

[CRITICAL DIALOGUES]

INTERCULTURAL

APRIL 2016

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Martha Graham, *Letter to The World*. Photo: Barbara Morgan 1940.



There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium: and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. No artist is pleased. There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.

Martha Graham to Agnes De Mille, 1943.

INTRODUCTION

Annalouise Paul

Why intercultural? Well, much like cross-cultural, transcultural or multicultural it's really just another label, which is useful in this context as it underpins this Critical Dialogues edition with nine articles that include reflections on practice, academic theories and curatorial provocations.

Biodiversity is my preferred descriptive for the intersection of multilayered cultures within one larger arts eco-system. Intercultural practice speaks across, between and inside cultures through artistic collaboration, hybrid practice, immersion and connection into country, ancestral roots and Diasporas.

I believe our unique cultural bio-diversity can pioneer artistic innovation. Newly arrived artists and artists from second and third generations of immigrant families are versatile and inventive

because they've had to be. Creative processes are highly adaptive by virtue of not having easy access to homelands, cultural elders, financial resources or support to specialise in a particular form. The tyranny of distance we all have as Australians is their opportunity for innovation and to better understand where they live. And this work challenges us to see ourselves as part of a collective Australian identity. The result is authentic, confident and culturally rich contemporary practice that is inspired by its local surroundings and a collective history.

Intercultural is also that in-between place where cultures and art forms *almost* meet. The world is a messy place, things are unknown and there are tensions but that's an exciting space to think about and to explore in creatively, because the possibilities are endless. And it's an honest reflection of our world right now.



Annalouise Paul at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun LÖhr

The residue of Australia's Multiculturalism, assimilation policies and cultural stereotyping is subsiding for many artists from the non-dominant cultures in Australia. Cultural dance has generally meant folkloric, community and heritage forms. These have not been regularly included in funding project excellence or in curated arts programs but more often relegated to community cultural development activity. Here again dance artists operating in both cultural and western forms find themselves in the liminal space creatively,

but also liminal within the wider dance sector that operates from Western-European modes of dance exploration. The works face challenges of cultural navigation and creation that must be produced and critiqued on its own terms, aesthetics, values and frameworks rather than through a European lens or sensibility.

Multicultural NSW proposes that by 2020 New South Wales will be the most culturally diverse place in the world. The latest Census showed that forty-seven percent

of Australians were either born overseas or have overseas-born parents, and that Australians identify with over 300 ancestries and languages. The Scanlon Foundation's latest report showed it's the 18-34 year olds that most embrace cultural diversity and 'smashing cultural stereotypes' was a key priority.

The pioneers of modern dance - Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham, Ted Shawn, Agnes De Mille, infused Oriental movement into their ballet languages. Australia has a much shorter dance history of contemporary-cultural dance exploration by comparison but imagine fifty years from now who we'll be and works that will emerge as our national identity evolves.

SPEAK LOCAL

As co-curator for the inaugural Speak Local with former Critical Path Director, Margie Medlin, part of the vision was to showcase the widest diversity of practices as possible of artists who share that in-between space of non-western and western forms and concepts and processes. This proposition for a curation did not begin from a place marginalisation or disadvantage but from a shared understanding of the liminal spaces that we inhabit;

the hybridism of cultural practices and the transmission of ancestral lineages.

Claire Hicks, Critical Path's new director wrote the following in response to Speak Local:

What do we mean? Critical Path. When we talk about intercultural dance...

The interrelation of different cultures through dance

The interrelation of people from different cultures who engage in dance

The interrelation of dances from different cultural backgrounds

So intercultural dance doesn't fall into that rather disturbing hole of colonialisation and racism. Or does it? I'm still a little worried about all of this. We don't live in a world where people have hermetically sealed cultures anymore, but we do want to be respectful of people's different cultures.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Critical Dialogues edition 6 highlights reflections of the presentations at Speak Local and Interchange Festival as a springboard into wider considerations on process, practice, festival curation and labels. Alan

The tyranny of distance we all have as Australians is their opportunity for innovation and to better understand where they live. And this work challenges us, to see ourselves as part of a collective Australian identity. The result is authentic, confident and culturally rich contemporary practice that is inspired by its local surroundings.

Discussion forum at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhr



Schacher and WeiZen Ho discuss the 'unknown' of hybridity and how they feel about the label of intercultural in their collaborative work. David D'Silva suggests the liminal space is supra cultural and that collaboration allows him to deepen his intercultural understanding.

Cheryl Stock presents a comprehensive overview of the history and intersections between Australian-born Asian artists since 1985, Dance in Malaysia and Indonesia and our current artists followed by Paschal Berry's unfettered diary entries as a poetic reflection of his literary and performance work in Australia and the Philippines. Yeewan Yeoh and Sumathi Krishnan observe the curation of major and grassroots Australian festivals; OZAsia, Parramasala, Interchange and Sydwhaney which specifically support and present imported and local contemporary cultural explorations by Asian and Australian artists.

Laura Osweiler shares her Middle Eastern and contemporary dance practice in relation to Edward Soja's Thirdspace and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theories. I have

included thoughts on my new solo work FORGE currently in progress and a trip to Spain and musician-composer Peter Kennard, suggests that we are at the tipping point of intercultural practice in Australia and it's time to close the gap between artistic collaboration and its disjuncture in the market place.

This collection of articles may serve as an archive and resource, but hopefully, also provides a much-needed contribution to Dance writing on intercultural practice in Australia. It aims to contextualise some of the work being made at this time and perhaps place a cement footprint in our Dance landscape, something I feel has been missing for a long time. Collective artistic genetics must be anchored, lest we forget our own pioneers and their legacies. This art is not necessarily on the current national agenda of excellence, derivative neither of western canon nor of cultural placement, but something wonderfully unique in between.

Thank you to Critical Path, Margie Medlin and all the contributors for this edition. Special thanks Zsuzsi Soboslay who is also a published writer and performance maker.



DIASPORIC DANCING IDENTITIES

Cheryl Stock AM

Attending the performances and forum of Speak Local curated by Margie Medlin and Annalouise Paul at Critical Path's Interchange Festival provided the opportunity to not only see up-close explorations of intercultural practice by Sydney and Canberra-based artists, but to discuss issues and processes arising from this experience. I was surprised by some of the discussion around the nature of intercultural practice, which seemed to imply we were struggling with something relatively new, misunderstood and under-appreciated. This in turn caused me to reflect on my own experience with intercultural dance over a period of 35 years and the long history of this type of practice in Australia, particularly with Indigenous and Asian forms and artists.

The eight works that I had the pleasure to see - often influenced by ancient traditions, stories and philosophies - were fresh, honest, and came from a deep-seated questioning of personal and cultural identity. As I engaged with their performative experiences, I was aware that my perceptual lens (and I suspect that of others in the audience) had been shaped by similar, if differently contextualised, intercultural performance experiences over several decades.

What went before in Australian intercultural practice

Intercultural performance has a long history but in terms of contemporary Australian dance a seminal influence is the pioneering work of Kai Tai Chan, who moved to Australia from Malaysia in the early 60s to study architecture in Sydney, and after taking up dance with Margaret Barr, created his acclaimed and innovative One Extra Company in 1975, where he remained as director until 1991. As Garry Lester (2000, p.212) points out: 'In choosing to work with Asian, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, black American and white Caucasian performers Kai Tai proposed identity as a hybrid, constructed, dialogic relationship'. These words still resonate strongly and continue to be relevant in the

present context. In retrospect I also realise how my own intercultural practice in Vietnam from 1988 to 2000 was informed through working with Kai Tai in the early 80s. At that time dance theatre was a popular genre in Sydney and visibly 'multicultural' so the mix of performers described above, with whom I performed, did not seem unusual.

Kai Tai Chan's hybrid choreographic style drew on image and situation-based improvisations together with phrases and sensibilities derived from his Chinese heritage and movement approach; it occasionally incorporated the fusion style coming from the early experiments of AIDT (Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre), as well as drawing on contemporary dance and theatre. Such hybridity was an accepted part of the creative process, given our cultural environment, like learning a Chinese ribbon dance and Torres Strait Islander dances and songs (Stock, 2009, p. 281).

During the same period in Melbourne, experiments in contemporising and fusing Indian classical dance with other influences were taking place with the ground-breaking work of Chandrabhanu, who had by 1985 formed the fully professional Bharatam Dance Company, touring

internationally until the company disbanded in 2000. From 1990 to 1997, in Western Australia, Rakini Devi explored intercultural dance techniques through her Kalika Dance Company.

In 1998 after working together for some years, Chinese-Malaysian choreographer and dancer Tina Yong, trained in Western, Malay, Chinese dance and the Indian classical style of *bharata natyam*, and Chinese born dancer and choreographer Sun Ping, trained in Chinese classical and folk styles, formed Wu Lin Dance Theatre. Unlike some intercultural approaches theirs did not rely on contemporary dance techniques as a conduit but consisted of contemporary works fusing Chinese, Malay and Indian dance genres.

Significant Japanese influences on Australian artists from the early 80s, and probably earlier, were those of *butoh*, *body weather*, and the training techniques of Tadashi Suzuki, observed in artists such as Yumi Umiuare, Nigel Kellaway, Tess de Quincy, John Nobbs and Jacqui Carroll (Frank Productions), Lynne Bradley and Simon Woods (Zen Zen Zo). At the same time ongoing collaborative exchanges were also taking place in Indonesia with Graeme Watson and One

Extra in Bali, Cheryl Stock in a 12 year relationship with dancers in Hanoi (see Stock, 2000), as well as other exchanges in India, Korea and Chinese speaking countries.

Many of the early intercultural experiments began with in-country collaborative exchanges and were often quite highly profiled in Australia and in the country in which the Australians made their work. Some later claimed it was merely 'soft diplomacy' funded by embassies for political reasons, but for the artists involved the opportunities were hard fought and came from a deep and abiding passion for, and curiosity about, the cultures with which they were engaging. Whilst debates about appropriation and power differences resulted in soul-searching for those artists working abroad, for many the value of such long-term experiences moved beyond exchange of forms, histories and bodily practices to lessons in culturally adaptive behavior and the 'central tenet of multiple, relational perspectives' of intercultural communication (Min-Sun Kim, 2010, p. 174).

Contemporary intercultural practices – an overview

Space prevents a comprehensive discussion on the many theories of intercultural performance that

have arisen over the last 40 years. Just as definitions of choreography have expanded to incorporate interdisciplinarity and interactivity, so have understandings about what constitutes intercultural performance. Fischer-Lichte, in her seminal work on the interweaving of cultures, tracks a long history of exchange of cultures in performance from the first years of the 20th century. She points to fundamental shifts in western theatre, influenced primarily by Asian performance traditions, through a 'breaking of perceptual conventions', changing relations of spectators and performers, and the introduction of three-dimensional space which she claims 'formulated a new body concept' (2009, p. 395). In the latter third of the 20th century the sharing of culturally specific, body-centred practices became prevalent and still maintains a place in our current context.

However, many intercultural dance artists now work in the globalised context of interdisciplinary mixed-media practices, preferring the broader concept of transcultural to that of intercultural. The continual evolution of these practices has 'augmented and refined modes of intercultural exchange, of which there are at least four, which I have grouped as:

1 in-country cultural immersion;
2 collaborative international exchange/
sharing of culturally diverse practices;
3 hybrid practices of diasporic artists;
4 implicit intercultural connections.'
 (Stock, 2009, pp. 283-284)

These approaches are not progressive or even exclusive since they may operate simultaneously. Whilst early exchanges in Australia (as outlined above) often fell into the first category, the second approach is currently an increasing phenomenon for predominantly small companies and groups seeking opportunities on the various festival circuits, and in a globalised world the fourth is becoming pervasive and often unconscious.

Diaspora and hybridity

It is the third model of diasporic artists pursuing various forms of hybridity that seemed most prevalent in the Speak Local program, which comprised artists of Indigenous, Chinese Malaysian, Philippine, Japanese, Indian, Jewish and Spanish heritage. In this model the intercultural resides 'within the artist's own body and is played out in a multiplicity of ways' through their practice (ibid, p. 297). As Speak Local was focused on solo practice, the dialogic relationship of intercultural practice that usually takes place in a collaborative setting was happening within a single

body rather than between several bodies. With a few exceptions the artists are also an integral part of the Australian diaspora where their experience embraces living in/between two or more cultures simultaneously. The term diaspora is linked to a feeling of a lost homeland, often from previous generations, which in turn can lead to a sense of displaced identity. In her program note for *Speak Local*, Japanese dancer Anna Kuroda asked 'What is home? Is it a place, feeling or time?', whilst Paschal Daantos Berry, an interdisciplinary artist and curator of Philippine heritage, spoke about 'reclaiming what has been erased'. Diasporic experience thus encompasses intersecting notions of loss, 'homeland', hybridity and identity. In the *Speak Local* context several of the works recalled the comment of London-based choreographer Jesayingh that her intercultural work takes place in 'that imaginary homeland of the Diaspora' (1995, p. 192), which Indian writer and artist Menon (2005) calls 'invented homelands'.

As I watched the performances I questioned whether 'intercultural' was still a useful term to describe the works that I saw, since these diasporic practices seemed to place greater emphasis on the integration of hybrid identities

above transference between cultural forms and content. In viewing the sometimes complex layering of diverse stylistic and cultural experimentation, I thought about the relevance of Birringer's 'overlapping circles of consciousness' (2000, p.72). And I pondered on the usefulness or otherwise of labels, a topic that surfaced during the post-performance forum, where a resistance to 'framing' and 'representing' practice emerged. Nevertheless, theorising and naming often help to focus on the principles that emerge from practice. It can also provide a vocabulary to articulate one's practice beyond the personal. Fischer-Lichte suggests that hybrid performance practices are created in a liminal or in-between space 'brought about by the interweaving of cultures' (2009, p.397), in which 'different identities are possible side by side' (p.398). Birringer's image brings to mind a dense hybridity emerging from overlapping concentric circles of influence, whereas Fischer-Lichte's 'interweaving' feels more porous, allowing an in-between space for hybridity to seep in and inhabit. But neither of these approaches are merely philosophical abstractions for they arguably lead to what Fisher-Lichte calls 'transcultural entanglements' that probe 'the emergence, stabilisation, and de-

stabilisation of cultural identity' in which 'the aesthetic and the political merge' (2009, p. 400).

Speaking with and speaking out

These concepts seemed to me pertinent to both the performances and the discussion that occurred in the forum where considerations of aesthetics, politics (particularly of visibility, access and gatekeeping), identity and embodied understandings surfaced, not only from the practice but from the cultural environment in which it was taking place. Nevertheless, beyond any theoretical constructs it was the individual voice of the artists and spectators speaking from her/his experiences that provided a relevant specific context for the works performed. Bearing in mind that Critical Path is a platform for choreographic and performance research and development, rather than a production house, Margie Medlin reminded us that our focus be on exchange (and interchange) 'as the beginning point where new conversations can happen'. And indeed the conversations were revealing, especially within the performances themselves where the verbal contextualisations gave us an insight into the bodily conversations being shared with the audience. For the artists it was generally agreed that 'artistic

sharing is an intercultural space' which is more akin to the milieu of a landscape than a framework. In this landscape, one artist remarked, 'we all have fluid identities' in which we are (re)creating cultural norms and traditions within Australia that are dynamic and continually evolving.

Voicing and embodying the personal and the political

The Speak Local showings included experienced as well as emerging dancer / choreographers and artists. Whilst all were rooted in their embodied experience of personal and cultural identity, the former tended to move beyond personal movement exploration to broader contexts of enquiry. These ranged from historical lineage and a reconstruction of the early intercultural work of Ruth St Denis (Liz Lea), to a sensory experience for the audience of spices, water and ritualistic engagement preceded by a visual and movement installation as an apparent metaphor of the colonised diaspora. This work, *Shoesandspices* created by WeiZen Ho and Alan Schacher, evoked experiences of displacement, echoing issues around the half-truths and half-memories of history gleaned from diasporic existence, as did the film presentation of Paschal Daantos Berry in portraying multiplicity to counter a sense of

erasure. Berry, in particular, revealed the power of narrative through mixed media and interdisciplinary approaches, enabled by his curatorial methodology and long-standing collaborations.

Whilst all the artists spoke articulately about their experiences, Annalouise Paul's presentation began with a moving and unexpected revelation of a family lineage in searching for an 'authentic' cultural identity that married with her flamenco based work. Her witty and moving text revealed the depth of an intercultural artist who continues to explore her own practice whilst facilitating that of others. From a more internalised perspective Anna Kuroda's slow moving work *Window* to a percussive score and live voice, demonstrated a highly developed dance of micro gestures with surprising changes in dynamics through falling, together with shifting levels and direction.

The explorations of the emerging artists were thoughtful and at times passionate, delivered through an intensity of focus and embodied discipline. Aruna Gandhi's Indian solo *Naayika*, based on Bharatanatyam in collaboration with western classical composer

and musician Anisha Thomas, was a courageous and dramatic attempt to break through and contemporise a highly codified tradition whilst retaining the clarity of form and content of its traditions. Indigenous performer Thomas Kelly's powerful yet strangely unassuming presence was used to advantage in two solos in the early stages of discovering an individual voice. His combination of gestural movement and text show potential for a dance narrative based on his connection to place. Unusually Raghav Handa is an Australian choreographer and performer of Indian heritage with training in Indigenous contemporary dance. His solo *The Shifter*, currently in development, was mesmeric in its simplicity. Starting with a single movement idea around shaking, the dance gradually built to a whole body impulse exploration that displayed impressive concentration and disciplined focus of energy.

Where to from here?

Together these solos of hybrid danced identities, in various stages of development, formed a diverse and highly engaging program which shows potential as a festival showcase of inter/trans cultural dance. However, the actuality of



As I watched the performances I questioned whether 'intercultural' was still a useful term to describe the works that I saw, since these diasporic practices seemed to place greater emphasis on the integration of hybrid identities above transference between cultural forms and content... Nevertheless, theorising and naming often help to focus on the principles that emerge from practice. It can also provide a vocabulary to articulate one's practice beyond the personal.

this goal may seem far away for the participating artists, judging from the issues raised in the post-performance forum, where artists either focussed on personal developmental processes or felt charged to speak about lack of support and their desires for greater visibility and access. Gatekeeping, in terms of performance and funding opportunities, was seen as the result of resistance to culturally based dance practices. This brought up the need for more creative and informed curators to take risks in programming culturally based work, since as Margie Medlin pointed out, there is a perception that such work still exists 'in a particular ghetto'.

In an article on the place of disability dance (also pertinent to diasporic dance), Whatley

(2015) argues for its inclusion in our 'cultural heritage' which she describes as being 'intimately bound up in ideas of cultural and political identity, individual and community norms and traditions, and individual and collective rights'. She makes a strong case for a more diverse and equitable dance ecology as a key factor for expanding what currently constitutes cultural heritage.

Whatley suggests that one way this can occur is 'developing a critical literacy [to] enable meaningful and informed discussions to take place' (ibid.) in relation to what are now marginalised dance practices. The Speak Local program has effectively begun this process, applied to the field of intercultural practice, but it is now time for all of us – artists, curators, writers – to work together in expanding visibility and

opportunities for such artists, with a view to ensuring their practice becomes an integral and not a

peripheral part of our Australian dance heritage.

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Cheryl Stock, PhD, AM has worked as a dancer, choreographer, director, educator, researcher and advocate. Cheryl is Secretary General of World Dance Alliance and Adjunct Professor in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology where she previously held positions as Head of Dance and Director of Postgraduate Studies. A recipient of the Australian Dance Award's Lifetime Achievement, Cheryl was founding Artistic Director of Dance North, is currently Artistic Advisor and has created over 50 dance works as well as 20 collaborative exchanges in Asia. Her publications and practice encompass interdisciplinary and intercultural site specific performance, contemporary Australian and Asian dance, and practice-led research.

www.accentedbody.com

THESE
BELONG
TOGETHER.
SMALL
PASSAGES.
BETWEEN
CULTURES.

Paschal Daantos Berry

I.

It took 21 years of curiosity to return to country. Leaving the Philippines in 1984 as an eleven year old, created a chasm between cultures – one end of it being sanctified in nostalgia and the other immersed in the irreverence of the new culture. So to a certain degree, it’s unsurprising for a migrant in an Australian context to be always wrestling with the cross-cultural. To navigate around languages – both the literal and abstract means of communicating – builds ones sense of curiosity for working out a way into a new environment or into new friendships. I went through art school and acting school, looking for a “universal” language or artistic vocabulary. Trying to figure out what the galleries liked, what kind of acting resonated and later what plays were being produced. And perhaps the older I get the more I despise this notion of universality, as one quickly realises that in performance making, it is specificity and idiosyncrasy that prove much more interesting.

Excerpt from a travel diary. Makati City, Philippines. December 2015.

II.

We have been gathered in a circle at the top floor of Papet Museo watching Ea Torrado’s Daloy Dance stake out their space. Saying hi to everyone as they sit down.

It’s absolutely hot and humid, the heat radiating out of the thick un-rendered cement and we are huddled together sitting on the floor.

I’m thinking. Shin splints. Bone on cement. Cement burn.

And it occurs to me that even my very Aussie subconscious has now yielded to thinking about insurance before the fucking art.

I think I’ve turned into a fear-ridden curator.

IPhone Notes entry. Quezon City, Philippines. May 2015.

III.

In the arts we espouse and preach multiculturalism as a part of our

ideals. But without playing the victim, I've always found this to be highly untrue. In our sector, we are quick to relegate "cultural works" as belonging to particular corners of our society – established and/or emerging migrant or indigenous communities. Our sector has always been good at marginalising the works of non-Anglo artists. And we find it easier to frame these works in multicultural programming, separate from the mainstream. When I was an emerging artist it was much easier to access these avenues – believing perhaps that this was a way into a much more stable practice. Thank heavens, for the Ethnic Council of NSW and the tireless work of people like Barry Gamba and Bruce Keller; Cheryl Yin-Lo at Downstairs Belvoir; and Lex Marinos at Carnivale. Thank god, for Performance Space.

The minute I realised that I wanted to create works that reflected the diversity of culture and forms of the Australia I knew, I felt liberated by the idea that I was not begging for an audience. That somehow I could find them and that I actually knew who I wanted to speak to.

IPhone Notes entry, entitled "That Angry Guy". Sydney, Australia. November 2012.

IV.

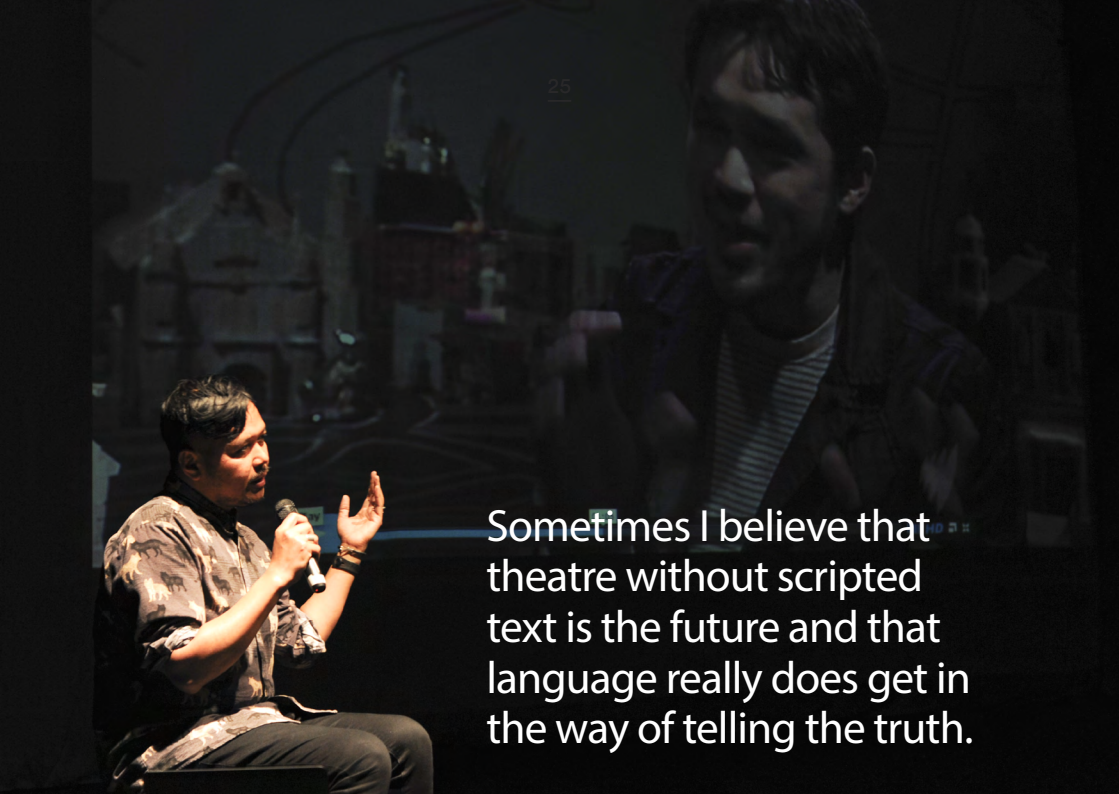
5. QUESTIONS:

A. How do we fund the ANINO component? Is there budget for the creation of the lantern? Is there a Karnabal fee?

B. What is in it for the community? How do we contribute to their lives and not just create art out of their lives? Is this about awareness around specific community concerns and issues?

C. How do we resolve the inefficiency of translators? Where do we source a translator that understands how to interpret artistic language? And who pays for this service?

Excerpt from Facebook Messenger discussion around a collaboration between Japanese performance artist Natsuki Ishigami and Anino Shadowplay Collective. Manila, Philippines. December 2015.



Sometimes I believe that theatre without scripted text is the future and that language really does get in the way of telling the truth.

Paschal Daantos Berry at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

V.

It's been strange developing a work and being convinced it would be text driven. Then having to rethink most of the ideas after going to Laguna and playing with Anino (Shadowplay Collective) at reducing the ideas behind the words, specially the abstraction. It's at once frightening and invigorating working in this way. But then again I've never been that precious about losing gorgeous material. As with (my previous play) The Folding Wife I feel the text will again be more like a schematic. It can easily be erased and worked into a much more physical idea of performance. I can even see it as dance really. The city as fiction, brutal memory or as ephemera is a pretty rich source material.

I went into this wanting to write but I think this text will disappear altogether. Once again conceding to the much more powerful and reductive force of the image. Or the simplicity of a movement vocabulary. And yet again, there's all this unspoken text piling up in

the backburner of unused words!

Maybe I'm done with theatre.

**Within and Without development journal. Sydney, Australia.
January 2011.**

VI.

My siblings and I were born Cebuanos. Our parents were Warays. My mother was a Marcos loyalist but changed her mind once in Australia. My father was on the Left side of politics. We were all multilingual. They both believed English to be the language of the future. We were raised on Walt Whitman, Lord Byron, John Keats and Wilfred Owen. My mother loved Nick Joaquin, a Filipino writer who wrote in English and was nostalgic for the Spanish era. She spoke English with a joyous formality. My father painted Byzantine style religious paintings with Latin inscriptions. We grew up hating the Japanese and being jealous of the Chinese.

As a child I was aware of borders. I understood geography. I observed that adults lived in coded realities and that they had elaborate funerals. I was aware of how you behave in front of your parents and how to behave in front of your maids. I was made to believe that I belonged to the educated middle-class. I was told that the Filipino is worth dying for and that it is a worthy death if you fought to have your own language. I was taught that Russia was Totalitarian. The U.S. was a Democracy. And the Philippines was... well, a Republic.

Identity and place has always been constructed around me or placed under my feet. My mother married an Australian – when I was 10 - and we moved to Ceduna, South Australia. I have not seen any of my Filipino relatives since 1984. We Facebook now. My step-father once told us that educating the Aborigines was a fruitless exercise. He was a boxer who adored Muhammad Ali but only when he was still Cassius Clay. My mother was an academic who specialised in Aboriginal Early Childhood Education. The white kids liked us. The black kids always high-fived us. We were more than just “tolerated” in a landscape of sporadic racial

inflammations. My brother won Young Citizen of the Year for the region. Mom won the senior version. We were the perfect migrants. As siblings we sang four part harmonies at the senior citizens' village. In public we spoke English. With mum we spoke Cebuano. Everyone spoke English if Dad was in the room. When Pauline Hanson arrived in our public consciousness, Dad welcomed her.

I loved my step-father.

I write, speak and think in English. My Cebuano is tolerable. My Tagalog is horrific for those who speak it. Spanish is a cloying spectre that I'd love to master. Sometimes I believe that theatre without scripted text is the future and that language really does get in the way of telling the truth. I enjoy dramaturgy for dance. Though dance has become obsessed with being theatre. Strangely enough the older I get the more affinity I feel for my Cebuano ethnicity – it probably has to do with burying ones parents...

In Manila I feel like an impostor. In Cebu I am a child looking for his footsteps. In Ceduna my Filipina mother and my Australian step-father are buried facing the sea, witnessing the sands claim the landscape. I write because it's like an act of excavation. At university I failed archaeology. My worldly possessions are my white goods, my bed, a few suitcases full of drawings and words.

I own my language.

Excerpt from *Border Language* first published in Performance Space's *Translab Dialogues* publication. Sydney, Australia. May 2016.

Paschal Daantos Berry is performance maker, writer and dramaturg whose practice is focused on interdisciplinary, cross cultural and collaborative processes. He wrote the critically acclaimed *The Folding Wife*, a co-production which received a national Mobile States Tour through Performing Lines in 2010. With Deborah Pollard he created *Within and Without*, presented by Performance Space in partnership with Blacktown Arts Centre in 2011. His 10-year collaboration with Manila-based company Anino Shadowplay Collective has yielded multiple projects including a current work, *Arkipelago: Intima-sea*, which played the Pesta Boneka Biennale in Jogjakarta in December 2014. Paschal was an inaugural member of Australia Council's Youth Panel. He is currently the Performance Curator at Blacktown Arts Centre.

A TALE OF TWO FESTIVALS

Yeehwan Yeh

In this article I briefly compare two festivals, namely Critical Path's Interchange Festival and Adelaide Festival Centre's OzAsia Festival, that use bilateral exchanges between cultures as a thematic focus. While it was enjoyable to witness and participate in both festivals as an audience member, it was also interesting to speculate on the relationship between two festivals of extremely different scales – one only drawing an audience of a few hundred people, and the other in the tens of thousands. How these events were placed and perceived within the broader ecology of the arts sector, particularly since the subjective notion of 'excellence' had been thrown up in the air by Minister Brandis' recent questionable decision to readminister Australia Council for the Arts funds.

Intercultural exchanges in the arts are often the premise for residencies, festivals, and even for the existence of some organisations. The rationale behind the exchanges often assumes that its value is a given, yet evidence to support this assumption is not always evident. Networking opportunities and sharing of skills are cited, but the intangible nature of these outcomes makes it difficult to capture and be represented into hard data.

According to social exchange theory, humans participate in exchanges by analyzing cost-benefit and "comparison of alternatives" (Wikipedia, 2016). To put it simply, we seek exchanges that we hope are going to be rewarding; in economic as well as social terms. Economic reward, for instance, may drive independent artists to be involved in transactions where future work is viable, for instance through meeting possible collaborators and producers. We also cannot underestimate the social impact that exchanges have on the independent artist, for whom these platforms can foster a sense of community otherwise lacking. Along these lines Critical Path programmed the Interchange Festival in 2015 (1-18 November 2015), with a festival program of workshops, exchanges, residences, presentations and discussions around the theme of intercultural exchanges.

Workshop facilitators included Annalouise Paul, whose works include collaborations across dance and performance cultures. Annalouise had recently returned from an artistic exchange in Singapore, where she had facilitated a new work in development, sharing processes on the idea of 'bilingual' dance. The other workshop

facilitator was Hemabharathy Palani, a choreographer who has been part of Attakkalari's FACETS residency and was also at Critical Path for the Sydney stage of her FACETS exchange with Lucky Lartey, a dancer and choreographer working between contemporary and West African dance forms. A substantial amount of Interchange Festival's energies came from the Monsoon Australia (2-14 November 2015) residency, where 9 artists from Asia, Europe and Australia were thrown into a 'blind-date' setting in the remote and inspirational Bundanon Trust property on the New South Wales south coast. The artists then presented sketches of ideas during the final weekend back at Critical Path, and revealed how intensely prolific and generative exchanges could be, even amongst artists with no prior histories of working with each other or in necessarily similar ideas.

The Interchange Festival culminated in Speak Local, a presentation evening followed by a discussion forum, which also featured a sampling of works by NSW and ACT artists working in intercultural format. Again these showings presented 'working' drafts of artists' ideas rather than finished productions, and the discussion forum afterwards allowed for

questions and comments to be fed back to the artists. As such the Interchange Festival prioritised artist processes and dialogue over final outcomes, seeking to bring both performers and spectators to the debate on intercultural exchange. For the artists involved, the Interchange Festival was an opportunity to re-examine reasons for engaging with dance and performance, and to improve the critical rigor behind their methodologies and subject matter.

This mini-festival emphasised Critical Path's mandate to invest in research before delivery.

When investigating process-based practices across other sectors, I found that the Department of Education in its resource website for intercultural exchanges in NSW schools, had defined the values of a "process-centred program" as such:

"...the schools (including staff, students, parents and community members) involved should collaboratively determine the goal/s, content and intended outcomes of their program, including the learning and social outcomes that they hope to achieve. Goals often change as the program evolves and so programs should be flexible enough to allow for this change and, importantly, incorporate teaching and learning around the value of flexibility within collaborative, intercultural contexts."



Moon Lantern Parade at the OzAsia Festival 2015. Photo courtesy OzAsia Festival.

(Department of Education NSW, 2015)

This guideline speaks of the importance of a “collaborative” and “flexible” pathway and is much like the “open architecture” that Critical Path aspires to. Nonetheless the real impact of the dialogical participation between performers and audience at “process-centred” festivals cannot be tracked in engagement numbers and Critical Path has found that the impact of the experiences can often only be relayed anecdotally.

On the other end of the spectrum to the Interchange Festival was the OzAsia Festival, hosted by the

Adelaide Festival Centre. I had the privilege to attend this festival courtesy of Critical Path and explore intercultural engagement on this scale. The 2015 OzAsia Festival featured 180 scheduled activities including more than 90 performances, 8 exhibitions, 15 film screenings, 10 speaking events and a variety of workshops and other activities. More than 270 professional artists performed across the Festival and more than 2,500 people participated in a variety of community events, performances and workshops. The festival reached record attendance figures of 230,000. (Adelaide Festival Centre, 2015) The figure

includes attendance at the Night Noodle Markets, in which people turned up in droves (nothing like food as a drawcard – Critical Path, take heed!), and the Moon Lantern Festival – featuring fireworks, paper lantern parades. In total, free performances, including several staged by participating schools and community groups, recorded an attendance of 50,000. (ibid)

Against the broad appeal of these events, there were more provocative selections such as Joshua Oppenheimer’s controversial documentaries on the 1965-66 Indonesian massacres, *Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* directed at more niche audiences.

In contrast to the Interchange Festival, the OzAsia Festival has immense socio-political expectations, not to mention financial outcomes. In Director Joseph Mitchell’s words, the Festival has strategic interests “to broaden our audience’s knowledge, perspective and engagement with various parts of Asia.”⁵ (Mitchell, 2014)

The Festival focuses on a different Asian country each year, and in 2014, the focus in China was even more specific to the region of Shandong. In 2015, the country of focus was Indonesia, in which Oppenheimer’s

documentaries as well as the dance highlight *Cry Jailolo* were program choices that presented insightful and specific, rather than generalized or typical, perspectives on the country.

Cry Jailolo, choreographed by Indonesian Eko Supriyanto, cleverly uses the dance vocabulary from the Legu Salai dances of the Sahu Tribe in West Halmahera, North Maluku to create a contemporary performance illustrating the reef erosion currently experienced there and in surrounding islands.

Other selections such as *Spectra* and *Play* in the dance program literally explored cross-form exchanges. Townsville-based company Dancenorth presented *Spectra* in an exchange with Japanese Butoh dance company Batik, and *Play* brought together the popular Moroccan-Flemish Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and French Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa in their flirtatious exchange of dance forms and bigger questions on life in general.

In responding to the weighty onus of the ‘Asian century’ looming in the horizon, Mitchell and team managed to create a festival with mainstream appeal as well as a nuanced program through the use of strategic curatorial focal points.

Although both Interchange Festival and OzAsia Festival engage with intercultural exchange as a theme, the former sees exchange as a process-based tool for artistic research, and the latter views exchange as a transaction with socio-political and economic outcomes. Yet these two very different festivals feed into our artistic landscape to shape the type of work that we create and then deliver to audiences, and therefore is a cogent argument for the continued need to program intelligently and sensitively so that “intercultural” does not become

a mere play between us and “the other”. Perhaps this was best summed up by Cherkaoui in his response to being typecast as a “cross-cultural” choreographer:

“I am translating into a field that is contemporary dance. Sometimes I am translating things from another field – like martial arts or Flamenco, which could be considered to have another language – but I feel that they are part of the contemporary language. When certain movements are brought into a contemporary field, suddenly they become natural; they become part of your language as well.” (Cherkouai, 2013)

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Yeewan Yeoh is an arts writer and visual artist, and until recently, she was also the Program and Business Manager at Critical Path. She has worked for various non-profit arts organisations including Gallery 4A, now known as 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and has an MA in Curatorship and Modern Art from the University of Sydney.

As such the Interchange Festival prioritised artist processes and dialogue over final outcomes, seeking to bring both performers and spectators to the debate on intercultural exchange... This mini-festival emphasised Critical Path's mandate to invest in research before delivery.





HYBRIDITY OR HERESY?

Annalouise Paul

What are you prepared to risk? You know, the flier says “Flamenco like you’ve never seen it before”. So what is the risk here? We could get a really bad review. It could be bad for your reputation in flamenco.

Do you really want to risk that? Do you really want to break flamenco apart and challenge it?

What if they hate it and we get booed off?

BEFORE JEREZ

January 2016. I've begun working on a dance-music duet *FORGE* in a new collaboration with a Western Classical pianist and composer. *FORGE* is about reckoning with oneself in the evolution of self-determination. In our first week of rehearsals, such conversations normally inspiring, became pivotal to the project's development. *We are part of the flamenco family, the flamenco Diaspora and so any commentary on our own work will be perceived as a challenge to flamenco. Regardless of what is being 'broken down' my work will always in some way be viewed as an 'import' into the flamenco milieu.*

Flamenco is (already) pure fusion: a melding of Arabic, Sephardi and Gypsy (Indian) cultures plus Cuban, South American and Christian Byzantine influences. In 2013 UNESCO declared Flamenco an 'art form'. Franco's dictatorship ended in 1975 and flamenco moved from exaggerated, often-touristy style of tablao (club) performances

to highly sophisticated concert form on the world stage. Today, its development incorporates European contemporary dance, multimedia and Brechtian aesthetics that are anti-stereotypic. Some of the leaders in this are Israel Galvan, Rocio Molina, Eva Yerbabuena and Juan Carlos Lerida.

The space between my 'bilingual' practice is a place I love to live in, a sweet spot that somehow feels real. Tension between flamenco and contemporary is high. There is an almost gravitational pull toward one or the other. The simple act of wearing shoes or dancing bare foot defines posturing and coded meaning. Torso torque with overtly bent arms goes into battle with straightened lines, released spine and suspension. Dropping to the floor becomes a curation rather than a place to naturally move in and out of. Revealing awkward leg line can only happen if the dress is lifted well above the knees - ungracious in flamenco--but leaving it down potentially looks like a reworking of Grahams' *Appalachian Spring*.

I've decided to return to Spain for 20th Festival de Jerez in February. Eva Yerbabuena opens the festival, Rocio Molina presents *Bosque Ardora* and Juan Carlos Lerida has directed segments for Marco Flores, a rising contemporary-flamenco star. I intend to research more on Sephardi history and I've contacted Lerida to help me with dramaturgy and consultation, just to make sure I am not committing some sort of heresy before we premiere in May. The pianist has decided to come along, she explains, *I have a lot at stake in this too. There's a risk to my reputation as a composer moving outside the boundaries and expectations.*

Akram Khan and Israel Galvan performed their incredible Kathak vs. flamenco machismo dance-off spectacle *TOROBACA* at *Da:ns* Festival in Singapore last October. In a post-show talk, someone asked Akram if he defined his work as intercultural, 'I don't like to use terminology' he preferred 'breaking down labels'. *'What is classical is made by others' rules, but what is contemporary is your own rules'.*

I agree with Akram about terminology; intercultural, cross-cultural, transcultural, fusions, multicultural are terms that diminish the art before it's even made - and after. But I am not convinced that

"Flamenco like you've never seen it before" - the marketing tag won't change what I make nor under whose rules it will be made under (mine) but if audiences have the wrong lens to start with, they may expect to see some sort of flamenco derivative that will disappoint their expectations. Will we be booed off?

labels aren't important at all. The marketing tag for *FORGE* "*Flamenco like you've never seen it before*" won't change what I make nor under whose rules it will be made (mine) but if audiences have the wrong lens to start with, they may expect to see some sort of flamenco derivative that will disappoint all expectations. Will we be booed off?

AFTER JEREZ

March 2016 Flamenco in the motherland has shifted way beyond my expectations. Main stage artists were exemplary in their vision to



Annalouise Paul at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhr

realise new ideas, to push and pull flamenco in every possible direction. Some of it worked, some didn't but every night there was a standing ovation. The traditional is still there in the smaller venues, and equally excellent, it is just clear now there is a market for both; the tradition and the contemporary of Flamenco. I found the Sephardi Museum in Seville, an affirmation that my Sephardi (Spanish Jewry) ancestry holds a real place in Spain's history books. Sephardi *cante jondo* or deep song is one of the root elements of flamenco and one of the most profound. Flamenco has

led me to know my cultural heritage through ongoing choreographic research of the art form. But the real test was Juan Carlos Lerida. What would he say about the concepts, themes, my hybrid vocabulary, processes, technique? Would my deeper analysis of the various shows and artists as non-Spaniard hold validity in his eyes?

In two short sessions he encouraged every idea, critiqued where necessary and saw more flamenco in my contemporary than I did. *Break the compas, use what you have as a tool, flamenco is like*

religion sometimes, it is fixed but shouldn't be. Just make sure it's real.

Dance DNA is a term I've coined to explore where the cultural movement might begin in the body, where that essential feeling or 'sweet spot' is located, how it is triggered and how known pathways can be pushed into new territories without losing that authenticity. For me, this begins in the elbows and moves to the hands and finger circling. *It feels ancestral and real.* It's the place I start from grounded

in a deep breathing and a silent rhythm playing inside. I showed him my Dance DNA processes. Thumbs up.

It's April, *FORGE* premieres in a month. Juan sent an email last night he is in USA to remount his show, *RITMO*. He said there isn't much support for 'contemporary-flamenco' in Spain. The new label. The pianist resigned last week. Performance anxiety or perhaps the risk is just too great. So I'll go it alone now. Adelante. Forge.

Annalouise Paul is a choreographer, dancer and actor. She trained at the Laban Centre in London in contemporary dance and flamenco with key maestros in Spain. Her works explore cultures, identity and transformation through the intersections of traditional and contemporary practice. Annalouise won the inaugural 2013 Australian Arts in Asia Award in Dance and NSW Premiers Export Scholarship with *Game On* tour to India. She was Founder-CEO of Groundswell Arts NSW a sector-driven advocacy organisation from 2009-2014. She has been supported by Australia Council, Arts NSW, DFAT, Critical Path, Bundanon Trust, NSW DET and Greater London Arts.

(Opposite page) Juan Carlos Lerida in *Pisadas*, 2016. Photo: Francisco Villalta
(Page 42-43) *Mother Tongue* by Annalouise Paul, 2014. Photo: Shane Rozario







FORMS
FORCES
HOPE
DESIRE

David D'Silva

Forms

Intercultural performance is like a landscape of shifting forms revealing the many different ways art is represented and experienced, re-configuring what is known or familiar, sometimes bringing to light forms that are entirely new.

Trained initially in Western Contemporary and Classical Ballet, I went on to study Kuchipudi (Classical Indian Dance) for many years. It is this meeting of Indian and Western Dance that has provoked, destabilised and inspired my creative search, bringing my practice to life.

Working and playing in realms both sacred and secular, with horizons focused on experimentation, in collaboration with other artists, moving and dreaming in the ebb and flow of imagined places and the spaces in-between, I have encountered a diverse range of traditional Asian and contemporary dance, live music and theatre styles. These cultural meetings along with other creative pursuits have greatly influenced my performances and my life as a dancer.

The study of Hatha Yoga has been inspirational, to say the least, especially in connection to Indian dance and as a somatic training for contemporary movement. The Spiritual practice of Yoga is a personal and deeply felt learning, a vast and expansive exploration in the philosophy of language and the history of ideas. Yoga as an artform is inseparable from dance and is a living tradition, a flowering of Indian cultural heritage.

Does Indian Dance as a cultural form yearn to find expression in the contemporary? Or does the contemporary become imbued with what is Indian - an essence of traditional practice?

New and emergent forms of Indian Dance might also provide “new modes of aesthetic standards, fresh perspectives from which to appreciate body movement and human experience” (Juhan 1987). The dancing body is also a sensing body, capable of making choices about what defines reality, the lived experience, self-knowing, social being-ness, a personal language, creative vision, in the moment,

transcendent, ephemeral, sacred, empty and full, a syzygy.

Art informs culture. Performance is at times luminous, bright, a revelation of form in transition, new clusters of intelligence activating perception and sensation, igniting the imagination.

Forces

Creative process can feel like a force of nature.

Dance is under my skin and in my bones.

I think interculturalism is as much about the individual as it is about the group.

The merging of two culturally different dance forms (Indian and Western), firstly in my own practice and then to take this into collaborative meetings with other artists has proved challenging at times. A shared aesthetic space can feel quite disorienting, especially in considering aspects of authenticity in traditional practice and cultural identity. I think it was probably through my training in classical Indian dance that I came to embrace the idea of 'Dance as the embodiment of culture'. But the dynamics of this, of how it might play out in cross-cultural collaboration was and is a difficult

thing. A fracturing of meaning does at times seem inevitable in the creative collision between different traditions. In other instances, meaning is invented, felt, or sensed as a force, resonant in the re-framing of inter-subjectivities present within a shared artistic space.

It has been important to me artistically in my own choreographic work that in combining Indian and Western styles, I seek to represent the aesthetic attributes of both forms. My contemporary dance expression continues to evolve.

Creative collaboration seems to say that conflict is ok, that somehow the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts". This is not always the case in culture "out there" in the world, in social-culture - a culture of comfort that expects things to be either this or that, never both, usually excluding the middle space, the space in-between. Maybe art can inform culture and cultural practices and perceptions?

Culture is a kinesthetic encounter with a world of forms via perceptive fields of study and observation. We train the body and the mind, both are inextricably linked, the body/ mind, a continuum of simultaneous energies, evolving along lines of force, resistance and surrender.

The dancing body is also a sensing body, capable of making choices about what defines reality, the lived experience, self-knowing, social being-ness, a personal language, creative vision, in the moment, transcendent, ephemeral, sacred, empty and full, a syzygy.

Hopes

The Monsoon is a time of saturation, re-generation, cross-fertilisation, growth. A restoration of nature, symbolizing renewal and hope.

It was a last minute decision, to jump in for the two-day workshop with Annalouise as part of the Interchange Festival at Critical Path and Monsoon Australia.

A few thoughts on the Workshop.... the body finding expression in dance through the quality of action and intentionality in gesture....as if the body is both subject and object

- "I perceive because I move"... . In dance more so than other art-forms the body is the aesthetic space that seeks to make contact with reality.

On reflection, the interchange Festival was a dynamic and interesting event. The three solo works featured as part of the "FACETS 2015" portrayed a broad

cross-section of choreography and cultural practice within contemporary dance. The performances were engaging enjoyable and enlightening as to the diversity in intercultural performance styles and expressions, as were the cross-fertilisation and inter-pollinations of Monsoon Australia between dance, visual art, video (documentation?), 'on-line' technologies and other 'virtual spaces', where new possibilities may emerge out of shared moments, inter-actions, conversations and secret meetings.

As an audience member at the launch of Monsoon Australia, it was exciting to meet so many artists from different lands although I could not help feeling a little anxious for them. We had been told they would be meeting for the first time, on a blind date with their co-collaborators. Soon to be transported to the unfamiliar terrain

of the Australian bush.

Collaboration can be a slippery term, with hopes for an equal footing between the participants and equal creative-sharing. It does not always go that way. Conflicts, disagreements, unsatisfying outcomes, and a deferral of connection are without a doubt a part of the process in practice based, inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary performance research.

Culture is not static. "It is a flow". We meet the other. Some things get lost in the transactions while other things are discovered. Collaboration can be a destabilizing force, a creative collision that can also give rise to multiple voices, discordant though the harmonies may be, against the flow, speaking of the potential for inter-creative invention and re-invention, the hope for change and perhaps something completely new.

Desire

'When taste, sound, image, movement, rhythm and transformation meet, therefore the rasa is possible.'

(Susan L. Schwartz, 2008)

RASA: 'flavour', 'taste', 'essence'

Indian aesthetic theory teaches that it is through the 'rasa' in performance, a joyous savoring

of essence that an audience may experience a higher state of consciousness and spiritual insight - a rasa of desire.

Tastes have definitely changed over the years, mixing new flavours infused with stories and shared dreaming, a distillation of essence... Inter-cultural practice in Sydney has stepped onto a world stage with local and international artists and forums, and an ongoing dialogue via the Internet, new writings, and a more astute gaze. There is a greater clarity in the personal and collective questions, articulating concerns about identity, shared knowledge and cultural framings evident in the work showcased at Speak Local.

The performances were thoughtful, intelligent, highly skilled, at times humorous and heart warming. And of course there were those special random moments, and synchronicities. For example, at the beginning of Thomas Kelly's performance, the space was activated by a sudden quiet as the rain stopped falling after an endless downpour. Seconds before the piece ended a kookaburra could be heard in the distance, beyond the window frames.

Watching the solo dance work by Anna Kuroda was like looking through a microscope, observing miniature creatures hovering on the

edge of time, a suspended space, seeing the outside from within. Being reminded that changes in nature are dynamic and explosive with sudden shifts between movement and stillness.

It was inspiring to hear the artists sharing views and opinions, their ideas about the role of the individual, the autonomy of self, a yearning to dance and the desire for creative freedom, artistic exploration and expression.

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Rasa

I enjoyed walking on spices and herbs

Tasting and experiencing new flavours and aromas

The air heavy with smoke

from a 'burning ground' of performance

Cooking up a storm.

Schwartz, S., 2008, *Rasa : Performing the Devine in India* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi) page 5 - 6.

David D'Silva Starting out as a nightclub dancer in Melbourne, I ended up becoming a temple dancer in the Western suburbs of Sydney. As a performer/choreographer, Yoga teacher with divergent interests in the visual arts, following the wisdom of dreams, my creative process has been inspired by dancing with peacocks, accidental meetings with Shiva, the spaces in zero and other (con)fusions. I still like to dance in nightclubs but now only to party in the temple within.





ON SHOES AND SPICES

Alan Schacher and WeiZen Ho

We accepted Margie's invitation to participate in Speak Local due to our respect for her and our desire to open-up the inter-cultural field, a label with which we sit uncomfortably.

What was appealing was the context of Interchange Festival and the presence of Monsoon Australia artists from multiple countries, who would observe, exchange and discuss their work.

We understood Speak Local would be a chance for the local artists to show and speak to their work within this context.

We devised a structure that resonated and echoed imageries or themes between the two performances, thereby allowing a fluid crossover between them.

We were exploring new interests with the common starting point of spices.

We had very limited time, so in our only site visit we just decided on use of space and flow.

AS

WeiZen elected to work outside with the spices and I wanted to occupy the whole hall. So the task was to guide the audience from outside to inside, from WeiZen's performance to a different experience where I directed the audience to enact a ceremony. To do this I asked everyone to remove their shoes on entering, thus providing some of the props I required. However being orderly Australians everyone left their shoes neatly at the threshold, nothing like what happens in Asia! I set other shoes along the line of white cloth and laid out squares of different spices. At the end I washed people's feet.

I read WeiZen's performance text,

expressing in prosaic form the injustices of Colonisation.

We left her in a wild dance covered in spices to enter the serene space of the ceremonial line, a walk enacted by the public to complete the artwork, an image of monks, meditation, pilgrimage, or indeed of trudging repetitive labour. This new work concept is open to multiple readings.

WeiZen and I started working together through practical necessity, and explore imagined meetings in our performative exchanges. My practice incorporates movement and spatial interventions, where the body is a core motif and device, and performativity becomes a mutable notion between artist and spectator. My interests are in embodied experience, architectural framing, and the diasporic condition. I pursue an activation of space, whether through solo action or a public choreography. At Speak Local I set up a spice walkway, an installation that was enacted by the audience. This became both a ritualised event and a public art, entailing trust and risk on my part through collaboration with the audience.

As a first generation Australian whose parents emigrated and met here as a result of the Holocaust of World War II, I'm possessed by

a post-holocaust imagery. Though not an observant Jew, I identify culturally and racially as Jewish. I have spent quite some time in parts of Asia and have been influenced by Asian art and culture.

WeiZen and I are raising a family, our lives are intercultural, and when we perform together we seek to move beyond that commonality to more extreme evocations. We believe that the product of true intercultural exchange should go beyond mutual understanding to new hybrid forms.

WH

We have been performing and collaborating together since 2011 and our collaborative processes include tensions that arise from the differences in our personal, cultural and artistic disciplines. These form our performative dialogues and arguments, which have momentary lapses of unison. We draw from myths, entities and historical lineage of our respective Jewish and Malaysian-Chinese backgrounds, re-imagined or sometimes extracted from dreams. In collaboration and dialogue there has to be room for negotiation, disagreements, misinterpretations, misunderstandings as well as shared ideas.

AS

We attempt to create an encounter in which imagery and a re-imagination of archetypes leads in an unknown direction. You've got to have that openness to the work for it to develop in its own way, and the outcome of a true hybrid process cannot be predicted.

We travel regularly to SE Asia and are inspired by the richness of the cultures, the closeness of tradition to everyday existence, the easy flow between music, dance, martial arts, ritual practices, and the overlapping of communities. So for me inter-cultural means finding the space between cultures that leads to possibility for imaginative dialogue, to symbols, to humour, and then to treading on taboos, to mis-referencing.

In our performance *shoesandspices* for Interchange Festival, we used spices for their reference to tradition, trade, for their colours and scents, as reference to travels, to our combined cultural cuisines and our home kitchen. My references included the work of visual artists like Anish Kapoor and Wolfgang Laib, and WeiZen worked with the image of basting her own body in spices. For WeiZen the colonisation era of the Dutch East India Company, trading through The Straits of Melaka, is tied to



Shoes and Spices at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhrl
 (Page 50-51) *WeiZen Ho* at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhrl

Inter-culturality in our performance is a device we employ more than expression of who we are. It generates a place where boundaries may be crossed and cultural content and contemporary existence are mixed in complicated ways.

a history of coolies as a cheap or kidnapped source of labour, and so to that of the Chinese Diaspora. She references the history of women in situations of domestic and kitchen slavery, sometimes by choice and other times by force.

My use of shoes is another new exploration, and has multiple cultural, historical and artistic references. Whether to the removal of shoes in homes and temples, to walking in another's shoes, the word play between "sole and soul", culturally not pointing your feet at



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Everything is memory
Everything is memory

another person's head, touching the feet of the master, and the biblical tradition of washing a guest's feet, there are so many cultural references. Precedents include the work of artists who, through use of relics and remnants, darkness and suggestion, convey a feeling of sadness and loss. French-Jewish artist Christian Boltanski, Greek artist Jannis Kounellis, Columbian artist Doris Salcedo, all have produced work that gives rise to sense of collective mourning. Holocaust Memorials in Berlin and Washington and the memorial iron sculpture *Shoes by the Danube* by Gyula Pauer and Can Togay all attest to the insurmountable numbers of those affected by atrocities. The smoking shoes I used referred to another type of disappearance: that reputedly caused by a direct lightning strike! And so to the vanishing and evaporating spirit.

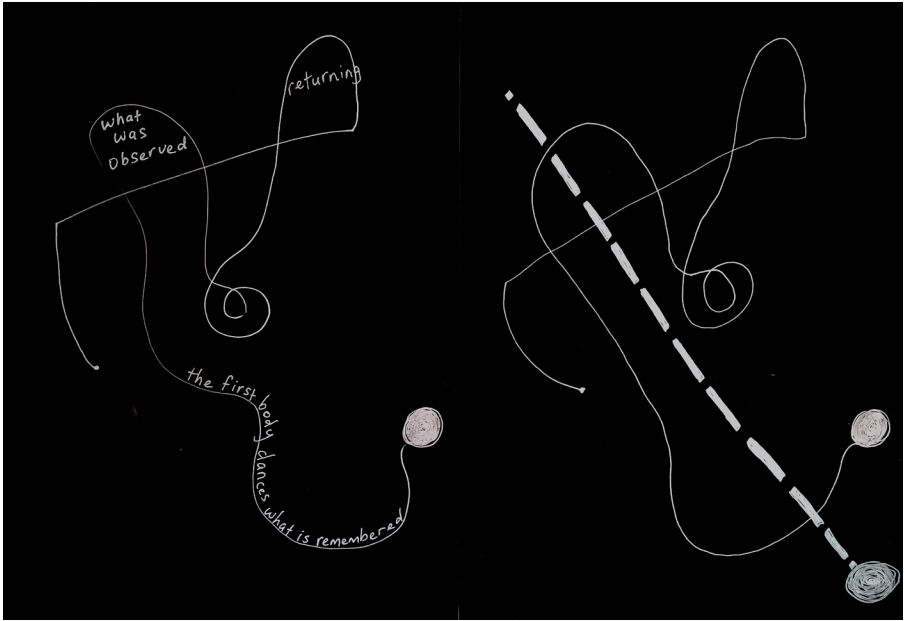
The performance was really two works, WeiZen outside and my ceremony in the main hall.

We seek to provide imagery that gives rise to different sets of associations and meanings, and these are also subject to cultural interpretation. Inter-culturality in our performance is a device we employ more than expression of who we are. It generates a place where

boundaries may be crossed and cultural content and contemporary existence are mixed in complicated ways.

Since participating in Melaka Arts and Performance Festival in Malaysia in 2010 and in The Arts Island Festival in Indonesia in 2013 we started observing trance rituals, and in 2013 we undertook a month-long residency in Penang, Malaysia, to observe the Taoist shamanistic practices of Tang Ki during the Chinese *Hungry Ghost Festival*. From this research we developed the project *Unappeased* which received Australia Council funding through Creative Partnerships with Asia. *Unappeased* takes ritual enactment as a springboard motif, and was realized through residencies in Penang, Parramatta, Bathurst and Albury in 2014-2015.

We intend our work to be rich in associations for each individual, and that the combined effect of our separate approaches and interpretations leads to varied and multi-layered interpretations of a synergistic event, something WeiZen terms dialogical performance. Having lived and worked in both Asia and Australia means that we both embody and carry the imagery of place and culture with us.



(Above and page 57) WeiZen Ho, *everything is memory*, 2015.

(Page 56) Alan Schacher at *Speak Local*, *Critical Path*, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

Alan Schacher is contemporary performance-maker and artist whose body-centric practice traverses dance, Live Art / Performance Art, and installation. He was influenced by the work of Min Tanaka, living in Japan from 1999-2001 and then formed Performance Ensemble GRAVITY FEED (1992-2004), conceiving and designing most of the company's 20+ works and performing in each one. He formed Gravity Research Institute in 2000 producing *SCHAM*, *Babel*, *The Bland Project* and *Unappealed*. Alan has since performed at Festivals in Beijing (2006), Taipei (2007) Indonesia (2011, 2013 & 2014), Malaysia (2012-2014) at *Cementa15 Art Festival*, *Kandos* (2015) and *Kolkata*, India (2016).

WeiZen Ho is a performing artist who brings together composition, sound, choreography and movement. Trained as a classical pianist from age three she rediscovered music through the voice. WeiZen co-founded TUFA, (Dec 1999-2004) a SE Asian pop-fusion music group, which amalgamated visual and theatrical elements. She is currently a recipient of Australia Council's Arts Project funding to *To Study & Develop Performances, Interpreted & Reimagined of Asian Animistic & Shamanistic Rituals*. In 2016, she will perform at the *Adelaide Festival* with *The Splinter Orchestra*, *Setouchi Triennale* in Japan, and participate in *Body As Material*, a collaboration between *Critical Path*, *Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre* and *Form Dance Projects*.

BALANCING ON THE ROPE OF CULTURAL PRACTICE

Sumathi Krishnan

In the realms of multicultural artistic practices in today's world, what is classical / traditional? What is novel / modern? Is it even relevant in this decade to ask these questions of ourselves? Are such questions defunct and immature? Moreover are these distinctions important?

Multicultural, Intercultural and/or Inter disciplinary and/or inter genre are but words for an artist, composer or creator. Today artists have many mediums, genre(s), styles and raw inspirational material to base their work upon.

The views expressed in this article are based on my study and observations of many programs both professional and community based of lesser known artists. Each of the artists has, and is, dedicating their life to performing art, which is centred in and emerges from Indian genres in Australia.

Their works make a sincere contribution to the larger cultural ethos and practice in Australia and therefore are worthy of nurture and recognition.

History of Development of Cultural Practice

History is comprised of intercultural exchanges, which created entirely new works, which today are considered to be well-established

traditional practices.

By tradition, I refer to a school / discipline or a body of work which developed over centuries and became aesthetically time tested. For example, the body of works in the *Natyashastra* in India, which was developed over a period of centuries and was written by Sage Bharatha arguably around 200 BC. *Natyashastra* is considered the bible of dance for Indian classical dance practitioners today, a dictionary and prose all in one.

Whilst the conditions which motivated great Sage Bharatha to write the 36,000 slokas in the *Natyashastra* is not known, it would come as no surprise that his work depicts the 'cultural practices' that were widely accepted in that era. (Wikipedia, 2015)

It is hard to pinpoint when a body of work becomes a complete acceptable cultural traditional practice as it is difficult to both define and/or measure this development. The seed of an idea

becomes a body of work. The aesthetic value of a body of work enthral artists and motivates them to in turn learn and repeat, imitate and reinterpret until the idea turned work turned practice becomes a cultural traditional practice.

‘New Work’ and Its Challenges

I define ‘New Work’ as a cultural practice that moves away from its traditional roots as its birth is usually influenced by ‘new factors’ resulting in the creation of a new experience.

I purposely abstain from using the word ‘Australian’ Cultural Practice or a ‘Multicultural’ Practice, or hybrid, fusion, and similar words, as I believe, once a traditional form of art migrates, it finds its own level of existence within a foreign environment. Once migrated, new works have historically never received the recognition of being accepted or defined as ‘traditional’ works in their countries of origin.

Some well accepted outstanding examples of such works seen in the past century is that of artists like Pandit Ravi Shankar, musician and sitar master, whose transmigratory music resulted in the production of new works in his collaborations with George Harrison or more recently,

that of Akram Khan, renowned dancer, who from his strong Kathak origins has developed works that are anything but traditional. His present works are a far cry from his original works in Kathak.

New Work has its many challenges. Today artists have various resources available to them. However constrictions are caused by ironically the same elements that existed centuries ago time, space, travel, language and means of access challenge an artist’s journey and process of discovery.

In my opinion, today we are technologically advanced enough to be able to break these barriers. But the little droplets of knowledge passed on from generation to generation is now an ocean of information that bombards our senses from all directions causing both unfocussed, confused works and confused *audiences*. For artistic souls these are inspirational times but a difficult one. An impatient disharmony exists.

For many artists working to schedules imposed by funded bodies that are too tight causes them to present works that are not fully complete and or fully developed or are so economically unviable that they are only

presented once and never see another ray of light.

Recent Development of Indian Inter-Cultural Practices in Australia

Looking at works that have been completed in the area of cultural practice in the context of Indian arts in the recent decade, we cannot go past the transmigratory work of Louise Lightfoot. An architect and dancer whose chance stop in India around 1937 saw the transmigration of Kathakali, a classical Indian dance style, to Australia and other parts of the world.



Louise Lightfoot.

Tara Rajkumar, Kathakali and Mohiniattam Dancer and Director of Performing Arts at the Monash Asia Institute says:

“Louise Lightfoot was a woman far ahead of her time, in addition to taking Kathakali out of India for the first time, she contributed in a major way to popularising Indian dance within India at a critical period in the renaissance of the classical dance styles.” (Gibson, 1999)

Tara Rajkumar OAM and the founding Director of Akademi in the UK, brought her passion for Mohiniattam and Kathakali to Australia 25 years ago. Specific mention of her works relevant here are *Prakrathi* where she choreographed to the poetry of the famous Australian poet Judith Wright

and the contemporary production *Malache – Despatches from Another World* which explored the power and strength of women.

Malache received accolades when first performed:

“Malache is a contemporary story and it is spoken in English making it fully accessible to an Australian audience. Rajkumar gave a riveting performance.” (Laughlin, 1996)

What She Said is a production where Tara Rajkumar explores the poetry of Ramanujam focussing on women’s empowerment, re-interpreting this ancient

text through dance and making it relevant to a new age issue; empowerment of women.

Today students of Tara Rajkumar, young Australian dancers Govind Pillai and Raina Petersen are making inroads into experimenting and discovery with technique and aesthetics of their respective classical Indian dance styles (Bharathanatyam and Mohiniyattam), while drawing inspiration from Kalaripayattu (the martial art of Kerala), yoga and the body-bending manoeuvres of acro-balance as seen in their performance *On the Verge* at Parramasala 2014.

On the Verge was reviewed in my own blog, Sydhwaney.com: “opening with a rhythmically fluid jazz track, and concluding with partner-contact inspired by acro-balance; Raina and Govind explored the possibility that a new dance aesthetic may be born from their traditional roots”.

The works of Anandavalli, Guru and Director of Lingalayam Dance Company in Australia is also to be recognised for works presented in Australia over the last 30 years. More recently her new work of *Chi Udaka*⁵, a collaborative work between the Lingalayam Dance Company and Japanese TaikOz drummers, cellist Dr John Napier

and singer Aruna Parthiban premiered at the Sydney Festival 2014. The production brought to life the earthy beats of the drummers contrasting it with the ethereal nymph like footsteps and expressions of the Bharathanatyam dancers.

The other works that I shall briefly mention, although not dance specific, are important collaborative works, which have created their own space and audience.

Pandit Ashok Roy, Guru and Sarod Maestro from India migrated to Australia in the eighties and collaborated with many Australian artists. In the 1980's his works such as *Slivanje* presented at the Womadelaide Festival 1992 was an outstanding piece of 'new work'.

Sangam was a band brought together in Australia by Pandit Ashok Roy that performed and produced many records. The group comprised John Napier (cello), Satsuki Odamura (koto), and Tony Lewis on Indonesian percussion. Further collaborative works include *To India with Love* with flamenco guitarist, Robert Varga.

The compelling contemporary powerful choreographic works by Annalouise Paul in which Bobby Singh, Tablist and dancers



Bobby Singh and Miranda Wheen in *Game On* by Annalouise Paul, 2011. Photo: Shane Rozario

Annalouise Paul and Miranda Wheen in *Isabel* and *Game On* (respectively), were an experiment in rhythmic movements across two cultures.

Bobby Singh's journey in itself is a testimony to creative development which includes performances with other musicians such as Sandy Evans, saxophonist, Damian Wright flamenco guitar, Adrian McNeil, Sarodiya in *Rasa Duende*⁸; in *Reunion* with Steve Elphick, bass sensation and Toby Hall.

Intermingling Disciplines, Spaces and Purpose

Disciplines

Cultural practice is fast moving into interdisciplinary areas. Whilst it may be framed within a pre-dominant discipline, it now takes elements from other mediums and other disciplines requiring artists not only to be able and proficient in one discipline, be that of dance or music, but also be knowledgeable light technicians or movie makers or song writers and more in one.

In a recent symposium, *Travelling Art – Translations in the Making* produced by Sydhwaney Productions at Information Cultural Exchange, Parramatta NSW, a young Bharathanatyam visiting dancer from the UK Shrikant Subramaniam presented an effective solo act.

He connected with his audience through the Shakespearean dramatic art of 'spoken word' delivery to his repertoire in classical Indian dance in *Who? Who is looking back?*. Looking back at his grandmother's life, he created an awe inspiring and energetic work that demonstrated the manner in which his grandmother's love of the arts and life itself was passed on to him. The work was presented in collaboration with a young Australian born South Indian singer Sanjay Ramaswamy.

Internationally renowned young dancer Aakash Odedra, mentored by world renowned Akram Khan, in Parramasala 2013, captivated audiences with his electric footwork and effective use of lighting to create an ethereal experience in his production entitled *Rising*.

The presentation in three segments took the audience from traditional classical Kathak performance to modern contemporary works, Taking a quote out of my blog,

Sydhwaney.com:

The first performance of the second half CUT created a space where dance was not defined by movement but the way in which the movement changed the flow and form of light. Working with lighting designer Michael Hulls, Russell Maliphant created a completely new world for Odedra. The last and final piece for the night was Constellation, choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Larbi's approach to choreography was through intense yoga sessions one on one with Aakash, learning and understanding the natural rhythm, rise and fall of his body. As if dancing within Yayoi Kusama's installation, Fireflies on the Water, Larbi adds a dimension of movement to the installation exploring the illusion of depth, force, ebb and flow with Aakash Odedra as the central locus. The climax of the piece and perhaps the entire show had Odedra centre stage, twirling a globe clockwise in front of his body, eyes pouring out into the soul of the audience as he slowly ebbs forward as a deliberate, luminous astral body.

The scintillating partnership between Kathak guru Pandit Chitresh Das and American tap dancer Jason Samuels Smith is another unique collaboration. Smith's tap shoes and footsteps and Das' bell jewelled feet and hands that steadily played on the tabla as he danced with his eyes and eyebrows reduced the lines between Kathak and tap dance



Aruna Gandhi in *Dreaming Damsel*, Anywhere Festival, 2015.

to once again create a unique experience. Works as mentioned above are still considered niche and continue to be presented only at specific forums.

Spaces

Further we are seeing a movement in presentations of cultural works to common outdoor sites and spaces where they were not previously traditionally expressed. Whilst site specific work is not an entirely new concept, as Indian styles of *Bharathanatyam* originated in the South Indian Temples, so did the Balinese traditional dance forms historically.

In Australia, this is still a newly developed or developing concept as seen in *The Calling* which featured at Sydney Festival in 2014. Audiences traversed religious sites including Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, St Marks Anglican Church in Granville, The Yeshe Nyima Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Harris Park and The Murugan Temple in Mays Hill and included performances by Eddie Muliaumaseali'i, Aruna Gandhi, Prabhu Osoniqs and Namrata Pulapaka. At each venue they witnessed a cultural practice relevant to that place of worship. Aboriginal traditional dances speak stories of their environment and were customarily presented

outdoors around fires. It is interesting to note that these traditional presentations are moving away from their traditional environments into schools, prestigious theatres and so on as witnessed for example in the productions of the Bangarra Dance Company, making the journey in reverse.

The Anywhere Festival, a festival of site-specific works curated by Paul Ousch, now provides opportunities to artists to present their works at any time anywhere. Established previously in Brisbane and Melbourne, Anywhere was brought to Sydney for the first time in May 2015. The festival's purpose was to facilitate and encourage artists to present works anywhere within a metropolis.

My own work *Dreaming Damsel* endeavoured to expand ways arts is received. Site specific work *Dreaming Damsel* was presented at the Anywhere Festival in May 2015. It was a collaborative presentation of Indian Classical music, dance, poetry and art by Aruna Gandhi, John Napier, others and myself.

Again the intention was to take traditional practices and make it site specific. We used space within the landscaped gardens and the historical architecture

of Hambledon Cottage Heritage home to use the architecture of the Cottage as a backdrop to form the house of the Indian Painter, Raja Ravi Varma.

Audiences were given an opportunity to experience two very different histories and cultures in one environment. They toured through the Hambledon Cottage and later witnessed an Indian Classical performance immediately afterwards. The production demonstrated potential ways by which historical spaces in Australia could be used in a multicultural context.

Purpose

Performing Arts has over the years also served a social purpose, aside from being entertaining. Today this purpose is even more relevant.

The symposium *Travelling Art – Translations in the Making* mentioned earlier touched upon discussions on how performing artists could help in addressing modern medical, social and socio-economic issues such as, racial discrimination, domestic violence, climate change and more.

In this regard, it was enlightening to witness the initial works of Bharathanatyam dancer Aruna



Anna Kuroda at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Lohr

Gandhi with Blacktown Hospital in Sydney where she ‘transformed and warmed’ the foyers of the Hospital into an unconventional creative space and environment of music and dance as part of the Sydney Sacred Music Festival.

Speak Local

Cultural practice needs organised forums that specifically cater to the development of artists and their works.

New ideas need opportunities to be tested and experimented with smaller groups from diverse backgrounds, ethnic, artistic and cultural sensitivity on a small scale. Formalised and informed feedback assists in the re-development of new works and form the building blocks in balancing cultural practices in Australia.

Speak Local provided a much-needed forum where artists expressed their emerging ideas and works through the now fast

intermingling worlds of dramaturgy, theatre and choreography.

Thomas Kelly's energetic demonstration of connecting with land; Raghav Handa's concept of shape shifting character to animal, Anna Kuroda's explorations of what is home; Alan Schacher's attempts at enhancing audience experience through spices were all very creative journeys. It became evident that audiences enjoyed performances when the manner in which artists communicated the purpose and meaning of their presentations was articulated to the audience clearly.

Conclusion

Today Australia is juxtaposed in a position where there is tremendous talent, skill and knowledge.

It will be only a matter of time before 'Australian Cultural Practices' shall become tradition(s) of their own. These traditions shall be bodies of work, which shall be influenced by some or all cultures living in its soil today. The movement in this direction has already begun, it needs only to be acknowledged, recognized and nurtured.



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(Opposite page) Thomas Kelly at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

INTERCULTURAL DANCE SPACES

Laura Osweiler

Peripheral Centres

Curators of Critical Path's Interchange Festival brought together amazing professional dance artists of varying trainings, backgrounds, and perspectives with the mission to explore the concept of intercultural dance. They demonstrated that as an open-ended umbrella term, "intercultural" accommodates different fluid identities and holds tension around the power of mobility and location. Artists, curators, and audiences investigating and discussing this term aided in the formation of new spaces within and around the concept of culture.

As an Experimental Middle Eastern dancer, I too explore what it is to be an intercultural dancer. My sense of identity is fluid and dynamic. Being a 5 / 6 generation American, I hold distant traces of my homelands of Ireland, Germany, and Holland. I am filled with American pop and mainstream culture. I have lived in numerous cities, each with unique and influential cultures. Additionally, my personal dance history is filled with cultural exchange. I entered into Middle Eastern dance as a non-Middle Easterner and ballet dancer. I also arrived into its complex intercultural dynamics. The United States has over 130 years of Middle Eastern dance history including development of several American Middle Eastern dance styles. I initially learned belly dance, now known by a variety of names including, American belly dance, Classic belly dance, and Turkish-American belly dance. Now, my professional life is a mixture of changing roles. I perform, choreograph and teach American belly dance, various staged folk dances and experimental dance.

I am also dance company director, producer and scholar.

Thirdspace

I see the artists in Interchange Festival were participating in and

Fringes exist no longer as places of banishment, passivity, opposition, or rejected attributes but as positive spaces of freedom.

developing what Edward Soja calls Thirdspace. Like dancers in the United States, Australian intercultural dancers negotiate and struggle with centre and periphery power plays. Forces at play include issues with funding, access to spaces to create and present, community / audience expectations, and being accepted and supported as significant artists. Centres can present the fringe as a negative space where they can lower the status of those who do not conform and / or transgress social boundaries. In order to resist the potential threat, some centralists try to prevent those in the fringes, like intercultural dancers, from influencing the centre.

By utilising and placing value on disconnection and transformation in the fringes, intercultural dancers develop fissures into new spaces, and therefore, expand dance and culture. As Soja notes with Thirdspace, they are not creating in-between centre and periphery,

“some additive combination of them” (Soja 33), or thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Instead, intercultural dancers are in a “creative process of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives...” Intercultural dancers re-evaluate the fringes by invigorating them with agency and choice. Fringes exist no longer as places of banishment, passivity, opposition, or rejected attributes but as positive spaces of freedom. In the fringes, intercultural dancers produce agencies that are not determined or regulated by all of centre’s concepts and rules. In turn, they develop fringe spaces in order to stand up to those who want to use the fringe as a site for lowering their social status. Although some do feel some social pressures from centres, intercultural dancers are not controlled by them. In the fringes, they connect to ideas and dances that are not a part of the centre’s dance. Intercultural dancers produce flexible and fluid genres, which are difficult to define, and therefore, to regulate.

Although as an intercultural dance artist I can be read as being forced into the fringe by social constraints or as not being able to move into mainstream society, I actively and intentionally situate myself at times in the fringe of tradition (substitute

mainstream or another centre’s term in lieu of tradition). As a dancer, I am on the fringe of mainstream culture. As a Middle Eastern dancer, I am on the fringe of mainstream dance. As an experimental Middle Eastern dance, I am on the fringe of traditional/mainstream Middle Eastern dance. My choice to move comes not from a rejection of traditional dance. Although I love working within my traditions, I often feel constricted and unable to express all that I would like to within its frameworks, structures, and expectations. By creating dance and productions on the fringe, over time, this fringe has become my centre. The tension with multiple centres and fringes is part of my centre’s identity.

Rhizomatic Spaces

As a means to resist making new binaries out of the periphery-as-centre, I constantly shift my centre. I know by having talked to several of them, some of the artists of the Interchange Festival do as well. I accomplish this through a rhizomatic practice. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the rhizome is comprised of assemblages and lines of flight. An assemblage is a site where heterogeneous elements enter into a relationship. These diverse parts

take shape through coherent and consistent actions in order to create things such as centre, style, genre, territory, tradition, and identity. An assemblage is a density where elements can repeat, vary, and tie back onto themselves. Some assemblages may lean towards being stagnant and frozen, while others become fluid and porous. Rhizomes are also made up of lines of flight, which deterritorialise. They rupture, break, flee, discontinue, detach, interconnect, change, transition, reverse, and create new connections by leaping across fissures. Lines of flight reside outside assemblages. They enter and/or exit into an assemblage at any point. An assemblage may sustain within itself lines of flight. Lines of flight may create, destroy, and/or change an assemblage “as it expands its connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 8).

On lines-of-flight, I enter into different assemblages (centres). I have for a long time moved between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern spaces, dragging in traces of the other back and forth. In the mainstream world, I make a living at belly dance. In the Middle Eastern dance community I am hired as a belly dancer; to be the folk dancer, the something different, in a belly dance show; and to be the experimental dancer, once again the

something different, in a traditional Middle Eastern dance show. In the last context, I learned to make work that bridges the traditional and experimental centres. I call them my “safe” experimental dances, meaning they are pretty, uplifting, and only slightly push movement, music, and costuming. In full-on experimental productions, I perform works on the edge of traditional and mainstream dance. I enjoy working and creating in all of these contexts. I perform traditional dance without feeling like I am compromising myself as an intercultural dancer or a dancer on-the-fringe and vice versa. They are not exclusive, but dancing with each other.

Fluid Spaces

While fluid multiplicity is a location of strength, American and Australian intercultural dance artists need to remember that we work in a privileged space. We build upon the work that others have done over the years to open spaces in-between and make new centres. The fact that we can talk about artistic freedoms is one that many artists cannot share. As relationships among groups are constantly being negotiated, our growing acceptance could just as easily and quickly be bordered, silenced, and denied. We also need to consider who may

be excluded from the intercultural dance frame in order to prevent it from collapsing back into an “us” and “them” position. All Dance is cultural. I cannot think of any that are not, but I am leaving space for the possibility they exist. Dance is already always inter-cultural, although a particular dance’s politics may not position itself as so.

Only through inhabiting new spaces long-term can intercultural dance artists explore and develop what we have to offer. We need more opportunities to learn from each other’s choreographic processes through workshops and collaborations. Regularly showing and sharing works in progress would not only allows dancers to gain valuable insight and fresh perspectives, help with problem areas, feedback on how the work is being read, but also to develop terms to explain and defend the work. Curating professional shows, especially collective ones, develops the overall arching concept of multiplicity within intercultural

dance. These new spaces also need to be populated by non-dancers. By creating community workshops for dancers and non-dancers, Q & A forums, and professional shows we can share and foster a knowledgeable audience and community.

The Interchange Festival demonstrated that intercultural dance artists are creating new territories on their own, but also that there is more power if we join together. It is also helpful to our endeavours to have recognition and support from larger organisations. We are fortunate that curators at Critical Path offered space to develop networks based on interactions and exchanges. Additionally, they understood and respected differences, not only in terms of where an artist came from, but also individual goals and missions. By sharing spaces, we can listen and express what binds us together as artists. Additionally, we can create collective politics based on multiple sites of interrelatedness.

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Laura Osweiler. Photo:
Chris Laudermilk

Laura Osweiler, PhD (Amara) is a performer, choreographer, teacher, and producer. She has performed traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance throughout the U.S. and Canada and has been highlighted in numerous videos. In addition to teaching dance studio classes, Laura has taught accredited courses at a number of universities. She is Director of Ya Helewa! Dance Company, Director of “Training4DanceTeachers,” and producer of workshops, performances, and conventions. She holds a PhD in Dance History and Theory from UC Riverside, a BA in Music History and Literature and a certificate in Ethnomusicology from The Florida State University.

FROM MULTI-CULTURAL TO MULTI-IDENTITY

Peter Kennard

Assessing the ever maturing
'Aussie Cultural Masala'.

This article wishes to identify a maturing intercultural dialogue being expressed in recent contemporary Australian music, theatre and dance; and that such work challenges existing notions of 'multiculturalism' in Australian performance.

The argument is that this is prescient of an inevitable broader cultural shift that will challenge the underlying conceptions and assumptions that permeate institutions, policies and public debates concerned with questions of culture and identity.

What are the implications in the seeming rise and rise of contemporary performance making that come from intercultural activity? How well is current public debate acknowledging this activity?

In the face of work that has increasingly complex cultural encodings, created by artists with increasingly layered identities, what positions, attitudes and models of thinking are being expressed in response? How well are we articulating, and perhaps more importantly, anticipating the flow of cultural dynamics in the age of information?

... a kind of reverse colonialism still pervades much of the dialogue surrounding non euro-centric performance in Australia; delegitimizing performers who are seen as not being of the ethnic origin of the traditions they are embodying.

Who is best placed to sponsor such critical thinking? And what of the continued validity of the term multicultural arts practice in the context of this contemporary work?

Contemporary intercultural performances are still advertised as an encounter between performers of isolated traditions reaching out across cultural boundaries in an exchange - often further encoded in dubious sentiments of 'East meets West' or similar. At worst the performance is exoticized to seduce a mainstream audience to take a

walk on the wild side.

Further to this, a kind of reverse colonialism still pervades much of the dialogue surrounding non euro-centric performance in Australia; delegitimizing performers who are seen as not being of the ethnic origin of the traditions they are embodying.

Contemporary intercultural work is an expression not just of collaborations between practitioners of singular traditions, but more an expression of the multiplicity of traditions embodied by a single artist. In this world global performance languages and technology are blending in exciting ways that challenge mainstream conceptions of cultural production.

At this level of activity the use of the term multiculturalism in arts practice is fast becoming redundant, simply unfit to describe the emerging mature integration of multiple performing languages on display. It may simply become a given that a contemporary Australian theatre work might invoke in equal measures performance languages drawn from middle eastern dance, South East Asian puppetry, and electronic sound art combined with a text driven theatrical narrative..... and not through an ad hoc clumping together (although this has

surely happened) but simply as an expression of the artists' own various deep engagements, training and personal heritages.

'And/and' identities..... (Magaldi 1990) This respectful alchemy of performance languages is simply an expression of who we are - and of who we are becoming.

View this through Attali's sense of the prescience of musical culture - expressing in anticipation the dynamics that eventually permeate and manifest more fully in the wider culture. (Attali 2009). I believe Attali's timeframe has contracted. The exponential curve of intercultural information exchange tilts to the vertical. We are at a tipping point, particularly when viewed from the need to acquaint ourselves more fully with the cultural sensibilities needed to negotiate and reinvent our position in the region in this 'Asian Century'.

Consider intercultural contemporary performance activity as the R & D of cultural discourse. This activity demands a critical assessment that is equally as well diversified. This will ultimately demand nothing less than a repositioning of institutional power structures.

'Exnomination' is a term John Fiske (Fiske 1994) used to describe the ability of a Eurocentric attitude to place itself at 'the centre'

- to become invisible to itself - constituting itself as the universal set of norms to which all other activity is considered 'other' or 'peripheral'. There is no doubting that many of our arts institutions, along with the funding priorities that favour the well established, indeed have demonstrated great skill in the art of exnomination - trading concepts of legitimacy, authenticity and cultural worth to preserve their positions.

If our institutions fail to anticipate and articulate the dynamics of how cultural information is being exchanged, adopted and adapted, we will find ourselves with a serious disjuncture between institutions, policy and a world that will belong to those experienced in nuanced and informed intercultural exchange.

I acknowledge that many artists, administrators, curators and academics are acutely aware of all this. Critical examination of contemporary intercultural performance requires methodologies that engage deeply with multiple perspectives, and are conversant in a diversity of intellectual, artistic and spiritual traditions. A big ask no doubt - but really the minimum requirement to be able to begin to engage with the complexities of cultural exchange and cultural 'production' the likes

with which we have only just begun to experience. This dialogue is seen best happening first in tertiary institutions.

Unfortunately many of our tertiary institutions are enmeshed in the struggle between the 'industrial discourse' and the 'cultural discourse'. Many contemporary music courses appear to provide nothing more than vocational skills training, replicating the dynamics of the commercial (and highly euro-american centric) pop industry. The dynamics of exnomination remain as potent as ever.

Beyond the subtle echoes of colonialism embedded in the term 'multicultural', beyond the dynamics of the industrial discourse, the platitudes of marketing, and tabloid hype that profits from feeding misconception, there lies a field of enquiry that dazzles with its promise of an attitude that has at its core a fascination with creating the 'new' with a deep regard for the integrity and history of source traditions. This attitude makes itself available to embrace the available diversity of cultural information as something we can all 'own' - aspects of the human experience that can speak to any one of us and resonate within us at a formative level beyond geography and ethnicity.

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(Opposite page) Liz Lea at Speak Local, Critical Path, 2015. Photo: Heidrun Löhner
(Page 85) Ruth St Denis in *Ouriada*, 1914. Photo: Baron Adolph de Meyer



Puranamityeya na sadhu sarvam
Na chapi kavyam navamityabaddham
Santah Parikshanyataradbhajante
Mudhah Parapratyaneya Buddhih

Malavikagnimitra of Kalidasa, Act 1, Verse 2

Nothing should be taken as good or acceptable merely because it is old
Nothing should be treated as bad merely because it is new
Great men accept the one or the other after careful deliberation
It is only a fool who has his mind led by the beliefs of others.

Translation by A.K. Krishna Rao



