

Abstracts: Shifting Dialogues

The Politics of Site, Locality & Context in Asian Performance and Visual Arts

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Sudipto Chatterjee and Proshot Kalami: Man of the Heart Project

Man of the Heart is on the life and times of Lalon Shah Phokir, the 19th century Bengali Sufi-Baul saint and song-maker, whose fame stretches across the political and religious borders dividing Bangladesh and West Bengal (India). It is a multi-media solo-performance incorporating live music, dance, spoken word, video and recorded audio. Without assuming any 'character' or 'story', it attempts to speak/sing/perform around the biography of Lalon Phokir. It is also an exploratory piece on the body-based philosophy and the virtuosic musical practice of a sect among Bengali Sufis and Vaishnavs known as Bauls. Of them, Lalon Phokir is regarded as the greatest. Although he practised personally, he spoke publicly through his songs. His music performance and practice embodied a highly syncretic philosophy that drew from diverse religious sources. He confronted orthodox fundamentalisms and preached a radically different search for divinity that could be located within the corporeal frame. According to this belief, divinity is attained only by means of disciplined, non-carnal physical practice with a female companion, for the Godhead is said to reside only in the female body.

Based on several years of field research conducted in Bangladesh and West Bengal and 6 years of performance life--moving from UC Berkeley, through New York, Los Angeles, Calcutta and New Delhi, to London's Barbican Centre and now Berlin--*Man of the Heart* is located between academic research and creative praxis, between deep ethnography and mediated live performance. More information on the project can be found at www.lalon.org.

Margaret Coldiron

Kreasi Baru for International Audiences: The Adventures of Lila Cita, Lila Bhawa & Global Gamelan

Nearly 20 years after Patrice Pavis' gave us his "hourglass" model for evaluation of intercultural performance, it is now widely acknowledged that the intercultural flow in performing arts today travels in all directions and is not merely a case of parasitic "Western" artists feeding off the rich traditions of Asia. Yet discussions of intercultural work remains problematic because of the persistent view that cultural exchange is a transaction in which each party remains in its own, separate sphere. As a result, discussion of transnational or intercultural work is hobbled by outworn shibboleths of Euro-American critical theory like "Orientalism," "Colonialism" and "cultural appropriation" that can be dangerously reductive and often actively hinder cultural exchange and development. Through an examination of the work of some Western and Balinese practitioners of Balinese 'traditional' arts, this paper will explore what can be meant by 'tradition' in the current climate of transnational, intercultural interaction for practitioners of Balinese music and dance. London-based gamelan and dance ensembles Lila Cita and Lila Bhawa will serve as case studies and will be considered in relation to other "international" ensembles such as Sekar Jaya (based in the San Francisco Bay area) and Çudamai, (based in Pengosekan, Gianyar) sketching out a picture of hybridity and innovation in the world of global performance.

Jakub Karpoluk

Noh Theatre in the Middle of Europe. Ethics and Aesthetics

During last 30 years, some of the Japanese, classical noh theatre professionals traveled intensively around Europe, Asia and both Americas to perform and to teach. What was once a local performing tradition became a globally recognized icon of Japanese culture. Interactive nature of noh and broad spectrum of its stage forms encourages all kinds of commingled performances and training projects that takes place in and outside Japan. In 2009, renowned shite actor of the Kita school, Akira Matsui, has established the Polish amateur noh theatre association, called Ryokurankai. The process of teaching, established by master Matsui, includes staging classical dramas in which he shares the stage with his Polish and Japanese students. Five such performances took place in Poland and in Germany, in 2011. In each of the spectacles students, including author of the paper, took part as *waki*, *shite zure* and *kōken* actors. This unusual formula needed a series of aesthetic and ethical compromises which will be examined in the presentation. The paper will discuss the possibility of organizing an European noh theatre training project, with the participation of Japanese noh professionals. Author would also like to discuss the effects that those practices could have on the classical form of noh.

Jay Koh

Domination, Equality and Accountability

According to Foucault's theorisation on power and knowledge, their dissemination does not work unilaterally but create responses, resistances or alternative channels for perspectives and appropriations. "There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (Foucault 1980: 142)

In Malaysia, Myanmar and many countries in Asia, political parties or military institutions in power have sought to manipulate this exercise of power to generate their versions of 'truth as accepted common knowledge' in order to create legitimacy for their propaganda, policies and practice. By accepting these constructed truths as common knowledge, normally through inaction and other vested interest, citizens give their consent and legitimise these suppressive authorities, which evidence the weak civil society that exists in all of these countries. Outcomes that mentioned by Foucault in "... to [those actual] effects of power which [truth] induces" (Foucault 2000: 132)

Foucault's theories on knowledge and power do not mention nor examine the possible pre-condition, space and language that nurture or produce the type of responses that can form the resistance that can answer to and challenge the exercise of knowledge and power.

My paper will present my research in Myanmar looking at the changes that have occurred in the last 5 years examining the issues that I have outlined above. The paper highlights the call for validation that situates itself between the need of proof and public opinion. It is a response to domination, a cry for equality and a call for accountability.

References Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, Harlow: Longman. Foucault, M. (2000) *Power, Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, Vol. 3, New York: New York Press.

Stefan Kuzay

Rituals and theatrical performances in Chinese villages. The significance of locality and site in a national context.

Ritual and religious motivated drama experiences in China after years of suppression a steady raise. In the past state ideology aimed to undermine the importance of local tradition and the meaning of locality. Today the balance of economy has resulted in a shift of focus from the central to the local. "State cult" increasingly loses its significance for local population and gets superseded by local ritual tradition. The return of the ritual

is certainly an indicator for a rebirth of the religious sphere. Yet in a climate of market economy and by making it a commodity to tourists and the mass media secularization is a sure side effect. Religious activities see a change of ritual context and meaning. Nevertheless a loss of authenticity can also be understood it as an expression of a growing sense of local independence. Cultural tourism can help to strengthen the sense of locality for inhabitants of a culturally defined area and to transmit the cultural heritage of traditional lineages. This becomes most evident in the transition area between religious activities and the visual and performing arts. My paper deals in particular with the development of local religious drama in the provinces Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui today.

Ray Langenbach

Outside/Inside: insurgent barricades, the avant-garde and the vanguard state

Inspired by the image of the barricades erected around Liberation Square in Cairo from 25 January until 11 February 2011, I began reflecting on the French insurgent barricade tradition of public installations and spontaneous demarcation of public space. The tradition includes the 1832 revolt in Paris, which provided the climactic scene of Victor Hugo's paradigmatic avant-garde novel *Les Misérables*, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Paris 1968 SI inflected *les enrages* among many others. In each of these, proletarians, students and avantgarde artists constructed barricades to protect a vanguard collective or protostate within the hegemonic state.

Bricolaged from the city's structures and debris, the barricades provided a material metonymy for the "disjunctive, polysemic writing", performance and visual art that characterised the modernist avant-garde's "revolutionary aesthetics" on both the left and right of the ideological spectrum.

Asian cities have seen their own barricades. Asian revolutionary movements have had a profound effect on regional modern and post-modern art, often combining aesthetics with tactics 'of the weak' for political transformation. Throughout the region, the ethos of political transformation combined with aesthetic agency influenced the imaginations of the region's political leaders and their designs for vanguard political parties. And there's the rub.

Cameron Macintosh's musical production of *Les Misérables* was welcomed to the National Theatre by the Singapore government in 1994, in the midst of this latest crackdown. In the musical, revolutionary fervour is presented as futile and quixotic, thereby spinning the PAP's contemporaneous arrests of critical young intellectuals as inevitable. In this peripatetic political theatre the government autogenically scripted its heroic struggle to amalgamate an ideal national collective, as it were from inside the barricades. It thereby paradoxically seconded the revolutionary ethos of the avant-garde to perpetuate an emancipatory image of the sempiternal vanguard party. This paper will reflect on the relation to modernism, and Asian avant-gardism of these events and other related epiphenomena.

Luqman Lee

Malay Culture and Minority Cultures. Performing the dominant culture on television

With the 1971 National Cultural Policy, the national culture of Malaysia was to be comprised of the assimilated minority cultures within pluralistic Malaysia into the dominant Malay culture.

In the ensuing decades, a rift has progressively grown wider with the minority non-Malay cultures asserting their identities, resulting in the growing proliferation of native-language programming and single-language satellite-television channels.

This research intends to explore the increasingly important questions of how the dominant culture is performed on television, and how the traits of vernacularity is translated and

commodified onto screen, within the milieu of the largely government-controlled television networks. If television constructs social reality, and television content is formulated on the basis of subliminal governmental propaganda and economic viability, then what does it mean for one to perform Malayness today, and how is the authenticity of a vernacular performance maintained?

Through the use of discourse analysis, eight top Malay-language television programmes within the genre of situational comedy (top on the basis of viewership ratings) will be studied. The outcome of this research is expected to contribute to the field of television studies and agencies in the governance of television, content producers, and cultural/ethnic identities research.

Jukka O. Miettinen

Leena Rintala and her Southeast Asian dance repertoire

In the 1930s when “oriental” dances were hugely popular in the West, and mostly based on Western fantasies of the exotic East, a young dancer with a Finnish name, Leena Rintala, suddenly appeared in the European dance scene. She claimed to have learned her Asian repertoire in India, Burma, Siam and Bali. She performed successfully in Tokyo, Vienna and Paris and finally landed in Finland where she performed in the Finnish National Theatre in 1935.

Many questions have so far remained unanswered with regard to her origins, training and later fate. This presentation aims to collect together the scattered information about the adventurous early life of this Manchurian born girl who performed around the world under the protection of her Finnish stepfather. New information about her later life in Finland and in Sweden will also be provided.

The main focus, however, will be on the dance iconographical analysis of the photographs showing the Southeast Asian dance numbers in her repertoire. The analysis is based on the comparison of other photographic material of the period, dance manuals, and finally, on discussions with specialists of Southeast Asian dance.

Chan E. Park

Reinventing the “Village” in Korean Traditional Performance

Performance was integral to the communal life of the preindustrial Korean villages. There was song to practically every human labor as planting, fishing, or weaving. Singing helped enhance the productivity by energizing the collective consciousness of the humans in labor. In production and consumption, birth and death, in praying and in playing, specific rituals were combined with musical and/or theatrical performances. Labor and leisure, or sacred and secular, became of the same context for performance. In the wake of massive industrialization and urbanization, loss of the context of the traditional performance, except as a stage art, appears inevitable. In the realm of death, dying, and healing, textual and contextual deconstruction of the indigenous ritual tradition is further exacerbated by the mainstreaming of the Christian doctrine that mostly demonizes the Korean indigenous ritualism. Its spiritualism is further jeopardized by the trendy postmodern theatrical deconstruction. The primary goal of folkloric preservation of traditional performance should be to help maintain and transmit the performative knowledge for future reinvention. Outside postmodern experimentation, what motivations for recontextualization of traditional performance may exist? In addressing these questions, I draw key observations and examples from my performative ethnographies of drumming and chanting started in Summer 2010, of the changing poetics and politics of traditional

performance on the island of Jindo, a salient locus of folkloric study off the tip of Korea's southwestern coast.

Jonah Saltz

Sites of passage: a century of Japanese kyogen comedy innovation

Examining new sites for performance reveals much about how Asian traditional forms embrace new audiences and technologies, and their mutual influence. I will examine how the six hundred year-old comic tradition Kyogen managed to regenerate spectator interest and media attention, while raising its artistic quality during a period of great social upheaval, competing performances and media, and shifting tastes. In particular, the Shigeyama family of the Kyoto area have managed to surf nimbly the shifting tides of fortune, securing popularity among a wide group of domestic and international fans. After sketching the early 20th-century noh-kyogen world, this talk will examine the new "sites of passage" for the maturation and innovation of this kyogen family in contemporary Japan: shrines and temples, civic halls, school tours, tours abroad, and the internet.

Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt, Palle Dahlstedt and Nonaka Kumiko

Deconstructing Shirabyoshi – Female dancers of the Heian period as a Mirror of Today

Choreographer Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt creates a performance (premiere April 4th, Gothenburg) investigating class and gender of historic female street performers Shirabyoshi, who, trained in music, dance and poetry, performed dressed like male priests with sword, long hakama pants and a tall hat. How did they move? How did they manage their ambiguous position belonging both to the streets and the court? They could easily be replaced and thus lose social position, home and income. At the heart of our performance are the Imayo ("modern") songs of the Heian time. What was important in the arts of the Heian period and how can we relate to it? Ami is exploring the border between modern dance expression and the classical, ritual Japanese Buyo dance. Two musicians/composers contribute their perspectives to the performance: Kumiko Nonaka (Kyoto) constantly widens the range and outreach of the nohkan flute, bringing intimate knowledge of and new melodies for the Imayo Songs. Palle Dahlstedt (Gothenburg) combines studies in Noh music with advanced Western composition training and state-of-the-art electronic music research. The objectives are to create an artistic synthesis, to bring it to a new audience and to show how these old artistic expressions can live – not only as a conserving museal craft, but as a powerful part of contemporary artistic expression.

Anna Thuring

Ghosts of the Ghosts. Disectig the Various Layers of *Giselle à la Nō*

Dialogue between Asian performance traditions and Western counterparts is in our midst and produces continuously performances which we can describe hybrid, intercultural, transcultural or interwoven. Surely there are ethical and aesthetic questions that can be raised concerning the borrowing from other traditions but, ultimately, it is the combination of quality, transparency and actuality that can be used as criteria for critique and evaluation.

The paper builds around a recent (will be in May) production of *Giselle. Planet Earth No. 2* by Aki Suzuki Spirits in Helsinki the Spring 2012. The publicity material describes it followingly:

"The impressive new production by Aki Suzuki is a piece of Noh theatre, a form of drama that has been performed in Japan since the 14th century. Featuring music, dance and masks, Noh has retained the same

elements throughout the centuries. Aki Suzuki's Noh interpretation turns the classic ballet into an entirely new Giselle by combining Japanese elements, Noh and Kabuki, with Finnish dancers and actors. The Noh manuscript by Shion Mizuhara / Rokuro Umewaka, which has been made in Japan, has been translated in Finnish by Kai Nieminen."

The paper takes up the questions of site, locality and context from three different angles. The first is the original 1841 libretto by T. Gauthier, inspired by H. Heine and V. Hugo, with its romantic and orientalist traits, with a touch of later queer and feminist interpretations, which is reworked into a *nō* script. Secondly, conception of the performance from the director's (and dramaturg's, choreographer's and costume designer's) perspective. Aki Suzuki is a Japanese, Finland-based former *butō* artist and teacher who has distanced herself from *butō* and, without actually having professionally practiced neither *kabuki* nor *nō*, is increasingly seeking inspiration from these traditional forms. Third angle is technical and concerns the different layers of training that are visible in the ensemble. The six Finnish performers are all, at least partially, trained by Aki Suzuki. Yet, at least two of them have a heavier training load from Peking opera and traditional Indian dance - and very limited knowledge of the traditional Japanese styles. What kind of an entity do these Inter-Asian trained, yet clearly Western, performing bodies form in this particular production?

Michi Tomioka

What is the Ritual Context in Javanese Court Dance?

What is the ritual context of traditional performances? Is the loss of ritual context always wrong? Ritual context is often created by the political power, even if it is derived from a religion or faith. In case of Javanese court dance referred as ritual, religious, or sacred, almost all of court dance had really been created for entertainment for ceremonial occasions in the court, which were held to maintain the court system. *Srimpi* and *bedhaya*, female court dances of Surakarta Court in Java were not opened to the public until 1970, because the court concubine system was maintained after the Indonesian independence. When female court dance was opened to the public, it became from political to aesthetic. However, there have been some conflicts between the court and national art institutions who took initiative to revive the court dance. The court dance was opened to the public in a national project to revive traditional dance. Should we maintain such ritual context of Javanese court dance, which is really the concubine system and federal court system? Because the court dance repertoires were separated from such ritual context in the national project, Indonesian people can equally appreciate and succeed them as their national heritage.

Maya Tångeberg-Grischin

Death and Salvation of the Terrorist Puthana (Performance and Discussion)

Under the learning process of the classical piece *Puthana Moksham I* I have analyzed where *kutiyattam* as a style and a cultural expression ends and where European theatre starts. This was done by the examples of improvised parts, where the actress has all freedom of expression, but has to stay within the frame of *kutiyattam*. Hopefully, the performance of this piece will make a good basis for the discussion how *kutiyattam* as a style can be understood by a contemporary, non-Keralan audience and what are the prejudices and misunderstandings involved.

Minna Valjakka

The significance of site, space and context in Chinese Urban Art

This paper explores the impact of the site, space and context in the emergence and development of Chinese urban art since the mid-1990s. The aim is to show how the interpretation of urban art images depends on the interaction between the content of the work, the specific physical site, the city as an intertextual space and the socio-cultural and political context of the country in question.

Based on information deriving directly from the creators of urban art on the mainland and Hong Kong, and on primary and secondary materials collected primarily during the fieldwork periods in Beijing and Shanghai in 2006–2009, I will discuss how the urban art images reflect on current social and political topics and how the scene changes from a Chinese city to another.

Despite urban art is evidently a transcultural phenomenon deriving from the emergence of graffiti and street art in the United States since the 1960s, the development of urban art is not as homogenous as it is assumed. As I have discussed elsewhere, local regulations, public perception, the intentions of the creators, and the contents of the works vary from one country and city to another. Even the primary concepts may be altered. Therefore I have proposed the usage of a slightly more neutral concept of ‘urban art’ for academic research focusing on China instead of the negatively overloaded and primarily Euro-American concepts of graffiti and street art. Approaching the scene from the local perspective allows us to acknowledge that urban art in China is not a mere derivative from its Euro-American paragon, but instead, local issues, notions and themes are being discussed through the images.