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**‘Mapping Performance:  
Intercultural Spaces, Negotiable  
Boundaries’**

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*Issue Editors*

Emer O’Toole & Jim Ellison

*Editorial Board*

Mara Lockowandt

Grant Tyler Peterson

Brahm Prakash Singh

Yasmine Van Wilt

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## Editorial

When we chose a theme for this issue of *Platform, Mapping Performance – Intercultural Spaces, Negotiable Boundaries*, we wanted to investigate performative trajectories, without neglecting to map the histories and genealogies that inform them. We hoped to explore the ways in which critical tools - such as postcolonialism and interculturalism - can help us to understand a new cosmopolitan geography and the power relations it reflects. In this regard, we have not been disappointed. We are very proud to publish the five papers in this edition, each of which interacts, from its own nuanced cultural specificity, with contemporary conceptions of community and universality as represented in performance.

The fields of interculturalism and postcolonialism are under scrutiny in this increasingly globalized era. At the International Federation of Theatre Research conference in Lisbon last June, there was a suggestion from some quarters that the term ‘intercultural,’ imbued with the negative connotations of the arguably neo-colonialist, arguably exploitative work of practitioners like Schechner, Brook and Mnouchkine, represented something of the past, something irrelevant to today’s, again, arguably, more ethically aware, more culturally sensitive, post-Schechner performance practice. New terms, it was proposed, needed to be found in order to explore the creativity that collaboration between two cultures can engender. Similarly, postcolonial paradigms are being called into question. In a world where East/West binaries are rapidly shifting, and developments in communications blur the boundaries between the local and the global, it can seem as though Fanonian calls for the cultivation of national cultures, or Bharucha’s exhortations on the economic exploitation inherent in intercultural encounters, must inevitably be muted. But has so much changed in the thirty years since Edward Said published *Orientalism*, or is there still much to be said about the sensitivities inherent in making theatre that crosses borders? The papers published here, we believe, make a case for the importance of finding the spaces where local performance, global performance, the theatre of the centre and the theatre of the margins overlap. The work of our postgraduate contributors explores intercultural and postcolonial themes, while helping to develop critical schemata to deal with race, nationality, gender, and identity in performance.

For some of our writers, history and national identity are the locus of their work. Ching-Yi Huang’s exploration of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan’s *Portrait of the Families* points to the power of theatre to give expression to Taiwan’s complex colonial past, helping to forge a sense of national identity from the fraught and ultimately unanswerable question ‘which country should I love?’ Mara Lockowandt’s article on Sephardic theatre has a similar historical bias. It deals with a New York based collective, the Ladino Players, who aim to keep the Sephardic language and customs alive through performance; in so doing they negotiate issues surrounding linguistic and cultural conversation and adaptation. She terms this phenomenon ‘theatre for survival.’ These two papers speak to the importance of performing national histories, whether post-colonial or diasporic, in the search for, or conservation of, identity. Leaning more towards the cosmopolitan, Marcus Cheng Chye Tan’s paper interrogates the notion of music as a ‘universal language’ in Ong Ken Seng’s intercultural project, *Awaking*. In the show’s merging of the musical traditions of Northern Kunqu opera, Chinese classical music and Elizabethan folk tunes there is a negotiation of the binaries of East and West, and a fusing of disparate musical forms to forge a ‘universal’ acoustemology which simultaneously contains the past and reflects the present.

With Lise Uytterhoeven and Mark Hamilton's scholarship, there is a move away from the drive to understand the past or preserve national cultures; they still foreground the issue of identity, but it seems to be individual identity that is interrogated. In *A Cosmopolite's Utopia*, Uytterhoeven argues that the work of the half Flemish, half Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's embodies a cosmopolitanism that defies the traditional and restrictive Flemish generational dance history model. Using the scholarship of Joseph Roach, she understands Cherkaoui's body as a crossroads of intercultural exchange, a site of hybridity, of merging identities and discourses that cannot be contained by national or ethnocentric paradigms. With *Mika's HAKA*, Mark Hamilton discusses the work of another choreographer and dancer who rejects traditional performances of his cultural heritage in favour of subversions that can express his layered otherness. Following Christopher Balme, Hamilton argues against the rigid conservation of cultural forms in his discussion of Maori performer Mika's queer cabaret show. Mika capitalises upon Western desire for Maori otherness, attracting charges of irreverence towards Maori tradition, or exploitation of the young Maori and Pasifika men who perform his work. Hamilton, provocatively, defends the legitimacy of Mika's representation of his identity and his otherness.

In thinking about how these papers interact with and speak to each other, it becomes apparent that the intercultural is individual: it is tangled up in questions of identity. When a Flemish-Moroccan rejects a nationalised discourse that cannot define his work; a Sephardi wrestles with the task of keeping cultural and linguistic heritage alive; a gay, adopted, Maori performer subverts both Maori tradition and Western stereotypes of Indigenes; when a fusion of three distinct musical traditions can be understood as universal; or a Taiwanese asks 'what country should I love?' then each speaker, each voice, is making a statement about identity in this increasingly globalized, yet culturally diverse world.

Continuing *Platform's* dedication to publishing performance responses, in this edition Georgina Guy uses a phenomenological lens to insightfully examine space and liminality in *Atelier Brancusi* by André Avril.

We would like to express thanks to Palgrave Macmillan and Intellect Publishers for the review copies of Patrick Lonergan's *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* and Olivia Turnbull's *Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain's Regional Theatres* respectively. As always, we are very grateful to our academic and peer reviewers, to the Royal Holloway Drama Department, and to all our contributors for their hard work.

Emer O'Toole and Jim Ellison  
(Issue Editors)

## Notes on Contributors

**Marcus Cheng Chye Tan** is currently pursuing a PhD at Trinity College, Dublin, and is a recipient of the College's Postgraduate Studentship. Marcus holds a M.A. and a B.A. (Hons) from the National University of Singapore. He has published in several academic journals and books, and has also taught at the National University of Singapore and Singapore Institute of Management University.

**Georgina Guy** is part of the Performance Research Group at King's College London (KCL). She is currently pursuing an AHRC-funded doctoral project examining the contemporary curated museum as a place for performance and in particular how visitors interact with exhibited space. Georgina also holds an Inglis Studentship 2009-10 for her work at KCL and is currently undertaking an empirical research project concerned with visitor behaviours in the Courtauld Gallery, London. She has recently worked as an assistant teacher at RADA and is now teaching 'Introducing Literary Theories' at KCL. During 2010 Georgina will co-curate a programme of special lectures entitled *Traces of...A series of discussions towards an ethics of literature, site and performance*.

**Mark Hamilton** completed his MPhil in 1992 (University of Birmingham, UK), in which he used modern holistic methods of Western theatre practice to explore the neo-Platonism of Elizabethan theatre. He then commenced intensive training in *bharatanāyam* (South Indian classical dance) – his study of which began in 1987 – with Priya Shrikumar, while also teaching at Dance Base, Scottish National Centre for Dance. Subsequent production collaborations with *Māori* and *Malayāi* martial artists and dancers seeded his current doctoral research in Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Canterbury (NZ), under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Mazer. In this work, Mark seeks to define an emergent genre he calls 'martial dance theatre.' Mark would like thank Dr. Mazer and Peter Falkenberg for guidance while developing this article, and his colleagues Shayne Panayiotis Comino and Coralie Dianne Winn for their contributions.

**Ching-yi Huang** is a PhD student at the University of Washington School of Drama, and a recipient of a grant from the Ministry of Education, Taiwan. She holds an MA in Drama and Theatre from National Taiwan University. She began her theatrical career as an actress in several Taiwanese fringe theatres and toured abroad as a project coordinator with Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. Her academic interests include

feminist and postcolonial performances in Chinese-speaking areas. Ching-yi would like to give special thanks to Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan for providing valuable archival sources.

**Mara Lockowandt** is currently investigating the role of theatre amongst diaspora and exilic communities for her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London. This research is supported by the Reid Scholarship and is focused on performance in the Sephardi Diaspora. Recently, she has assisted on courses in Theatre History and Critical Theories at Royal Holloway. She holds a MA in Performance Studies from King's College London and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

**Emer O'Toole** is a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London, where she is supervised by Helen Gilbert and Karen Fricker. Her research examines the ethics of collaboration, focusing in particular on rights of representation in intercultural theatre practice; this work is supported by the Thomas Holloway scholarship. She teaches critical theories and contemporary theatremaking, and lectures on Pierre Bourdieu, phenomenology and postcolonialism. She is on the postgraduate committee of the Royal Holloway Postcolonial Research Group. She holds a MPHIL from Trinity College, Dublin and a BA from National University of Ireland, Galway.

**Eleanor Paremain** is currently undertaking doctoral research on audiences, archives and the Tricycle Theatre at Birkbeck, University of London, where she is supervised by Helen Freshwater and Aoife Monks. Her project, which is funded under the AHRC's 'Collaborative Doctoral Award' scheme, has involved working with the Victoria & Albert Museum's department of Theatre and Performance, where she is supervised by Kate Dorney, the curator of modern and contemporary performance.

**Lise Uytterhoeven** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Dance, Film and Theatre of the University of Surrey, focusing on new dramaturgies and the ontology of performance with regard to the work of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. She lectures on BA Hons and Foundation Degree programmes at the University of Surrey and London Studio Centre, addressing a broad range of topics in Critical Theory, Choreographic Analysis and Dance History.

## Abstracts

### **A Cosmopolite's Utopia: Limitations to the Generational Flemish Dance History Model**

Lise Uytterhoeven (University of Surrey)

Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's nomadic lifestyle and cosmopolitan attitudes are central to his choreographic work. At the basis of each creation lies a series of intercultural encounters and exchanges. This process is reflected in the staged work, in which elements from different cultures are juxtaposed or layered upon each other, and languages are spoken without translation. For example, one of the scenes in *zero degrees* (2005) includes a Hebrew song with latent Basque origins, which has become Israel's unofficial national anthem. Cherkaoui's eerie performance of the song undermines the notion of purity of origins of nationalistic cultural symbols. Because Cherkaoui's work both facilitates and demonstrates oral and/or embodied transmission of cultural knowledge at work, which can be unpredictable, it has become extremely difficult to evaluate the work within a historical framework that is geographically isolated and based upon an understanding of cultural transmission as happening lineally between generations. Cherkaoui's life and artistic choices exemplify the kind of flexibility and fluidity that is required to overcome the types of nationalism and ethnocentrism with which he was confronted in his youth.

### **Theatre for Survival: Language and Cultural Preservation in the work of the Ladino Players**

Mara Lockowandt (Royal Holloway, University of London)

This paper examines the role of theatre in maintaining and developing a sense of cultural identity. Through an examination of a performance of *Presentando de un Megilah para Muestras Dyias* by the Ladino Players, I consider the production as a form of *theatre for survival* based upon its particular use of language in myth to evoke cultural memory. *Theatre for survival* indicates the impetus for performance to propagate the Judeo-Spanish language, as well as the customs and identities embedded in it. This paper draws upon a number of theorists, including Diana Taylor, Helen Gilbert, and Marvin Carlson, to examine the relationship between performance and the transmission of cultural identity. In discussing how the Ladino Players encourage broad community participation, I show how the production motivates audiences to reactivate Sephardic language and traditions in the present. *Theatre for survival* demonstrates how theatre can function as a means of archiving and reactivating



histories and memories, and emphasizes the imperative of collaboration for the propagation of a cultural identity.

**‘If Music Be the Food of Love’: An Acoustic ‘Fourth World’ in Ong Keng Sen’s *Awaking***

Marcus Cheng Chye Tan (Trinity College Dublin)

Staged as an attempt to ‘bring together Shakespeare’s plays and Tang Xian Zu’s classical Kunqu opera, *The Peony Pavilion*,’ (Ong, Programme Notes) *Awaking* stands as Singapore Director Ong Keng Sen’s most recent and prominent attempt at engaging issues of the intercultural through music and sound. While Ong’s previous intercultural projects sought to explore the politics of intercultural performance through the exchange, layering, confrontation and inter-mixing of Asian performance modes as visual aesthetics, *Awaking* is a performance at the borders of theatrical and musical conventions, as it features the music and musicians as central performative devices of staging the intercultural. Northern Kunqu opera, Chinese classical music and Elizabethan folk tunes from Shakespeare’s plays were re-moved, re-contextualised, and juxtaposed to explore ‘differing yet connected philosophies on love, death, and the afterlife’ (*Awaking*, Publicity). These humanist and ‘universal’ themes found expression in the ‘universal’ language of music. Through a study of the musicalities and sonic expressions of *Awaking*, the paper seeks to explore the implications of such cultural-musical juxtapositions. The paper engages, specifically, with the problematics and possibilities of music as a ‘universal language’ as implied by Ong’s concordance of Eastern and Western sounds in the final act. It further considers the politics of an intercultural soundscape and the acoustemologies of such an intercultural approach.

**‘Which Country Should I Love?’ *Portrait of the Families* by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan**

Ching-yi Huang (University of Washington)

In September 1997, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan premiered *Portrait of the Families*, a one hundred minute long dance which was described by choreographer Lin Hwai-min as ‘a ritual that pays homage to the turbulent past and to those common people who died unjustly.’ At the age of six, Lin saw secret family photos of his ancestors clad in Japanese kimonos, for the first time. Warned by his mother, he soon understood that he was unfolding an untouchable chapter of Taiwan’s past. Forty-four years later, he decided to face the traumatic history of Taiwan, and choreographed a dance threading together the fragments of the past, by unearthing the old family photos of Taiwan over the past one hundred years.

In this paper, I attempt to examine how *Portrait of the Families* showcases Taiwanese people's renegotiation and relocation of their Taiwanese (local), Chinese (national) and Japanese (colonial) identities in a postcolonial situation, through personal story-telling. I will also show how the dance attempts to forge a new narrative of 'home' for Taiwanese people by juxtaposing personal 'truth' with historical 'facts,' through a collage of movements, voices of personal narratives, and slide projections of family portraits. 'Which country should we love?' is the main question in *Portrait of the Families*. It embarks on a journey of not only finding the 'roots,' but also redefining the 'routes' of the immigrant communities in Taiwan.

**Mika's *haka* in *Mika HAKA*: Performing as the 'Other.'**

Mark Hamilton (University of Canterbury, New Zealand)

In 2000, Māori performer Mika, with his company Torotoro, created a dance show called *Mika HAKA*. The production was developed expressly for presentation at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. As such, it was targeted at the popular market in the UK. Its Māori-Pasifika teenage cast was predominantly male, and its choreography was based on *haka* (Māori intimidatory dance). In anticipation of non-Māori audiences, Mika structured *Mika HAKA* in such a way as to focus attention on the dancers' bodies. This paper considers how *Mika HAKA* constructed sensational images of Māori men by subverting performance conventions pioneered in *kapa haka* ('traditional' Māori group performance). By doing so, the production might be seen to have challenged the definitions of Māori identity that *kapa haka* upholds. In particular, *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have exposed how performances of native identity in New Zealand necessarily negotiate the continuing 'othering' of Māori. This paper considers how *Mika HAKA* explores the valorising and demonising typifications that historian James Belich observes in non-Māori portrayals of Māori men. Furthermore, I propose that the production is a contemporary permutation of the performance of alterity that Christopher Balme identifies as recurrent in the history of Pacific theatre. Finally, I propose that Mika's particular experiences of growing up adopted and gay might be seen to inform his theatrical practice of self-othering.

## **A Cosmopolite's Utopia: Limitations to the Generational Flemish Dance History Model**

Lise Uytterhoeven (University of Surrey)

Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui finds himself at a point of friction. He was born to a Flemish mother and Moroccan father, grew up in Antwerp and attended Koran school until the age of twelve. Being of mixed origin, Cherkaoui has always found it difficult to fully identify with a single culture. In Antwerp during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cherkaoui witnessed the rise of the populist radical right Vlaams Blok party. This nationalist movement argues for an independent Flemish state, but also displays xenophobia in its attitude towards foreigners and non-European immigrants. Cherkaoui was caught in the middle. It can be argued that an ambiguous sense of simultaneously belonging to both cultures and not belonging to either undermined the nationalist discourse surrounding him. Later, he became part of a mixed international artistic and performing community when studying at the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S), the contemporary dance school of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in Brussels, and performing and choreographing with dance collective Les Ballets C. de la B. This was crucial in instilling a sense of global citizenship in Cherkaoui. This paper will explore the affinities Cherkaoui's work has with cosmopolitanism,<sup>1</sup> particularly through his dramaturgical use of foreign languages.

The postcolonial critical voices that have influenced his thinking on concepts such as the nation, culture and identity, include the writing by Jiddu Krishnamurti and Amin Maalouf. Krishnamurti, whose ideas resonate with both cosmopolitanism and poststructuralism, suggests a change in mentality towards '[h]uman beings who are not labelled with any particular nationality' (11). He would like to see humanity

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<sup>1</sup> 'Cosmopolitanism combines appreciation of difference and alterity with attempts to conceive of new democratic forms of political rule beyond the nation-state' (Beck and Grande 12).

become free of nationalism, contending that '[w]e human beings are inter-related, wherever we live' (Krishnamurti 11). According to Krishnamurti, the fact that the world is run through warfare is the result of a specific kind of thinking, which is self-centered and intolerant. This kind of thinking clings on to xenophobic and self-protective beliefs and usually results in nationalism. The key to moving away from this thinking is to adopt a global, holistic outlook (Narayan 64). Cherkaoui has also been strongly influenced by Maalouf's concept of composite identity, which is based on the understanding that identity is not a singular entity, but the sum of one's diverse appearances (20). If one aspect of someone's identity is under threat, it may become dominant and therefore dangerous. As Cherkaoui explains:

I am the sum of multiple identities. [. . .] When one of our identities is put in danger, it becomes more important than the others. When I hear homophobic statements, I am homosexual, when I hear racist statements, I am Arabic. However, I constantly try to remember that I also consist of other, equally important identities.<sup>2</sup> (qtd. in Hervé n.pag.)

This embracing of diversity may have led Cherkaoui to evaluate cultural difference in a new light. Cherkaoui's recent collaboration with monks of the Shaolin temple in *Sutra* (2008) involved him spending a few months living and training with them in China, giving him the opportunity to refine his martial arts skills and live out the philosophy of one of his heroes, Bruce Lee. During an informal conversation in Antwerp in 2007, Cherkaoui explained that 'when people asked me why I wanted to work with these Shaolin monks, as they are so different from us, I replied that in fact I have a lot more in common with them than with most Westerners: I don't drink alcohol, smoke or eat meat.' Instead of reiterating an exhausted discourse which fixes cultural difference, Cherkaoui emphasizes his interest in Buddhism to reveal his

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<sup>2</sup> Personal translation by author of 'Je suis la somme de nombreuses identités [. . .] Lorsque l'une de nos identités devient plus importante que les autres, c'est qu'elle est mise en danger. Lorsque j'entends des propos homophobes, je suis homosexuel, lorsque j'entends des propos racistes, je suis Arabe. Mais j'essaie de me rappeler en permanence que je suis fait d'autres identités égales.'

affinities with the monks. In his acceptance speech for the Kairos Prize in Hamburg he recently explained:

You are never just one thing, one character, one function but rather each of us has the ability to perform many different functions, within a project but also in life. By recognizing this multiplicity in oneself, you realise that “the Other” (being the other performer, the new culture you discover, or the audience even) is often buried somewhere inside you too. I realise [sic], for instance, when I was in the Shaolin Temple, that a lot of the human elements that appealed to me in China were things I could definitely nurture within myself. I had it in there somewhere. It was just easier to see it outside of me. “The Other” is somewhere inside of you. It’s never really detached from you, and it is this bond that makes me keep looking for other links. It’s a never-ending search for interconnectedness, for common roots. (Cherkaoui)

Cherkaoui’s dance theatre addresses political and societal issues through the active discovery of the performers’ cultural backgrounds. He seems particularly interested in their dance or other movement traditions, such as martial arts or circus techniques. He explored kung fu movement in *zero degrees* (2005) and deepened his understanding of the martial art through his collaboration with the Shaolin monks in *Sutra* (2008). He has collaborated with circus artists Damien Fournier and Dimitri Jourde in *Myth* (2007) and *Apocrifu* (2007) respectively. Another aspect of the performers’ cultural background Cherkaoui is interested in is the singing of orally transmitted music from their childhood, such as lullabies. In one particularly memorable scene from *Foi* (2003), Erna Ómarsdóttir sings an Icelandic lullaby in a penetrating, raw voice. These embodied or orally transmitted cultural elements are often layered upon each other, or juxtaposed, in the performance, to reveal common connections or similarities of principle, mood or intention beyond cultural difference.

The performers often speak in their native languages on stage. However, because no translation is offered, the spectator might become frustrated by the incomprehensibility of the texts; they might become, as Hans-Thies Lehmann has argued, part of ‘a shared *space of language problems* in which the actors as well as

the spectators experience the blockades of linguistic communication' (147). In Cherkaoui's work, the deliberate act of non-translation obscures some of the dramaturgical content with the aim of exposing biases in and limits to the spectator's knowledge. In order to grasp the finesse of the dramaturgy, the spectator requires an understanding of non-Western languages and cultural values. Therefore, Cherkaoui approaches confrontations between different cultures with cultural relativism, challenging the marginalisation of non-Western cultures. Paradoxically, while compromising the conventional mode of communication based on a shared language, Cherkaoui actually aims to improve the understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds through his choreography (Olaerts 17). He acknowledges, however, that this is utopian.<sup>3</sup>

Cherkaoui's utopia seems to be based on the cosmopolitan idea that all human beings belong to the same community and have responsibilities of justice and hospitality towards each other beyond state boundaries. Cherkaoui, together with co-choreographer Akram Khan, reveals the concept of the nation as a construct in their work *zero degrees*. For this production, the two choreographers collaborated with composer Nitin Sawhney and visual artist Antony Gormley. The two performers are joined on stage by the presence of two latex casts of their own bodies, created by Gormley. The title of the work makes reference to the 'in between' point, the point between positive and negative, between water and ice, between life and death, between one state boundary and the other, between performance and visual arts.

When Khan travelled to India, he discovered that national identity can be determined by something as arbitrary as the colour of a passport. In the story that he

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<sup>3</sup> The unattainability of the intended effect may in fact be the result of the obscurity of the dramaturgy. The polyglossia of theatre texts can lead to the musicalisation of language, characteristic of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre. Focusing on the musical qualities of foreign languages may set off a process of exoticising and othering, while more pertinent issues are overlooked. This offers the spectator the option not to question his or her own biases and limited knowledge.

tells in unison with Cherkaoui, when the state officials at the border between Bangladesh and India took his passport away from him, Khan realised that without his British passport he no longer had any proof of his identity and panicked. He tells of his encounter with a dead body on a train, an event which deeply unsettled him and exposed his struggle with finding his identity as a British-Bangladeshi travelling to the 'homeland.' By duplicating the storytelling in a second body, Cherkaoui and Khan reveal the peculiarities in the way the story was originally told. It is not a perfect text; it is flawed, with hesitations and sentences abandoned midway, but at the same time demonstrates richness in movement and gesture stemming from Khan's lifelong experience as a Kathak dancer. Uncannily, because both voices speak at the same time, there is an initial confusion about whose story this is: Khan's or Cherkaoui's? Or do aspects of the story apply to both men? Some scenes of *zero degrees* can be read as Cherkaoui 'trying on' Khan's story to see how it fits his body. During the creation process Cherkaoui learnt to perform Khan's grounded, percussive, and explosive Kathak-based movement style. The staged work is thus a direct result of this exchange of oral and embodied cultural knowledge.

Although Khan's central personal narrative in *zero degrees* is immediately apparent, Cherkaoui's narratives are more complex. Towards the end of the performance Cherkaoui sits on the floor facing the audience holding the latex cast of Khan's body on his lap as if he is mourning a loved one, and sings. Khan stands behind the cast of Cherkaoui's body, covering its mouth and drawing his hands away from it, as if he is visualizing the sound of a voice resonating into the space. While Khan's lower body remains stable, his legs extended as he shuffles sideways on his feet, his upper body movements become more convulsive and evolve into a violent shaking. There is a clear development in the relationship between Khan's movement

and Cherkaoui's song, similar in dynamics at first and utterly contrasting towards the end.

Audiences may possibly recognise the exotic sounds of this foreign song as Hebrew, label the song accordingly, and not question it any further. However, in this exoticising process of labelling, issues inherent in this specific lament Cherkaoui is singing are overlooked. The paradoxical theatrical image Cherkaoui presents is more complicated. He sings the Hebrew song 'Yerushalayim Shel Zahav' or 'Jerusalem of Gold,' written by Naomi Shemer in 1967 to celebrate Israel's independence. The first stanza of the song laments the loss of Jerusalem to the Jewish people, whereas in the last stanza the victory is celebrated. The song became a national symbol and unofficial national anthem after Israeli troops captured the Old City of Jerusalem and soldiers sang the song to celebrate the liberation of the city (Masalha 39). However, the song's melody is indebted to the Basque lullaby 'Pello Joxepe'.<sup>4</sup> Shemer admitted being subconsciously influenced by the song after hearing a friend singing it. Although the rhythm has been adapted from an upbeat, bouncy and slightly irregular 3/8 metre to a clear, steady and regular 3/4 metre, the resemblance of the two melodies is distinct. When Cherkaoui performs the Hebrew song in *zero degrees*, he abandons the 3/4 metre of Shemer's song, occasionally using the entire duration of his exhalation for certain syllables. The song becomes extremely protracted and eerie, adding to a sense of Brechtian *Verfremdung*. This may prompt the audience to question what the song is and where it comes from, thus drawing attention to its unexpected origins.

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<sup>4</sup> The construction of Basque national identity and consequent claims to autonomy should be historically located in the project of modernity (Diaz Noci 2). Arguably, this could be seen to apply to the Flemish nationalist and Zionist movements too. The autonomy claims of these different groups also seem to resonate with Maalouf's concept that when a certain aspect of people's identity is threatened, such as their Flemishness, or Basqueness or Jewishness, this aspect often becomes more important than other aspects of their composite identity and may mobilise them into defensive action.



Cherkaoui is eager to point out in conversation that many of the cultural, nationalistic symbols that are considered to be authentic and pure actually originate from different cultures and are not as unambiguous as people might assume. By unveiling this disorderly cross-pollination of cultures, demonstrated by a nationalistic Israeli symbol having hidden Basque origins, Cherkaoui dismantles the claim for purity of origins when he performs this song. This scene from *zero degrees* demonstrates Derrida's notion of 'iterability' or 'a critique of pure identity,' indicating that the work shares characteristics with liminal performance (Broadhurst 50).

Cherkaoui's Islamic roots and upbringing in a Western country already complicate his cultural identity; the fact that he chooses to sing a song that has become a nationalist Israeli symbol in Hebrew makes for a provocative political statement in the eyes of some spectators. One reviewer comments: 'I can't imagine it is easy to find a Flemish-Moroccan who can [. . .] sing Jerusalem the Golden - in Hebrew' (Flanders). Ultimately, Cherkaoui's aim with this theatrical image is to demonstrate a pluralistic approach to the complex issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, countering one-sided and ethnocentric views. During an informal conversation in December 2008, Cherkaoui explained that in his opinion, there is no straightforward victim and/or aggressor in this situation. With this awareness that social concepts such as that of the nation are constructed and often constricting, nationalistic and ethnocentric ideas are difficult to retain. Instead, Cherkaoui proposes a flexible approach to such complex political issues as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, utilizing multiple viewpoints simultaneously and refusing a dogmatic, singular stance. In certain strands of cosmopolitanism cultures, too, are regarded to be unfixed entities, constantly influenced by, and influencing, other cultures (Scheffler 112; Appiah xv).

For example, Rahul Rao, an emerging scholar in the field of international normative theory, believes that 'all cultures simply *are* cosmopolitan mixtures, evolving in interaction with other cultures, so that we are all "naturally" hybrid and it is purification that is taught and imposed' (20). Cherkaoui actively seeks out occurrences of this kind of cultural cross-pollination in his choreographies; in *Myth* he layers tap dance upon Slovakian folk dance and Bollywood dance, revealing the dance forms' common emphasis on sophisticated rhythms and spectacular virtuosity.

The international and cosmopolitan nature of Cherkaoui's work necessitates a re-evaluation of Flemish dance history. The traditional linear historical narrative is based on a generational model characterized by the mechanism that the old generation feeds and educates the next. For his artistic creations, Cherkaoui prefers to surround himself with collaborators from all over the world, including Japan, South Africa, Iceland, United States of America, Australia, Slovakia, France, Belgium and Sweden. Given the international nature of Cherkaoui's and other Flemish choreographers' work, it will be argued that a geographically isolated historical narrative no longer suffices to characterize the Flemish dance landscape.

In the main sources that constitute Flemish dance history, a divide is made between the post-war ballet generation, the 1980s contemporary dance generation with De Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre, Wim Vandekeybus and Alain Platel, and finally a new generation since the 1990s including Charlotte Vanden Eynde, Meg Stuart and also Cherkaoui (De Belder and Van Rompay; De Vuyst; Lambrechts and Van Kerkhoven; Uytterhoeven). However, there are significant elements that destabilize the generational model. The Flemish dance field has been entered by artists who were not originally trained as dancers, but worked or continued to work in the field of visual arts or theatre. These artists have enriched and diversified the dance field.

Fabre, Vandekeybus and Platel are the key figures who have entered Flemish dance history in this way and pushed it in a direction that Lehmann identified as 'postdramatic' in his key text of the late 1990s. There are also artists from abroad who have actively been invited to base themselves in Belgium: Maurice Béjart was one of them, as was the American artist Meg Stuart; an increasingly high number of P.A.R.T.S. graduates have also been granted funding to create work in Belgium. This internationalisation of the Flemish dance field again undermines the generational model, which can be considered as much more linear and restricted to the boundaries of the nation state. The 'Flemishness' of the Flemish dance field is strongly contested, because of the extensive use of foreign dancers in those so-called Flemish dance productions. It seems that many dance artists working in Flanders are not in the least concerned with 'being Flemish' or using their work to construct a specifically Flemish identity for themselves. Perhaps this is due to the negative connotations of this term following the rise in popularity of the Flemish-nationalist populist radical right Vlaams Blok party. In this regard, the attempt to rationalize Flemish dance history in isolation from international performance discourses might seem distasteful and be frowned upon by the liberal artistic community.

The construction of the notion of 'the Flemish dance wave' is considered a strategy of the 1980s contemporary choreographers to obtain funding both domestically and internationally (Laermans and Gielen, 12-27). The work of a large portion of current Flemish dance artists, including Cherkaoui, is partially funded by international, albeit mostly European, theatres, arts institutions and festivals through a system of co-production. Following a series of international collaborations, Cherkaoui refuses to be grouped under the generalising term of 'the Flemish dance wave.' Indeed, sociologists Rudi Laermans and Pascal Gielen have contested the

'Flemishness' of the wave because of the international nature of the work of many choreographers working in Flanders (12-27). By insisting on the cosmopolitanism of his work, Cherkaoui resists being forced into the linear, generational Flemish dance history. The term generation suggests that the members of the same generation share traits and have something in common. It has become clear that the work of many of these artists is so diverse they actually share few characteristics and attitudes. Artists such as Cherkaoui continue to work somewhat independently from or perhaps beyond the generational historical model in a complex system of collaborations with a wide range of artists.

In the process of re-imagining Flemish dance history, useful insights can be gleaned from Joseph Roach's investigation of cultural transmission in the circum-Atlantic world. His work on the relationship between memory and history opens up a space for histories to be reinvented. He uses Renato Rosaldo's helpful notion of:

a busy intersection in which unanticipated or novel junctures may occur. [. . .] In contrast with the classic view which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders. (Roach 29)

With regard to the busy traffic in the Flemish dance landscape, generational history can be seen as one of the roads of this intersection, but by no means the only one. Other paths, such as the one leading visual artists or theatre makers to the intersection, or the path of internationalisation, connecting traffic between Flanders and the rest of the world, make up the intersection as well. In this metaphor, current dance artists definitely do not come from the same place and, more importantly, they travel in diverging directions and at different speeds. The cross-roads of intercultural exchange runs straight through Cherkaoui's body, and this is an element which he actively explores in his work.

I would like to propose that Cherkaoui's choreography both facilitates and demonstrates a kind of cultural transmission at work, which is unexpected and similar to the transmission of cultural knowledge Roach describes. Cherkaoui's nomadic lifestyle and cosmopolitan attitudes are central to his choreographic work. Intercultural encounters and exchanges, embodied and/or oral, are at the basis of each of Cherkaoui's creations. These processes are reflected in the staged work, in which elements from different cultures are juxtaposed or layered upon each other, and languages are spoken without translation. Therefore it has become extremely difficult to evaluate the work within an historical framework that is geographically isolated and rationalizes cultural transmission as happening lineally between generations. Cherkaoui's life and artistic choices exemplify the flexibility and fluidity required to overcome the nationalism and ethnocentrism with which he was confronted in his youth.

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## **Theatre for Survival: Language and Cultural Preservation in the work of the Ladino Players**

Mara Lockowandt (Royal Holloway, University of London)

The opening scene of *Presentando de un Megilah para Muestras Dyias* is haunted by the threat of linguistic and cultural annihilation: ‘Vozotros tambien devesh uzar la lengua antes de ke se vos olvide por entero’ (Altabe 2) (‘We need to use the language before we forget it entirely’).<sup>1</sup> A Rabbi speaks these lines to a number of congregants who are part of a Sephardic Diaspora, now residing in New York City. As these lines suggest, the framework for this production is to embrace and maintain Judeo-Spanish, the language of the Sephardic Jews. From this opening scene, the importance of language, as explicitly discussed and debated amongst the community members, emphasizes the tension between assimilation and survival.

This play was a 1996 production, performed by the Ladino Players in New York City. American professor Avivah Ben-Ur argues that unlike the earlier twentieth century American Sephardi Theatre, the Ladino Players seek ‘to celebrate and revive the Judeo-Spanish heritage, culture, and language’ (Ben-Ur, ‘Ladino Theatre’). While previous Sephardi theatre had foregrounded entertainment and escapism, the Ladino Players shift to an ethos of education and recovery of the Sephardi identity. In this article, I use the term *theatre for survival* to signify the relationship between the Ladino Players’ performance practices and their audiences. Focus is given to the performance strategies aimed at challenging traditional Sephardi language and cultural norms. Moments where the language is openly contested appear as demonstrations of cultural memory, in which

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are the author’s.

the performers reactivate the Sephardi identity with a contemporary relevance. Drawing upon interviews and a close reading of the performance text of *Presentando de un Megilah para Nuestros Dyias*, this article focuses on two aspects of the production. These are the explicit discussion and modernization of language, and the relationship between the individual and the collective in the process of cultural propagation. I propose that the production serves as a call for increased responsibility, within a wider community that is not exclusively Sephardic, for cultural and linguistic preservation.

### **The Sephardic Diaspora and the Ladino Players**

The Sephardic Diaspora originated with the Jewish expulsion from Spain in 1492, an event that contributed to the mass migration of Jewish exiles to Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America. The majority of the exiles settled in the Ottoman Empire where their language and culture continued to develop. In addition, some Sephardim began migrating to the United States during the seventeenth century. With the further erosion of the Ottoman Empire, more Sephardi immigrants settled within the United States during the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Judeo-Spanish is the language of the Sephardic Jews, developed in the diaspora following the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Although Judeo-Spanish shares a kinship with Medieval Spanish, it has also taken ‘loan’ words from Greek, French, Ottoman-Turkish, and Hebrew, creating a spoken language that is a ‘mélange of calques’ (Kerem par. 4). Ladino, although occasionally used synonymously with the term Judeo-Spanish, is traditionally the written language used to teach liturgical text amongst the Sephardic Jews.

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive account of the Sephardim in America see Ben-Ur, Aviva. *Sephardic Jews in America*. New York; London: New York U.P, 2009.

The majority of plays written by the Ladino Players were written in Judeo-Spanish with Latin characters, or in English. The Ladino Players were an amateur Sephardi theatre troupe in New York City from 1994-2004 whose performance practices focused on preservation and revival of the Sephardi culture. David Altabe founded the company and wrote a number of plays including *Prezentando una Megilah para Muestras Diyas*, *Orchard Street Blues*, and *Forsyth Street*, the last of these based on his own experiences of immigrating to America and living in the Lower East Side. In addition to his involvement with theatre, Altabe published original folktales and presided over the American Society for Sephardic Studies. The company was comprised of both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews from a multitude of geographical backgrounds with varying levels of Judeo-Spanish comprehension.

The Ladino Players' 1996 production of *Prezentando un Megilah para Maestros Diyas* is a re-telling of the Queen Ester story, or Megilah story, from the Book of Ester in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible). This story is often told to compliment the festival of Purim, celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar in the Jewish calendar. It tells the story of a woman who marries the King of Persia and, while keeping her Jewish identity secret, succeeds in thwarting a plot against her people and thus saves the community. In Altabe's version, the traditional setting is interwoven with a twentieth century Jewish community centre through a hybrid storytelling which often juxtaposes the dual settings and characters. The play is divided into three acts that follow an amateur theatre company's telling of the Megilah story in preparation for the festival of Purim. In a metatheatrical staging, the play is set in the Social Hall of a synagogue, which is a similar location to where the staged production took place in 1996. The audience primarily consisted of New

York-based Jews from the local Lower East Side Community. The majority of the audience would therefore have been familiar with the actors as well as the Megilah story. Although the themes of the traditional Megilah story centre on redemption and rebirth, it is the way in which the Ladino Players discuss and present language and traditions in the dramatic storytelling that characterizes this production as *theatre for survival*.

### **Theatre for Survival**

The term *theatre for survival* indicates the strategic use of theatre arts for the survival of cultural identity. This form of theatre, I suggest, seeks to interrupt the domination of the hegemonic system. The stage becomes the platform whereon diasporic minorities and displaced communities may counter prevailing norms with the aim of increasing solidarity for the celebration and preservation of the groups' values and identities. It is worth distinguishing *theatre for survival* from ghetto and community theatre, both of which share characteristics with this form but are distinct. Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo offer concise definitions of ghetto and community theatre; as they argue, ghetto theatre focuses on origins and loss and privileges the memory of a 'homeland' above the new home. However, while *theatre for survival* acknowledges the memory of a 'homeland,' it also emphasizes the collective memory of displacement, rooted more in local tensions than historical utopias or dystopias. This distinction is important because, unlike ghetto theatre, it is not place or memory which motivates production so much as the preservation of culture. The impetus for the performance in *theatre for survival* is a desire to revalue and reinsert the cultural identity into the present historical moment. The production of *theatre for survival* within specific communities and its integral function as

a means of cultural activism can make it a powerful form of community theatre. However, although *theatre for survival* seeks social change and supports cultural democracy, two attributes of community theatre as defined by Gilbert and Lo, theatre for survival differs in its imperative drive to perform or die. It is a form of protest against a dominant culture, potentially subversive, and present only in circumstances where the performing community perceive themselves to be under threat. While seeking to transform the psyche of the spectators, *theatre for survival* utilizes characteristics of forum theatre or epic theatre, forms of political theatre derived from Augusto Boal and Bertolt Brecht respectively.

The impetus behind *theatre of survival* is not to have the spectators directly join in the decision-making during the theatrical event, but rather to acquire an awareness, understanding, and desire to contribute to the propagation of the language and traditions of displaced groups. For audiences who do not identify as part of a diasporic community, *theatre for survival* functions as a type of epic learning play, whilst for members of the diasporic community the production and reception of the performance offers an opportunity to reinforce the existence of a cultural identity, and interrupts the dominant language, religion, and tales of origin of the hegemonic system. In the following section I will explore the Ladino Players use of *theatre for survival*, which seeks to both abject the minority culture and integrate it into society.

### ***Prezentando un Megilah para Maestros Diyas***

Until the Rabbi states ‘We need to use the language before we forget it entirely’ (2), *Prezentando un Megilah para Maestros Diyas* is spoken entirely in Judeo-Spanish; yet,

when the Rabbi insists that the club members present the play in Ladino, the other characters respond with shock and disbelief. This self-reflexive act parallels the metatheatrics evoked in the shared venue of the fictional narrative and the performance event. The utterance simultaneously becomes an act of cultural validation and a call to action. When questioned about this decision the Rabbi responds that enough people are familiar with the Megilah story and have studied Spanish in school, so they will understand the narrative. The dialogue between the Rabbi and the club members suggests that not only will the audience understand, but also that they must. The Rabbi's statement implies that since the Megilah story is part of a shared cultural memory the production need not focus on imagery or narrative, but rather should concentrate on presenting and performing the Sephardi language. Although the play is spoken in Judeo-Spanish, this tension resonates throughout as the characters are constantly highlighting and disputing the modernization of the language within the production.

What follows are two examples of how the language is openly and critically discussed within the production by the characters. Immediately following the opening conversation on language and intentionality are moments where the relevance of language and the attitudes of characters are questioned, revised and reversed. One such moment occurs when the audience encounters Ester as she first passes before the King during a festive promenade where he intends to pick a wife. The king is immediately overcome by her beauty and wishes to marry her. Haman, the King's chief advisor, encourages him to wait to see the other women, one of whom is his own daughter. The king refuses, declaring, 'No me sekas mas el kulo' (11) ('Get off my ass'). The club members respond that this word ('kulo', translated as 'arse') isn't in the Megilah or the

script, suggesting the actor has improvised this moment within the performance. The president of the club declares that if the Rabbi doesn't say anything then they can use 'kulo' in the performance. This instance is particularly noteworthy, as the actors/characters engage in a 'double-writing' of the Megilah story, a revision of the playwright's modernized text. The actors are rewriting the traditional story, illustrating how one can, and perhaps should, update language and traditions. The Megilah story, as well as the script itself, is presented as living text, flexible and adaptable.

The flexibility of the text is also present in the roles and relationships of the characters. In scene four, the King utters to his wife Vashti, 'I yo me siento tan asolado sin ti...' (8) ('I would feel so destroyed without you'), which is a textual addition as well as an alternative sentiment for this character within the traditional story. The King is often portrayed as heartless and inclined to debauchery and thus these openly expressed sentiments offer a re-characterization. A club member responds to this textual addition with 'Aunken no aprese en la Megilah, me esté gustando' ('Although that doesn't appear in the Megilah, I like it') (8), signifying that the addition accurately reflects how the actors/characters feel the character could (or perhaps should) be retold. While the alteration of the King's lines and intentions may be to add a layer of romantic appeal, the two reasons the characters give within the playtext for adapting the traditional story are to add humour and to modernize the text's chauvinistic characteristics. This additional instance of interruption further establishes the actors'/characters' ability to edit and redefine the language in the traditional story whilst also altering gender and power relations. These moments of adaptation affirm the mutability and contemporary resonance of the traditional story.

The modernization versus conservation debate with regard to Ladino is further illustrated by the structure of the performance. The action transpires between two concentric narratives, the traditional Megilah story and the modern-day re-staging of the story in New York City. While the traditional narrative is evoked as part of a collective cultural memory, the present-day narrative signifies the ongoing presence and value of the language in daily life. The actors/characters use Ladino to communicate the play and mytho-religious narrative, as well as to gossip and discuss issues related to everyday life.

While an examination of language within the production is crucial for understanding the overarching drive for cultural preservation, equally significant is *who* is speaking, as both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews are members of the Ladino Players. However, as an acquired language, and not the autochthonous language of the Ashkenazi, Judeo-Spanish serves, to borrow a description from Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author’ (Bakhtin 324). In other words, the significance of the utterance lies not only in the words themselves but also in the extra-textual meaning added by the cultural identities of the speaking bodies. Although Altabe makes no mention of Ashkenazi or Sephardi identities explicitly, the composition of the company affects the potential meaning-making.

As Judeo-Spanish serves as a unifying force for the performers, it, perhaps more importantly, serves as a means of connecting to the audience. This is illustrated most clearly when the actors invite the audience onto stage to join in the traditional dancing at the Persian court; ‘Por ke no les demandamos a todas las mujeres ke van a estar mirando la ovra ke suvan al tabló a prezentarsen al rey. Ansina azenmos lo ke yaman “audience



participation” (10) (‘Why don’t we demand that all the women that are going to see the play come on stage to present themselves to the King. Then we will have what they call ‘audience participation’). A traditional song is sung and the audience is encouraged to join the performance to contribute to the story.

Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor writes about the relationship between performers and audiences in transmitting knowledge. She states that spoken language is part of a culture’s ‘repertoire,’ a way of knowing and connecting to embodied cultural knowledge (20). For her, the repertoire ‘enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge’ (20). Through speaking and singing, the Ladino Players are reinserting the Sephardi repertoire of the mytho-religious text into the local-temporal, giving the language and tradition an embodied presence. The Ladino Players’ *theatre for survival* is a performance that ensures the ongoing use and understanding not only of the Ladino language, but also of the culture and identity embedded in the act of speaking.

By modelling the wider potential for language use and value through the individual subjectivities of the company members, the Ladino Players seem to, in part, be encouraging audiences to follow suit and participate in the propagation of the language and traditions. Emphasizing the role of language in the journeying and settlement of the Sephardim, historian Mair Jose Benardete states, language was ‘the most precious possession [...the Jews of Spain] took with them in their exile’ (9-10). Even for the Sephardim in America, with their diverse range of ‘microidentities’ (Judeo-Spanish-, -Arabic, -Greek), ‘language was an overarching unifying force’ (Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews*

20). Even within the heterogeneity of the Sephardim, language was used to unify the community against a dominant culture.

Further linking language to cultural traditions, John Joseph identifies the formation of this connection as being ‘a universally observable capacity to interpret signs’ (34). The value of language lies in its ability to establish a foundation for ‘perception, cognition, reading and interpretation, all of which interact with each other’ (34) so a shared sign-system is developed and communicated within the community. This shared system is both translational and transnational, spanning both global and local histories. In his monograph on language, *Speaking in Tongues*, Marvin Carlson investigates the role of language in theatre and its relation to location. Carlson has noted that with dramatists creating work for specific audiences, ‘locality and specificity’ are central to the production and reception of language (3). However, diasporic groups construct ‘locality’ in alternative ways to the geographically consistent postcolonial communities suggested by Carlson; due to their ongoing process of displacement, journeying, and settlement, specific localities are sites of travel. In discussing the relationship between a sense of belonging or ‘home’ in diasporic global and local journeying, Avtar Brah states, ‘[d]iasporic identities are at once local and global. They are networks of transnational identifications encompassing “imagined” and “encountered” communities’ (196). The semiotics of this transnational quality is best expressed through the language, which reflects the history of multi-localities. Although Judeo-Spanish is characterized by being the language of the Sephardim, the amalgamation of Turkish, French, Spanish, and Greek influences in the vocabulary and grammar signifies the geographical and temporal maps from centuries of (re)settlement

and alienation. Language, in instances of diaspora performances, such as those by the Ladino Players, is simultaneously local and global, occurring in specific geographical locations while also linked to past experiences of embodied culture and language that have evolved globally. Language is rooted in the local but identifies with the global. The act of enunciation gives the spoken language a localized presence amongst specific performers and audiences. The global identity is the abstract, the pluralist, the archived, and the historical. The local is embodied, fractured, disfigured, and heterogeneous. *Prezentando una Megilah* straddles global and local geographies and temporalities by blending traditions and modernizations as well as through the joint storytelling of audiences and performers.

While the company members and community seem to be invited to revive and modernize the language, there is also a danger involved. What is at stake in this widening of participation? The acquisition of language by members of the wider community is a form of assimilation. Survival, as represented within the production, is cloaking the underlying problem of cultural dissipation by assimilation. While the use of Judeo-Spanish serves as a model for the use and relevance of the language to wider audiences, it is limited in establishing a unified cultural identity. As John Joseph writes,

a given language is capable of sustaining more than one culture...Even if, historically, it has developed within a particular culture, it does not *in itself* spread that culture to other people who learn the language. Language must be embedded within the cultural habitus in order to function as the vehicle in which the culture will be acquired. Transferred to a different habitus, the language will mould itself to that habitus, rather than the other way around. (169)

Without being embedded within the community the cultural traditions linked to Judeo-Spanish can never be fully realized for audiences. However, as Joseph suggests, Judeo-Spanish may be capable of sustaining more than one culture as audiences don't *acquire*

but *connect* to various partial traditions within the multitude of signs present in the performance. The heteroglossic presentation of the text, that is, the doubled sign system of the playwright and the performers, is expanded to include the audience as a third interpretive body. In Carlson's discussion of the benefits of heteroglossia in theatrical texts, he argues that 'one of the most important results of an author relinquishing monologic control over a text is that the text, like life itself, becomes much more clearly open-ended' (Carlson, 'Theatre and Dialogism' 317). This open-endedness accounts for the possibilities within the text itself as well as the audience's interpretation. The ongoing reverberations of the narrative accounts create a continuous renewing of the mytho-religious text between the audience and the performers as it becomes (re)articulated into the heteroglossic cultural texts of new societies.

In discussing the attitudes of exiles, Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz declared, 'language is the only homeland,' signifying language's ability to create mobile places of belonging and support (qtd. in Umpierre 135). The use of the Ladino language within the performance of the Ladino Players unites the Ashkenazi and Sephardi performers through the act of storytelling, as well as connecting audiences who, through meta-theatrics and participation, are encouraged to join in the revival of Sephardi traditions. Cultural survival is made into a present imperative as the actors/characters are constantly re-evaluating the traditional narrative to reflect and address the past and present. This agency in altering the traditional text may be essential for the survival of the Judeo-Spanish language and the cultural traditions. This textual updating is the ongoing result of modernization and Westernization upon the diaspora groups and thus finds relevance in postcolonial discussions on syncretism and mimicry. The use of Judeo-Spanish signifies

not simply the revitalization and shared understanding of Sephardi culture, but of a broader diaspora-nation. Situated on the ‘borderline of history and language’ the Ladino Players struggle for cultural survival through exilic heteroglossia (Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation’ 320).

In conclusion, the strategic use of language is a key characteristic within the Ladino Players’ theatre in encouraging wider audience participation in the understanding and use of the language. As argued by Diana Taylor, cultural memory is archived and potentially remapped through embodied practices. Emphasizing the transitional processes of memories, she states, ‘what changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied’ (19). Taylor’s observations suggest that collaboration between makers and receivers of cultural acts is essential. The ongoing contribution and involvement of remembering and restating cultural memory is a crucial element of theatre for survival. Taylor goes on to state that the ‘reproduction of knowledge’ occurs because of people “‘being there,” being part of the transmission,’ which, for the Ladino Players, includes active participation in the theatrical event (11). For the Ladino Players, *theatre for survival* is a proposed shift from ancient to modern and from a private to public investment in the understanding and reviving of the Sephardi language and culture.

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**'If Music Be the Food of Love': An Acoustic 'Fourth World' in Ong Keng Sen's *Awaking***

Marcus Cheng Chye Tan (Trinity College Dublin)

**'Music is the Universal Language of Mankind': Sonic & Performance Universals**

In the opening pages of a stimulating explication on the state of world music today, ethnomusicologist Laurent Aubert asks, 'if, as one hears, music is a universal language, of what music do we speak, wherein lies its universality and under which conditions does it emerge?' (xii). The plausibility of music's universality, its transcultural semantics, and humanist affections, has long been debated in the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology. Aubert's inquiry, however, interrogates this episteme of universalism in sound and notes how in an aural encounter with a 'music of the Other,' a dilemma often encountered in ethnomusicology, universality is not about a transcendental signified or an affective communion but a comment about one's own musical tradition and sensibilities, particularly when one fails to specify what music is being referred to (Aubert 7).

Like hybridity, disguised appropriation is the trademark of interculturalism on the stage, for such Orientalist importations first began as a genuine attempt at comprehending the performance philosophies of the alien Other. Expeditions of humanist ideals led to a quest for universal structures, beginning with Victor Turner's anthropological quest of establishing social dramas as universals in myth, ritual and drama, which was built on by Richard Schechner's consequent developments.<sup>1</sup> Performance theory developed from the efforts of Turner and Schechner. Asian performance practices and principles were

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<sup>1</sup> See Victor Turner, 'Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?' and Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* or 'Intercultural Performance: An Introduction.'



consequently adopted and adapted by practitioners such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Eugenio Barba in an attempt to explore the deep structures of theatrical practices that could enunciate performance universals.

Universality has been a contested claim in both the fields of ethnomusicology (and musicology) and intercultural performance since Edward Said's theories of Orientalism caused paradigm shifts in Western academia's treatment and depiction of the 'East.' In the light of these performative, intercultural and Orientalist debates about universal principles in performance, this paper seeks to examine the intersections of musical and theatrical universals in a particular performance and the ways in which 'universalisms' are consistently employed and deployed in performance. It thereby addresses the questions Aubert raises as well. Specifically, the paper will examine the soundscape of Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen's most recent intercultural project *Awaking* through a close 'listening' of the final act, in which the music performed is a convergence of Western and Eastern sounds that engenders a new cosmological universal. A soundscape, a term first coined by R. Murray Schafer in his seminal work *The Tuning of the World* (1977), can be understood as an acoustic environment, or an environment of sound. It is an auditory 'terrain' that maps the composition of noises, sounds, music and human melodies in a particular space and context. As Barry Truax notes, it is 'how the individual and society as a whole understand the acoustic environment through listening' (xii). An intercultural soundscape is thus one in which listeners comprehend the cultural interactions and intersections, and the engendered intercultural space, in performance. A study of music and sound, an often neglected area of performance analysis which is frequently considered secondary to the visual spectacle,

serving only to augment the emotional atmosphere of the performance, could consequently facilitate a clearer understanding of the cultural dynamics on stage, particularly in the light of *Awaking's* performance of the intercultural as sonic negotiation. In undertaking such a study, this paper postulates that despite attempts at re-appropriating and underscoring the autonomy of the East in intercultural discourses, *Awaking* (re)performs Western notions of universalism, albeit ones that are merely re-tuned to an 'Oriental' acoustic signature. *Awaking* can thus be said to engage explicitly with early modern notions of universalism reformulated as a postmodern performative through the performance of sound.

Staged as an attempt to 'bring together Shakespeare's plays and Tang Xian Zu's classical tale made popular as Kunqu opera *The Peony Pavilion*' (Programme Notes), *Awaking* marks Ong's paradigmatic shift in dramatic strategies of (re)figuring the intercultural that is Other to Western modes. In Ong's earlier controversial works such as the Shakespeare-trilogy *Lear* (1997), *Desdemona* (2000) and *Search Hamlet* (2002), the intercultural involved an interplay of juxtaposed cultural spectacles framed by inversions of and re-visions to Shakespeare's text. *Awaking*, however, attempted to explore issues of inter-culture beyond a visual aesthetic and depart from ocular obsession to aural encounter. It thus trod on the borders of theatrical and musical conventions in intercultural performance discourse, for it featured the music and musicians as central performative devices of (re)presenting the intercultural.

This 'dramatic concert' (Ong) was thus a product of a collaboration between The Musicians of The Globe, led by music director Philip Pickett, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) under the direction of Maestro Tsung Yeh, and the Northern Kunqu

Opera Theatre troupe from Beijing. The performative structure of a triadic interplay between Kunqu opera (昆曲), Chinese classical music and Elizabethan folk tunes from Shakespeare's plays became a hybrid composition that sought to explore 'the differing yet connected philosophies of love, death, and the afterlife' (Publicity pamphlet). This tripartite negotiation of these metaphysical universals found expression in the triadic relation between the three performance traditions. The humanist and 'universal' themes were thus embodied in the 'universal' language of music creating, in the space of performance, an imagined intercultural heterotopia of an 'after-life' – a 'Fourth World.' The term 'Fourth World' is minimalist composer and trumpeter Jon Hassell's title for his 'world music' albums that attempt to feature the exotic sounds of the East in fusion with those of contemporary Western music.<sup>2</sup> It describes, more significantly, his compositional philosophy of minimalist fusion: a sonic topography of utopian interzones composed of electronic sounds and Asian-African rhythms and musics.

The arcadian Fourth World of *Awaking* is the acoustemologies of intercultural interstices.<sup>3</sup> The shared belief in a universal cosmology engendered by the quality of music is distinctly revealed when Ong writes of how *Awaking* was an attempt to merge aesthetic and cultural parallels of West and East exemplified by the lives and canonical

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'Fourth World' can be understood from a variety of perspectives. It can be regarded as a creation of a 'fourth' world/space from the three performance traditions represented on the stage. It is also used to underscore, and de-centre, the Orientalist discourses prevalent in Jon Hassell's music. For an experience of Hassell's music, listen to *Fourth World, Vol 1: Possible Musics*, also *Fourth World, Vol 2: Dream Theory in Malaya*.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'acoustemology' was coined by anthropologist Steven Feld to denote the specific relations between acoustic experience and epistemology in the establishment of personal and cultural identity. Feld created the term to study the sense of place and the place of senses in the Kaluli people's experience and expression of the tropical rainforest in Papua New Guinea. For Feld, sound could denote specific local conditions, knowledge and imagination embodied in a culturally particular sense of place (91). See 'Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea' in *Senses of Place*. I have adapted this term to performance analysis by considering the ways in which acoustic densities in intercultural performance can be accessed and understood by listening phenomenologically and considering the ways that acoustics can engender an inter-cultural epistemology.

works of Shakespeare and Tang Xian Zu (汤显祖). Both playwrights lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and wrote great dramatic works that have transcended temporalities; both wrote of tragic lovers and states of unrequited love. For example, the star-crossed lives of Hamlet and Ophelia mirror those of Du Liniang (杜丽娘) and Liu Mengmei (柳梦梅) in *Mudan Ting* (牡丹亭) / *The Peony Pavilion*. Ong attempted to use music as a performative instrument to stage the universal, thus highlighting the parallels between the cosmologies of East and West. He notes that 'sad songs and happy songs of love became the pillars of quotes for us' (Ong, 'Programme Notes'). Ong's equation of sonic with metaphysical universals consequently created in the space of performance an aesthetically seductive idea of an intercultural acoustemology.

### ***Awaking to a 'Fourth World': An Intercultural Acoustemology***

The dramatic structure of the performance exemplifies Ong's dramatic philosophy of juxtaposition as central tenet of the intercultural. The performance was partitioned into five acts with each act musically contrasting the act preceding, leading to a finale. Each prior act featured the musics of the cultural divide, with Acts I and III assigned to the performance of *The Peony Pavilion* and Qu Xiao Song's, *Awaking's* composer, contemporary classical composition and Acts II and IV showcasing songs from Shakespeare's plays respectively. The universals of love, life and death were interwoven into this structure of 'quotations' (Ong, 'Programme Notes'). This antiphonal structure culminated in a finale where 'the universe unite[d].'<sup>4</sup> The final act saw the involvement of all the musicians – both Eastern and Western – with the attempt to create an orchestral

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<sup>4</sup> This is the title of the Final Act.

denouement of a journey into the after-life, an alternate consciousness reflected through a *mise en abyme*.

The dramatic structure of antiphonal citations metatheatrically performs the philosophical and cultural dissimilarities underlying two different musical systems and the purported incompatibilities between Renaissance music and Chinese classical and Kunqu sounds. Since the structure is presented as a ‘dialogue’ between the two dominant traditions, with each being performed in an alternate sequence, the final Act effects a potential reversal of dramatic attitudes through a performance of syncretism within sound types, and between sight and sound. In the attempt to unite universes, physical and metaphysical, visual and aural, Western and Far Eastern, Ong and Qu engineered an aural performative that became a sonic ‘spectacle.’<sup>5</sup> The ‘awaking’ to a ‘Fourth World’ was an acoustic space of simulated harmony between the three performance styles and two dominant cultural traditions.<sup>6</sup> The compositional structure of the finale distinctly reflects the movement, both musical and theatrical, toward an intercultural acoustemology. Qu necessitated an involvement of all musicians segregated, proxemically, on the stage. While the solitary video screen located above the stage revealed two geometric circles merging, as a most overt signifier of merging universes, a violin solo, played by the violinist from the Globe ensemble, performed a variation from Qu’s theme for *Awaking* as the *luo* (锣) (Chinese high tin-bronze gong) reverberated with a deep resonant echo. The audience saw Wei emerge from offstage, stripped of the vestimentary and cosmetic codes that had earlier assigned her as a *guimen dan* (闺门旦), a particular female role of

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<sup>5</sup> The term spectacle has generally been used with reference to visual aesthetics. There is, however, an increasing association of the term with the aural sense particularly in the area of Film Studies.

<sup>6</sup> In the post-show dialogue, Ong calls this a ‘Third World’ – a transcendental new space which engenders a new culture. For Ong, transcultural work necessitated the creation of something new. ‘Through layering, collage, juxtaposition and quotation, a new space emerges in the finale.’

the Kunqu tradition.<sup>7</sup> Garbed in a layered 'patchwork' floral dress, and gracefully manipulating a fan in her hand, she danced across, still abiding by the stylized kinesic movements of Kunqu. The physical 'deconstruction' of her *dan* role mirrored the visual narrative of Singaporean Choy Ka Fai's cosmetic 'deconstruction' of character (Du Liniang) to become an actor (Wei) seen on the screen above. Yet her stage speech (*nianbai*, 念白) was performed as lyric couplets (*lian*, 联) indicating retention of the vocal modulations of the Kunqu performance form.

The visual and aural juxtaposition provoked a discursive confrontation that engendered questions of identity location, suggesting that the character Wei plays has metamorphosed. This was followed with a clash of the *bo* (钹, cymbals) and the climax resolved on the mellifluous woodwind tunes of the *dizi* (笛子, bamboo flute) that filtered the accompanying Buddhist mantra, 'Om Mani Padme Hum,' chanted by the SCO musicians. Pickett's English piccolo partook in the woodwind sounds and following this the distinctive 'wailing' resonance of Chinese *huqins* (胡琴)<sup>8</sup> were heard as other instruments, such as the *pipa* (琵琶, a Chinese lute) and *sheng* (笙, a mouth-blown reed instrument of vertical pipes) gradually entered the composite refrain in a showcase of 'musical grafts' and sonorous layering. The interplay of cultural sounds quietened, and the movement of unification was repeated as Wei revealed her 'water sleeves' (*shui xiu*, 水袖)<sup>9</sup> and moved gracefully to the cosmic soundscape created by the reverberating gong

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<sup>7</sup> The *guimen dan* is a role that usually demarcates maturity and relative youth along with an impeccable ability in singing and dance-acting. They are usually of high social status and are unmarried. See Xiao Li, *Chinese Kunqu Opera*, 41-45; Jo Riley, *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Huqin* refers to a series of instruments including the *erhu* (二胡), *zhonghu* (中胡) and *gaohu* (高胡), all of which are bowed string instruments. The *gaohu* produces the highest-pitch and the *zhonghu* the lowest.

<sup>9</sup> The 'water sleeves' are sleeve extensions of the costumes that consist of a length of white silk worn by Sheng and Dan roles in Chinese theatre. They are cultural iconic signifiers and are used to signal to the

and the strains of the cellos. In this musical cycle, accompanied by a crescendo of musical concordance that culminated in a climax, Wei welcomed the coming of Autumn and heralded the conjoining of universes.

Autumn was marked by Wei's continued dance in celebration of the passing of spring and the bountiful harvest of autumn, achieved through classic *yunshou* (云手, cloud-hands) gestures that expressed her joyous emotions. Her patterns of rounded movements, an essential aesthetic philosophy in Chinese Theatre,<sup>10</sup> culminated in an embrace of the moon seen as the classic pose of *baoyueshi* (抱月式). The mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum,' chanted by the SCO musicians, accompanied the visual signifiers of autumn. With each chant cycle completed, there was an upward modulation by a major second indicating aurally a journey toward nirvana and enlightenment – recognizably a musical articulation of the uniting universes. The following rest was punctuated by the enchanting sounds of the piccolo playing to the tune of 'Walsingham.' Joanne Lunn followed with a solo performance of the mantra sung to the established melody. While Lunn's solitary soprano voice filled the auditorium with the chant, Wei removed her costume to reveal yet another beneath – a casual dress that is removed from cultural signification, a vestimentary sign perhaps of the mundane schizophrenic condition that is consequent of re-birth and regeneration into a new postmodern 'Fourth World.' The

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orchestra that the actor is ready to speak or sing. Movements and 'flicks' of the water sleeves also characterize the role, attitude and emotional state of the character. See Riley, 59, 175-6. See also A.C. Scott, 'The Performance of Classical Theatre' in *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (31). In *Awaking*, the twirling motions indicate, perhaps, the merging of universes and the passing of time. It seemed as though it was also done for aesthetic effect, as a dance, rather than in order to maintain the symbolic roles the sleeves assume in a Kunqu or Jingju performance.

<sup>10</sup> 'Pattern of roundness' is an essential aesthetic principle in Chinese Theatre. It is regarded as emblematic of perfection, holism, and beauty. But more importantly, it holds cosmological and philosophical significance related to yin-yang and the Luo (落) matrix where, in combination with all other aspects of performance, it metaphorically unifies all times and spaces in the theatre space. See Riley, 295-331.

cosmetic act of cultural erasure on the actor's body is undoubtedly a dramatic signifier of the re-birth of Du Liniang and the union of universes in the time and space of the here and now. Yet the 'un-dressing' ironically performs, metadramatically, a renunciation of tradition for modernity in the search for a universal language both musical and theatrical. In *Listening to Theatre*, Elizabeth Wichmann observes how, in *Jingju*, 'everything in the world of the play must above all be beautiful (*mei*, 美)' (2) and all aspects of *Jingju* performance adhere strictly to this basic aesthetic value. This is true of Chinese performance styles and in Chinese theatre the aesthetic principle of *xieyi* (写艺), which literally means to write/paint/draw the meaning, pervades the process of preparation to performance in any artform and in particular for theatre. *Xieyi*, as opposed to *xieshi* (写实), which is to write realistically, conveys the essence of things in representation and beauty is consequently a necessity in Chinese performance (Wichmann 2-3). Beauty, in performance, is not an attempt at verisimilitude but an aesthetic philosophy. The performative event of 'undressing,' adumbrated by Choy's earlier virtualized act of deconstructing the *dan* character, gestured to an abandonment and erasure of the fundamental principle of beauty (*mei*, 美). The finale was thus a confounding moment of an anti-aestheticism that juxtaposed with the flourish of musical syncretism.

When one considers the significance of this musical movement, one *hears* the overtones of synthesis and *sees* its occurrence with the inclusion of the various instruments from the cultural divides on stage. In the post-show dialogue, Qu explains that this is the dramatic moment of universes uniting, structured as the lyrical transformation of 'Walsingham' to the Buddhist mantra. Musically, the shifting variations on the tune of the former eventually become tonally assimilated by the theme



from *Awaking*, thereby performing melodically the harmony – cosmic and musical – that is desired. The intercultural intersection can thus be heard as different vectors of signifiers culminating in a compositional flourish that is aurally pleasing to the listeners and perhaps even a moment's experience of the romantic sublime. The currents of exchange in this sonic interzone then are not only located in melody or the formal structure of the composition but also in song – in the metamorphosis of lyrical translatabilities to Buddhist untranslatables.

### **Listening In/To Each Other: Acoustic Orientals and Occidentals**

While the fusion of cultural sounds and styles engendered a Fourth World of intercultural possibilities, one could listen alternatively to this soundscape as one that is not a utopian universal but an appropriative reversal or a reclamation of acoustic identity in the political theatre of interculturalism. Critiquing the intercultural music of Jon Hassell, John Corbett sees this Fourth World of world music possibilities not as a topography of alternatives or a utopian interzone where all cultures mingle freely and without anxiety of authenticity or propriety but an imperialistic equation of Third World musics being added to First World sounds.<sup>11</sup> In *Awaking*, however, it was 'First World' sounds becoming assimilated by 'Third World'<sup>12</sup> experimental discourses. 'Walsingham' became appropriated and consumed by an overtly Chinese composition. The metamorphosis of linguistic signifiers performed a political process of an Eastern philosophy and religion

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<sup>11</sup> See Corbett, 175-8.

<sup>12</sup> I use the terms 'First' and 'Third' Worlds here loosely, recognizing that the rapidly changing economic landscape has led to China being thrust onto the First World playing field. Also, I recognize that these Elizabethan tunes are hardly characteristic of a First World England, but are nonetheless reflective of the global position Britain once held. It reifies my argument about the dichotomies of West/East prevalent in the production despite the attempts at concord and harmony.

grafted onto an Elizabethan tune; the sonorities of an English soprano were subverted by the religious semantics of an Eastern mantra. What was composed as a journey towards re-birth realized through an acoustic universalism could be heard as an acoustic Occidentalism.

This Occidentalism is not merely a simplistic model of Saidian Orientalism inverted, nor is it a strategic subversion or writing 'against' and in opposition to the Western Other, but a complex process of selection, re-appropriation, assimilation, and transformation of 'foreign' properties. In *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, Chen Xiaomei defines Occidentalism in China as 'a discursive practice, that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others' (4-5). While Chen's views addressed specifically the state of Chinese theatre in the Post-Mao era, they resound in the context of Qu's cosmopolitical composition which exemplified a Chinese musical discourse that has consumed and appropriated qualities of its Western Other – here an Elizabethan tune that, Philip Pickett notes with a high degree of certainty, was a historical rendition of the popular ayre sung in 16<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>13</sup> Thus Patrice Pavis's source-target assimilative model that would yield a utopian intercultural *mise en scène* is effectively disproved. Yet while the intercultural hourglass has been shattered, the power relations contained within these cross-cultural dialogues prevail.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Pickett notes, in the post-show dialogue, that although there were three varying versions of the tune 'Walsingham,' they all had strong similarities with variations only in certain musical phrases and notations.

<sup>14</sup> Pavis was among the pioneering theorists to postulate the dynamics of intercultural negotiation. In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, he proposes an 'hourglass' model where the upper bowl contains the foreign or source culture, and the lower bowl contains the target culture. Intercultural exchange can

### **Aural Exoticism: The Sounds of Universal Spiritualism**

The performance complicates the political dynamics of cultural practice not only by its attempted dismantling of sonic boundaries in a performative act of acoustic utopia, but also by introducing the discourse of religion. One can consider how the recurring Buddhist mantra, that is the refrain of Qu's composition, becomes a third 'culture' introduced to the performance syntax. As performative element, its recurrence, as refrain and repetition as chant, becomes a dominant sonic presence that erases all other aural signifiers and appropriates all other cultural languages. Chants possess appropriative abilities, for they engrave acoustic signatures subliminally not only through repetition but, in *Awaking*, via the annexation of the characteristics of Elizabethan songs: ease of singing due to flowing pitch patterns, firm pentatonic melodies and a high degree of emotionality due to word painting.

'Om Mani Padme Hum' is a Tibetan mantra derived from earlier Hindu mantras. There is no exact translation or equivalent in any language nor is there a corresponding lexis that can be used to explain what it means. Chants work on the principle of the recurrence of sound and Tibetan Buddhists believe that the repetition of this phrase as a monotonal vocal expression invokes the powerful benevolent blessings of *Chenrezig*, the embodiment of the compassion of all Buddhas. The mantra exemplifies the failure of language and speech – where words and grammar cease to depict reality – and advocates a primacy and pre-linguistic power of sound. The sonorities and timbre generate meaning and significance – it is the sonic quality that possesses the power to invoke a

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be likened to the grains in the hourglass flowing from the source culture, through the narrow neck, to the target culture in a linear fashion. See Pavis, 4-6.

transcendental truth. It is sound that conjures and materializes meaning that is beyond referential and absolutist determinations of musical signification.

*Awaking* is distinctly an attempt at transculturation effected through the oral and oracular powers of religion. It is an attempt at awaking not only to an after-life located in the narrative of *The Peony Pavilion*, but to a Fourth World of a cultural-religious hybrid that is located in associations with the spiritual powers of a metaphysical compassion. With a composition that has movements distinctly engendered from the musical refrain of the chant, Qu and Ong dramatised acoustically a plane that crossed ethnic and cultural topographies. Yet the desired effect of transcendental enlightenment is unverifiable and indeterminate at best; the outcomes of the proselytizing intentions of global compassion embodied in the mantra's performance, as advocated by Qu in the post-show dialogue, are also doubtful. Viewed through the lens of cultural politics, however, this performance motif challenges assumed notions of intercultural discourse as interstitial modalities of mediations between cultures, for it engages an alternate 'culture' located in the ethereal and spiritual. In *Awaking*, Buddhism is the new intercultural and the mantra the new universal language of cross-cultural understanding, for it has become imbued with the musical traditions of both East and West.

Considered within a framework of reception aesthetics, the dominant reading proposed may not be effectively decoded by an audience devoid of any understanding of Buddhism, much less the 'meaning' of 'Om Mani Padme Hum.'<sup>15</sup> Recognizably, cultural

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<sup>15</sup> The terms 'dominant reading' and encoding/decoding are Stuart Hall's concepts of reception. Essentially, Hall believes that visual texts such as film and television (and theatre can be included as well) employ a process of encoding, by the producers/director, the intended message and in the viewing there is an active process of decoding. This process of decoding results in a 'reading' of the text which may not always result in a preferred (or dominant) reading. There can be an oppositional reading. Such consequences result from the social and cultural backgrounds of the viewer. See *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*.

formation is an imperative aspect of audience competence and efficacy in reception; as Susan Bennett rightly notes with regard to performance reception: ‘we should not talk of theatre as an art form in isolation from cultural practice’ (93).<sup>16</sup> Beyond the discourse of the cultural production of a theatrical event, cultural reception is a necessary consideration of performance analysis. Intercultural negotiation should happen between the sign-texts of a performance and also in engagement with the audience, for in that dialogue, between the audience and sign-texts, the problematics of intercultural communication become salient. Although *Awaking* premiered in multi-cultural Singapore where almost 42.5% are proclaimed Buddhists,<sup>17</sup> ‘[w]ithin cultural boundaries, there are [...] obviously different viewing publics’ (Bennett 94). For a public whose knowledge of Buddhism is limited or who are unfamiliar with the mantra employed, the vocal chants would have served as nothing more than aural exotica – performative devices in an elaborate acoustic apparatus. Qu’s intended performance of compassion would have communicated little more than surface effects to achieve the narrative union or merely convey that which is ‘beautiful in music’.<sup>18</sup> These audiences might have received this moment as a performance of musicalities converging and possibly appreciated the beauty of the confluence of cultural sounds but not recognised the Occident and Orient signifiers or the proselytising intentions of the mantra. Yet, there are other possible receptions. For

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<sup>16</sup> I recognize that this may be a reductive explanation of aspects of Reception Theory. However, the discourse is wide and beyond the scope of this paper. It is mentioned here only to provide a framework for considering differing audience receptions to an enigmatic moment in the performance and therefore the consequent theoretical implications.

<sup>17</sup> This figure is taken from the National Census in 2000. See *Statistics Singapore – Census of Population 2000*.

<sup>18</sup> This is the title of Eduard Hanslick’s seminal work on musical aesthetics. Hanslick is often considered the father of modern musical criticism and in *On the Musically Beautiful*, he emphasizes the absolute quality of music as beauty in its own right. Based on a formalism in Kant’s aesthetic of the beautiful, Hanslick believes that while music can be expressive of emotion, it is not that which defines its being. Musical meaning is extraneous to the ‘intrinsic beauty’ (68) of music. See Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*.

me, approaching the performance as a local with knowledge of Renaissance music, Shakespeare's songs and the Kunqu tradition, as well as some familiarity with Buddhist philosophy, the composition in this finale of the popular mantra was defamiliarizing, for it was distinctly de-contextualized and re-framed as avant-garde artwork. The exotic quality was thus further accentuated due to its heightened performativity.

The visual prominence of the singing body on the stage adds to readings of the exotic. As Lunn stood to continue her solo chant of the mantra in the closing moments of the performance, the distinct high tessitura produced by a white body 'floated' above the prevailing refrain produced by unaccompanied Asian voices intoning the mantra. This performative action created a schism between the visual and aural signifiers and resulted in a reversed exoticism where the Other is not the Asian body but the English one that attempts to enact an Asian philosophy. This fissure of sound and cultural location is also apparent in the materiality of the voice where Western classical training compels one's production of vocal sounds to be 'full' and 'rounded.' Lunn's singing voice abides by the demands of Western classical vocal music, and the sharp differences in timbre with the vocal sounds produced by 'Asian' bodies can be heard. The currents of appropriation and re-appropriation thus occur at several levels; the white body enchants the audience with the hypnotic melodies of an Asian (arguably Hindu and Buddhist) mantra, but this performance is contained within the distinctly 'Chinese' composition, of which the chant is merely a refrain.

The dynamics of cultural negotiation reveal, then, the inverse positions of alterity. More importantly, this performative event reveals the perplexities of acoustic interculturalism that extend beyond binary arguments of I/You and West/East. *Awaking*

exemplifies Corbett's views about a neo-Orientalist and self-exoticizing trend in new age compositions today such as those by Chinese contemporary classical composer Tan Dun (谭盾). Corbett believes that Tan Dun's compositions reveal

[t]he deep complexity of neo-Orientalist strategies [...]: an Asian composer in the West uses techniques devised by a Western composer inspired by Asian philosophy – the work is played for an Asian audience which hears it as an artifact of the bizarre West. Orientalism is reflected back-and-forth like a musical *mise en abyme*. (Corbett 180)

This musical *mise en abyme* is the intercultural position reflected in *Awaking* where the West is regarded as bizarre and the East exotic. The inclusion of 'white' bodies chanting 'Eastern' mantras extracted from their religious framework inflects the nodal positions of Orientalism and Occidentalism and refracts the static images of appropriation and counter-appropriation. In addition, Ong's instrument of creating a Fourth World is not, ironically, the sonic fusion of dichotomies achieving consonance but is instead a modernity located in the compositional structure of the original soundtrack. While the triadic interaction of cultural forms enacted, visually, a synthesis of sound and an intercultural soundscape of a contemporary *Chinoiserie*, it is in the listening to Qu's composition that we already hear a self-Orientalism. Embedded in the structure of Qu's theme to *Awaking* is the site of an intercultural acoustemology, for the composition is a modernism effected through traditionalism, where Western music elements of thematic variations and recurrence, musical motifs, tonal transpositions, chromatic shifts, and free atonality<sup>19</sup> characterize the composition effected through Chinese traditional instruments.

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<sup>19</sup> This refers to compositions without a tonal centre. While it is largely believed that this musical principle was consequent of Arnold Schoenberg's 'Twelve-Tone' movement to address the crisis in tonality in the late nineteenth century, classical Chinese music philosophy has rarely regarded 'atonality' as a sonic quality to be avoided.

### **Acoustic Syncretism, Sonic Hybridity or World Music Kitsch?**

Differentiating varieties of cultural appropriation, which is the *sine qua non* of the world music genre, Corbett observes that some American experimentalists such as John Cage employ sophisticated annexations of Other-sounds through a creation of conditions for musical events to evoke Eastern philosophies, and these annexations are not merely superficial pilferings. The resulting music may have little or nothing to do aesthetically with the original system but is no less aggressive in its appropriation. There are others, like Henry Cowell, who engage in a more common intercultural appropriation through the extraction of cultural acoustic characteristics for the performance of a 'musical contagion'<sup>20</sup> – an infectious transference of sounds and emotions.

*Awaking* lies in the hinterland of both appropriative territories where the utopian 'Fourth World' employs distinctly, and attempts to retain while adapting, philosophies in Asian performance styles. In its compositional reworking, it is also a superficial extraction of musical characteristics from dominant traditions to create a contagion of cultural sounds. The performance, as hybrid, is as much 'world music'<sup>21</sup> as it is 'world theatre'. It presents a philosophy and belief, originated in Asia, as exotic, framed by the exploitation of Western musical and dramatic structures and principles. The production attests, consequently, to the argument that globalization of culture is not synonymous

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Dana Paul Perna in liner text to Henry Cowell, *Persian Set*. See Corbett, 166 – 173 for a discussion on Cage and Cowell's 'experimental oriental' music.

<sup>21</sup> 'World Music' is a term coined in the 1960s by ethnomusicologist Robert Brown and subsequently marketed as a musical genre by German and English producers in the 1980s as a promotion of traditional and ethnic sounds of various indigenous cultures, its use here is a deliberate pun both to indicate *Awaking* as a production that presented itself as a 'World Music' performance but also attempted a performance of the world through new musical universals.



with the Westernisation of the world. Rather, there is, as Aubert recognizes, a reciprocal sonic invasion (53). ‘Cultural globalization appears, on the contrary, like a vast and indefinite game of distorting mirrors, in which the other sends back to us the altered image of our transient identity’ (Aubert 53). The attitude towards the inevitability of the prevalence and perversion of the culture industry and the schizophrenic conditions of cultural globalization, then, is that which gives rise to the polemic positions both in world music and intercultural theatre – that of hope and fear.

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**‘Which Country Should I Love?’<sup>1</sup> *Portrait of the Families* by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan**

Ching-Yi Huang (University of Washington)

In September 1997, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan premiered *Portrait of the Families*,<sup>2</sup> a one hundred minute long dance which was described by choreographer Lin Hwai-min<sup>3</sup> as ‘a ritual that pays homage to the turbulent past and to those common people who died unjustly’ (‘Portrait of the Families’).<sup>4</sup> At the age of six, Lin, by chance, found a family photo album buried in the bottom of his mother’s clothes chest and, for the first time, saw old pictures of his ancestors clad in Japanese kimonos (Lin, ‘An Unanswered Phone Call’). Immediately warned by his mother not to touch the album, the young Lin understood that he was unfolding an untouchable past both of his family and of Taiwan. It was not until forty-four years later, due to the changing political climate, that he decided to face the traumatic history of Taiwan and choreograph a dance threading together the fragments of the past, by unearthing the old family photos of Taiwan over the past one hundred years. In this paper, I attempt to examine how *Portrait of the Families* showcases Taiwanese people’s renegotiation

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<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from the English Voice Text of *Portrait of the Families*, provided by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. (I would like to give special thanks to Cloud Gate for providing valuable archival sources.)

<sup>2</sup> The premiere was on 20 September of 1997 at the National Theatre in Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>3</sup> All Chinese names in this article are written in Chinese usage, with family name first and given name next.

<sup>4</sup> For the people who share the same Chinese cultural heritage, the year 1997 was marked with historic significance: it was the same year of the hand-over of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China, ten years after the lifting of martial law, and fifty years after the island-wide massacre conducted by the Chinese Nationalists in 1947.

and relocation of their 'Taiwanese (local), Chinese (national) and Japanese (colonial)' (Ching 13) identities in a postcolonial situation, through personal story-telling. I will also show how the dance attempts to forge a new narrative of 'home' for Taiwanese people.

Through a collage of movements, voices of personal narratives, and slide projections of family portraits, Lin pieces together the 'truth' of personal stories in order to supplement and contrast the so-called 'facts' written in Taiwan's history books. As Lin writes, this work is created to 'console human pathos in those erased memories of the colonial years' (Lin, 'An Unanswered Phone Call'). 'Which country should we love?' is the main question raised by the recorded voice of *Portrait of the Families*. The performance embarks on a journey of finding not only the 'roots' but also the 'routes' of the Taiwanese immigrant communities in order to redefine their relationship with the land they inhabit.

*Portrait of the Families* begins with a series of family portraits projected onto a downstage screen. Having decided to open the old album of his homeland, Lin started collecting old photos from all walks of Taiwanese life and uncovering the stories behind these photos. The projections consist of a variety of subjects from different eras: 'the family portraits, the military troops, the religious rites, and the victims of the massacre' ('Portrait of the Families' 2). Through these photos, changes in the clothing

and hairstyle can be seen: a mix of Chinese and Taiwanese style, a mix of Japanese and Taiwanese style, and an Americanized Taiwanese style. These photos, along with the personal narratives of the survivors or their descendents, provide a valuable source for revealing civilian lives from Taiwan's colonial past, which was dominated by complicated imperial control – external foreign forces as well as internal ethnic suppression. They also unravel the Taiwanese people's complex mentality in search of identity.

In order to understand the layered Taiwanese identities presented in this production, it is essential to briefly introduce Taiwan's long colonial history from the fifteenth century onwards. A former offshore territory of China, Taiwan was occupied by the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch respectively due to its rich natural resources as well as its geographical location. In 1895, Taiwan was permanently ceded to Japan by China in the first Sino-Japanese war. During the following fifty years, Taiwanese were forced to receive Japanese education, to speak Japanese, to wear Japanese clothes and to adopt Japanese names.<sup>5</sup> Taiwan was part of Japan, while Taiwanese people were not 'real' Japanese. Consequently, emotions about the identity change were split among Taiwanese people. Some transitioned to their new Japanese identities with ease because they saw that 'the Japanese substantially modernized and

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<sup>5</sup> By 1944, seventy-one percent of Taiwanese spoke Japanese (Bedford 4).

expanded Taiwan's infrastructure' (Bedford 4);<sup>6</sup> however, others chose to become loyal to Chinese nationalism and sought identification in this way because they 'opposed the colonial system and sympathized with the revolutionary movement to create a nation-state after the May Fourth cultural movement that began in the latter half of the 1910' (Shōzōn 70).

During the Second World War, thousands of Taiwanese people were forced to put on Japanese military uniforms to fight against the Chinese army, and many local women were sent to the front-line to provide sex services to the Japanese Imperial Army.<sup>7</sup> After the defeat of Japan in 1945, Taiwan was returned to China's reign; however, this created a new internal dilemma because the new ruler, the Nationalist government (Kuomintang, KMT), did not regard the Taiwanese as 'compatriots, but rather as "semiferal" Chinese to be treated with suspicion as Japanese collaborators' (Bedford 6). The KMT even dismantled the infrastructure constructed by the Japanese, in order to 'liberate' the Taiwanese.<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1947, the tension finally exploded due to a conflict among different ethnic groups, causing an island-wide massacre (the White Terror) in which many local elites were arrested and then 'evaporated.' The Code Red of Martial law was declared and the KMT kept a watchful

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<sup>6</sup> 'Japanese construct[ed] roads, railroads, hospitals, harbors, and sewage and power facilities, and improve[d] agricultural production' (Bedford 4).

<sup>7</sup> These women were known as 'comfort women,' providing sex services in numerous 'comfort stations' in Japanese concessions in warring China during the Second World War.

<sup>8</sup> A Taiwanese saying goes, 'the dogs (who could at least protect your property) had been chased away, but the pigs (who only make a mess) had come' (Bedford 6).



eye to prevent further ethnic riot mainly from the local Taiwanese against the Mainlanders (people retreating from China with the Nationalist army). Under the governmental crackdown, any hint of Japanese colonial legacy was strictly contained. 'To have a photo discovered of anyone wearing a Japanese kimono would result in being labelled un-nationalistic, or un-patriotic' ('Portrait of the Families'). In addition, to talk about politics in public was to be suspected as a 'pro-Communist.' Soon, the sympathy that Taiwanese people had with China prior to the handover was shattered and subsequently turned into a strong antipathy. It was not until the lifting of the martial law in 1987 that old photos were gradually unearthed, rewriting the history of Taiwan.

Taiwan's colonial past complicates the process of how people in Taiwan recognize themselves as 'the Taiwanese' and negotiate Taiwan as their current home. In order to chart the relationship of Taiwan's identity formation and its long colonial years, scholar Leo T. S. Ching uses the term 'three consciousnesses' to point out Taiwan's complex, but irreducible, triple identities: Japanese (colonial), Chinese (national) and Taiwanese (local) (Ching 13). Ching tries to explain that colonial identities are far more than just an 'essentialized difference and sameness between colonizer and the colonized' because the historical conditions of colonialism 'have enabled and produced various discourses of cultural differences and sameness in the

socially transformative projects of the colonizer and the colonized' (Ching 11). In other words, the residues of colonial forces complicate the trajectory of Taiwanese identity formation. Even though the last colonial force of Japan had retreated from Taiwan over fifty years earlier, it is still hard to pinpoint one single 'pure' Taiwanese identity, which completely dissociates the colonial influences.

Ching takes the example of Taiwanese writer Wu Cho-liu's famous novel, *The Orphan of Asia*, to map out this formation.<sup>9</sup> Written between 1943 and 1945 under Japanese colonialism, *The Orphan of Asia* is one of best-known texts describing the mentality of the Taiwanese elite. As the protagonist of the novel, Hu Tai-ming (or Ko Tai-mei in Japanese) is trapped between his tangled, triple identities of being a Taiwanese, Japanese or Chinese. Hu sailed to imperial Japan from colonial Taiwan during World War II. Treated as a secondary citizen in Japan, Hu therefore journeys to his cultural motherland, China. Unexpectedly, he is suspected of being a Japanese spy in war-ridden China, arrested and put into jail. He flees back to Taiwan and devotes himself to mobilizing the Taiwanese consciousness. In the end, he is driven insane because he is unable to define his national identity (Ching 177-185). The 'orphan'

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<sup>9</sup> Ching states that 'a contextualized reading of *The Orphan of Asia* must be apprehended and articulated in relation to a contradictory and irreducible triple consciousness that is the embodiment of a colonial Taiwanese identity formation' (Ching 176-177). This statement reflects the importance of the novel as a means of mapping out Taiwanese identity.

metaphor not only implies Hu's tragic ending but also reflects the Taiwanese people's sense of 'homelessness,' the loss of belongingness.

*Portrait of the Families* was also produced against the background of the complex triple identities of Taiwan, China and Japan. Instead of enforcing a single unified version of the Taiwanese identity on the Taiwanese people, as the colonizers did, *Portrait of the Families* highlights the notion that any 'myth of a homogeneous national identity' (Wiley 278) is indeed an artificial construction produced by the colonizers' imagination. In his article dedicated to the dance, *An Unanswered Phone Call*, Lin contends that 'Taiwan had long been treated as a woman through its colonial history. She was considered to be sad, fragile, and helpless with no right to speak, being forced to marry someone she did not love' (Lin, 'An Unanswered Phone Call').<sup>10</sup> Lin is fully aware that Taiwan's colonial past needs to be recast and situated in a different light, departing from the colonizers' infatuation with the East (the colonized), which 'is characteristically coded negatively in Orientalist discourse as variously – voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational, and backward', while the West (the colonized) 'is characteristically represented in positive terms, as masculine, democratic, rational, moral, dynamic, and progressive' (Moore-Gilbert 23). In the opening section of *Portrait of the Families*, the audience witnesses a bride with bound

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<sup>10</sup> The English title of the text and some quotations are my translation.

feet striving to escape the pull of a long, red dog leash controlled by a certain invisible force. After a protracted struggle, she falls down and is dragged into the pitch darkness of the wings. Another young woman, chased by a group of muscular men, is forced to wear a traditional Chinese costume and to pose like a doll. As the rhythm of the music increases, the woman rips apart a peony blossom in a frenzy, but ultimately lies feebly on the chair. It is worth noticing that Lin does not simply demonstrate these fixed fragile female images but also tries to internally subvert them. Gradually, towards the end, one female dancer skillfully expresses the gamut of her emotions using only the movements of her fingers. She succeeds in expressing anger, grief, excitement, anxiety, and even accusation, pointing to the invisible suppression of all these things. At this point, the woman is no longer voiceless in terms of her self-consciousness and becomes her own master. The transitional subversion of female images in *Portrait of the Families* implies that Taiwan's identity is not defined simply by the colonizers, but, most importantly, by her own people.

In order to contrast and highlight the rupture between historical facts and personal memories, Lin creates a 'collage' by juxtaposing the three theatrical elements: dance, voice, and images. These three theatrical elements are designed to intervene and comment on the narrative of one another periodically. For this purpose, Lin invited Ming Cho Lee, the distinguished American theatre designer to create a set consisting

of a huge white wall sized '8.1 metres long by 15.5 metres high.' Eight doors under the wall are designed for the entry and exit of the dancers while a dozen panels are raised in combination to create the 'spatial landscape' in each scene. The slides are projected onto 'twenty rectangles' ('Portrait of the Families'), each of which can be projected onto the stage dependently or independently. The dancers, as groups or individuals, weave in and out of the slides.

The juxtaposition of these elements to some extent makes 'presence' fragmented yet fluid. As a result, temporal discontinuity is able to challenge the monolithic fixed historical past and create a fissure for the new narrative. This is demonstrated in the opening scene when a series of happy family pictures is projected on a huge screen, while through the transparent gauze the audience witnesses a lion dance 'with a blazing red tail of silk, preluding a performance about family ties and tales of bloodshed' ('Portrait of the Families'). It reveals the collective pain hidden behind the suppressed memories. During the process, the untold 'truth' gradually surfaces and causes the spectators to think about their own identity. It seems that for Lin, personal truth through photos and story-telling is far more authentic than the documented facts written in history books which serve the needs of dominant powers. His lighting designer Lin Keh-hua also states that '*Portrait of the Families* tends to present those commoners' ordinary trivial acts under the pressure of their

circumstances' (Lin Keh-hua). Under colonial discipline, daily activities, such as tooth brushing, face cleaning, hair washing, and swimming, all turn into mechanical movements and convey the agony of the suppressed to the audience. However, to distinguish 'truth' from 'fact,' it is crucial to use personal stories to reconstruct the history. 'Therefore,' as Toni Morrison contends in her essay 'The Site of Memory,'

the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left – to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard. (72)

Parting the veil, filling in the blanks, and rewriting the individual's subjectivity all rely on knowledge of how to unearth the shattered shards of personal truth from the masses of constructed historical facts. Ann Cooper Albright points out that, 'history is written about past events and stories are told in order to connect the knowledge of the past and hopes for the future with one's experience of present realities' (152). Toward the end of the performance, the black and white portraits are gradually turned into colour. Bright faces of youngsters are projected onto the screen in the last ten minutes after the video footage shows a burning sacrificial boat. On one hand, the boat mourns for the departed; on the other, it symbolizes a spiritual link between the past, the present, and the future because the predecessors' sacrifices create a better life for the

next generation. The once-forgotten memories of the sacrificed come to life and are re-lived in *Portrait of the Families*.

In order to re-live the memory, Albright also points out two requisite elements: ‘a sense of truth, and a sense of community’ (151). The latter contains the relationship of the speaker and the listener. Thus, collective memories are located in visual and aural stories and are based on the realization of a shared community. In addition to authentic traditional Taiwanese music and excerpts from music by Arvo Part, the soundscape for *Portrait of the Families* consists mainly of voices, ‘passages from taped interviews conducted especially for this production’ (‘Portrait of the Families’). These voices reveal touching stories related to personal experiences as well as the shared, suppressed memories of other Taiwanese people: the forced assimilation of Japanese rule, the traumatic loss of their beloved ones during the 1947 massacre, the hardship of retreat to Taiwan at the end of the Chinese civil war, and the bodily remains hung on trees after a series of bombings by American planes.

The rich, textured voices are of different dialects and ages. A connection with Taiwan and ambivalence about identity is recounted in Yami (one of Taiwan’s aboriginal languages), Mandarin, and Taiwanese. Each dialect represents a different immigrant ethnic group which came to the island under various historical forces. An indigenous man recalls his ancestral tale that ‘when you are far away from home, you

miss your family. Looking at the sea, you think of your family. In the evening, look at the stars, it will be just like looking at the faces of family' ('Voice Texts'). To the aboriginals, Taiwan is the final resting place, protected by their ancestor's spirits even though they had been expelled from their original 'home' by the late-comers. Another woman speaking in Mandarin depicts her family's arduous escape from warring China: 'In 1949, the Communists moved toward the South. "I will defend our land until the last minute" Father told us. Mother and I were in Kwan Chou, ready to get aboard for Taiwan' ('Voice Texts'). To the mainlanders, Taiwan is perhaps a makeshift shelter on their way 'home' to China. A man says in the Taiwanese dialect:

Speaking of patriotism, which country should I love? The Imperial China, or the great Japanese Empire? After having been ruled by the Japanese for fifty years, the last words from my Grandfather on his deathbed were, "It is painful, absolutely painful, under Japanese rule." Let me tell you something. The truth is: the Taiwanese don't have a motherland. ('Voice Texts')

'The overlapping shadows of the personal truths will form a historical forest,' said the lighting designer of *Portrait of the Families* (Lin Keh Hua).<sup>11</sup> By overlaying various images and voices, Lin does not mean to make any judgment because he knows there is no correct or incorrect answer about the Taiwanese identity. These storytellers all share a commonality: they are all current inhabitants in Taiwan. The performance demonstrates that 'it is the composite of these diversifying ethnicities that complete the term of "the Taiwanese" on this island' (Lin, 'An Unanswered Phone

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<sup>11</sup> My translation from the Chinese text of Lin Keh Hua.



Call').<sup>12</sup> Shared memories create what Albright calls 'the sense of community.' All these different migratory experiences make up the historical content of Taiwan's collective memory, and build a new narrative of the Taiwanese identity.

When discussing the concept of migratory diasporas, Avtar Brah attests that

[t]he word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure. (Brah 193)

It is significant that the trauma of dislocation and separation caused by migratory experience should be appeased by collective memories, because an individual often has a sense of belonging among those who share similar stories. In the course of the dance, those intangible traumas of Taiwan's colonial past are presented by the symbolic deaths of individual dancers, who fall from the group and are carried from the stage. However, the chalk outlines of their bodies remain, declaring the existential marks of their passing lives. As time goes by, the marks increase and gradually lay out a map, a land, and a territory on stage. The home here is no longer the conventional one, dependent on ancestral roots, marked by the inscriptions on gravestones. The new narrative of home in Lin's work is 'primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past' (McLeod 211). It exists in a 'fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present' (211). Instead of

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<sup>12</sup> My translation from the Chinese text.

giving one a specific address for home, Lin provides the audience with a piece of the map guiding one to find one's home – both spatially and temporally. It is the 'imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation' that Lin unfolds with pain, and 'the sites of hope and new beginnings' that he tries to write on the page/territory of Taiwan's history through *Portrait of the Families*. Only after embracing one's cultural 'root' – the Taiwanese, the Chinese or the Japanese – can one trace an ancestral 'route' to Taiwan and see it as home.

The restoration of memories, as Liao Ping-hui points out, is always accompanied by 'language reclamation' (Liao 11). Similarly, the reconstruction of Taiwan's history requires the preservation of different dialects, which have been suppressed by the dominant language as a means of cultural as well as political control. 'The control over language by the imperial centre – whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a "standard" against other variants which are constituted as "impurities," or by planting the language of empire in a new place – remains [one of] the most potent instrument of cultural control' (Ashcroft 261).

Language functions as a medium of knowledge and power. Those who manipulate language are usually those who have access to knowledge and who seize power. In Taiwan, Mandarin was instituted as the official language by the KMT government in 1945, when it was a 'mother tongue to only 15% of the population'

(Liao 6).<sup>13</sup> The languages of Southern Min, Hakka, and indigenous languages in particular were considered to be ‘minor and backward’ (Liao 6) and were completely ignored in primary education. Lin’s strategy, which showcases various dialects on stage, implicitly demonstrates his challenge to the single official version of the Taiwanese identity as well as the hegemony of the dominant power. However, despite Lin’s efforts to present the variety of original Taiwanese dialects, he is still forced to face the fact that most aboriginal languages can be understood by only a small group of tribal people. The translation from Yami to Mandarin points out the urgency of preserving the vanishing language of the Taiwanese minority because an irretrievable language will often be accompanied by the loss of cultural self-identity. Trin T. Minh-ha reminds us of the danger of minorities ‘being said,’

You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal – relocation – reeducation – redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice – you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf and you will be said. (qtd. in Ashcroft 246)

After its premiere, *Portrait of the Families* was invited to tour in the cities of Jerusalem, Israel and Vienna, Austria in 1998, and Berlin, Germany in 2000. All the recorded dialects remained without change, while the audience could only see an English translation projected onto a screen, and it was risky because those voices were

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<sup>13</sup> Language systems have long been the wrestling arena of different dominant colonial powers. Scholar Fujii Shōzō explicitly points out that the language system went through a major shift from the period of the Japanese colonial rule to the KMT rule for the KMT soon adopted Mandarin as the national language in lieu of Japanese (Shōzō 74).

exotic to foreign ears. However, Lin insisted that ‘Taiwan should be understood, in its own way’ (Lin, ‘Keep the Chorus On’). Extremely anxious about his decision, Lin was not relieved until thunderous applause resonated in the auditorium. Ursula Kneiss, an Austrian critic of the newspaper *Der Standard*, said, ‘Taiwan’s history may seem remote, even strange to us. But in the manner it was presented by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre it was touching’ (Cloud Gate, ‘What Has Been Said About’).

Toward the end of the performance, Lin has still not provided any explicit answer to the question, ‘Which country should I love?’ As he insists, ‘*Portrait of the Families* is absolutely not about politics’ (Lin, ‘An Unanswered Phone Call’). The closing scene provides a clue to one possible narrative of Taiwanese identity while ‘glittering, lit lanterns for the dead tranquilly [float] across the stage,’ and complete ‘the cycle of a ritual that pays homage to the turbulent past and to those who died unjustly’ (‘Portrait of the Families’). Again, it is also a circle bridging the present and the past and reaching to the far future. Home therefore is all-dimensional, including the past, presence, and future. The routes to home are traceable and uninterrupted.

‘Which country should I love?’ The voice piece and dialogue near the end of the production probably best answer the redefinition of ‘home’ in Lin’s mind.

When Father was ninety-one, I took him to his home town in China. That was his first home coming in fifty-nine years. We went to the field to pay respect to his parents’ graves.

Suddenly Father said: ‘Let’s go home.’

‘Home? Aren’t we already home?’

‘No,’ He said. ‘Our home is in Ping-Dong [a county in Southern Taiwan]’

Throughout his life, he had been homesick. I was surprised he took Ping-Dong for his home. After returning home, Father was calm and happy. Finally, I realized that Taiwan was the place he wished to have his body buried. (‘Voice Texts’)

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## Mika's *haka* and *Mika HAKA*: Performing as the 'Other'

Mark Hamilton (University of Canterbury, New Zealand)

E kore e hekeheke, he kākano rangatira.

*I will never be lost, for I am the seed of chiefs.*<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, I assisted Māori performer Mika in forming a company called Torotoro.<sup>2</sup> With this group we created a dance show called *Mika HAKA*.<sup>3</sup> The predominantly male cast was comprised of Māori and Pasifika<sup>4</sup> teenagers. Their choreography was based on the *haka*.<sup>5</sup> The production was developed expressly for presentation at the Edinburgh Fringe. Mika hoped this show would help him to achieve commercial success in Britain. Immediately prior to creating *Mika HAKA*, Mika was performing *haka* in his queer cabaret at arts festivals in Australasia and the UK. I first saw him perform in 1997.<sup>6</sup> He wore a green catsuit cut low at the back to expose his buttocks, and was flanked by two Māori drag queens in heavy mascara, stilettos and bikinis.<sup>7</sup> The three men's hyper-femme, revealing costumes accentuated their muscularity, which they displayed overtly, stomping and slapping their chests and thighs during the show's final, vigorous *haka*.

<sup>1</sup> I follow here the Māori custom of using an established proverb to commence a public speech, connecting the topic at hand to ancient discourse preceding.

<sup>2</sup> Mika (Ngapuhi) b.1962, formerly named Terence Pou at birth, and Neil William Gudsell by his adoptive parents. Torotoro is a Māori word meaning: 'to visit, reconnoitre [and][...] scout, advance guard' (Moorfield 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *Mika HAKA* premiered in Auckland (New Zealand) at the Maidment Theatre on 25 January 2001. The eleven founding members of Torotoro were: Arianna Cook Tamati (Ngapuhi), Terri Ripeka Crawford (Ngati Kahungunu, Ngati Porou, Tūhoe, Ngati Mahuta), Corrina Hunziker (Ngapuhi, Ngāti Swiss), Ioane Leota (Samoa), Anthony McCarthy (Ngapuhi), Kororangi Pihema (Ngapuhi), Rangi Rangitukunoa (Ngati Ranginui, Ngai Terangi, Ngati Ruanui, Ngati Maru), Tamiaho Searancke (Waikato Tainui), Kereama Te Ua (Te Aitanga a Mahaki, Whakatohea, Tuhoe, Apanui, Tuwharetoa, Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri), Christina Perenita Tuifao (Samoa), and Tangata Ngatoko (Cook Islands).

<sup>4</sup> Pasifika: a term widely used in New Zealand for people of Pacific Island descent who grew up in New Zealand.

<sup>5</sup> *Haka*: 'vigorous dances with actions and rhythmically shouted words' (Moorfield 2005). In my usage, and that of common parlance, *haka* commonly refers to *haka taparahi*, which is a 'ceremonial dance performed without weapons' (Moorfield 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *Mika and the Uhoras*. By Mika. Assembly Theatre, Edinburgh, 3 Aug. to 1 Sept. 1997.

<sup>7</sup> The drag queens were Cassandra & Korneisha, aka contemporary dancers Taiaroa Royal (Te Arawa, Ngai Tahu, Ngati Raukawa, Uenukupako) and Tane Mete (Ngati Kahungunu, Ngati Koriki).

Mika was adopted at birth by a *Pākehā*<sup>8</sup> couple. Until he was eighteen, still and moving images of Māori – targeted at non-Māori viewers – were his principle source of contact with Māori culture. In his performance practice, Mika continues to work without a specific tribal tradition. He engages instead with exoticising fictions, originating both inside and outside New Zealand, about Māori, and Māori men in particular. In anticipation of non-Māori audiences, Mika centred Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* on the movements seen in *haka*, rather than the use of the words that accompany these gestures. He used the confrontational and exhibitionist elements of this physical vocabulary to form the basis of Torotoro's athletic dance style. Mika's primary objective was to structure *Mika HAKA* in such a way as to focus audience attention on Torotoro's bodies.

The very substance of Torotoro's Polynesian physiques was of prime importance to *Mika HAKA*. In order to maximise white audiences' potential sexual interest in the dancers' brown skin and marked muscularity, Mika conditioned Torotoro till they were toned and lithe, and costumed them in the bare minimum. Intent on making a saleable international show, he asked them to incarnate Eurocentric fantasies of South Seas natives. Playing the exotic 'Other' is Mika's forte, and he wanted Torotoro to learn his tactic.

I want to consider the ways in which *Mika HAKA* constructed sensational images of Māori men by subverting conventions pioneered in *kapa haka*<sup>9</sup> – now considered 'traditional' performance. By doing so, how might *Mika HAKA* be seen to have challenged the definitions of Māori identity *kapa haka* is seen to uphold? To

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<sup>8</sup> *Pākehā*: New Zealanders of European descent.

<sup>9</sup> *Kapa haka*: Māori group performance. A number of historians locate the birth of *kapa haka* in the 1930s, when Parliamentarian Apirana Ngata and Te Puea Herangi, cousin-protector of the Māori king, staged large events to advance a Māori cultural resurgence and develop bicultural diplomacy (Walker 2001; King 2003). A differing angle of historical research presents *kapa haka* as developing primarily from Māori performance overseas and for tourists to New Zealand (Makereti 1986; Galbraith 1992; Werry 2001).

pursue this enquiry, I will analyse one song from *Mika HAKA*, as performed in Edinburgh, called 'Ko te Iwi' – meaning 'Of the People' (Mika, Haines, and Hamilton).<sup>10</sup>

In 'Ko te Iwi,' Torotoro were seen to dance in ways that appeared to alternate acts of challenge with seductive gestures. On the one hand, they were aggressive indigenes, marching on the audience with fierce stares and balled fists to claim their 'personal sovereignty.' Yet, on the other, they were provocatively garbed teenagers, whooping and smiling whilst shaking their bottoms flirtatiously to loud music. Torotoro appeared to switch between confrontational and invitational modes of audience address. Their eye contact appeared imperious then compliant. The dancers thrust out their limbs abruptly and aggressively, penetrating the space, then flipped to fluid and expansive twirling movements, which made them seem vulnerable. Significantly, throughout it all, Torotoro's minimal clothing ensured that in every action their bodies were revealed.

**Fig 1. Courtesy of Patangaroa Limited**



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<sup>10</sup> *Mika HAKA*. By Mika and Torotoro. George Square Theatre, Edinburgh. 3-25 Aug. 2003.

I will examine how Torotoro's performance of this song might be seen to have referenced the 'Othering' of Māori that is persistent in New Zealand. With reference to the work of New Zealand historian James Belich and performance studies scholar Christopher Balme, I consider how performance by Māori before non-Māori audiences might be seen to perpetuate racial stereotypes. Finally, I will consider how Mika's particular experiences of growing up Māori and gay, in a small *Pākehā* town, might be seen to inform his relationship to these stereotypes and his use of them to create theatre.

In 1994, New Zealand historian James Belich gave a series of lectures at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. He explored a number of key Othering stereotypes of Māori that he had identified in his survey of European settlers' writings. Each of these he labelled with a different colour: green, red, black, brown and white. It is fifteen years since Belich spoke, and longer still since the texts he referenced were written. I observe, however, that a number of the typifications Belich identified were incarnated in *Mika HAKA*. Indeed, their manifestation might be considered indicative of the endurance in New Zealand of Othering constructs of Māori people.

This phenomenon might be attributed to New Zealand's particular societal order. Though the country's population is becoming increasingly multicultural, people of European descent predominantly occupy positions of power. Meanwhile, governmental policies and legislation acknowledge native title and promote pro-Māori positive discrimination. In toto, the national culture sustains a Māori-*Pākehā* binary. In daily life, this division can be seen to encourage articulations of ethnicity in which essentialist typifications of Māori, based on markers such as skin-difference, readily arise. Homi Bhaba considers all such constructs to be fetishistic (66-84).

Developing this idea, Josephine Lee suggests that the fetishism underlying racism is a desire for ‘the pleasurable and energizing magic’ often attributed to ‘colored’ bodies (152). But Kobena Mercer, in his 1986 analysis of images of black men, suggests that ‘racial fetishism’ sustains dichotomous stances (187). In 1991, he elaborated that the ‘black’ body can be rejected fearfully, or covetously idealized (190). These tensions can be observed in Belich’s colour-coded list of Māori typifications, and their manifestation in *Mika HAKA*.

Belich says that in settlers’ writing, pre-contact Māori man was often portrayed as a benign ‘green savage,’ possessing those ‘virtues that Europeans lacked’ (22). He makes a comparison between this ‘green’ figure and the Noble Savage, whose genesis he attributes to Rousseau (22). This ‘Green Māori’ typification – being pure, natural and bucolic – held no value for Mika, who has frequently told me that such pastoral images deny the modernity of urban Māori life. Furthermore, it might be noted that the passivity of such figures had little to contribute to the dynamism central to Mika’s burlesque.

In battle circumstances, however, Belich says the Green Māori turns Red. This stereotype, he says, promotes conceptions of the Maori race as ‘inherently war-like, its menfolk natural warriors’ (18). Drawing on the ‘myth of Martial races,’ it seeks to ‘ennoble’ Māori as ‘Conan-like barbarians’ (18). The Red Māori ideal persists through contemporary lionising of Māori sportsmen. Rhetoric and imagery assign the apparently innate yet volatile power of these men a patina of national glory (Hokowhitu 21). This conflation was the central conceit of the Adidas advert created for screening during the Rugby Union World Cup in 1999, which spliced footage of the All Blacks with re-enactments of *haka* as performed by tribal war parties (*Black*). Mika choreographed *Torotoro* to evoke similar notions of the Red Māori. In ‘Ko te

Iwi', the six athletic men and two women dancers of Torotoro – wearing black Lycra hot pants and not much else – performed actions that seemed to indicate their combative intent. Recorded, synthesized nightclub music with a driving bass line accompanied their dance, while Mika declaimed a lyric in *te reo* (Māori language).

*He kohu tau.  
Kō au anake, he patapatai ana.  
Kō tāku wairua e rere atu nei.  
Kō tāku ngākau e piri mai.  
Kō tāku tapu, he parerau, he tohu tikitiki.*<sup>11</sup>

One section was in English:

Be the chooser not the chosen and nominate yourself.  
When you know what you want, you get it.  
You are kings, you are queens, leaders of the pack.  
Retain your personal sovereignty.

Staring directly, the young dancers marched towards the audience. They held their torsos still and erect, and lifted their thighs high with each stride. When those to the fore reached the stage's edge, in unison each dancer planted a clenched fist on the floor with a deliberate flourish. They paused momentarily, and glared at the audience from under their eyebrows.

Behind the Red Māori, Belich spies a shadow figure, which he identifies as the bestial Black Māori, ruled by primal 'passions' (27). These 'Black savages,' says Belich, are assigned innumerable 'unsophisticated vices and disabilities,' rendering them 'less human and more animal than their exact opposite, the civilised European' (14). This Black stereotype gained global renown through the hard drinking and violence of Alan Duff's antihero Jake 'the Muss' Heke (Duff).<sup>12</sup> The excitement offered by the volatility and wildness associated with the Black Māori made this figure a fit for *Mika HAKA*. It seeded a number of Torotoro's choreographic motifs.

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<sup>11</sup> 'My identity is hidden from you. Only I can explain who I am. My spirit flows out from me, my thoughts gather to me. My sacredness resides in the crown, the symbol that is my topknot of hair.'

<sup>12</sup> Duff is a Māori author whose critique of Māori people's self-perpetuation of their under privilege is epitomised in Jake's alcoholism and consequent dysfunction.

For example, mid way through ‘Ko te Iwi,’ Torotoro released their rigid postures. They rolled their heads and twisted their torsos, flexed arms and clawed hands in writhing circles. Their eyes flared, and the whites showed around their pupils. Their retracted lips revealed clenched teeth. The dancers seemed to momentarily loll towards abandon. Becoming somewhat chaotic, they slipped towards an explosion – regaining focus just before it seized them.



Fig 2. Courtesy of Patangaroa Limited

Adding white to red and black constitutes an iconic Māori colour scheme. This is the palette of the painted decorations on the rafters of tribal meetinghouses, and the flag that symbolizes the quest for the restoration of Māori sovereignty. The entry of Belich’s ‘White Māori’ into my analysis is pivotal. He is an indigene ‘civilised’ through religious conversion, Europeanization, or social assimilation (32).<sup>13</sup> Mika actively sought to bar ‘Whiteness’ from the choreography of *Mika HAKA*. Five of the

<sup>13</sup> Belich finds that ‘Whitening’ has often been proposed as the only route for Māori following the supposed moment of ‘Fatal Impact’, when their native world order began its slide into extinction after meeting the colonialists’ ‘superior’ culture (32).

original *Mika HAKA* cast had Western contemporary dance training that made them efficient and precise, but Mika disliked their lightness and fluidity, which he told me was too derivative of ballet. He sought instead to construct the show's dance using the staccato rhythms and angularity of the *haka*, male Pacific Island dance, and break dance (which is widely practiced by young Māori and Pasifika men).



**Fig 3. Courtesy of Patangaroa Limited**

Belich gives the White Māori a close cousin he calls 'Brown Māori' – a 'servant, faithful and true, but not too bright, [a] clown,' held in 'affectionate contempt or contemptuous affection' by non-Māori (20). Though Mika attempted to bar White dance vocabulary from *Mika HAKA*, the show's burlesque might be seen to promote Brownness. For example, the middle of 'Ko te Iwi' featured a rhythmic interlude. The strident lyric gave way to rapid rattling Pacific Island log-drumming. During this section of the song, Tōrotoro suspended the combative challenge implied in their performance. They began to leap about – clapping their hands and slapping their chests – as if in celebration. Whooping and smiling, they shook their shoulders



to shimmy their pectoral muscles, and jerked their hips to waggle their buttocks. These frivolous and flirtatious moments, and the dancers' big smiles, were a peculiar contrast to the song's messages about personal sovereignty.

Some critics (in emails, phone calls and occasional fist fights) suggested to Mika that he made the dancers of Torotoro into White Māori who played Brown Māori – that Torotoro were indigenous artists wholly acquiescing to the values of *Pākehā*. Indeed, Mika deliberately ensured that Torotoro operated without tribal affiliation, uniting simply as 'Māori.' For many *kaumātua* (Māori elders) such a blanket identity is a homogenising colonial construct. They propose that only a definite *iwi* (tribal) culture protects a Māori person from gradual assimilation into dominant *Pākehā* society. It could be suggested that Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* lacks the particularities of *iwi* culture, which authenticates *kapa haka* as a valid expression of Māori identity (Papesch 37).

I would like to argue, however, that this perspective could be considered complicit with continuing colonialism. Its recourse to ancient precedent might be seen to concretise Māori as the historicised 'Other' fixed in the curatorial colonial gaze. Belich identifies a 'myth of the Frozen Maori, locked into immutable tradition' (26). In his 2007 discussion of Pacific performance, Balme connects such cultural 'freezing' with the salvage paradigm visible in certain schools of ethnography, and the 'invention of tradition' arising from a nostalgic quest for 'peoples and places apparently located outside the realm of modernity' (186-187).

Aspects of *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have specifically opposed such cultural petrification. The choreography's close integration of hip-hop with *haka* could be seen to have foregrounded the complexities of the dancers' contemporary urban Māori identities, as well as their identification with other marginalised people

of colour. In the first half of 'Ko te Iwi,' though Torotoro's dance was distinctly innovative, it was comparable to the movement vocabulary seen in contemporary *kapa haka* performances. At the item's end, however, this connection was quite stretched, if not broken. Tilting their torsos side to side, Torotoro slid back and forth between two silhouette forms. They punctuated their arrival in each crisp shape with a tiny, sharp bounce, which read to the eye as if their bodies were clicking into a groove. While Torotoro's silhouettes echoed the figures of Māori *whakairo* (carved figures), their robotic dynamic – predominant throughout this looping phrase – replicated a core quality of break dance technique. The close of 'Ko te Iwi' simultaneously showed the blend of inherited and imported aesthetics that constituted Torotoro's urban Māori-Pasifika culture.

What might the comparison of *kapa haka* and *Mika HAKA* reveal about the contemporary contestation of definitions of Māori identity? While Mika may consider *kapa haka* a conservative construction that historicizes Māori, his critics claim *kapa haka* is *tūturu Māori* (authentic),<sup>14</sup> and that *Mika HAKA* is an opportunist hotchpotch and not truly Māori at all. Yet, in a number of ways *Mika HAKA* and *kapa haka* could be considered similar forms. The history of *kapa haka* suggests that since its inception this idiom has addressed two audiences – Māori and non-Māori. This led Christopher Balme, in 1998, to call *kapa haka* an 'intercultural art' (186). In his 2007 book, he elaborates on this analysis, determining that indigenous Pacific performers simultaneously address their kinfolk and the 'colonizing majority' (15). Furthermore, he highlights a native-colonial duality that might be observed in New Zealand theatre practice. He notes that its 'heavily syncretic' nature frequently frames indigenous performance practices within 'European dramaturgical conventions' (192). The

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<sup>14</sup> *Tūturu*: 'real, true, actual' (Moorfield 2005).

cardinal transposition central to *kapa haka* might be considered an exemplification of this duality; aspects of tribal meeting rituals, ordinarily sited in a ceremonial courtyard, are performed on a raised platform (viewed from one side only), in keeping with European proscenium arch conventions. Using Balme's analysis, both *kapa haka* and *Mika HAKA* might be termed intercultural performance; each addresses, to a differing degree, an audience's appetite for 'alterity' (123), while using conventions familiar to them to ensure a degree of accessibility.

The crucial difference between *kapa haka* and *Mika HAKA* is that the former intends to reference tribal traditions accurately, while the latter does not. The Wehi family (Ngāti Porou) are leading *kapa haka* exponents, based in Auckland.<sup>15</sup> They train young performers to become versed in Māori cultural 'authenticity' (Pounamu Performing Arts). This, they say, requires strong 'roots' (New Zealand Qualifications Authority). The majority of Māori leaders propose that such roots are secured through actions such as recitation of *whakapapa* (genealogy), visits to *papakāinga* (ancestral homes), and participation in *marae kawa* (tribal rites) (Durie 58). *Kapa haka* might be said to site its performers in the continuum of Māori history, whereas *Mika HAKA* encouraged each member of Torotoro to focus on the contemporary capital value of his body - in particular, the body's potential to perform the fictions woven about Maori by non-Māori.

Mika endeavoured to teach Torotoro how to use erotic, self-exoticising performance as a means of self-empowerment. It seems, however, that they lacked the particular personal history that had educated him in this strategy. Torotoro's

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<sup>15</sup> I observed the teaching and performance work of the Wehis on a number of occasions: *Competition Performance*. By Te Waka Huia. ATMPAS Festival, Ngaruawahia. 2-6 Feb. 2000; *Training Class Presentation*. Pounamu Training Systems Centre, Auckland. Oct. 2000; *Tourist Presentation*. By Te Waka Huia. Stamford Plaza Hotel, Auckland. Apr. 2001; *Competition Rehearsal*. By Te Waka Huia. Waipapa Marae, Auckland: 22 Apr. 2001; *Competition Performance*. By Te Waka Huia. Te Matatini, Palmerston North: 22-25 Feb. 2007.

embodiment of the Other might be seen to have lacked the ironic sophistication of Mika's own *haka*. Mika grew up experiencing himself as Other. He was openly queer from a young age (Mika, 'Growing Up Gay' 143-154). He was also the only Māori member of his immediate family, and one of very few in the local community. Mika learnt that he was Māori through *Pākehā* people commenting about his skin-difference (Mika, 'He Iti Taku Iti' 224-227; Interview). His access to Māori culture was through essentialist typifications of Māori circulating in *Pākehā* society (Mika, Interview). Experiences of reaction to his appearance, and stereotyped images of Māori, were the sources that informed Mika's development of a queer, indigenous self-identity. They are also the resources that he has continued to mine when constructing his theatrical celebrations of this identity. Mika is aware that his Māori identity is his own construct, developed largely in dialogue with non-Māori (Mika, Interview). His theatrical performances accommodate non-Māori audiences' expectations about his ethnicity. His strategy of self-exoticising might be seen to accept the 'commodification and consumerism' that – said Balme in 2007 – is implicitly part of such an audience's 'desire for authenticity' (17). Though Torotoro performed Mika's choreography precisely, it might be said that they lacked the propensity to objectify their selves, in the way that Mika objectifies himself. Torotoro's average age was eighteen. Before touring with *Mika HAKA* the dancers had had little experience of interacting outside of Māori or Pasifika society. In addition, they all identified as heterosexual.

Torotoro's performance of *Mika HAKA* did not have the irony evident in Mika's *haka*. Their dance, therefore, may have appeared to perpetuate racial essentialism without critique. Mika's performance as a fantastic Other is informed by prolonged experiences of displacement arising from his adoption and his queer sexual

orientation. His sense of difference distanced him from the heteronormative orders of both *Pākehā* society and Māori tribal life. He performs from a place of not belonging, of always identifying as Other. Mika's performance practice queers both gender norms and those pertaining to Māori identity.

My analysis might seem to suggest that Mika exploited Torotoro by choreographing them to dance his queer version of Māori identity. He sought to capitalize upon the objectification of their young brown bodies in order to gratify a Western gaze. As such, Mika might be seen to have facilitated the kind of projection of White racial and sexual fantasies on to darker skinned men that Mercer has identified in Mapplethorpe's photographing of African American men ('Imaging' 173; 'Skin Head' 190). Mika chose the Torotoro dancers primarily for their physical attributes. When he met them, these teenagers were not sophisticates versed in strategic subversion or reclamation of stereotypes. But, in their daily lives, the Torotoro dancers navigated the racial stereotyping, described by Belich, which might be seen to arise from the societal schism of New Zealand's biculturalism. Torotoro were not unaware of how Māori and Pasifika people might objectify themselves for a sexually desiring Western gaze. It would be a simplification to suggest that Torotoro's collaboration with Mika disempowered these dancers. Rather, Torotoro and Mika might be seen to have operated according to different but complementary agendas. While Mika's focus was global, Torotoro's was domestic. Mika's strategy of exploiting international market opportunities for staged Māori-Pasifika Otherness gave Torotoro income, travel and education. In addition, the holistic rehearsal process through which Torotoro developed their stage personae provided them with opportunities to explore pressing issues of identity – other than those pertaining to the Māori-*Pākehā* divide – that tensioned their daily lives. Each dancer brought questions

of belonging to *Mika HAKA*. These concerned relationships between Māori and Pasifika, between urban and rural Māori, and vernacular contestations circulating in those communities regarding ideas of cultural authenticity. While Torotoro might be seen to have played the exotic other at Mika's request, he supported their search for a reconciliation of these issues. Torotoro were immersed in exploring the inconsistencies that destabilized their space of belonging, while Mika had settled in a space of otherness, from which he formulated his identity.

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***Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain's Regional Theatres* by Olivia Turnbull.**

Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2008, 237 pp. (paperback)

Eleanor Paremain (Birkbeck, University of London)

In the aftermath of the December 2007 funding cuts by the Arts Council, Olivia Turnbull's *Bringing Down the House: The Crisis in Britain's Regional Theatres* is a well-timed investigation of public subsidy and how it has covertly shaped the national theatre landscape. Giving particular attention to regional theatre, Turnbull illustrates how competing demands and expectations from a number of directions have placed increasing pressure on regional theatres, resulting in many going dark for long periods or closing altogether. For example, she points out that in 1997, after eighteen years of Conservative rule - a period that she labels as 'the crisis' for the arts in general and regional theatre in particular - three quarters of provincial producing houses were facing imminent closure (13). Beyond the lamentable loss of these theatres themselves, Turnbull contends that the fabric of British theatre itself is at stake because regional theatre has traditionally been a 'forum for new and experimental dramatic ideas, a touchstone for local community access, education and entertainment, and as a training ground and employment industry for a large part of the country's theatre profession' (14). *Bringing Down the House* will undoubtedly prove a valuable companion for not only the study of regional theatre, but also more broadly for the analysis of the arts and their relationship with the public sphere.

At the heart of Turnbull's study is the claim that the fortunes of publically subsidised theatres have always existed on 'unsteady foundations,' which has consequently exposed such organisations to the faddish economic and political

environment, an environment that was to prove particularly brutal during the Margaret Thatcher and John Major governments (17). Part one examines these foundations, starting with the early years of public subvention and the hastily formed 1940s predecessor to the Arts Council, CEMA (the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts). The impact of CEMA's chair, the economist John Maynard Keynes, is given particular attention; Turnbull convincingly demonstrates how Keynes' conservative and paternalistic values were reflected in the policies of CEMA, and were then, in turn, transferred to the newly formed Arts Council. Perhaps most crucial was the centrality of London and the valorisation of elitist companies such as the Royal Opera House and Sadler's Wells. The legacy of such values is shown by Turnbull to have had much longevity and to have regularly threatened the survival of regional theatre.

The perennial lack of arts funding from central government is a persistent shadow cast over the national theatre scene in Turnbull's account, although for regional theatre she also emphasizes the impact of the exacting and often conflicting demands of 'plural funding,' a scheme where theatres are also supported by local organisations such as city councils or regional arts associations (47). Plural funding, Turnbull argues, forces regional theatres to serve a diverse range of strategies, ideologies and realities, from those imposed on them by their local, regional and national masters, to the demands of the theatre industry, theatre boards and, of course, theatre audiences. Moreover, Turnbull demonstrates how these demands are necessarily tied to the fluctuating political and economic circumstances at the time, and also to ever changing public attitudes towards the arts and their projected value. As such, the picture she paints is of regional theatres embroiled in perplexing bureaucratic systems, required to negotiate with multiple

bodies, and with whom the rules of engagement keep changing. Turnbull illustrates the absurd consequence of this: that funding, rather than being channelled into theatre-making itself, was increasingly used to hire the necessary expertise to ensure future monies were secured.

Building on this exposition of the precarious basis of arts subsidy, part two is devoted to the 1980s and 1990s where, Turnbull argues, systemic problems came to fruition. She outlines the impact of Margaret Thatcher's government that required the arts to be subject to market forces, where their 'worth could be discerned by their ability to earn their keep' (65). This, she claims, was particularly problematic for the regions, where 'four decades of state funding had ensured that the operations of Britain's regional theatres effectively revolved around subsidy' (69). The thrust of Turnbull's argument is, however, best demonstrated through her case studies of selected regional theatres in part three. Here, she evaluates in greater detail the impact of policy changes and the turbulence of public support for the arts, and persuasively explicates the build-up to and fallout from the crisis for particular regions and venues. Although she provides brief examples in parts one and two, it is here that the reader is given more contextualized evidence that takes account of the specificities of individual theatres.

Yet, although this section is illuminating, the scope of Turnbull's sample theatres is somewhat limited: her focus is noticeably on southern England, in particular the commuter belt, with a gesture towards the north through the inclusion of Liverpool and Harrogate. It would have been interesting to have had more accounts of theatres further from London, and to have perhaps considered in more depth the impact of devolution. Furthermore, although it is evident that Turnbull has utilized a diverse range of sources in

her research, including previous studies, surveys, government reports, Arts Council publications, media articles and archival documents, it would have been helpful if her archival and statistical sources were more fully referenced to assist future researchers.

*Bringing Down the House* is likely to prove useful for future research into both the mechanisms of the regional theatre industry and the political underwriting of public subvention funding in the arts. The fourth and final part of the book examines the impact of Tony Blair's New Labour government, a period of relative reprieve for regional theatre, although, as Turnbull notes, not unproblematically so. As the full implications of the New Labour administration and the current recession continue to emerge, analysis of arts funding will surely become increasingly pressing; for, as Turnbull warns and the December 2007 cuts signal, it is 'safe to say that the problems for the country's regional theatres are far from over' (220).

***Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* by Patrick Lonergan**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 248pp. (hardback)

Emer O'Toole (Royal Holloway, University of London)

In his study of the relationship between globalization and Irish theatre, Patrick Lonergan argues that the former 'complicates – and in some cases renders obsolete – many of the categories used to study dramatic literature and performance' (5). Globalization faces us with the tasks of defining concepts like 'nation' anew and finding relevant vocabularies of analysis. The study of Irish theatre, Lonergan suggests, provides a useful lens to seek out such definitions and vocabularies for three reasons: Ireland has been transformed by

globalization; historically, Irish theatre has functioned not just nationally, but internationally; and the globalization of Irish society has been contemporaneous with a revival in its theatre scene (23). There is a fourth possible reason for Lonergan's geographical focus; his evident expertise in and enthusiasm for the subject matter credits the choice of Ireland as much as the reasons cited above, making this book not just an excellent academic resource, but a thoroughly enjoyable read.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Kate Newey, one of the judges on the panel that granted Lonergan the Society of Theatre Research's prestigious Theatre Book Prize in April of this year. Speaking of the judges' choice, Newey recalls: 'Each of us recounted how we picked [the book] up, expecting difficult concepts, expressed in the highly technical language of economics and political theory, and with not much to speak to us as working theatre practitioners or scholars, only to find that each of us was gripped' (STR). *Theatre and Globalization* is the second book on Irish theatre to win the prize in recent years, following Christopher Morash's *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000* in 2002. It is not difficult to see parallels between the volumes. Morash's book, with its in-depth scholarship and informal tone was groundbreaking insofar as it opened up a discourse of Irish theatre history beyond the widely accepted 'Abbey' version, thus demythologising the Irish National Theatre Society and debunking the idea that the Irish stage was barren prior to the dramatic efforts of Yeats, Gregory and Synge. Lonergan expands our horizons further; he takes the discourse beyond the confines of history and dramatic writing, asking how Irish criticism can 'meaningfully address the works of writers whose reputation and reception are now strongly predetermined by global factors' (55) and reminding the reader of the limitations of 'attempting to use a nationalised

discourse to analyse work that has transcended national boundaries' (108). The study of milestone 'Irish' productions in their global contexts enables the reader to see the many aspects of theatre that can be overlooked when one fails to cast an eye beyond the local.

*Theatre and Globalization* merges economic and cultural concepts with the language of theatre criticism, ranging in its scope, as I will go on to discuss, from broad concepts of globalization, to innovative theatre theory, to engaging theatrical case studies. The section 'Defining Globalization' (17) in Chapter One offers a thought-provoking discussion on what the word globalization has come to mean and the phenomena it has been used to explain. Working with a loose conception of globalization as a 'paradigmatic shift from physical to conceptual space' (17), Lonergan draws on theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Malcolm Waters to suggest that while the world has been becoming globalized for centuries, globalization happens when people become aware of the shift from the physical to the conceptual, or the recession of geographical constraints, and begin to alter their behaviour accordingly. The scholarship of Goran Therborn is used to show that the catch-all of globalization encapsulates at least five distinct discourses. This clear and concise section would prove valuable not only for those interested in theatre, but for students and academics from a wide range of disciplines.

With regards to theatre theory, *Theatre and Globalization* offers new frameworks through which to analyse theatre in its global contexts. Particularly interesting is the discussion in Chapter Four of the ways in which globalization has altered the production and reception of many plays. Lonergan outlines five characteristics of theatre productions intended for international audiences, each of which sheds light on the mechanisms of the

global theatre industry. We are told, for example, that globalized theatre makes use of branding to manage risk (86). In this way, the reader is encouraged, as elsewhere in the book, to engage ‘more fully with the language of commerce and trade’ (219). There is a danger that this encouragement might be read as a denigration of theatre studies, that the arts are being asked to defer to the discourse of economics. However, *Theatre and Globalization* makes clear that the arts and the economy are in a reciprocal relationship; it is this reciprocity that makes it important for practitioners and scholars to understand the forces that both influence and are influenced by theatre. So while it might seem self-evident that the resurgence of theatre in Ireland was due in part to economic growth, Lonergan makes the less evident suggestion ‘that the performance of the Irish economy was influenced by the international profile of Irish drama’ (22). Of the five characteristics defined, the idea that globalized theatre inhibits intercultural exchange insofar as it reinforces national stereotypes for profit is also contentious (89). Again, this idea surfaces throughout the book, allowing us to reflect on the constructed notions of nationhood offered by an ostensibly creative industry that often privileges the exchange of capital over culture.

The analysis of influential ‘Irish’ theatre productions of the Celtic tiger era is one of this book’s strengths. There are informative and insightful discussions of quintessentially ‘Irish’ works such as Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa* and Dion Boucicault’s *The Shaughraun*; the examination of The Abbey Theatre’s 1995 production of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, however, deals with the reception of difference, in terms of both multiculturalism and homosexuality, on the Irish stage. Lonergan’s interest in this regard lies in ‘the relationship between an audience that is dominated by one set of



cultural values and a performance that represents *other* cultural values' (129). The production, though critically successful, flopped, and this was seen by many as evidence of either Irish insularity or homophobia. While accepting both these explanations as factors, Lonergan argues that much was done to make the play accessible to Irish audiences (139) and also that *Angels in America* was performed 'during a period in which there was an alteration in representations of homosexuality in Irish culture – almost none of which provoked outright hostility, and many of which were popular' (152). He gives another possible reason for its box office failure: that the June performance of a play representing difference was not amenable to the national theatre's primary audience of that period, namely tourists (153). This emphasizes once more the effect of the global on seemingly local theatrical discourses, and points to the limitations of the nationalised techniques used for theatre research. Box office figures, newspaper reviews and interviews with practitioners all need to be understood in light of the commodification of theatre in terms of national brands.

In conclusion, *Theatre and Globalization* offers readers from diverse disciplines a means to sharpen up their understandings of globalization and to situate their own thought within the rhetoric covered by the umbrella term. Furthermore, in exhorting theatre scholars to expand their discourse beyond the national it instils sensitivity to global economic factors that can no longer be dismissed or ignored when thinking about contemporary theatre. Finally, in its use of apt case studies to illustrate and enliven this theoretical framework, *Theatre and Globalization* does what every good theatre production should – it entertains its audience, and leaves them asking questions.

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**‘The integrity of the whole’: *Atelier Brancusi* (Pompidou Centre, Paris, 2007-2010)**

Georgina Guy (King’s College London)<sup>1</sup>

In *Theatre and Everyday Life* Alan Read identifies how, ‘[s]tepping outside the specifics of theatre temporarily will allow for a sense of where its boundaries might adjoin other practices’ (68). More and more frequently it is at the sites where performance interfaces with other creative and social actions that we find new modes for practice and analysis.

*Atelier Brancusi*, an exhibition showing at the Pompidou Centre in Paris until early 2010, has relevance not only as a visual arts event but also as a document or map of past performative actions. The exhibition reconstructs the ‘atelier’ or studio of the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi in the square outside the main structure of the gallery. The sculptures within this purpose-built environment are apparently displayed within a context representing that in which they were originally created. As visitors, we are told that what is represented within this space is, according to the information plaques within the exhibition, ‘the very site of creation.’

A site is a location where some activity happens, an area with a distinct purpose and so what is immediately invoked is the previous function of the atelier as a practical place of making (“site,” def. *n.*<sup>2</sup>). The archaeological resonance of a site as a place which contains the remnants of past human occupancy elucidates the reconstructed studio as testament to the past activity it housed.

In his own lifetime, Brancusi, as the exhibition leaflet, written by André Avril, describes, ‘was constantly preoccupied by the relation between his sculptures and the space around them’; he believed that works should not be separated from the environment in which they were produced and sought to maintain this connection.

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Within the reconstructed studio, the ‘relation’ between objects connotes not only a fascination with spatial associations but also with narration, revealing the ways in which the current arrangement of sculptures is a ‘relation’, or retelling, of the artist’s past actions of making and positioning. By arranging the sculptures within his studio, Brancusi draws attention to the ways in which the space around us is something we ourselves create. As the leaflet says, ‘[t]he studio was an “intermediate” space which Brancusi mentally constructed surrounding his work.’

In *The Shifting Point: Forty years of theatrical exploration 1946-1987*, theatre practitioner Peter Brook expresses that, ‘[t]he important thing is not space in theory but space as a tool’ (149). When the artist is no longer using the studio to facilitate artistic behaviours a certain functionality is removed. If we adopt Brook’s designation of space as ‘a tool’ in relation to the exhibition *Atelier Brancusi*, the instrumentality of the studio space can be seen to shift so that a function of exhibition becomes primary. The furniture and tools with which Brancusi carved his works appear disused, rendered, by abandonment, as sculptural objects.

Within his studio Brancusi sought a concurrency of action and display, a movement away from disorder and dispersal towards, what the exhibition leaflet calls, ‘the integrity of the whole.’ In this way, the space ‘became in its own right a work itself,’ within which collections of objects and perspectives form various additional compositions. In a contradictory sense, while multiplying the possible associations between his works, Brancusi sought to control their trajectory and therefore the possible engagements visitors may have with them. When displayed in this context, the ‘contiguity,’ to employ a term used in the exhibition information, of the objects and processes of creative production point not only to a desired spatial ‘unity’ but also invoke proximity and connection across time as we as visitors are asked to engage with

a representation of a past and displaced concept of curation.

The biographical information displayed as part of the exhibition is, of course, a contemporary addition, a signifier that what is present is a reconstruction of a relocated space. The wall plaques divide the story of *Atelier Brancusi* into temporal sections relating the different stages in the life of the studio. The title of one such division is 'l'origine de l'atelier' or 'the origin of the studio.' Since origin connotes not only the beginning of an existence but also the source from which something is derived, this reinforces the notion of attempting to reconstruct a (creative) process from the residual objects and domain ("origin," def. *n.* and *adj.*).

In *Being and Time* Heidegger investigates the realities of 'Being' and asserts that:

If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophical step consists in [...] not 'telling a story' - that is to say, in not defining entities by tracing them back to their origin to some other entities [...] Being, as that which is asked about, must be exhibited in a way of its own. (26)

In seeking to explain and represent Brancusi's designated spatial relations, the exhibition curators 'tell the story' of their construction. If we follow Heidegger's argument, for the studio to become an entity in its own right it must be considered only in its current state of exhibition, not as a document or legacy to past events.

My own experience of visiting this space was heavily affected by the presence of the 'story of the studio.' I was, as Marc Augé describes, reading as opposed to seeing the space (98). To attain a new vision of *Atelier Brancusi*, it seems, we need to look at the space between the sculptures rather than at the words describing their history.

'To look at something closely is to imply a thorough analysis, to take a step back is to get an overview of the infinite positions in between' (Read 163). At *Atelier Brancusi* the visitor is constantly asked to take a step back. We cannot enter the space of the studio; our movement is permitted only along glass passages surrounding the

more central studio-gallery. We are restricted to the boundaries of the space, so that our positioning as visitors imposes a limit on the 'positions in between' that we are able to view; only certain perspectives are authorized. *Atelier Brancusi* raises crucial questions of spatial depiction and the documentation of past moments of performance. In order to develop new modes of critical engagement and analysis, it is the liminal spaces between bodies of work, between performance and other practices, that we need to access. It is here that new perspectives and relations can be effected and probed.

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