to put yourself aside and really consider the needs of others in a real way, not like in a barmy way. (laughter)

That's another part of the re-parenting piece. That's the, "now's not a good time" piece. Instead of asking "what am I going to get for this?" You just be like, "you know what, we're all in a crisis. Let me make sure like, sis is good. Even if I don't know them."

SM: And that inventory piece is so important. For you know, those of us with just an abundance of resources. What are you using? What resources do you need? And then, what are you hoarding? What are you holding on to?

YBG: Exactly. I've been very privileged in doing a lot of care work that a lot of you know, literally good things have come to me.

There is something messed up about the rage, I connect having anything with like—and I've done this my whole life—I connect having anything with needing to let something go. It's probably a trauma response that I have to delve into but it's just funny because part of it is good. When I get something I give something.

When I'm not purchasing something, when someone is just generous with me, then I always make space to give something. Which is good and bad because I also need to stand by one of my other missions which is that Black Trans people are deserving of the utmost care. I'm a part of that—I deserve—

SM: And shifting that mindset of scarcity and resource hoarding, I mean, it is it's about shifting that idea of, you know, like, how can you actually learn how to give something and removing giving from this false notion of sacrifice? For a lot of people who are in positions of privilege and who have these resources, like, what is it that they are actually sacrificing? Taking inventory of that.

We see a lot of people doing a lot of [anti-racist solidarity] actions right now and it's great, it's amazing, but I think a lot of people need to take that quiet time too, to kind of really sort that out for themselves before involving other people, you know?

YBG: Absolutely. I mean, unless you're exorbitantly rich, which is, in my mind like...(laughter)

Not to be tangential, but one of the things that I have the biggest issue with celebrity—as a construct—especially as it pertains to black and brown people...there are people (and I'm not talking about like black people here) but like there are celebrities that might mean well and like care or whatever. But they are so happy somehow to have like received abundance, they're so glad to have “escaped” or something that they can't even fathom how to to then share it. There suddenly becomes so much webbed hate for people to answer to when it's about being generous and then we circle back into like “visibility” and like “spectacle” and “awareness” as like, that's what people with platforms have to offer? I don't know, I'm calling bully on that that's neither here nor there. I'm mostly thinking globally, and transnationally, how do we build—and this is on all tiers, just as humans—how do we build and provide for each other. And can *that* please like be the model now and moving forward? Then that means abolishing a lot of, you know, a lot of excess and crap.

SM: Well, let's also be specific. You've just recently co founded, co founded, excuse me, (laughter) the Herbal Mutual Aid Network, which is a “grassroots organization providing free plant based care for Black people seeking support due to the ongoing crisis of racial violence and injustice.” This work is so expansive and accumulating. It currently includes sending care

boxes to Black individuals and organizers, creating protest safety kits, supplying materials to Black herbalists and organizers, and more. All of this is funded by donations and funded specifically [donations by] white folks. Or that was the original call to action at least.

YBG: Mm hmm.

SM: This idea of, you know, you're actually you are going to give something without the return and I know you had to deal with so much backlash for that.

YBG: Yeah (laughter)

SM: ...which is ridiculous but I wanted to ask you about the pillars of this work—the structure of the work is upheld by these rigorous frameworks of equity and decolonizing in wellness, business, practice and industry—I'm really curious how you identified that lack of equity and definitely a lack of decolonizing frameworks within the industry of wellness, and care and self care and herbalism, perhaps?

YBG: Um, there's so many different elements that led me there. I'll give you like one really tangible way is, it's started when I landed in LA, I—and this was happening before but my sleep paralysis came back very intensely right at the brink of, you know, the clashing in the streets back in the end of May. And my friend, Hayden, who's just so dear to me, um, without any sort of prompting at all. She just was like, “Hey, I have something for you” and I hadn't seen anybody. I was just here alone, quarantining, after leaving New York, or leaving upstate New York, and I went to meet her (out in public) and she gave me a Kava tincture, and then she was like, “also tomorrow you have an appointment for acupuncture at this time.” I was speechless because it was like, I couldn't have known—now I get acupuncture every two weeks from the same person. I couldn't have known how much that would have changed me and how manageable it made this time. It was just that gesture of, “I can't fathom what what you might be going through. But I know these two things can help.” It was at once like symbolic, but also really tangible care. It was medicinal. Yeah. And so, you know, I went to the acupuncture and came out like feeling really dazed and I was about to head to a protest in fact, and I stopped myself and I was like, This is not my—well right now I cannot do that. I feel dazed because I just got acupuncture and it probably released a lot of blocked energy inside of me. I need to just go and lie down.

SM: Yeah. (both laughing)

YBG: But the next day I was like, I was kind of filled with a lot of righteous fury. And I was like, “God damn it like, we all deserve similar gestures, both symbolic and tangible that say that we deserve better than this” and I wasn't gonna stop until that worked out. So I hit up a few people, but namely, I hit up Remy, who is Goodwitch and with initially just being like, hey, how do we get tinctures to people that need them? And I was already making a list of people that I personally knew that could use that sort of care and Remi was just down. And the rest is, you know, a

working history of how we now have like sent out several hundred boxes to people across the country and not to mention the protest kits and like the direct actions for houseless women in LA and in New York and like all this other stuff that we've got going on—I mean stay tuned—but like that we have done. It all just came out of this. This specific place, in me, and in this Black trans non-binary physicality. I could not fathom where the world went wrong that it took me that long to realize that I deserved that shit like I deserved like to be taken care of. And that we all deserve to be taken care of. And that's just on, period! (laughter).

Of course, there's one other element, that I wasn't about to stop in just getting Remy to pump out a bunch of medicine for us. It had to be the work of [collective action]. I was just basically hitting people up directly [Remy too], brands, and folks that are were insufficiently engaged, and was like, “I need a donation of the supplies, this amount of money, or I need you to put me in touch with such and such from this brand so I can get this care to Black people. And, you know, the response was really great because I mean, let's just be a thousand percent about it, a lot of white people feel extremely...guilty, I guess. And responded somewhat like—and you know, at the end of May—just being like, okay, like, sure—

SM: Well, how generous of you actually, you know what I mean? That ask did a lot of that work, for a lot of folks. I'm sure for a lot of folks who didn't know where to put the guilt or the want to engage but not knowing how, and you really actually set up a structure, and a very informative structure, for people to kind of consider how they want to share the resources that they have, one, in that industry but then also outside of it. There's a ton of info there.

YBG: Right, I want a lot more of that. I can't stress it enough that we have to be thinking collectively. We have to be thinking about like...you know...I don't want to say, “the greater good,” but we just have to just be thinking about each other.

I mean, you're damn right, like, there's a bunch of stuff that I personally want and need right now but none of it matters so long as Black Trans women are being killed at an alarming rate. Nothing matters so long as my life expectancy is 35. Nothing matters as long as kids, KIDS, children, are being traumatized and abused by police officers and white supremacists all over the country and world. Like all this other stuff, all the shit that I could possibly need—and you know, “need” being used very loosely—are connected to capitalism. Part of mutual aid is about removing capitalism, or at least transforming capitalism, to work for the collective rather than spit out the same lie about “rags to riches” or “trickle down.” I'm so through with that. That's very chop.

SM: Mm hmm. Before you started the Herbal Mutual Aid Network, you also released a book.

YBG: Yes, I did.

SM: “Good first of creation.” I actually have my copy next to me right now. I say this also because of just the storm of work that I see you in and putting out so much. I think you were—were you still working on the book in the midst of the beginning of COVID really hitting New York? I feel like you were finishing?

YBG: Yeah. Absolutely.

SM: It has since been printed, and sold, and sold out! What was that process like of finishing a collection like that? And especially in this unprecedented climate.

YBG: Well, gotta give a huge shout out to Harrison, my publisher and good friend. He was very instrumental in making this pop and put in a lot of work to get it done. I was just...with this collection, which is very—it's kind of strange how many parallels it really has to how I'm feeling and how I'm moving right now—I mean, it's not that strange, it came from me and it's like, and it's it's kind of where my mind is always at—I'll just talk logistically, it was complicated because suddenly I couldn't get to anybody. I was planning a book launch, you know? And I really wanted to sign them and share them with people. I wanted to be there. I wanted to know what people thought, in a way, it was really an experiment, this book. I was really curious about what people were thinking about it. And I couldn't do any of that, or most of that. Yeah, that was a lot and it made me feel really—well aside from how it made me feel, it still happened and I was very glad with the result. In fact, it's being reprinted now. Look out for an announcement.

Also just to talk about the content, “Good Fist of Creation,” it's...it's about the slipperiness of desire and the kind of material that I think—I was writing this yesterday, so I'm trying to remember like what I wrote—but like the kind of the material that passes between the impulse to exist and to evolve and to stagnate and to like, build, and also to just be indolent. It couldn't have been more fitting because, you know, the book is about negating one's participation in building a world...with people that may not deserve it or people that you don't want to or because you're just too tired or because it's not right yet. And we're all kind of in a weird limbo all of a sudden. I think that this book is kind of a container for, or the ideas of this book and this character's ideas are a container for limbo.

SM: As you were talking, I just flipped open a page—I've been doing this practice where I'll take books of poetry that I'm sitting with, and I'll kind of set an intention and flip to a page—so as you were speaking, I flipped open, and [it reads], “all things accumulating matter.” This idea of accumulation recurs often in this book...I mean, I think that this publication actually came out at exactly the right moment. It really has hit me as very prophetic.

YBG: Aww, that's sweet.

SM: Yes well we'll look out for news of more to come, because I know it's currently sold out, but you're gonna follow up on that soon.

Let's get into let's *Petrichor*.

YBG: Absolutely.

SM: So we released *Petrichor* at Danspace, a couple weeks ago and it's a collaborative project between yourself, Stephen Hill and Quenton Stuckey. It's a video work, it's 20 minutes long—everyone should check it out.

It's also a poem that you wrote, "Petrichor." I'm really curious what your collaborative relationship is, with these two artists and what the process for this project was for the three of you.

YBG: Quentin and Steven, are like my siblings really. I just have so much love and admiration for both of them. It really kind of bursted in this project and this video.

It all came from the fact that like Steven and I have collaborative practice already where we've done radio shows and kind of built scores and really just are kind of dreaming a lot together and experimenting and materializing a lot of random, good, stuff! One day I was just like, "I want to do a thing with you, like a live thing with you, like as if we were a band!" I think it was kind of a joke—what a band looked like with us? I'm sure Steven probably proposed some strange, glitchy, atmospheric, what have you... I was like, absolutely, because this is exactly what we need and I have just the piece...

Just to talk about "Petrichor" the poem... "Petrichor"...wait let me think...

"Petrichor" is a poem with eight versions. And the first version was like 13 pages long. Over the course of maybe half a year it dwindled down to two. I would say that if it's not my favorite poem that I've written, it is certainly my most favorite editing moment ever. If it wasn't my favorite poem ever, it was definitely the most potent of my poems, to me, because when reducing all of the, the detail, it just became...it was sort of like a psychorama thing, where it's giving you a lot of information without like any of the images. You are just attaching yourself to what little I give you in that poem. I know that when I read it, I see really specific things and there are some of my most potent memories and the actions of a lot of my being are in that poem.

Yeah I really do love that poem so much. (laughter) And I was glad to share that with Steven. We had planned and had produced a live version of it once, for a project. We had always envisioned doing it again in a better forum. So when you invited us or when you invited me to participate, I couldn't not. All I could think was I would want to have Steven there as well. Back then I also was thinking, God, I wish I could bring Quenton in because Quenton is like my favorite dancer. And yeah, the timing wasn't right for a lot of reasons. You know, COVID came in and swept that all up, but I knew that we had to build something. What it ended up being was—kind of in each of our pieces, in each of the components of us, you know, that were assembled to make this video—It felt like we were existing in and building a container.

Some really potent parts about the video—it's Quenton in their living room and they've removed a lot of stuff out of it, and the camera doesn't move at all. It's like they were in a sort of like snow globe. And the words were the snow. And the sounds were the water. It just, it just worked so well.

SM: Yeah. It's beautiful. This element of water in your work is so strong. It's interesting you were saying when we first started talking, you were talking about rain and I can't remember exactly what you're saying but it really struck me that this element of water and rain in your work is always framed by temporality. Or that's how I've received it. I was thinking back to the [Poetry] collective and series that you curated, *Fox Wedding* that I was so excited to be a part of it. This was like...when did we do this? In 2017-2018 or 2016-2018?

YBG: Oh my god. (laughter)

SM: It was a series of poetry readings that invited lots of folks to read their work and it was such a beautiful time. And [the title] *Fox Wedding*—I remember the work also, the poem that you wrote, *Fox Wedding* a couple years even before that I think. “Fox Wedding” meaning, you know, like...it's a sun shower, right?

YBG: It is, yeah.

SM: Right. I just remembered that today before we were talking and thinking about Petrichor, which is you know, the smell of rain, and specifically—I had to look it up because, like I sensorially know what that means—but the definition is, “a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm dry weather.”

YBG: Mm hmm.

SM: Yeah, I guess I was just curious if you have more to say about how water comes into your work and this idea of water and time. I don't know if there's something there that you could speak more to?

YBG: Yes, um... one thing that I remember learning as a kid was that the atmosphere and the air is made of water. It never like—I wasn't the same since (laughter). All the time I'm just like, “push through girl” or like “I'm pushing through” or even when I think about you know, dragging myself through events that are...unsavory, to say the least, I consider it to be pushing through something. The something is fluid. Time itself is a fluid material and the more sure I become of that the more time bends around what I need it to be.

What circles right back to my mantra right now, which is that “all good things come to me” is the sureness that I'm made of what I'm pushing through..that I'm also time. That I'm also water. I think a lot about what it means to be like water.

I also got a shout out Hayden [Dunham] again because Hayden and I talk about water a lot. I just—god, there's just so much there that I couldn't even know how to begin but I just have a sureness that...it's there. The thing is that it becomes so emotional to me and it loses its logic because that's how my understanding of existence is what it's brought me to. The logic has ebbed and I just sort of, break with the waves a little bit?

SM: Well maybe it's less logic and more knowledge.

YBG: Right. What I'm certain of is like...I'm just certain of fluidity. I'm also certain of release and retention. Those are elementally connected to the material that is water. And it's something that's abundant. And it's something that we're made of. And it's something that we exist around and push through. And I think that the work that I make and the way that I participate with the world is my attempt to be like water, if not my ode to fluidity, to water, to liquid.

SM: Hmm.

YBG: I'm like, I'm like—Bitch I'm the gender fluid!

(Both laugh)

YBG: I'm sorry. But like, you know what I mean? Like if it was a material (laughing) just like, the fluid. It's the flow.

SM: I made a note earlier too about what I think was so emotional for me in watching the video, Quenton's movements, to me, call to water and ocean so strongly. And throughout the 20 minutes there is this accumulation of sweat on the body. That visceral, bodily evidence of labor, as fluid, and as water...then hearing you speak to this idea of like, the connection of that pushing through it, because you're also made of it, and the possibility there.

Oh, there was something else in the I'm trying to find...there's something else that you wrote in the book that I was reading today as I was flipping through. Um I don't know if I'll find it now...—Oh here, yeah—

“licking my fingers clean is to know that what fails to stop the sun from rising if formed against me won't prosper” - [Good Fist of Creation]

Hearing you talk about pushing through what you are made of, just called that line back to me

YBG: Just to speak on Quenton for a second before I get into “Good Fist of Creation,” the poem.

Quenton really embodied, like deeply embodied, the poem and the sentiments in it. Honestly, I'm so incredibly proud of that video because it was just seamless execution on all parts. Of my ramblings just now...that was the execution of those sentiments that I find so dear and that I have such a sureness about...

When I watch [*Petrichor* the video] there are times where Quenton is like ice, and vapor, and a body of water, and a drop of water, and a cloud—all of these different kinds of materials or all of these different manifestations of the material...I'm just so grateful for them. Not to mention Steven who just really ran with a lot of directions [in the process of creating *Petrichor*]. At some point in our collaboration and back and forth of sending each other stuff, he sent me the final product. I was probably having a really, to put it lightly, taxing day. And it was the sound. And it was just done. And I was like, this is as good as it could possibly be and I couldn't be happier. And it just really worked. So thank you for inviting us to do that and for hosting it [*Petrichor* on the Danspace Project website journal].

SM: Thank you so much. It's so generous and beautiful. I know I speak for everybody at Danspace when I say we're just really thrilled to be able to host it on the journal.

Well, I'm looking at the time and I feel like we should probably come to a close soon but I was wondering if you might read "Petrichor" for us or any other piece or anything you might want to share?

YBG: Oh, absolutely...I can give a portion of it ["Petrichor"]. Give me two seconds....

SM: Okay.

YBG: And like, the thing is that... what people don't get to see is how many times I've privately read "Petrichor" and just wept. Because it really is so dear to me and there are some moments in it where..um...there are just some moments that really speak to how I how I exist now and how I take care of myself and how...I don't know.

SM: hmhhh...

YBG: It's just really huge to me. So yeah, I'll read you a little piece. Let me just wait for this plane to pass by. I'll read the end:

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[EXCERPT OF "PETRICHOR" - A POEM WRITTEN AND READ BY YVES B. GOLDEN]

Seldom fades full of
empty room.

hidden place.
full of water.
behind the teeth.
face
behind doppling
blue.
not you

through
my eyelids, red
full of days-
stuffed air.

the yolk.

the
something
newer still;
the face unlike my face.

mama's just tired baby mama's just tired baby stuffed air in the blue, sagging.
full of won't you at long last be quiet baby
lined in red-white.

first the days.

old. the red-white. face like my face. the bright. the red yellow. yolk behind eyelids. new. fray
yellow. face full of lines. water. full of.

tired eye

following
the cold
above spelling.

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SM: Thank you.

YBG: Of course.

SM: I always love hearing you read. I really do

(both laugh)

YBG: I love hearing you read. I miss our *Fox Wedding* days. [Poetry reading series curated by Yves in which Seta participated as a poet]. Soon.

SM: Yeah

YBG: Yeah, it'll come back. It'll be back.

SM: I trust it.

All right. Well, thank you so much Yves, again for talking to me today and I'm really looking forward to all the good things that are coming for you.

YBG: Me too. And for you.

SM: Okay.

YBG: I love you.

SM: I love you, too.