



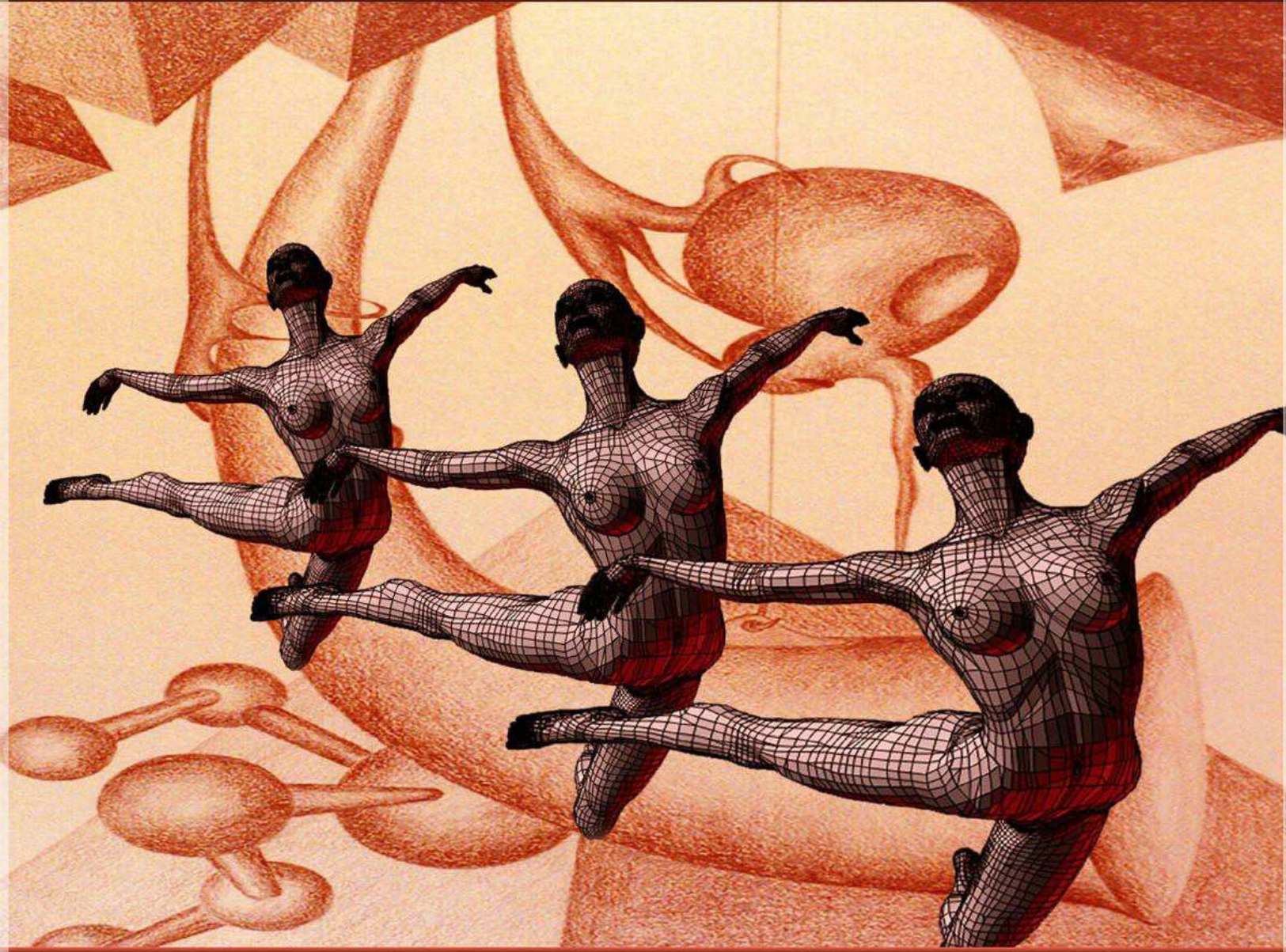
Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

Volume V, Number 2, 2013

www.rupkatha.com

ISSN 0975-2935



SPECIAL ISSUE

PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

An Online Open Access E-Journal

ISSN 0975-2935

Volume V, Number 2, 2013
Special Issue on Performance Studies

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Cover designed by Rob Harle

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Editorial

Special Issue on Performance Studies

In this edition of Rupkatha we have the privilege of incorporating an introductory essay by Richard Schechner, in which he once again valorizes the anthropological foundations of performance studies and goes on to refer towards the infallible necessity of observing behaviour as a kind of transbiological agency and of tracing its effects in theatre and other kinds of representations. Schechner belongs to a tradition of performance scholars who believed in a kind of large, scientific ontology for the arts, a tendency which is evident when he quotes a New York University scholar. Perhaps the objective vision of a performance continuum is instructive for the future, as it creates an immediate stance, of both engaging as well as transcending the flow of experience in our lives which are organized and controlled by means of mimetically emerging actions. The performer acquires, in Schechner's scheme, as a liminal activist, so wonderfully described by anthropologist Victor Turner, and analysed in the scientism of Geertz' observations of culture as an influential medium in which the arts and performances get endowed with signification.

It may be however also worthwhile to consider the very specific nature of the origins of performances and the need to abandon rather than yield to more global discourses of theatre: indeed the Western academics of performance studies may lead to universality and conformity of perspective in the face of actual cultural and discursive practices. This aspect of de-institutional learning of genres has been taken up in a couple of essays in this edition thus making the debate on performance studies in academic institutions more challenging and interesting to say the least.

In this context it should be fitting to assume once again, that theatrical imitation, and the representations of other audio-visual or digital media shall survive and find their fulfilment only when there is organic cultural breeding –and that the assumptions of contemporary ethnography could lend no support in our true appreciation of the spirit of cultural beliefs and the arts in particular. Perhaps there is a need of re-structuring the academic components of cultural studies, one which might gain more energy and impetus of expression from inclusion of people who have no prior training in academic discourse but whose creative life stand out as exemplary precepts for communal harmony. In no case could it be truer than in that of performance arts, including the songs, dances, theatres, and poetry of the common non-writing people.

—Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay

Editor-in-Chief

What is Performance Studies?

Richard Schechner

Tisch School of the Arts, New York University

Because performance studies is so broad-ranging and open to new possibilities, no one can actually grasp its totality or press all its vastness and variety into a single writing book. My points of departure are my own teaching, research, artistic practice, and life experiences.

Performances are actions. As a discipline, performance studies takes actions very seriously in four ways. First, behavior is the “object of study” of performance studies. Although performance studies scholars use the “archive” extensively – what’s in books, photographs, the archaeological record, historical remains, etc. – their dedicated focus is on the “repertory,” namely, what people do in the activity of their doing it. Second, artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project. A number of performance studies scholars are also practicing artists working in the avant-garde, in community-based performance, and elsewhere; others have mastered a variety of non-Western and Western traditional forms. The relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral. Third, fieldwork as “participant observation” is a much-prized method adapted from anthropology and put to new uses. In anthropological fieldwork, participant observation is a way of learning about cultures other than that of the field-worker. In anthropology, for the most part, the “home culture” is Western, the “other” non-Western. But in performance studies, the “other” may be a part of one’s own culture (non-Western or Western), or even an aspect of one’s own behavior. That positions the performance studies fieldworker at a Brechtian distance, allowing for criticism, irony, and personal commentary as well as sympathetic participation. In this active way, one performs fieldwork. Taking a critical distance from the objects of study and self invites revision, the recognition that social circumstances—including knowledge itself – are not fixed, but subject to the “rehearsal process” of testing and revising. Fourth, it follows that performance studies is actively involved in social practices and advocacies. Many who practice performance studies do not aspire to ideological neutrality. In fact, a basic theoretical claim is that no approach or position is “neutral”. There is no such thing as unbiased. The challenge is to become as aware as possible of one’s own stances in relation to the positions of others – and then take steps to maintain or change positions.

Performances occur in many different instances and kinds. Performance must be construed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and on to healing (from shamanism to

surgery), the media, and the internet. Before performance studies, Western thinkers believed they knew exactly what was and what was not “performance”. But in fact, there is no historically or culturally fixable limit to what is or is not “performance”. Along the continuum new genres are added, others are dropped. The underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance. Many performances belong to more than one category along the continuum. For example, an American football player spiking the ball and pointing a finger in the air after scoring a touchdown is performing a dance and enacting a ritual as part of his professional role as athlete and popular entertainer.

As a method of studying performances, the relatively new discipline of performance studies is still in its formative stage. Performance studies draws on and synthesizes approaches from a wide variety of disciplines including performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, semiotics, ethology, cybernetics, area studies, media and popular culture theory, and cultural studies. Performance studies starts where most limited-domain disciplines end. A performance studies scholar examines texts, architecture, visual arts, or any other item or artifact of art or culture not in themselves, but as players in ongoing relationships, that is, “as” performances. Briefly put, whatever is being studied is regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as “objects” or “things”. This quality of “liveness” – even when dealing with media or archival materials – is at the heart of performance studies. Thus, performance studies does not “read” an action or ask what “text” is being enacted. Rather, one inquires about the “behavior” of, for example, a painting: how, when, and by whom it was made, how it interacts with those who view it, and how the painting changes over time. The artifact may be relatively stable, but the performances it creates or takes part in can change radically. The performance studies scholar examines the circumstances in which the painting was created and exhibited; she looks at how the gallery or building displaying the painting shapes its reception. These and similar kinds of performance studies questions can be asked of any behavior, event, or material object. Of course, when performance studies deals with behavior–artistic, everyday, ritual, playful, and so on–the questions asked are closer to how performance theorists have traditionally approached theatre and the other performing arts. I discuss and apply this kind of analysis more fully in every chapter of this book.

In performance studies, questions of embodiment, action, behavior, and agency are dealt with interculturality. This approach recognizes two things. First, in today’s world, cultures are always interacting – there are no totally isolated groups. Second, the differences among cultures are so profound that no theory of performance is universal: one size cannot fit all. Nor are the playing fields where cultures interact level. The current means of cultural interaction – globalization – enacts extreme imbalances of power, money, access to media, and control over resources. Although this is reminiscent of colonialism, globalization is also

different from colonialism in key ways. Proponents of globalization promise that “free trade”, the internet, and advances in science and technology are leading to a better life for the world’s peoples. Globalization also induces sameness at the level of popular culture – “world beat” and the proliferation of American-style fast foods and films are examples. The two ideas are related. Cultural sameness and seamless communications make it easier for transnational entities to get their messages across. This is crucial because governments and businesses alike increasingly find it more efficient to rule and manage with the collaboration rather than the opposition of workers. In order to gain their collaboration, information must not only move with ease globally but also be skillfully managed. The apparent victory of “democracy” and capitalism goes hand in hand with the flow of controlled media. Whether or not the internet will be, finally, an arena of resistance or compliance remains an open question. Those resisting the “new world order” are too often stigmatized as “terrorists”, “rogue states”, and/or “fundamentalists”.

As a field, performance studies is sympathetic to the avant-garde, the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized. Projects within performance studies often act on or act against settled hierarchies of ideas, organizations, and people. Therefore, it is hard to imagine performance studies getting its act together or settling down, or even wanting to.

What is gaining in importance is hypertext, in the broadest meaning of that word. Hypertext combines words, images, sounds, and various shorthands. People with cell phones talk, of course. But they also take photos and use the keypads to punch out messages that combine letters, punctuation marks, and other graphics. A different kind of freedom of speech is evolving, even more rapidly in the so-called “developing world” than in Europe or North America. In China – the world’s largest market – more than 1 billion people owned cell phones as of 2012 —and the global total is 6 billion, out of a total world population of nearly 7 billion. Not as many people have access to the internet as own cell phones. But the two platforms are converging and very soon just about everyone on planet earth will be able to communicate with everyone else and also be on the internet. Email, the internet, cell phones, blogs, instant messaging, and wi-fi are transforming what it means to be literate. Book reading is supplemented and to some degree supplanted by a range of ideas, feelings, requests, and desires that are communicated in many different ways. People are both readers and authors. Identities are revealed, masked, fabricated, and stolen. This kind of communicating is highly performative. It encourages senders and receivers to use their imaginations, navigating and interpreting the dynamic cloud of possibilities surrounding each message.

Performance studies as an academic discipline is gaining in importance and acceptance. The discipline is conceived, taught, and institutionalized in a number of different ways. At present and broadly speaking, there are two main brands, New York University’s and Northwestern University’s. NYU’s performance studies

is rooted in theatre, the social sciences, feminist and queer studies, postcolonial studies, poststructuralism, and experimental performance. NU's is rooted in oral interpretation, communications, speech-act theory, and ethnography. But over time, these two approaches have moved toward each other sharing a common commitment to an expanded vision of "performance" and "performativity." In China, there is "social performance studies." Other parts of the world also have their own versions of performance studies. I welcome this diversity.

But for all this, is performance studies truly an independent field? Can it be distinguished from theatre studies, cultural studies, and other closely allied fields? One can construct several intellectual histories explaining the various specific outlooks of performance studies as practiced by different schools of thought. The narrative outlining how performance studies developed at NYU concerns interactions among Western and Asian philosophies, anthropology, gender studies, feminism, the aesthetics of everyday life, race theory, area studies, popular entertainments, queer theory, and postcolonial studies. These interactions have been heavily inflected by an ongoing contact with the avant-garde – both the Euro-American "historical avant-garde" (from symbolism and surrealism through to Dada and Happenings) to the more current avant-gardes being practiced in many parts of the world. Many students, and some professors, of performance studies at NYU are also practicing artists – in performance art, dance, theatre, and music. Preponderantly, their approach has been experimental – to stretch the limits of their arts in ways analogous to how performance studies stretches the limits of academic discourse.

The philosophical antecedents to performance studies include questions addressed in ancient times, in the Renaissance, and in the 1950s to 1970s, the period immediately before performance studies came into its own. Early philosophers both in the West and in India pondered the relationship between daily life, theatre, and the "really real". In the West, the relationship between the arts and philosophy has been marked, according to the Greek philosopher Plato, by "a long-standing quarrel between poetry and philosophy". The ancient Greek felt that the really real, the ideal, existed only as pure forms. In his *Republic* (c. 370 BCE), Plato argued that ordinary realities are but shadows cast on the wall of the dark cave of ignorance. (One wonders if shadow puppetry, so popular in Asia from ancient times, was known to Plato.) The arts – including the performing arts – imitate these shadows and are therefore doubly removed from the really real. As if this weren't enough, Plato distrusted theatre because it appealed to the emotions rather than to reason, "watering the growth of passions which should be allowed to wither away." Plato banned poetry, including theatre, from his ideal republic. It was left to Plato's student Aristotle to redeem the arts. Aristotle argued that the really real was "indwelling" as a plan or potential, somewhat like a genetic code. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle reasoned that by imitating actions, and by enacting the logical chain of consequences flowing from actions, one might learn about these

indwelling forms. Far from wanting to avoid the emotions, Aristotle wanted to arouse, understand, and purge their deleterious effects.

Indian philosophers had a different idea altogether. Writing at roughly the same time as the Greeks, they felt that the whole universe, from ordinary reality to the realm of the gods, was *maya* and *lila* – illusion, play, and theatre on a grand scale. The theory of *maya-lila* asserts that the really real is playful, ever changing, and illusive. What is “behind” *maya-lila*? On this, Indian philosophers had several opinions. Some said that nothing was beyond *maya-lila*. Others proposed realities too awesome for humans to experience. When Arjuna, the hero-warrior of the *Mahabharata*, asks Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* section of the epic to show his true form, the experience is terrifying in the extreme. Still other philosophers proposed the existence of *brahman*, an absolute unity-of-all which a person can enter through meditation, yoga, or living a perfected life. At the achievement of *moksha*, or release from the cycle of birth–death– rebirth, a person’s individual *atman* (the absolute within) becomes one with *brahman* (the universal absolute). But for most people most of the time, reality is *maya-lila*. The gods also enter the world of *maya-lila*. The gods take human form, as Krishna does in the performance of Raslila (Krishna’s dance with adoring female cow-herders and with his favorite lover, Radha) or as Rama does in the performance of Ramlila (when Vishnu incarnates himself as Rama to rid the world of the demon Ravana). Raslila and Ramlila are performed today. Hundreds of millions of Indian Hindus believe in these enacted incarnations – where young boys temporarily become gods. (Notions of *maya-lila* are discussed more fully in Chapter 4 of the book *Performance Studies—An Introduction*, 3rd edition, by Richard Schechner. London and New York: Routledge).

In Renaissance Europe the widely accepted notion that the world was a great theatre called the *theatrum mundi* was well put in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* when Jaques says, “All the world’s a stage | And all the men and women merely players; | They have their exits and their entrances; | And one man in his time plays many parts” (2, 7: 139–42). Hamlet, in his instructions to the players, had a somewhat different opinion, more in keeping with Aristotle’s theory of mimesis: “[. . .] the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’t were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (3, 2: 21–25). To people living in the *theatrum mundi* everyday life was theatrical and, conversely, theatre offered a working model of how life was lived.

The most recent variation on the *theatrum mundi* theme emerged shortly after World War II and continues to the present. In 1949, Jacques Lacan delivered his paper “The Mirror Stage,” an influential psychoanalytic study proposing that infants as young as six months recognize themselves in the mirror as “another”. In 1955, Gregory Bateson wrote “A Theory of Play and Fantasy”. Bateson emphasized the importance of what he termed “metacommunication”, the message that tells the receiver that a message of a certain kind is being sent – social communications

exist within a complex of frames. Bateson's ideas were elaborated on by Erving Goffman in a series of works about performing in everyday life, the most influential of which is his 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. At roughly the same time, philosopher J. L. Austin developed his notion of "performativity." Austin's lectures on the performative were published posthumously in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*. According to Austin, performatives are utterances such as bets, promises, namings, and so on that actually do something, that perform. A little later, in France, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Guy Debord, and Félix Guattari proposed what were then radical new ways to understand history, social life, and language. Many of these ideas retain their currency even today.

My own role in the formation of performance studies goes back to the mid-1960s. My 1966 essay "Approaches to Theory/Criticism" was a formulation of an area of study I called "the performance activities of man" (*sic*): play, games, sports, theatre, and ritual. "Actuals", published in 1970, related rituals in non-Western cultures to avant-garde performances. Both of these essays are in *Performance Theory* (2003). In 1973, as guest editor of a special *TDR* issue on "Performance and the Social Sciences", I outlined seven "areas where performance theory and the social sciences coincide":

- 1 *Performance in everyday life, including gatherings of every kind.*
- 2 *The structure of sports, ritual, play, and public political behaviors.*
- 3 *Analysis of various modes of communication (other than the written word); semiotics.*
- 4 *Connections between human and animal behavior patterns with an emphasis on play and ritualized behavior.*
- 5 *Aspects of psychotherapy that emphasize person-to-person interaction, acting out, and body awareness.*
- 6 *Ethnography and prehistory – both of exotic and familiar cultures (from the Western perspective).*
- 7 *Constitution of unified theories of performance, which are, in fact, theories of behavior.*

Over time, I developed these ideas and I related my theories to my artistic work and research activities in the USA and also in various parts of the world, India especially. Anthropologist Victor Turner—with whom I worked closely during the 1970s until Turner's death in 1983, put it this way:

Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances. [. . .] A performance is a dialectic of "flow", that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and "reflexivity", in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen "in action", as they shape and explain behavior. A

performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies. ("Introduction," *By Means of Performance*, Willa Appel and Richard Schechner, eds., 1990: 1.)

As I noted earlier, performance studies resists fixed definition. Performance studies does not value "purity". It is at its best when operating amidst a dense web of connections. Academic disciplines are most active at their ever-changing interfaces. In terms of performance studies, this means the interactions between theatre and anthropology, folklore and sociology, history and performance theory, gender studies and psychoanalysis, performativity and actual performance events – and more. New interfaces will appear as time goes on, and older ones will disappear. Accepting "inter" means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance studies is open, multivocal, and self-contradictory. Therefore, any call for a "unified field" is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies.

At a more theoretical level, what is the relation of performance studies to performance proper? Are there any limits to performativity? Is there anything outside the purview of performance studies? The performative occurs in places and situations not traditionally marked as "performing arts," from dress-up and drag to certain kinds of writing and speaking. Accepting the performative as a category of theory makes it increasingly difficult to sustain a distinction between appearances and reality, facts and make-believe, surfaces and depths. Appearances are actualities – neither more nor less so than what lies behind or beneath appearances. Social reality is constructed through and through. In modernity, what was "deep" and "hidden" was thought to be "more real" than what was on the surface (Platonism dies hard). But in postmodernity, the relationship between depths and surfaces is fluid; the relationship is dynamically convective.

Many who practice performance studies resist or oppose the global forces of capital. Fewer will concede that these forces know very well – perhaps even better than we do – how to perform, in all the meanings of that word. The interplay of efficiency, productivity, activity, and entertainment – in a word, performance – informs and drives countless operations. In many key areas of human activity "performance" is crucial to success. The word crops up in apparently very different circumstances. These divergent uses indicate a basic overall similarity at the theoretical level. Performance has become a major site of knowledge and power). In relation to this relatively new situation, many ethical questions remain nakedly open. The most important concern "intervention" – biologically, militarily, culturally. When, if ever, ought force be used to "save" or "protect" people – and why say yes to Kosovo and no to the Sudan? Who has the right and/or the responsibility to say yes or no? What about genetic intervention? Who can be against preventing or curing diseases and increasing crop yields? But what about

cloning? Or modifying human traits? What constitutes a “disease” and what traits are “bad”? The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw some very nasty things done under the aegis of a eugenic “improvement” of the human species. What about genetically engineering “super athletes”? In terms of art and scholarship, what, if any, ought to be the limits to creativity and cultural borrowings?

Dwight Conquergood, one of the founders of performance studies at Northwestern, outlined in his *Rethinking Ethnography* (1991: 190) what he deemed “the five areas of performance studies”:

1. *Performance and Cultural Process*. What are the conceptual consequences of thinking about culture as a verb instead of a noun, a process instead of product? Culture as an unfolding performative invention instead of reified system, structure, or variable? What happens to our thinking about performance when we move it outside of aesthetics and situate it at the center of lived experience?
2. *Performance and Ethnographic Praxis*. What are the methodological implications of thinking about fieldwork as the collaborative performance of an enabling fiction between observer and observed, knower and known? How does thinking about fieldwork as performance differ from thinking about fieldwork as the collection of data? [...]
3. *Performance and Hermeneutics*. What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding? [...]
4. *Performance and Scholarly Representation*. What are the rhetorical problematics of performance as a complementary or alternative form of “publishing” research? What are the differences between reading an analysis of fieldwork data, and hearing the voices from the field interpretively filtered through the voice of the researcher? [...] What about enabling people themselves to perform their own experience? [...]
5. *The Politics of Performance*. What is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?

And Jon McKenzie, who earned his PhD from NYU, declared that:

[...] Performance will be to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the 18th and 19th, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge [italics in original]. [...] Like discipline, performance produces a new subject of knowledge, though one quite different from that produced under the regime of panoptic surveillance. Hyphenated identities, transgendered bodies, digital avatars, the Human Genome Project – these

suggest that the performative subject is constructed as fragmented rather than unified, decentered rather than centered, virtual as well as actual. Similarly, performative objects are unstable rather than fixed, simulated rather than real. They do not occupy a single, “proper” place in knowledge; there is no such thing as the thing-in-itself. Instead, objects are produced and maintained through a variety of socio-technical systems, overcoded by many discourses, and situated in numerous sites of practice. While disciplinary institutions and mechanisms forged Western Europe’s industrial revolution and its system of colonial empires, those of performance are programming the circuits of our postindustrial, postcolonial world. More profoundly than the alphabet, printed book, and factory, such technologies as electronic media and the Internet allow discourses and practices from different geographical and historical situations to be networked and patched together, their traditions to be electronically archived and played back, their forms and processes to become raw materials for other productions. Similarly, research and teaching machines once ruled strictly and linearly by the book are being retooled by a multimedia, hypertextual metatechnology, that of the computer. (*Perform Or Else* 2001: 18)

Performance studies came into existence within, and as a response to, the radically changing intellectual and artistic circumstances of the last third of the twentieth century. As the twenty-first century unfolds, many people remain dissatisfied with the status quo. Equipped with ever more powerful means of finding and sharing information – the internet, cell phones, sophisticated computing – people are increasingly finding the world not a book to be read but a performance to participate in. Performance studies is an academic discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the “glocal” – the powerful combination of the local and the global. Performance studies is more interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, and fluid than most scholarly disciplines. At the same time, adherents to performance studies face daunting ethical and political questions. What limits, if any, ought there to be to the ways information is gathered, processed, and distributed? Should those with the means intervene in the interest of “human rights” or must they respect local cultural autonomy at whatever cost? Artists and scholars are playing increasingly decisive roles in addressing these ethical and political questions.

Acknowledgement: Adapted from *Performance Studies - An Introduction*, 3rd edition, by Richard Schechner. London and New York: Routledge.

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The Entangled Vocabulary of Performance

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This article attempts to map the concept of performance, in terms of its genealogy and the diversity of its application. Such a mapping is an unavoidably reductive step, since the productive force of the concept partly relies on the difficulty of pinning it down to a precise typology or set of definitions. The act of mapping out the concept can itself be interpreted as a kind of performance, as has been argued by Richard Schechner (*Performance Studies*, 40-42), it is not a neutral or interest-free undertaking, and however persuasive the mapping may be, it may not necessarily simplify the application of the concept, nor resolve the disputes around it. As a "keyword" in the sense of Raymond Williams, performance is an operative concept, "whose meanings are inextricably bound up with the problems [they are] being used to discuss" (*Keywords*, 13). The concept is not merely descriptive, but programmatic, in that the choice and justification of the uses of the term lead to and imply specific effects. German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the concept in terms of the range of its semantic shades, 'Begriffsabschattungen' (*Kulturen des Performativen*, 9), arguing that these shades need to be seen in relation to each other in order to trace the histories and contexts of the concepts of performance and the performative. Fischer-Lichte derives the semantic shades of the performative with reference to different disciplinary influences and deployments of the term, such as anthropology, linguistics, language philosophy, technology, economics and aesthetics. A typology and historicisation of the concept is a necessary though not entirely sufficient step in understanding its usage. Even if one makes sense of each of the shades of the term, one does not know how to make sense of the entire range of these shades.

In his *Introduction to Performance Studies*, Schechner claims that because performance is "open, multi-vocal and self-contradictory, [...] any call for a 'unified field' is a misunderstanding of the fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies" (*Performance Studies*, 19). Being involved in teaching and researching in performance studies over the past decade in an international and cross-cultural setting, I initially found this to be an exciting idea, but have gradually found it to be a restrictive introduction of the field to students new to performance studies. On the one hand, it is a charmingly open-ended liberal statement, promising a horizon rather than offering the ground to stand on. If fluidity and playfulness are fundamental, then these become the very gestures unifying the field, despite the declaration that it is not possible to unify the field. On the other hand, the refusal to chart the practical parameters of the field can foster a certain elitism, whereby methodological tools and clarity are somehow

implicitly disseminated, but not systematically taught.ⁱThe view that the field of performance is unlimited and all-encompassing is, I would argue, a way to steer around the discontinuities and tensions that are inherent to the field, and mark instead a meta-level continuity. If everything can be seen as performance, then the term is easily susceptible to becoming a catchall phrase with no conceptual stability. One could ask, as Bert States does in an essay on the use of performance as metaphor, "what isn't performance, what isn't culture?" (5). Departing from Williams' idea that a keyword is better grasped by studying its systems of signification, rather than studying its meanings (*Keywords*, 23), this article maps the concept of performance by way of dwelling on some of its entanglements with other concepts and by reflecting on some continuous and discontinuous aspects of its vocabulary, aiming to address some common misunderstandings related to these terms.

A note on the disciplinary formation of performance studies is in order at the outset. As a relatively young academic field, it is dominated by Anglo-American and European scholarship, even though the contributions of academics from the Global South to its body of theory and geographical outreach are changing this scenario. In terms of institutional history, performance studies has emerged as an offshoot of Theatre Studies or Drama/Literary Departments, and has branched out and struck affinitive roots in areas as diverse as Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy, Memory Studies, Musicology, Media Studies and Educational Sciences. Scholars who have established themselves in the field of performance studies tend to have strong methodological and theoretical ties to one of these disciplines, and this has led to a productive cross-pollination of the field, bearing an outlook that can often be characterized as comparative and internationally oriented. The emergence of performance studies as an academic discipline is further a result of a number of shifts in the humanities over the course of the 20th century, which broadened its focus, first from the study of drama texts to the study of theatre and theatrical practice, and then from theatre to performance, expanding its scope outside of the conventional theatre to include ritual, play, social interaction and cultural manifestations of all kinds in its gamut. These shifts are sometimes referenced in the shorthand terms 'linguistic turn', 'cultural turn' and 'performative turn', which will be elaborated in the last section of the article. Some tertiary institutions offering a degree in theatre and performance treat the combination of theoretical and practical training as essential to the study of performance. Others strictly differentiate between a vocational training in an academy or conservatory and a university level study of performance, which involves criticism, history, aesthetic and theoretical aspects, but not physical training and performance practice. The paradigm of artistic research or practice-based research in performance is another evolving path in the discipline, wherein the opposition between practice and research is sought to be undone at a fundamental level, calling for a broadening of research epistemologies and standards. These different institutional paths have contributed to both an

expansion as well as a “profound de-centering of the field” (McKenzie et al, 1), which includes divergent perspectives on both how to construct performance as an object of knowledge, as well as how to generate knowledge through performance. It is crucial to bear in mind the disciplinary formation of performance studies in order to recognize the grounds from which certain conceptual entanglements around performance have emerged.

Theatre and performance

The first entanglement to be examined is that between theatre and performance. The distinction between these concepts is usually explained in terms of performance being an umbrella term, including not only theatre, but also music, dance, ritual, everyday life actions, sports and all actions that involve embodiment. Yet there are more specific distinctions between theatre and performance, which are implicitly assumed when both terms are mentioned together. Performance, in opposition to theatre, sometimes specifically refers to ‘performance art’ or ‘live art’, an artistic event that combines visual art and public performance elements, often conducted in spaces that are outside institutional boundaries, or explicitly try to break these boundaries and are interventionist in nature (Goldberg). Unlike theatre, performance art can take place in any space, whether marked as an aesthetic space or not, sometimes without viewers being aware that they are witnessing art or without their consciously choosing to go to an art space. Performance art often questions the boundary between art and life, whereas most forms of theatre maintain the fourth wall or the distinction between an aesthetic space and the space of spectatorship outside of it.

The etymology of performance and theatre is instructive in order to understand the correlation between the concepts. The term theatre stems from the Classical Greek *the-in*, which denotes ways of seeing. Together with related terms such as *thea-tron*, *theo-ria* and *thea-mai*, it refers to specific rules and arrangements related to the activity of the gaze. *Thea-tron* is ‘a place for looking’ and *theo-rein*, root for ‘theory’, is the Greek verb meaning ‘to consider, to speculate, to look at’. In Aristotelian poetics, by far the most influential theoretical body of work in the Western canon, the concept of theatre covers aspects such as dramatic structure, spectatorship, aesthetic rules, the organization of social practices or events, as well as the organization of space through architecture. Theatre is etymologically closely related to theory, in that both concepts deal with orders of perception and meaning making of reality. Theatre has long been dominated by the notion of drama, and theorized chiefly as the representation of a dramatic text. This implied that societies without a scripted tradition did not have a place in the theatre history of the world. With the incursions of academic scholarship from and on non-Western societies, as well as the insights of communication studies, semiotics, postcolonial theory and post-foundational language philosophy in the course of the 20th century, this restrictive framing of theatre has been revised. Theatre has

come to be recognized as a communicative process and as an event with historical and cultural specificities (Zarrilli et al).

Performance, on the other hand, derives from the 16th century Middle French term *parfournir* (to accomplish, provide, supply, furnish) and Middle English *perform* (to accomplish, to alter form, to carry out). Compared with the etymology of theatre, performance foregrounds action as opposed to perception. It is connected to the legal act of executing a will or promise, as opposed to the emphasis in the terms 'theatre' and 'theory' on considering and speculating. Whereas theatre is a place for *looking*, performance is the legally or otherwise recognized accomplishment of an *act*. Placed together, theatre and performance span a range of investments, from the aesthetic and formal to the political and social. The relationship between acting and spectatorship, between modes of action and perception, forms a central concern that connects these terms in aesthetic theory. Yet, when the concept of performance is examined outside of aesthetic spaces, an entirely different system of signification comes to the fore.

Performance as Process and Performance as Goal

The term performance can be distinguished in terms of two paradigms: performance understood as process, and performance understood as goal or accomplishment. The former usage is most predominant in the humanities, referring to artistic, linguistic, cultural, and gender performance. The latter usage is most common when referring to economic, technical and sexual fields. One semantic field emphasizes performance in terms of its creation, constitution and becoming, whereas the other emphasizes performance in terms of success, accomplishment, growth, reputation, or inversely, non-performance, failure, collapse and inadequacy. Whereas the former emphasizes the processuality of performance, the latter emphasizes the fulfillment of a goal or the failure to do so. Linguistically, the two paradigms could be argued to correspond to the performative and the constative dimensions of language and speech. In Austin's theory of speech acts, constative utterances are concluded statements, whereas performative utterances are acts that have been ushered in to a situation (*How to Do Things With Words*). Here is a tentative glossary of both paradigms of performance in the English language:

Performance as process

1. Artistic or Cultural Performance: public presentation, exhibition, creatively developed work belonging to the realm of performing arts; culture as articulated and consolidated in practices and intangible archives and repertoires.
2. Linguistic Performance: ability to use language, linguistic competence to accomplish meaning and acts; the term performative as enunciated in speech act

theory derives from this field. Most widely recognized here are the works of J.L. Austin and N. Chomsky respectively.

3. Gender Performance: gender as identity being historically constituted through a 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler, *Performative Acts*, 519).

Performance as goal

4. Technical Performance: the manner in which a mechanism accomplishes a task, as well as the measurement of its output;

5. Business Performance: an indicator of the difference between actual results vs. desired results in a business-related activity; the quality of execution of an action, operation, or process when measured against a standard;

6. Sexual Performance: vocabulary referring to the ability to carry out sexual activity and the associated norms around virility and libido.

It may be argued that these two paradigms remain largely distinct from each other, employing very different vocabularies and pointing to different trajectories in their conceptual histories.¹¹ Performance studies primarily engages the notion of performance as process. However, in works such as Jon McKenzie's *Perform Or Else* (2001), where performance is presented as a 'new power matrix of globalization' (McKenzie, 1), the technical and business dimensions of performance, which inform neoliberal society in far-reaching ways, interplay with performance as process, making performance into an all-encompassing organizing mode of life. Thus there is a dialectical entanglement between performance as goal and performance as process. Despite the inter-connections between the two paradigms, performance is most widely understood as a processual phenomenon in the field of performance studies, rather than as a marker of technical or business results. Here another noteworthy distinction needs to be drawn, namely between performance as object of knowledge and as lens of knowing.

Performance and Knowledge

One of Schechner's oft-cited distinctions around performance is the difference between "is performance" and "as performance" (*Performance Studies*, 38). The former refers to particular types of events such as dance, theatre, live art, music or ritual, embodied practices that follow certain conventions, traditions and styles. The latter category "as performance" points to how practically everything can be perceived as performance by way of a certain kind of framing. In Schechner's analysis, which is strongly influenced by the anthropology of Victor Turner, the framing of various cultural practices and interactions normally falling outside of the conventions of artistic performance, allows for creating performance as "a broad spectrum or continuum of human actions [...] any action that is framed,

presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance” (*Performance Studies*,2). For Schechner, the concept of performance allows for a development of a discipline that is not necessarily based on a common object or modality. However, it is Diana Taylor who has more fully articulated what it means when we say that performance is not just an object of study, but an epistemology, a way of knowing, which alters the subject in the process of seeking knowledge of another:

“Part of what performance and performance studies allow us to do, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge. [...] It's not simply that we shift to the live as the focus of our analysis, or develop various strategies for garnering information, such as undertaking ethnographic research, interviews, and field notes. Or even alter our hierarchies of legitimation that structure our traditional academic practice (such as book learning, written sources, and documents). We need to rethink our method of analysis.”(Taylor, 26-27)

There are two aspects to Taylor’s claim worth mentioning: the first is that performance as lens necessitates the shift from the textual or the narrative to embodied practices, to forms of cultural articulation that cannot be captured in the archives of material culture, but are to be found in the repertoire of living practices. This shift, sometimes referred to as the ‘cultural turn’, describes yet another shift in the humanities, which emphasises that text is not the primary and-or only source of knowledge. It also calls into question the gap between so-called high and popular culture. The idea of performance as a way of knowing points to the recognition that culture is not only something that exists in opera houses or in classical concert halls, but also on the streets, in every class of society, and is worthy of study. So ‘performance as object’ is expanded from to embodied and living practices of all kinds. The second aspect is that this shift in focus from the textual to the embodied or lived culture also demands a transformation in the mode of research. The same tools of analysis that are used in studying texts cannot be applied to the study of performance. The tools of ethnographic and sociological research are necessary though not sufficient, because they still recognize the distinction between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ (Conquergood, 146). The proposition that performance is an epistemological category means that the study of performance requires a re-alignment of the relationship between researcher and researched, the act of doing research is not separable from the object of research, as both are or can be perceived as performance. Taylor proposes that ‘performance as lens’ necessitates a questioning of the conditions of knowledge generation, new ways of knowing and not only new things to know (27). Thus the notion of performance as a processual phenomenon is itself a broad spectrum, on the one hand extending from texts to conventional artistic performances to all kinds of actions and interactions framed ‘as performance’. On the other hand, performance requires a re-positioning of the relation between the researcher and subject of research, acknowledging that in order for something to be known, it must be

formed as an object of knowledge, and this work of forming something as knowledge is also part of the knowledge. This latter understanding of performance as epistemology leads to the final entanglement around the notion of performance, which stems from its relation to the concept of performativity.

Performance and Performativity

It can be argued that performance relates to performativity in the usual way in which a noun becomes an adjective and then a nominalization, such as the relation between 'act' and 'activity', or between 'feast' and 'festivity'. Yet such an explanation would only chart the grammatical relation between the terms and ignore several turns, incursions and transformations that have occurred in the shifts between 'perform', 'performance', 'performative' and 'performativity'. These incursions come from linguistics, culture and philosophy in the course of developments in the humanities in the 20th century, and add further levels of complexity to the concept's already outlined entanglements. The concept of performativity can be approached through three inter-connected landmark turns: the cultural turn, the linguistic turn and the performative turn.

The idea of the cultural turn, outlined in the previous section, points to the first characteristic of performativity, namely an emphasis on embodiment, event, interaction and practice, rather than on text alone. The realization that paying attention to culture is crucial for various disciplines, also brought the performative qualities of culture to the foreground, the fact that culture is not simply artifacts and monuments but also practices, acts, embodied moments, events. The works of Goffman and Turner are two prominent examples of the adaptation of performance language to ask and answer questions about social life, practices, conflicts, rituals, ceremonies and phenomena of social interaction. The field of anthropology has influenced this use and development of the concept. With this emphasis on and recognition of sources of cultural expression other than the written or printed text, it becomes possible for cultural analysis to consider more fluid and impermanent forms as cultural material. Recognising the importance of performative practices means giving importance to gestures, acts and expressions that were so far considered to be irrelevant or only of ancillary significance to the main modes of social interaction such as language and text. It also allows for predominantly oral traditions to be recognised as valuable historical sources.

The second turn that charts the concept of the performative is the linguistic turn. This refers to the claims of post-foundational language philosophy, inaugurated with structural linguistics and the critique of the relationship between language and truth or reality. Representative of this turn is the work of C.S. Peirce, J.L. Austin in linguistics and of M. Heidegger and J. Derrida, amongst others, in continental European philosophy. Without even trying to cover this vast field in passing, I would like to focus on one idea which is relevant to this article, namely

that acts are not outside of the realm of language, or that language points to or represents a reality outside of itself, but that there are acts that are performed through speech. Austin names this act, for which speech or language is a prerequisite, the performative speech act. The 'performance' or accomplishment of the act is done through language. The notion of the performative speech act forms part of the larger claim that language is co-constitutive of reality. Performativity thus indicates the intertwining of language and action. Performativity in the sense of the speech act refers to the double bind of saying and doing, thus also of a way of perceiving action and the conditions of its efficacy. The performative refers to the way things assume shape and are constituted by way of naming, of being called and interpellated. The performative speech act emphasises that speech on the whole, and particular forms of address are acts in themselves, thus questioning the distinction between discourse and action.

The third turn, that cannot be separated from the cultural and the linguistic turn, is the performative turn. Here the work of J. Derrida and J. Butler have been instrumental to the discussion of subject formation as a process that can neither be understood as socially constructed, nor as a natural given. Performativity denotes the subject, understood as a linguistic category, not in a zone of free consumer choice, but in a highly regulated and historically determined framework. Following from the question of how speech can be a form of action, the concept of the performative asks about the formation of a subject through its actions. In Butler's theorization, the engagement with performativity is part of a larger project of a theory of practice and the creation or transformation of a subject, where the focus is not on finding an essence that is already existent, but on establishing the power relations at work that allow for certain acts to be performed and others not to be performed. To say something is performative thus implies it is not finished yet, that it is lively, it is taking shape in the crossroads of real life.

Performativity thus does not draw a division between the theatrical and other social spheres, although it carries different implications in each case. Just as language is performative in the sense of being co-constitutive of reality; just as culture is performative, in the sense of being lived interaction and process and not stable identity, so the subject is performative in the sense of being neither merely a natural body nor merely a social construction, but as the object of a gradual, compelling formation of acts. The entanglement of performance with concepts such as theatre, knowledge and performativity demonstrates that it is most valuable to approach the concept by asking what its operation it is useful for, what it sets itself out against or distinguishes itself from. Understanding performance is thus a matter of charting its vocabulary, rather than identifying its definition, to borrow Raymond Williams' well-known distinction. Far from having a proper or strict meaning, the concept of performance reveals the attempts of various disciplines of the Humanities to self-critique their working terms by reassessing their mutual relationship.

Notes

ⁱ In all fairness to Schechner, his book *Performance Studies* is an attempt to provide exactly such a practical handbook, though it does not explicitly reflect on methodological issues.

ⁱⁱThey curiously overlap or intervene with each other in relation to gender. When speaking of performance as process, gender is theorized as a subject position that is not natural or biologically given, but as generated and constituted through linguistic, socio-political and cultural acts and interactions. When speaking of performance as goal, gender is commonly understood in terms of the accomplishment of certain norms and the judgement of successfully fulfilling these standards, or, more frequently, failing to do so. This productive contradiction is theorized in Bala 2012.

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Dramatizing Water: Performance, Anthropology, and the Transnational

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Place: Athipatti, a fictional South Indian village
Vellaisamy: Can I trouble you for a little water?

..

Vellaisamy: Why do you laugh when I ask you for water?

Kovalu: To ask a man for his wife is not a sin in this village. But to ask him for water is a great sin.

Thaneer Thaneer (Water!) Komal Swaminathan

Abstract

“Dramatizing Water: Performance, Anthropology, and the Transnational” investigates how “dramatizing water” can act as a constellation that links the basic substance of life to translocal performances across a continuum that spans water in everyday life, in ritual, and as it appears on a formalized stage. A brief genealogy of examples is developed across the everyday and ritual, but the primary focus is on the late Tamil playwright Komal Swaminathan’s 1980 *Thaneer Thaneer (Water!)* and its relevance as a prototype for political drama on water. There is currently a profound global crisis around water distribution and “dramatizing water” indexes an attempt to chart the possibilities of moving toward a differently configured space for our water-practices, toward an alternative and more sustainable performative cartography of water.

[**Keywords:** Water: Performance, Anthropology, Transnational, Swaminathan, *Thaneer Thaneer*, ritual]

“Dramatizing water” is a constellation that links the basic substance of life to translocal performances across a continuum that spans water in everyday life, in ritual, and as it appears on a formalized stage. Although “dramatizing” does indicate a process of “preparing for the stage,” it also encompasses the fundamental senses of “acting,” “doing,” or “working.” “Water” derives from two Proto Indo-European roots: *ap* (preserved in the Sanskrit *apah*, or animate) refers to water as a living force and *wed*, an inanimate substance. Water exists on a threshold that launches the animate out of the inanimate, and, as we know, there is currently a profound global crisis around water distribution and usage. “Dramatizing water”—as an artistic, theoretical, and heuristic device—indexes my attempt to chart the possibilities of moving toward a new space for our water-

practices, toward an alternative and more sustainable performative cartography of water.

Dramatizing Water across Borders

For several decades, water has been a central topic on the international stage, spanning, most predominantly, science, engineering, history, law, and policy.ⁱ In an effort, for example, to respond to the urgent need for new direction regarding our water problems, on March 22, 1993, the United Nations General Assembly launched World Water Day, a set of internationally sanctioned events that focused on getting the message out about water as a basic human need, its cultural significance, and its growing scarcity. This celebratory day has continued to galvanize awareness through public forums, activities, and related research, including the implementation of UN recommendations about water. An important milestone occurred in 2010 when the UN Human Rights Council adopted a binding resolution that established that “the rights to water and sanitation are part of existing international law...It also calls upon States to develop appropriate tools and mechanisms to achieve progressively the full realization of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, including in currently unserved and underserved areas.”ⁱⁱ Water, then, has been established as a basic right and as a public good.

Today, in 2013, a quick scan of nearly any online news site—the Huffington Post, CNN, BBC, South China Morning Post, the New York Times, or the Times of India—indicates that, despite the progress we have made, we are far from solving our global water problems. Things, in fact, are getting worse. The statistics are alarming: 884 million people lack access to clean waterⁱⁱⁱ; “more than 3.4 million people die each year from water, sanitation, and hygiene-related causes. Nearly all deaths, 99 percent, occur in the developing world”^{iv}. “200 million hours are spent each day globally collecting water”^v; by 2031, the demand for water will exceed the supply by 40% (Charting: 40). The privatization of water continues at an exponential pace.^{vi}

“Water wars,” or a generally heightened state of conflict, have already resulted from the lack of access to water: in the US, from the Tennessee/Georgia border, Alabama/Florida, areas in southern California, to the Southwest; between Ethiopia and Egypt; Darfur, Sudan; between regions of China, and across areas of India, Pakistan, and Nepal. The race to engineer solutions in the form of massive dams (such as the Three Gorges Dam (Yangtze River) and the Sardar Sarovar Dam (Narmada River)) in order to increase the supply of power and water to underserved regions has led to massive displacements of local populations, the submergence of abandoned villages, and technological complications that continue to unsettle, even destroy, the local riparian cultures as well as overall environmental balance.

As we chart the shifting demographics, increasing populations, and the impact of the global economy on the distribution of water, it is very clear that it is not a simple physical limit of a vital material substance, but also the result of the impacts of a complex web of technical, social, political, and cultural systems that have led to and promulgate the current dire water shortage. Without a reconfiguration—one that relies in some part on an alternative enactment of “dramatizing water”^{vii}— we will fail to honor what environmentalist David Abrams has termed “our ongoing reciprocity with the world” (56), truncate the possibilities of recuperating a living relationship with water at the threshold of the animate and inanimate, and narrow the emerging geography of water to an “epistemic” of the manageable.

In “Species Nova [To See Anew]: Art as Ecology,” David Haley, for example, notes: “It is ten years since the Earth Summit in Rio [held in 1992] popularized the notion of sustainable development and introduced Agenda 21 as a strategy to achieve it. Sadly, culture and art, two of the systems that define humanity, were not mentioned among the necessary tools for building a better future”(144). It is, then, to the re-creation of such systems that we must turn for a series of translocal and transnational solutions to the water crisis, which will depend on both global agreements and microprocesses in the local context. How can we create new stages—in the theaters, in the university, in the city and village streets, and on the web—for telling our (local and global) stories about water and generating new forms of action? The story, on its own, is not sufficient.

A shift in social, political, and cultural dynamics around water practices can help us find ways to bridge the science, art and religion^{viii} divide that, unmitigated, will continue to haunt our water problems and limit our capacities to find new responses in a timely fashion. Haley both cautions and invites us into new territory:

[T]hat our societies tend to value economics over ecology, and monoculture and agro-industry over diversity and permaculture, is certainly worthy of ethical attention. Here I want to invoke a call for integrating art as a necessary contribution to ecological intervention. I consider how artists may engage uncertainty, and how art may be used to develop new ways of seeing and ‘drawing.’ This is art for evolutionary survival, not commodification. Art that practices care, shared responsibility, and diversity in the pursuit of eco-centric cultures. (143)

Water is a substance always aligned with meaning; therefore, the performative aspects of creating cultural responses to, and from, water will be essential if we are to change pathways toward a more sustainable future.

The water issue is one of the clearest indices that we have of the profoundly transnational character of our attempts to build a new commons. In hopes of provoking for new “lines of flight”^{ix}, I am situating this project in the context of theory of “dramatizing water” in and across what can be termed a “translocal”

geography (Brickell and Datta: 3).^x Translocality “deliberately confuses the boundaries of the local in order to capture the increasingly complicated nature of spatial processes and identities, yet it insists on viewing such processes and identities as place-based rather than mobile, uprooted or ‘travelling’” (Oakes and Schein, 20).

As we “dramatize water,” we become ever more cognizant of the fact that its use is always intertwined with the question of the porosity of borders or the lack of borders, as issues of privatization, distribution, and human rights begin to contest one another. How will this fundamental and essential human good be distributed across and within borders when the planetary climate systems pay no attention at all to the politics of borders?

Art Responds: Dramatizing Water

The Everyday

What might it mean, then, to examine and then to respond to contemporary water dilemmas as dramas of daily living, if water itself becomes an activated character in its own dramatization? There are, certainly, the diverse water stories of the everyday—across daily use, natural disasters, and landscape and urban spaces—that we learn about from the news, documentary films,^{xi} extended anthropological and scientific fieldwork,^{xii} travel, and a range of transnational academic and artistic networks and partnerships. In order to establish a framework for an anthropology of water in which it might become possible to intervene in the technology and culture of water in more reciprocal and sustainable ways, Ben Orlove and Steven Caton write that “[w]e propose to study water as a ‘total social fact’ (Mauss 1990)” (402) and describe a broad systems approach water as an engagement with “waterworlds” (Hastrup’s term, cited in Orlove and Caton: 403).

This approach to the “total social fact” of water informs a number of contemporary art practices. This type of dramatization that revolves around capturing *in situ* actions in photographs, installation works that invite audience interactions, video work that tracks the actions of ordinary people, or complex and beautiful movement pieces that render meditative engagement with water, or a range of dramas focused on bringing together lived experiences heightens perception and challenges our cognitive engagements with water. For example, in “Early Man at Ganga,” images of Delhi-based performance artist Inder Salim, Salim swims in the polluted and shrinking waters and removes garbage from the Ganges River. Japanese installation artist Ichi Ikeda, who has created more than forty of works on water in order to put in motion an extensive water network, recently completed a provocative work in Aso, Japan, “L-Shaped Walks of Peace,” a localized response to the March 11, 2011, earthquake, subsequent Tsunami, and disaster of a nuclear power generation in Fukushima. In Dublin, the 2011 Science Gallery exhibit “Future of Water,” “Water Catchers,” a video by Kay Westhues,

focuses on people who collect water from artesian wells in the Midwest of the United States. Two of Eiko and Koma's movement pieces, *River* (1995) and *Water* (2011), are profound site-based performance meditations on the power of water as elemental partner and the ways in which we are both in and of the landscape.

These works—all of which tap into the elemental—remind us of the stark and troubling contradictions of our current situation. At the same time they unsettle and reorganize our perceptual systems as they recalibrate our momentary, fleeting, and more persistent engagements with our “waterworlds.” Consequently, as we move toward a new performative cartography, the perceptual dynamics of these *in situ* actions accrue, predispose us to new forms of action, and, over time, lead to a deepening of the interactions between communities, water activists, policy-makers, scientists, and artists.

Ritual

Ritual is codified behavior that provokes the sacred or generates a secular experience of community. There are many ritual uses of water, from baptism in Christian Churches, the collection of water in India from nearby rivers to take in jars to Shiva's temple, to the protective rites of Tin Hau in Hong Kong, and MamiWata, the divinity of water in parts of western Africa. In a number of countries, there are water festivals such as Chaul Chnam Thmey (Cambodia), Songkran (Laos), Thingyan (Myanmar), Aluth Avurudda (Sri Lanka), Songkran (Thailand), and Puthandu (Mauritius, India, Malaysia, Singapore and India).

In my own performance work on water—influenced by the methodologies of Rudolf Laban, Anna Halprin, Augusto Boal, and *butoh*—my choreographic explorations veer toward the ritualistic. In “Hong Kong Water Works,” a dance piece shown at the 2010 Hong Kong-Shenzhen Biennale, for example, incorporated large puppets and short films of the front doors of the temples of Tin Hau, the sacred space of the sea goddess, as we performed in the developing space of the West Kowloon Cultural Center in a provisional pavilion next to the harbour that faces the laser-lit skyline of Central.

A 2011 dance film on water in Hong Kong—shot on top of a building in the village of Tai Po—shows dancers drifting along the crumbling roof top walls with fish bowls full of water that captured the upside down reflection of the Hong Kong building-scape. In this performance, touch acted as a method for tracing a kind of imaginal history of water that was conveyed in the setting of literal rooftops of Tai Po and metaphorical images of the upside down buildings in the fish bowls. The always developing cityscape has created its own stranglehold on itself, and, as we see in the last image of the film, a rusty water faucet against the skyline, it is running out on itself. These projects, as I seek to invoke a liminal space for water—at a threshold that launches the animate out of the inanimate—will ask “what ‘new body’ must we dance from and within order to recover our senses and re-enchant

our relationship to the built and natural environment, especially given the escalating array of water issues?

Theatre

Theatre provokes.^{xiii} It acts as a vehicle for carrying (cross) cultural stories and images and igniting the emotional spheres of one's lifeworld. One of the most significant dramas on water that provides a prototype for thinking through political dramas late Tamil playwright Komal Swaminathan's 1980 play *Thaneer Thaneer* (Water!), a work that investigates the impact of government apathy on a remote Tamil village that had been without water for five years. Already a successful play in the early 1980's, it was made into a film by the Tamil filmmaker K. Balachander. Significantly, in addition to the fact that the themes of the play are relevant today, the play is also being revived. The Madras Players, under the direction of Pennathur Ramakrishna, produced Subramanian Shankar's English translation in Chennai in late 2012. Swaminathan's daughter Lalitha Dharini plans to reform Swaminathan's theatre group, Stage Friends, and open the new season with a re-staging the original version of the play in the near future.

Swaminathan, one of the leading Indian dramatists of the 20th century, is most well-known for this play, and Subramanian Shankar's translation is a powerful rendition of the original play. The play was initially banned from production; it was very critical of both the Indian government and seemed to be calling for a revolution through the voice of one of the characters. After some modifications, the play was allowed to go forward. It has been published six times and has been performed over 250 times both on stage in Madras and in the surrounding villages. It has also led to activist work on the part of slum dwellers (Swaminathan/Shankar: 124).

When the story opens, we learn that for the villagers of Athipatti, who have been without access to water for five years, the seemingly simple request of "troubling" one of the villagers for water (as outlined in the opening epigraph above) is no simple matter. Although the villagers have already exhausted the usual governmental channels of appeal, they gain a temporary reprieve when Vellaisamy, a stranger, decides to stay in the village and help them find solutions to their water problems. First, Vellaisamy helps them build a water cart and purchase a bull that he then daily runs to the waterhole seven miles away. Later, Velusamy Naicker, a rich man from a neighboring village and a politician, who retaliates because of the lack of endorsement of the villagers, sends his men to rough up Vellaisamy while he is at the water hole and also destroy the cart and kill the bull. Meanwhile, the villagers have discovered that Vellaisamy is a fugitive murderer, but after a village council and vote they decide to maintain their allegiance because of the ways in which he has befriended the village. As a final option to solving the village's water problem, Vellaisamy organizes the village to start building their own canal. Just as the village readies to blow up the boulder

that stands in their way and that would reroute the water, both the police and engineers intervene. Vellaisamy—on the lam—dies in the desert.

The situation is dire. Shankar notes that two central figures attempt to defy the status quo. Vellaisamy is one of midnight's children, born on the eve of India's independence, and despite the fact that he is a fugitive from the law he plays the role of harbinger of new future. An ethics of the possible overrules the rule of the law of the status quo. Sevanthi is the village woman who gives Vellaisamy water when he arrives. She supports his effort to collect money to build a cart and buy a calf so he can go daily to get water for the village, and she later disavows her husband when he wants to take Vellaisamy in as a wanted fugitive.

Vellaisamy fails. He is after all a double criminal, as fugitive and as community leader who leads the village efforts to reroute the canal and to blow up the boulder in the stealth of night without proper permission. But we watch how the law fails the villagers. Because the village is rendered powerless three times: 1) through the first government appeal (before the play proper, 2) through the destruction of the cart and bull, and 3) through the stopping of the rerouting of the canal, we see the need drives the villagers and we see the consequences of acting outside the law. Though the play works to bring empathy and attention to the villagers, the play is already an inversion. Vellaisamy, who thinks he can use the tools of the master to shift the course of the river, must in the end fail. More engineering, in other words, may well not be the answer to the problems of lack of access to water.^{xiv}

Nirmal Selvamony notes the significance of *tinai* in early Tamil literature, and he writes:

The Tamil oikos, namely, an early Indian social order was based on five basic ecological regions: scrub, mountain, arid tracts, riverine plains, and the sea coast (*tolkaappiyam III.1*). Before the introduction of the caste system in India most parts of Indian society were ordered eco-regionally... Each of the eco-regions (oikoses) has its own water source. (89-90)

The inhabitants knew how to work with the water available. This practice of working with, that is in a form of common relation, lead to a deep bonding between water, the land and the humans in each region. This form of bonding is what Selvamony notes bioregionalists now urge when they emphasize the importance of "dwell[ing] in the land" (90). These modes of bonding, based on *tinai*, promoted bonding with water, which was seen not as an object manageable by scientific policy, but, instead, as spirit.

Selvamony tracks the ways in which the move to a colonial state lead to the destruction of the communally managed system to one run centrally and intervened in technologically.^{xv} As the modes of governance changed to a state structure, power had to be deployed to manage water which has led to a—deeply agonistic relationship (96).

Gender, race and ethnicity also play an important role in *Water!*. It is Sevanthi, a woman who has been walking the seven miles one way to get water; and, today, the burden of collecting water still falls on the women. Selvamony notes that “[e]ven water is casteized. The only well that with water in the village is in the *dalit* (untouchable) settlement...The ” caste Hindus” do not draw water from this well for fear of contamination (Cuvaaminaatan 27)” (98).

The “casteization” of water continues. The *Times of India* notes, for example, in a July 2011 article, that: “*Dalits* of Yanamalai Kodikulam village have been prevented from fetching water from a well by non-*dalits* to protect the 'sanctity' of the well. For decades, *dalits* of the village, have not been allowed to use the well, the only source of potable water in the village, about 12km from Madurai” (Ramanujam). Today, the water situation in India has continued to worsen; in the peak of summer the water shortage is so acute that there is a need to bring tankards into various regions and the violence is growing. People, as they rush toward the tankards, are killed. Clearly, the play, as it brings attention to “unserved and underserved” and the layers of uneven distribution of power and access, continues to reverberate beyond its historical moment both in India and elsewhere.

At the end of the play the journalist OV finishes his chronicle of what has happened to the villagers since Vellaisamy’s death. He notes:

And the questions in the minds of all these people: Will we never see better days? Are we not worthy of living? Will our condition never improve? Society must put a full stop to these question marks at once...Otherwise, the day will undoubtedly come when these marks of interrogation turn into marks of violence. (173)

OV speaks as a friend for the villagers from within the play, but he is also a double for Swaminathan and his own outcry against the injustice the socio-economic conditions that hold in place a perpetual lack of water, a lack that eventually destroys the village.

Those final cries of “Water!” are channeled through OV as a summative statement for the play’s storyline. Water, as materiality, means something different to the politician, the engineer, the villagers, and the fugitive. OV’s words arrive to us today belatedly, distant, too late for the villagers of Athipatti. We can only partially hear the last words of the play as the question marks they are before the “marks of violence” will erupt again, as they have in many places since the play’s inception. Water, though, is a key metonymy for the promise and failure of contemporary life and—as the title suggests—its rallying cry.

Re-Configuring the Water Drama

We need, at this moment in our globalized and local histories around water, to develop new theatrical practices, critical inquiry, and forms of cultural diplomacy

that attend to exchanges across a set of transnational pathways. Arjan Appadurai writes that "The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (31) and imagination must, therefore, interact always with the rapidly changing cultural, political, and global flux caused by technology, capitalism, and the movement of people, ideas, money, and products. Rather than map "water" as some measurable indicator of a specific nation state, we can, instead, map the flows, migrations, crossings, and cultural exchanges at work, and then find ways to give body to these emerging story-maps in performances both onstage and in everyday life.

Given these transnational flows, there are pressing questions regarding the emergence of an alternative and more sustainable performative cartography of water. Erika Fisher-Lichte notes:

"The interweaving of cultures in performances quite often creates an innovative performance aesthetic, which establishes and gives shape to new collaborative policies in society. It probes the emergence, stabilization, and de-stabilization of cultural identity. Here, the aesthetic and the political merge" (400).

What does it mean to affiliate, or even to intervene, in the context of the translocal—as a stranger, as an artist-academic-activist, as friend? It is not enough to argue for new relationships with our local spheres of water alone; we must also generate translocal points of contact across communities and regions.

Dramatizing water—in the everyday, through ritual, and through staged performance—provides a constellation for building transnational intercessions around our many stories of water, as the problems we face with water are certainly not bound by the space of the nation-state. This type of exchange, although often fraught with the historical and geographical incommensurabilities, triggers new forms of cross-disciplinary sharing on water issues and artistic practices. We need different maps, networks of artistic and community action, ways of speaking, and a new set of friendships. As we learn, again, how to become the friend of water, we will develop new forms of working-with that will offer a different relationship between art, science, policy, and religion that will, in turn, co-create more sustainable spaces of water practices.

Notes

ⁱ For more on pertinent conversations regarding the performance of science, see Sue Ellen-Case's *Performing Science and the Virtual* and Bruno Latour's *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*.

ⁱⁱ http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_milestones.pdf, p.3, accessed June 12, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf, Accessed June 10, 2013.

^{iv} <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/>, Accessed June 10, 2013.

^v <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/women/>, Accessed June 10, 2013.

^{vi} <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/private-vs-public/>, Accessed June 13, 2013.

^{vii} There is a developed body of theory and practice on the intersection of visual art and the environment as well as environmental humanities. The field of eco-performance (Theresa Mays, UnaChaudurai, Downing Cless, Wendy Arons, Downing Cless, Baz Kershaw, Nirmal Selvamony) is still emerging. Less, however, has been written on water and the arts. David Clark's *Water and Art*, seminal in this area, makes scattered references to examples of the intersection of water and performance.

^{viii} Numerous works chronicle the divide between the global economy, the technical, and the religious and its disastrous consequences. See for example Vandana Shiva's *Water Wars*, David Haberman's *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India*, and Richard Foltz's *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*.

^{ix} "Lines of flight" derives from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. For more see *A Thousand Plateaus*.

^x For more on how I am developing the terminology of the "translocal" in relation to tracking alternative histories and the emergence of forms of performance-based transdisciplinary practices, please see my forthcoming work, *Transnational Avant-Garde Asian Performance Histories* (with Iris Tuan) and *Dramatizing Water: Performance, Science, and the Transnational*.

^{xi} Examples of films include: *Blue Gold: World Water Wars*, *Flow*, *Poisoned Water*. See also film shorts at: <http://waterfortheages.org/water-films/>.

^{xii} See, for example, Lyla Mehta's *The Politics and Poetics of Water: Naturalising Scarcity in Western India*.

^{xiii} There are a number of provocative dramas on water: 1) David Diamond's Vancouver based *Headlines Theatre*, which draws on the approaches of Theatre of the Oppressed and Legislative Theatre, created *THIR\$TY*, a 2002 dance/theatre work that used a fifty foot pool of water as its setting and addressed the privatization of water. 2) In March 2013, at the Greer Garson Theatre at Santa Fe University, a documentary theatre work "Cold Water" (March 2013), directed by Victor Talmadge, based on interviews and found material, charts the story of the village of Aqua Fria, N.M., and their struggle to survive without sufficient water. 3) "Water Ways," by the Cleveland Public Theatre (2013) directed by CPT directors Raymond Bobgan and Chris Seibert, is a devised theatre that uses a range of multi-media approaches to engage audiences in poetic, associative, and non-linear explorations of who owns the water and what happens when the new well just dug up turns out to be dry.

^{xiv} In a personal interview with Nirmal Selvamony, November 2011, he notes that the play is deeply indicative of the Tamil environmental ethos. Nevertheless, he is under-convinced by Swaminathan's consideration of Vellaisamy's way out is through the use of more engineering.

^{xv} The work has been extensively examined in a number of important works, including, for example, Vandana Shiva's *Water Wars*.

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'All the world's a stage and I'm a genius in it': Creative Benefits of Writers' Identification with the Figure of Artistic Genius

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the romantic notion of artistic genius and its operations as a kind of theatrical script functionally guiding many writers' lives and approaches to their creations. In recent years, the concept has been justly deconstructed as heavily gendered and providing an inadequate representation of actual creative processes. Nevertheless, what these studies of genius have often overlooked are the manifold functions the genius ideology has traditionally fulfilled for artists and society at large. To illustrate this, the article focuses specifically on the complex and often beneficial interaction arising from authors' self-identification with the genius role and their negotiation of the creative process. A plea will be made for taking seriously the limitations of the genius script while at the same time trying to save-guard its valuable influence on creative writers' artistic performance.

Introduction

Over the past decades the notion of artistic genius, referring to 'an exceptionally intelligent or able person' (Pearsall) usually in possession of 'exceptional intellectual or creative power or other natural ability' (Pearsall), has come under heavy scrutiny. While previously the romantic concept had done much to inform analyses and celebrations of human creativity (Galton; Young; Kant), it has become the focus of rigid deconstructions from numerous fields, including feminist aesthetics and creativity studies, to name only a few.

As to the former, scholars such as Christine Battersby and Carol Korsmeyer in their respective works *Gender and Genius - Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* and *Gender and Aesthetics* have made it clear that the seemingly neutral concept of genius is, in fact, deeply gendered. Ever since the term's first usage in ancient Rome in order to refer to a spirit of masculinity and the male seed (Nitzsche 20), up to notorious treatises like *Sex and Character* by Otto Weininger who considers genius an exclusively masculine property (115), the concept's has been skewed towards connotations of maleness. As a result, it is not surprising that, with the exception of a few token female 'geniuses' like Virginia Woolf or George Eliot, the accolade has been applied almost exclusively to men.

With regard to creativity studies, the works by scholars such as Margaret Boden, Robert Weisberg, Michael Howe and Susan Kolodny (among others) have done much to deconstruct traditional views of creativity as related to some mysterious, innate gifts. Rather, several areas of creativity studies have tended towards highlighting a profound interconnection between creative achievement and training (Howe, Gladwell), as well as learnable skills. Among these - for reasons detailed elsewhere (Chibici-Revneanu) - the features of tolerance of regression (Kolodny 39), self-efficacy (Bandura), internal motivation (Amabile) and persistence (Lerner 35) appear to be of particular relevance to the development of creative writers.

These deconstructions may be considered potentially enabling to male and female creators discouraged by the fatalistic implications of an ideology that celebrates only a few individuals supposed to have been born with a special ability. Nevertheless, this article will argue that one has to be careful not to simply wipe the genius script from our thinking about creativity before analysing the multiple functions it has often fulfilled for society in general and artists in particular.

In order to understand these operations, it will be helpful to turn towards some basic concepts of performance studies to illustrate how the notion of genius has acted as a kind of implicit theatrical script inspiring and guiding the professional part many artists choose to play. It will be argued that the genius role has often acted as a source of self-identification, thus - somewhat paradoxically - enhancing the very elements of tolerance of regression, self-efficacy, internal motivation and persistence previously mentioned as playing a key role in creative development. Consequently, it seems crucial to deal with the genius script carefully - safe-guarding what has worked for many artists and discarding its potentially negative elements.

As implied, the present inquiry will limit its focus to the effect of genius on creative writers, as it strikes me of particular interest to see how those involved in the creation of stories and reliant on empathy with fictional characters also often cling to stories and their protagonists in order to explain themselves and their profession. Also, given that the phenomenon of genius has been dealt with from within many different fields, the approach to the matter at hand will be interdisciplinary, drawing from such diverse fields as performance studies, aesthetics, creativity studies and creative writing studies. Throughout this article, reference will also be made to observations by historical and contemporary writers. To complement these, I will also draw on a series of qualitative interviews about the genius notion and the creative process I conducted with writers from varied nationalities in 2008. I will only quote those observations relevant to an illustration of this article's primary concerns. As the writers questioned chose to remain anonymous, I will refer to them by their initials.

To stress the heterogeneous nature of writer's role-playing relationship with the genius part I have furthermore decided to use the terminology of performing,

acting, identification etc. with deliberate vagueness. I do not believe that such an individualised relationship to the genius script can or indeed should be described with more precision.

There are evident limits to the present discussion. First of all, due to the brief extent of this article, the presentation and analysis of all elements illustrating the complex interaction with the creative process of writers will be rather general and concise. Also, whereas the genius notion and its related idea of innate talent continue to play a crucial role in many writers' lives, it would be absurd to suppose that every literary creator bases his or her sense of identity on the concept of genius. Not only may they rely on no such fictional part at all; one may also argue that there are other, powerful scripts which seem to guide many role performances within the art world. Without being able to presently discuss the matter in detail, the common story-pattern of writers who, J.K. Rowling-like achieve immense riches through market-success, for instance, also appears to have a significant hold over many writers' imagination.

Also, it is important to highlight that an author's identification with the genius role may only be regarded as beneficial if it is of a limited kind. In other words, and as we shall return to, its effective interaction with the creative process seems to rely on the writer playing the part of genius, believing his or her role, yet at the same time being able to distance him or herself from it.

The subsequent discussion, then, does not strive to be exhaustive. Above all, it wants to demonstrate the overall power genius has on writers' 'performance' – understanding the latter both as self-affirming creative interventions that make-up the literary process and creative achievement.

2. Casting: Protagonist needed for 'The Genius: From Suffering to Fame.'

Reviewing some of the main trends of the field of performance studies, Richard Schechner exposes the theatrical nature of every-day life and the way much of our sense of identity and many of our social interactions rely on role identification and performance (Pos 1287-1292). At the same time, he also points to the multiple functions performances tend to have in our social and individual lives, summing these up as 'to entertain, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade, to deal with the sacred and the demonic.' (Pos 1852-1857)

Looking closely at the concept of genius, it becomes evident that this romantic ideology has, in fact, been tied up with all of the functions Schechner outlines. Nonetheless, this cannot be made fully explicit until we have not exposed the profoundly narrative nature of the genius idea. Arising, as mentioned, in ancient Rome; becoming a male allegorical figure often associated with (pro-) creation in medieval literature (Nitzsche 24, 25); and eventually taking on its notions of outstanding talent and acts of innovation during (early) Romanticism

(Young; Kant), the idea appears to have gradually evolved into a fully formed story pattern or script, with its starring hero of outstanding cultural achievement.

The plot seems to be structured around a path from tragedy to triumph. A lonely creator figure fights many obstacles such as poverty and artistic rejection (among others), to be finally rewarded with a kind of secular immortality in the form of fame. To cite Arthur Schopenhauer, a crucial influence on genius: 'The most excellent works...must always remain sealed books to the dull majority of men' (*World as Will*²³⁴). Hence, the artist: 'comes to think more about posterity than about contemporaries; because...time will gradually bring the discerning few who can appreciate him' (*Art of Literature*).

As to the protagonist of this plot, one may – on the whole – describe 'him' as outstandingly talented, often mysteriously inspired and mentally unstable, as well as deeply driven not by hopes of market success but (to refer to Immanuel Kant, one of the most significant writers on genius) the creation of art 'without ulterior regard to any other end, and yet with a feeling of satisfaction and stimulation (independent of reward)' (185).

There is, unfortunately, no space to provide a detailed analysis of this narrative pattern's multiple operations among artists and the art world in general. Still, its adherence to Schechner's functions may be pointed out very superficially, at the very least in order to stress the need for further research on the matter.

There may be little doubt, then, that artists historically regarded as geniuses such as Mozart, Shakespeare or Tyāgarāja have been celebrated for providing the world with beauty, entertainment, and teaching. 'Geniuses', so often cited (like Goethe for Germany, Cervantes for Spain, etc.) as national heroes, clearly also serve to enhance community cohesion. They may not directly heal, but scholars have associated the genius figure with a means of escaping modernity's growing feeling of alienation (Curie 108). Moreover, in the frequent association of genius with divine inspiration, as well as the historical belief that some artists (like Paganini or Liszt) obtained their gift by selling their soul to the devil, we can also observe how the genius concept has been tied up with matters of the sacred and demonic. (In fact, for a long time the word 'genius' was also connected with both angelical and demonic beings influenced by the Greek concept of 'daimon', Nietzsche 24, 25). Most significantly for our present purpose, however, is the operation of the genius script as a form of marking and changing artists' identity.

In the following discussion, we shall come across numerous examples of authors using elements of the genius script's main character and plot as a form of self-identification, an overall guide to what to expect from and how to perform one's authorial role. As implied, this does neither mean that all writers demonstrate such a self-identification nor that they all display it in the same manner. The existence of a vast array of differences, while impossible to be fully teased out here, needs to be perpetually born in mind.

3. The importance of being 'a genius'

Once, during the previously mentioned interviews, a young, male writer explained to me how, as a young adolescent 'At the back of one's mind, the "great writer" is born, and from now on you'll see yourself in this way and you'll try to write on and get better' (Interview M.Z.). Similarly, the novelist Truman Capote recounts how, as a pre-adolescent boy he had his I.Q. tested and

came home a genius, so proclaimed by science. ...I was exceedingly pleased – went around staring at myself in mirrors and sucking in my cheeks and thinking over in my mind, my lad, you and Flaubert...I began writing in fearful earnest' (22).

In both cases, we can observe how two men, in their early youth, cast themselves for the role of 'eminent' writer or genius and how this helped to push them towards a more active engagement with their writing ('in fearful earnest') and career.

What I aim to illustrate during this section is precisely the extent to which such a positive identification with the genius part may be seen as having a beneficial effect on creation, through an interaction with creativity-enhancing elements such as acceptance of regression, self-efficacy, internal motivation and persistence. Still, before looking at all these possible advantages, it is crucial to turn towards some significant reservations.

Above all, one needs to bear in mind the previously outlined fact that the genius script has been profoundly gendered and thus tended towards casting men for its leading role. While this, as we shall see, has not kept women from identifying with this part, it has surely made the role interpretation and performance far more complicated for females. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Chibici-Revneanu), the genius script may have been implicated in the very oppression of many female artists. Therefore, if I am nevertheless arguing for a consideration of its manifold functions, it is evidently *not* to perpetuate its potentially sexist operations. Rather, as stated, I am pleading for a complex cultural engagement with what has worked about the genius script while at the same time taking very seriously what has been shown to be harmful and misleading about it.

In addition to these 'gender reservations', some scholars have also addressed other potential risks of authors' self-identification with the genius figure. One example of this is the theorist on writing Eviatar Zerubavel who advises in his book *The Clockwork Muse* that it is fundamental for authors to let go of all romantic ideas about the creative process which the notion of genius, of course, epitomizes (Zerubavel 310). For the scholar, this admonition is principally related to beliefs of mysterious inspiration so central to the genius ideology. According to him:

the common Romantic image of the bohemian writer who forgoes structure in order to accommodate essentially unscheduled outbursts of creative energy...is a rather dangerous myth, since it might lead you to willingly relinquish much of the control you can have over your writing by opting to rely on some mysterious and rather capricious 'muse'. (Zerubavel 311)

In other words, instead of working hard at their craft, authors may start relying on irregular out-bursts which may hinder steady creative development.

From a different angle, the psycho-analyst Susan Kolodny also warns against too strong an identification with the genius-figures and the association with mental instability this, sometimes, implies. As she observes in her work *The Captive Muse*, writers need to realise that leaving their psychological issues untreated because they consider these an integral part of their artistic gift is a serious error, as psychological problems often severely interfere with (rather than enhance) writers' ability to work (102).

Both Zerubavel's and Kolodny's observations need to be taken seriously; they crucially emphasise the previously implied fact that in order for a performance of the genius role to be beneficial, it needs to be of a limited kind. At the same time, however, it is also of paramount importance to become fully aware of the significant advantages to be derived from a writer's decision to act the starring role in an enactment of society's traditional performance of the 'genius play'.

To illustrate this, let us stick for a moment longer to the work by Susan Kolodny. In her exploration of helps and hindrances of the creative process, Kolodny also highlights that much creative work, especially writing, involves experiences of psychological regression. Authors may experience these as a loss of conscious control, hence 'find frightening, and so avoid' (39). Now, this may already point towards one advantage of an author's identification with the genius role. For the romantic script's emphasis on inexplicable inspiration (arguably the very reliance on a 'capricious "muse"' Zerubavel warns against) can be seen as preparing some authors for an acceptance and tolerance of these regressive states.

This may be manifested through a successful female novelist, D.A., who – despite the male gendering of the genius part – identifies herself very strongly with this role. Interestingly, in her case, this also leads to what may be called her 'proud tolerance' of regressive states involved in creative writing. As she explained during an interview:

When I sit down to write I write. I don't need an idea. I don't need a synopsis, a plan of characters. I just need a plot and to start. The story happens as I start to write. Quite weird...Usually I know where to end. But I don't have a clue about the path I got to walk in between those points. And that's the fun of it all. Characters present themselves to me in the middle of

the way, like they always meant to be there: 'Hey, don't you forget to mention me. I'll be useful.' (Interview D.A.).

Here then, we already have an instance of how an identification with the role of the mysteriously inspired creator may assist rather than block the creative process. Instead of being scared away by the occurrence of regressive states, this writer comes to interpret them as 'the fun of it all'.

Let us now turn towards the interconnection between an adoption of the genius role, creativity and self-efficacy. Defining the latter as 'people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance'(1), Albert Bandura explains how people's strong belief in their ability tends to have a dramatic effect on their capacity to handle challenges, maintain an intrinsic commitment and stick to their goals even in the face of 'failures and setbacks' (1). Interestingly, Bandura even goes so far as to regard idealised visions of one's self as potentially beneficial, for: 'If efficacy beliefs always reflected only what people can do routinely they would rarely fail but they would not set aspirations beyond their immediate reach nor mount the extra effort needed to surpass their ordinary performances' (5).

This becomes relevant to our present discussion in numerous ways. Firstly, given the fact that writing, for instance, a novel may be deemed an extremely challenging and strenuous task, we can see how profoundly authors may benefit from a high-level of self-efficacy. Secondly, for several writers, a strong self-belief can be directly correlated to a positive identification with the genius role. After all, regarding oneself as a possible genius implies precisely the kind of self-overestimation that may actually mobilise (as we have seen in the case of Capote and the young writer M.Z.) hitherto untapped energies. As the young writer M.Z. further explained, without 'this image of yourself as a great author at the back of your mind...you are unlikely to write novels containing hundreds of pages' (Interview M.Z.). Acting the role of genius, then, seems to potentially enable some authors to 'surpass their ordinary' life and writing 'performance'.

Let us look in somewhat more detail at the features of internal motivation and persistence. As to the former, the creativity scholar Teresa Amabile outlines the positive correlation between internal motivation - the wish to engage in artistic work because of one's love and profound interest in it - and creative success. Although she also presents some exceptions to this rule, she stresses how motivation of an intrinsic kind tends to be highly conducive to increased levels of creativity. At the same time, a focus on external aspects is supposed to lead to a decrease in creativity and hence - implicitly - also the quality of works produced (31).

With regard to persistence, numerous voices have begun to emphasise the important role of this psychological feature for creative success and development. As the editor-gone-agent Betsey Lerner observes in her book *The Forest for the*

Trees – An Editor’s Advice for Writers: ‘I won’t say there is no such thing as a natural talent, but after working with many authors over the years, I can offer a few observations...the degree of one’s perseverance is the best predictor of success’ (35). Hence, sheer resilience and ‘staying power’ seems to be one of the most decisive factors between a writer ‘making it’ or not.

If we have already seen how a potentially genius-promoted self-efficacy may positively interact with both authors’ internal motivation and sense of persistence, it is now crucial to show how the power of the genius ideology goes still further than this. To do so, let us briefly remember Kant’s declaration that the kind of art produced by geniuses must be created ‘with a feeling of satisfaction and stimulation (independent of reward)’ (185). Here, the philosopher actually appears to provide a kind of ‘declaration of internal motivation’ worth considering as a creativity-enhancing bonus for all those interested in the genius-self-identification package.

To provide an example of this, let us cite novelist Orhan Pamuk’s decision to ‘dedicate myself to art without expecting anything in return,’ which seemed to have helped him when he ‘lacked confidence and had doubts about my future as a writer’ and ‘to bolster my resolve’ (ix). Here, then, we may again suspect the potential benefits of an identification with a protagonist at work whose life is supposed to involve around ‘his’ perpetual engagement with ‘his’ art, without the expectation of external rewards.

This also leads us to the specific interaction of the genius role and plot with the feature of persistence. It has been briefly mentioned that there appears to be a common ‘rival’ script available for writers – an alternative plot focusing on a story of hard-work and market success. Yet, quite apart from the fact that one evidently stresses an internal the other an external form of motivation, what can be said for both ideologies’ interaction with persistence?

Whereas a self-identification with the story-line of achieving immediate fame and riches through writing may provide a strong pull for potential creators to begin with, it also strikes one as particularly fragile and difficult to sustain. For, ultimately, only very few authors get anywhere close to J.K. Rowling’s legendary success. Rather, as Dag Björkegren explains in his work, *The Culture Business*: ‘The odds are almost a hundred to one against the publication of unsolicited manuscripts, with which the major publishing houses are inundated’ (52). Thus, not only the achievement of great financial success, even the mere publication of a written work is a highly difficult and even - to an extent - unlikely event. As a result, writers aligned with this script may easily become discouraged and give up.

The effects of a personal endorsement of the genius script may be regarded as remarkably different. We have already seen that a ‘true’ artist is supposed to create without any hope of external rewards (at least, during his or her lifetime). Rather, the genius plot promises nothing more than the somewhat dreary prospect of a creator living in potential poverty, possibly bombarded with rejection and

plagued by mental instability, to be rewarded with immortality through fame after his or her death. Now - as bizarre as this claim may at first sound - a partial or full adoption of this ideology may work wonders for authors' creative staying power. As Mexican writer Rosario Castellano emphasises in her novel *Album de familia*: 'There is one defense against failure; the certainty that it is unjust and that posterity will rectify the error' (48, my translation).

Of course, one may object that eventual genius status is even more difficult to achieve than vast financial success, and that the genius script therefore helps to perpetuate a system of self-deception and exploitation. While this may be partly true, it also misses the main point that the kind of stamina and ability to deal with rejections a personal alignment with the genius role may facilitate might well become the decisive factor for an author's eventual success. Furthermore, while many artists would agree that their career choice often involves sacrifices of a financial kind, there tend to be enormous advantages to be gained from performing in a social play that grants a potentially metaphysical meaning to one's work and existence.

In fact, at this stage we may return to our previous observations about Schnechner's multiple functions of performances in society and the way the genius script can be related to all of these. Acting the genius role, authors may benefit from following a life-path characterised by spirituality, a potential psychological defense against alienation, and a profound sense of doing something special, with meaning.

In his work on C.G. Jung, psychoanalyst Anthony Storr writes about Jung's conclusion that everyone possesses their own 'delusional system,' although he did not use this terminology. He would rather have said that every man needs a myth by which to live, and that if he does not appear to possess one, he is either unconscious of it, or else sadly alienated from the roots of his being.' (34).

I consider this is one of the key gifts performing the genius part may provide for many creative writers: they obtain 'permission' to rehearse, act and create within a 'delusional system', a make-belief world which allows them to thrive.

4. Conclusion

In the course of this article, we have thus looked at the notion of genius and shown how it operates as a powerful cultural script interfering with many writers' performance - both their level of achievement and the way they engage with the creative process. By necessity, the discussion of many profound and complex issues has been confined to rather general observations. I nonetheless hope that I have drawn attention to the risk of simply throwing out the genius story from our stock of cultural scripts, removing this plot and role pattern from those available for writers and other artists.

It has been illustrated that the interaction of the genius idea with reality is highly complex. On the one hand, the concept of genius misrepresents the creative process and perpetuates some profoundly gendered ideas. On the other, it has been manifested as potentially interacting very positively with a number of elements (such as tolerance of regression, self-efficacy, internal motivation and persistence) associated with a successful engagement with creative writing.

Personally, I believe it is time to promote a re-working of the genius script to become more inclusive, not only in terms of gender, but also class and 'race'. After all, genius has not only been predominantly associated with men, but also with the European, white, upper and middle classes. Also, to stick to this article's overall theatre metaphor, I feel that many advantages of the genius script can be preserved by promoting writers' engagement with it in a Brechtian, rather than a Stanislavskian manner. Instead of letting themselves fully fall into their part, it strikes me as healthier and more effective for writers to access the genius role and plot as a significant act of distanced make-belief. Alternatively, I call for writers and other actors of the art-world to create new scripts for self-identification; narratives that may capture and promote highly positive elements of genius, yet allow for both men and women, blacks and whites, to stand an equal chance of casting themselves or being cast for their lead roles.

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Was Shakespeare an Existential Wimp?

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In this paper I discuss the way in which Shakespeare explores the implications of such human traits as lust, greed and envy. The acts of violence we perpetrate upon ourselves and one another indicate that there may be no guarantees of benevolent human action. I will look at “*Measure for Measure*” and “*The Merchant of Venice*”, these two plays seem to me to address the problem of benevolent human action at a more complex level than many of Shakespeare's other plays. Further, many performance studies address how the audience feels 'during' the performance, this essay addresses how the audience feels when 'leaving' the theatre.

Before discussing the plays in detail it is necessary to briefly define what we mean by benevolent human action. Benevolent means, “to do good without thought of profit”. This implies selflessness in the one being benevolent. It is my belief that there is no such thing as, purely, benevolent human action. There is always a self-interest motive, generally unconscious, behind all human actions. This idea, as theory, was expounded by Hobbes in “*The Leviathan*”, and as the discipline of Evolutionary Psychology matures, the idea becomes more and more compelling (see works by E.O Wilson, J. Diamond, D. Dennett and R. Dawkins).

The ideology of Christianity, underpinned by Platonism (eternal “Form of the Good”), would argue strongly against this position. However, I wonder how many people would perform benevolent Christian acts of goodness if they believed there was no reward. The reward of course is *survival* of the individual, either immediate or for eternity (everlasting life).

In both the plays under discussion Shakespeare devised closures which seem to indicate that there *is* a guarantee of benevolent human action. “*Measure for Measure*” ends with the various couples getting together “nicely”. “*The Merchant of Venice*” ends with justice *seeming* to be done, and the couples getting together, again in Mills and Boon style. I would charge Shakespeare with being an “existential wimp”, no less a genius for this though. Calling these *saccharine* sweet closures, comic, only gives my claim more validity. Shakespeare juxtaposes comic and tragic action to give the audience, and perhaps himself, some emotional relief when the going gets too heavy. For me, all is not well that ends well. Life experiences and history show us, if we have the fortitude to look honestly, that life rarely ends as Shakespeare would like us to believe.

Sartre and Brecht, like Shakespeare, explore greed, manipulation, survival and such but do not let us leave the theatre with a “nice, warm, fuzzy feeling”, they force us to leave with the blood on *our* hands. This does not make for vastly popular theatre though, perhaps Shakespeare's genius was, that by

giving the audience a happy or justified ending, he ensured the continuing popularity of his works.

It is argued that myths and fairy-tales allow us to venture into chthonian realms and experience vicariously the dangers that threaten our survival. Similarly Shakespeare's plays, like the myths he used as source material, allow us to experience these human *sins* (?) that are latent in us all. When we leave the theatre, Shakespeare wants us to do so feeling that our sins may be forgiven and that we subliminally accept the puerile, subservience required of us by a Christian monarchy that is his underlying ideology.

It is important for this discussion to understand Shakespeare's ideology, because traits such as, greed, pride and so on which are considered simply aspects of human character from an Eastern perspective, are sins from a Christian perspective. As Nosworthy points out St. Luke's Gospel 6.36-42. is present in a number of Shakespeare's plays and is the main source for "*Measure for Measure*" (Nosworthy 1969. p.25-26).

In "*Measure for Measure*" two characters, Isabella and Angelo, stand out as being the most *sinful* and who also have the greatest opportunity of being benevolent. The Duke's pride prevents him from being a good leader so to retain his good image with the Vendettas he entrusts Angelo with absolute power. Angelo is to rid the city of fornication and selects Claudio to make an example of. Angelo's adherence to the letter of the law. This makes his later crimes even more abhorrent. He is not only overcome by lust for Isabella: he commits the same crime for which he has condemned Claudio; he is willing to kill a man if his lust is not satisfied; he is willing to "deflower" a virgin attached to a religious order; and he attempts to satisfy his lust by coercion, as Trigg mentions this would legally be rape (Trigg. 1990. p.73). At no time does Angelo show benevolence towards Claudio nor to Isabella, whom he purports to love (after meeting her for a few minutes).

Through the swapping tricks, Mariana for Isabella and a pirate's head for Claudio's, some of Angelo's crimes in the end were not really committed. However, when Angelo confessed his sins, "But let my trial be mine own confession/Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death" he did not know of these tricks. So in intent and thought, and I would add in the eyes of God, he committed them all. So Shakespeare, echoing Christ, forgives Angelo and expects his audience to do the same. This play would be a travesty for a Muslim or a Jew as both these faiths require, not a confession but, "an eye for an eye..."

Isabella's actions are somewhat more complex than Angelo's. Her refusal to yield to Angelo's demands, on religious chastity grounds, has been the subject of much debate. As Nosworthy shows, she really did not have a choice, mere physical death is a trifle compared to eternal damnation (Nosworthy 1969. pp.30-31). This argument holds only if Isabella is absolutely devoted to the "Order of Saint Clare", which as we find out in the final scene, to our horror, she is not. Isabella drops her self-obsessed "holier than thou" chastity routine, backs out of her marriage to Christ to marry the Duke, allowing her own brother to die. Because it suited her self-interest, at the time,

shows that there really are no guarantees of benevolent human action. Similarly, Isabella is subjected to Claudio's self-interest and greed when he cares not for his sister's dilemma but only for his own life.

Isabella pleads for Angelo's life by insisting that, "His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,/And must be buried but as an intent/That perished by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,/Intentions but merely thoughts". This, coming from a supposedly religious novice is bizarre, impure thoughts are "as subjects" in Christ's (God's) eyes. Further, Isabella helped the Duke set-up Angelo for her supposed own rape, on the very weak grounds that Mariana was already betrothed to Angelo. Fie, Fie, Isabella is an evil self-serving character!

Shakespeare cleverly explores the way lust, greed and pride interact and drive humans to act in hypo-critical, self-serving and non benevolent ways. However, having exposed these human *sins* he then contradicts existential reality's non-benevolence with the incongruous, over benevolence of the play's closure. Even though Shakespeare had to be mindful of heresy both in regard to the Church and the Monarchy this play could have ended very differently. The final scene at best weakened his exposé of lust and greed and at worst rendered it ineffectual.

Turning now to "*The Merchant of Venice*" we find two similarities. Both plays have nice, respectable endings and both use a rather weak scheme to turn the plot around: condoning the fornication with Mariana because she was already Angelo's; and the legal point of law regarding the "pound of flesh". For me "*The Merchant of Venice*" is one of Shakespeare's most enjoyable plays but more importantly, I believe it is a literary work of great significance. This play deals with a fundamental issue that underpins the last two thousand years of Western civilisation, that is, the antagonism between Jew and Gentile. This conflict between the Old Law and the new is far more complex than that of a dispossessed people and a difference about religion.

Shakespeare had no knowledge of what would happen in the twentieth century regarding the Holocaust; as Code notes there were very few Jews in England in the sixteenth century and Shakespeare probably never met one (Code. 1990. p.27). This makes Shakespeare's ability to tap into and explore human character all the more profound, though not necessarily desirable. Not having personal connections with a particular group of people nor individuals within the group is the perfect prerequisite for upholding a received stereotypical image.

Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock not only continues the Jew stereotype but helps **recreate** it for future generations. As the dominant plot of the play it is a vehicle for Christian propaganda. In "*Measure for Measure*" Christian ideology is rather subtle and covert, emphasising the gentle side of Christianity, meekness and loving your enemy. In "*The Merchant of Venice*" the blatant hypocrisy of Christianity is overtly evident. The hypocrisy involves on the one hand, forgiving your enemy, on the other, killing or punishing them if they transgress or will not accept Christianity's doctrines.

In this play Shakespeare explores hatred, pride and mercy specifically. Although the Princes of Morocco and Aragon lust after Portia it is a very controlled, proper lust. When they fail to solve the casket riddle they just leave without a fuss. Portia is the dignified, *correct* lady, exhibiting none of the strumpet like lust of Cleopatra nor the manipulative lust of Angelo. Portia's romantic subplot enables Shakespeare to focus on the intransigent non benevolence of Shylock.

Gratiano virtually pleads with Shylock to show mercy, "Can no prayers pierce thee?" And The Duke, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" The Duke, Bassanio, Antonio and Gratiano seem to represent all the good things of Christianity. However, the hypocritical Shakespeare shows Shylock absolutely no mercy nor benevolence. Shylock is made a scapegoat upon which the "squeaky clean", both psychologically and physically, Christians may vent their collectively suppressed hatred.

Shylock is no less hateful though, throughout the play at every opportunity he expresses his hatred for Christians, "I hate him for he is a Christian", "...but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you". When Warren Mitchell in the BBC production of the play says these lines, they take on an added vitriolic power and hatred that chills the audience to the bone.

Power issues are not overtly prominent in this play, the control of Portia's future by the father's casket test and even Jessica's oppression by Shylock are minor issues. The major covert business of Shakespeare is to strip Shylock of all power, to make him physically (financially) powerless and to psychologically obliterate his Jewishness. In the court scene as part of Shylock's sentence, Antonio insists that, "He presently (instantly) become a Christian". Forcing a person, by law, to adopt a religious belief contrary to their wishes is itself a most heinous crime.

When Portia, as a male, says: "The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.'/ Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh /But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed/One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods/Are by the laws of Venice confiscate".

Shylock is further psychologically defeated. Because Shylock's whole "merciless Business" is based on his professed but obviously insincere adherence to the letter of the law. After he realises he is beaten, he says he will accept the offer of thrice the amount due, after refusal of this, he then says, he will be content with the principal only. This grasping at any payment shows Shylock to be motivated by greed, not simply adherence to the law.

The final annihilation of Shylock is when half the money is directed by Antonio to Jessica and Lorenzo. This finalises the loss of power of father over daughter which started when Jessica left home (with Shylock's jewels).

After the minor subplot, of giving away then regaining the betrothal rings, everyone pairs off and all are happy. All except the "evil" Jew who has been persecuted by Christian hypocrisy. Whether Shylock's actions are right or

wrong is not really the issue, the play portrays him as an evil sinner and shows him none of the benevolence that “*Measure for Measure*” bestows on Angelo, Claudio or Juliet.

“*The Merchant of Venice*” highlights a further Christian dichotomy between homosexuality/transvestism and “proper” heterosexual betrothal and marriage. As Jardine explains, boys played the female roles in all Elizabethan theatre (Jardine, 1983, p.9). This is not unusual in itself as this practice is widespread in India, Asia and Japan. However, the “friendship” between Bassanio and Antonio is a little too perfect for me. Antonio is smitten by Bassanio and will do anything for him, include die if necessary. This is perhaps the only instance in the main part of the plays where a degree of benevolence is guaranteed, however, Antonio is only benevolent to Bassanio because he loves him.

Bassanio gives “the learned doctor” Portia's ring for saving Antonio, then when he later recovers the ring and learns Portia was the “androgynous” doctor he says, “Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow./When I am absent then be with my wife”. This latter part of the last scene is riddled with *high camp* sexual innuendo and double entendre mixed with sexual power games. As Paglia insists, “Every gesture of love is an assertion of power. There is no selflessness or self-sacrifice, only refinement of domination” (Paglia, 1990. p.274). Although these two plays have none of the bloody, murderous action of Hamlet and Macbeth, they explore the more subtle ways greed, lust and hatred drive humans to action. The closures of both plays lull us into believing that we can rely on human benevolence, even though this theatrical licence denies existential reality and contradicts the main action of the plays.

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Performing “Fine Arts”: Dance as a Source of Inspiration in Impressionism

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Abstract

The proposed article aims to highlight the importance of the most significant performing art which, according to the author's opinion, is dance, in influencing one of the most magnificent movements in world art history: Impressionism. Through an diachronic and deep cut in time, namely, the last decades of the nineteenth century France, a period commonly known as *fin de siècle*, this article attempts to illuminate the unseen sides of this magical "physical ceremony" which was meant to affect dramatically not only art, but also the social status of the country. The process of human movements, especially female ones, through the interaction of body and music was ultimately the cornerstone of the configuration of not only the aesthetics, but the overall ideology of some of the most prominent representatives of Impressionism, but also Post-Impressionism, as in many cases it determined their own lives. The imposing and much debated waltz, the classical ballet as well as the charming can-can and, its ancestor, the playful quadrille, were harmonically blended with the enchanting tools and materials of the Impressionist artists and the result was some of the most astonishing works of art in the world art history.

[**Key words:** Dance, Impressionism, painting, waltz, ballet, theatre, cabaret, women.]

Introduction

Dance in the 19th century played a particularly dominant role not only in the dance halls of the world but mainly in the social arenas of both East and West as it seemed to invade and fatally change the hierarchy in the moral and aesthetic principles of many world societies. For instance Argentinean ladies in the 1850s, used to wear protective pads under their clothes in order to avoid the "unseemly" physical contact with their partners, not being able to resist to the charm of the, banned by the Pope, tango. The reactions and protests from the Austrian, German and French "good societies" in the 19th century Europe, caused by the way waltz was dancedⁱ as well as the arrest of 1009 women by the police for dancing swing in the early 20th century US constitute characteristic examples of what kind of changes dance would bring in the course of the European and American social and cultural history.

So, if we turn our attention to France in the second half of the 19th century, we can realize that dance, both as a classical performing art and as a simple social event or a spectacle of night entertainment, played an important role in the way people looked at the new status quo dictated by the new order of the time. The era of our concern was an extremely turbulent and at the same time constructive and prolific period when newly born ideas, innovative inventions and new political and social developments took place in Europe. The

fertile ground of the French society was ready to bear some particularly significant ideological, political and cultural events such as the Prefect Baron Haussmann's role in modernizing Paris (1853), the Parisian Communeⁱⁱ or else the Fourth French Revolution (1871), or the miraculous construction of the Eiffel Tower and at the same time the inauguration of the Great International Paris Exhibition, the World's Fair (1889), just to name a few. Arts, both visual and performing, flourished at that time of unprecedented change and development, rendering Paris the most renowned art centre in the world. Thus such a wonderful and strongly influential performing art, as dance was, which seemed to evolve along with the new, sweeping changes in Europe could not leave French fine artists' interest untouched. It not only influenced but also transformed in a way the imagination and the creative verve of the greatest and most important visual artists of that era, as it constituted an inexhaustible source of inspiration. The result of this was a totally new way of visual expression in the art works of the greater fine artists of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, the most important art movement of the fin de siècle in France which led to the miracle of the 20th century Modern Art.

The Success of Waltz and the Birth of Impressionism

The new, innovative wind which began to blow in the cultural life of the City of Light was the providential matrix that would give birth to a promising magma of reversal, dispute and revolt against any previous artistic power that would stand as an obstacle to freedom of expression. Impressionism was born to represent what its name really implies: the impression and its charting on a rigorous personal and unordered style.

On the other hand many types of dances (social, classical, recreational) constituted the basis on which Impressionist artists relied in order to acquire their inspiration for the most exquisite pieces of painting (and sculpture) of the World Art. The waltz was one of them as it arrived in France in the early 19th centuryⁱⁱⁱ and spread with such rapidity that the impressive Parisian magazine *La fleur de lys* published on June 4, 1824 a long article devoted to this 'peculiar' dance, titled *Guilty Idignity*. In this article religious authorities condemned and reproved in a hard way this new dance style, blaming it on the corruption of the young and the innocent housewives. The pastors were ordered to excommunicate the waltz as a dance that misrepresented the spirit, plagued the heart and led to the loss of the soul. The Viennese Waltz was one of the first popular dances, which used real closed stance (close body contact of the partners) and polka the second dance in Europe which used this "provocative" new attitude. Generally speaking, in the 19th century this contact between the female and male bodies was considered scandalous and it got finally accepted after a very long time.

Around 1850, when the Paris Opera was in financial difficulties, its director had the bold idea to include the Viennese Waltz to some of its shows on a trial basis. This was proved to be a great success as the curiosity of the public filled the halls again. Paris, the centre of arts, forwarded slowly the idea

of this 'prohibited' dance and made it accepted throughout the world.

As we can see, there was certainly no coincidence that dance as thematic material would play an important role in the course of this new power in Fine Arts given that its birth coincided with the planning and realization of the Opera building, a project of Charles Garnier (1825-1898) - i.e. a space that would host not only the Viennese Waltz itself but also some of the most remarkable, from both an artistic and aesthetic point of view, dances across the universe^{iv}.

The dazzling opulence and rich structural composition of this imposing neo-baroque building was completed by the insertion of a series of life-size sculptures compositions among which there was a special group called *The Dance*. This work, made of plaster, was the brainchild of the then-known academic sculptor Jean - Batiste Carpeaux, (1827-1875) who depicted a frenzied scene of Bacchanalians bearing many of the features of the naturalistic approach of painters of Realism, but also the art of the Renaissance^v.

This project reflected the human body through the erotic sensation of dancing with such a verisimilitude as to be considered obscene and vulgar by the conservative French public of the time so, it was not long before strong pressure was exerted for "dismantling" not only this one but also similar sculptures. This reaction of the Parisian public, which was quite often manipulated, was an indicator of attitude to artists in general, who were often subjected to negative criticism and even to aggression at that time, not only in France but throughout Western Europe.

The institutions of arts in Paris imposed a strange status quo under which specific circles of critics and artists formed a strict and rigorous committee which had the power to approve (or reject) projects by practicing artists in order to present them at the annual Public Salon Exhibition - a kind of art show occurring in town once a year. The answer, which did not take long to come out by the unsuccessful participants, was the organization of a new and independent Salon where their works would be exhibited by themselves, which angered not only the public but also the coterie of reviewers, as such a move was regarded as rebellion against institutions^{vi}.

It was through this independent move that gave birth to the stream of Impressionism, a liberal "dogma" which despised the soft colours and thoughtful touches of the painters of Realism and proposed bold colours, violent brushstrokes and themes bathed in natural light. One of the basic principles of impressionism had been expressed long before the conception of its name by the French landscape painter Eugène Boudin, to the then young Claude Monet (1840-1926):

"Anything that is painted directly and on the spot has strength, vitality and brawniness, qualities that can never be achieved in the laboratory. Three touches from life amount to two or more days of work in the laboratory or on the easel"^{vii}.

Painters such as Monet, Manet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro, Buzz etc., praised the

free landscape and the outdoor painting influenced mainly by the work of the British John Constable (1776-1837) and the Frenchman Camille Corot (1796-1875). Nevertheless, they have also praised human pleasures, fun and love while others like Renoir, Degas and Lautrec, the light entertainment, the human toil but also the margin of life.

Renoir's Social and Sensual Dance

Although most of the representatives of this stream came from bourgeois families, which played an important role in the selection and performance of their subjects, Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) was the only one who came from the working class. Apart from the human figure that he depicted in portraits and paintings of nudes, he was inspired particularly by the social lives of Parisians, either in the night or daytime, putting dance prominently in his works.

Dancing in the works of Renoir is not but a simple social union or association of persons of the opposite sex mainly of the bourgeoisie. Thus we see how the images of prosperity and happiness of the upper social classes, by which he was so much impressed were contradicting his roots revealing the intimate intention to waive or to embellish them. Smiling elegant men and well-dressed women with immaculate coiffure either as individual pairs on neutral background or as groups of dancing couples, danced carefree and happy to the rhythm of waltz. An old mill on the hill of Montmartre Le Moulin de-la-Galette had become a Café and at the same time a ballroom with social events and had eventually been, especially in the summer when dances were taking place in the courtyard, a great support for the painter. We are pleased to notice that urban dance in his paintings was a dance transformed along with the wonderful music of his time in one of the most powerful means of expression of the Parisian society: beauty, harmony, flirt, joy and hope are some of the countless feelings expressed by both the male and female dancers through the grace of their movements affecting the pulse of their spectators by inviting them to become participants in this rite of consciousness of the human spirit. It should however be noted that the images shown by Renoir through these paintings do not constitute an objective rendering of reality as the harsh and unpleasant aspects of life seem to have been totally ignored and replaced by an idealized image of harmony and peace.^{viii}

Apart from this, rather simplified interpretation of the identification of urban dance with the concepts of satisfaction and prosperity so much opposed to his childhood experiences, Renoir never hesitated to renounce his perpetual passion and admiration for the opposite sex. The sleek, contoured, voluptuous young women always invaded his dreams and were automatically transformed into sensual forms of inspiration for a grand part of his overall painting work. The elegant, fresh, young French women constituted his great passion which, however, was responsible for the transubstantiation of a simple and perhaps despicable fantasy into a fine art. This, however, became an even stronger foothold when an attractive female figure 'was connected' with a male body through a fathomless indolence and erotic fantasy dance.

These are the main reasons why in most of his paintings which are dominated by the urban dance or some kind of it (*Dance in Bougival* (1883), *Dance in the country* (1886), *Dance in the city* (1888), but even in the multi-faceted work of *Le Moulin de la Galette* (1876)), the female figure seems to prevail in the up until then 'sexist' waltz dance, marginalizing the male figure in the background. Even though the male figure, following the fatal waltz steps, always looks to 'guide' the erotic, unconsciously will-less and therefore more desirable female body, the women



Figure 1: Auguste Renoir, *Dance in the city* (1888)

manages to achieve domination. So the feminine charm and beauty seem to invalidate the previously male dominating status of this dance, and transform it into a more 'feminine' form of urban entertainment. More precisely, in the painting *Dance in the city* all the above are strongly highlighted by the seventeen years old female model Renoir chose to pose for him: her name was Suzanne Valadon and she was one of the most attractive women of that era who was to become his lover and a famous painter herself, later.^{ix} On the other hand, the female model he used for the painting *Dance in the country* was mademoiselle Aline Charigot, a young twenty years old dressmaker, who had a more simplistic and intimate beauty compared to the



Figure 2: Auguste Renoir, *Dance in the country* (1886)

impressive bourgeois Valadon, was about to become his wife. Both women seem to gather most of the characteristic features Renoir used in order to screen the endlessly 'seductive' and challenging or - on the contrary - low profile aesthetics of the female dance showmanship. The rather subdued male figure in both works (as well as in the painting *Dance in Bougival*) belongs to his close friend Paul Lott.



Figure 3: Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal*, 1871

Edgar Degas and the Ballet 'Nymphs'

In contrast to the vivid depiction of the social life of Parisians by Renoir, it was the artistic instinct of another artist that came into play and whose relationship with dance was recorded by history as integral and unique. Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was regarded as the uncompromised artist whose expressively rich and experimentally diverse work had to do more than anyone else with the representation of life in cities given that he was not interested at all in landscapes and large painting outdoors (he always worked in his laboratory in contrast to Renoir and the others who painted from nature).^x Degas preferred, despite his bourgeois origin, the cheap and nasty reality of night-time of gas-illuminated roads, regional cafés women who worked hard as laundresses and ballet dancers. The fact that he was inspired by a very important kind of performing art which had then triumphed in the choices of cultural entertainment of the upper social strata, ballet^{xi} did not necessarily mean the artistic and purely aesthetic depiction on canvas of this sensual art. The artist, however, really loved the world of dance. In a letter to the sculptor Paul-Albert Bartolomé in January 1886 he mentioned:

"Apart from my heart, I feel everything grows old in me. Even my heart has something artificial. It has been sewn by the dancers in a soft, pink satin purse like their shoes".

Degas used to give different answers when he was asked about his mania to paint ballet dancers. *"I like their dresses"* he said once. *"They constitute, in a way, the continuity of the ancient statues"*, he replied another time. However, there exists a third version according to which ballet dancers merely offered him the pretext to capture the human movement.^{xii}



Figure 4: Edgar Degas, Little Dancer aged fourteen, 1881.

As it is shown in the Paris Opera Museum Library archives, Degas had attended a total of 177 ballet and opera performances and managed to have access to the backstage before obtaining enough money to be subscribed to the theatre. However, his constant presence there did not bother the dancers. Degas was a bourgeois and used to go to the Opera with his friends who belonged to the same class as him, if they were not aristocrats, in contrast to the ballet dancers themselves most of which came from financially and socially lower classes. Degas was a voyeur but without the emotional charge that this word currently bears. His work was a kind of hidden camera, a secret body that went thoroughly unnoticed. Thus, he tried to see his art through a wide angle lens of artistic approach, which included not only the almost photographic depiction of dance movements of the small ballerinas but also the dark side of their world. This means that he managed to trap the time in his paintings and to capture the grace, glamour and excellence of a dance performance, but also to penetrate into the backstage area and the ballroom and to debunk in his own way the glamour of a performance. Thus we see dancers stripped of light and spectacular masquerade that gives the scene to look so earthy, austere almost vulnerable in the systemic, debilitating activity of their exercises. The female dancers of Degas are slightly ethereal and mythical given that, with loose bodies and members, uneasily and under pressure they are deprived of any erotic grace in the eyes of their masters. The tough and sometimes ruthless professional life seems to be depicted in all its extent in these two-dimensional

works of his.^{xiii}

But apart from his paintings, Degas was engaged particularly towards the end of his career with sculpture because his eyes did not help him anymore with the details painting demanded. On the other hand, any kind of sculpture he had dealt with before that time was only intended to improve his paintings. But, the only piece of sculpture that he managed to exhibit^{xiv} while he was alive was the famous *Little Dancer aged fourteen*, a small masterpiece of metal (bronze) which he inspired nude in order to 'dress' it later with other than metal materials (fabric, hair) revolutionizing the academic sculpture of the nineteenth century. However, this rather unexpected and challenging combination of traditional and non-traditional sculpture materials caused a shock to the Parisian public.

However, the relationship between Marie van Goethem, the young daughter of a laundress who posed as a model for his afore mentioned most admired piece of sculpture and Edgar Degas, was occasionally discussed. The truth is that in 1881, the period when this statuette was presented at the Sixth Impressionist Exhibition in Paris causing many controversial comments, it was not unusual for the "little mice" - as the French capital Opera ballet dancers were affectionately called - to seek patrons among wealthy spectators who were gathered at the backstage, as Degas used to do. Most of his sculptures (which were models in wax) were cast posthumously and are subject to small nude dancers in moments of exercises. Degas's sculptures glorify the human form and effort for pure performance of art, dance, which makes them more than merely nude.

Lautrec's Nocturne Marginalized Dances

The post-impressionist painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) was of aristocratic descent. Alcoholic, bohemian and scarred with severe physical disabilities^{xv}, he excommunicated almost at once his origin and was devoted to his art. A decisive role in this was played by his miserable appearance since he was often subjected to racist treatment by his entourage, which caused him to turn quickly to the pole opposite to that he already knew as life.^{xvi} Enchanted by the Parisian nightlife and, all the more so, by that of dives and cabarets, the brothels, the circus and bars he drew all his inspiration from the sidelines trying to give the latter the glory and beauty that he truly believed they deserved. This world made Lautrec feel not only socially but also amorously acceptable (his love affairs with prostitutes gave him the right to sleep in brothels and thus to capture from nature on the canvas his impressions in a pragmatic and grounded way rather than a pornographic one).

Toulouse-Lautrec's painting was formed and matured with endogenous, but also exogenous non-French and even non-European^{xvii} aesthetic and morphic footholds. Initially, as Degas did, Lautrec recorded the marginal ethics of the Parisian society yet based on the immediacy of his own senses. Since 1886, Lautrec visited systematically Aristides Bryan, a popular music composer and spent his evenings in his own cabaret, called "Le Mirliton", to get ideas in

order to illustrate many covers of his songs. He quickly became a regular frequenter of clubs such as the “Moulin de-la-Galette”, the dance hall “Elysée” in Montmartre and in the 1889 the well known “Moulin Rouge”. Sitting at a table in a corner of the ballroom, he would sketch innumerable scenes of the delectable programs quadrille dancing, a dance that we would later know as can-can. His hasty sketches were completed the day after and he used them in order to make paintings or lithographs. Every night he used to be among the audience of several cabarets in order to study the elegant movements of their exuberant dancers who would monopolize the interest of the male customers. Dancers such as Jane Avril and Gulu were arrested by the experienced eye of the painter and were depicted on his paintings, conveying the joy of lively nightlife of not only “Moulin Rouge” but also “Le Jardin de Paris”.^{xviii} These two cabarets had become widely known not because of his paintings but rather from the posters he created for them.



Figure 5: Toulouse-Lautrec’s poster depicting cabaret dancers one of which is Jane Avril, lithography, 1892.

He was also a frequent customer at the cabaret “Divan Japonais”, trying to capture the expressive and enigmatic face of Yvette Gilbert, the French excellent performer of the Belle Époque era. At the same time he focused on the strange melancholy of the clown Cha - U - Kao who was a famous *chahut-chaos*^{xix} dancer, too. On the contrary when he painted the charismatic movements of the dancer Marcel Lender, all her sensual movements were translated into a bright wreath full of colours and when he tried to capture the charm of the attractive Loie Fuller’s Serpentine Dance, all his colourful sketchy lines were transformed into abstract dance movements. By using the same decisive strokes Lautrec worked on the portraits of popular persons of the circus. Most of the singers and dancers that were depicted in his paintings,

were primarily his personal friends, as he never ceased to be himself an integral part of their fantastic world. As he often said: "Only persons exist. The landscape is not and should not be but only a minor element. It should be used only for the better understanding of the nature of a person".^{xx}

As we can see, Lautrec liked painting women and especially women dancing. From the prostitutes or the cabaret singers and dancers, the workers as well as the actresses and in some cases the bourgeois ladies, Toulouse - Lautrec painted tirelessly women whose souls were infiltrated through their body movements. He painted them in countless synthetic variants with verve soul, imagination and integrity always driven by the virtue of truth. With respect for the persons he depicted in his works, and understanding about what they really were, he tried to reveal the truth of their social reality, which however was not always brutal and unjust. Without inhibitions, he initially entered a cruel and inhumane environment by tracing the innermost truths of people in whose characteristics the mixed feelings of joy and happiness, agony and tension co-existed simultaneously. At the meantime he found out that dance and women were inextricably woven parts of that reality and constituted the most significant features of his own world.

Conclusion

The once rapid and rhythmical and sometimes slow and seductive dance steps in the music halls, cabaret, bars and theaters of the French capital in the second half of the nineteenth century, were destined to be vital for the evolution of painting and sculpture of the afore mentioned great masters of Impressionism. However, if we try to understand the main reasons of this huge contribution to dance in visual arts development of that era we will certainly focus on the following points:

a) Although dance (traditional, ceremonial, religious, social) has always been a reference point for the visual arts throughout the course of history of world cultures, in this case it constitutes the catalytic element which shaped an imaginative and inventive thematology seen through a totally new prism, and also a new aesthetic style. In conjunction with the new technologies of the time (invention of the camera and later the kinoscope^{xxi} and the first portable cinema^{xxii}), the new aesthetic order that was brought by the "invasion" of the Japanese prints in Europe and in combination with the rapidly changing social, political and cultural conditions of the time, dance was an inexhaustible source of new ideas for visual artists.

b) If we approached closely the starting point of inspiration and action that the three artists who were the subject of our interest in this research had in common, we would find that all three were possessed by the same likes, desires and passions, despite their completely different backgrounds and experiences. Their common love for entertainment, the female sex, the almost always unexplored movement of the human body, but also their ability to depict ideally all the wealth of information they received, enabled them to produce works which are considered to be the culmination of Impressionism.

Acknowledgement of the sources of the images used

Figure 1: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre-Auguste_Renoir_019.jpg

Figure 2: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre-Auguste_Renoir_-_Danse_%C3%A0_la_campagne.jpg

Figure 3: <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/edgar-degas/the-rehearsal-1877>

Figure 4: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:La_Petite_Danseuse_de_Quatorze_Ans

Figure 5: http://statico.artsy.net/additional_images/523b5eeb275b24fa9f00029b/1/larger.jpg

Notes and references

ⁱ Kalamatianos, Stavros. *Chorou Enstikto (Dance Instinct)*. Athens : Private Publication, 2000, 26.

ⁱⁱ The Paris Commune was the labor revolutionary government which was established in Paris after the revolt of the National Guard and the urban workers and lasted from 26 March 1871 until 28 May of the same year.

ⁱⁱⁱ The waltz was a fashion in Vienna around 1770. Despite many genres of popular music, many composers like Mozart wrote several waltzes for the Vienna dancers. In this romantic period the most classical compositions of the Viennese waltzes were written by Schubert, Chopin and Brahms. This dance, which was born in the provinces of Austria and its capital, began evolving and acquiring its current form, thanks to the Napoleon soldiers who travelled to Paris, a city which had more than 700 dance halls at that time. Of course this constituted a solid and firm basis for the development of new streams in the arts, particularly dance.

^{iv} Mead, Curtis-Christopher. *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*. New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1991, 89

^v Honour, Hugh, Fleming, John. *A World History of Art*. London: Fleming Honour Ltd, 1982, 58, 59.

^{vi} Bayle, Françoise. *Orsay Visitor's Guide*. Versailles, Paris : Artlys, 2002, 26-29.

^{vii} Sutton, C. Peter, Finamore, Daniel. *Eugène Boudin*. Salem: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1991, 19.

^{viii} Bronchkaya, Natalia. *Auguste Renoir*. Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1984, 34-36.

^{ix} Rose, June. *Suzanne Valodon, the Mistress of Montmartre*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1999, 6.

^x Grove, Bernd: *Degas*. Cologne: Taschen, 2001, 7.

^{xi} Ballet has its roots in the Italian Renaissance that is in between the 15th and 16th century. Etymologically it derived from the Italian word *ballo* which means dance. It was then quickly spread to the French court where it was further developed. In the 17th century it was associated with the opera and this is considered the time when the first recording of its basic steps started. This fully explains the fact that its vocabulary is in French. The 19th century was a period of great social change which was also

reflected in ballet as it converted it from a dance for the bourgeoisie to a romantic dance for all. That was the time when Paris became the centre of the European ballet. During this period and especially until the mid-19th century ballet techniques were much developed mainly for women who started dancing at the edges of their feet, a surprisingly impressive technique which in combination with the elevation on the toes, suggested a supernatural lifting to a mythical world.

^{xii} Toulatou, Isma M.. «Πόρνες οι μπαλαρίνες του Ντεγκά» (“Prostitutes the Degas’s ballerinas”), *To Vima*, 1102 (2011): 30.

^{xiii} Blistene, Bernard. *A History of 20th Century Art*. Paris: Flammarion, 2003, 39.

^{xiv} In the Sixth Impressionist Exhibition, 1881.

^{xv} His early childhood years rolled smoothly. In 1873, his family moved to Paris where Henri started going to high school. Two years later, however, his fragile health forced his parents to stop him going to school and thus he started having private lessons at home. In 1878 he slipped and broke his left leg, while the next year he fell over again and broke his right leg. After that his legs would stay forever as fifteen-year-boy legs, while the upper part of his body would develop normally. Throughout the rest of his life, the adult Lautrec would look like a dwarf, something that would deeply stigmatize him and would determine all the aspects of his life, including his work.

^{xvi} Haftmann, Werner: *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2. New York: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1965, 45, 46.

^{xvii} This can be interpreted in two ways: a) mainly because many of the dancers that attracted his attention were foreigners, carrying the strange and many times peculiar elements of their culture in their art and b) because Lautrec was a loyal fan of the Japanese civilization and especially of the Japanese prints that had flooded France that time.

^{xviii} Gombrich, Ernst, Hans. *Το Χρονικό της Τέχνης (The Story of Art)*, trans. Lina Kasdagli. Athens: National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, 1994, 554.

^{xix} A high-kicking and quite difficult kind of dance which was particularly popular at the cabarets of Paris at that time.

^{xx} Mortoglou, Iliana. «ΤΟΥΛΟΥΖ ΛΩΤΡΕΚ: Ένας άνδρας που ζωγράφιζε γυναίκες» (“TOULOUSE-LAUTREC: A man who was painting women”), *Rizospastis*, 97 (2001): 4.

^{xxi} The kinoscope was invented by William Dickson, who worked in the laboratories of Thomas Edison. It was a projector which was equipped with the ability to screen the film in a box, which was visible only by one viewer each time through a hole.

^{xxii} In 1893 the French brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière, based on Dickson’s and Edison’s kinoscope, invented the *cinematographe*, that is a portable movie camera which was used for the making, printing and projecting the film. On December 28, 1895, they made the first public screening in Paris.

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Singing Specters: Phenomenology in the Performance of Music

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Abstract

In this article, I write along with key 20th century thinkers—Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida—to understand how a phenomenological examination of the performance of music can contribute to a meaningful exploration of the roles of consciousness and presence in the process of rhetorical invention. I begin by looking at Plato's *Phaedrus* and assess the notion of “fit” as it relates to rhetoric and performance as well as the mythical trope of the cicadas. I will then explore how Plato's rendering of madness in this piece might help us understand Derrida's almost paradoxical construction of the voice in *Voice and Phenomenon*. From here, I move to analyze the figure of the ghost as presented by Derrida and relate this to the *non-presence of presence* while asking: how might this notion better help us understand how rhetorical decisions are made by performing artists? The argument I put forth is that there is a subtle difference between the aleatoric moments of invention that occur in the process of solitary composition and those that occur on the stage. My conclusion points toward further research that would analyze these elements in recorded music and digital recording technologies which further problematizes the notion of non-presence: what would it really mean to have a ghost in the machine? Do we perform a séance each time we press “play”?

Phaedrus as venue: an ensounded text

I'll begin with a rough etymological inquiry. The notion of the Platonic Idea stems from the Greek “to see,” from *iden*. Audience has an interesting relationship, here, from the Greek root *au* which is “to perceive,” to feel or grasp, even, *aisthanesthai*, and through time audience has come to mean both an assembly of listeners and then later, through French it seems, to mean the reader of a text. This notion of the audience as those who encounter the text directly correlates most with our contemporary understanding in rhetoric and composition studies, but might we expand this notion? Plato distinguished that the work of the mind is separate—we abandon the senses to think theoretically, as in the Pythagorean theorem, where we think of the law behind the triangle and not the triangle itself—and it is from Plato that we have this understanding of the idea. This idea is the distinct knowledge of something, *the mind's eye*, and is distinct from what was perceived as an empirical reality.

What of audience, then? G.R.F. Ferrari, in his “Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's *Phaedrus*,” provides an interesting analysis of the notion of being “fit” that I would like to incorporate here. *Phaedrus* is unique among the Platonic

dialogues in its descriptions of environment and for setting up a narrative which corresponds to the themes of the dialogue itself. Socrates was known for having seldom left the city—so it is significant that we find Phaedrus and Socrates outside of Athens in this dialogue. Ferrari explains:

He [Socrates] takes pains to select a suitable place for reading. A tall plane-tree nearby marks a zone of shelter from the sun, he judges, ‘just the right breeze’ (*pneuma metrion*), and soft grass to accommodate whichever posture they prefer, whether sitting or lying down (229a8-b2). On the way to this bower he speculates that they are passing the very spot where according to story Boreas the wind-god snatched off the princess Oreithyia. What fuels his conjecture is, again, the recognition of fit: that the alluring purity of the water at this point makes it suitable (*epitedeia*) for girls to play in (229b4-9). Furthermore, had Phaedrus not been struck at the outset of the dialogue by how especially ‘appropriate’ (*prosekousa*) Lysias’ speech on love would be for the notoriously ‘erotic’ Socrates to hear (227c3-5) he would not now be applying to the environment this ability to recognise fit. (Ferrari 8)

How can we understand this characterization of nature and environment? Do we simply impose, anachronistically, the nature/culture divide or the divide between nature and city? No, for it seems that, while Socrates is not accustomed to the land outside the walls of Athens, he seeks to use his environment in his speech. He finds himself in the country and so incorporates it. This is now his venue. Similarly, Plato has Socrates speak throughout *Phaedrus* about the relationship between the body and rhetorical composition: “Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both one another and to the whole work” (541). Despite this concentration on the physical body, it is still Socrates’ assertion that “the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul” (548). So, too, in other works, do we see both Plato and Aristotle characterize music as that which directs the soul.

Mary B. Schoen-Nazarro writes in “Plato and Aristotle on the Ends of Music” that Plato understood music to be an essential part of the education of young Athenian boys because of its ability to shape “proper order in man’s nature”: gymnastics worked toward the ordering of the body, while music worked “principally toward his soul” (Schoen-Nazzaro 261). Further, Nazzaro reads Plato to tell us that musical education should not just give “dexterity to the fingers or strength to the voice”—that is, a sort of technical training that is most common in today’s Western musical pedagogy—but rather that “musical education should measure and order the movements of the soul” so that the child can learn to “feel pleasure and pain the right way” (262).

Debra Hawhee might help us further understand the role of rhetoric, here, by linking oratory, the body, and music in educational environments in her “Bodily Pedagogies: Rhetoric, Athletics, and the Sophists’ Three Rs”:

Given the proximity of athletic and rhetorical training, as well as the noisiness of *auloi*—their shrill sounds approximate those produced by modern-day bagpipes—it is also likely that music flowed into recitations and sophistic lectures, producing an awareness of—indeed, facilitating—the rhythmic, tonic quality of speeches. As Kenneth J. Freeman points out, the *aulos* did not merely provide background noise, but rather played an integral role in training, as the instrument was used “in order that good time might be preserved in the various movements” (128). Music’s role in the gymnasium, then, was to introduce a rhythm, to provide a tempo for the practice and production of bodily movements. In short, music established a rhythm through the cyclical repetition of patterns, and this rhythm was replicated in the bodily movements of those in training. (Hawhee 146)

It seems that the practical use of music in Athenian society may have differed from Plato’s hopes, then. Here, music is being used to keep time for gymnastic exercises, and is leaking out into the study halls, into the classrooms. Of course, we have many types of music, now, and certainly so did our ancient friends. Yet, this trope of repetition remains in contemporary rhetorical composition practices in both musical composition and in the writing classroom. But here, we see the significance of the sounds of an environment. Might we better think about how we design the acoustic spaces of our classrooms and our universities? Not in architecture, as an end, but in thinking of how sound works rhetorically on us. Yet here too we must be reminded as to why we should pay attention to the sounds around us and to listen: the rhythms at play effect our experience, or even constitute our experience. We are the sound, and in the sound, as much as it has an effect on us. As in the example of the Athenian orators above, we find a rhythm to our oratory from sounds that come from our environment. Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy* describes how, while vision “dissects,” sound is a means of centering (72). Through our hearing, we are the experiential centers of not the world of sound but *our* world of sound. But can we say so easily that the experience of hearing is not one of dissection? The very biological reality of binaural hearing—of having two ears—we locate sound sources, a sort of automatic calculation that is conducted through the difference between our ears: this is why we see a dog tilt its head in “confusion”: it is trying to listen “better,” to get a sense of the source of the sound. We are thus always looking for origins, for causes to the experiences which we come by, whether sound or sight. We should be careful with Ong, who argues that “The spoken word is always an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word” (75). For, our written texts are ephemeral, too, and only seem to have permanence.

We can transition back, then, and bring forth the cicadas in *Phaedrus*. What role do they play for the dialogue? The backdrop of the pastoral countryside provides many discussion points for Socrates and Phaedrus, and the cicadas are noted throughout the text. Socrates spins a myth to explain their existence and their presence:

When the Muses were born and song was created for the first time, some of the people of that time were so overwhelmed with the pleasure of singing that they forgot to eat or drink; so they died without even realizing it. It is from them that the race of the cicadas came into being; and, as a gift from the Muses, they have no need of nourishment once they are born. Instead, they immediately burst into song, without food or drink, until it is time for them to die. After they die, they go to the Muses and tell each one of them which mortals have honored her.

There is a close relationship here between the role of song and the role of madness. The people were “so overwhelmed with the pleasure of singing” that they died without “even realizing it” and were given a gift from the Muses: they would no longer need to eat. Now, these creatures can “immediately burst into song” from birth, and continue singing until they die. There is a sort of strangeness, here, however. The mythological people who were converted to the race of cicadas died without knowing, so we can assume they felt no pain, so powerful was their love of song, so great was their pleasure. What need was there to change their form, if already present in the human is the capacity to be “so overwhelmed”? I’ll leave this point for another time. But we might take this rendering of the cicadas as an indication of the celebratory power of music for Plato. Or is this too far? There is, too, a more morose mythology here being crafted: that the allure of song, of sound can be so great that it leads to death, a complete loss of the self and a stripping of life to bare performance. But is this not experience itself, a coming together of desire and action? Perhaps in the myth of the cicadas we see a notion of the embodied rhetoric of music: the cicada is not-present and beyond its own “self-control”: it leads itself unwillingly to death. An early critique of phonocentrism? Most likely no, considering Plato’s distrust of the written word, but we’ll approach this notion of writing and the voice later in the paper. And of course it would be anachronistic to think of Freud in the venue of the *Phaedrus*, but the death drive here seems to call strongly through the song, through the cicadas.

Instead of these unsure pursuits, let us think again about what role the cicadas have in the framing of the dialogue we read in *Phaedrus*. The always present sound of the cicadas makes for an *ensounded* environment. The dialogue occurs *in* the sound, *with* the cicadas. Ferrari can perhaps help us again with his notion of the “impresario”: “Phaedrus’ careful matching of audience to performance and performance to environment shows him turning from the mere consumption of others’ art to the exercise of the art to which he is peculiarly devoted.” (Ferrari 8-9) Here I have come back to my original etymological inquiry. What is the significance of audience in the *Phaedrus*, and for the rhetor? This is

part of Socrates' critique of writing, that with oratory, one can know the souls of his audience: the rhetor can see to whom he is speaking. But with writing, it is not known. The performing musician, similarly, can see and hear his audience, be in a sort of dialogic responsive atmosphere with them, but with recorded music, there is the possibility of being heard through tinny speakers or being remixed, edited, spliced up through a digital audio workstation.

Ferrari sees that Phaedrus is acting as a sort of impresario, here, as Ferrari argues—traditionally and interestingly, an impresario is a manager of a concert hall or venue—that Phaedrus is trying to manage the conversation through “fussing” over “fit” in assessing the “landscape” and the “environment” (4). Yet, Plato seems to engage with wherever they find themselves, though he does deliberately choose a shaded area. Perhaps this is why Ferrari is critical of the role of Phaedrus as impresario, deeming it something less than philosophy. Ferrari interprets that Phaedrus attempts to pass off his “art” of acting as an “impresario” as the “good” where really it is just the “fitting” (12-14). And, as aforementioned, Phaedrus attempts to pass this off as “philosophy” (14). Yet, Phaedrus, in his oratory, knows that “If the physical arrangements for the performance become the focus of audience attention, those arrangements have failed their purpose” and that “Phaedrus understands that his arrangements will give pleasure to the extent that they are appropriate, but must not be declared appropriate merely because they give pleasure. In this he has a fair grasp of his art as impresario” (Ferrari 12). The impresario cannot quell the fervor of the audience, though. The environment becomes part of the performance. And the cicadas are a key contributor to this soundscape that surrounds Phaedrus and Socrates in their dialogue.

For, we know, all along, that there is the incessant singing of the cicadas. Can we call it singing? The cicada produces what some call a deafening noise—the loudest insect, over 100 decibels—yet it is a hallmark of a bucolic sun-lit summer afternoon. Should we assume the cicada songs are distant, and thus non-interruptive of the speech that occurs between Phaedrus and Socrates? How does this sort of feedback from the environment influence their conversation? We can only speculate—and it is a fictional account, most likely, of the two speakers, anyway—but perhaps the exploration of the concept of madness in *Phaedrus* can further direct this exploration.

Socrates describes four types of divine madness. The third describes the very sort of state of being “overwhelmed” which gave rise to the death and birth of the race of cicadas:

Third comes the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will

be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.
(523)

I find here a fascinating relationship between this state of divine madness and its contribution to the creation of art, to “poetry.” Is this not also the transcendent state of the musician in times of creation, of inspiration, of aleatoric moments? It seems that these cicada people were indeed mad, that is, they were lost in the “frenzy of songs” that overtook them and thus, in a sense, non-present. Yet, it is also in these extraordinary moments of divine madness that the artist is *most* present. Can we relate this to the Derridean notion of the voice and the non-presence of presence? Is the mad artist not also a ghost, both here and not here, both alive and dead?

Madness and the ghost: the non-presence of the self in the performance of music

*The unlike is joined together,
and from differences result the most beautiful harmony.*

-Heraclitus, *Fragments*

Madness is a recurring topic in the *Phaedrus*, and its characterization differs greatly from notions of mental disease or disability. Madness is a sort of gift. A source of inspiration, a reaching out of the fingers of the divine into the mind of the mortal. Socrates tells us that: “The people who designed our language in the old days never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word ‘manic’ for the finest experts of all... thereby weaving insanity into prophecy” (522-523). The academic and the philosopher often carry the stigma of madness: of working against expectations and norms. So, too, we think of today’s musician as the Bohemian. The ancient Greeks, however, found solace in the madness of Homer: the figure of the blind prophet. The bard, the eccentric, the performer acted as a cultural touchstone to unite pre-Socratic Grecian culture and thought. We can of course criticize this unity—perhaps this is the first heralding of nationalism in the lines of epic poetry inscribed, so long ago, then. But the trust in the blind and the mad as a prophet, as he who has access to another realm—a metaphysical realm, the realm of Ideas, of gods—might first be located here. The mad man is both of this world and of another. He is a living ghost, a spectral figure.

Who now is a ghost? Derrida appears in Ken McMullen’s improvisational film *Ghost Dance* (1983). He is asked, “Do you believe in ghosts?” and responds:

That’s a difficult question. Firstly, you’re asking a ghost where he believes in ghosts. Here, the ghost is me. Since I’ve been asked to play myself in a film which is more or less improvised, I feel as if I’m letting a ghost speak for me. Curiously, instead of playing myself, without knowing it...I let a ghost ventriloquize my words, or play my role, which is even more amusing...

We might think of this in terms of Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon*. He writes: "When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself during the time that I speak" (Derrida 66). Time and the voice. The immediate past, the present, and the immediate future are strung together by the voice. The syntax of our Western conversation is comprised by a logos of repetition. We speak sentences, like melodies. Strings made of units. Further, "...the soul of language, seems not to separate itself from itself, from its presence to itself. The soul of language does not risk death in the body of a signifier abandoned to the world and to the visibility of space" (Derrida 67). The voice presents itself to itself. In Derrida's critique—or response—to Husserl, we might find a better understanding; Derrida explains that Husserl imagined a pre-expressive element to "lived-experience" (13). It is through the difficulty in discerning between the "element of language" and the "element of consciousness" that a certain "indiscernibility" arises: this interdiscernability brings "non-presence and difference" forward, "right into the heart of self-presence" (13). Thus, through the voice, there is a sort of mediation that occurs. The non-presence arises through the dismissal of the Mind, of the Ideas, of "ideal objects," which are not ideal objects at all but "historical products" (Derrida 13). Derrida continues, from *Ghost Dance*:

Therefore, if I'm a ghost, but believe I'm speaking with my own voice, it's precisely because I believe it's my own voice, that I allow it to be taken over by another's voice. Not just any other voice but that of my own ghosts. So ghosts do exist... and it's the ghosts who will answer you. Perhaps they already have.

Are we ghosts? Can we merely say that Derrida thinks that language gives us life? Are we phantoms floating around in overt subjectivity, hosts to language? To the voice? No, but it is when one believes they are speaking with his or her "own voice" that it can be "taken over by another's voice." What is meant, here? Do we understand this to be a sort of Heideggerian sense of language—in a reduced or reductive sense, where there is ready-made content to our language that we inherit? How is it that the *voice* does not fall subject to the ideologies already present? Maurice Merleau-Ponty ensures us that language does more than simply carry ideas. He writes in his *Phenomenology of Perception* that "speech accomplishes thought" (Merleau-Ponty 183). That is, language works reflexively with the world around us. Or is it only language mediated by the voice? No. Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the author who sits down to write a book not knowing what they plan on writing (183). Meaning is not directly transferred outward. Merleau-Ponty argues that words do *not* carry with them ready-made thoughts, that each word we utter is not some "inert envelope" carrying signification (181-83). We are always engaged in an active process of making meaning with these words, which have active meaning in themselves: words are alive. That is, Merleau-Ponty means to say that, almost in a memetic fashion, words "import" their "meaning [*sens*] into the listener's mind" (185).

Does not also the performing musician react and respond to the world around him via the “language of music”? Though I much dislike this term, “the language of music,” so often thought of as a universal language, a *lingua franca*, for the code of Western music seems to be a product of Western language itself and not its own language, though this is thought’s food for another day. Might we say that this responsivity erupts through the performer’s musicality, through the complex network of interactions that occur between audience, instrument, voice, technology, audience, and ghost? Let us return to Derrida’s explication in *Ghost Dance*. Perhaps he means that through the illusion of speaking with what might be our “own” voice we are inhabited by the meanings made by others, by ideologies, but these ready-made constructs pre-existing in language. But why is it only in the guise of self-ratified authenticity, of self-assured authentic identity that we are overtaken by the ghosts of ourselves? What, in fact, does it mean to be haunted by our own ghosts? Through the rote repetition and recitation of performance—that is, of playing from a scripted piece, for example, or even from memory—each performance has slight variation but it is in novel invention that we separate ourselves from our self-history. It is through the process of composition that we leave our ghosts behind and take up a voice, a voice that responds to these complex networks and surroundings and emerges as an aleatoric rupture:

The enigma of the voice is rich and profound because of all the things to which it seems to be responding. That the voice simulates the “keeping watch” over presence and that the history of spoken language is the archive of this simulation from now on prevents us from considering the “difficulty” to which the voice responds, in Husserl’s phenomenology, either as a systematic difficulty or as a contradiction that would be specific to his phenomenology. (Derrida 13)

This “keeping watch”—is it a sort of tie between non-presence and presence, or past and present? I am unsure—is the role of the voice. I have attempted here to bring about this figure of the ghost as a way to understand, perhaps as a metaphor, perhaps as more, the non-presence of presence, the “being lost in thought” of madness or more than this: that to be not quite here is indeed to be here. Derrida of course is non-phonocentric and the voice should not be here given our attention and priority, but the *paradox* of the voice. But for Derrida, meaning comes through the figure of the voice: for there to be meaning, there is a coming together of form and content—of the transcendental and the empirical—so every repetition is both the same and different. The voice cuts across the empirical and transcendental. Through Derrida we abandon the simple notion of the present, for it contains with it always our ghosts and of future ghosts to come, and perhaps the very condition of *being* is that of being ghosts, or of being a being-ghost. Within this notion of the ghost there is, too, the thought of not-being-at-all, of negative being, in the immediate present the ghost appears as the far-past—and perhaps the forever-to-come—but is in the present, if it appears to us, and appears in the

voice as both writing and sound. Thus it is for us not to see a ghost but to hear it. And to hear it always.

Conclusions and future research

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

*Hotspur: Why, so can I, or so can any man;
But will they come when you do call for them?*

Shakespeare, Henry IV (3.1.51-53)

I don't intend to here offer a denouement but rather a further string of complications on which to play, for future thoughts and future research. Ghosts mean something else to philosopher Slavoj Žižek, channeling Lacan:

The whole point of Lacan is that in order for social reality to establish itself- by social reality I mean social order, social symbolic reality- something must be primordially repressed. Something cannot be symbolized, and the spectral apparition emerges to fill up the gap of what cannot be symbolized. So, again, the specter conceals not social reality but what must be primordially repressed in order for social reality to emerge. (np)

We might be reminded of the Freudian construction of the ghost as a kernel of repressed truth, similar in some sense to the dream. But for Žižek's reading of Lacan, the apparition is not part of the symbolic order: "They are always here as the embodiment of what Lacan would have called a certain symbolic deadlock" (np).

Through these phenomenological explorations and what have been very free-wheeling interpretations of key thinkers of the 20th century, I have attempted to expand the notions of composing, to think less of the act of creating music as a deliberate and fully conscious structuring of intellectual content through the technology of an instrument, but to think more of the composition process as one of rapture, response, and tied up in a thousand hands, not just the hands of the performer. It is not that the rhetorical act is unintended or the product of the will of others, but it is in moments of novelty—in the composition of music—that the artist is least self-identifying and imbued with ghosts, that he is haunted. It is through this contribution to a rhetoric of music that we might move beyond the stereotype of the mad artist or the Bohemian if we are instead to understand the musician as he who sings with ghosts of his self rather than he who sings alone in a contained madness.

I have not here addressed the deep ideological content of music. Now, a rhetoric of music doesn't have to confront Deriding philosophy or even perform deconstruction. We should still be mindful, however, of the ready-made structures in music as well as the structures which come from pre-existing tropes in our language. But we might learn something here about the analysis of voices, of

recordings, and of digital waves. What does the ghost mean for our identities, our authenticity? How can we reconcile this Derridean paradox that it is when we believe we are most ourselves that we are most haunted, that we have been inhabited by past selves? How do we reconcile the reality of having to let the voice leave the body, and of letting it be recreated on our speakers: ghosts born from our household technology, and ghosts saved for later days?

I have in other works both criticized and applauded the recent American revival of “folk” music. The Swedish folk musician Kristian Mattson, popularized in the United States, said in an interview: “I don’t consider my work to be a part of any tradition. This is how I play. This is how I write songs,” despite stylistically similar songwriting to American folksters such as Bob Dylan, who drew heavily from Woody Guthrie, who channeled ghosts of Appalachian ballads strung from Old English ballads, and so on. To discredit history and suppose some sort of *ex nihilo* composition as potential for social change is to attempt to uproot a hundred-year oak with bare hands. Rupture must come from roots, and so the ghost is as new as it is old.

However, a phenomenological framework to assess the rhetoric of music should hope to welcome the ghost with open arms—though it will never quite touch it, we can watch and listen, still:

*Do so, and those musicians that shall play to you
Hang in the air a thousand leagues from hence,
And straight they shall be here. Sit and attend.*
(3.1.220-22)

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Modern Rendition of Ancient Arts: Negotiating Values in Traditional Odissi Dance

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Abstract

Recent innovations in remediating performances allow dancers to perform, collaborate, teach, learn and forge new inter-body relationships that substitute the traditional Guru-Shishya or master-disciple relationship. The divide between technologized and traditional practices in dance creates a productive space that can help scholars understand how digital and networked technologies are transforming embodied cultural memory. Tradition-technology encounters and formations of a deviant discourse challenge the dominant (traditional) norms of embodied cultural memory. My qualitative study of the field reveals that innovation has been encouraged by the most members of the dance community. However, if mediated dance compromises values associated with the dance, like its sacredness, the importance of the body, and the importance of the Guru, it can be potentially subversive to the traditional practice. The main points of conflict between traditional dance and technologically mediated practices indicate moments of compromise in the traditional values.

[**Keywords:** performance, performative rhetoric, Indian classical dance tradition, technology, dance pedagogy, digital mediation, cultural memory]

Introduction

Odissi is one of the nine recognized classical dances of India. Odissi originates from two distinctive styles of dance. One is the spiritual dance style of the female temple dancers, or Maharis. Dance, an intrinsic aspect of Indian spirituality, has shaped the social and political patterns in Indian history. The performing Modern body is often represented as fragmented, destabilized (Armstrong) and pragmatic (Bourdieu) biological entity (Merleau-Ponty). This paper examines the core value system of traditional Odissi involves sacred associations between the dance space, the dancing body and an immediate presence of the master. Digital technologies of teaching, like CDs, DVD, online videos and synchronous videos have a profound impact on these values in relation to the teaching and practice of traditional dance as well as how we understand performative cultural memory. It is understandable that new technologies have created a divide in the dance community. To some, technology is an important tool for innovation. To others, it has the potential to spoil the authenticity of the art. Odissi has been constantly remediating across several generations, and the authenticity of the dance has been constantly remediating, too. While technologizing the dance is unavoidable, to some practitioners it may be disrupting Odissi's core value system. My interviews and

surveys of practitioners of Odissi dance across the globe reveal this controversy. These findings help us understand the relationship between traditional and online teaching, and the impact of mediation on these practices.

Background

I am an Odissi dancer with over twenty-five years of experience as a student, teacher and performer. I learnt Odissi the traditional wayⁱ since the age of four from Guru Aloka Kanungo in Calcutta. I encountered Indian classical Odissi dance at a very tender age. Indian classical dance is not only an artistic expression, but also a way of living. Odissi shaped my perception of the world and the way in which I communicate. The shaping became more evident when I joined the academic program in the United States of America, and developed a new language (rhetoric) to communicate with the academic world. I realized that my dancer-self deeply influences my pedagogic stance and attitude towards learning and research. This has also shaped the theoretical and methodological stance I have taken in this study. I will situate my focus in this juxtaposition of these personal experiences with representing my body as a dancer and as an academic. Despite my traditional learning, I have used technological tools like CDs, DVDs and online videos, in my learning, teaching and performance over the past decade.



Figure 1: Temple sculpture & Odissi dance
(photo courtesy: Neha Kachroo, Pramod Thupaki)

Having learned the dance in a traditional, unmediated environment and having taught the dance using tools of technology, my unique position allows me to raise crucial questions regarding the performance of cultural memory through several forms of remediation. In this chapter, I will attempt to explore how digital dance practice is changing the pattern of traditional pedagogies and practices of dance. Coming from an ethnic heritage that values story, orality has played an important part of the trans-generational passage of wisdom. Mediation of the memory of Odissi dance happens through this transmission of knowledge by practitioners of Odissi (choreographers, learners, teachers, musical accompanists and performers). I have bolstered my own experiences as an Odissi student/teacher/performer by extensive reading in the field, field observations, interviews, surveys and interactions with veteran Gurus (masters), as well as contemporary proponents and users of digital technologies. These practitioners of

Odissi dance are instrumental in construction and mediation of the values of this art.

In all its years of arduous training of the dance, the focuses lie on the precision and dexterous execution of hand and body movements. In this dance, the presence of the body and the sacredness associated with the Guru are central to performance and learning. Odissi has survived for generations through the *Guru-Shishya parampara* or master-student tradition. When bodies are mediated from its traditional dance space, to an online space where they can be digitally represented, the body as an “avatar” or a digital image on Skype or a video forges new relationships between this sacred art and its pedagogy, and its performance.

The dance originated in the temples of Orissa as an ancient performance tradition. In the act of etching the movements into stone sculptures, the memory transmits itself from the physical body (the original keeper of memory of this oral artistic tradition) to the sculptures that represent the body. These sculptures were instrumental in the survival of the art form for several centuries. When sculptors sculpted the movement of the temple dancers on the temple walls, the memory of this artistic ritual got detached from the body of the temple dancers and mediated to other means that preserve/perform the memory. These bearers of memory also served as supplementary tools for teaching. Temple sculptures have a deep influence in helping dance practitioners understand and teach postures of the dance.

Later, in the twentieth century, we started etching them in virtual spaces. This was done through the creation of virtual dancing bodies on videos, web spaces, and virtual worlds like Second Life. With new digital technologies, it is possible to record, replay, edit, and remix performances; virtual worlds allow dancers to turn into avatars and transform their physical shapes and perform gravity defying feats otherwise impossible in physical spaces. The influence of these new digitally mediated practices on teaching, on performance of traditional dance, and on how we understand performative cultural memory has generated interesting debates within the community of artists, and raises provocative questions about the transformative impact of remediation of the dance by the current sprout of tech-savvy students and performers on the conventional practice in the new



Figure 2: Odissi dancer in Second Life (Shree Frizzle is an avatar of the current author)

environment. My research in of the field has revealed that new technologies have created a divide in the dance community. Some senior gurus and some traditional practitioners of the art find that the new technologies have the potential to hurt both the transmission and performance of traditional dance. Most of the dancers of the new generation embraces the remediation of the dance with new technologies, and sees it as an important way to preserve, promote, and secure the survival of the art form. The reception of technological remediation of the performative practice is mixed and a rich source of understanding of the transformative nature of art through technology. Before I explore and analyze parts of my conversations with Odissi practitioners across the globe, I would like to present my understanding of remediation as I have chosen to use in this chapter. I would also like to explore the significance and function of the concept of “tradition” and “authentic” as understood by the practitioners of this dance.

Tradition and Remediation

Remediation has modified the dance at every stage, problematizing the concept of “authentic” and “traditional”. Bolter and Grusin explain that "The very act of remediation [. . .] ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways" (47). In the remediated form of dance, visual and aural semiotic artifacts that perform the function of maintaining the memory of the dance replace the presence of the body. The foundational aspects of this cultural performative memory remain in the remediations, theoretically at least. For those practicing traditional dance, however, the evolutionary path these remediations have taken over the centuries— from oral transmission, to being templated in stone sculptures, to videos, to digital avatars— has distanced the necessary body and pedagogical relationships in negative ways. These are the values underlying the performance. This paper is also works as a mediation project between the traditional Odissi masters and dance practitioners who use digital technologies for teaching, performance and stage enhancement.

The habitus of the Odissi dance performer determines dispositions of the dancer and the traditional value system conveyed in each gesture, pose, and performance. For Bourdieu, the habitus flexibly determines the subject’s worldview. To Bourdieu, “Habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in the order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g. of language economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions” (85). Practitioners of Odissi dance constructed traditional values associated with this art to give the dance a regional and national identity. The collective memories attempt to reproduce and continue traditional practices “more or less” completely, thereby allowing scope for flexibility, subjective interpretation and innovation. Bourdieu defines class habitus as “a subjective but not individual system of

internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception” (86). The system is subjective and therefore interpretive, while recognizing that the subjective always works from the “internalized structures” of understandings and frameworks governing perception. Generated not by an individual, but a group, the habitus shapes the patterns of an understanding that are common to the members of that group. This system influences how the subject interprets the systems around him/her.

Most Odissi dancers inhabit/perform tradition by adhering to socially patterned structures that innate cultural systems flexibly structure. The practitioner of this dance is automatically a part of this value system. To me, understanding this system from the perspective of the survey responders and interviewees was important for my research’s underlying theory. These stories are important because they come from “a conscious, intentional and rational” (36) participants who are retrospectively rationalizing their practices. Since experiences are heterogeneous, the individual dancers display differently nuanced attitudes towards remediation of the dance according to the value system that the habitus inculcates. To Bourdieu, “each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group or class habitus, expressing difference between trajectories and positions inside and outside of class” (86). The individual artistic practices constructed from the habitus, and these constructions determine the value system that underlies the artistic practices of the dancers.

With a notion of the habitus, it is possible to understand ‘tradition’ in several ways. In terms of Odissi dance, tradition involves practices that were apparently part of the temple rituals. These orally transmitted practices are spiritual in nature, adding to the underlying value system based on this dance. The practice of Odissi dance and its social manifestations are rooted in the process of learning and performing, more *traditions*. Importantly, though, in the case of Odissi dance, traditions transmitted across generations are not hegemonic articulations of a community or a set of coercive regulations on how to practice the art. Performers can and do creatively adapt these dance practices through their interpretations and remediations of them. The tension emerges when classical traditions and cultural memories, which are the creations of the collective unconscious across generations, are remediated, especially in spaces that distance the performer from body and the guru-shishya relationship. Practitioners can become uncomfortable and wary of these potentially counter-hegemonic attempts by the mediated dance practices. The traditional artistic practices of eastern cultures are strongly rooted in the hierarchical pattern of the master-disciple relationship. The present generation of dancers attempts to maintain the purity of the dance as they pass down the memory of the dance to Indian and non-Indian students. While, most practitioners support innovations, if any form of innovation can potentially hurt the dance’s perceived authenticity, it is discouraged.

Due to globalization, the practices of traditional arts are no longer limited to the national or cultural borders. Often in the remediation in the practices of these arts, the borders of the virtual and the real are smudging. Based on the attitudes of the practitioners as revealed in my research, I assert that diasporic and non-Indian populations practicing art have demonstrated awareness and value for traditional values surrounding this performative practice. Alessandra Lopez y Royo and Avanthi Meduri have worked on authenticity and tradition in context of the diasporic practices of the art. Both acknowledge the cultural specificity of the practice of Indian classical dance tradition and argue the necessity of understanding the dances not in terms of western theoretical assumptions. Finnegan defines tradition as “any established way of doing things whether or not any antiquity; the process of handing down practices, ideas or values” (7). To her, traditions are “ideas of a) unwritten or oral transmission (but what exactly *this* implies is, likewise, not always agreed upon); b) something handed down and *old* (but how old and in what sense varies); and c) *valued*—or occasionally disvalued—beliefs and practices (but whose values count and why seems to vary)” (1991, 106). As she defines the idea of traditional practices, Finnegan includes the scope and limit of this definition. The limitations of this definition allow flexibility of interpretation and practice within the restrictions and constraints of tradition. Dancers sometimes consider memories transmitted orally as “old,” “original,” and therefore valued by many who are involved in the practice of this art. According to Finnegan, tradition brings with it the concept of “our” and “us”. According to her, Western researchers never fully understand what traditions mean. They outline inaccurate “(n)otions about the nature and applicability of tradition” (110) to define and identify eastern cultures. Western imperial powers thus facilitated projects to use these “our” and “us” concepts of tradition for anthropological categorization within colonized countries. Their association of traditional is to the “primitive”(106) and “old” (110). In general, practitioners of Indian classical dances take “traditional” as “pure”, “authentic” and “original” (their terms). In order to understand how the value system shapes and stabilizes the practice, I will present the voices from the field.

Values: Body and Guru and the Sacred Space

Most people in the artistic community consider the sacredness of the dance as valuable to its practice. When I was learning dance, my Guru asked me to associate the dance with a form of worship. In this sub-section, I will summarize the results from my interviews with Gurus conducted in Orissa and the responses to my survey administered online. Respondents acknowledge their awareness of the sacredness of this dance as an essential value in several ways. To many dancers, purity lies in the authenticity of the dance. The artist community conceptualized authenticity over several generations. Though the definition of authenticity has evolved across generation in this practice, the association with spirituality is has remained in this temple dance tradition.

In relating the story of the origin of the dance to me, Guru Gangadhar Pradhan, an eminent Odissi Guru, reiterated the spiritual aspects of the dance sculpted on the walls of the temples of Orissa. Pradhan said, “Gurus saw the sculptures on the temple walls, researched on them and perfected the poses. The best dance poses are on the walls of Konarak, Rajarani, Mukteshwar, Lingaraj. These also show that dance was happening in those temples.” The importance that he placed on the questions about the Guru and the purity of classical dance leads one to associate sacredness with this idea of the dance. I understood from the conversation with him that he associated sacredness with the art. For instance, traditionally, the presence of the musical instruments was vital and sacred and the dancer would begin the performance with acknowledgement of the instruments by offering obeisance to them. Now that dancers mostly use pre-recorded music in performance, the tradition of touching the instrument and then touching one’s forehead in an act of offering respect has discontinued. There was a sense of urgency when Pradhan mentioned, “Gurus, artists, need to be ‘awake’ ... they need to transmit the tradition to one generation to the next and to the next. They need to advise, teach to remember what is traditional.” He went on to express disapproval for dancers who are “slipping” from the classical tradition by attempting to change the dance style. To him, if a dancer changes the form, context and costume of Odissi and if they do not perform according to the grammar of classical Odissi dance, they should not call it “Odissi”. They should simply call it “Creative Dance.” To him, the dance of a classical Odissi artiste needs to align with the approved performative grammar that the community recognizes.

To veteran Bandha guru Maguni Das, “Music in Sanskrit is “Sangeet”... “Sang” means union. Sangeet is the union between the body of the dancer and the music accompanying the dance. It is important for the people to get together and perform.” He stresses the importance of the physical presence of the Guru, the musician and the musicians playing on the mardala (drums), veena (string instrument), flute and violin. To him, this communion creates an ambience of sacredness and purity.

The body of a dancer is the mediator of meaning. Each gesture and movement conveys a specific message. When the dance video or Skype transmits dance, the meaning of the body undergoes remediation in the online or digital space further. The meaning disassociates from the audience in this remediation. The survey question related to teaching with technological tools like DVDs and videos generated comments from the learners and teachers of Odissi related to the collaborations conducted virtually (through chat or Skype). Email correspondences further clarified the concerns about body expressed by the practitioners. Technological tools like video and Skype is however, quite extensively used in teaching, learning and performing, especially by diasporic and non-Indian practitioners.

Eminent Odissi master, Ratikanta Mohapatra is resistant to the over-dependence of technology in the performance and pedagogy of dance. To him, the

presence of technology discredits the meaning-making potentials of the body. “There are several effects that the body can show; we do not need technology so much.” He meant that Indian classical dance contains a gamut of postures, gestures and expressions to represent a visual on stage. If there is a storm scene, it is possible to portray that through the movements of the body and music. Stage effects can also enhance the effects, but it takes away from the possibility of recreating the same through movement alone. Mohapatra challenges dancers to explore the full potential of the body and not to replace the body’s ability mediate the meanings on stage with “special effects” made possible through stage technologies.

An Odissi dancer from the Middle East wrote in a survey response, “The technology is used in several ways: 1) remembering the poses and sequence, 2) criticizing later and improving the movement.”. Technologies of dance are serving as a memory keeper and as a pedagogical tool for this dancer. A video played repeatedly ingrains the steps in the memory of the dancer. Since the learner is able to watch her/his performance through videos, they get the scope to locate and improve imperfections in their rendition. Here, the survey respondent seems to project more extensive use of technological tools for teaching of the dance in future.

The figure of the Guru or master has been traditionally significant in Indian arts. The survey asked if dance-learning technologies such as DVDs and videos comprise the position of the Guru. They responded variously. None of the respondents undermined the importance of the Guru under any circumstance. Learning the basic nuances of this dance through personal interactions with an expert is not only crucial for learning the right way to perform, but also for gaining the knowledge of the underlying values of the art. “You can learn recipes from the Internet, not dance”, said Ratikanta Mohapatra. His response was almost sarcastic. In his response, he tried to highlight the exclusiveness of this dance and the value of the process of transmission of the knowledge of this dance.

Legendary Odissi Guru, Gangadhar Pradhan said technologizing is unavoidable, but dancers should use technology “in the right way.” The inner values of the dance should be unspoiled when dancers use technologies in dance. He acknowledged the requirement and unavoidability of digital practices. To Pradhan, books on dance show postures or describe the postures. He said, “Working with the Guru is required to understand the nuances of the dance. The teacher communicating and illustrating these layers of meaning is important in the learning of this piece of dance. If a video replaces the Guru’s body, it must show the dance clearly and explain the meaning of each nuance clearly. Pradhan emphasized that a Guru needs to demonstrate what is *chowka*, *tribhanga arasa*, *mandala*ⁱⁱ. Then you can have the idea and you can emulate that correctly.

New York-based dance scholar Uttara Coorlawala explained her experience with dance videos with these words: “it subtracts the presence of the whole body

and adds to the presence of close up faces... It gets both revelatory and tricky...” Learning dance with technology presents an interesting juxtaposition of opposites: Learning videos replace or conceal the Guru. The Guru is, however, present in the form of a remediated image in the video. The close-ups of the face can reveal the expressions during the dance. The close ups of the hand gestures and feet can also give an understanding of the grammatical aspects of the dance, helping students to hone their own dance postures. She went on to say that the practice of performing with technological tools is still developing and the effects not known yet.

That traditional dance has been rooted to the immediate presence of the guru. To Coorlawala, “Technology can be helpful in documentation, propagation, teaching, learning and choreography. It is just an aid for dancers and dance teachers. The Guru (must) maintain the pristine form in practice and performance of the dance style.” Coorlawala reflects the viewpoint of most dancers I corresponded, that technology has a very important role in dance practice. Technology can be a supplement for teaching and for promotion, networking and memorizing. However, the Guru requires being present in order to help the student perform the dance and embody the memory of the dance with geometrically perfect postures and gestures. The feedback is crucial.

An Indian dancer based abroad also agrees that there is no substitute of Guru's personal presence in learning. She pointed out, “There are many places in the world where my dance form (i.e. Odissi) doesn't have good teachers/performers... My stay abroad has convinced me that there are many students who are not able to learn the dance form just because they do not have a teacher in their city /town. .” Being in the presence of the Guru can be rare and expensive in case of non-Indian dancers. Indian classical dance teachers are less in number outside India, so a student might need to travel for a long distance to learn from the Guru.

Most Odissi dancers agree that videos cannot completely replace the body in a pedagogical and performative space, although videos can be useful in preserving the memory of the dance while the student is learning. Most practitioners approve of making these tools supplementary to teaching or performance for enhancement and not as a replacement of the body of the dancer or the Guru.

In addition to the sacredness of the body and the guru as core values of Odissi dance represented in my data, several respondents discussed the ways in which the sacredness of space remains central to Odissi dance. Some practitioners see the Internet as a liberatory space, which is not necessarily in coordination with the nature of this dance that has traditionally needed protection by the community against any kind of colonization. To them, the Internet gives power, knowledge and visibility, which might not necessarily be a good thing since it creates tension amongst the artists who seek to persevere in traditional ways. One survey respondent writes, “When one learns just the art from videos without

complete understanding of the cultural context, the art is only half-learned. They often might do something or perform somewhere, which might be an insult to the art form. Performing an art form in dinner party is not proper. Classical dance is a very formal thing, it is important for students to understand that. For this, the Guru needs to help students understand the importance of tradition that determines what is proper and what is not.” The responder refers to the improper ways in which the artiste can performed Odissi. For instance, it might be improper to perform Odissi in a party where non-vegetarian food and alcohol is present. It requires a cultural understanding of dance in order to make these decisions. There is no written law regarding the “proper” and improper places for a performance of Odissi. That might be a reason for the respondent’s recommendation that the Guru must help students understand these culture specific concepts.

Analysis of Patterns Identifiable in the Conversations

The analyses of several quotes from the interviews and surveys present views of practitioners of Odissi dance on the sacredness of the body, the guru, and the space in which the dancer performs are central to maintaining the tradition of Odissi. The comments by the practitioners show that most of them value the sacredness of the dance, presence of the body and importance of Guru. Some responders also presented a view that the space in which the dancer performs the dance is also sacred. These values manifested when respondents discussed the impact of remediating technologies on the learning and performance of dance. Remediating technologies have strongly influenced Odissi over the recent past, and the effects are still visible. All survey respondents use technology in some way or form, but still maintain some connections to the traditional aspects of the performance. Many respondents demonstrated knowledge of the affordances of particular technologies over others. In these moments, the traditional values surface. However, to what extent might these remediations of Odissi affect the dance’s perceived authenticity? The respondents expressed a variety of viewpoints on this topic.

For respondents, the most important of these values is the immediate physical presence of the Guru. Most of the values described above are present in the pedagogy of real space involving the Guru and the Shishya. Remediations of the dance might compromise these values. Taken together, then, the interpretation of the value system described at the beginning of this chapter reverberates in most of the responses received in my interactions within the dance community. Studying tradition in this way confirms some of the core values of the dance that I learnt as a student. My data also revealed several perspectives on tradition, the body of the dancer, and the importance of the Guru from several people involved in this artistic practice. Though values of the Odissi dance community have evolved across generation, it is important to be aware and respectful of certain primary values of this dance that define its nature.

Mediation through technology is not a smooth system. In “From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technology”, Dennis Baron examines the stages of mediation in the advancement of technologies of communication and literacy. He argues that in spite of the initial resistance against the technologies, they ultimately integrate in a culture as if it were always a part of it. “As the old technologies become automatic and invisible, we find ourselves more concerned with fighting or embracing what’s new. Ten years ago math teachers worried that if students were allowed to use calculators, they wouldn’t learn their arithmetic tables. Regardless of the value parents and teachers still place on knowing math facts, calculators are now indispensable in math class”(31). Mediating the traditional art of Odissi through technological tools might not necessarily be harmful. However, it is important to understand the effect of this on the dance, to preserve the authenticity of ancient art. Authenticity of this spiritual art is valued amongst the Odissi practitioners. The patterns of conversations above show that to some Gurus, sacredness of the dance is intrinsic. Students practicing Odissi dance need to understand this aspect of the practice. To some Gurus, it is important to help students across cultures recognize these values.

Conclusion

Understanding the traditional value system has been helpful in unraveling the profound significances of some of the nodes of tension and the drama surrounding them. Though these patterns of valuation of the body of the dance, the role of guru, and the context for performance are key aspects of this tradition, it would be mistaken to assume that these patterns are tidy representations of this cultural practice. In fact, these perspectives often contradict each other, instigating conversations in the field of Odissi dance practitioners and the formation of an alternative value system that may not be in agreement with the core value system of this dance.

Classical Indian dance has moved from one phase of mediation to another and one context to another, from folk to classical and then to digital. Indian Dance has journeyed from immediacy to codification to the floating signifiers of digital media that deviate from the ritualized, codified two-thousand-year-old cultural practice. Mediation of the dance in online spaces and in teaching videos has led to destabilization, confusion and some resistance from the veteran practitioners of the art, who welcome changes, but think that the central authoritative figure of the Guru is essential for the ultimate survival of this cultural art form, for its continued performance and preservation (Cushman, Ghosh). Mediations of the dance in digital spaces, such as in virtual spaces and social networking spaces and its mediation in different modes, such as in teaching videos, take away the traditional association of the dance with the body of the dancer, importance of the teacher and sacredness. The objections of the Odissi Gurus to remediations of the dance are not coercive, as long as mediation of the dance does not spoil the

underlying values of the dance. This ancient dance has mediated several times. The memory has transferred from one mode to another and to another. The values of underlying the dance practice and pedagogy has remained essential of the dance.

Notes

ⁱ My Guru would sit in front of the class and chant the *bols*. She would demonstrate one piece a number of times and ask us to repeat the same. Guru teaches a small piece in every session, and we would repeat the piece closely several times to memorize it.

ⁱⁱ the postures of Odissi and the individual dance pieces of the dance that comprises the entire section

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Aestheticizing without Agenda: A Counter-Reading of the Western Approach to *Chhau* Dance

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The Argument

In an article titled “A Crisis of Culture” published in *The Hindu* (May 07, 2006), T. M. Krishna observes:

We are in a modern world, don't we need to modernise everything? What's modernisation? Have the arts not always moved with the times? Do we sing or dance the way it was done 200 years ago? Don't we experiment with all our artistic traditions? Don't we address contemporary issues through dance? Don't we package our music differently today? (2)¹

The crux of this paper is to raise similar issues with regard to the popular folk dance form of Eastern India- *Chhau*. The *Chhau* of Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand has been included in the UNESCO list of Intangible Heritage. The western perception on this essentially folk art form has been quite problematic. There is a constant attempt by the western researchers to categorize *Chhau* as a classical dance form and the ostensible reason behind it has been the royal involvement in terms of performance and choreography particularly in Seraikella and Mayurbhanj. However, the purely folk origin of the Purulia *Chhau* of West Bengal is left out of the ambit of discussion. But it has not been taken into consideration that after the independence and the abolition of monarchy in various Indian states, this paradigm of nobility controlling the art form of *Chhau* has been done away with. Instead, various state governments and their agencies have undertaken a string of democratic measures to preserve and promote this rich indigenous art form. This paper attempts to confront and counter the traditional readings of the western scholars with regard to this folk dance form. The recalcitrant approach to search for a “pure” form as *Chhau* is incorrectly projected as a classical dance form. There is a sardonic reaction at any deviation from the so-called “purity” of form as sheer exhibitionism with regard to the western audience and a downright rejection of political patronage as an ignoble way of promoting tourism industry. Such misconceived criticisms are taken up for discussion in this paper. With first-hand knowledge of the ground reality and close interaction with the folk artistes, the paper aims to correct the western approach to standardize an essentially fluid and vibrant art form that imbibes the best of western influences and blends it impeccably with the indigenous tradition to produce an organic unity of impression. The paper begins with an outline of this dance form.

About *Chhau*

In Eastern India, in the states of Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand there exists three styles of *Chhau* called Mayurbhanj *Chhau*, Purulia *Chhau* and Seraikella *Chhau*. The main difference among the three styles of *Chhau* is in the use of masks. While Seraikella *Chhau* of Jharkhand and Purulia *Chhau* of West Bengal use masks, the Mayurbhanj *Chhau* of Odisha does not have the masks thereby adding facial expression with body movement and gesture. The Mayurbhanj *Chhau* and Seraikella styles of *Chhau* are highly evolved with classical elements whereas the Purulia *Chhau* is less evolved yet highly dramatic and the most vigorous of all styles of *Chhau*. The rhythm in all the three styles is created by Dhol, Dhumsa, Chadchadi and Mahuri. The vigorous war dances with swords and shields, the colourful, dignified and intricate rhythmic pattern of other items of *Chhau* dances, the boisterous yet melodious sound of battle drums bring thunderous effect to make the audience spellbound.



The difference in the style of presentation gets quite obvious as we look into some very popular presentations in each school of *Chhau* dance. 'Dandi Mahabharat' is a popular presentation of the Mayurbhanj *Chhau* troupe. As per the epic written by Sarala Das, the main game-planner and conspirator was 'Shakuni' and not Lord Krishna as portrayed by 'Vyasa' in his script. He explains how 'Shakuni' took a silent vow to eliminate the entire 'Kuru kula' to avenge the death of his brothers and family members at the hands of 'Duryodhana', who imprisoned all and let them die without food or water. Such adaptations from the Mahabharata are presented with facial expressions and artistic body movement without any use of masks. In another composition, 'Shradhanjali' the artistes depict the evolution of *Chhau* dance starting with Rukmar Nach (War Dance). This is marked for its rhythmic complexities. Then the dance is developed on

different mythical characters like Shiva and Krishna followed by some social and imaginary episodes. It is a tribute to the Gurus and the royal personalities who contributed for the promotion of *Chhau* dance.

The most highly evolved artistic *Chhau* dance form is Seraikella *Chhau*. Here we find many short compositions on myriad themes. 'Ratri' or Night is conceived from the Ratri Sukta, a verse in the Rig Veda that personifies night into a goddess. Night is a goddess that protects the world and its beings from the threatening forces that may lurk in her darkness. The second composition titled 'Mayur' captures the dance movement of the bird. Its dance at the sight of rain-laden clouds and the spreading of its resplendent plumage epitomizes an almost divine grace. The third composition 'Hansa' depicts the beauty of the stately swan as it swims in its natural habitat of water. The gliding movements of its graceful flight, the preening of its feathers are a visual treat. Another remarkable composition is 'Radha Krishna'. The eternal love of Radha-Krishna, a metaphor of the union between the supreme and human consciousness is a common motif that finds abundant representations in Indian art. In this particular dance composition Krishna's mellifluous flute that forms an intrinsic part of their love imagery becomes the centre of focus.

Compared to the two *Chhau* forms described above, Purulia *Chhau* displays athletic skill to an amazing degree. Here the performers exude raw energy and sheer acrobatic skill to entertain the spectators. One popular composition is 'Mahisasura Badha'. Shattered by the oppressions and exploitations of Mahisasura the gods appeared before Lord Brahma with the appeal to save them and his creation from the demon Mahisasura. Arrayed with the most powerful weapons in her ten hands, Goddess Durga on the back of the lion fought with Mahisasura and killed him. Another popular composition, 'Ravana Badha' has been adapted from the great epic 'Ramayana'. The dance begins with this 'Akal Bodhan' Durga Puja. In this episode Ravan and Ram are engaged in fierce battle which ultimately ends with the death of Ravan. Very high decibel sound, resplendent masks, vigorous body movements and natural rhythm mark the essence of Purulia *Chhau*.²

Debate over Compromise with the Indigenous Aesthetic of Performance

In the final chapter of her book *Indian Folk Theatres* (2007), Julia Hollander opens up a new issue of alienation for the urban theatre enthusiasts in India. At the outset, she humbly admits her outsider status in approaching the vast spectacle of folk theatre in rural India. She recounts her experiences of being a British citizen in India and the resultant feeling of otherness. As she elaborates on this idea of being a foreigner to the Indian soil, she moves swiftly into a different domain of perception and identifies the global consumerism as a more potent force than erstwhile British colonial legacy. As soon as she enters into the discourse of global village she includes the urban populace of India as the practitioners of a global

consumerist culture and identifies them as “cultural outsiders” in terms of indigenous theatrical traditions of rural India. In a very interesting manner she equates her racial outsider status with the cultural outsider status of urban Indians. She goes on expanding the list of multinational brands in the fields of garment, food and beverage, entertainment and others to show how the urban India has adapted itself to this imported culture in course of time. As a result, they have been segregated from their folk roots and allied cultural practices. Now, this is selling half-truth at the expense of an equally vibrant urban culture that embraces folk as an alternative way of life. In India, the entertainment industry has made it fashionable to include folk as part of a greater strategy to re-connect with the roots. Be it fusion music and the emerging bands that dole out heavy doses of folk tunes or recent releases in the domain of parallel cinema where folk song-and-dance sequences find an eloquent expression. One may remember Satyajit Ray’s film ‘Agantuk’ where folk performance provides much-needed cathartic experience to the main protagonist. Even in the world of fashion and jewellery ethnic ornaments and garments have their sway in the recent times. Such spontaneous experimentations with various folk elements in the domain of mainstream urban culture cannot be dismissed as insincere frolicking with indigenous cultural materials by the so-called urban cultural “outsiders”. If such charges of a “resident alien” status of urban theatre enthusiasts are leveled a counter-charge of failure to understand the cultural nuances of a composite society may also surface quite pertinently. What became particularly disturbing was the attempt of a British folk researcher to project the folk performers in very poor light and that too, out of a misconceived notion. She quotes from the observation of a very famous British playwright, John Arden, during his visit to Purulia in the 1970s. The statement was directed against the overindulgence of the academia in certain folk performing art forms like Chhau and the resultant multiplication of ineffectual academic research works at the expense of serious conservationist approaches. The *Chhau* performers were not the target of his attack. Their innate hospitable nature prompted them to modify the mode of presentation in such a manner so as to pay greater attention to the guest spectators like John Arden. It was not a compromise on the format of dance- rather cosmetic changes to facilitate the viewing of a distinguished group of foreign spectators. Such conciliatory gestures were quite frequent during the days of kings and emperors who were self-styled patrons of folk art forms. Unfortunately, such extempore improvisations on the dance craft were mistaken by scholars as an attempt to dilute the ‘purity’ of form to keep the well-off foreigners in good humour for future opportunities to perform abroad. Let us have a look at what Arden observed regarding the Purulia *Chhau* performers.

Instead of dancing ‘in the round’ for the benefit of all the audience, they imperceptibly metamorphosed their act into a proscenium arch display, pointing everything at the academics – maybe they didn’t even realize they were doing it. The academics recorded and recorded. The archives will now be stuffed, the doctoral theses already lying on the publishers’ shelves.

Arden 1977, p.149

It seems difficult to accept Julia's description of the *Chhau* performance as 'artificial' and meant solely for the academics. Next, the most artistic and scholarly version of *Chhau* in the Indian subcontinent, Seraikella *Chhau*, has also been described with certain misconceived notions. Hollander admits the basic mode of presentation like the 1970s version where Seraikella *Chhau* is presented front on. But it seems she is not comfortable with the greater presence of modern commercial accoutrements- the microphone, the light, the cameras. Even the arrival of the Chief Minister to inaugurate the dance festival is viewed sardonically by Hollander. She fails to appreciate the use of Hindi by the Chief Minister as the main language of communication amongst several tribal language communities. What she expects as "people's language" ultimately turns out to be "people's languages". Jharkhand has more than thirty tribal languages and it is impossible for any Chief Minister to use all the tribal languages in his speech. Jharkhandi politicians' tourism initiative through *Chhau* dance festival is strongly disapproved by foreign scholars like Julia Hollander. But such festivals are a major means of subsistence for the not so well-to-do *Chhau* performers. Festivals boost rural economy to a large extent. The Government of Odisha established a Government *Chhau* Dance Centre in 1960 in Seraikella and the Mayurbhanj *Chhau* Nritya Pratisthan at Baripada in 1962 since the abolition of princely states made it difficult for the local communities to sustain these traditions. These institutions engage in training involving local gurus, artists, patrons and representatives of *Chhau* institutions and sponsor performances. The Chaitra Parva festival, significant to the *Chhau* Dance, is also funded by the state government. It is the best form of mask dance. For safeguarding *Chhau* Dance the Sangeet Natak Akademi has taken up specific measures including grants to cultural institutions and the establishment of a National Centre for *Chhau* Dance at Baripada, Odisha.

Hollander and her ilk search for real, live theatre and are dead against any experimentation with the pure art form. This notion of purity is classical and logocentric. In a folk art form like *Chhau* this hardcore notion of purity is a misplaced idea. Hollander may argue that the *Chhau* form of Seraikella had been given great patronage and wide publicity by the kings of that region. It is true that the kings used to participate in the *Chhau* dance performances to encourage the young artistes to join the dance troupe and also to popularize the folk art form among the villagers of that region. In the contemporary socio-political scenario the role of patrons for *Chhau* performances is being played by the influential politicians. The charges of corruption in the pure art form, lack of interest among the village community members during the performances and creation of two clearly demarcated types of *Chhau*- one for the foreigners and another for the indigenous audience during festive rituals- are ill-formed keeping in mind the vibrant tradition of *Chhau* even after the passage of so many years. In reality, folk performers are attempting to go global in the true sense of the term. They have imbibed the best folk tradition of the western theatre and are trying to sensitize

their own village community about the complete nature of theatre to be brought out by a skillful *mélange* of the best of eastern and western traditions.

Surprisingly, the large body of literature that describes the esoteric meaning of the Chhau dances in English, and the *Chhau* maestro J. B. Singh Deo's lyrical English language descriptions are straightway dismissed by western critics like Julia Hollander as incomprehensible to most of the audience. What they term as "intellectual package" for "naïve foreigners" could also be explained as the true attempt at globalization for this rich folk dance form. What's the problem if the presentation is a bit dazzling and smart? In the name of purity do we want the folk artistes to remain in the infernal darkness of poverty? Isn't it a holier-than-thou agenda to deny global access to the traditionally rich folk forms like *Chhau*? Do we feel uneasy if a great *Chhau* performer like Guru Shashadhar Acharya is invited to reputed universities abroad for lecturing and conducting workshops?

The inflexible mindset of a western critic like Julia Hollander is made explicit when she makes an adverse comment on the present "degeneration" of *Chhau* art form and shows the reason for this "fall from grace" by referring to the absence of a controlling British cultural policy,

We watch the palace courtyard shows as the last vestiges of community theatre, our liberal sensibilities gratified that they contain both tribal and royal influences. But here is a troubling colonial legacy – our literature informs us that the royal heritage is intertwined with the period of British colonial power. **Were it not for the Brits, the Maharajas would never have been able to develop the Chhau form. And their cultural interest was broader, more cosmopolitan than they might nowadays like to admit.** We know Bijoy Pratap Singh Deo brought European ballet and even possibly Manipuri dance, via the Bengali Tagore, to his dance aesthetic.

Hollander 2007, pp.182-183

Lure of the lucre had always been a driving motif for many of the so-called celebrity artistes. Poverty has been an eternal companion to the rural performers. Now, with the advent of globalization and free market economy, the artistes get exposed to media and in some cases film industry in Mumbai. But it will be highly unfair to claim that the *Chhau* artistes are serious only in front of the camera where a rich booty has been promised. Of course, a fat purse brings along with it additional responsibility of delivering it perfectly. However, it does not mean that they are lax and perfunctory in their other performances. They are after all fallible human beings like us. They get tired due to a very hectic schedule and it has to be understood with sympathy for the artist community. Another grave misconception about *Chhau* of Seraikella among the western critics is that the foreign tourists and theatre enthusiasts are chiefly responsible for the preservation of the dance form. If this is true how the purely folk origin of Purulia *Chhau* and relatively scant attention of the foreign visitors for its promotion and preservation made it survive against all odds? It is really unfortunate if foreign entrepreneurs of folk theatre

impose condition of an “unspoilt” art form for visiting India and paying for the survival of art forms like *Chhau*. With the passage of time and the influx of heterogeneous theatrical influences, it is quite obvious that the learned section of the folk artistes would take up the good aspects of other dance forms and try to enrich their own indigenous art form. There is another possibility of mainstream young performers eager to learn *Chhau* dance and represent this form to the other countries of the world. If the foreign admirers of this folk dance think that as they have been paying for such performances they will have absolute control over the dynamics of performance- this is once again a not-so-tolerant mindset with certain fixed ideas about controlling other agencies.

Conclusion:

It is interesting to note how folk researchers like Julia Hollander end their commentaries with notes of optimism completely dissonant with their main argument. They depict a rosy picture for India in 2050 and cite Goldman Sachs as evidence. The overall economic condition will improve and it will make village folk artistes a little well-off. Their argument is that such prosperity will bring new opportunities to the folk performers to perform in town and subsequently settle there. They will learn to adapt to the new cosmopolitan environment of Indian urban space. It will also put great stress on their indigenous art and compel it to change and adapt in course of time. The paradigm of “purity” will fall into disuse then. Such critics often voice their anxiety regarding the danger inherent in the process of urban settlement of the folk performers. They might face humiliation of various kinds and perhaps be forced to lead an ignoble life. Even there is an open call to include such unpleasant experiences into the format of their performance to stay relevant to the urban theatrical circle.

All said and done, the flip side of the folk performers’ life in the village has not been addressed by the western theatre analysts. It was a rare opportunity for me to meet Guru Shashadhar Acharya, a leading *Chhau* artiste of India, in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on the fringes of the National *Chhau* Dance Festival on 30th May 2013. In a long interview Guru Acharya talked about a grave crisis in the moral life of the young and upcoming *Chhau* performers. I think an excerpt of that interview could be very relevant to the main argument of this paper.

I feel the problem that has spread like cancer amongst the young generation of *Chhau* artistes is addiction to liquor and drugs. The influx of hard cash has spoiled the moral nature of these young people. There is an urgent need to build awareness for the prevention of such evil practices. Otherwise, we’ll lose a large number of talented young artistes in near future. I feel they should receive proper education or else their life will definitely be ruined by the lure of filthy lucre and its attendant vices. Today, we live in metropolitan cities. Our commitment to the indigenous folk art

form has been recognized by the government. We've received many facilities and honours. I've visited many foreign universities to conduct workshops and deliver lectures on *Chhau* dance form. But I feel anxious when I find there is lack of excellence in terms of coping with the limelight that will hog a successful performer once he carves a niche in the professional circuit. Who will continue this glorious tradition after us? Who will represent this art form to the international audience? These are some of the disturbing questions that haunt me. I've set up schools in Seraikella and New Delhi to sensitize the upcoming folk artistes for performing at the highest level. I've also accepted women from the mainstream to join our troupe and continue the tradition. Growing beyond the sobriquet of martial dance, we've incorporated many artistic nuances into our traditional form. We produce a *mélange* that will survive the onslaught of commercially viable popular dance forms.³

This excerpt shows the complex form of *Chhau* that has evolved over the years by accepting the challenge of alien art forms. If it had got stuck in the western notion of 'purity' perhaps there could have a slow but sure movement towards oblivion. Hence, the mindset has to change and the so-called deviations from an imaginary ideal should be interpreted as bold acceptance of a new kind of reality to survive and flourish.

Notes

1. The article was published in the Sunday magazine of The Hindu. It was a soul-stirring commentary on the downward slide of many eminent folk art forms. The author suggests that the crisis has deepened in the case of many indigenous art forms due to the inability to adapt with the challenges of the new era.
2. The information provided on the content and classification of *Chhau* dance was borrowed to some extent from the brochure of the National *Chhau* Dance Festival organized by Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. I am indebted to Mr Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi.
3. This excerpt is part of a memorable interview. It was held at Odisha Pantha Nivas, Bhubaneswar in the morning of 30th May 2013. I took the interview with two other field investigators- Suchismita Pattnaik and Koutuk Dutta.

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Indranil Acharya is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore (West Bengal). He obtained his Ph.D. on Yeats and Eliot in 2004. He also completed one UGC Research Project on Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Fiction in 2008. Dr Acharya had been the Deputy Coordinator of the UGC Special Assistance Programme on the documentation and translation of the oral and folk literature of the dalit and tribal communities in West Bengal. He is also implementing one UGC Major Research Project as the Principal Investigator on the documentation, translation and analysis of Bengali Folk Drama in the context of endangerment. His first published book is *Beyond the Sense of Belonging: Race, Class and Gender in the Poetry of Yeats and Eliot*. He has also edited a book, *Survival and Other Stories: Anthology of Bangla Dalit Stories* with Orient Blackswan. Another edited volume entitled *Towards Social Change: Essays on Dalit Literature* (Orient Blackswan) is in press. Dr Acharya has taken up one Sahitya Akademi publication project on the translation of representative short fiction by twenty women writers of Bengal. He is also translating stories of Narendranath Mitra, a great Bengali author, for Orient Blackswan.

Performance as Protest: *Thumri* and Tawaif's Quest for Artistic Autonomy

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Abstract

Indian cultural history testifies to the intimate bond the tawaifs had for centuries with the performing arts. Be it the pre-Mughal folk culture of rural India or the highly sophisticated culture of classical music in the Mughal courts, the tawaifs had always remained at the focal point of it. However conservative social paradigm never allowed them to belong to the mainstream Indian society. Concepts of honour, chastity and occupational propriety, with which patriarchy regulates a woman's individual choices, constrained the tawaif to inhabit a limited space, isolated and solitary, alluring, yet infamous. In the present paper, I propose to explore how *thumri* reflects the tawaif's own consciousness of her contradictory status as an outcast as well as an artist, indispensable to India's musical heritage. Through a detailed structural analysis of the genre, I would discuss how the textual world of *thumri* with its distinctive formal and performative peculiarities supplies the tawaif with a potentially subversive "action repertoire", enabling the nautch-girl to voice her desperate demand for autonomy.

[**Keywords:** tawaif, liminality, performing arts, *thumri*, "action repertoire", artistic autonomy]

Indian cultural history testifies to the intimate bond the tawaifs had, for centuries, with the performing arts. Be it the pre-Mughal folk culture of rural India or the highly sophisticated culture of classical music in the Mughal courts, the tawaifs had always remained at the focal point of it. However the patriarchal social structure of India has ordained them to perennially inhabit a limited space. In the present paper, I propose to explore how *thumri* reflects the tawaif's own consciousness of her contradictory status as an outcast as well as an artist, indispensable to India's musical heritage. Within the textual world of *thumri*, the social reality of the courtesan's life and her repressed resentment against it seem to find artistic expression in the formal as well as performative peculiarities of the genre.

Socio-cultural anthropologists have traced the origin of the tawaif-class back to a north Indian group of folk-artists whose primary occupation was to entertain people with their songs and dances. Social anthropologist Somnath Chakrabarty has made a classification of different regional communities of nautch-girls. The women, belonging to the 'Beria' community of Uttar Pradesh, had, at one point of time, taken up the profession of public-dancers. This section of baijis is called 'Berin'. To another group belongs the 'Deogarni', hailing from the 'Gand' or

'Gondh' community of central India. The southern parts of India, the Telengana region, to be more specific, had their own community of nautch-girls known as the 'Bogams'. The term 'tawaif', however, was ascribed to the Muslim nautch-performers, whereas, the communities mentioned above were all Hindus by religion. (Chakrabarty, 140-144)

While in the Hindu tradition, nautch-performance was invested with prominent religious overtones, the flamboyant Mughal durbars accorded to the baijis a rather 'secular' position of court-performers patronized by the emperor and appointed for his entertainment. Bernier, in his 1660 account of the Mughal India, had demarcated between two classes of baijis—the ordinary, less sophisticated group of public women, and the more refined tawaifs whose adept mastery over music was appreciated by the elites. The latter were frequently appointed by the *amirs* and *mansabdars*—the feudal lords of the Mughal era—as their personal entertainers and, even, sometimes, allowed to enter into a marital relationship with them. (Chakrabarty, 154)

If the above discussion points towards the prominence the courtesans enjoyed in the rich heritage of Indian classical music, the fact, however, remains that these tawaifs were nonetheless marginalized in India's patriarchal society. Concepts of honour, chastity and occupational propriety, with which patriarchy regulated a woman's individual choices, constrained the tawaif to inhabit a limited space—isolated and solitary, alluring, yet infamous. The frequent marriages between Muslim elites and tawaifs notwithstanding, the predominant social structure of India, formulated according to Puritanical Brahmanic principles, never sanctioned such alliances. Chakrabarty notes, "...according to the strictures of the Smriti-shastras, such liaison with these fallen women was pronounced improper for the householder." (152, my translation)

However, the social attitude, towards both performing arts and their artists, has throughout been one of ambivalence. One may refer, in this connection, to an anecdote about Aurangzeb, an inveterate enemy of music, who outlawed the tawaifs. One day, on his way to the mosque, he ran into a procession of mourners. When asked whose coffin they were bearing to the cemetery, they replied "Music is like our mother; your laws have killed her. We are carrying her corpse for burial". The story, though perhaps, apocryphal, points to the fact that Indian civilization had always acknowledged the tawaifs as the sole custodians of music, whose disappearance would spell the extinction of Indian classical music itself.

The contradiction with which Indian society regarded nautch-performance was conspicuous even in the Anti-Nautch Movement of the late nineteenth century. The marginalization of tawaifs that took place in this period was related to the larger and more complex political matrix of the pre-independence India. The Social Purity Movement that erupted in Britain by the mid-nineteenth century had direct impact on the colonial India. The British government, in the post-Mutiny era, came to proscribe any interaction between British officials and Indian

nautch-girls. This policy however was motivated less by any missionary zeal for moral purification, than by the shrewdly political strategy of curbing the tawaif class whose complicity with feudal elites during the 1857 Mutiny had posed a threat to the colonial rule. However the ultimate death knoll for the tawaifs was struck around 1892-93. The British Government came up with an official declaration by which all nautch-girls, irrespective of their class or profession, were banned. The *baijis'* refined arts were overlooked and they were all indiscriminately branded as mere prostitutes, indulging in immoral flesh-trade.

The aversion against tawaifs, again, was further accentuated by the emergent nationalism's indictment of them as agents of India's moral decadence. The anticolonial exigencies of creating a militant Hindu identity for the nation, subverting the coloniser's derogatory construction of the colonized as weak and effeminate, resulted in a denigration of the tawaifs. Vikram Sampath quotes the nineteenth century reformer Keshab Chandra Sen's virulent attack on nautch-girls:

"Hell is in her eyes. In her breast is a vast ocean of poison. Round her comely waist dwell the furies of hell. Her hands are brandishing unseen daggers ever ready to strike unwary or willful victims that fall in her way. Her blandishments are India's ruin. Alas! Her smile is India's death". (qtd. Sampath, 186)

However, the tawaifs' inseparable relationship with Indian performing arts complicates the nationalists' perception of them. Rejuvenation of indigenous artistic forms was an essential part of the anticolonial project of asserting India's cultural alterity. Yet, Indian musical tradition would become crippled if it be dissociated from its custodians, the tawaifs. The problematic connection the tawaifs had with the cultural heritage of India is emphasized in a comment by Lala Harkrishan Lall:

"According to our ancient beliefs and ideas, music and dancing are heavenly, while prostitution is hellish... the question ought to be how to divorce blessing from curse and separate one from the other". (qtd. Sampath, 188)

While their annihilation was deemed necessary for India's moral regeneration, the nationalist agenda of cultural revival required that classical music be "redeemed" from the stigma of being associated with the tawaifs. Hence, the likes of Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936) and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931) endeavored to bring classical music out of the "kothas" of disrepute.

The ambivalence is not merely reflected in society's attitude towards the tawaifs, but it is, more often than not, deeply embedded in the latter's own self-perception. Interpellation to the patriarchal, conservative ideology has been so complete for some of the tawaifs, that they themselves regard the profession of nautch-performers to be degrading. Chakrabarty in his extensive research on the

tawaifs of Kolkata, notes that in 1982-83, a survey was conducted on them which revealed their own response to this dichotomy:

“Twenty-one baijis (24.14%) consider themselves to be *kalakaars* or artists and think that they should get equal respect in society. Yet they are looked down upon. This is social injustice. 14.14% think themselves to be inferior to respectable women....” (151, my translation)

In the light of the above discussion, the present paper seeks to examine the extent to which the musical genre of *thumri* encodes the courtesan’s sense of pride in her artistic autonomy, notwithstanding her consciousness of her ignominious social identity.

Discoursing on the interrelatedness between art and protest movements, theorists of social movement studies have conceded that art is not peripheral or a mere functional element in the framing of protest. Rather it forms a central part of the “action repertoire”. (Teune, 1) The term, coined by Charles Tilly (1977), refers to the collective means political actors adopt to voice their remonstrance against the existing paradigms. The action repertoire, however, is not restrictive in its scope. Tilly acknowledges the possibility of the incorporation of newer methods and strategies of protest, depending on the political exigencies of a specific time and place. (Tilly, 1995: 28) “Repertoires evolve as a result of improvisation and struggle”. (McAdam et al, 49)

In this connection, it is to be noted that the domain of art and artistic performances does not fall outside the sphere of “action repertoire”. On the contrary, where authoritarian interference comes to stifle all signs of dissent, art supplies a potent, yet shrewdly disguised, voice of recalcitrance. “[A]rtists should be understood as critical communities... Artists provide methods of self-expression beyond the rationality of arguments. Social movements pick up such dissident cultural forms and integrate them into their practices. Thus, new forms of protest are staged and become part of a shared repertoire of contention... Art has particularly attracted attention of movement scholars in many cases where the use of arguments is restricted, for instance because of limits to freedom of speech...” (Teune, 4)

Although *thumri* never evolved into any political protest movement, we may attempt a politicization of the musical genre in the light of the above discussion. The tawaifs’ lack of autonomy renders any overt demonstration of dissidence an impossible dream. However repressive and censorious the orthodox Indian society might have been, the tawaifs, at all times, are dependent on it for their livelihood. Their remonstrance, hence, must resort to a strategic camouflage, if it is ever to be effective. *Thumri*, with its distinctive formal structure and performative tactics, furnishes the nautch-girls with a useful means of asserting their artistic autonomy, even while outwardly conforming to society’s derogatory definition of themselves.

Musicologists like Thakur Jaideva Singh have traced the earliest forms of *thumri* called the 'Chalitham Nrityasahitam' to the *Harivansh Purana* (c.200 A.D.). Some have considered *thumri* to be an art form older even than the *dhrupad* or the *khayal*. Some scholars have considered Nawab Wajid Ali Shah to be the originator of the genre. Yet the claim made by Captain Augustus Willard, a band-master in the state of Banda in the United Provinces, to have been fascinated by the erotic charm of *thumri* in the early nineteenth century, negates the possibility of Wajid Ali Shah being the initiator of *thumri*, as he was, at that time, only a boy of 9-10 years (Sampath, 101-102). Gauhar Jaan, the most celebrated exponent of *thumri*, on the other hand, attributes the creation of *thumri* to Tumburu, a legendary divine singer or 'Gandharba', whose singing renditions abounding in dance-like movements and facial expressions were called 'Kauthumari Pada'. Gauhar Jaan opines "It is likely that the word '*thumri*' is a corrupted version of 'Kauthumari Pada' of Tumburu" (qtd Sampath, 195)

Whatever be the originary point of *thumri*, the genre characteristically uses the regional dialects of northern India. The lyrics were conventionally composed in Braj Bhasha, a dialect spoken in and around Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. Khadi Boli or spoken Hindi, Urdu and other regional variations of Hindi like Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Mirzapuri etcetera are frequently found to be the language in which the text of *thumri* is couched.

The customary performance of *thumri* involves an elaborate use of facial and bodily expressions. Such physical gestures, however, contribute to the heightened eroticism of *thumri* and, therefore, the genre is particularly suited for the seductive performances of the tawaifs. Sampath observes "The word '*thumri*' is said to be derived from the Hindusthani word '*thumakna*', meaning an attractive gait. So literally it means a song that has an attractive, rather sensuous, gait in both melody and rhythm." (102) History too vindicates the fact that, until recently, *thumri*, along with "interpretative dance", formed the typical content of a courtesan's performance at intimate *mehfils*. (Manuel, 1986: 470)

The association of the word '*thumri*' with '*thumakna*' has been insisted on by Gauhar Jaan too. She says that *thumri* may have originated in the devotional songs that commemorated the "... *leelas* or dalliances of Krishna and Radha (*thumak thumak ke* as they say in Hindi). Perhaps these songs of the *raas leela* were set to the lilting rhyme ('*thumak*') and became known as '*thumris*'". (qtd Sampath, 196)

However, although the stylistic conventions of *thumri* facilitate the courtesan's supremacy in its performance, the names of the known female *thumri* singers are few in comparison with those of the male exponents of the genre—like Sadiq Ali Khan or Bhैया Ganpatrao—who are celebrated in history. This points to the marginalization that the tawaifs were subjected to even within the cultural space of music. Not only the patriarchal society, but even the gendered fabric of Indian classical music pushed the tawaifs into a limited space and robbed them of

the opportunity of earning recognition for themselves. They were neither allowed to play musical instruments, nor to train students. This apart, being groomed by a *gharanedar ustad* was a prerequisite for a professional courtesan. Since they had no disciples, the tawaifs were bereft of any means to transmit their art to the next generation and their names were eventually lost in oblivion.

On another level, the genre of *thumri* itself, like the tawaifs, inhabited a marginal space within the domain of Indian classical music. It was considered light and flippant, compared to the more exalted forms like *dhrupad* or *khayal*. While *dhrupad* presents a well-constructed framework of *swara* (musical notes) and *laya* (rhythm), the *khayal*—both *bilambit* and *drut*, the slow and fast variants respectively—unfolds the majestic beauty of the *raga* through a logical and progressive development of notes. Contrary to this, *thumri* follows no well-defined pattern of elaboration and frequently fuses multiple *ragas*, thus corrupting the distinct identity of each of them.

Vidya Rao notes that the defenders of *thumri* have tried to vindicate the prestige of the genre, on the ground that it too, like *khayal* or *dhrupad*, demands years of diligent practice to acquire mastery over the *taiyari* (technical virtuosity) and the *mizaz* (the appropriate attitude of presentation). Like *khayal* and *dhrupad*, *thumri* follows the grammar of *raga*, *tala* and exploits various complex styles like *murki*, *khatka*, *meend*, *zamzama*, *taan* etcetera.

Yet, this struggle to find points of similarity between *thumri* and *khayal* only evidences a desperate attempt to “elevate” *thumri* to the equal status of *khayal*, and is thus a covert admission of its inferiority. *Thumri* does not need to conform to the normative requirements of *khayal*. It possesses its own generic peculiarities. The standards of evaluation applicable to *khayal* must not, and indeed cannot, be applied for an understanding or appreciation of *thumri*. In being “different” from *khayal*, does *thumri* present the recalcitrant voice of a tawaif, undaunted by the restrictive norms of both a patriarchal society and a male-dominated musical tradition.

However, a *thumri* mirrors, in its structure, the tawaif’s own constriction within a limited space. It uses the “limited” range of only a few specific ragas, customarily considered “light”, such as *Kafi*, *Piloo*, *Ghara*, *Khamaj*, *Sindhura*, *Dhani*, *Manj-Khamaj*, *Des*, *Tilang*, *Jhinhoti* etcetera. Frequently, the musical space within which the *thumri* unfolds itself too turns out to be rather “limited”. “Many *thumris*... take *madhyam* as the tonic—a note half-way up the normal scale, effectively giving the singer only five notes (from *madhyam* to upper *shadja* on her normal scale) to work with.” (Rao, 32) In respect to *talas* too, *thumri* uses short, less complicated *talas* like *Dadra*, *Kaharwa*, *Deepchandi*, *Addha*, *Sitarkhani* and so on.

The subject-matter of *thumri* centres round the tawaif’s awareness of her status as a sexual commodity to her patron. *Thumris* depict the emotions of the

'*nayika*', yearning for her lover. "The pangs of unrequited love, agony of separation, the ecstasy of union and the anger coupled with sorrow at being deceived, form the thematic content of *thumris*." (Sampath, 104). The centrality of the female speaker and of feminine emotions notwithstanding, the literary text of *thumri*, therefore, cannot be regarded feminist, for, as Rao argues, it projects the image of the heroine in perfect consonance with the traditional patriarchal construction of femininity as weak and given to sentimental pinings for the nonchalant male. The *thumri* rarely presents "woman [who] is in control and has subjugated her beloved." (Sampath, 104)

Yet, despite the "limited" melodic-rhythmical space and the projection of femininity as constructed by the male-gaze, *thumri* does represent the tawaif's conviction of her artistic autonomy. In its fluidity of structure and deviation from the formal rigidity of classical music, *thumri* (more specifically, its *bol-banao* variant) proclaims the subjective authority of the singer. The multiple layers of ambiguity that the singer explores in the literary text and the freedom with which she coalesces diverse ragas to suit the mood of her rendition seem to be a proud declaration of an autonomous artistic self slighted in a male-dominated society.

To begin with, in the *khayal*, the '*jagah*' or the musical space for artistic improvisation is strictly defined according to the grammatical conventions of the raga it is set on—its particular *nyas-swara*, *bakra*, *badi* and *sambadi swara* and so on. The poetry of the *bandish*, however, receives scant attention. *Thumri*, on the other hand, elaborates itself on the *swara*-structure of its particular raga, and, also, on the '*jagah*' of the lyric, exploring its diverse meanings and implicit ambiguities. In addition, a *thumri*-singer improvises on the facial or physical expression. *Thumri*, thus, deviating from the confining constraints of classical music, creates for itself a multi-dimensional musical space. "To the *jagah* of rhythm and *swara*, *thumri* adds...the *jagah* of the poetry...and the *jagah* of body-movement and the *jagah* of *bhav* (the *jagah* of dance)". (Rao, 33)

Thumri, then, allows the tawaif to take artistic flights beyond her limited space. While improvising on the literary text of *thumri*, she, more often than not, performs a kind of dramatic enactment. Vidya Rao notes how, while presenting the *thumri* '*Kaun gali gayo Shyam*' ('Which road has Shyam taken?'), the singer would emphasize and explore the multilayered meaning of the phrase '*Kaun gali*'. Rao further notes that one of the means of bringing variation into the textual content of *thumri* is the '*kaku prayog*', whereby a singer sings the same line with same *swara*-structure, but in different voices, sometimes loud, sometimes soft. The emphasis on particular words or pauses may undergo frequent shifts everytime the singer sings the line. '*Kaku prayog*' seems to create a multifaceted persona of the singer, whose one interpretation of the text delivered in a particular tune, contrasts sharply with another, conveyed in an altogether different tune; this builds up, as it were, a heightened dramatic tension amongst the many internal voices of the same speaker.(33)

Incidentally, the indispensability of drama in a *thumri* rendition is stressed by Gauhar Jaan too, when she speaks of the necessity for a tawaif to be trained, not only in the ‘techne’ of classical music, but also in ‘*abhinaya*’ or the art of enactment. The tawaif, in order to effectually bring out the rich play of ambiguities, must internalize the meaning of the text, “...its context and the ‘cultural setting’ of the song as a whole.”(qtd Sampath, 197) The tawaif, thus, takes up an autonomous role in creating the polyvalence of *thumri*.

On another level, Rao’s elaborate discussion on the complex ways in which *thumri* formulates its *sthayi* and *sanchari* serves to illustrate how *thumri* complicates the identities of the addresser and the addressee. In the *sthayi* or the initial lines, the *bandish* rather unambiguously presents the dominant emotion and the identity of the *nayika*. The singer, then, in the *sanchari*, improvises on the melodic-rhythmic structure, playing also with the text and thus disrupting simplistic meaning. Rao cites the example of the *Dadra* in *Piloo* ‘*Gori baanke naino se chhalave jaduva*’ (‘The fair girl spells magic with her eyes’), where there is no way of arriving at a definite conclusion regarding the identity of the speaker or of the addressee. It can be a dialogue between two women about a third person, or it may be a compliment paid by a companion to the *nayika*, or it may even be the narcissistic voice of the *nayika* herself. This verbal ambiguity is complemented by the shifting melodic structure—in the present instance, *Piloo* is seamlessly mixed with *Shivranjani*. (34)

This brings us to the allegation leveled against *thumri* on ground of its violation of the purity of ragas. Indian classical music has attributed distinct and strictly defined *swara*-structure to each raga. The “correctness” of a singer’s presentation of a raga implies his/her impeccable conformity to these formal conventions. A *khayal*-singer then, pays wary attention to his/her presentation of correct notes, so that the raga he/she is performing does not get confused with another.

Thumri, on the other hand, however, plays with such dangerous boundaries (where one raga seems to resemble another, excepting a slight difference in the application of notes) to introduce variety within its musical text. It subtly interchanges the position of the notes or drops one/two *swara* so that one raga may, almost imperceptibly, get fused with another.

Such fusion, however, often complements the textual meaning. An example, cited by Rao, is ‘*Ab kaise dharoon dheer, Nis din nainon se neer bahat hai*’ (‘How can I have patience/ The eyes shed tears night and day’) in *Tilak-Kamod*. The singer may cleverly change the ‘*ma-ga-re-sa-sa-re-sa-ni*’ of ‘*neer bahat hai*’ into ‘*ma-ga-re-ga-ni-sa*’, thus replacing *Tilak-Kamod* with *Des*. Such slight alteration on the *swara*-pattern, which according to Rao is akin almost to “punning” (35), is, again, in perfect congruity with the theme of the *thumri*. *Des* is a raga traditionally associated with monsoon. The inclusion of *Des* seems to turn the rain into a metaphor for the tears of the lovelorn *nayika*. (35)

Peter Manuel observes: "A good *thumri* text is 'incomplete'; in that its expression of emotion is sufficiently broad, simple and general, so that the singer can interpret it in innumerable ways."(qtd Sampath, 103) It is through her intelligent evocation of "innumerable" interpretations and her exploration of multifarious emotions, that the marginalized tawaif claims her due respect as an autonomous artist, at least within the cultural space of *thumri*, a genre itself trivialized by the arbiters of Indian classical music.

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Healing through Hip Hop in the Slums of Phnom Penh Cambodia

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Abstract

Local non-government organisation 'Tiny Toones' is the first and only of its kind in Cambodia, to use hip hop to engage with, and empower the most disadvantaged children and youth in Phnom Penh. Working with young people from backgrounds of drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, gang life, family violence and extreme poverty, it offers creative arts alongside education and life skills. Teaching life lessons through break-dance, hip hop dance, lyric writing, rapping, and art, Tiny Toones 'speaks street' to those that need it most, empowering them to believe in themselves, trust themselves and make better choices about their futures. The staff and students of Tiny Toones are living proof of how the creative arts can be used to change lives and free young people from their past.

[**Keywords:** Hip Hop, Therapy, Performance, Cambodia, Tiny Toones]

The creative arts have long been used in therapy. Gone are the days when dance, music or art therapy were considered 'too alternative' and 'not real therapy.' I remember when my mother was studying to be a Dance therapist in the 1980's and 90's and everyone, myself included, boiled it down to her just 'being a hippy.' She spent many years trying to explain what it was and why it worked, falling on deaf ears. Only when I started studying social work in Melbourne, Australia did it start to make sense and now in 2013, I realise that I have fundamentally been working for the last three years, although unintentionally, in dance therapy, music therapy and art therapy. Always a believer and advocate for the relationship between physical health, mental health and emotional health, always viewing health from a holistic point of view, I found myself living in Cambodia managing a drop-in Centre for 'street kids' which used creative arts as a tool for engagement and empowerment. Here my belief was cemented as I watched, daily, how the dance floor and the music allowed children and young people to break free from societies imposed values. It helped them to break free from political, family, and personal trauma and to break free from themselves. I have witnessed teenage drug users leap out on to the dance floor with full force and dance through the pain and anguish of 'needing a hit', sweating out their 'detox' and melting it into the sweat of relief and exhaustion. Also victims of domestic violence, frantically writing new lyrics about pains and frustrations, and then singing it to a group of others who understood it. In a society like Cambodia, where talking about fears and dreams, where 'complaining' is not acceptable, the creative arts is offering a new way to heal from their past and grow.

Whilst this is not a new phenomenon, it is certainly new to Cambodia. The use of hip hop, once considered ‘anti-Khmer, and ‘creating gangsters’, is now the platform used to engage with disadvantaged children and youth in a continually growing centre in Phnom Penh. Hip hop ‘speaks street’ in a non-judgmental way that engages young people, empowering them and allowing them to be themselves and discover who they are. What I didn’t realise at the time was how widespread the use of hip hop had become until I was invited to San Patrignano, a drug rehabilitation community in Italy, to participate in ‘WeFree’ Day (‘we are free of drugs’) where seven countries came together to discuss the use of break-dancing and rapping to empower young people to make the choice against drugs. In Australia, I presented at the 6th International Conference on Drugs and Young People at the ‘Using Creative Tools to Empower Youth and Prevent Drug Use’ conference and later in Singapore on how hip hop dance and music was impacting on the lives of disadvantaged youth in Cambodia. Further recognition was being invited to present at the first ever Tedx held in Cambodia, where in 2011 I presented ‘Dance Your Life Around’, bringing eleven former ‘street kids’ on the stage to dance and sing their true-life stories of personal struggles and survival, to a standing ovation at this prestigious event (Tedx Phnom Penh, 2011).¹



Figure 1: Founder KK

It is a positive sign that the use of the creative arts in working with disadvantaged youth is starting to grow in Cambodia but the first and only organisation to use hip hop as this platform is local Non-Government Organisation (NGO) ‘Tiny Toones’ based in the slums, only minutes from the centre of Phnom Penh. Tiny Toones works with the most disadvantaged children and youth in Cambodia, aged 4-25 years who come from backgrounds of drug addiction, alcoholism, family violence, gang life, HIV, labour and/or sexual exploitation and extreme poverty. With Phnom Penh being saturated with NGO’s, Tiny Toones is unique in its approach. Taking a holistic approach to mental, physical and emotional health, Tiny Toones uses the universal language of the creative arts, more specifically hip hop, to empower youth to lead healthy lives and dream of better futures for themselves.



Figure 2: Group Shot

Overview of Cambodian history

With Cambodia’s tumultuous recent history, the country could be considered a ‘new’ country only recently being re-born and developed. Bordering Laos, Vietnam and Thailand with a total landmass of 181,035 square kilometers, Cambodia is located in the southern portion of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It has an estimated population of 15,000,000. Cambodia’s economy has taken many hits over recent decades, from complete devastation in the 1970’s, diplomatic isolation in the early 1980’s and the Asian economic crisis. In 2008 Cambodia’s economy was affected by high oil and food prices as well as the global financial crisis, which saw a decrease in orders in the garment industry and a drop in tourism (Ministry of Planning, 2010).ⁱⁱ Its current economic challenge heading in to the future is to create an environment which enables the private sector to establish enough jobs to handle Cambodia’s demographic imbalance, with half of the population being under 21 years (ASE-AN, 2009).ⁱⁱⁱ Today, Cambodia still remains heavily reliant on foreign assistance with about half of the central government budget depending on donor assistance. With more than a third of Cambodian’s

still living below the national poverty line, on 2,473 Riel (61 cents) a day (UNDP, 2010),^{iv} families are heavily exposed to extreme poverty and food insecurity. Children are exposed to malnourishment from a young age, which impacts on education and learning ability.

The Cambodian civil war in the early 1970's left the country's transport system, harvest and water supply in a great state of decline. By April 1975, the newly proclaimed Democratic Kampuchea, commonly referred to as the Khmer Rouge, were in power until 1979, during which an estimated 1.7 million people died through torture, execution, starvation and exhaustion. (BBC, 2013).^v Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot wanted to start Cambodia all over and declared 'Year Zero', erasing all history. In order to gain complete control he ordered the torture and killing of all teachers, artists, professionals, intellectuals, police, government employees and ethnic minority groups and abolished all money and private property. The city of Phnom Penh was emptied, violently forcing all civilians to the countryside to cultivate fields, where the majority of Cambodians still live.



Figure 3: Learning new moves

Cambodia's young population is faced with various issues that place them in a highly vulnerable position. One major problem is the economic migration from rural to urban settings where young people arrive in cities with little or no money, support and family. With limited education, knowledge of or access to social services, there is a high risk of alcoholism, drug use, prostitution, unsafe sex,

exposure to HIV, theft and poverty. Social services are limited and there is limited knowledge and understanding in the sector. With 'saving face' being a dominant feature of Cambodian life, young people are not inclined to seek services for medical or social needs. Unfortunately a great number of children become 'street kids'. There are an estimated 24,000 children living and working on the streets of Cambodia.^{vi} This particularly vulnerable group become greatly at risk of domestic and street violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and drug and alcohol abuse.



Figure 4: Performing in Singapore

Cambodia, like many other Asian countries is what I would term a 'non-verbal' society, whether it is due to saving face, war and conflict survival, or poverty survival, I am not sure, or maybe it is due to the lack of social services. Whatever the reason, there is little or no counseling services in Cambodia, and certainly no knowledge of what does exist among the vulnerable groups. It is a society that believes family problems should remain private affairs even if they involve family violence, and where talking about your problems is considered a weakness and undesirable. Phnom Penh only recently introduced its first ever Social Work degree at a university level with the first graduating class in 2011. Although there was international assistance in the development of this course, it is still, by western standards, well below par. The overwhelming rote learning education system at a primary, secondary and university level does not allow for critical thinking, pro-activeness or concept understanding and analysis. Furthermore the education system heavily relies on corruption and bribe money with students having to pay individual teachers for class handouts, homework, assignments, exams and grades to pass. This neither encourages teachers to teach, nor students to learn. This also excludes poor students from having the opportunity to attend.



Figure 5: Tedx

I am certain I am not alone in believing that education is the key to the road out of poverty and helps to create a better society in which the Government works on behalf of its people. In a country such as Cambodia, with such a young and extremely impoverished population, education for all seems like an unattainable dream. To make this possible, children and young people need to be empowered to believe there is the potential for change. If education is the key, then empowerment can be the eyes and hands that find this key. This is where NGO's such as Tiny Toones play such a large role. They have found a revolutionary way to connect and engage with young people in Cambodia. The universal language of hip hop has found its way onto the streets of Phnom Penh and its surrounds, and those on the streets have found their way to this 'now quite famous' NGO Tiny Toones. Tiny Toones 'speaks street' in a way that those that attend can understand. There is break-dancing, hip hop dance, Deejaying, lyric writing, learning to MC, music production and art, all under the umbrella of hip hop, mostly in the Khmer language with some English for those that are willing and able. Hip hop is the draw card to this centre that, without any advertising but rather through word of mouth and only nine years since its inception, has over 300 students a month, lining up willing to learn. What is unique about this centre is that the majority of its staff are former 'street kids' themselves, the original students under the founder Tuy Sobil, aka: KK, who were mentored in to leadership roles and eventually the staff in the dance and music departments. Mentoring 'street kids' to become reliable staff members of an N.G.O. is no easy feat. Whilst their leap from student to volunteer, to staff member, is predominantly based on their dance and music abilities, they then have to learn the responsibilities of everything from positive role modeling, to punctuality, scheduling, time sheets, time management and financial management as they are working and earning for the first time in their lives.

Whilst hip hop is the draw card, once in, each student is exposed to education classes and to an outreach program. Students can learn Khmer, English, Math and computer studies, as well as receive knowledge in health, hygiene, drug and sex education. These 'additional' studies would not be possible however without the initial engagement through hip hop.

Case Study No. 1: Samnang, 17 years-old.

Samnang grew up in a gang in the town of Battambang, a six-hour drive from the capital of Phnom Penh. He lived a 'street' life, doing drugs, and leaving school before his teen years. One day he saw the Tiny Toones break-dancers perform on a 'tour' in Battambang and heard their story of getting off the streets and learning to dance, drug-free and judgment free. He hitchhiked his way to Phnom Penh to find them and was accepted in to the centre with no questions asked.

Samnang was an incredibly shy boy who barely spoke. He stood on the outskirts of the dance floor watching, without the courage to join in. The older boys and the staff encouraged him and mentored him, taking him in as one of their own.

Samnang was discovering for the first time a sense of family. He was not only starting to learn to break-dance, but he was learning trust, respect and friendship. He was learning how to be a team player and learning to accept leadership and teaching from others who were not out to hurt him, but there to support him. These were all new feelings for Samnang and it took him a long time to open up and accept his new life as something he deserved and was entitled to.

Gradually Samnang moved from hovering around the back of the dance floor, to joining the main circle of dancers, eventually having his moment in the centre, dancing to the applause and encouragement of his new family. The centre started giving him more responsibility and he became a volunteer helping with errands and supporting the younger children, which he did with great pride. Samnang joined the outreach classes and learnt more about drug use and addiction, about safe sex and about basic hygiene practices and over time he was teaching young six year olds to wash their hands before eating.

The confidence Samnang gained on the dance floor allowed him to open up to the prospect of learning and believing in himself. By 2010 he joined the Khmer classes and in 2011 the English classes too. He was well behind a boy for his age, learning Khmer at a grade 3 level and struggling with the concept of English. To his credit, he never gave up, even asking for additional classes to help him.

By the end of 2011 Tiny Toones decided to start a 'B' team of dancers to shadow the 'A' team of break-dancing staff who routinely performed to large audiences. Samnang was thrilled to be chosen in this team where he and a group of eight dancers, male and female, rehearsed consistently and with pride. Again, a

new family was born for Samnang and he became the glue holding this tight -knit group together. He also learnt for the first time to work along side females and see them as his equal. Soon after the development of this team, Samnang made his greatest leap. He asked the management staff to help him re-enroll at school. Samnang wanted to graduate. Never have you seen a school uniform being worn with such delight, that even once he returned to the centre, he strutted around and danced in it for the rest of the day. In 2013, seventeen year-old Samnang is now in grade 10.

Hip hop alone may be what allowed Samnang to express himself, what brought him to traverse across the country to Phnom Penh, but what he learnt on the dance floor, the sense of friendship and family, the re-learning of respect, team work and the belief in himself is what gave him the courage to ask to go to school. Tiny Toones multi-disciplinary approach, their holistic view of health, and their non-judgmental acceptance of new students gave Samnang the freedom to choose a better life for himself.

Each student that enters the centre is encouraged and not forced, to enter the education program. Many, afraid of being considered 'stupid', come initially only to dance or learn music. With time and the growth in confidence, almost all enroll in at least computer studies and Khmer, and eventually English when they realise that even in Cambodia, the knowledge of English allows for a better paid job.

For the younger children, aged 4-10 years old, education is their priority. These children come in to learn Khmer and English and are then exposed to the creative arts. Many come from backgrounds of extreme poverty, single parent households, or other forms of guardianship. They do not know how to enter the school system and even those that do, cannot afford the fees and bribe money. Families also seem more comfortable and confident to approach this centre than a government run school. These children come to Tiny Toones where they are split into classes which match the school system allowing the greatest opportunity for supported reintegration. Outside of these classes, they have compulsory education in health and basic hygiene, learning how and why to wash their hands and brush their teeth. They also spend one hour in the art room or on the dance floor a day with the staff. In art they can free-draw or follow instruction, and always have their artwork pinned up on the walls. The children even painted the art classroom walls themselves. The laughter, clapping and cheering that come out of the dance room would rival any large rock concert. This place provides the opportunity for the children to be in a safe environment away from predators of exploitation, dangers of needles and sharp objects on their bare feet and family violence. Children having the space to 'just be' is as important as any form of therapy; they are allowed to giggle, be happy, play, dance, sing and relate to other children in a non-harmful and non-aggressive way. They are exposed to learning life and social skills that may not be taught at home, learning friendships, and learning to listen and be heard. They form life long friendships, as can be seen by two older boys, now 18

year-old Ouk and 20 year-old Vy who came in as Tiny Toones first students and are both now dance teachers and third year university students.

Case Study No. 2: Vy, 20 years old

Vy grew up outside Phnom Penh, near the border of Vietnam. He was never violent or a drug user. He was from a low-income family and was going to school as a young boy. One day a fire ripped through his family home, taking with it all of their belongings including their small life savings that was, like most Cambodian families, kept under the mat in their home. They quickly went from being poor, to having nothing at all. The family couldn't afford to send Vy to school anymore and he left to start picking up scraps and goods to recycle off the street for a few Riel to help the family eat. Moving to the streets of Phnom Penh, Vy found himself in a street gang. When his gang made the move from petty theft to violent theft against people, he left. Vy says that whilst he needed the money he did not want to be a part of hurting other people.

As Vy entered his teen years, he came across KK, founder of Tiny Toones and started break-dancing with him and a small group of boys in KK's living room. Vy had raw talent and as Tiny Toones grew, so did Vy, as a dancer and in confidence. He was a natural leader and KK began to rely on him for support, a role that Vy took to easily and with great pride. Within only a few years, Vy was working as a dance teacher, teaching the young children and the young teenagers and playing a supporting role in teaching about hygiene in the community. He had also received support through another NGO to re-enrol at school.

Vy was eventually given the responsibility of being the team leader of all the dance teachers whilst attending classes in English and computer studies. His English improved every day. In 2010 Vy graduated from high school with ambitions to go on to university. His ability to dance, his teaching and leadership at Tiny Toones, his increased responsibility and the belief instilled in him, helped Vy to dream of doing bigger things with his life. He dreamt of graduating from Business Management at University so that he could work in management at Tiny Toones and help it grow, wanting others to receive the same support and education he received. In 2011 Vy, with the support of Tiny Toones enrolled in the four-year course and is the first Tiny Toones staff or student to have ever entered university, setting a new precedent for all. He is the first known 'street kid' in Cambodia to graduate from high school. He is certainly the first in his family to achieve any of this. He is also challenging the strong hierarchical class system of Cambodia that works hard at keeping people 'in their place'. With a university degree, he can move up in class and is truly challenging the system. He will have access to higher paid jobs and be 'allowed' to marry above his original class. Vy will graduate from university in 2014. He was also promoted in 2012 to the Creative Program Coordinator.

There are countless stories coming out of this one centre. It is not about the centre however but rather about the impact that the creative arts has on young disadvantaged children and youth and how the creative arts can be used as a tool to free them of their past. I often say to the staff and students - “you are not your past ... you are what you choose to be” and hope that we have then given them all the tools they need to make good choices. So what tools do they need? This depends on their background and what they have learnt from their family homes if they have one, what they have learnt on the street, or at school if they were fortunate enough to have been. We teach them life skills through the outreach program, the languages of Khmer and English and more through the education program, but most importantly we offer them the creative arts. The creative arts is the catalyst that helps them to grow as individuals. They learn dance, music, and art and just as importantly they learn the social and life skills that accompany this that cannot be taught in a classroom. We hope these skills coupled with the empowerment through dance and music, gives them the tools and the confidence to make these smarter choices, and more important, to *want* to make smarter choices.

Case Study No.3: Bou, 20 years-old.

Bou is the middle child of eight and went to school when he was young until his family couldn't afford it anymore. Like many, he moved out to the streets to pick recycled goods off the ground and dump sites to help make money for his family. Soon he turned to drugs and gang life and became quite violent and a heavy drug user, too embarrassed to return to his family. He slept between the streets and a drug refuge. As he entered his teen years, Tiny Toones started sending break-dance teachers to this drug refuge and he began to learn from them. Bou was a 'natural' who enjoyed break-dancing and started taking his aggression out on the dance floor rather than the streets. He then started attending the main centre to learn from 'The Master' of break-dance, the founder, KK. For a while he was doing both, break-dancing and drugs. KK spent many hours mentoring Bou in both his dance and in his lifestyle choices. As his dance and confidence improved, his desire for drugs decreased. He had chosen a dancers lifestyle and to take the classes on offer to him at the Centre. He quit smoking cigarettes also claiming that it was harder to dance because he had less energy. He wanted to be the best dancer he could be. By 2007 he was already considered one of the best break-dancers in Cambodia, famous for his athleticism, strength, flexibility and head-spins.

In 2011 Bou entered a break-dance competition with three of his friends that was broadcast across local television. They won each round as well as the grand final. His parents saw him on television, clean from drugs, motivated and dancing, prompting them to call him for the first time in many years, and they have since rekindled their relationship.

Bou is now working as a break-dance teacher at the centre and has a full class of young students five days a week. He is also contracted with his 'dance team' to perform for various high-class events around Phnom Penh. Additionally Bou has travelled to Mexico and Thailand to participate in workshops on the use of dance to empower youth to make decisions against drug taking behaviour. He is clean from drugs and before his 18th birthday, enrolled in English classes. Having never learnt English before, it was difficult for him but he was dedicated and soon became the top of his beginner's class.

2011 saw Bou along with ten other dance and music staff and students, perform at various venues in Melbourne Australia and later in Auckland New Zealand. First they needed to choreograph the longest performance ever attempted by this young group; a 90-minute piece based on their true life stories. This was the first time they had been assigned to do a piece of choreography that was so reflective and serious and for such a great length of time. It took great courage, introspection and teamwork. Bou was given an additional task. To add to the pressure of choreography, rehearsal, and the fear of performing to a foreign audience, he was asked to be the guest speaker on stage. His initial response was of fear and self-doubt and that his English wasn't good enough. Without being pressured to say yes, he was seen practicing his English with any and all foreigners he could find, asking "Can I tell you my life story?" He would practice the telling of his life story in English any minute that he wasn't rehearsing his dancing and acting. Both in Australia and in New Zealand, he was up on the stage with a full house, or standing comfortably in front of a local group of teenage drug users at a community centre, telling his life story and telling the audience that anything is possible, that if he could do it, so could they. He explained his former drug addiction, gang life and family breakdown before explaining how he found dance and this new family to support him through this. He was a true inspiration to every person he met. His confidence grew each time he performed and each time he spoke.

Bou says of Tiny Toones, "this is my family, now I have two family". He admits that he is not sure where he would be if he hadn't found dance, 'maybe dead? maybe in jail'. The once mischievous young boy who previously had to be dragged to class, is now a young man encouraging others to attend class and lends an ear to those in need. He is not *just* a break-dance teacher and performer, he is a mentor in every sense of the word, to drug users and all disadvantaged youth.

There are over ten young staff members in the creative arts department, all of them with similar stories. All of them were fortunate to have found dance, music or art during the most vulnerable times of their lives, all of them who admit they may well not have survived without it. They are the lucky ones. Lucky also are the local children and young disadvantaged youth of Phnom Penh who receive daily classes in the creative arts, mentorship and education. They too now have the opportunity to grow and learn and to receive guidance from a young group of people who understand them. They are exposed to the life lessons learnt on the

dance floor, to express themselves through dance and music and to learn the values of friendship, teamwork, respect and honour. They have become empowered and have learnt to have faith in themselves, in their decision-making abilities, and to learn right from wrong, good from bad and to *choose* a better life for themselves. This is what the creative arts offers, in this case particularly hip hop dance, and this is the impact it has, in freeing these disadvantaged youth from their past and helping them to look forward to a brighter future.

Notes

ⁱ Tedx Phnom Penh Cambodia, 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4Hvkh9R6RU>

ⁱⁱ Ministry of Planning, Royal Government of Cambodia, 2010; 'Achieving Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs), Update 2010. <http://mop.gov.kh>

ⁱⁱⁱ ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, 2009. <http://www.asean.fta.govt.nz>

^{iv} United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Cambodia, 2010. <http://www.un.org.kh>

^v BBC News Asia-Pacific, 2013. www.bbc.co.uk

^{vi} Child Safe International (Non-Government Organisation), 2007. www.childsafe-international.org

• *The names in the case studies have been changed and are not their real names.*

Romi Grossberg, Australian-born, has spent many years volunteering and working in the areas of community development and international development in South East Asia, including India, Vietnam and most recently Cambodia. Her academic studies from Melbourne Australia, include a Bachelor of Social Studies, a Bachelor of Social Work, and she began her Master of (International) Public Health before moving to Phnom Penh in March 2010. There she was the General Manager and Management Advisor of local non-government organisation 'Tiny Toones', using hip hop as a tool for empowering the most disadvantaged youth of Phnom Penh. She has since presented at numerous conferences on the use of the creative arts with disadvantaged youth in various countries including Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and most notably at Tedx Phnom Penh.

The Sitala Saga: a Case of Cultural Integration in the Folk Tradition of West Bengal

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Abstract

The paper discusses religious narratives about annual deity of Savara of South Bengal that can be conceptualized as myths, legends, and memories according to folklore of 'Sitalamangal'. This goddess is primarily associated with smallpox, yet she is occasionally given other roles and powers, including those as the protector of children and the giver of good fortune. Her role also incorporated other elements of the period, viz. incorporation of deities from Brahmanical religion, incorporation of motifs and symbols from it, incorporating tribal, Tantric-goddess tradition to its fold as well as developed an elaborate ritual structure. The Sitala worship has attached the social fabric of Savara society and maintaining social solidarity.

[Keywords: Sitala Saga; Savara, Worship, Ritual, Religion, Epidemic]

Introduction

The Savara is a marginalized scheduled tribe distributed both in North Bengal as well as in South West Bengal. In ancient medieval literature *Savara* was used as a generic term for the tribal population to mean non-Indo-Aryan population living in forest. From the literary evidence of Caryapada of 10-11th century, it seems that the Savara have been living in the hilly terrains of Bengal –Bihar borders since 10th century AD. Sitala is the goddess worshipped by the Savaras of South Bengal. Sitala is considered as the chief deity of the Savaras. She is controlling deity of epidemic diseases like cholera, small-pox and the like. Some tribal shrines were eventually changed to temples dedicated to her. She is also worshipped as the Village Goddess (*Gramadevata*). The Savaras worshipped Sitala to get rid of the disease, for wellbeing of Children and for fortune. The attribution of widely varying personalities to Sitala is a result of continuous processes of communication between localized little traditions and the more widespread, continuously Sanskritizing great traditions.

Ethno-History of Sitala Worship

Sitala is a pre Aryan goddess, worshipped by tribals of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa. Texts written in the 17th and 18th centuries as paeans (*Mangalkavya*) elaborated Sitala Saga. She was the goddess of smallpox appeared in the *Skandapurana* and the *Bhavaprakash* , a Sanskrit ayurvedic medical text, allegedly quotes from this Purana in discussion concerning the cure of poxes. The

Bhavaprakash quotes a Sitalastakam from the Skandapurana and clarifies the nature of the Goddess herself. Sitala appears in nibandhas of the late medieval period. Kane in the history of Dharmashastra claims references to Sitala are found in the Nirayasinidhu of kamalakarabhatta (composed in banaras in 1610). The popular folklore depicts that Sitala has seven sisters and may also have one brother who is not as well known. Sitala's sisters are known as Masani, Basanti, Maha Mati, Polamde, Lamkaria, and Agwani and are all associated with one of the seven types of fevers that are prevalent in these regions.

The goddess also has its origin in Vajrayāna Buddhism. It catered to the need of the masses by inventing Buddhism, where one finds numerous Buddha, *bodhisattvas*, gods and goddesses, both in peaceful and wrathful moods. Each god and goddess was assigned an instrumental role to fulfill the everyday needs and aspirations of the masses. The worship of plants, trees and log by the remote tribal race gave birth to the concept of Saktism. Later she was included in the Hindu pantheon.

The Sitala cult is unquestionably the most highly developed in Bengal. She is worshipped throughout the Indian subcontinent and is especially adored in the region of Bengal (Stewart). Sitala is commonly known as the goddess of smallpox and disease but may also be referred to as the Queen of Disease (*Roga Raja*), Lord of Pestilence (*Vyadhi Pati*), or Mother of Poxes (*Basenta Raya*). Her name means the "Cool One" which is thought to be derived from her mythical birth from the cooled ashes of the sacrificial fire (Stewart). The three regions have different views about Sitala but all are linked by a few common ideas. Sitala is always the "Cool One" and she is frequently represented by a golden pot, except in wealthy temples where she is depicted as a naked women with her hair dishevelled, riding a donkey, and wielding a broom (Rodrigues). Sitala is most well known in West Bengal where there are many temples and *mangals*, which are lengthy poems written in her honor. Throughout West Bengal she is associated with Jvarasur, the Fever Demon, and Raktabati, the one that possess the blood of servant women (Wadley). Sitala is one of the many Hindu mother goddesses who are known for their benevolence and dreadfulness. Sitala is worshipped during Phalgun which are the months of February to March. . In North India Sitala is associated with stale or leftover food because she is thought to have been born of the cold ashes of the sacrificial fire. Festivals are held in her honor and are commonly termed *basora* which literally means "Leftover Food Worship" (Wadley). The people of this region prepare only cold foods on the day before the *pujas* and offer these to Sitala and eat only cold food themselves. The third region, which worships Sitala is the state of Gujarat, where she is no longer associated with disease; instead she is seen as the giver of good fortune, husbands and sons (Wadley). The origin of the Sitala shrine in Gujarat is thought to be identified with Bariha Bapji or Babribahan of the Mahabharata (Misra).

In this region she is not worshipped during the hot season but rather during the rainy season, Shravan, the months of July and August. Although there are vast differences between these three regions and the ways in which they worship this goddess, there are a few similarities that link the regions together. Sitala's main association in Bengal is with the various forms of pox. The origin of worship of Sitala in this region was thought to come from a popular story about a kingdom that was infected with the smallpox disease. Sitala went in disguised as a beautiful woman to see the king and advised him to worship her. The people of the kingdom worshipped her and were relieved of the dreadful smallpox disease (Misra). In Northern India Sitala, is associated with pox but she is also seen as the protector of children (Wadley).

It is claimed that in a previous life Sitala was married to a Muslim emperor and was very faithful and devoted to the Hindu gods and goddesses, who was deified as Sitala in reward (Misra). She is worshipped during Caitra which is in the months of March and April or Baisakh the months of April and May because these months are in the hot season when the outbreak of the disease is the most prevalent. The Mangalkavaya tradition is an archetype of the synthesis between the Vedic and the popular folk culture of India. Indigenous myths and legends inherited from Indo-Aryan cultures began to blend and crystallize around popular deities and semi-mythological figures in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Mangalkavaya were used to describe the greatness of particular Hindu deities known as "Nimnokoti" (roughly translating as lower) by historians, because they were absent or unimportant in classical Hindu literature such as the Vedas or Purans. These deities were based on indigenous to Bengal who had become assimilated in regional Hinduism. These deities are often depicted with unusually strong human qualities and they engage in direct interaction with humans. The Mangalkavyas were written to popularize the worship of a number of deities, mostly Shitala, Manasa and Chandi. The physical attributes of Sitala are as follows.

1. Appeared as Brahmin women, in Red border white sari

The Goddess Sitala is the cool one. She always appeared as Brahmin women who dressed up with red border white sari. Her hair is long and open. The length of hair is too long and they touched her knees. She is fair and put big round 'Sindur' on her forehead. She is a married woman. The attitude looks and dress of goddess reflects her divine personality.

2. Ass as Vehicle

Mother goddess Sitala rides on an Ass. In Hindu mythology it is common that deities have various animals as their vehicles. It is also believed that the vehicle also represents the nature and spiritual power of the deity. The selection of an ass, as a vehicle is unique and surprising because the ass is referred as Gadha. Ass as a mammal is bracketed with the horse. It lacks all horse like qualities thus become a

symbol of dullness and idiocy. In this context it neither represents sexuality nor disrespect. It represents destruction, devastation and complete infertility. If she is in her terrible form can completely devour vegetation and life. She rides on Ass which is a unique symbol of negative animosity.

3. The Broom

Goddess Sitala carries a huge broom in her hand. The broom is referred in Bengali “jhata or jharu”. This article is used to remove dirt and dust. The first job of Savara women is getting up early in the morning and sweeping the house with a broom. The use of broom after sunset is prohibited. The belief is that it can sweep out all prosperity if it used at night. Another belief is that if pregnant women cross a broom she runs the risk of miscarriage. The broom is made of straws tied tightly from one side, leaving the other side loose and open. It represents simplest transformation of nature into culture. Broom as an instrument of cleanliness helps in transformation of nature. Its form in itself has a variety of meanings. For instances, the tightly tied side of broom represents unity, order and cleanliness while the open and loose side with scattered positions of straws symbolizes disunity and disorder. It is never placed in the position in which loose and open side is upward because it is believed that it brings disunity, disorder and pollution. One important practice is the symbolic sweeping or dusting of the subject with the broom made of feathers or twigs of some plates. With this ritual, the patients mind and spirit are supposed to be cleansed and a balance is restored. In this particular context it represents both aspects cleaning and elimination.

4. The Pitcher

Pitcher in Bengali language is known as “gharo”. It is used to store water particularly in summers. It is used as a device to cool the water. The pitcher resembles the human body in many ways. Its hollowness is like human body which has air as breath or prana inside. Its association with water is very significant because water is a universal symbol of vegetation and life. Pitcher as its container symbolizes human body which contains life. The association of a pitcher with the cult of Sitala emphasis the fertility and life-giving or protecting aspect of the cult.

5. Winnowing Fan

Winnowing is a process of cleaning grain through the winnowing tray. It is called “kulo” in Bengali language. As an instrument it has acquired a unique cultural significance in Sitala worship. It is used in various rituals and ceremonies. It mediates between purity and impurity. The cult of Sitala is also associated with a particular type of impurity which causes smallpox. The disease in itself is processes which symbolize both the manifestation and outbreak of impurities and ultimately it ends in purification and rejuvenation. As a symbol, it represents the cleaning

and curative power of the cult on one side and the mediating and luminal position of the cult on the other.

6. Huge Eyes

The huge eyes symbolize the essential nature of the cult. She is not the personification of goodness and beauty. She represents the negative and ugly side of famine. She looks with starved eyes towards her victims. Her eyes invoke dreads and awe which is transformed into respect and devotion. Through humanity and devotion she is propitiated particularly in the season of an outbreak of the smallpox.

7. The ewer

The ewer which is locally known as “jug” . It is a pot which is used to carry water or other drinks. These containers are communally used to contain liquids but the specific form of urn is used to contain ashes of cremated persons. Sitala keeps a pitcher and an ewer in her hands. Symbolically she may be life giving and life taking depending on her will. In the symbol of a vessel the pitcher and ewer both have qualities of protecting as well as of containing.

Folklore of Sitala Worship

Folk narratives are powerful medium through which folk assimilates and disseminates knowledge and power of a given society. Like any other oral discourse narratives construct, reconstruct social order, define gender roles and reverse it when necessary. Folktales explain womanhood and basic principles of female biology which signifies social reality. The three stages; menstruation, defloration and childbirth are most important events of women’s life which rule and determine women’s behaviour in a society and culture. It seems, these phases of female life are expressed symbolically in a narrative. Three stories of goddess Sitalas are mostly popular among them. The stories depict mainly her terrible form and how devotees benefited through her worship. For them Sitala is always “the cool one”, a goddess who abhors heat and who seek coolness. It is coolness which links Sitala’s various personalities. They believed Sitala was born on cooled ashes. Sitala is by nature cool and she seeks coolness. When heated, she heats others and attacking them with dreaded pox or destroying their children.

1. The Goddess of Smallpox
2. The protector of Children
3. The Giver of Good fortune

Sitala Katha : The goddess of smallpox

Once upon a time, pox (chechak) appeared on the oldest son of a king. At the same time in the city pox appeared on the son of farmers. The farmer was very poor and a devotee of a Sitala. They used to keep houses very clean. Spread cow dung everyday on the floor. They serve only cold things to a pox victim. His son quickly got well. Elsewhere because of the appearance of the pox, the king sat in the shrine of Sitala and reading the hundred names of Chandi. Every day he performed sacrifices. They made various kinds of hot and spiced foods and also made meat with spices. Because of the adore of the cooking of spiced foods. The prince eats spice and hot foods. Sitala's anger with the prince grew on his whole body huge itchy louse's appeared and he began to burn up with fever. The king and queen schemed to obtain the peace of Sitala but everything was futile. Then someone brought the news that along with the prime pox had appeared on a farmer's son and he had been completely cured. The king became extremely jealous and he thought why Sitala been so unjust to my family? His anger was due to the fact that the farmer could not do any kind of puja and service but his son quickly got well. One day Sitala manifesting herself in a dream and said to king that she was satisfied with the shrine and for that reason his son is still alive. If he wants happiness for his family and for son, from today do not eat cooked food. Give only cold things to me for offerings and also to the prince. The king saw Sitala in his dream was the seventh of the dark half of Chaitra . The king gave a proclamation to his people that on the eight day everyone should do Sitala's puja with state grain and cold foods for offerings. From that day , the prince condition began to improve and after some days he was completely cured.

Sitala Katha : The protector of children

Sitala is associated with the Bengali goddess "Sasthi" whose domain is the bestowing and protecting of children. Sasthi is worshipped on the sixth day after the birth of a child and also on the sixth day of many lunar fortnights. A Brahman and his wife have seven sons. All were married but none had any children. One day old women gave the rules for having the sons and daughter-in- law do the fasts of Sitala Sasthi. The Brahman women had her daughters -in - law do the fasts of Sitala Sasthi. The Brahman women had her daughters -in-law do this fast with great faith and after a year all daughters-in- law had sons playing in their days. One day the Brahman women doing the fast negligently bathed with hot water and made fresh food. Along with her daughters in law she did this. Brahman women were started into awakening from a nightmare. She tried to wake her husband but he was dead. Looking toward her sons and daughters-in-laws she saw that they too had all died. She began to scream with grief. Hearing her screams hers neighbors awake and came to her. These people said that this is the result of the anger of Bhagavati Sitala. The Brahman women ran toward the forest on the road she met a old women who was burning up with fever. Upon inquiring, she came to know

that this was the reason for her sorrow. The old woman was none other than Sitala Devi herself. Bhagavati Sitala asked the Brahman women to bring a clay jar filled with curds to relieve her of the heat of the fever. She spread curds on the body of Sitala from this the fever was reduced and her body became healthy and cool. The Brahman women felt very sorry for her and she begged again and again for forgiveness for her bad actions and she prayed for the lives of her family. Then Sitala devi was pleased and told her to put curds on the heads of the dead. Then they being awakened from sleep and they all sat up.

Sitala katha : The Giver of Good fortune

There was a king in Hastinapur. His name was Indradumn. His queens' name was dharmasila. Her faith in religion cannot be overstressed. The almighty had given the couple a daughter. Her name was subhakari. She too was religious like her mother and in beauty. Her parents got her married to Gunavana. After the marriage, Subhakari went to her home of in -law and then back to home of the parents. After a few days, the prince Gunavana came to take Subhakari back. It was Sitala Sasthi day. Subhakari parents told her to stay here . Ma Sitala is going to bestow 'Akhandasaubhagya'so better to go after performing the vrat. Subhakari was sent to the pond for a bath with the priest and his wife. The three of them were moving from here and there in the forest but the pond could not be seen anywhere. She had never walked so much. But even then she went on walking by taking the name of Sitala. The tired priest was lying under the tree. The Brahman wife sat nearby but Subhakari went ahead in search of a pond. In the meantime she saw old women. She managed to go under the old women and asked about the pond. The old women felt pit for Subhakari and she told her "it is good you have come on, I shall show you the pond to take a deep in the pond, perform the puja of Ma Sitala and your husband will live a long life". They came across a pond. Their subhakari took her bath. She performed the puja of the Ma Sitala. The Goddess was pleased and she gave her a divine favor. Feeling pleased Subhakari started going home on the way she saw the Brahman wife's crying. The Brahman wife's said to her "sister I shall be sati after my husband. My husband died from the bite of a sinful serpent and what is the worth of my living"? Meanwhile the Brahman said "till I go on the pyre do remain here". She readied herself to become a Sati. The princess started to pray to Sitalama being, remembered. Sitalama appeared and said "Child, why did you remember me? While crying the princess said "ma, you are a remover of widowhood, please have mercy for me and give life to this priest. Sitalama told the princess, give the merit of the 'vrata' done today and her husband will come alive. After performing the vrata to the Brahman's wife and thereby the priest got life. Meanwhile the prince started to worry as the princess was gone for a long time. He left home to find the princess. After completing puja they all were going along the road. The princess saw her husband dead. She started cry. Seeing her crying, trees, animals and birds also started to weep. There upon

Sitalama appeared and said “Child , the one who performs Sitalama vrata never get widowhood. So go and wake up your husband. While praying to Sitalama the princess awakened her husband. The prince wake up the way he would, after a restful sleep at home. Subhakari told the old women, “Ma give me such a favor that I would never get widowhood, not see poverty and not be separated from my husband. There on the old women took the form of Sitalama and said “So be it, wherever does the puja with complete faith and hears this katha shall never be occasion to be a widow”. On saying this goddess disappeared afterwards the princess worshipped Sitalama.

Sitala Pala : Sacred Ritual into Professional Performance

Sitalapala is a layering of religious ritual and professional theatre, where, unique feature of this form of sacred performance. The custom of accompanying the puja of Sitala with a performance of her sacred text, or Sitalamangal, reflects the Brahminization of this goddess, and is common in the Midnapore, 24 parganas , Howrah and Hooghly districts of Bengal. Isolated and tribal intensive areas do not associate the performance of the lyric with worship, nor do they give it ritual status. However, where this custom is prevalent, the performance and the worship are part of the same ritual. Sitalamangal lyric troupes, or "parties," sing the devotional mangalsangeet (auspicious songs) between March and June, when the epidemics of infectious diseases are traditionally at their height and Ma Sitala is widely worshipped. The lead singer performs with six accompanists holding a chamar or whisk in his hand, and wearing ritually accepted clothing associated with the recitation of a sacred text-such as a dhoti, with the upper torso bare and a shawl draped over the shoulders, or a dhoti and kurta (the traditional upper garment worn by males as formal clothing). Musical instruments include the harmonium, khol (drum), and kartal (cymbals). The performance can last from one to seven days. During this time, the lead singer has to practice celibacy and vegetarianism. (Mukhopadhyay)

Of the several poetic texts of the Sitalamangal, the one that is most widely read and accepted as the definitive version is by Nityananda Chakravarty, which has been printed and distributed by the Battala presses of Calcutta. This text, composed in the panchali tradition (poetic renditions of a religious tale), details Sitala's struggle to gain due recognition as a "new" devi, first from the gods in heaven and then from man on earth. In every case there is a locking of horns between arrogant patriarchy and the will of the goddess; in every case the women plead for her and advise capitulation. The custom of holding a Sitalagan (song) , where the legend of the goddess is sung and performed, is part of a long tradition of auspicious gatherings where virtue is dispersed through the recitation of and accrued through the communal hearing of the holy life of a saint, or a god or goddess, or scriptures. It is quite common for such gatherings to be organized around the festivals of different deities. On such occasions, being present at the

chanting, recitation, reading, song session is in itself considered auspicious, an act of bhakti, devotion; those performing, reading are similarly performing an act of devotion. There are only certain areas of Bengal where the Sitalagan is performed at the time of the annual puja, and this is done in different ways. The Sitalamangal palas follow the puja, which is conducted by the priest before the idol. The performance starts with a vandana, or invocation to the goddess, by the actor playing the goddess, who asks for blessings and sings her praise. This is directed to the image of the goddess, either in the nearby temple, or within the performance space, or both. At the end, the entire company turns once again to the idol and offers pushpanjali, or offerings of flowers, uttering the prayer in praise of Sitala. Then the actor-goddess, who has been carrying a pitcher of holy or Ganga water (known as shantijal, literally, the water of peace), walks around sprinkling it on the gathered devotees while sweets are distributed as Prasad, or consecrated food offerings. So, at the beginning and the end of the performance, the sacred space and the performance space are explicitly melded together.

According to the Sitala performer Chapal Bhaduri, his empirical research into the customary Sitala performance shows that the Sitalagan of Medinipur (Midnapore) is traditionally performed by a male, seated and dressed in a dhoti and kurta, with the formal shawl over one shoulder and sporting shoulder length locks. In fact, he often repeats the incident where, when the women were anointing him with sindoor (vermilion) and he was in turn anointing or blessing them in the same way, which is a ritual only women share, he stopped and questioned a young woman. She replied that as long as he was playing the goddess, with the divine third eye on his forehead, she accepted him as Ma Sitala, even though she knew he was Chapalda (elder brother). This is just one example of what Richard Schechner, in his study of other Indian sacred performances, describes as "the two realities which are mutually porous" (Schechner), the simultaneity of which in such situations makes possible the mechanism of faith. The gradual changing of sacred performance of Sitalapala situates itself in an ongoing tradition that express its contemporaneity is a typical feature of folk culture.

Ritual Performances

The cult of *Sitala* is also associated with a particular type of impurity which causes smallpox. The disease in itself is processes which symbolize both the manifestation and outbreak of impurities and ultimately it ends in purification and rejuvenation. The huge eyes symbolize the essential nature of the cult. She is not the personification of goodness and beauty. She represents the negative and ugly side of famine. She looks with starved eyes towards her victims. Her eyes invoke dreads and awe which is transformed into respect and devotion. The Savara of North 24 Parganas, worshipped *Sitala* on the day of *Paus Sankranti* every year.

According to Sastri, Sankranti as the time in which the sun moves from one sign to another is considered most auspicious time of worship. Twelve Sankrantis make one year, when the sun goes to Makara or Karkata, the night is holy. *Paus Sankranti* occurred everywhere on the day of 14 or 15th January. The weather changes dramatically and human beings like all another organism respond in various ways. On the day of *Paus sankranti*, they do not cook any food nor light the hearth. It is believed that on this day *Sitala* visits every house and lies inside the hearth. If anybody lights the hearth by mistake, she becomes angry and curses the family, as a result of which some member of the family suffers from small-pox. It is a custom that the expenditure to be incurred in celebrating the occasion should be collected from all the Savara families.

The community priest or *deheri* is selected from the community members. The *deheri* should have knowledge of the traditional rites. The *deheri* or community priest of the Savara community prepares a list of articles which is collected from the markets. Three deities with different size and physical attributes were prepared by the neighbouring pal community. The shrine or *bedi* is cleansed by women. They spread a paste of cow dung and mud all over the floor of shrine and later melt the paste by their hand. The young girl decorates —*alpana* at the side of the shrine. The —*alpana* is the decoration of white colour. The colour is the mixture of —*Kharimati* and *chalerguro* (rice flour). The *dehri* or community priest goes on a fast on the day before the worship. He took a bath in the morning and put a fresh cloth. The cloths are new *Dhuti*' and undergarments. He went with his wife to nearby pond at around 4 pm to fill water in earthen pot. He was followed by a procession of women and children. They are all playing bells, blowing *Shankha* (conch cells) and *Ulu* (sound comes from women tongue). He throws fruits, flower and unhusked rice and *batasa* (round shaped sweet of sugar) to pond before filling water. The earthen pot was carried by the priest on his shoulder and placed on the platform of the shrine. The priest put a mango twig on the mouth of the sacred pot and vermilion marks were pointed on its neck. A green coconut having a long stalk was also pointed with vermilion on the head. This coconut was placed on the mouth of the pot with its head forward. The idol was then garlanded with *chandmala*' and of flower. She also dresses up with ornaments which they brought from local market. *Kachha* (not cooked) foods are generally offered to *Sitala*. They offered raw, unripe, unbaked and uncooked food as likes fruits and vegetables, sun dried rice, milk and sweets. The priest began uttering incantations which are composed of distorted Bengali. Priest sprinkled a quantity of ghee on the fire and recited short incantation. The sacrificial rite is next stage of *Sitala* worship. *Dehri* or community priest brought a quantity of sun dried rice which is mixed with sweets, flowers and fruits. Mostly fowls and goats are offered at the time of sacrificial rites. He applied vermilion marks on his sword. The head of fowl and goats are marked with vermilion before sacrifice. Some sundried rice was then offered to fowl and goat. It is believed that if the animals eat the rice then sacrifice was acceptable to the goddess.

After cutting the heads of fowl and goats, he poured the blood in the long banana leaves. The detached head of fowl and goat were taken in front of the *Sitala* as an offering. He again recited the incantations and the villagers were directed to blow and the *Shankha* (couch shell), ring bell, drum and *_ulu'*. All the Savara men's and women's started dancing after the sacrificial ceremony. The youth group carrying musical instruments like, dhamsa, madam etc and then play their musical instruments and sing folk song. The ritual performance ends with playing music, singing and dancing. The collected money is to be spent in celebrating a communal feast where country liquor is also served for drinking and making merry some of the Savara old man developed a sign of possession of spirits. They started uttering the future of the Savara society. They immersed *Sitala* on the next day. Priest takes bath early in the morning and started the arrangement of immersion worship of *Sitala*. He offered the goddess with fruits, flowers and sun dried rice and started incanting.

It is believed by them that if flowers fell down at the time worship then the deity was pleased. The *dehri* or community priest also worshiped the *Tulsi* Tree at the time of final immersion. Priest and his son take idols in their hand. All the Savara fell down on the way of priest. He takes *Sitala* in his hand and crossed everybody who was lying on the way. He crossed one by one over the bodies. It is believed by the Savara that *Sitala* take all the disease of the village at the time of immersion. Ceremonial immersion completes with placing *Sitala* in the field. They immersed the goddess in *Galay-Darir-Maath*. The field is 5 km far from the present habitation. They also immersed old basket, Kula', Jhata' and Earthen Vessel. The Savara are not allowed to turn back to the place at the time of returning home. It is believed if anybody did wrong he will die at the time of returning home. If a gilt person confessed his crime in front of *Sitala* then nothing will happen wrong. *Sitala* always forgive her children. The belief behind such worship is that the deity will destroy evil elements or spirits.

Conclusion

Although the smallpox disease is thought to be eradicated by the worship of *Sitala* and it still continues as the reason in some regions or community . She has taken on different personalities that depict her as not only the goddess of disease but also the protector of children and giver of good fortune (Wadley). Another reason that *Sitala* is associated with so many different personalities is because of the changing modes of transmission of traditions and cultural practices among the Hindu religion (Wadley). The attribution of widely varying personalities to *Sitala* is a result of continuous processes of communication between localized little traditions and the more widespread, continuously Sanskritizing great traditions. Her multifarious manifestations also reflect the influences of changing modes in the transmission of cultural data. In this respect, the shift from orally transmitted

tales to popular printed literature is especially crucial, tied as it is to processes of Sanskritization and standardization. Sitala is considered one of the lesser goddesses not part of the Great Traditions. She is most feared and appeased wherever due to lack of medical facilities or the money to offered treatment. The need to please her is the most urgent in rural areas and among the poor. She is worshipped largely by tribal and lower caste populations.

Sitala priests are usually non-Brahmins belonging to tribal or lower caste communities. It is interesting to note that almost all village deities like Sitala, Baram and Garam are regarded as "Mother" and usually worshipped by the women folk of India. The beliefs of the people in the spirits and demons have been interpreted by the priestly class in such a manner that a Sitala cult has evolved during the passage of time. Sitala in her primitive form was also anionic and was only responsible for and in charge of small-pox. From the position of a disease deity, she has been transformed to a children's deity now. She is still regarded as the small-pox deity with additional responsibility as a protector of children. Naturally, therefore the worship of Sitala is not done for any sense of gratitude or spiritual attainment, but due to a fear complex, the only desire being to get rid of the disease and for wellbeing of Children. Their origin, method of worship and folk-beliefs about their uncertain temper pose a bewildering complexity in explaining their relationship to the goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Today our country is witnessing a militant resurgence of religious ritual and demonstrative religiosity. An aggressive reclamation of "tradition" and "heritage" stifles with its rhetoric any analytical thinking about how these traditions evolve and change, or how they are inflected by socio-economic factors. It suits the agents of fundamentalism to see religious tradition as fixed, divinely ordained, unchanging and unchangeable. To accept that they have always evolved as society has evolved, that they have been inflected by other cultural influences, that they reflect accretions and adaptations, is to accept that there is no single, definitive, point can be judged and condemned.

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Ritualistic World of Tuluva: a study of Tuluva Women and the Siri Possession Cult

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Abstract

The paper could roughly be divided into two sections: first provides a brief outline of Bhūtārādhane or the ritual-performance traditions of the Tulu-speaking region in the coastal region of Karnataka. Second offers an insight into the mass possession cult of Siri, which like the other rituals of Bhūtārādhane derive their referential script from the oral tradition of the land. Connected intricately with the Siri epic or pāḍḍana, Siri rituals are performed annually in many places of the coastal region of Karnataka. During these rituals thousands of 'afflicted' women gather and get 'possessed' by the pantheon of Siri spirits. This paper is an attempt to delve into the emancipatory potential that this platform could offer women who participate every year, first as novices and then as adepts.

[Key words: Tulu, culture, ritual-performance, oral tradition, women, possession cult, emancipation]

Introduction

Tuḷunāḍu, or the land of Tuḷuvas¹ roughly located in the Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of coastal Karnataka (Figure 1), has been a land of distinct cultures fostering year-long rituals woven around the indigenous belief-system; matrilineal family system; a rich repertoire of oral tradition; linguistically diverse² communities; popular performance arts like Yakshagāna³; active theatre and film industry, etc.

Tulu, one of the earliest off shoots of the South Dravidian languages, developed as an independent language since about 8th century B.C.⁴ The pre-colonial literature in Tulu has been predominantly oral, and it is this vast vista of remarkably sophisticated oral tradition – pāḍḍana and sandi (oral epics narrating the legends of the local spirits, būtas and daivas⁵), kabita or obele (lively shorter poetry sung in the agricultural fields), etc – bequeathed by this land for centuries that has come to occupy prominence in the folk culture of the world.⁶ Apart from the vast corpus of folk literature available, the socio-religious fabric of a large section of the Tuḷuvas include: worship of spirit/local deities which is roughly and perhaps more wrongly⁷ translated as

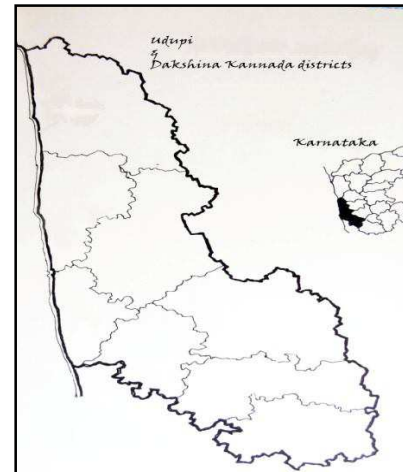


Fig 1: Tuḷunāḍu or Tulu-speaking area
PC: Navada, G (1999)

*bhūtārādhane*⁸; possession cults like *siri ālaḍe/jātre*;⁹ ritual practices associated with local deities like *nāgamaṇḍala*,¹⁰ *dakke bali*,¹¹ *nēma*, *kōla*¹² etc.; matrilineal system of society, favouring the inheritance and succession of family property by the sister's son through a system called *aliya santāna kaṭ* and so on makes it a region with some distinct cultural features, also sharing with some of the similar practices found in the Kerala region.

Bhūtārādhane

As this paper is an attempt to discuss in detail the mass possession cult of *Siri* in Tuḷunāḍu, it would be appropriate to dwell a little on the ritual tradition associated with the local deities of this region. The different ritual-performance traditions are an intrinsic part of the 'religious' world of many castes like *bunṭa/nāḍava*, *billava*, *mogēra*, *parava*, *pambada* and *nalke*. Organized generally by the *bunṭa* or *billava* caste, and carried out/impersonated by castes 'low' in the hierarchy like *nalke*, *parava* and *pambada*, 'high' caste Brahmins' participation in these rituals is minimal. Apart from *nāgarādhane* (serpent worship) which is found extensively through different rituals (*sarpākalam*, *sarpa tullāl*, *nāgamaṇḍala* and *dakke bali*) the most striking feature of the worship-system of Tuḷuvas is *bhūtārādhane* or the worship of a large pantheon of local gods, ancestral spirits, and semi-deities. It runs parallel or, we could say is more prevalent than the worship of vedic gods and goddesses mediated by Brahmin priests.¹³ *būta* worship includes the worship of localized and personalised (also hierarchized) semi-deities or ancestral spirits like *Bobbarāya*, *Kōṭi-Chennayya*, *Panjurli*, *Kallaḍa-Kallurṭi*, *Jumādi*, *Māyaṇḍala*, *Mula Mysonḍāya*, *Pili Chāmunḍi*, to name only few (*Figure 2*). These spirits have fixed spheres of influence and are generally associated with a family or village or region. The devotees offer them periodic oblation by arranging annual ceremonies of great pomp and festivity like *nēma*, *kōla*, *bali*, *tambila*, etc. at household and at village levels. In turn, the spirits protect the families, villagers and their livestock from danger, and warn them whenever it is necessary. The chief



Fig 2: Panjurli Būta being worshipped in the ritual

aspects that get enacted on the ritualistic stage of *būta* worship are possession, trance, performance of the self-hypnotized *būta* impersonator, and his dialogue with the members of the respective family or village regarding their worries, problems and ways to resolve their physical, material related issues. The *būta* impersonator also enacts as the medium of folk judicial system. These night-long rituals are a means of ensuring an escape from the wrath of

afflicting spirits (termed *upadra* in Tulu). The aura that is predominantly surrounding these *būtas* is that of fearful reverence. Most of the worries befalling the family or village are considered to be the result of a lacuna on the part of the members in giving due offerings, and their failure to appease the personalized deity through annual rituals.

Besides being a pronounced ‘religious’ phenomenon, *bhūtārādhane* intricately involves more social dimensions to it. The annual rituals arranged around these personalized *būtas* is primarily a binding force as every member of the family or village is obligated to partake in it. The otherwise scattered families – especially in the present times with extensive migration into larger cities like Bangalore, Mumbai and Gulf countries – gather particularly during the ritual, failing which they believe to be inflicted with worries. One striking feature of these rituals is also that the *būta* impersonator, who is a medium between the deity/spirit and the community members, is invariably from the ‘lower’ castes like *nalke* and *parava*. The impersonated *būta* wears make up, consecrated clothing, sings the respective deity’s *pāḍdana* and dances to the rhythm of background music throughout the night. These rites have continued from generation to generation, and the artists, the managerial and other personnel associated with this tradition have always worked towards maintaining the ritualistic norms and patterns.¹⁴



Fig 3: A man impersonating the *Kallurṭi būta*

The reversal of societal hierarchy that takes place during the ritual night – otherwise ‘lower’ caste person assuming the status of a dictating deity – could be, with all the disagreements it can generate and the complexities it involves, seen as a platform to seek a temporal liberation from the caste-ridden hierarchies. It opens the possibilities of a hitherto marginalized individual from the ‘lower’ strata becoming important in the intermediary world of worship, an otherwise untouchable becoming touchable and acquiring the reigns of voice and power. “Bhuta is a complex ideology. It is a mystery. But there is a message behind masks of bhutas... (it) signifies the fight against injustice and exploitation in society. It is a fight against denial of social justice by upper class to the suppressed class of society. The different actions of the bhuta impersonator in the performance-situation like exaggerated shouts, swallowing fire, wounding himself with sword, walking on a heap of embers signify impatience against injustice and exploitation” says Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda,¹⁵ a senior researcher on Tulu folklore and *būta* worship.

Nevertheless, the role of women in these rituals is that of a logistics-provider alone. The female spirits/deities like *Kallurṭi*, *Ullālti* are also impersonated by the professional male members of a caste (*Figure 3*). Female members of the *būta* impersonator's family sing *pāḍdana* during the elaborate make-up and costume preparation of the impersonator prior to the ritual-theatrical performance, thereby creating an atmosphere for the ensuing performance and possession. The rituals are headed by male member of the family or village who also get possessed in the course of the ritual, albeit for a short while, and women assume the secondary role of assisting the entire process.

Finally, "It has to be borne in mind that *Bhuta* worship is not a theatre form, meant only for entertainment. As a composite 'system,' it has functioned as an instrument of establishing a close balance associated with the social, political and judicial systems of Tulunaadu. The dynamics of the social and political systems of Tulunaadu are reflected in the dynamics of *Bhuta* worship. The changes in the details of *Bhuta* worship and in the materials used therein have always responded to the social compulsions." (Gowda 2005: 22)

The Siri Cult

The lengthy narratives of *Siri* and *Kōṭi-Chennayya* are considered to be the two prominent oral epics or *pāḍdana* of Tuḷunaḍu by many scholars. The different available *pāḍdana* form a vast mythological and poetic corpus, constituting a chief element of the cultural identity of the region. These orally transmitted narrative corpuses also traverse from the mythic tradition to the different ritual contexts mentioned in the above section on *bhūtārādhane*. The legend of *Kōṭi-Chennayya* is sung in the traditional *garaḍis* (martial arts cum worship centres), and the legendary twin-brothers have also been included in the pantheon of the spirits/semi-deities creating the cult of *Kōṭi-Chennayya*.



Fig 4: The 'possessed' Siris

The *Siri pāḍdana* sung primarily by women in the fields during paddy transplantation is considered to be a major epic in Tulu. It is the story of three generations of women – Siri, her daughter Sonne, and twin granddaughters Abbaga and Daraga, and the tragedies that befall them. Like the epic of *Kōṭi-Chennayya*, what is prominent is the translation of *Siri* text from the mythical to the ritual context of *Siri jātre* or *Siri ālaḍe*,¹⁶ and the deification of these women as spirits or semi-deities. For the matrilineal society of Tuḷuvas, Siri occupies a very special position as she is regarded as their founder from whom the matrilineal descent is traced. A synopsis of the major episodes bringing out the most relevant themes to account for the distinctiveness of the *Siri* cult and its 'religious' activities is provided in the Annexure.

The *Siri* festivals take place annually on the full moon night during the months of March-April-May primarily in 15 to 20 locations, called as *ālaḍe* in the Tulu speaking areas (*Figure 4*). During these rituals, thousands of women gather in the temple premises, sing the *Siri* epic, get possessed by different spirits of the *Siri* category, and thus get transferred into the mythical world of *Siri* as spirits. These apotheosized humans are said to be seven in number – *Siri*, *Sonne*, *Ginde*, *Abbaga*, *Daraga*, *Daaru* and *Kumara* (referential script for this is the *Siri* myth outlined in the *Annexure*). These annual ceremonies are considered to be the places of ‘spirit investigation’¹⁷ as the participant women are brought to the festivals because they are said to have been ‘troubled’ (*upadra* in Tulu) by spirit possession. The ritual performance is regarded as curative healing the women of ‘abnormal’ behaviours like speaking inappropriately or not speaking at all, shivering, sickness, delayed puberty, lack of appetite, etc. Such behaviour is diagnosed to be the ‘trouble’ of *Siri* spirits and the relatives are advised to take her to the next *Siri* rituals so as to resolve by their promise to serve (*seve*) *Siri* spirits as possession vehicles in subsequent years. Along with the experienced *Siris*, many participants partaking each year are newcomers.

During the night-long ceremonies, the women participants gather in small groups and recite a ritual version of the *Siri* myth. Soon all are possessed in one form or another, usually under the supervision of *Kumara*. Attention of the adepts is given to helping novices to more easily and fully express the character of their possessing spirit. While singing the story of the *Siri*, they get possessed and get individually transformed into the characters of the story they sing. Once the context is transformed into that of the story, the ritual stage is taken over by the male priest in the mythical form of *Kumara* who controls the spirits and leads the entire night-long ceremony. *Kumara* interrogates the women/spirits who already reported to have had a history of troublesome individual possession, helps in spirit identification, acts as a priest-medium in nursing the ‘afflicted’ women back to ‘normality.’ The ‘healed’ women vow their allegiance to the cult by ensuring their participation in the rituals in subsequent years, not as novice but as adepts. In short, “recitation of myth and ritual action are brought together in a dramatic model through which the individual is reintegrated into a moral order” to use the words of Claus.¹⁸

In order to avoid the trap of a ‘scientific’ observation which leads to making ‘logical’ statements about the possible causes of these women’s ‘possession,’ this paper will keep itself away from delving into this area of investigation. As for now, the paper will only concentrate on the ritual as it is available for any observer to see and understand. Probing into the reasons for why and how women get possessed, what is or is not the logicity behind society’s over-all perception of it are deliberately kept out of the purview of this paper. We merely continue with the understanding that women who are said to have been troubled by *Siri* spirits are inducted into the cult as novices during the annual ritual, and thereafter they continue to participate every year as adepts. What is more important for the

author here is the emancipatory potential that the space of this ritual can extend to the participating women.

Moving on to the ritual tradition of *Siri jātṛe*, one is faced with a situation where women participants feel that the rituals are good and sacred. Although many non-believers, especially the younger generation raise scepticism about the entire process, – and, the ritual activities could, and at places probably do, easily devolve into this if the drama-dimension and entertainment function overwhelm the ritual- dimension and social functions¹⁹ – it could also be relevant to observe that the *Siri* rituals serve as a space where women make an attempt to reclaim their self or forge new identities by identifying with the characters in the *Siri* myth. The inextricably linked worlds of myth and present-day serve as a platform for the ‘afflicted’ women to construct their new self-identities. The tragic dimensions of the *Siri* story lends multiple models – of quarrels and jealousies between husband and wife, between co-wives, and between sisters; the tragic plights that could befall a woman; the economic deprivations that a woman may face under the *aliya santāna kaṭ* of Tuluva community; etc – for the women to identify with and find solace in thereby lending them a cathartic effect. Women’s identification with tragic proportions of the *Siri* myth may bring about a realization that misfortune was a part of life and that a blessed and divine woman like *Siri* could also not escape from it. The women-centred narrative structures of *Siri* thus re-enact and dramatize women’s struggles and her search for identity.²⁰

Women who have perhaps been relegated to secondary position in the household when come into the fold of *Siri* cult are faced with a different world – a world wherein they are welcomed by the divine Kumara; attentive gestures and talks from him and the adept Siris; special care and reverence from the family members; and the exalted feeling that comes with the idea of a divine spirit having chosen and dwelling in her body. *Ālaḍe* acts as a space for the women to temporarily forgo their individual identities and with that, their anxieties, traumas of the real life. The ritual stage acts as a protected podium for the women to vent out their anger, frustrations, unfulfilled desires, tensions generated by family,



Fig 5: Kumara performing his task
PC: www.dalijworld.com

caste, class conflicts, rules and regulations of the society, sexual dissatisfactions, etc which they could otherwise not express in day to day lives. In the mass hypnotized scene of the *Siri jātṛe*, they lay their hearts bear in the disguise of a divine spirit. Suspended in the state of trance, the women switch to a different language (*kucchona* in Tulu, roughly translated as ‘teasing’) and articulate the anger, frustration, injustice

meted out to them in the past and present. The outside world is sealed for few hours wherein they get transported to the world of Siris which lends them the

power to articulate that is otherwise missing in their real lives, all amidst the presence of the family members.

The hypnotized state to which they are induced by Kumara enables them to adopt an imaginative role enactment thereby shedding their scattered identities of being a daughter, mother, wife, sister at home, at least for few hours of that night. The alternative self adopted by these women perhaps ensure better place within the socio-cultural context of their own lives. This interchangeability of roles could be seen as a strategy adopted by the women to claim their due social status. Also the spatiotemporal all-women space offered by the geo-ritual world could build new affinities, new communities offering the benefits of empowering group affiliations.

The central role performed by the male priest, Kumara (*Figure 5*) who initiates the singing, gets possessed by the divine spirit of Kumara and controls the other personated women Siris also lends for an interesting study, which due to the paucity of space is not taken up here. In the dramatization of the mythical episode of quarrel between Abbaga and Daraga, in the ritual context of some of the *Siri jātre*, Kumara comes to assume great proportions as against projected in the referential script of *Siri pāḍḍana* sung primarily by women in other contexts. In the re-enactment of the fateful event which puts an end to the three-generation of Siri,²¹ the tragic end is subverted by Kumara. In the dual role of the priest/uncle of the myth, he stops the quarrel before the girls re-enact their earthly deaths thereby also fulfilling the primary role assigned to 'uncle' (*maamu*) in the matrilineal society of Tuḷuvas. By acting both as the priest and the medium, he becomes a nexus between the two worlds of myth and reality. Thus, the *Siri* narrative of women in the 'akam' when comes to the public ritual performance of the 'puram,' is controlled and monitored by the male member, Kumara, thereby reinforcing the primary role assigned to men in the society.²²

Conclusion

In recent times, rituals like *bhūtārādhane*, *Siri jātre*, *nāgamandala*, etc have become tools to assert one's cultural uniqueness, and are celebrated with festivity and pomp. They gradually have been losing the high aura of devotion, belief and faith that were associated with these rituals in the earlier days. Women are growing more sensitive to the visual display of their bodies in the public sphere and this keeps them away from participation in the rituals as possession vehicles. Nevertheless, these rituals are performed without fail in many parts of the coastal region annually even to this day. A closer analysis of the socio-cultural factors associated with 'spirit possession,' will throw more light on the entire episode of the 'disorders' and therapeutic influence of the *Siri* rituals. Without having to rely on the modern psychoanalytic studies to 'throw light' on such a cultural practice of a community, and to view these rituals as a site for the multilayered emancipation

of the women could lend a comforting thought to the author's mind. To conclude with the words of Prof. Rai "emancipation should be redefined by distinguishing between the point of view of the performer and that of the audience... Rather than considering 'emancipation' as a social activity of the outsider, I would like to stress here the transformation of mind and body of the performing women as a way of emancipation... how the performance of folk narratives and rituals contributes to bringing it about."

Annexure: the Story

An old wealthy man named Berma Alva or 'Ajjeru' (grandfather) as he was fondly called, living in the palace of Satyanapura, was beset with grief as he had no issue. Lamenting his state, he had vowed that he would give his wealth as alms to beggars if he could have a child. He prayed to the lord Naga Berma who shortly afterwards came to his door disguised as a beggar. Berma Alva, following his word but not aware of the beggar's real identity, ordered his maidservant Daru to give alms generously. The beggar, however, refused to accept alms from the maid but insisted that the master of the house personally give him alms. When Berma Alva appeared, the beggar asked him the reasons for his grief and suggested Ajjeru to renovate the family's ancestral home and the shrines, the ruin of which was the reason for his issuelessness. Ajjeru complied with the Brahmin's suggestion and performed regular worship at the shrine.

In the large ceremony performed for the family god, Bermeru and all of the family *butas*, Ajjeru offered the lord a flower pod from the areca nut palm (*pingara*) containing a ball of sandalwood paste, begging to be forgiven for his neglect. At that moment the pod opened, revealing a baby girl. Pleased Ajjeru named her as 'Siri.'

Siri grew up at a phenomenal rate and at the age of five she was married to Kanta Punja of Kadengadi and a huge sum of gold and land, all of Berma Alva's wealth was given to Kanta Punja as Siri's dowry. However, Siri's beauty and faithful devotion could not dissuade Punja from favouring a prostitute Siddu on whom he squandered all of Siri's wealth and property. When Siri became pregnant Punja refused to perform the customary *bayake* ceremony which honours the wife as she departs to her natal home. Ajjeru visited her and insisted Kanta Punja to perform the bayake, and even provided money for Kantha Alva to buy a saree for Siri. On his way back from the town bringing saree and jewels for Siri, Kanta Punja visits his prostitute Siddu who wears the garment of Siri. Siri refuses to wear the polluted saree and returns to Ajjeru's house dishonoured.

Siri gave birth to a son named 'Kumara' in Ajjeru's house. Her wish to meet her husband and mother-in-law Sankaru Punjedi in the ninth month of pregnancy went unfulfilled. Also, the father refused to come and acknowledge the child. Infuriated Siri cursed her husband's family, lands and estate to go barren (and so, it is said, they are today). On the birth of the child, an astrologer forbade the grandfather from seeing the child as that would cause his death. One day, when Siri had left Kumara alone while bathing him, the grandfather enters and takes the child in his arms. He collapsed immediately and was found dead on the floor with the baby still in his arms when Siri returned. He breathed his last telling Siri not to lose her freedom come what may. Siri

sent message to her husband and her in-laws who didn't respond to it. Thus Siri and Daaru were made to arrange the last rites of Ajjeru.

Annu Shetty of Sulura Guttu convened a village court and claimed stake over the palace as per the *Aliya Santana Kattu* of Tuluva Community. Although Siri made an attempt to resist this, she failed to succeed. She refused to submit and cursed the palace to be reduced to cinders. Overcome with grief, Siri wandered aimlessly with the child Kumara and maidservant Daaru. She had renounced her husband, lost her only kinsman, and her wealth had been squandered on her husband's mistress and by the kinsmen. In her wanderings, Siri comes across many people and the story also narrates the use of her magical powers at times. At a place called Booladapavadu, after Siri fed Kumara with milk, he started talking and predicted his mother's second marriage and said that he would not be there for the ceremony. At his request, Siri disappeared him and Daaru was also sent to the invisible world.

As she wandered southward, she met two warriors (*ksatriyas*) of Boolamallige palace who both desired her greatly, but recognized her as a virtuous woman. She begged their help and asked them to regard her as their sister. She was taken to their palace. A man called Kodsara Alva of Kotrapadi sought to marry her in a special ceremony called *kaipptawuni* ('taking-the-hand') as both of them were already married. No dowry, no Brahman, no feast, no relative's consent would be necessary for this ceremony.

Saamu Alvedi, the wife of Kodsara Alva resisted the second marriage of her husband and left the palace devising a curse that if Siri were to look into a certain oil lamp she would go blind in the palace. While accompanying Kodsara Alva to his palace, Siri intuited that Kodsara Alva had another wife and that she was angered. She refused to enter the palace unless she was welcomed by Saamu Alvedi. When Alvedi realizes the honesty and forthrightness of Siri, and how pitiable her plight was, she welcomed Siri into the household as a co-wife.

At Kodsara Alva's house Siri became pregnant with a second child. Just before her time of delivery, Siri went to an areca nut grove at the edge of the jungle where she made a bed of betal leaves. There at dusk she had her baby, a daughter, whom she named Sunne (white lime). Kumara came in the disguise and helped his mother in the delivery. He blesses the child, put her on an areca leaves and floated it on a stream. He also made his mother disappear (*mayi*) who is still said to be guarding the land.

The child Sonne was found by Kaanebottu Ajjeru who brought her up. At the same time, he also found Gindye, the daughter of Paddantaya and Ginde Giliramu in the forest and brought her up too along with Sonne. Sonne was married to Gurumarla of Urukototu palace. On Gindye attaining puberty, a ritual was arranged. Sonne was ridiculed in the ceremony as she had not yet attained puberty. At the end of the ritual Sonne made Gindye disappear who later joined the divine circle of Kumara.

On both Sonne and her husband's prayer and vow to god that they would make him a big offering, Sonne attained puberty and became pregnant. She gave birth to twin girls, Abbaga and Daraga. Caught up in the joys of family life, they neglected their vow to Bermeru. Bermeru appeared to Sonne and Gurumarla disguised as a fortune teller. He foretold that they would suffer most deeply if they neglected their vow to him. All that the god had given them would be taken back. Guru Marla was angered by the fortune teller and told him to leave.

One day when Sonne and Gurumarla went away to invite the Kaanebottu ajjeru for the twin's marriage, Bermeru appeared in the palace disguised as a Brahmin. Although Gurumarla had locked the girls' favourite game Cenne Mane as they often quarrelled over it, Bermeru enticed the girls to play the game again. As expected, the game took a violent shape where the girls started fighting with each other. Abbaga hit her sister on the head and killed her. Shocked at the heinous crime she had committed, Abbaga also jumped into the well. When the parents returned, they were met by the sage who warned them that should never neglect a promise made to a god, for all that they were, all that they had was a god's gift. What was given by a god was taken away. The twins were later sent to the divine circle of the deities. The story of the three-generation women of a matrilineal family thus ends on a tragic note.

Notes

¹ Tuḷu is the lingua franca of this region, and hence has popularly been referred to as Tuḷunāḍu.'

² Apart from Tuḷu, Konkani, Kannada, Havyaka Kannada, Beary, Malayalam, Urdu, Kodagu, English languages are spoken in the region (Reference: *Survey of English: South Kanara District*. Hyderabad: Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. 1985)

³ Yakshagāna is a theatrical, dance-drama form that combines, dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up and stage techniques with a unique style and form. This theatre style is mainly played in the coastal districts and other adjacent regions of Karnataka, and traditionally played from dusk to dawn. Yakshagāna is the recent scholastic name (used in the last 200 years) for art forms known as *kēḷike*, *āṭa*, *bayalāṭa*, and *daśāvātāra* (source: wikipedia).

⁴ Upadhyaya, Dr. U.P. in "Renaissance in Tuḷu Literature" (1996)

⁵ Terms used to refer hundreds of local deities of diverse origin in the region.

⁶ The 'folk' art and ritualistic world of Tuḷuvas was introduced outside India through different studies undertaken by scholars including American Anthropologist Peter J. Claus, Finnish Folklorist Lauri Honko, Heidrun Bruckner from, etc. The 15,682 lined *Siri* epic is published in three volumes by FF Communications, Kalevala Institute under University of Turku in Finland.

⁷ The word *Bhūta* in Kannada also translates as devil or demon. A.C. Burnell's collection of Tuḷu folk songs, later published by R.C. Temple in *The Indian Antiquary* between 1894 and 1897, was titled as *The Devil Worship of Tuḷuvas*, thereby creating the 'other' category of the 'heathens.' As against the general norm, I have used the spelling *būta* instead of *Bhūta* throughout the article, which according to me is closer to its Tulu pronunciation. Latter spelling is retained when it occurs in quotes.

⁸ A brief outline is provided in the next paragraph.

⁹ Dealt with in detail in the latter part of the paper.

¹⁰ Elaborate and pompous rituals conducted while worshipping serpent, one of the chief deities worshipped. *nāgamandala* is now become an Aryan rite performed by *Vaidyas* who belong to Brahmin caste.

¹¹ Form slightly similar to *nāgamandala*, performed chiefly for non-Vedic deities like *Swaami*, *Hayguli*, *Bobbarya*, and so on.

¹² ritual-performances, also sometimes referred as *nēma*, involving the worship of hundreds of semi-deities, spirits in impersonated forms. *kōla* rituals are conducted annually at family and village levels in different parts of Tuḷunadu so as to appease these protecting spirits. Find more details in *Bhūtārādhane* section.

¹³ To quote Prof. Chinnappa Gowda “Tuḷuvas worship bhutas with first priority. That is why in every prayer they say *daiva devarugalige*. The first word used is *daiva* and not *deva*” (2011)

¹⁴ Chinnappa Gowda (2005) pg 21.

¹⁵ In *The Hindu*, January 26, 2011.

¹⁶ The place in which Siri Jatre is conducted, generally the temple premises, is also referred to as *alāḍe*.

¹⁷ Peter J. Claus in “Ritual Transforms a Myth” (1991).

¹⁸ Peter J. Claus in “Medical Anthropology and the Ethnography of Spirit possession.”

¹⁹ Peter J. Claus in “Ritual Transforms a Myth” (1991)

²⁰ To quote an example for the way the story of Siri has seeped deep into the lives of Tuḷuva women: During the documentation of the *Siri pāddana* as sung by a Bunt woman Kargi Shetty in 1999, while narrating the episode of Siri delivering her daughter Sonne with the help of her son Kumara and disappearing with him into the divine world soon after that, Kargi Shetty broke into emotional excitement and fainted on the spot. While enquired about this incident later, she replied, “Aren’t such episodes from the life of Siri similar to the incidents in our lives? Therefore it sorrows us a lot. It is similar to the pain we experience when our own children face difficulties. Isn’t it?” (*translation mine*) (Alva, Ashok 2009)

²¹ Refer Annexure for the story.

²² Dealt in detail in Claus, Peter J. (1997) "Ritual Transforms a Myth."

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From New Elocution to New Criticism and the Dismissal of Vachel Lindsay

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Abstract

Vachel Lindsay's fame was made, and ultimately ruined, by his performances of his "Higher Vaudeville" poems. This essay discusses the performance of the Higher Vaudeville in light of ideas of the New Elocution movement of the early twentieth century which influenced Lindsay's technique. Lindsay conceived these poems as elements of a performance medium. Ironically, some of the New Elocution ideas were indurated by the New Criticism, which discounted performance as constitutive of poetic meaning and led to Lindsay's critical dismissal. A consideration of the Higher Vaudeville as performance argues that Lindsay's achievement warrants critical reassessment.

[**Keywords:** Vachel Lindsay; performances, New Elocution; Higher Vaudeville]

The posthumous assessment of Vachel Lindsay's poetry represents a dramatic reversal. The change in tenor of Lindsay criticism and the suddenness of that change are startling. The critical acclaim for Lindsay during his life was typified by the critic John Gould Fletcher. Six years after the poet's death in 1931, Fletcher saw Lindsay as central to a worthy tradition in folk art:

Ever since the appearance of "The Congo" and "The Chinese Nightingales" I had realized that [Lindsay] deserved the acclaim which Americans audiences were giving him. He had achieved a fusion of popular American subject matter and vivid rhythmic and dramatic presentation which made him the chief folk artist among the American poets. It seemed to me that he had largely fulfilled the task only half accomplished by such earlier American folk singers as James Whitcomb Riley, Irwin Russell, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. He had given the world poetry that was sentimental and yet not false, popular and yet not cheap, democratic and yet full of heightened imagination. (281)

Yet, by 1940, not yet a decade after Lindsay's death, the critic C. P. Lee could confidently assert that "nowadays many a college student has never heard of Vachel Lindsay" (7). T. R. Hummer claims "[n]o poet of genuine visibility has ever been more summarily dismissed—from the canon, from the classroom, from the consciousness of readers—than Vachel Lindsay" (63). Such an abrupt and precipitous fall from poetic favor cannot be explained merely as the correction of a misplaced enthusiasm. Dennis Q. McNerny has voiced this dilemma:

Vachel Lindsay's power was real enough, but it was diffuse, unconcentrated, with the result that much of what he produced, though tantalizing, is not enduringly compelling. Yet it is difficult to evade the uncomfortable feeling that that assessment of the man, while accurate, is not adequate. (36)

Vachel Lindsay's reputation was made and ultimately ruined by his so-called "Higher Vaudeville" poems and by his exuberant public performances of them. What scholars have failed to recognize is that these poems were conceived as elements in a larger performance. Discussion of that performance and its relationship to the elocutionary ideas of his day can provide a more adequate assessment of Lindsay's achievement.

Lindsay's term, "Higher Vaudeville," has been unnecessarily confused by subsequent scholarship. Most critics have used the term to describe all of Lindsay's poems, whereas the Higher Vaudeville is actually a small set of poems Lindsay wrote between 1913 and 1915. Lindsay clearly marked these poems in the tables of contents of his books. What the Higher Vaudeville poems have in common is that, first, all of them have taken American vernacular forms or sounds as their prosodic inspiration. "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," for example, is inspired by the Salvation Army hymn "Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" An introductory note to "The Kallyope Yell" compares the poem to "The Jayhawk Yell," a college cheer from the University of Kansas. "The Santa Fe Trail" is imitative of car horns. Second, all of these poems include introductory comments and marginal notations that are meant to facilitate oral recitation.

In order to fully appreciate Vachel Lindsay, it is important to understand that all of his work was highly politicized. Lindsay's prose is full of references to a wide variety of liberal social reform movements of his day. He was a regular attendee at socialist meetings and at the meetings of woman's suffrage organizations. He had worked with Jane Addams at Hull House. He was an advocate of Henry George's Single Tax Movement. A brochure that he printed to promote his lecture appearances advocates for Ebenezer Howard's Garden City ideas. From his earliest *War Bulletins* and *Village Magazine* to his last illustrated poems, his aesthetic thinking was always influenced by social concern. He was especially worried about the problems of class divisiveness and racial rancor. As Anna Massa in "The Artistic Conscience of Vachel Lindsay" contends, "He believed that a writer's duty was not to himself, but to his audience, which should be all-class and nation-wide" (243). Toward this end, his Higher Vaudeville was an attempt to create a participatory performance form that would foster a sense of community and empowerment in a listening audience

Lindsay's life work is replete with bold experiments in genre. He mixed verse with prose, wrote illustrated poems, and experimented with a semiotics of design. His children's poems, many in the spirit of Blake, are subtly directed at adult readers. His book, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) was the first book of film criticism, for he was among the first to recognize the merit of this new

medium. Lindsay's "Higher Vaudeville" poems were an equally radical experiment in the art of performance. Early in his career, Lindsay began to realize the efficacy of vaudeville technique. In an 11 November 1913 letter to Arthur Davison Ficke, Lindsay states that vaudeville is a medium "which I have all my life abhorred," but he also confesses "I at last grasp what those painted folks are up to" (Lindsay 81). What they were "up to" was seeking the audience's collaboration in creating meaning. In her introduction to *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914) Harriet Monroe recalls that, when Lindsay first introduced "The Congo," well before he had gained any notice from reciting it, the explanatory note he sent to accompany the poem had discussed his method as a "type of Greek work which survives in American vaudeville" (vi). He further claimed his work was "an attempt to carry this vaudeville form back towards the Greek precedent of the half-chanted lyric" (vii). In defense of his aspirations, Monroe sees in Lindsay's Higher Vaudeville poems

a return to the healthier open-air conditions, and immediate personal contacts, in the art of the Greeks and of primitive nations. Such conditions and contacts may still be found, if the world only knew it, in the wonderful song-dances of the Hopis and others of our aboriginal tribes. They may be found, also, in a measure, in the quick response between artist and audience in modern vaudeville. (viii-ix)

This desire to foster a creative interaction between artist and audience is very much a natural development of Lindsay's artistic and political aspirations.

The style of the Higher Vaudeville demonstrates that Lindsay was aware that, because the medium of sound is transient, the act of listening to poetry makes demands on an audience that are not required of the reader of print. Readers are at leisure to reread, not only to understand difficult passages, but to compare sentences or images not immediately juxtaposed. The pace of the reading experience is controlled by the reader. Listening, on the other hand, is controlled by the speaker. Hans-George Gadamer has pointed out, "when you look at something, you can also look away from it by looking in another direction, but you cannot 'hear away'" (462). The listening audience must grasp the speaker's message, as Yeats asserted, "swiftly or not at all" (221). Consequently, an oral form will tend toward simpler syntactic strategies. Walter Ong has remarked that oral poetry tends to use an "additive" grammar (38). Sentences are simple or compound. Ideas follow in an additive progression. Inverted word order is eschewed. Ong also notes that oral poetry is also "copious" (40). It makes ample use of repetition and redundancy which allow the listener to keep pace with the presentation. These features are especially true of the Higher Vaudeville poems and distinguish them generically from Lindsay's other poetic works. The Higher Vaudeville are consistently written in a more simplified syntax than his other poems, and these poems alone make liberal use of refrain and *leitwort*.

When Lindsay performed these poems, he consistently found ways to include the audience in the performance. In her biography of Lindsay, *The West Going Heart*, Eleanor Ruggles reports that while Lindsay recited “The Kallyope Yell” he would exclaim “Every day a circus day,” cup his ear, ask “What?” and answer himself, “Well almost every day.” Eight lines later he would proclaim, “Bands a-playing every day,” cup his ear and wait for the audience to respond, “What?” (243). Frederic Melcher, an attendee at a Lindsay performance at the Central Christian Church of Indianapolis in 1917 recalled his surprise at the audience’s response to Lindsay’s recitation of “King Solomon.” As instructed, when Lindsay declaimed “King Solomon he had four hundred sweethearts,” Melcher reports, “to a woman, those good ladies sang back: ‘We were the sweethearts!’” (Ruggles 246). Lindsay was adept at leading audiences in participating in his poems. Ruggles recounts that “he worked them up, led them row against row, aisle against aisle, the floor against the balcony” (243).

In 1916 Lindsay privately printed *A Letter about My Four Programmes for Committees in Correspondence*, which he used as an explanatory and promotional pamphlet in booking his appearances. This document is notable for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that Lindsay’s performances were politicized; second, it shows that he considered an evening’s performance as one holistic event, not merely the performance of a set of individual poems. His “Programme I: The Gospel of Beauty” is a clear example. For this program Lindsay lists twenty-one poems which are to be “threaded together with a discussion of Democracy and Art” (3). Lindsay also asserts a thematic arrangement for the verse in the list. He writes, “the plot of this recital is the contrast of the ‘Kallyope’ message [the third poem in the list] to ‘The Soul of the City’ [seventeenth on the list]” (4). From this description it is apparent that Lindsay has a political message he wishes to impart, and he has couched this statement in a single performance. Most of the poems Lindsay associated with the Higher Vaudeville are part of “Programme III: An Evening of Higher Vaudeville, and Orthodox Verse as well.” The Higher Vaudeville poems in this program are all listed first; all of the “Orthodox Verse” follows. In his book, *Poetry and Community*, BalzEngler has remarked a three-part organization of the poems in this list. Of the sixteen poems, the first six are Higher Vaudeville. The next six are a “sharing of private visions.” These poems are more varied in style and theme, ranging from short, personal lyrics like “The Moon’s the North Wind’s Cookie” to celebrations of American working classes in “Kansas.” The final four poems are presentations of “men of vision” These poems either celebrate or elegeize significant individuals (158).

A complete description of the performance of “An Evening of Higher Vaudeville and Orthodox Verse as Well” no longer exists; however, there is ample testimony that it involved elements of performance beyond the Higher Vaudeville poems. In a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* for 23 July 1964, Phyllis Mills recalls attending Lindsay’s performance at Oxford in 1920. She remembers the audience participating in the Higher Vaudeville poems in such ways as roaring in

imitation of the lions in “Daniel,” but she also recalls, “at intervals, [Lindsay] had every window opened and everyone walking about to ‘take the air’” (649). Another attendee, Arthur Rau, confirms this memory in a letter for the 13 August 1964 issue of the same journal, recalling “audience participation and opening of windows” (731). Though it is certainly too late to reconstruct the performance as a whole, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that the performance as a whole had a method. By encouraging audience response, Lindsay established a co-operative rapport with the audience. By giving separate sections of the audience individual parts of the poetry, leading them row against row, he produced a co-operative spirit among the audience members. By having them walk about and “take the air,” he extended this community spirit beyond the poems.

It is useful in understanding Lindsay’s social program for poetry to see the Higher Vaudeville poems in particular as a response to The New Elocution. Lindsay had been a student of Solomon Henry Clark, the central champion of The New Elocution, at the University of Chicago, and he credits Clark with influencing his performance (*Letter about My Four Programs* 5). Davis Edwards reports that when he personally asked Lindsay if Clark had influenced his oral poetic technique Lindsay responded emphatically, “that’s where I got it. And you can tell the world” (182).

The New Elocution movement began with S. H. Clark’s address, titled “The New Elocution,” to a Chicago meeting of the National Association of Elocutionists in 1897. Clark began by pointing out his objection to Delsartean method. He declared that this made the speakers “mechanical and affected,” and he argued that the purpose of public recitation is to transmit literature to an audience, not to be a vehicle for the reader’s self-expression. Calling elocution the “handmaiden of literature,” he emphasized the need for close, appreciative reading, and he asserted that “training in vocal expression leads the student to a careful, critical, and sympathetic study of literature as literature, with the special object of developing his powers of appreciation” (32). He concluded by asserting that students of the New Elocution “recite *to* an audience rather than *for* them” (36).

The New Elocution movement arose from a short-lived school of oratory called “Expression” which came to prominence in the 1880s. In fact, at the time Clark gave his seminal lecture, he was also head of the Chautauqua Institution’s “School of Expression.” The Expression School of Public Speaking, in response to the excesses of nineteenth-century elocution, had re-opened the centuries-old debate concerning the distinction between elocution and acting.

What has particular bearing on the study of Vachel Lindsay’s performances is the debate over *personation* in the oral presentation of literature. The debate began with an address delivered by Maud May Babcock, a professor of speech at the University of Utah, to the convention of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking in Chicago in 1915, subsequently published in *The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* in January 1916. Babcock begins by defining

interpretation as opposed to *impersonation*. She defines interpretation as “the presentation of any form of literary material [...] without the aid of dress, furniture, stage setting, or of literal characterization in voice, action, or make-up,” and she emphasizes the idea that “interpretation means translation—literary interpretation, a translation from a dead printed form to living, breathing experience” (18). She goes on to define impersonation as “an attempt to give exact, literal characterization in voice, action, and make-up, in realistic surroundings of dress, furniture, and stage setting.” She declares that “impersonative presentation will be confined to the stage and drama, while interpretive presentation will naturally and of necessity be limited to the platform and deal with various forms of literature” (19). Babcock believes that an impersonative treatment of a work violates standards of aesthetics,

since it destroys the unity and harmony of a selection by detracting from the purpose of the author, and also since it distracts the listener by directing his attention to the *how* rather than the *what* of that which is being read, and further destroys the purpose of interpretation by appealing to the visible rather than the imaginative. (19)

She concludes that impersonation cannot be considered as helpful to the interpretation, or even as harmless, but must be set down as absolutely baneful to platform presentation and hence to be discarded (19). For Babcock, “real literature will not lend itself to [...] imitative treatment, and there are few, if any, opportunities in things of literary worth to exploit one’s ability as an entertainer.” In agreement with Clark’s dictum that speakers recite to rather than for an audience, Babcock asks, “Shall the audience be instructor and tell us how to proceed?” (21).

Babcock’s thesis was not accepted by mainstream scholars without dissent. In the April 1916 issue of *The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, R. A. Talcott, professor of public speaking at Valparaiso University, asked, “Is there a legitimate place in Lyceum work for literal characterization and pantomime in the presentation of literature?” (118). He proceeds by expanding Babcock’s dichotomy of impersonation versus interpretation into a four-part scheme of *interpretative reading*, *impersonative reading*, *straight personation*, and *acting*. He argues that impersonative reading, which he defines as reading with the use of literal characterization in voice and with pantomimic action without the trappings of costume or stage properties, cannot be dismissed from serious literary appreciation out of hand. He asserts that “there is a place for such personation,” and that place is “in the lyceum where a college professor can personate with perfect propriety and with no loss of dignity” (120). One reason Talcott gives for the use of personation is that speakers “can lead people to an appreciation of the highest and best if [they] first give them something that is easy to appreciate” (121). He insists that “personation does not belong to vaudeville,” and he asks, “would you send people to shows where decency is not always paramount when they

might be getting in the lyceum an entertainment consisting of clean personation interspersed with some pure interpretation of literature?" (122).

Lindsay seems to have been aware of the subtleties of this argument in at least one regard. A major objection to personative treatment raised by Babcock is that it "destroys the unity and harmony of reading, since the mechanics of impersonation make it impossible to pass quickly and unnoticeably enough from one character to another" (19.) Lindsay was aware of this difficulty and punctuated his stage characterizations by dramatic exits and entrances. Paul Horgan, who saw Lindsay perform, recalls that the poet's first entrance on the stage was both dramatic and in character. "Suddenly, and with dramatic violence, the side door was flung open, and the poet came before us treading a dance step" (566). When the performance of that poem was finished, Lindsay left the stage, "and when he returned he was in another mode" (567).

Though Babcock and Talcott disagree on the use of personation, they both implicitly agree on the terms "lyceum" and "vaudeville." They use the term "lyceum" to designate an oral presentation designed to edify and enlighten an audience. In contrast "vaudeville" designates any oral presentation designed solely to entertain. Vachel Lindsay's term "Higher Vaudeville" is in concert with this distinction. Lindsay had been inspired by the popularity of vaudeville and had realized the efficacy of its participatory strategy, but he had not engaged in the baser shenanigans of the typical vaudeville performance. Like the term "vaudeville" used by Babcock and Talcott, Lindsay's Higher Vaudeville is an entertainment, but it is aimed at a higher goal. When Talcott asks if we should "send people to shows where decency is not always paramount," he reveals an attitude implicit in Babcock's stance—that audiences will, or should, seek out literature of their own accord. Talcott, however, is willing to *promote* literature among the citizenry. Lindsay's Higher Vaudeville is intended to make a similar concession to the audience. On 18 January 1918 Lindsay wrote to Jessie Rittenhouse: "The American people hate and abhor poetry. I am inventing a sort of rag-time manner that deceives them into thinking they are at a vaudeville show, and yet I try to keep it to a real art."

Clark's ideas of elocution had an immense effect on the subsequent study of public speaking in the United States. As K. B. Valentine points out, under the influence of the New Elocution the study of oral interpretation moved from "a skills focus to a literature focus" (559). An influential text book of the early twentieth century, Algernon Tassin's *The Oral Study of Literature* (1923) illustrates this change. In the introduction to his text, Tassin argues for the use of instruction in oral reading as a tool for literary appreciation, claiming that "the higher forms of literature cannot be appreciated by young people except when read aloud, and that reading aloud enriches the appreciation of even discerning minds" (14). His text, he says,

is not an “elocution” book, and the lessons given in the appendix are not “elocution” lessons. They concern getting the thought of the writer, and the oral reading contemplated is only a test of whether one got the thought or not. (21)

Tassin’s book is a direct product of the New Elocution, and it implicitly denies oratory as the *locus* of meaning. Following the ideas of such thinkers as Tassin and Clark, university systems in the United States began to consider oral recitation as a method of literary study and, consequently, began offering courses in “the oral study of literature” as opposed to “elocution.” With the publication of Clark’s *The Oral Interpretation of the Printed Page* (1915), interpretation rather than personation became the accepted theoretical norm for the oral presentation of literature among the majority of theorists, despite the protests of scholars such as R. A. Talcott. The debate never fully subsided and is still sometimes engaged today. David A Williams, for example, argues in his 1975 essay that a reader must decide “how much impersonation should be used.” He points out that “no one has yet devised a system to indicate the amount of characterization” a reader should employ (52).

Though the New Elocutionists disagreed among themselves about such problems as the place of personation in oral delivery, they implicitly agreed on one central tenet. They considered poetry to be a writer’s art. For them oral presentation is the translation of the “real literature,” as Babcock so boldly put it, which is the printed page. The effect of this assumption on Lindsay’s reception was two-fold. First, it discounted his performances as a mere showman’s trick. Second, it inspired critics to consider the printed poems individually ignoring their role as elements of a larger performance. The performances were viewed as *promotional* of Lindsay’s work, not *constitutive* of it. All the critics who heard Lindsay admitted the power of his delivery, but none recognized a generic difference from his work and that of his American contemporaries.

Interestingly, Lindsay’s contemporary critics often betray a suspicion that their criticism is inadequate to Lindsay. Typical is Virginia Woolf’s review of Lindsay for *The Times Literary Supplement* of 29 January 1920. Woolf considers the language of Lindsay’s poems “generally too large and loose for the thought; it is often even more banal than the thought—pompous, careless, slack, and conventional” (64). Still she wonders how such “mediocrity should yet remain buoyant and seaworthy,” and she concedes that “you walk on with the tune running in your head. It comes back of its own accord later in the day.” She asks, “has it not somehow addressed itself to you also?” Woolf’s dilemma is typical of Lindsay’s American admirers; those who saw the performances were quick to admit their power but were unable to describe adequately how that power arose. John Dos Passos, for example, saw Lindsay perform at Harvard. He recalled, “We went to kid, but were very much impressed in spite of ourselves” (Ruggles 237).

Lindsay's performances were in dialogue with the ideas of the New Elocution. Ironically, the New Elocution's focus on the text anticipates New Criticism and ultimately sows the seeds of Lindsay's critical dismissal. New Criticism, with its emphasis on a careful reading of the text and its belief in the heresy of paraphrase and the affective fallacy, considers the written text as the sole *locus* of meaning. In *Theory of Literature* Rene Wellek and Austin Warren pose the problem of the *ontological situs* of the poem. Though they concede that the printed text cannot be considered *the* poem, they assert that print is indispensable claiming that "poetry is written for the eye as well as for the ear" (144). Thus, the central assumption of New Criticism is that the poem is an *object* rather than an *event* (21). The new critic held the proper object of study to be "the poem itself" and viewed public recitation of poetry as derivative. For the new critic, recitation is necessarily an act of *translation* not of *creation*. It is inherently imperfect and constantly in need of verification from the printed text.

This understanding of public recitation as translation has been embraced by twentieth-century theorists of elocution. Wallace Bacon, for example, claims that the twentieth-century approach to public speaking, in contrast to the elocution of the eighteenth century, treats the text as "a point of return" rather than as "a point of departure" (4). In other words, the purpose of public recitation is to interpret for the audience a text, and the public speaker's primary concern is fidelity to that text. The act of recitation, therefore, is a translation of an unchanging meaning that resides in the text. This understanding of the public speaker's function is, Bacon asserts, "the clear line of change from the eighteenth century to our own time in the teaching of oral reading" (4). In *Literature as Experience* Bacon and Breen imply the primacy of the text when they assert that the experience of poetry "exists only within the poem itself" (124). And they further claim that "the poem exists only in the words in which it is set down" (235). Thus, they discount both extra-textual events in the performance as part of the poem, and they ignore the participation of the audience as constitutive of meaning.

After Lindsay's death, as critics read these poems on the printed page divorced from their performed context, they faulted the poetry for its simplistic syntax and repetitiveness, not considering that these characteristics arise from Lindsay's understanding of the demands made by a listening audience. Further, as critics were unable to see such elements of performance as audience participation and extra-textual events as essential elements of the poems, they were unable to see the Higher Vaudeville as generically distinct from other lyric poetry. But the testimony of those who saw the performances demonstrates that Lindsay's performances were successful. To a person, attenders report feeling a real power in Lindsay's presentation. To a person they report having left the auditorium feeling that they had experienced something remarkable, that they had been part of an empowered community.

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“The Times They Are A-Changin’”: Bob Dylan and Urban Poetry

Sudev Pratim Basu

Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan

To begin with, it is really a daunting task for someone to attempt to map, categorise and pin down Dylan’s poems and songs to any *one* particular socio-cultural matrix. The problem intensifies when one tries to separate his poems from his songs, and vice versa. They are symbiotic and we cannot ‘read’ one without reference to the other. Which one is the ‘center’ and which is the ‘periphery’ is difficult to ascertain, especially with such a chameleon-esque poet-singer-song-writer like Dylan. Throughout his career as a cult-guru of marginalised voices who ‘abandoned’ the purist path for the lure of ‘electronica’ and the mainstream, Dylan has continuously re-defined himself and his cultural alignments almost as if to challenge the Dylan-baiters; and, in the process, has achieved a near immortal ‘parallel’ status which is almost exclusively his own.

Over the years Dylan has tacitly encouraged myths and anecdotes about his unconventional lyrical style – of writing and singing – and at the same time, despite the almost hysterical fan following, he has remained an intensely private and insulated individual. Guarding his privacy and poetical/musical copyrights like the proverbial dragon, Dylan did not hesitate to grant others his ‘words’ when he thought it fit, the best examples being his songs “Blowin’ In The Wind”, “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door”, and “All Along The Watchtower”, made famous by Peter, Paul and Mary (Peter, Paul & Mary), Eric Clapton (Clapton), and Jimi Hendrix (Hendrix) respectively. A shrewd businessman with an uncanny nose for the market and the marketable, Dylan has used this skill to promote the greatest eccentric poet-singer of our times – himself!

This essay examines, with reference to a few of his selected songs, various themes of urban existentialism and the desire to belong: which taken together, is symptomatic of post-1950s urban, consumerist and capitalist ennui that gripped USA. It will also highlight Dylan’s position as the ‘counter-culture’ messiah – forever shifting his marginal position to accommodate social changes, perceptions and assumptions – and always speaking of social crimes and imbalances. All this has made him the ‘unacknowledged legislator’ of the so-called ‘other’-world. Dylan is uneasy about being appropriated by the establishment: political, musical and cultural. He hardly has any voice other than his songs. Intensely media-shy and interview-unfriendly, he has always limited his comments to his musical repertoire. Needless to say, there will be omissions and exclusions in this essay, as it is utterly impossible to condense his immense output spanning six decades into a single account. Much to his own irritation, Dylan has now become part of the

academia, where his songs and positions are scrutinised, analysed and bracketed. Given a choice, he would have liked to leave his songs to personal interpretation and reaction, and not have them hierarchised and canonised by the academic establishment. But, sad to say, he is the most popular modern poet in his homeland and almost all universities offer a Bob Dylan course, despite the official non-cooperation from the man himself. May I add the further disclaimer that Dylan's output is so vast that I have been able to incorporate only a few of his albums, and I feel I have done him much harm by such labeling.

Dylan's rise, both as a poet and protest-singer, coincides with the various civil-rights movements, anti-nuclear proliferation backlash, students' revolts, cold war and its propaganda, alternative/'deviant' sexuality awareness, the Haight-Ashbury hippie counter-culture, black-empowerment, rock music, communist enclaves, drug consumption and the general post-war economic boom that was responsible for the anti-establishmentarianism in vogue at that time; specially among the urban youth. Dylan has, gradually over time, consciously checked against appropriation; so much so that when the folk community began calling Dylan their own, he turned his back on them and embraced rock n' roll. It becomes difficult to categorise him musically too. He later rejected rock n' roll for blues and rock. His influences are vast and he has dabbled in everything from cockney rhyming rap to heavy rock. He consciously turned his back on the seminal counter-culture platform Woodstock, which took place almost in his backyard in 1969, and, unlike Bob Geldof and U2 front man Bono, did not make it an issue to be a leader of the West's consciousness vis-à-vis the rock community. His songs talk for him.

I'll consider Dylan's songs as poetry. We need not reiterate the harmonic co-existence between poetry and music. All proto-texts and epics combine poetry and music. Under the all-pervasive catholicity of orality and the oral tradition, the poet-singer functioned not only as an entertainer through his structured narratives, but also became, by virtue of his position as the 'voice', the social consciousness of his people, often providing a rallying point for the individual and the nation's politics of identity(s). Both poetry and music employ rhythm, rhyme and pitch, and also refer to contained parallels and private insights, open to their shared community, which, in the long run, help define spatio-temporal constructs of race, gender, class, habits and tradition.

Dylan and other protest-singers/poets of that period and earlier – Huddie Ledbetter, a.k.a. Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Allen Ginsberg to name a few – followed this tradition of orality. The resurgence of the folk tradition and the folk song in the late 1950s and early 1960s is a telling symptom of America's almost religious rejection of notions such as social welfare and social ghettoisation. The mantra of the time was: return to the pastoral, rural and personal roots through the bard. This almost dichotomous divide whereby the insurgence of the pastoral is located in the urban conglomerates is perhaps the reason why Dylan, protest-songs, folk-rock and its peripherals were seen as

aberrations, not as reflective of the general bias towards the idyllic and the idealist. Dylan’s ultra marginality – born Robert Allen Zimmerman into a Jewish family in backward Minnesota, running away from home at the age of ten, apprenticing with a travelling circus in Texas, barely making pass grade in elementary school, dropping out of university – his lack of a proper occupation and his extreme obsession with the eccentric Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, led him early in life to distrust success. Having seen his father crippled by hard work, Dylan had no problem grasping the problem of working class America from within: “My father never walked right again, and suffered much pain his whole life”, said Bob. “I never understood this until much later, but it must have been hard for him” (Sounes 16). Naturally, he made music his first-choice career.

Dylan had learnt to play the guitar and the harmonica while at school. He was already performing in school bands at pubs and coffee houses. The close camaraderie of these dim-lit places where the informal atmosphere brought out the best in him: the ability to connect while singing about the inability to connect. The essential performance-roots still lie heavily with him – even today. Though celebrated as a concert or arena performer – having enjoyed tremendous success with live albums and mega-bucks collaborations – Dylan prefers small enclosed spaces with a few ‘interested’ listeners, people he can see and connect to like in his early albums; from his later days, the best example is the multi-platinum selling album *MTV Unplugged*. This, the modern equivalent of the oral tradition – a man with a guitar, harmonica and a voice, albeit backed by a band that does its utmost to remain invisible both musically and visually – is where Dylan’s entry into the world of poetry can be located.

The Spatial Paradigm

After wandering through the American hinterland in search of inspiration and idols – Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, Jesse Fuller; Arthur Rimbaud and John Keats – Dylan landed up with the folk community of Greenwich Village in New York City in January 1961: “Long ago, when New York City was affordable, people who felt they didn’t fit into the mainstream, could take a chance and head there from wherever they were. Bob Dylan came east from Minnesota in the winter of 1961 and made his way downtown to Greenwich Village. Like countless others before him, he came to shed the constricted definition of his birthplace and the confinement of his past” (Rotolo 13), says his long-time (early) girlfriend Susan Elizabeth Rotolo, forever immortalised as the girl in Dylan’s arms as they walk down the street in the cover of his second album *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* in 1963. He immediately made a huge impact in this burgeoning hub of counter-cultures with his caustic remarks, unconventional takes on song-themes and the lacerating vocal intensity of his ‘attacks’ at social hypocrisy through his bluesy folk songs – much of which were cover versions of existing songs. He played at small venues and his eccentric charisma and dedication to social change brought him

fans, both the ordinary and the elite. Joan Baez, already an established protest-singer, recognized his worth and brought him to perform with her at protest gatherings and street corners: “It would be a serious mistake, however, to underestimate Baez’s importance as an artist. She was a decisive figure on the American folk scene and helped bring that music to a huge mainstream audience. In addition, she introduced many superb songwriters at that audience as well, most notably Bob Dylan” (DeCurtis xiii). Overshadowing his mentor, Dylan soon forged a new path for the specialised folk song, giving it a much-needed popular feel of angst, and introduced a raw edge to the otherwise placid songs. After he opened a concert for Blues legend John Lee Hooker, Dylan was ‘spotted’ and signed up with Columbia Records. His eponymously titled first album was released in 1962 – an eclectic collection of standard authentic folk with only two originals. Since then Dylan has come a long way.

His poetic-songs have been compared to Homeric and Roman ‘rhapsodes’, and he has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature every year since 1996 – and the precedent shown for arguing Dylan’s case is Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore – another poet-song-writer who easily straddles the twin worlds of poetry and music. In fact Joan Baez uses a Tagore quote to begin her preface of her memoir: “God respects me when I work. He loves me when I sing” (Baez xxv). Dylan’s earliest songs, from his pre-recording-contract days, speak of travel – in search of kindred feelings, brotherhood and home – and disillusionment with the big city:

Rambling out of the wild west/
Leaving the towns I love best/
Thought I’d seen some ups and down/
’Till I come into New York town/
People going down to the ground/
Building going up to the sky... Well, I got a harmonica
job begun to play/
Blowing my lungs out for a dollar a day/
I blowed inside out and upside down...
Dollar a day’s worth... That some people rob you
with a fountain pen/
It don’t take too long to find out/
Just what he was talking about/
A lot of people don’t have much food on their table/
But they got a lot of forks and knives/
And they gotta cut something. So one morning
when the sun was warm/
I rambled out of New York town/
Pulled my cap down over my eyes/
And headed out for the western skies/
So long New York/
Howdy, East Orange. (*Bob Dylan*).

This is one of the earliest songs Dylan wrote – “Talkin’ New York”. Its history is a bit hazy, but it was probably penned in 1961, or earlier. The song talks about a naïve view of the big bad city seen from a country hillbilly’s point of view. The loosely structured narrative is a direct first-person account of the exodus which had been undertaken by many people especially after the post-war economic boom. They left their homes in their beloved small towns and villages and headed to the Big City for the American Dream. But the illusion was short-lived and brutal. The city was a place of oppression, struggle and anonymity – the postmodern invisible small person was unable to cope with the sophistication of the city and its rules of survival, and turned back home. This is interesting because

Dylan himself did not go back, but stayed on, fought it out with ‘dollar a day’s worth.’ Incidentally, New York – the prime suspect in Western postmodern urban alienation – figures prominently in Dylan. Another song from his early days – “Hard Times In New York Town” – underlines the social disparity, the unequal distribution of wealth, status and opportunity:

Old New York City is a friendly old town/ From Washington Heights to Harlem on down... They’ll kick you when you’re up and knock you when you’re down/ It’s hard times from the country/ Livin’ down in New York town... If you got a lot o’ money you can make yourself merry/ If you only got a nickel, it’s the Staten Island Ferry/ And it’s hard times from the country/ Livin’ down in New York town... You c’n listen to m’ story, listen to m’ song/ You c’n step on my name, you c’n try ‘n’ get me beat/ When I leave New York, I’ll be standin’ on my feet... (*Bootleg I*).

This is the typical Dylan. The direct reference to the listener, including him within his circle of sympathy/antipathy, the raw impolite ungrammatical English, the socialist and/or communist undertones – these were the first Dylan-esque attacks at the Establishment. The visceral hatred for the City and crass commercialisation found many a taker in those hard times. The war – Vietnam – was yet to figure in his songs. His first site of political awareness in his songs was the City: usually the anonymous, cold, commercial, East Coast cities. The poverty, death, callousness and lack of dignity of the common man are shockingly portrayed in another early song, called “Man On The Street”:

I’ll sing you a song, it ain’t very long/ ‘Bout an old man who never done wrong/ How he died nobody can say/ They found him dead in the street one-day. Well, the crowd, they gathered one fine morn’... There on the sidewalk he did lay/ They stopped ‘n’ stared ‘n’ walked their way. Well, the p’liceman come and he looked around/ “Get up, old man, or I’m a’takin’ you down”... Well, he jabbed him again and loudly said/ “Call the wagon; this man is Dead”/ The wagon come, they loaded him in/ I never saw the man again. I’ve sung you my song, it ain’t very long/ ‘Bout an old man who never done wrong/ How he died nobody can say/ They found him dead in the street one-day. (*Bootleg I*).

This is one of Dylan’s most direct songs aimed at highlighting homelessness and the utter desperation of the aged and the poor especially in a big city where they are seen as signs of failure – personal as well as collective – and ignored with utter disdain. The sting of this song – aimed at the listener in a direct frontal attack – is starkly highlighted with the raspy vocals and the jangling guitar and harmonica lines that almost paint the picture of the homeless man dying uncared for on the streets of the biggest and most ‘successful’ city in the USA. These three early songs are symbolic of Dylan’s non-urban background. The common refrain in these songs is the acute country-city divide. The wide-eyed country bumpkin has seen through the hypocrisy and charade of civilised society, and is keen to leave it

behind, at least metaphorically if not literally. This is another facet of Dylan that baffles the listener and the critic – if these urban spaces are not conducive to simplistic lifestyles, then why doesn't the poet-singer leave? The answer I hazard is that for Dylan, and others like him living on the verge of acceptability and making a career out of speaking out and for these problems and people, the city *is* essential to the development, growth and popularity of this particular tone of protest-voicing, be it through candle-lit marches or popular songs. The city and/in popular music is too great a subject for me to handle in this essay, but Dylan and others, fed *off* the city, which almost assumes a kind of postmodern intellectual limbo: I hate the city, but in the voicing of my hatred, I find my vocation; hence I exist.

Pacifist Dis-connectivity

Dylan joined the anti-war bandwagon in a major way – as far as his recordings are concerned – only in 1963. His classic indictment of war and war mongering became an instant popular street refrain cutting across race and national divides. Called appropriately “Masters Of War”, this song aptly sums up the contemporary attitude towards war. This song from 1963 was overshadowed by another song from the same album which also talked about freedom and peace – the cult song “Blowin’ In The Wind”. But “Masters Of War” is a chilling reminder of *realpolitik* where the angst is internalised against the numerous ‘official’ home-grown enemies who collaborated in the war for personal gain at the expense of the common-man’s body-bags. This song touched a chord amongst the young people especially the urban youth and draftees, who saw in this song the betrayal of the promises of the modern Free America. This song has lyrical affiliation with the war poetry of the First World War, especially with Wilfred Owen – “The Send-Off” in particular:

Come you masters of war/ You that build all the guns/ You that build the death planes/ You that build all the bombs/ You that hide behind walls/ You that hide behind desks/ I just want you to know/ I can see through your masks. You that never done nothin’/ But build to destroy/ You play with my world/ Like It’s your little toy/ You put a gun in my hand/ And you hide from my eyes/ And you turn and run farther/ When the fast bullets fly. Like Judas of old/ You lie and deceive... But I see through your eyes/ And I see through your brain/ Like I see through the water/ That runs down my drain... When the death count gets higher/ You hide in your mansion/ As young people’s Blood/ Flows out of their bodies/ And is buried in the mud... For threatening my baby/ Unborn and unnamed/ You ain’t worth the blood/ That runs in your veins... You might say that I’m young/ You might say I’m unlearned/ But there’s one thing I know/ Though I’m younger than you/ That even Jesus would never/ Forgive what you do. Let me ask you one question/ Is your money that good/ Will it buy you forgiveness... I think you will find/ When your death takes its toll/ All the money you made/ Will

never buy back your soul. And I hope that you die/ And your death’ll come soon/ I will follow your casket In the pale afternoon/ And I’ll watch while you’re lowered/ Down to your deathbed/ And I’ll stand over your grave/ ’Til I’m sure that you’re dead. (*The Freewheelin’*).

Dylan’s recordings in the early 1960s were an eclectic outpouring of anti-war songs (the ones mentioned above), alienation (“Down The Highway”), death (“See That My Grave Kept Clean”, a cover version of a Lemon Jefferson song) and God and established religion (“With God On Our Side”). But in the mid-60s, Dylan began writing the poems about human relationships which defined the postmodern inability to connect with people – people you loved, people you have lived with for a long time but cannot comprehend. It is to be noted here that Dylan himself went through a series of personal relationships during this time – the most high-profile being the one with fellow poet-singer Joan Baez, a roller-coaster on-off affair that was as much musical as emotional. The first song from his 1964 album, appropriately titled *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*, highlights this dilemma regarding love and control, and how emotional dependence is a kind of telescoped colonisation – of mind, and body – from which the poet wants to break free, *if* he can: “All I Really Want To Do”.

I ain’t lookin’ to compete with you/ Beat or cheat or mistreat you/ Simplify you, classify you/ Deny, defy or crucify you... No, and I ain’t lookin’ to fight with you/ Frighten you or tighten you/ Drag you down or drain you down/ Chain you down or bring you down... I ain’t lookin’ to block you up/ Shock or knock or lock you up/ Analyze you, categorize you/ Finalize you or advertise you... I don’t want to straight-face you/ Race or chase you, track or trace you/ Or disgrace you or displace you/ Or define you or confine you... I don’t want to meet your kin/ Make you spin or do you in/ Or select you or dissect you/ Or inspect you or reject you... I don’t want to fake you out/ Take or shake or forsake you out/ I ain’t lookin’ for you to feel like me/ See like me or be like me/ All I really want to do/ Is, baby, be friends with you. (*Another Side*).

This existential positioning is evident in many of Dylan’s later albums. Dylan was earlier criticised by critics as well as fellow performers that most of his lyrics were ‘issue-based’ and that he did not talk about the essential individual wrapped up in the modern society. Countering these allegations Dylan has, over the years, come up with lyrics that question man’s position in society from an acute angle of loneliness and internal displacement that echoes similar collective strains of the same vein. The notion that all relationships are powered and guilty of influence run throughout Dylan’s entire repertoire right down to the hauntingly uneasy “Lovesick” from the 1997 album *Time Out Of Mind*:

I’m walkin’ through streets that are dead/ Walkin’ with you in my head... Did I hear someone tell a lie?/ Did I hear someone’s distant cry?/ I spoke like a child/ You destroyed me with a smile/ While I was sleepin’. I’m sick of

love that I'm in the thick of it... I see lovers in the meadow/ I see, silhouettes in the window, I'll watch them 'til they're gone/ And they leave me hangin' on/ To a shadow. I hear the clock tick/ Sometimes the silence can be like thunder/ Sometimes I wanna take to the road and plunder/ Could you ever be true/ I think of you/ And I wonder. I'm sick of love, I wish I'd never met you/ I'm sick of love, I'm tryin' to forget you. Just don't know what to do/ I'd give anything to/ Be with you. (*Time*).

However, on the musical side he was undergoing a drastic transition – a transition that fans still bicker about. In 1965 at the influential Newport Folk Festival Dylan went electric (Shelton 301-04) with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, which included Dylan staple Al Kooper on guitar. Purists were enraged and fans booed him throughout his loud set. But Dylan hasn't looked back since. His first major 'electric' release was the 1966 *Blonde On Blonde*, which featured such Dylan classics like “Rainy Day Women Nos. 12 & 35”, “I Want You” and “Just Like A Woman”. But the operative track from that album will surely be the surrealistic ballad of madness, sexuality, prostitution, voyeurism and rejection of the Godhead – provocatively entitled “Visions Of Johanna”:

Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when you're tryin' to be so quiet? / We sit here stranded, though we're all doin' our best to deny it... The country music station plays soft/ But there's nothing really nothing to turn of/ Just Louise and her lover so entwined/ And these visions of Johanna that conquer my mind... And the all-night girls they whisper of escapades out on the D-train... That Johanna's not here/ The ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face/ Where these visions of Johanna have now taken my place... And these visions of Johanna they kept me up past the dawn. Inside the museums, Infinity goes up on trial/ Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while/ But Mona Lisa must'a had the highway blues/ You can tell by the way she smiles/ See the primitive wallflower freeze/ When the jelly-faced women all sneeze/ Hear the one with the moustache say, “Jeeze I can't find my knees”/ But these visions of Johanna, they make it all seem so cruel... As she, herself prepares for him/ And Madonna, she still has not showed/ We see this empty cage now corrode/ Where her cape of the stage once had flowed/ The fiddler, he now steps to the road/ He writes ev'rything's been returned which was owed/ On the back of the fish truck that loads/ While my conscience explodes/ The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain/ And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain. (*Blonde*).

The apparent absurdity and images of languid decadence that pepper this song can be read as anti-Christian and hedonistic – but Dylan deliberately draws reference to absurdity as an artistic tool for emotional and existential ennui – somewhat like Eliot's “Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock”. Often regarded as a loose reference to substance abuse (like the Beatles' “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” from the 1967 epic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*), this song is loaded with

arcane and personal references that make this longish track a psychoanalyst’s dream-project. The Catholic Church reacted violently against this song.

Ethnicity, Christianity and Marginality

Race was an area where Dylan was not as prolific as we might have thought he would be, given his status as a spokesperson for the marginalised. It might be argued that as his recording career chronologically mirrored the rise of the civil-rights and black-power movements, Dylan thought it best to leave it alone, knowing fully well that to his inner initiates, the bardic-voice also spoke for the blacks as it did for the whites. Dylan speaks for the universal-subaltern and not for any particular marginal, and that makes him open to appropriation by various peripheral groups who find in Dylan their voice, so lacking in modern music which is so enamoured of chart-rankings and market-saturation. Dylan does talk about the murders of the two civil rights workers in the caustic “Oxford Town”:

He went down to Oxford Town/
Guns and clubs followed him down/
All because his face was brown/
Better get away from Oxford Town. Oxford
Town around the bend/
He comes to the door, he couldn’t get in/
All because of the color of his skin/
What do you think about that, my frien’ ?
Oxford Town in the afternoon/
Ev’rybody singin’ a sorrowful tune/
Two men died ’neath the Mississippi moon/
Somebody better investigate soon.
(*Freewheelin’*).

In 1966 Dylan almost died in a freak motorcycle accident, and was incapacitated for a while. He returned the next year with rumours of his Christian belief and conversion with another hard-hitting album – *John Wesley Harding*: with an album cover featuring his ‘musical friends from the East’, Baul singers Laxman and Purna Das Baul, from Rampurhat in Birbhum, West Bengal, who collaborated with him in this album (Baker). In the song “I Pity The Poor Immigrant”, Dylan talks about the displaced peoples in America, mostly surviving on manual labour in the big city for less than minimum wages, and dreams of the home he has left behind:

I pity the poor immigrant/
Who tramples through the mud/
Who fills his mouth with laughing/
And who builds his town with blood/
Whose visions in the final end/
Must shatter like the glass/
I pity the poor immigrant/
When his gladness comes to pass. (*Harding*).

In one of his forgotten songs from 1963, Dylan narrates the story of how a young girl is seduced by a corrupt judge, in exchange for her father’s life; but the next morning she finds him hanging. This is based upon a real-life turn-of-the-century incident which Dylan read about in a report on courthouse abuses. This is called “Seven Curses”:

When Reilly's daughter got a message/ That her father was goin' to hang/
 She rode by night and came by morning/ With gold and silver in her hand.
 When the judge saw Reilly's daughter/ His old eyes deepened in his head/
 Sayin', "Gold will never free your father/ The prize, my dear, is you
 instead"... In the night a hound dog bayed/ In the night the grounds were
 groanin'/ In the night the price was paid. The next mornin' she had
 awoken/ To find that the judge had never spoken/ She saw that hangin'
 branch a' bendin'/ She saw her father's body broken. (*Bootleg II*).

Politics

Dylan became more and more vocal about how politics impinged into the cocooned world of urban homes and cracked the fragile walls of relations and emotions. Ever an acutely conscious man regarding politics and politicking, Dylan goes all out to show how even the common man is held to ransom by powers in the capitol and other high places. Taken from his 1989 classic born-again Christian album which subtly parodies Christian ethics, ironically titled *Oh Mercy*, "Political World" is as much a song about religion, or the lack thereof, as politics:

We live in a political world/ Love don't have any place/ We're living in
 times/ Where men commit crimes/ And crime don't have any face...
 Wisdom is thrown in jail/ It rots in a cell/ Is misguided as hell/ Leaving no
 one to pick up a trail... Where mercy walks the plank/ Life is in mirrors/
 Death disappears/ Up the steps into the nearest bank... Where courage is a
 thing of the past/ Houses are Haunted/ Children unwanted/ The next day
 could be your last... In the cities of lonesome fear/ Little by little/ You turn
 in the middle/ But you're never sure why you're here... Under the
 microscope/ You can travel anywhere/ And hang yourself there/ You always
 got more than enough rope... As soon as you're Awake/ You're trained to
 take/ What looks like the easy way out... Where peace is not welcome at all/
 It's turned away from the door/ To wander some more/ Or put up against
 the wall. We live in a political world/ Everything is hers and his/ Climb into
 the frame/ And shout God's name/ But you're never sure what it is. (*Mercy*).

By the late 60s and early 70s Dylan consolidated his stature as a rock star, a far cry from his Greenwich Village and folk-roots. During that period of rock and metal, with the invasion of the British bands, especially the three heavyweights Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple, metal and rock usurped the urban marginal voices from rock n' roll and folk, and Dylan, always the survivor, hitched up to the rock genre. The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) included bands like Judas Priest – its name taken from a 1968 song by Dylan called "The Ballad Of Frankie Lee And Judas Priest" released in *Oh Mercy* – Def Leppard, Wishbone Ash and Iron Maiden, which dominated the 1980s and were influenced by Dylan, as both a musician and song-writer.

Over the years Dylan has released close to seventy albums – studio recordings, covers and adaptations, collaborations, movie sound-tracks and a whole array of live recordings ranging from solo projects to the now cult team-up with The Grateful Dead released as *Dylan And The Dead*. In 1970 Dylan penned the surrealist novel *Tarantula*, which received widespread literary coverage. In 1977 Dylan made a largely autobiographical film called *Renaldo And Clara*. In 1978 Martin Scorsese had filmed Dylan’s last concert with his back up band called The Band as *The Last Waltz*. Scorsese has already brought out the definitive Dylan biopic, with full collaboration from Dylan. The 2007 weird film directed by Todd Haynes *I’m Not There*, apt name for a film where six actors including women play Dylan in various avatars in private and public spaces, push the envelope of myth and fascination for this man further into this century. Purists consider his live shows as ‘more’ authentic and closer to his folk roots – the man, the guitar, the harmonica and the voice. But it will be a great injustice to Dylan to reduce him to certain socio-cultural positions. He is much more than a movement. He has changed and adapted with the times – lyrically, politically and musically.

Dylan has associated with the cutting edge of musical innovation and interpretation. He has collaborated with everyone – from Mark Knopfler to Slash, from Daniel Lanois to Eddie Van Halen, from Purna Das Baul to the televangelist Bill Graham. He has shared public platform with Beat poet Allen Ginsberg and constructed the sublime ‘Dylan-esque Republic’ with visionary inspiration from varied sources – William Blake, the Bible, Thoreau and Whitman, among others. His urban space is a cultural potpourri of different anxieties and the common man’s perception of morality, tolerance and normalcy.

My contention is that Dylan is essentially an urban socialist and reformer. Though he has dabbled in many musical shifts and has evolved as a musician since his earliest days, his lyrical paradigm is continuous. He needs the big bad city and social causes. Utopias frighten him – as they would render him sterile. His virility is directly associated with the psyche of success and progress – against which he rants and raves. He is the modern marginal, who seeks and seduces marginality to survive. His position in society is essential and secured for posterity. His initial underground success and later unease with that same success stems from the realisation that the erstwhile anti-establishment marker was slowly being sucked into the mainstream and was in danger of being made a part of the very establishment that he pilloried in his songs; hence the myth about privacy, insulation and isolation in society, outside of his songs. Dylan and his songs have become synonymous with the battle the lone individual fights against the Kafkaesque establishment. His songs are about failures and incompleteness. Success and holistic culminations are alien to his songs. He is the perennial underachiever, standing up for the rights of the underdogs in an alienated world of images and links which mock comprehension.

In the end, such a reading as this should not be seen as an attempt to belittle or debunk his status as one of the few cultural icons of our time who

occupy the almost mutually exclusive spaces of the popular and the canonical, the kitsch and the *Kultur*, the peripheral and the central. When all is said and done, Dylan will always be remembered as one who will

... tell and think it and speak it and breathe it
 And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it
 Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin'
 But I'll know my songs well before I start singin'.

(“A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall”).

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Gender Dialectics of Yoruba Drum Poetry

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Abstract

The analytical and dialectical nature of Yoruba oral art with the inclusion of drum poetry facilitates its unending discourses. In the past and contemporary African society, gender issues have attracted critical attentions of scholars and researchers using different subject areas. In the past Yoruba societies, women were acknowledged as the performers of oral art, particularly in the genres of poetry and prose but with the exemption of drum poetry. It is on this understanding that this paper examines the impact of gender dialectics on the discourse of Yoruba drum poetry. The paper draws inferences from Ifa literary corpus for mythico-historical origin of Yoruba drums. Data are gathered through primary source (field investigations) and secondary sources (books, journals and periodicals). As a verbal art, Yoruba drum poetry has some masculinity attached to it and until recently, women are passive participants in drum poetry performance. It is established that gender dialectics has made a score as there are now the emergence of female professional drummers.

[**Keywords:** Gender, Yoruba Drum poetry; Ifa literary corpus; Meaning, Drum ensemble]

Introduction

The present writer is not unaware that there has been conflation of ideas on Yoruba drum poetry and gender studies. The claim of Sotunsa (Vii) that “although globally known as an African unique cultural asset, few literatures have been written on the art of the talking drum poetry” is rather bogus and baseless. In journals, books and dissertations, many scholarly contributions have been made on the nature, performance and art of drumming in Africa.

It is also acknowledged that gender studies has gained prominence among the academics, sociologists, social critics and media practitioners because “gender is a concept and process imbued with multifarious complexities in content and structure (Olademo,9). In Africa, the walls built against women visibility are being destroyed through various means – concretization of the phallocentric society on the need to give women chance to enjoy their civic and human rights, media campaign against dehumanization of women and deconstruction of phallocratic socialization that maintains the myth of male superiority.

This paper wants to bring out a point of intersection between Yoruba drum poetry and gender (dialectics). This is necessitated by the gaps in knowledge observed in the publication of Sotunsa’s (2009) *Yoruba Drum Poetry*, Olademo’s (2009) *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions* and Opefeyintimi’s (2009) *Women of*

Yoruba Culture: A Dozen of Academic Articles. Despite the comprehensiveness of Sotunsa's *Yoruba Drum Poetry*, the book does not focus on gender dialectics in the art of drumming. The two other books – *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions* and *Women of Yoruba Culture: A Dozen of Academic Articles* do not make comments on drum poetry among the women in Yoruba land. In his study, Opefeyitimi observes occupations of Female humans as hairdressing, hawking business, bean-making, kernel-oil making, cloth weaving, sales of medicinal ingredients, sales of palm-oil and Sales of bean-cakes. Throughout the book, the writer (Opefeyitimi) does not make any reference to women engagement in the art of drumming. Olademo, in her book, *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions* devoted three chapters to “Ifa and Gender”, “Oriki and Gender” and “Ijala and gender”. There is no place in the text where reference is made to “Gender and Drum”. It is the shortfall in these well researched books that this paper wants to address.

Yoruba Drum Poetry

The systemic functions of Yoruba drum poetry for psycho-cultural interactions within a community justify its relevance in religio-cultural, social and political milieus. Different scholars (Ajayi, 1987 and 1990; Euba, 1986 and 1994; Laoye, 1959 and 1966; Sotunsa, 2005 and 2009; Finnegan, 1968 and Sesan, 2007) have discussed the forms nature, functions and total practice of Yoruba drum poetry.

This paper shall start with mythico-historical source of drum art/poetry in Yoruba land through Ifa literary corpus. In Yoruba cosmology, Ifa is believed to be “encyclopedia” of knowledge. During divination, Ifa literary corpus makes use of symbolism and cultural pre-figuration to explain mythico-historical origin of a phenomenon. As there are symbolic objects, number, places and sign, etc., so also are there symbolic deities, persons and significant period (Adekola 258).

The mythico-historical source of Yoruba drum Poetry in Ifa literary corpus points to its totemistic nature through close attachment to the worship of some Yoruba mortal gods, deified human beings and Yoruba kings. There are so many Yoruba drums as recorded in Ifa literary corpus. Different Odus (Literary verses) have pointed out the mythico-historical source of Yoruba society. For our purpose, two literary verses that point to the mythico-historical sources of two Yoruba drums (Dundun and Bata) are discussed for critical analysis and discussion.

In Idinguda (Idin Ilu) verse, the mythico-historical source of Dundun as the drum that enjoys royal patronage in Oyo town till now is given. The verse goes thus:

Dindinguda Dindinguda
 Adifa fun enlojo ilu
 Ti won n sawo lo sode Oyo
 Dundun nikan lo n be leyin to n sebo
 Dundun wa ni mo yin Dindinguda Dindinguda

Dundun pele o, Ayo Oba

Dindinguda Dindinguda (the Ifa priest)
 Divined for drum ensembles
 That were going for performance in Oyo town
 Only Dundun remained behind to make a sacrifice
 Dundun said that I praised my Ifa Priest Dindinguda Dindinguda
 Dundun walk gently, the favorite of (Oyo) King.

In the mythico-historical story that gave impetus to the Dindinguda verse, it was reported that all the drummers (Dundun, bata, etc.) were going for a competition in Oyo town. Earlier before then, the king of Oyo had wanted to select a royal drum and thus he sent for all the drums. For their outage the drummers consulted an Ifa priest, Dindinguda to divine for them. The priest divined for them that they should have a sacrifice but all the drummers refused except Dundun. At the Occasion, Dundun excelled and he was later chosen as the royal drum of Oyo king. The Popularity of Dundun drum goes beyond the palace as it has become a drum for nearly all social and political occasions. It has been observed elsewhere that:

Today, in our major cities and town, itinerant drummers gatecrash at various social events to practice their trade for monetary reward. They drum and interpret the message to the audience (Sesan 27).

The popularity of Dundun drum is also made possible because it can easily approximate human speech (See Euba 1986 and 1990; Sotunsa, 2005 and 2009; Ajayi, 1990 and Sesan 2007).

Another drum of significant mention is Bata. In the mythico-historical origin of this drum as given in “Okaran Obara” verse in Ifa literary corpus, bata snatched Roro (Sango’s wife). This is shown in the verse below:

Okan Pa Okan Po
 Adifa fun bata
 Tin lo gba Roro, Obinrin Sango
 Won ni ki Sango O rubo
 Sugbon Sango ko O gbekele agbara
 Bata gba Roro aya Sango
 Sango ba pada pe awon awo
 Wipe n je on le gba aya oun pada
 Awon awo ni ko ni etutu
 Sango gbo riru ebo o ru
 Sango gbo atete ko esu o se etutu
 Ati Bata ati Roro Pada sodo Sango

Okan Pa Okan Po (part of the prosodic sounds of Bata drum)
 Divined for Bata (the dummer)
 That wants to snatch Roro (Sango’s wife)

The priests told Sango to have a sacrifice
 But Sango refused because he believed in his might
 Thus, Bata was able to snatch Roro from Sango
 Therefore, Sango re invited the Ifa priests
 To know whether he would be able to get his wife back (from Bata)
 The Ifa priests said he should have propitiation
 Sango hearkened and he made a sacrifice
 Sango hearked and he made the propitiation for Esu
 And both Bata and Roro went back to Sango's house

Thereafter, Bata became the official drummer of Sango. Any time Sango is annoyed, Bata pacified him. In the semantic interpretation of drum poetry, it is believed that the basic message of Bata drum is:

Okan Pa, Okan Po
 Mogba roro na.

Okan Pa, Okan Po
 I have snatched Roro (the wife of Sango)

Other Yoruba drums also have their mythico-historical origin but that is not the primary concern of the present study.

Culture critics have examined forms, functions and semantic interpretation of drum poetry. Sotunsa (34) classified the use Yoruba drums into two forms – religious and secular. She writes: “Some of the drum sets are used for purely religious and traditional ceremonies while others are used for both religious and secular function”. Sotunsa’s observation points to the fact that Yoruba drums have different performance occasions.

It is no doubt that different deities in Yoruba land have their respective drums. It is therefore inappropriate to use the drum ensemble meant for Ifa for Orisa-nla (Sesan 22). Sango is known with Bata ensemble and it is improper to use this drum ensemble during Ifa divination. During Ifa festival, Ipese is the drum ensemble commonly used. Any other drum ensemble during Ifa festival is inappropriate. Ipese or Ipesi is also used at the burial of an Ifa priest. The main purpose of using Ipese is to give the last respect to the departed soul and at the same time to draw a line between the living and the dead. Only the initiate can beat Ipese and the meaning of what Ipese is saying can only be understood by the initiates.

Olorisa-Okoko worshippers normally use Igbin drum ensemble. This drum is stationed in the sacred grove and this enhances the sacredness of the drum as the non - initiate cannot enter the grove. Hunters, on the other hand make use of Agere. This drum ensemble is used when the hunters celebrate certain events or activities. Apart from this, Agere is drummed during “Isipa” (a ceremony to separate the dead hunter from his colleagues). Obalufon worshippers make use of

Agba Obalufon for various religious and sacred purposes while the Ogbonis - a Yoruba religious cult make use of Gbedu which is kept in their “Iledi” or Shrine.

Drums are also used for ceremonial and social functions in Yoruba land. The commonly used drum ensemble for ceremonial and social functions is Dundun. At a naming ceremony, house warming, chieftaincy ceremony and other social functions, Dundun drummers of different ranks and files swarm the occasion to practice their trade. What is observed today is that Dundun ensemble is usurping the function and relevance of other drum ensembles. The reason might be its easy mobility and its proximity to imitate human speech as speech surrogate. A keen listening ear that is well groomed in Yoruba tonal marks can hear and decipher (with relative fairness) the message of Dundun ensemble when it “talks” because of its proximity to human voice.

Understanding Meaning Of Yoruba Drums

It is a known fact that meaning is central to communication. For drum poetry to achieve its communicative potentials, its meaning must be mutually intelligible to the drummers and the audience.

Scholars and culture critics have observed that the mastery and understanding of what a drum says can be attained through the mastery of tone as inherent in human speech (See Euba, 1986; Ajayi, 1990 and Sotunsa 2005 and 2009). Dundun drum utilizes Yoruba tonal marks for its communicative potentials. It is a well known fact that Yoruba is a tonal language and the (im) proper use of the tones affects the interpretation of drum language. The tones of Yoruba language are classified as high (mi), middle (re) and low (do).

The sound knowledge of the tonal marks alone cannot guarantee effective interpretation of drum poetry. There can still be mis-interpretation of drum poetry because different Yoruba words can attract the same tonal marks and thus, there is a room for polysemous interpretation of drum poetry. Some Yoruba words such as owo (wealth), ile (house), ade (crown), aye (life/world) and ina (fire/light) share the same tonal interpretation. There is therefore a possibility of ambiguity when a drummer beats any of these words. In order to get the “exact” semantic interpretation of drum poetry, this paper, like previous scholars, suggests the use of sock phrases and consideration for the situational context of performance (See Finnegan, 1968; Euba, 1986 and 1990, Sesan, 2007 and Sotunsa, 2005 and 2009).

In this paper, the semantic interpretations of drum poetry are classified into three: intended meaning (IM); communicated meaning; (CM) and shared meaning (SM). The intended meaning (IM) is the message that the drummer has in mind before drumming. The meaning is personal and it also relies on the individual interpretation of the drummer. In Yoruba cultural belief, it is often said that no one can adequately interpret what a drum says except the drummer himself.

Communicated meaning is what the drum “actually says”. This is what is the audience can deduce from the drum poetry. Often times, communicated meaning is under the manipulation of the drummer. This simply means that the communicated meaning may have dual interpretations from the drummer’s perception and the audience’s perception. The case of the gate keeper of Lalupon shows the relationship between the intended meaning and the communicated meaning, and intended meaning and shared meaning. The story stated that there was an ugly gatekeeper that was kind to a particular drummer by giving the latter some gifts. To show appreciation, the drummer usually referred to the gatekeeper’s kindness through his drum thus:

Mo Jeun Ejigbo
 Mo Jeun Iwo
 Mo Jeun Onibode Lalupon

I was fed at Ejigbo
 I was fed at Iwo
 I was fed by the gatekeeper of Lalupon

There above message was the intended meaning of the drummer. On the other hand, the drummer’s detractors informed the gatekeeper that the drummer was abusing him with his drum. They reported that the drummer was saying:

E wenu imado
 E wenu isin
 E wenu onibode Lalupon

See the mouth of wart-hog
 See the mouth of willows
 See the mouth of gatekeeper of Lalupon

When he heard this, the gatekeeper was annoyed but his anger was pacified when the drummer explained the intended meaning.

Shared meaning (SM) takes place when the drummer and the drum audience have the same semantic interpretation of what the drum says. This occurs when the intended meaning and communicated meaning of what the drum says have the same semantic interpretation in the linguistic repertoire of the audience and that of the drummer. Ajayi (31-2) gives conditions that can be met before shared meaning can be possible. He writes:

One who interprets must have a common semantic dialogue with the drummer over a conventional meaning attributed to the drummer. In other words both the drummer and he who is to decipher the drummer’s message must have the same semantic universe which thrives on conventional usage.

The only issue that can be raised against Ajayi’s observation is that what constitutes conventional usage and meaning, and even whose convention? The

shared meaning can be made possible when there is consideration for situational contexts, the use of stock phrases and practical interpretation of tonal marks.

Gender and Yoruba Drum Poetry

Since man control the public space, tradition has empowered them to define and restrict women (Emenyi 28). In traditional Yoruba society, women have had their discursive and interpretive powers influenced by the phallogocentric society until recently when there has been emergence of women voices in arts, politics, administration and social activities. Menial jobs, as well as selling of wares such as pap paste, locust beans, palm-oil and pepper are the basic economic activities of women in traditional Yoruba society. The Iwori Igosun of Ifa Literary Corpus points to this:

Iwori gosun gosun
 Gogi gogi aya oni goosun
 O looko nile oba
 Oun gun ogi o si n rise
 Oko ko ri oju gogi gogi mo
 Nitori o ti lowo lowo
 Oko re ba bere si gun ogi bi ti iyawo
 Pe ki oun naa o le lowo
 Sugbon ko ri se
 Igba to pe, o di fa
 Won ni a o fi ise ton se ran an
 Nitori owo obinrin ni

The Iwori that pounds camwood
 The one tha makes pap paste, the wife of Onigoosun
 She married a husband from the ruler's lineage
 She produced pap paste and became prosperous
 The husband did not enjoy her anymore
 Because of her new wealth
 The husband began to make pap paste like his wife
 In order for him to be rich like his wife
 But he was not rich
 After some time, he consulted Ifa priests
 They told him that he was not destined to do the job he was doing
 Because making of pap paste belongs to women

The above Ifa literary poetry shows the phallogocentric belief of Yoruba society that less stressful economic activities belong to the women folk. Rigorous and stressful economic activities are believed to be the sole preserve of men. It is even in the recent times that women engineers and architects are emerging in the contemporary Nigerian society.

The passivity and docility of women in socio-economic activities have been traced to their anatomical and physiological composition. It has been recorded in Okanran-Meji of Ifa literary corpus that breast was originally in the chest of men but because of their rigorous socio-economic activities, the breast could not produce milk and thus it consulted Ifa priests. The verse (Okanran-Meji) is reproduced below:

Okanran kan nihin-in
 Okanran kan l'ohun-un
 Okanran di meji odo oduro l'ododo
 A difa fun Omu nigba ti n lo isaluaye
 Won ni ko'rubo
 Ko korubo
 O dele aye, o so si aya Okunrin
 Okunrin a gun igi, won a lo jagun
 Omu ko ni isinmi
 O n wa ifokanbale
 O gba oko awo lo
 Babalawo ni ki o rubo
 O gbo riru ebo o ru
 Obinrin o ni igi gun, beni ko ni ogun ja
 Ni omu ba ri ifokanbale
 Nigbeyin, omu ri aponle ati iyi

One Okanran here
 One Okanran there
 Okanran becomes two
 It became droppings in the truth
 Divined for breast when coming to earth
 Breast was told to offer a sacrifice
 Breast refused to offer the sacrifice
 On the earth, Breast went to chest of men
 Men climb trees and fight wars
 Thus, breast found no rest
 Breast consulted Ifa priests
 It was divined that Breast should offer a sacrifice
 Breast hearkened to the divination and offer the sacrifice
 Breast now moved to the chest of women
 Women do not climb trees nor fight wars
 Breast found peace
 Eventually, breast found honour and respect

From the verse, it can be deduced that men are noted for rigorous activities that may not allow the survival of breast. It is a known fact today that breast is one of the attractions of women.

In traditional and even the contemporary Yoruba society, it is very common to hear “baba onilu” (the drummer man) but very uncommon to hear Iya onilu (the drummer woman). This shows that drumming is seen as a phallogocentric profession. In the entourage of drummers, no woman is found and even there has not been women apprentice for drumming. The mythico-historical source of Yoruba drums as recorded in the Ifa literary corpus point to the fact that Yoruba drums cum drummers are predominantly males.

The phallogocentric Yoruba society has set a double standard for the description of the drum ensembles. The lead drum is called “Iya Ilu” (mother of the drums). We suspect a sort of posturing in the classification. A woman is forbidden to engage in drumming as profession but she can only be the object of battery. By extension, the beating of drum, particularly iya-ilu can be equated with wife battery of the contemporary Yoruba society.

With modernization and globalization, there has been emergence of women drummers who have been trained in the formal situations. In the contemporary Nigerian society, many schools and institutes of performing arts and cultural studies have been established to offer gender-sensitive training in performing and cultural arts (including drumming) to interested participants. This practice has encouraged the emergence of some women drummers. Examples of such institutes and schools include Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan and Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University.

The current implementation of gender-sensitive training in performing and cultural arts encourages the emergence of female drummers cum performers. One of the renowned female drummers is Ara. Owing to her dexterity in drumming, some people refer to her as “the enigma of the African race”. Based on her outstanding performance in drumming, Ara has broken the jinx surrounding the male hegemony of drum art. This ‘enigma of African race” (Ara 38) has been able to combine conveniently drumming, singing and dancing. She affirms this in an interview with V- World that:

My drumming is about just 30 - 40% of my performance, depending on the song, because it’s not all my songs that I drum. Singing and dancing take a major part.

There are so many Aras that history has not discovered. What is however certain is that myth of male hegemony in the art of drumming is gradually fading away.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the mythico-historical origin of Yoruba drums using Ifa literary corpus as a paradigm. From the Ifa literary paradigms, male origin of Yoruba drums are deduced. Functions and forms of Yoruba people towards drumming is also examined. The paper observed that modernization and

globalization have encouraged the modification and/or re-modification of some cultural practices. Drumming has also benefited from this through the emergence of women drummers.

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People's Art or Performance of the Elites?: Debating the History of IPTA in Bengal

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Abstract

This article attempts to re-read the cultural history of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) within the larger context of the progressive nationalist politics of Bengal. The purpose of this re-reading is to engage in a debate to locate the political status of the various non-urban, non-elite, non-middle class performative practices within the political strata of IPTA. The article reiterates that the Left politics of Bengal maintained an inseparable alliance with the Bhadrakalok class since its early days and by virtue of this alliance, the hegemony of the Bhadrakaloks remained secured. Consequently, within the practical domain of the Left politics vis-a-vis the IPTA, the middle class intelligentsia kept controlling the performative arena by restraining the movements of various non-Bhadrakalok forms. By citing references from the writings of Sudhi Pradhan and Hemango Biswas, this article contemplates to enter into a lesser-known chapter from the glorified history of IPTA.

[**Keywords:** Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA); Bhadrakaloks, hegemony, Sudhi Pradhan; Hemango Biswas; Left politics]

Introduction

It was broadly the tradition of radical nationalism from where the progressive cultural movement in India emerged out in the 1940s. Historically, the movement materialized in the form of a diverse assembly of performing individuals, groups and communities under the elusive organizational canopy of the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA). And thus IPTA, a mass-cultural wing of the then Communist Party of India (CPI), became an imperative agent in bringing a fresh approach of progressive cultural practice in India. Though operating under the party guideline in order to exercise creative forms of Marxist cultural practices, IPTA never remained a satellite organization only, but established itself as a potential platform for promising artists, performers and cultural activists who thought to engage themselves with newer social experiments. Sudhi Pradhan, one of the eminent activists and a leading historian of IPTA comments, 'IPTA was the only organization engaged in serious creative activity which attracted ambitious artists with hardly any knowledge of Marxism and People's art.' (*Marxist Cultural Movement in India* XVI). However, the glorious movement reached its peak in the mid-1940s and started to slow down gradually from the late-1940s and early-1950s.

On the other hand, the early forms of the progressive politics in Bengal had its lineage in the intellectual tradition of Bengali middle class. And from the 1930s, there developed a gradual, significant and steady shift towards the Leftist

politics. IPTA itself was a product of this radical expedition. But the organization was a real breakthrough on another level. It enabled the progressive section of Bengali intelligentsia to negotiate with the hitherto unknown domain of popular politics for the first time and tried to reform and to reconstitute the terrain of cultural construction of Bengaliness.

Nevertheless, a careful study of the history of this period may also bring to light some interesting particulars about the aforesaid performative domain of IPTA. One of the pioneers of the progressive cultural movement in Bengal and Assam, Hemango Biswas, in a personal dialogue in 1980s, identified some of the possible reasons for the disintegration of the movement in 1950s. For him, the movement could not sustain and died out gradually because it had largely become 'confined only to the educated middle class people' (*Ganasanskriti Andolon* 384). However there are several other historical and personal accounts which may yield similar inferences. Thus, I was wondering whether it would be possible to assume that the hegemony of middle class leadership specifically in IPTA and more generally in Left politics historically subdued the possibility of emergence of a performative realm of a people's cultural practice in Bengal. My contention here is to engage with this question from various perspectives. In the first section of this paper, it would be to briefly chart out a cultural history of the Left movement as an alternate consequence of the political development of a progressive middle class in Bengal, whereas the next section will try to complement this historical observation with other circumstantial accounts. To proceed further, I would like to refer from the writings of two prominent IPTA activists of that period- Sudhi Pradhan and Hemango Biswas.

I.

Any careful observer, while going through the history of the nationalist movement of India of the early-20th century, can identify the gradual process of marginalization of Bengali-speaking middle class leadership in the nationalist arena. It presumably started from the early-1910s and took a decisive turn in the 1920s. Partha Chatterjee writes, 'After the 1920s, the all-India Congress ceased to be just a gathering of the upper strata of professionals. The growing all-India bourgeoisie, which did have substantial investments in Bengal, however had no Bengali component' (*Bengal: Rise and Growth of a Nationality* 80).

The 'alienation' of Bengal from the Congress-fed nationalist tradition can symbolically be explained through the spectacular arrival and departure of Subhas Chandra Bose in the Congress leadership. Interestingly, his short term as the Congress President can also be seen as an important phase where the emerging trend of the Leftist politics went on to find a space within the mainstream nationalist political arena. After the Tripuri session (1938), Bose suggested that a Left coordination committee, consisting of the like-minded Leftists of Congress, the Socialists and the Communists, should be formed to strengthen the nationalist movement. The leadership of the communist party also hailed this attempt (Chakravarty 23). The committee was initially formed with the followers of Bose, Congress Socialist Party leaders like Jayprakash

Narayan and the communists (Chattopadhyay 212). But after his removal from his post in 1939, not only this attempt was virtually ceased to exist, but even the socialists working within Congress grew weak too. However, there were several other instances where Bengal's mounting interest in the practice of communism can be experienced. By the early-1930s, Rabindra Nath Tagore came out with his fresh accounts of Soviet Socialism by publishing his *Russiar Chithi* (Letters from Russia). These were Tagore's first-hand impressions of the practice of socialism in the Soviet Union. This book and some other writings on Soviet were successful in creating significant interest among the Bengali intellectuals (Saha 26).

However, the progressive influence in the realm of cultural practice in India was first observed in 1936 when the All-India Progressive Writers' Conference was held in Lucknow under the presidentship of Munshi Prem Chand. This became an event where an entire generation of creative thinkers not only started to cope up with the intellectual crisis in their respective performative domains but also started to find a radical way out. The great Hindi writer Munshi Prem Chand's presidential address during the conference brilliantly provides the ideological impetus of this assembly:

We have no use today for those poetical fancies which overwhelm us with their insistence on the ephemeral nature of this world and whose only effect is to fill our hearts with despondency and indifference. We must, resolutely give up writing those love romances with which our periodicals are flooded. (Pradhan *Marxist Cultural Movement in India* 36).

In a way, this endeavor emerged as 'both a nationalist undertaking and a search for a new means of generalizing communist ways of thinking among people, a strategy approved by the international leadership' (Dasgupta: 81). Thus, as we shall see, this process was later envisaged as a new pedagogical task that closely cohered with the cultural vanguard entity of the Bengali intellectual leadership.

But within a few years of its formation, AIPWA became virtually inactive because of several differences between its participants (Chowdhury 125). On the other hand, the communist party was banned since 1934 and it had been continuing its activities by floating a number of mass organizations. The Students' Federation (SF; the students' wing of CPI), was formed in 1936 and quickly emerged as an important platform in the arena of students' political and cultural activism. There was another Left-leaning cultural organization run by the students of the Calcutta University- Youth Cultural Institute (YCI). It engaged itself in activities like drama, debates, song performances, poster exhibition etc. In due course of time, a serious note of differences on the question of the student movement and the forms of cultural activities started to emerge between the SF and YCI. The federation was largely consisted of the students from lower middle class families and they were not only from Calcutta, but from the other districts of Bengal. Whereas, YCI was made of the city-bred intellectual students and their activities were largely confined within the upper strata of the society (Ibid 134). Nevertheless, there were other organizations like the 'Friends of the Soviet Union' and 'Anti Fascist Writers' and Artists'

Association'; but none of these were capable to create an all-encompassing effect on the contemporary cultural scenario. After AIPWA became defunct, there was a vacuum that was to be filled by some other organizational attempt.

In the meanwhile, the ban on CPI was lifted on 1943 as recognition to their support in the British war effort. The party held its first congress in Bombay during May, 1943. Moderate leader PC Joshi was elected as the party general secretary and a resolution was passed to form an all-India cultural organization by assimilating different cultural outfits which had been operating under the guidance of the party in different regions. The first All India People's Theatre Conference was held in Bombay in the same year to announce the formation of IPTA. This conference also led to the formation of different level committees of IPTA across India. The movement thereafter hit not only the theatres, but the domain of literature, music, painting, photography, sculpture and cinema in many Indian languages were greatly influenced. Particularly in Bengal, it was a grand success. Moinak Biswas mentions, '...it is impossible not to take the crucial role of the IPTA into account in understanding the culture of the period, even where the artist in question was not directly affiliated to the organisation' (42). The events started with the World War-II and continued through the Quit India Movement (1942), Great Bengal Famine (1943), communal riot (1946) and number of popular upsurges including the mutiny in Royal Indian Navy (1946), *Tebhaga* peasant movement (1946) and finally the partition in 1947 mark some significant junctures in this glorious history of existence of IPTA. However, two major events among them appear to me as the most important benchmarks in that trajectory- the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Partition. In fact the famine was the first ever event where the progressive intelligentsia experienced its first historical encounter with the social reality of their concern.

The year of famine eventually coincides with year of the formation of IPTA. Historical accounts reveal that about 3.5 million people died during this famine and the number of the effected people remains countless. Actually, through the procurement policy that prioritized official and military over local needs, the government allegedly tried to save Calcutta at the cost of the Bengal countryside (Bandopadhyay 432). However, the communist workers were more prepared to face the impending challenges. With the two prime mass organisations, Bangiya Pradeshik Krishak Sabha (BPKS) and Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS), they rapidly undertook massive relief work in the villages of Bengal. Also during their relief campaign, they started propagating against the government policies and the role of the landed elites of then Bengal being responsible for famine. And for the cultural activists, as I have mentioned earlier, it was a chance to engage with the mass struggle at par with their progressive political ideology. IPTA's clarion call came with the staging of Bijan Bhattacharya's play *Nabanna* (The Harvest), which eventually ushered in a new era in Bengali theatre. What *Nabanna* brought to theatre was a real shock to the existing cultural practices. In fact,

The famine also brought home the fact that the world is linked into a fateful unity by the forces of modernity even as it exploded the ahistorical

illusions that urban educated classes would nurture about Indian villages...Bijan Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* brought upon the Indian stage completely new protagonists in the form of starving Bengal peasants (M Biswas 41).

Not only the famine and *Nabanna* but several other events that took place consequently were addressed by the artist-activists who belonged and were associated with IPTA and the progressive cultural movement as a whole. Malini Bhattacharya writes, 'they were performing in front of people who were already participants of the political struggle of which the cultural struggle was a part [...] But it was still a great achievement to give dramatic form to what was emerging as new political reality' (8). Historically, it emerged as a process introducing the changing domain of performativity with the popular-folk art and to exercise a long pending task of the progressive cultural activism.

On the other hand, the event of partition of Bengal in 1947 further signifies some interesting developments. In fact, there were several preparatory exercises, that led to the partition, were on for long even before the actual event. Partha Chatterjee counts several instances of agrarian conflicts that started to take place in rural Bengal from 1930s which he envisages as the symptomatic outcomes of the changing pattern of various social and economic networks in rural Bengal (*Present History* 31). During this new phase of peasant politics and conflicts, the existing socio-political relations either started to be withered away or be transformed into different other modes. During the provincial elections in 1946, Maulana Azad, then President of the All-India Congress Committee asked for a collection of evidence of 'Communist treachery during the 1942 disturbances and afterwards', marking the beginning of the Congress campaign to denounce the Communist Party as 'anti-national' for taking part in the war effort during the Quit India movement (Chatterji *Bengal Divided* 145). But on the other hand, by the 1940s, the status of the Bengal's leadership in the mainstream nationalist domain practically became either marginal or oppositional in nature. The affects of Partition complicated it more. After the Partition, the West Bengal chapter of the Indian National Congress became largely incapable in resolving the impending contradictions aroused during this phase. On the other hand, the Muslim League virtually ceased to exist. Thus, the lacuna in the larger paradigm was to be filled up by a force reckoned with the essence of reconstructed Bengali nationalism of a bifurcated imagined territory. The agony of partition was greatly alive within minds of the transported refugees. The process of uprooting was thereby historically symbolised in their search for a Bengali nationhood in post-partition period. In his monumental work on Bengal Partition, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Prafulla Chakrabarti writes:

After partition the exodus assumed the proportions of a deluge. Disintegrating hunks of humans from a dissolving society crossed over to the other side of the international border. They were moved by a single thought. They wanted to end the uncertainties of a nightmarish existence. They were completely leaderless. (38)

Hence the Leftists, long equipped with the modern rhetoric of the political activism gradually emerged as the singular alternative for the Bengali nationalist intelligentsia. However, this Left-turn of the Bengali imagined nationhood did not come out in consequence with the waves of workers' and peasants' movements in the post-partition era. Rather it emerged as a product of the cultural imagination for a Bengali nation. The condition after partition actually served as a matrix to construct this milieu which in due course became the bastion of Leftist politics (Chatterji *Spoils of Partition* 260).

Ironically, the key organization behind the all-pervading effects of progressive cultural movement virtually in all spheres of cultural practice in Bengal, IPTA, started to disintegrate from the late-1940s. In 1948, the chief initiator of the numerous cultural initiatives, 'soft liner' Puran Chand Joshi (PC Joshi) was replaced by the 'hardliner' BT Randive as the general secretary of the Communist Party. As a consequence of the political 'hard line' they started practicing, the party was announced 'illegal' by the then Congress government in the same year. Later in 1951, the ban on CPI was lifted and it became a legal party and started participating in elections. The conflicts and contradictions which existed since the days of the inception of IPTA, however, came into focus from 1948 onwards. Actually, after the removal of PC Joshi, 'as a new leadership emerged with an agenda of armed insurrection, they adopted an orthodox and bureaucratic approach to culture, signaling a breakdown of the Left's long alliance with cultural intellectuals thereafter' (Dasgupta 97). A good number of the front-rankers in the IPTA started leaving the organization from this time only to form several independent theatre or other cultural groups like *Bohurupee*, *The Little Theatre Group* and so on. Some of them, nonetheless, continued to maintain links with Leftists for some more time.

II.

In terms of its political history, IPTA's call for a realist art performance comes out of an understanding that vowed to formulate a progressive nationalist agenda in culture. This theorisation had its basis on the understandings of the famous Dimitrov thesis- 'Popular Front against Fascism'. The thesis argues that the building of a united front by aligning with the petit-bourgeoisie and the democratic sections of the national bourgeoisie to fight Fascism is an immediate task for the communists worldwide. Under colonial conditions (like in India), it naturally inferred for an alliance with the progressive sections of the premier national bourgeoisie political organisation and its sympathizers. As a consequence, there was an assembly of the writers from liberal democratic traditions within the arena of the progressive writer's movement. This tendency of liberal mass-cultural practice was prevalent in IPTA too. Sudhi Pradhan writes:

The organisation of the cultural movements was never very elaborately or thoughtfully planned. P.C Joshi, then General Secretary of the CPI took a personal interest in the organisation of culture. His political reformism was also reflected in Cultural movements (*Marxist Cultural Movement in*

India XVII).

This factor was also instrumental in formulating the aesthetic strategy for the new forms of artistic practices. According to Moinak Biswas:

The doctrine of socialist realism was adopted in the Soviet Union at the first Writers' Congress in 1934. But even when the Indian left critics used the term in 1940s- and they did read Gorky and Louis Aragon on this as well as Mao's Yanan Forum lecture on art- they often confused the word with the social realism, a term that was ideologically more loose and inclusive. (42).

Nonetheless, this lucidity stood for giving a virtual preference to the middle class progressive intelligentsia over the others. Further, it provided a unique and popular solution to the marginalized Bengali intelligentsia to exercise their political ambition while pushing the claim to reacquire their lost legacy of national prominence. In a way this practice also emerged as a well-competent agency that could even generate a thematic approach in reclaiming the nation from the conglomerated spectrum of colonial forces and the non-Bengali capitalist-feudal leadership. Rajarshi Dasgupta terms this process as the 'communist discourse on to the cultural imagination of the Bengali middle classes' (97). Thus it is no wonder that the middle class approach will dominate the policies to run the organization. This fact was later revealed by many veteran IPTA activists. Sudhi Pradhan writes:

The metropolitan artist was attracted to the movement not only because he was inspired-genuinely no doubt, but transiently in some cases-by anti fascists and pro-socialists ideals, but also because a means of enriching his art; in some cases this was an aesthetic equivalent of slumming, or a mere rummaging for newer techniques, in order to attract larger audiences, but there was a deepening of realism in the work of a few. But genuine politicization, a necessary precondition of the continuity of a movement of this kind, was never systematically attempted and seldom achieved (*Marxist Cultural Movement in India VI*).

Whereas in the all-India scenario, the attempts carried forward by IPTA achieved significant success in reviving several folk traditions. In the Andhra region, IPTA exploited the popular form of *burrakatha*, in which a central narrator weaves an historical story in a satirical way to attack the opponent. In Maharashtra they used the popular form of *bawdy tamasha* to present social criticism and propaganda. One of the major founding figures of IPTA Maharashtra, Annabhau Sathé made another significant contribution by revitalizing the ancient form of *powada*, a recital version of an epic poem by two singers through *Akle Che Gosht* (War of Wits), a contemporary satire about a moneylender and a peasant (Richmond: 323-325). But, as Rustom Bharucha observes, 'the Bengal branch of the IPTA failed to exploit the indigenous theatre familiar to the Bengali peasants such as the *jatra*, the *kabijan*, and the *kirtan* (44). In the field of music, one of the major tasks of the leading composers of IPTA was appeared as to

accommodate the folk and other popular musical forms in their expressive modes. Composers like Salil Chowdhury went even further to produce a specific musical form for protest music where he fused the Indian forms with various traits of western musical tradition. Sumangala Damodaran writes:

Considered relevant to the stated objectives were a wide range of songs, both traditional and completely indigenous, and modern or expressing modern ideas in the folk idiom. It is apparent that the folk tradition had been interpreted in its widest sense while taking care not to reduce the attempt to 'mere versification of political slogans'. Apart from expressing the sentiments of the people, it was considered necessary to use the folk tradition for the creation of a larger national identity and help forge international solidarity ("Protest Through Music").

In fact, the Bombay conference (1953) experienced a number of interesting debates on the various aspects of IPTA.

One of the major debates that took place between the two stalwarts of Bengal IPTA, Hemengo Biswas and Salil Chowdhury, during the Bombay session was largely centered on the most acceptable forms of the protest music in order to reach to a common understanding. Hemengo Biswas opined, the political vigour which played a significant role in making the protest songs of Salil Chowdhury gradually began to fizzle out from the late-1940s and by then Chowdhury started moving towards experimenting with 'western formalism'. In response, Chowdhury defended himself by citing examples from the musical tradition of Bengal during the 19th-20th century, particularly from the works of Dwijendral Roy, Atulprasad Sen. His point was to show how Roy, Sen *et. al.* used western musical forms to create a Indian nationalist musical tradition. Above all, he hailed the idea of 'internationalism' in artistic practice. However, Hemengo Biswas vehemently opposed this position and termed it 'cosmopolitanism', not 'internationalism'. I would like to quote a passage from his biographical sketch *Ujaan Gang Baiya* to substantiate the point further:

He [Salil Chowdhury] had a good knowledge of western orchestration and from the beginning he had a natural inclination towards it. But due to his influence, many composers of Bengal had tried to follow this form in a blind fashion...I had opposed it...But our debate finally was reduced into an argument on the preferred forms for mass-music; whether it would be folk form or urban form. (125).

However, this debate rose to a different level and the organization finally resolved to form different sub-committees for each branch of its practice. There was one for the music also. The resolution of the conference reads:

Both from improving and developing the techniques of IPTA singers and composers as also to get to know intimately our classical and folk heritage, the sub-committee will work out methods, syllabus etc for educating our music workers, helping to solve their technical problems

and guiding the Provincial Units in the fulfillment of these tasks. (Pradhan *Volume II* 165).

In a way, this resolution could also be envisaged as a note of negotiation between the two conflicting trends of IPTA. The IPTA project of accommodating folk forms in a larger performative domain of contemporary art practices had a great influence of the European experiments on the various mass-cultural forms during the 1930s. And the practice was not confined only to the middle class artists as we see a large number of peasant and working class poets, musicians and performers came within the fold of the movement. But this too, for the most part, was guided by the cultural elitism of the urban intellectual-activists.

It would be interesting to name one folk artist here who hailed from a remote area of Bengal and drew considerable attention during the 1940s–Nibaran Pandit. He was a sharecropper and *bidi* (a local made cigarette filled with tobacco flakes and wrapped with tendu leaves) worker. He became quite famous for his songs composed on the occasion of *Hajang Bidroho*, a peasant revolt in Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). Hemango Biswas narrates how Pandit was 'humiliated' in an event when the Calcutta Squad of IPTA did not allow him to sing during a significant occasion just to maintain the 'standard'. For Biswas, it appeared as an event of shameful distrust. (*Gansanskriti Andolon* 391). He also recalls from his experiences during his days in Calcutta when he was asked to change some words or lines from his composition because being 'vulgar', these words or lines were 'unacceptable' in 'Bengali culture' (*Ujan Gaang Baiya* 110).

However, it was not an isolated event roughly because, as Biswas opines, the cultural activists of Calcutta always maintained a sense of snobbery in their approach and denied to accept anything that could challenge their hierarchy. He further alleges that they always tried to present themselves as the supreme advocate of progressive culture (Ibid). However, another example can be given by naming another cultural activist of that time- Dasharath Laal. He was working as a tram-worker in Calcutta and was picked up by PC Joshi. He took Laal to Bombay to prepare him as an active participant of IPTA. Laal became famous for his performance in the drama *Mai Bhukha Hoon*. Ironically after the disintegration of IPTA in 1950s, he had to work in a slaughterhouse in Calcutta to earn a living. But interestingly, most of the middle class *Bhadralok* IPTA activists did never face such consequence.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me broadly identify three significant traits of the progressive cultural movement of Bengal which could help locate it in a specific historical perspective. First, the characteristic approach of the movement, I would say, basically functioned through the operation of a hierarchical intellectual paradigm largely dominated by the urban middle class activists. Second, this characteristic did never operate as a 'tendency'; rather it acted as an inherent and non-excludable generic formation which had its influence in all walks of political-cultural life of Bengal. IPTA was only a site of experimentation where

the viability of this intellectual dream was to be verified. Third, the basic condition of survival of this intellectuality was to dominate the others which can jeopardize the aforementioned imagination.

Nevertheless, the account produced in this article may not render to elicit a complete picture of a particular period or a nationwide cultural movement. I too, do not want to claim that my suppositions about IPTA and its political dynamics can be universalized through these arguments. Rather I would suggest engaging with it in a way so that within the specificity of Bengal and its political culture, the policies and activities of IPTA can be studied in accordance to their respective historical locations. Thus, the tale of the middle class cultural dominance and its overrunning the popular domain of non-elite cultural performances should not remain concealed under the fictional narratives of the glorious episode of this cultural movement. Hence I feel that the post-scripts that bear the inheritance of the IPTA, partition and the Leftist political culture can act as a historical basis to answer or to address similar interesting revelations that may explain the peculiarity of the practice of Leftist politics in Bengal. And finally that revelation could contribute at least something to the larger historical project at present moment when IPTA completes its 70 years of existence.

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“Acrobating between Tradition and Modern”: The Roots Movement and Theatre’s Negotiation with Modernity in India

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Abstract

When playwrights like Girish Karnad joined the stage after the nation’s independence in 1947, the Indian theatre was suffering from acute identity crises being torn between its ancient cultural past and its more recent colonial legacy, which gave birth to hybrid dramatic forms. Several theatre personalities at that time articulated the aspirations of a newly independent nation through their attempts to decolonize the aesthetics of modern Indian theatre by retracing its roots in the repository of India’s classical and folk traditions. In the light of these developments my paper aims to look at some of the diverse indigenous forms that had been deployed with much success in plays like Karnad’s *Hayavadana* or Tanvir’s *Charandas Chor*, thereby significantly contributing to the larger project of decolonization after independence. At the same time the paper also wishes to interrogate whether this ambivalent process of *Indianization*, sometimes loosely brought under the umbrella of ‘Roots Movement’, is quintessentially ‘anti-modern’, or whether it is actually an attempt to evolve a discourse of an ‘alternate modernity’ by subverting some of the paradigms of its European counterpart which are actually a by-product of both capitalism and imperialism in the West.

[**Keywords:** Modern Indian theatre; Girish Karnad; alternate modernity; tradition, Roots Movement; Indianization]

In the final pages of Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Those Days*, a historical fiction spanning around the momentous canvas of 19th century Bengal, or more precisely the time that came to be known as *Banglar Nabajagaran* or Bengal Renaissance, Nabin, its flamboyant protagonist, modelled as one the progenitors of this new awakening, expressed his visionary death wish in the following words: ‘I was born to a race of hapless men and women, crushed even now, under the heel of a foreign power... Ah! Will this dark age never be spent...I want to hear the cannon booming at midnight a hundred times, ringing out the old and ringing in the new—the twentieth century’ (588). While, his early demise left his dreams woefully unrealized, his spiritual successor Pran Gopal looking out into the night ‘heard its footsteps in the distance and his eyes glowed with the light of another—a more glorious world’ (588). Indeed, the new century dawned with a promise of a long cherished freedom, but even after Empire’s dissolution the vestige of the colonial past lurked beneath the veneer of the postcolonial nation and made its presence felt in every sphere of our cultural life. So the generation that came after

independence suffered from a cultural schizophrenia, being caught between two worlds—one that refused to die and the other that was still struggling to be born. Thus when playwrights like Girish Karnad associated themselves with stage productions post 1947, the Indian theatre, much like his own creation, Hayavadana—the human with an equine head, was still trying to grapple with an acute identity crisis, being torn between the cultural past of the country and the more recent colonial legacy, which gave birth to a curious melange that can be termed neither exactly Western nor precisely Indian, but perhaps *both* ‘Western’ and ‘Indian’ (Mee 142) at the same time. Expounding the causes behind this strange hybridization Karnad explains:

My generation was the first to come of age after India became Independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self justification: tension between the cultural past of the country and the colonial past, between attractions of the Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. (Girish Karnad 1994:1, qtd in Erin B. Mee p. 141)

Indeed the quest for an appropriate theatre form that would resolve these contradictory stains became a part of the larger ontological questions that these dramaturgists asked themselves: ‘Who am I? ...Where do I belong in this complex social structure in this complex world? What are my times? What is my language? What is my theatre? What is the language of my theatre?’ (Badal Sircar: *The Changing Language of Theatre*. p.9). While Karnad’s Hayavadana, in his bid to integrate himself in the human society as a ‘complete man’ faithfully participated in a range of material, institutional, and cultural practices of the newly emergent nation—*Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization* et al and crooned out the national anthem with a great gusto, the Indian thespians attempted to *reverse*, even if it was partial, ‘the colonial course of contemporary theatre’ (Awasti 48), by recovering from amnesia the traces of their roots as a way of asserting their cultural autonomy.

In 1955, Satyajit Ray’s rendition of *Pather Panchanli* which became a watershed mark in shaping the cultural history of post 1947 India has a particularly poignant scene where Durga wakes child Apu by opening his eye with her hands, and as Apu stares wide through his tattered blanket, the camera fixes upon Apu’s gaze. This may be read as a succinct metaphor for the opening of the eye of Indian consciousness searching for a collective and national self-definition. An awakening into a new realization, a gaze that now looks inward at its own history to enable the present and reinterprets myths and traditions to patch and darn the rich tapestry of its Indigenous culture. Thus the decades from 1950s to 1980s may be roughly deemed as an era of Indianization when the nation was gradually trying to rediscover itself by removing the mantle of the colonial culture. In 1961, Habib Tanvir called for ‘our own plays about our own problems in our own forms’. So for

at least next thirty years after independence by ‘disclaiming colonial practices and by seeking to reclaim classical and other precolonial Indian traditions of performance as the only viable media of effective decolonization’ (Dharwadker 2), *The Sangeet Natak Akademy* under the stewardship of Dr. Suresh Awasthi, culled out a whole new gamut of indigenous folk forms— *Nautanki, Ramlila, Krishnalila, Swang, Kabigaan, Gambhira, Tamasha, Yakshagana, Kuchipudi* etc drawing upon the epic and the folk resources of the country. The thespians of course, differed substantially in their approach to the tradition which was often mediated by vastly different cultural and linguistic articulations. However, this difficult and often impossible search for a postcolonial *Indian* theatre as a collective category within the larger ideational context of decolonization led to a widespread rejection of the models of Western realism tradition on stage, which itself was dying out in Europe, giving way to new and exciting experimental forms.

In this heady quest for rediscovering the centuries-old roots, theatre personalities like Habib Tanvir, K.N. Pannikar, Ratan Thiyam, Girish Karnad or Vijay Tendulkar variously experimented with the paraphernalia of ‘folk’ theatre. The Marxist theatre veteran Utpal Dutt, for instance, showed an abiding interest in the folk form of *yatra* to reach out to the masses. In his forceful defence of *yatra* *In Search of Form*, Dutt praises *yatra* (*yatra*) for having the potentials for a revolutionary theatre. Forms such as *yatra*, ‘evolved over centuries and continued to adapt from and adapt to contemporary reality’ (Katyul xviii) —whether this means satirical digs at status quo or topical references to current affairs and local scandals, all are adroitly interpolated into their performance routines. *Yatra*, which Dutt argues persuasively, ‘has refused to die with the incursions of Capitalism into countryside’, unlike ‘many other folk forms have been wiped out’ (Dutt 464) is ‘theatre at its primitive best’ (Dutt 465):

[it] relies for its dramaturgy on figures of history and mythology who are well known to its audience—Mughal Emperors, British proconsuls, revolutionary martyrs, even Lenin, Mao and Che, the new mythical heroes...But the elements [of the folk form] must be there, robust proletarian audiences dictating their shape, size and nature... [it upholds] a mythical world where even Mao Tsetung must conform to the requirements of a *Yatra*-hero...The *yatra* can take any subject from any country but must necessarily mould it into its own folk-lore. Compare this to the petty-bourgeois experimenters of the city who can take the most local subject but must necessarily Europeanize it, and make it a[...]bastard, revolting in its rootlessness. (Dutt 465-66).

Dutt himself experimented with the form in ‘*yatra*-plays’ as he calls them, like *Sanyasir Tarabari* (*The Crusade*), *Tutu Meer* and the critically acclaimed *Tiner Toloar* [*The Tin Sword*]. He even ventured into a direction of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in a *Yatra* style. Like Dutt several of his contemporaries were experimenting with different ingredients of Sanskrit as well as folk theatre by

incorporating masks, mime, half-curtains, dance and music in their plays dealing with diverse subjects and belonging to different genres such as *Hayavadana*, *Ghasiram Kotwal* or *Charandas Chor*, just to name a few. 'This was a time when varied plays were being written and staged in different parts of the country with exciting linguistic manoeuvres and transfers from one region to another.' (Dutt 2:2013) Nonetheless one must acknowledge that even before the *Roots Movement* the Leftist Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), out of their interest in the various living traditions in folk culture, explored many of these ethnic performative traditions by weaving them into their theatrical presentations. In the light of these developments my paper aims to look at some of these theatres, and at the same time interrogate whether this 'encounter with tradition' as Suresh Awasti terms it, loosely brought under the umbrella of 'Roots Movement', is 'anti-modern in its essence' or, whether it is actually an attempt to 'enact an alternative modernity' by subverting the paradigms of Western modernity a by-product of both capitalism and imperialism in the occident.

In order to search for an answer whether this whole process of *Indianization* that Dr. Suresh Awasti describes as 'a move towards creating 'a kind of Indian national theatre' (qtd in the Introduction to *Modern Indian Theatre*) is 'anti-modern' we need to probe into the nature of Indian modernity that was born somewhere in the ferment of the 'first light' of 19th century Renaissance, the concomitant issues of nationalism, and the growth of the modern theatre itself in colonial India.

In his seminal works such as the *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* or in *Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee has elucidated that the ideological structure of nationalism, a progeny of the post-Enlightenment European Modernity, was imported to India by the colonizers themselves. Within this hegemonic framework of a received or borrowed knowledge, Indian nationalists shaped their own modes of anticolonial expression to overthrow the yoke of Western domination in the subcontinent. His contemporary Dipesh Chakrabarty in his evocative commentary on Partha Chatterjee's *Derivative Discourse* in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11th July 1987, agrees with Chatterjee, that the nationalist thought in countries like India exhibits a 'characteristic element of self-contradiction. While there is a continual urge to "emphasise the differences of the 'national' culture from that of 'the West' [it] is combined with an aspiration towards a modernity that can be defined only in terms of the post-Enlightenment rationalism of European culture' (Chakrabarty 1137). The modern Indian theatre whose inception in the 19th century can be traced in the 'colonial encounter' that resulted in the imposition of European models on local theatrical traditions' (Introduction to *Modern Indian Theatre* xv), too betrays similar contradiction that exists in the heart of Indian nationalism. In the late 18th century, theatre first found a congenial home in India in the bustling colonial cities of Calcutta and Bombay. The wealthy and educated Parsi entrepreneurs of Bombay were one of the first groups to embrace Western staging techniques and

organization. In Bengal, modern theatre, which was a foreign import from England came via the English traders and colonial rulers of Calcutta, and was facilitated by the rise of a native English educated *Babus* that formed a large section of the Bengali intelligentsia. In an early account of the Indian theatre in British Bengal, Hemendra Nath Das Gupta writes:

We have no hesitation to admit that they [The English theatres of Calcutta] were not only the forerunners of Bengali Stage but also inspired the enlightened Hindus with a love for theatre and with a strong desire for the establishment of the genuine Bengali Theatre. The English Stage in Calcutta used to be patronized by our countrymen and both the Chowringee theatre and the Sans-Souci owed much to the princely liberality of Dwarakanath Tagore, and his contributions to the growth of stage were not less than that of a Torrens or Parker. Such was the earnestness for English plays amongst our countrymen that each night a number of Bengali spectators were amongst the audience, as is testified to by the following observations of the Asiatic Journal:-

The Indian Gazette adds: "It affords us pleasure to observe such a number of respectable natives among the audience every play-night, it indicates a growing taste for the English Drama which is an auspicious sign of the progress of general literature amongst our native friends."ⁱ

The impact of colonial modernity on Indian theatre may be also illustrated with an example narrated in Sudipto Chatterjee's riveting essay on the 'Nationalist Discourse in Late 19th century Bengali Theatre'. Earlier Sushil Kumar Mukherjee's encyclopaedic account of the *Calcutta Theatres (1753-1980)* recalled the birth of the National Theatre (1872-73) by the enthusiasts of Bagbazar Amateur Theatre group who mustered all their resources for a public theatre but 'when all arrangements were complete' says Mukherjee, a problem arose about a suitable nomenclature. Finally Nabagopal Mitra, Editor of *National Paper*, nicknamed 'National Nabagopal' for his zealous nationalism and 'his keenness on adding the word National to every Bengali enterprise, suggested the name The Calcutta National Theatrical Society, which was ultimately shortened as the National Theatre.' A year later, National Theatre merged with the Hindu Theatre to establish their first professional theatre hall in 6 Beadon Street, Calcutta. Alluding to the paradox involved in its very conception, Sudipto Chatterjee refers to a newspaper article in *The Englishman* on October 3, 1873 that reports "laying [of] the foundation stone' of a Bengali public theatre, a wooden structure modelled on the European proscenium theatres of Calcutta' (Chatterjee 98). Its inaugural ceremony presented a mishmash of the *Eastern* and the *Western* cultural aspirations—it had a procession led by a European band with flags bearing the inscription "The laying of the foundation stone of the 'Great National Theatre' (qtd from Sushil Mukherjee: *The Story of Calcutta Theatres: 1753-1980*, p. 40 in Sudipto Chatterjee 98). This so

called Bengali National Theatre was a replica of the Lewis Theatre in Chawringee that staged European productions for the expatriate English community in Calcutta. This 'neo Hellenic' construction of the Bengali Great National Theatre, observes Sudipto Chatterjee:

had very little to do with the play, the first and the last, that was to be produced within its premise two months later—A Bengali mythological, referred to as a 'Fairy Tale' by its author, Amritalal Basu. But although the architecture of the theatre seemed to be literally at war with the content of what was staged inside, it was nevertheless, dubbed the Great National Theatre! (Chatterjee 98).

Not only was the playhouse, the Modern Indian Theatre itself a product of two opposing cultures: The European drama which had generated a strong interest among the English educated Middle Class audience in the 19th century, and Sanskrit Natya, restored to reputation from the nadir of neglect by the European Orientalists like Sir William Jones, H.H. Colebrook, William Carey et al. This theatre, purports Rakesh Solomon 'sought to project both modernity and Indianness in its style and subject matter, and thus constituted a fundamental component of the Indian Intelligentsia's grand nationalist enterprise to invent, on one hand, a pan-Indian nation state that was modern' but simultaneously attempted to bring about an 'imagined nation into existence through a return to ancient Hindu traditions' (intro xvi). Thus while on one hand Modern Theatre in India internalized the British bourgeoisie representational form gleaned from the European proscenium stage techniques, on the other, it sought its legitimacy from the greatness of its ancient Indian Theatre. Post-Independence, what came to be identified as *The Theatre of the Roots* embodied a similar ambivalence (at least in its initial stage) — that one observes in Pre-independence Modern theatre, due to its 'cultural ambidexterity', (Mee 142) or the ability to operate concurrently in two opposing cultural systems. The *Roots Movement* strikes a middle ground between *revivalism* and *imitative Westernization*, says Aparna Dharwadker, in its attempt to reconcile 'pre-colonial traditions with the socio-cultural formations of a modern nation-state (Introduction xxi). Hence, the tag anti-modern needs a closer examination, since the concept of Indian Modernity born as a result of cross-pollination between the East and the West has always remained a contested terrain, as it cannot be totally understood or restricted to the European sense of the term. Rather, it requires a more inclusive categorization that would permit not only the co-existence of the European and the Indian traits, but sometimes even allow the juxtaposition of the contemporary with the old with only a thin line separating the two. So what we know as the *Theatre of the Roots*, as defined by Dr. Awasti is 'both avant-garde in the context of conventional realistic theatre, and part of the 2,000-year-old Natyasastra tradition' (Awasti 296).

This so called *Roots Theatre*, as elusive as the definition of Indian civilization itself yokes together such heterogeneous cultural practises and performance forms under its portal, having to negotiate more than one self, more

than one history, more than one language in the shaping of an intracultural narrative’ (Bharucha 78), that it becomes impossible to make any sweeping generalization about them. In fact Dr. Awasti in his defence of *The Theatre of the Roots* speaks of ‘plurality of theatres’ that combines ‘traditional and modern elements... where village and urban cultures existed both independently and in combination’ (Introduction xxiii). Further, as Bharucha points out, ‘in India we have a more differentiated gradation of cultures in tribal, rural, folk, ritual, mofussil (district town), urban and metropolitan contexts [...] alive in different states of vibrancy, and different proximities to the process of modernization, industrialization, and secularization in India that is far from complete.’ (79). The sheer variety of traditions it endorses can be understood just by mentioning some of the doyens who attended the Sangeet Natak Akademy’s Nehru Centenary Festival in 1989, one of the high points in the Roots Movement, to discuss ‘The Retrospective of Modern Indian Theatre’. The galaxy of luminaries included Bijan Bhattachariya, Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad and Panikkar. Those absent but should have been present were Habib Tanvir, Ebrahim Alkazi and Badal Sircar. This staggering diversity shows the sheer absurdity of any rigid straitjacketing. A point of commonality that may bind several of these theatre schools in the political milieu of postcoloniality is the self-conscious eschewal of a blind mimicry of the colonial theatre aesthetics that was meant to assert the empire’s cultural superiority with Shakespeare at its helm and dramatic realism as its most effective tool, as a way of exorcising the spectre of colonialism that still loomed large over the subcontinent even after its independence. Therefore, they searched for a more ‘localized’ indigenous tradition, however diverse and polyvalent it may be in the context of its Indian articulation, but distinctly identifiable from the Metropolitan theatre. They also broke a common ground in their rejection of the canons of the Western Realism which became obsolete by the time most of the colonies were granted independence in post-World War II era. This denunciation of the realist paradigms in Indian stage was however not an exclusive gift of the *Roots Movement*. Years before the independence, Rabindranath Tagore had scathingly criticized the deployment of elaborate stagecraft, particularly scenography with all its symbolic gloss, in Western realist theatre. He alludes to the time-revered text of *Natyashastra*, showing how Bharata’s description of the stage precludes any mention of artificial scenes. He claims that the use of painted backdrops to obtain a verisimilitude of the reality pays the spectator a very poor compliment, by ‘ascribing to them an utter poverty of imagination’ (Tagore 432). Then further elaborating upon the limitations of European realist mode he indicts:

European wants his truth concrete. He would have imaginative treats, but he must be deluded by having these imaginings to be exact imitations of actual things [...] The theatres that we have set up in imitation of the West are too elaborate to be brought to the doors of all and sundry. In them the creative richness of the poet and player are overshadowed by the wealth of the capitalist. If the Hindu spectator has not been too far infected with the

greed for realism and the Hindu artist still has any respect for his craft and skill, the best things they can do for themselves is to regain their freedom by making a clean sweep of the costly rubbish that has accumulated roundabout and is clogging the stage. (*Rangamancha*, translated into English as *The Stage* by Surendranath Tagore, p. 434)

Nonetheless, in post independence years the dissenting voices in theatre became all the more prominent as the rejection of the realist tradition gained a new momentum under the larger project of decolonization. Badal Sircar, for instance, in the 70s made a radical departure from the European realism with his dismissal of extensive props, costumes and sets. Almost in the *Growtowskian* convention of the ‘poor theatre’ⁱⁱ, which believes that ‘theatre can exist without make-up, without automatic costume and scenography’ (Growtowski 19), the stage setting is kept minimal. However, while Sircar often sought inspiration from several futuristic trends in European dramaturgy, —his theatre, particularly that which came to be known as the *Third Theatre* self-reflexively appropriated, translated, relocated and read anew these Western models, thus furnishing a subversive critique of the cultural prototypes of colonialism and neo-colonialism. For Sircar, theatre has always been a potential weapon for challenging various echelons of political and cultural power. Thus, by assimilating in his works the traditions of some of the famous proponents of avant-garde, anti-realism, such as Artaud, Beckett, Brecht and Growtowski, he allowed the undercutting of the Western realism from within the West itself, and finally he offered a postcolonial response to European theatre at large through a localization of the *Growtowskian* or *Brechtian* models.

This apathy of the Indian playwrights towards the realist conventions was nevertheless, a part of a larger global drift. Roughly around the same time several practitioners of theatre in Sri Lanka, South Korea, Japan, and even China discarded the naturalist mode to evolve a style in tune with the aesthetic praxis of one’s own culture. In Europe itself as mentioned before, during the 50s which may be deemed as an era of transition between the modern and the post-modern, the realist conventions showed signs of waning with the immense success of what came to be known in popular parlance by lazy labelling —*The Theatre of the Absurd*. But while in the post-apocalyptic Europe a playwright like Beckett was attracted towards minimalism, or staging the ‘lessness’ as he calls it, by discarding all props of the outmoded modern culture, in India the artists preoccupied themselves in the rediscovery of their pre-colonial roots after a long somnolence that persisted over two hundred years. For instance, Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana*, which immediately after its publication in 1971 attained the status of the ‘poster play’ for the movement was inspired by the *yakshagana* forms of Karnataka. Much of the action in the play is presented through stylized gestures or mime (*Mukhavinaya*). Another device of the folk theatre that Karnad adopts with much ingenuity is the use of masks which is an integral part of our traditional and tribal art-forms including Kathakali, *Chhau Yakshagana* etc. In *Hayavadana*, Devdatta,

one of three protagonists, appears on the stage wearing a pallid mask and Kapila a darker headgear. Later on to signify the transposed heads, their masks are interchanged. Likewise, Lord Ganesha wears an Elephant-headed mask and Hayavadana appears on stage with a mask of a horse.

In the mid 1950s Habib Tanvir’s production of *Mitti Ki Gadi* (1954), a popular operatic version of Sudraka’s *Mrichchhakatikam* (*The Toy Cart*) and *Agra Bazar* (1954) on the life and works of the renowned Urdu poet, Nazir Akbarabadi brought ‘music and poetry back to the theatre’ (Awasti). He worked with a troop of brilliant folk performers from *Nacha* background, closely associated with ‘robust oral culture’ from his native state Chattisgarh, to revive the tribal traditions that were pushed to marginality by the artefacts of ‘high culture’:

I believe in the viability of the rich forms of the rural theatre in which they have tendency to incorporate the most topical, the latest local happening, the thematic and formal flexibility by which we cannot claim this is how it was performed 200 or 2000 years ago...I believe that it is possible to usher in progress without demolishing this culture. (Habib Tanvir as quoted in Katyal, p. xviii)

Yet, notes Javed Malik in his introduction to the Seagull edition of *Charandas Chor*, Tanvir did not ‘romanticize the ‘folk’ uncritically or ahistorically. He was aware of their cognitive limitations and [did] not hesitate to intervene in them and allow his own modern consciousness and political understanding to interact with the traditional energies and skills of his performers.’ (Introduction xii).

A radical development in the *Roots Movement* is the change in the spatial dimension of drama brought about by the rejection of the modern proscenium stage by several practitioners of theatre and their experimentation with a variety of theatre spaces. E. Alkazi for instance, used his terrace in Bombay as a performance area in the late '50s and later, after moving to Delhi as a director of the *National School of Drama*, he explored an array of location from closed studio to the open-air *Meghdoot Theatre*.

The Roots Movement broadly aimed at two contradictory things— as an ideological apparatus of the government, at an institutional level it displayed a distinct homogenizing tendency by trying to shape a *national* theatre, as a part of a larger *national* culture. This of course, like the grand rhetoric of European Nationalism, a bi-product of Western Modernity has encountered a stiff resistance for ignoring the experiences of difference. As Bhaba claims in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*: ‘What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. [...] The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds of cultural comparativism—are in a profound

process of redefinition.’ (2 &7) Further, in India, ‘there are conflicting nationalities that resist the very idea of a ‘single nation’ in the first place. Secessionist and insurgent groups demand separate nations, while entire communities of tribal and indigenous peoples lie outside of the framework of the nation altogether.’ (Bharucha 79) Such ‘totalizing’ impulse often legitimizes the oppression of minorities and disempowered groups either by excluding them, or by subsuming their cultures ‘within the cultural hegemonies of the dominant groups’ (Bharucha 11).

Conversely, at a micro level, the *Roots Theatre* rejected the framework of metanarratives by creatively engaging with a plurality of traditions, upholding local histories and preserving specific practices of a particular region. What Habib Tanvir does with the *Nacha* tradition or Teejan Bai with the *Pandavani* tradition of Chhattisgarh are examples of such practices.

While it is impossible to undo temporally and culturally, what can be called the colonial trace in Indian theatre, the complex articulation of hybridity in *Roots Theatre* realigns our definition of modernity which is neither pre-modern, nor post-modern exactly in the European sense of the term, even though the mindless use of folk elements as a cultural commodity inadvertently created a whole new culture of kitsch and postmodern superficiality. Nevertheless the intention was perhaps different. The prefix ‘post’ modern can be used, it at all, to *Roots theatre* to denote what Bhaba calls the ‘gesture to the beyond’-the ‘restless revisionary energy’ (7) embedded in the various liminal traditions and folk forms with which it experimented, to transform the present into an ‘expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment’ (ibid 7).

Roots Theatre in its nuanced complexities went beyond (or at least it intended to go beyond) the simplistic binary of tradition and modernity, urban and rural, to create a platform for experimenting with various performance forms— *Tamasha* and *Lavani* of Maharashtra, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Yakshagana* of Karnataka, *Koodiyattam* of Kerala, *Therukoothu* of Tamil Nadu and *Chhau* of Orissa and Bengal. Further, it involved some of the stalwarts of Indian theatre, who believed that the ethos of Indian modernity comprising various regional/vernacular *alterities* cannot be separated from the folk resources that constitute ‘the memories of their childhood, family, community, and tradition.’ (Bharucha 93) It would be rather an oversimplification to label the *Roots Movement* as ‘anti-modern’ in its essence because of the departures it takes from the normative understanding of Western modernity which in any case has multiple versions, or because of post-colonial Indian theatres’ engagement with the non-European past. While acknowledging its hybrid lineage, the *Roots Movement* in a way pioneered a theatre that enacted ‘an alternative modernity’ to use Mee’s words, that did not ‘repudiate’ but attempted to ‘redefine’ modernity from certain non-Western vantage points and simultaneously through new interventions, worked towards an evolution of the variegated traditions of *lok-parampara* in India.

Notes

ⁱ The first performance in Prasanna Kumer Tagore’s *Hindu Theatre* (1831) were Bhababhuti’s *Uttar Ram Charita*, translated by Professor Horace Hayman Wilson) and portions from *Julius Caesar*.

ⁱⁱ It is a term coined by Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski (1933 - 1999) in his seminal book, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968)

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Ajitesh Bandopadhyay: In the Neighbourhood of Liminality

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Abstract

In my essay I would like to investigate the shift of paradigms in the relationship between theatre and politics that director, playwright and actor Ajitesh Bandopadhyay (1933-83) was bringing into Bengali theatre. I would like to analyze how in the field of theater he was trying to form a threshold space: a threshold where politics and ethics, community and the individual, global and local can exist together as equals not imparting the hegemony of one on the other. How Ajitesh strove to conceive a theatre which puts forth itself as an analytical presence of life and society unmediated by an ideological or ethical regime. I would like to argue that it is in such a liminal presence in theatre, politics and the world; that the key to our future community of equality lie. This would also be an attempt at reclaiming the legacy of Ajitesh, whose influence on Bengali theatre has been hugely underplayed by the rather scanty posthumous attention being paid to his work.

[**Keywords:** Ajitesh Bandopadhyay; Politics, Ethics and Art; global and local; luminal, Bengali theatre; Globalism and Nationalism]

Prelude

“Decisive here is the idea of an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence.”

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*.

When Bengali theatre, which had ushered into modernity in a post world-war, ethico-politically charged backdrop in late 1940's and early 50's- in the hands of two stalwarts Utpal Dutt and Sombhu Mitra who dominated the Bengali stage in 1960's and 70's; finally became subjugated to the regime of institutional politics and ethical individualism respectively, it was perhaps Ajitesh Bandopadhyay in whom theatre could finally anticipate freedom from this regimentation. While, Utpal Dutt, a Marxist to the core, in the 1970's, post Naxalbari movement and coming to power of the left in West Bengal had allowed himself to be restricted by the regimes of left ideology and Sombhu Mitra was being trapped in his own discourse of ethical individualism and nationalism, it was Ajitesh who came forward with a distinct individuality. It was not as if Ajitesh was not interested in politics or in ethics of 'individual life forms'- rather, he was interested in both; but what he was most interested in, was theatre. It was this immense passion for theatre and the indomitable will to follow that passion with gusto that prevented

Ajitesh to subjugate theatre to the regimentation of either politics, or ethics or philosophy though they were nonetheless present in his theatre. While extremely aware of the importance of the regional cultural influences in theatre, he was never afraid of producing adaptations and translations of Brecht, Pirandello, Chekov or Wesker: adaptations which were as good as original plays and plays which if not politically decisive were politically analytical. Always being aware of the need for professionalism in theatre he also did never compromise on the quality of his productions. Many other such contrasting tendencies had found their manifestation in Ajitesh. Thus Ajitesh signified more than anything perhaps liminality: an existence in the threshold. Ajitesh was able to create to great extent, a harmony between theatre, life and the world while maintaining the clash or the subjugation of one by another. Thus, in more ways than other, Ajitesh I believe, presented the third alternative in modern Bengali theatre, as well as a modern Bengali, Indian and perhaps Universal subjectivity. It would be my intention in this article to investigate his aesthetic (I do not use the term 'aesthetic' here to denote just a formal aspect of it but rather in a more contextually embedded sense) universe to find out how exactly was such a potentiality being shaped through Ajitesh's thought gestures. In an era where categories like political and ethical; globalism, nationalism and regionalism are contested with such intensity and zeal, I believe it would be crucial to re-read Ajitesh who successfully negotiated them to leave behind an experiment in theatre practice where perhaps the secrets to the future of our theatre and our life lies.



Antigone (1975) - Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay

Politics, Ethics and Art in Balance

Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay began his theatre career as a member of the cultural wing of the left party, Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) at Kolkata, in the mid 1950's. He made a name for himself inside the IPTA quite early owing to his fine theatrical and coordination skills. In the year 1958, Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay was

elected the secretary of the Dumdum branch of IPTA. In the second state meet of IPTA, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay was elected the joint-secretary of the West Bengal state committee. Associated with the local committee of the Dumdum branch of Indian Communist Party, Ajitesh was intensely involved in workers', refugee, cultural and teacher's movementsⁱⁱ (from which engagement we would find him drawing materials for his later plays). However, Ajitesh's tryst with IPTA, like in case of so many other artists had to end abruptly in 1964 because of conflicts arising out of apparently trifling matters.

As Ranjan Gangopadhyayⁱⁱⁱ reveals in his book from the recollection of Nirmal Ghosh, the rift between Ajitesh and IPTA grew keeping at the centre two principal incidents. Both of them bear a testimony to the high handed nature of a section of the IPTA bureaucracy of the period. The first one of the two was regarding a statement or opinion that Ajitesh expressed in one of the meetings at the Dumdum Patipukur regional branch. He had said that - "I think of Bohurupee as the only serious centre for thinking about theatre nowadays." As Gangopadhyay explains, the IPTA leadership present that day, began being offensive towards Ajitesh without trying to comprehend the true nature of his words. There was apparently no fault with what Ajitesh had said and neither was any lack of fidelity towards the IPTA exhibited by his statements. At the time, as Dutt had just announced his arrival in the Theatre scene and *Bohurupee* under Sombhu Mitra was being responsible almost single handedly for carrying forward the Baton of group theatre movement in West Bengal. However, based on this single statement, Ajitesh was vehemently criticized and alleged as being disloyal to IPTA. One senses that the gesture of naming Bohurupee (Sombhu Mitra's group) in this context must have invited the wrath of IPTA bureaucrats whose old differences with Sombhu Mitra had found new impetus in the early 60's. The second event which deepened the growing rift and finalized Ajitesh's split from IPTA was when in 1961, Ajitesh did a production of Italian playwright Gian Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* under the banner of IPTA. There were immediate allegations from IPTA authorities regarding the ethicality of producing a play by Pirandello under its banner, because of Pirandello's association with fascist dictator Mussolini. As Radharaman Tapadar who was in *Nandikar* then and remained a colleague and friend till the end recalls- "Utpal Dutt too had said that we should not have performed a play by Pirandello"^{iv}. By the time, Ajitesh himself, though had already become doubtful regarding the functioning of IPTA or for that matter regarding any theatre done under direct auspices of a political institution, even if a left Marxist one. It was revealed to him that a left political institutional patronage does not guarantee the existence of a sincere and serious theatre or that matter art practice- that it can also be equally coercive framework to be in. Incidentally, one of his first popular productions in his IPTA days was *Saontal Bidroho*, which was also the first play authored by him.

While, it is true that the first phase of his career was spent in drawing forth all his energies in enriching an outright political theatre practice, it is also deserves

mention that Ajitesh's first association with theatre in his childhood was not in form of any political engagement; but as he recounts to fill up an existential void created by the horrors of the war in the 40's that haunted him as a child. Ruminating on those days he later wrote-

I felt very helpless. War- Why a war, a war with whom? I did not know when, at what time in a war with whom we would all perished by the strike of a single bomb. The year passed by amongst these horrific thoughts...To fill up this void appeared three claimants- Football, politics and theatre. Among these, I left Football; Politics left me and thus I am only left with theatre now.^v

Thus, it is a fact that almost similar to Sombhu Mitra^{vi}, in case of Ajitesh too, there was an extremely subjective sense of ethical crisis from which along with theatre, Ajitesh's interest in institutional politics too developed. In many ways it was a personal gesture. However, as circumstances changed, with CPI gaining in power, he gradually found it difficult to sustain such an ethical position while remaining within the party especially with regard to his theatre practice. We find him voicing these realizations in a number of his writings at that time or which he wrote later. In one of his essays titled *Atyalpa Abhijog* (A Few Complaints) he writes-

They try to explain that, *Avigyanam Sakuntalam* (Kalidas) might be an excellent play but; does it contain any reflections of the political problems of our contemporary society...Our audience then do not remind them that the theatre does not begin and end with only a theatre of political problems. Psychoanalytical plays, plays about conflicts within the individual, plays analyzing the ethical ends of science and religion in their social contexts have formed the subject of theatre since ages and many of them have also found recognition with posterity... Actually our audience, do not realize that the commitment of these people lie not with theatre; but with the theatre business. Not in politics; but in exploiting politics to commercial ends.^{vii}

Thus, here we find Ajitesh trying to make two significant critical points regarding the practice of political theatre in Bengal. First of all, he stresses on the fact that there can be problems in society which might not necessarily be relevant to 'institutional politics' and theatre does not begin and end with only a singular category of 'political' theatre. Therefore, it would be wrong to begin with such a precondition for any theatre tradition that to be relevant, it has to be only able to represent institutional politics by confirming to a particular ideology. Secondly, the very significant point that he makes is that, such politics like every other phenomenon of our times can be used to fulfill commercial ends. People can be fooled and exploited in the name of a political ideology. Politics and especially electoral one can often try to take advantage of their weakness. He presents a keen analysis of the technicalities of such exploitation in case of theatre in another of

his essays, *Baiblabik Theatre Ebong Amader Ajker Sangram* (revolutionary theatre and our present struggle). He says-

Thus, we try to assert our importance by abusing each other. The noble expression of anger which imparts importance on the creation, has its own risks, therefore our outbursts of anger excites the audience only for a while. Our anger against the political system or social system never reaches the revolutionary climax. We are careful about being angry too. A pattern of our anger too has been created. Thus, all our angry plays have patterns too.^{viii}

Thus, we find Ajitesh here making a crucial point. He voices the concern that, more often than not, contemporary revolutionary theatre in Bengal had fallen into a trap of a representative pattern. It had become trapped in formal and structural regime which renders it into an empty signifier.

While Ajitesh parted from IPTA and thereafter was strongly against doing theatre under the patronage of either the government or any political party, his theatre did not forsake political thought. Though vehemently criticized by the critics during their productions as being apolitical, *Sher Afgan*, *Manjari Amer Manjari*, *Teen Poysar Pala*, *Paap Punya* and many of his other plays today at hindsight seem to open a very interesting space for analysis of socio-economic-ethical structures in the society. Ajitesh, we find, did believe that doing theatre without any politico-philosophical thought behind it, is futile. He says in one of his essays-

I can accept this fact without reservations, that an art should always be influenced by a political philosophy or it will lose its essence in amidst the cultural activities, at least that is my experience. Why I am doing a theatre? Which play would I like to do? How would I do it? If an artist is not politically clear about these things, I feel it is impossible for him to reach a certain degree of completeness.^{ix}

Veteran theatre critic Samik Bandopadhyay in his lucid and enlightening article *Ajitesh: Theatre-Rajniti* provides us an extremely well thought analysis of Ajitesh's views regarding the relation between politics, ethics and theatre. He says-

In later years, Ajitesh did not directly participate in what today can be called a political theatre. Rather, Nandikar (Ajites's first group) moved away in certain ways from directly political thinking. There is no reason not to accept that. There was a certain thinking of Ajitesh behind that. He had voiced about that thought to us a number of times. That notion was the understanding that it is not only by directly representing the reality on stage or bringing forth a political decision at the moment that the political responsibility would be fulfilled. Because, if one has to do a political theatre, if theatre has to play a political role then, that could never end with mere

providing facilitation to a few people with similar opinions or belonging to the same the same party.^x

Theatre has greater objectives to fulfill. Being political in theatre means to Ajitesh as he himself would say according to Bandopadhyay-

I feel if we have to do political theatre, then we would have to realize firstly what form of politics is going around the world and contextualize it. Secondly, we have to criticize it without fear, without thinking of receiving any aids or benefits whatsoever. Thirdly one would have to show the historico-philosophical way forward and for that one will have to read books of various theoreticians.^{xi}

Thus, we find a completely different definition of politics in Ajitesh's thoughts. Politics to him lie, not in promoting or ridiculing a particular group or institution. Politics, meant to him to be concerned about, to think and analyze in depth in a historical context problems that concern people as a collective-

The responsibility of a political theatre is a bit more... That can never be reached by providing certain stereotypical political decisions. There, one has to judge critically- one has to distantiate himself. A little bit of the past-the continuity-one has to place the moment among these. The moment is never a distinct and independent one.^{xii}



Tin Paisar Pala (1969) - Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay, Keya Chakraborty

'Politics' for Ajitesh, has ethical dimensions too and politics to him does not mean a total control by a specific party or group. Politics happens in a continuous

dialogue between the self and the community not to the exclusion or subjugation of any of these; but by finding ways of coexistence. Thus politics for him always lie at the liminality of an individual ethics and a collective responsibility without compromising on any of them. Theatre as an art form however, again for him exists at a liminality of its being an art form and also an expression of ethico-political concern.

Negotiating Globalism and Nationalism

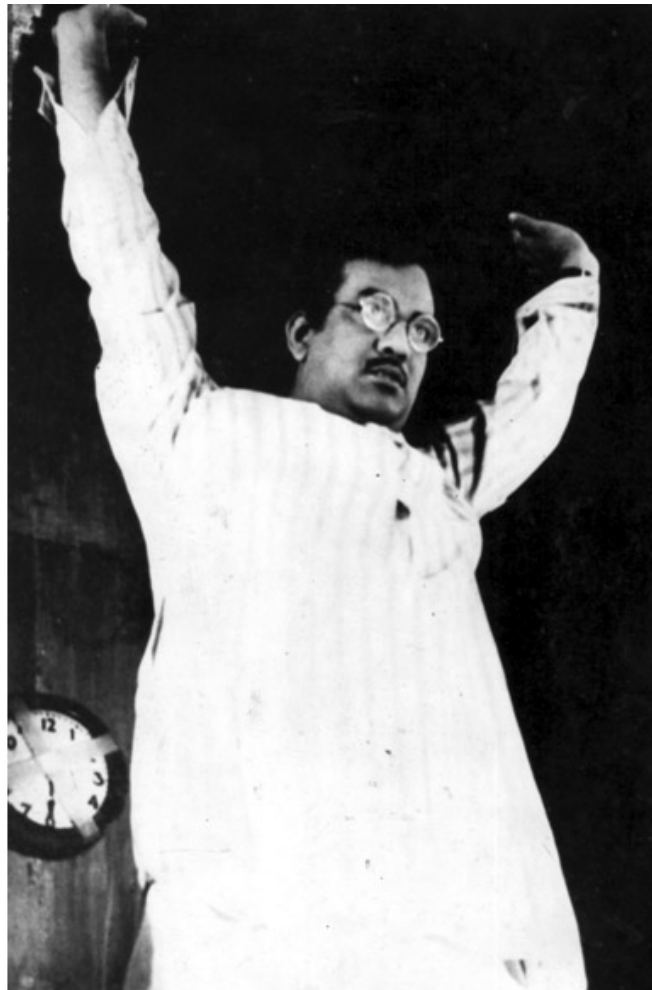
“The Postmodern is possibly a luminal bridge in history, a period conscious of itself, its past, and its multiple potentials as future.”

Richard Schecner

Performative Circumstances: From the Avant Garde to Ramlila.

It is now indeed for some time that in India, and almost all the countries with their new found independence from colonial regimes, we have been witness to two

contrasting tendencies in the field of arts and perhaps more so in the field of theatre than any other forms of art. On one hand, has emerged a discourse of globalism and multiculturalism, a cultural enrichment through unrestricted sharing of aesthetic signifiers and real political concerns. On the other, such conceptions of a blissful co-existence have been jeopardized by new hegemonic structures identifiable within the discourse of globalism itself. There has been a gradual erasure of languages in their traditional purity. Thus, new forms of language have emerged, compulsively hybrid in their origin, what Marxist critic of postmodernism, Frederic Jameson has termed “pastiche”^{xiii}. Theatre by its very nature being political^{xiv} as an art form, has been, especially in the countries struggling through the



Manjari Amer Manjari (1964)- Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay

after effects of a long regime of colonial exploitation and a new found modernity, in the very midst of this cultural phenomenon. Responding to such a situation of course, two mutually conflicting set of political discourses has emerged in these countries relating to the field of culture generally and theatre in particular. A certain half of theatre practice has responded to the globalization process by openly accepting thematic and stylistic effects of foreign theatrical and cultural traditions^{xv}. While the second half has found its objective in searching and preserving traditional forms in their purity, making them their cultural bastion of identity and resistance^{xvi}. In the Indian context however, contrastingly, the discourse of cultural identity has been used as a tool of governance to enforce the field of arts into a secluded, formalistic, aesthetic cocoon and thus render it politically impotent. It is rather the urban or sub-urban cosmopolitan globalised theatre which has emerged in India as the politically sentient voice.

One of the questions which was often being asked or rather a demand often being made in cultural field in the post-independent Indian context was for an Indian or national theatre. Sometimes as an aesthetic searching of roots, as in case of Habib Tanvir, Sombhu Mitra and at others as propaganda by the Central Government of India or the National Congress; any hint of foreign influence on Indian theatre was being criticized. Indigenous and traditional forms existing at the very verge of extinction were being proposed as alternatives. In the context of West Bengal, it was Ajitesh Bandopadhyay who more often than not, was the bane for most of these attacks. We have already discussed the vehement criticism that he faced for producing Pirandello. He was even more criticized for his adaptation of Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*, *Teen Paisar Pala*. Utpal Dutt was severely critical of the production claiming, Ajitesh to have done injustice to Brecht by rejecting the Marxist context and reducing Brecht to a mere formal exercise^{xvii}. Samik Bandopadhyay presented a vehement criticism of the production in an interview *Problems and Directions: Calcutta's New Theatre*. He said-

The popularity of *Tin Paisar Pala* makes us somewhat apprehensive, for it corrupts and destroys the basis of the experimental theatre on the one hand and that of the strongly committed political theatre on the other.^{xviii}

Ajitesh however continued to produce translations and adaptations of Brecht, Chekov, Pirandello, Wesker and others throughout his career.

It is indeed an irony of sorts that it was Ajitesh who was alleged of being partial to Western cultural influences. Ajitesh unlike Utpal Dutta, Sombhu Mitra and most other urban born and brought up theatre practitioners, spent his childhood away from Kolkata in a small town. He came to Kolkata only during his college days and it was while studying English Honors at the Manindra Chandra College, Calcutta University that he came in contact with various foreign playwrights. However, it would be simply nurturing a wrong conception if it is thought that Ajitesh's theatre activity was alien to Bengali cultural contexts. In one his essays written during the IPTA days we hear about his desire to reach a wider

public than urban intellectuals or even urban masses. He was not interested in doing fringe, parallel theatre-

It was not about performing easier plays for common mass or performing difficult plays in an easy and careless manner; it was our objective that the commitment with which we have presented any play for the urban intellectuals, we will reach out to the audience at Asansole or Durgapur with the same commitment...^{xix}

However there are a number of questions which would be claiming to be answered and which were often asked to Ajitesh in regard to his production of translated and adapted plays. Ajitesh in one of his essays titled *Anudito Natok* (translated plays) articulates his defense in this matter. First of all, he addresses the most fundamental of all questions: why translated or adapted plays?

Ajitesh begins by mentioning the importance of translation in sharing of knowledge. He draws evidence from the history of theatre to show that how much poorer the tradition of world theatre would have been without translations. He points out that productions of Shakespeare's plays or the most modern English plays would never have happened in Russia if there was no translation. Moreover, Stanislavski could not have produced *An Enemy of the People* if he did not have access to a translation of the play by Norwegian playwright Henric Ibsen. Bertolt Brecht could not have produced Greek plays if they were not translated to German; and in very recent times, Italian Pirandello could not have been produced in England. He reminds that the hundred and seventy year old Bengali theatre that was founded by a Russian, Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev(1749-1817), began with translated plays only. He lists three distinct ways in which any theatre tradition can benefit from translated plays-

- a) New spirit- forms, structure, characters, events, rhythm and emotions are brought into literature. The production of the translated plays similarly brings to the stage new spirit- forms, structure, characters, events, rhythms and emotions.
- b) The translated plays bring the realization of the fact that people of the world all belong to the same family, and their life too flows by the same variant and blissful stream.
- c) Facilitates weak, underdeveloped understanding of theatre to move towards gaining maturity. Translated plays work as its friend, philosopher and guide.^{xx}

The next aspect of criticism that Ajitesh responds to is a voice of dissent heard quite often from both critiques and directors of the period: 'is not translation and production of translated plays a hindrance to the writing of original plays?' In reply to this, Ajitesh says that such allegations to producers would be unjust in the very beginning as- if they are able to produce plays by Sophocles, Chekov or Arthur Miller successfully then there should be simply no reason whatsoever, why they

would not be able to produce original plays with the same efficiency. Thus, he concludes, the problem lies elsewhere; that is in the absence of good plays being written and he says unless and until good plays are being written, producers would have to produce translations and adaptations of foreign plays. However, he continues to say that it is the very translations and adaptations from which the future authors of plays should take lessons.

Thus, as his final explanation, he says that if he supports doing translations and adaptations of foreign plays, he feels it is this practice which will finally lead to writing of original plays. He quotes famous English critic Kenneth Tynan to the support of his statement, who while evaluating the consecutive productions of Sophocles, Sartre, Ionesco and Pirandello in England, had written-

Even if it seems absurd to hear now, I can foresee that within one or two years we would start finding good plays in England. Realizing this belief of Tynan the next year only was produced “look Back in Anger” and there ushered in a new age of theatre in England.^{xxi}

It is indeed a fact that tilting the land of theatre with translations and adaptations of foreign plays did yield rich dividends in case of Bengali theatre. In form of crop, not only we have got excellent plays by Dutt, one after another; who, one should remember began his career by doing Shakespeare first at the Saint Xaviers college group and then with the group of famous English director Jeffrey Kendhal, Shakespiriana; but in the 60’s and 70’s we got brilliant plays by Badal Sircar like *Ebong Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas* and others and also by Mohit chattopadhyay like *Mrityu Sanbad*, *Rajrokto*, *Konthonalite Surjo*, *Captain Hurrah*, *Mahakalir Baccha* and others. These plays have been of immense value to the development of Bengali theatre and it is a fact every theatre enthusiast would know that the inspiration behind writing of these plays were reading of foreign plays and also watching them being produced by the contemporary amateur theatre groups.

However, Ajitesh in spite of being a supporter of translations and adaptations from foreign plays, was, as have been often been wrongly alleged, not indifferent to the question of Indian regional forms of theatre. In this essay, he devotes a few lines too on the ongoing debate on the issue of a national theatre and asserts that we would have to draw as much material possible from the available history of our Sanskrit tradition of theatre and he stresses on the fact that, that too can happen only through translation of Sanskrit texts. He says-

We can discuss in this context how in recent times our intellectuals have begun discussing about an ‘Indian theatre’. We cannot; but feel interested in this issue. At least, from the curiosity of knowing history we would have to think- how much can we look to get from the practice of theatre which has become extinct in our country? When the history of Sanskrit theatre is discussed in the countries abroad... our neglect towards the roots of our own theatre is truly painful...Today, without Bengali translations of our

Sanskrit plays and a few successful productions of them, we cannot hope to realize our dreams of developing an 'Indian Theatre'.^{xxii}

Not only from ancient Sanskrit theatre; but we need to have translations of plays written in various regional language in our times, he stresses-

We at times through the newspapers get a feeling of where thoughts regarding theatre exist in various other Indian states. When we hear about famous director Ebrahim Alkazi we naturally fill interested to know about his productions. Regarding this matter however the work of translation is still much neglected.^{xxiii}

Now, if we come to an analysis of Ajitesh's work on how much he was actually doing what he was preaching, we find that even his productions of

translated or adapted plays are replete with influences from regional culture. His adapted plays like, *Manjari Amer Manjari* (adapted from Chekov's *Cherry Orchard*), *Sher Afghan* (adapted from Pirandello's *Henry IV*), *Teen Poysar Pala* (adapted from Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*) or *Pap Punya* (adapted from Leo Tolstoy's *Power of Darkness*) become independent plays by their sheer rootedness in Bengali culture and traditions. Each of these plays provides keen study of socio-economic conditions in, marginal spaces of and individual psyches of people, in Bengal. Ajitesh's brilliant study of human nature, their physical and linguistic habits were infused into the characters to



Sahi Sangbad (1974) parts- Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay & Amitabha

the extent that losing their foreign garb they became of regional. Neither were they poor mimicry of their originals nor fine parody: their distinctness as texts situated in Bengal was apparent. Ajitesh's adapted plays thus provide a very interesting overlapping space between Indian and foreign cultural traditions. While, Ajitesh did adaptations of foreign plays he also did not reject ancient Sanskrit or regional plays. Thus we found him also producing *Mudra-rakshasa* or *Andhay Yug*."

There is an opinion about Ajitesh often voiced by people: that he was passionate and thus produced or did whatever he felt passionately about. But that

is perhaps only a partial truth. A close look at Ajitesh's theatre career reveals a rather strategic approach. Theatre according to him was a European medium and thus Ajitesh wanted to understand it through practice. He had a thought that through these exercises he would be able to give shape to an Indian form of theatre. One has to realize, that when he began with adaptations or translations of foreign plays, he was not interested in their philosophy but their form. Ajitesh himself clarifies-

When Nandikar performed foreign plays it was this exercise with form which the principal objective. It was same reason to do Pirandello. We were not much concerned about the philosophical nitty-gritties of Pirandello rather we were enticed by the form of Pirandello's plays...^{xxiv}

Later on, when he produced *Mudra Rakshas*, he had a similar objective. But it is evident that he knew, that these forms in themselves were not an end and certainly not without a content which was relevant to our country, our state, our times. He has always expressed such a notion-

For the content as I will look towards the whole world I will also look towards villages.^{xxv}

He knew in the end he had to reach through this arduous journey through which he could conceive of a harmony between the form and content and figure out a new and unique language of theatre. When he wrote his second independent play in 1976 it was perhaps the first step towards realizing this objective.

Thus, here too we find Ajitesh drawing from both western and Indian paradigms and formulate a third and new language out of it. While there have often been demands for going back to roots; and while there indeed might be important resources to be utilized in Sanskrit theatre tradition or indigenous traditional forms but under changing socio-economic structures in the last hundred years and especially so after our independence a complete transposition of our theatre to the form of a Sanskrit theatre or indigenous one is a thought of gross stupidity. As Ajitesh would say-

Of course we live in Bengal and India and are the part of Bengali theatre tradition. Therefore, the problems of Bengali theatre concerns us and thus we are driven by thought whether Bengali theatre would be able to achieve a form of its own. But the matter at hand is not so simple. Numerous complicacies of tradition and modernity entwined that. We have the tradition of Indian Sanskrit drama or Bengal's very own rural traditions. But theatre is ultimately an urban phenomenon and how much Jatra (an indigenous form of performance in Bengal) would be able to facilitate its growth is a question yet to be answered...But it is true that Indian theatre has a characteristics of its own...But how to put that in to use in our contemporary largely western influenced society and find an Indian form?.. It is because of the need for this knowledge about forms the translations

and adaptations of foreign plays need to be performed. At the same time we should also perform Sanskrit classical play.^{xxvi}

Man Beneath the Mask

“One must therefore also “con-sent” that his friend exists, and this happens by living together [syzen] and by sharing acts and thoughts in common [koinonein]. In this sense, we say that humans live together unlike cattle that share the pasture together”.

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Bibhash Chakraborty, a renowned director and founder member of the amateur theatre group Theatre Workshop in one of his essays on Ajitesh Bandopadhyay titled *Ajitesh: Bhitore Agun Baire Proshanti* (Fire within, calm without) says-

When the third Pandav of Bengali theatre made his first appearance in the Bengali theatre scene, Utpal Dutt at the Minerva theatre and Sombhu Mitra at the New Empire had already established themselves. People like us, who had little more self respect than others found it difficult to go near those two castles. They were great figures and our respect for them was sky high; but whatever little we could see from afar it seemed they were surrounded by a high wall, crossing which neither they would be able to reach out to us, nor we will be able to reach out to them. How could we have discovered them, if we would not been able to come at the proximity of each other? And how could we develop if the sudden instincts would have been left undiscovered by the teacher or vice versa; if both are watertight containers of safe drinking water. Ajitesh was a flowing river breaking banks and dams- one who wants to move along taking everybody in his path by making everything fertile in his path. No body is a pawn of chess in his hands; all are his companions and comrades in arms. If you are an established artist, you would have to enclose yourself in a shell- or you would have to create a cocoon around your presence- he never believed in such a theory.^{xxvii}

One of the principal political questions of our times has been how to be friends with the other. In earlier times ‘friendship’ was generally not considered as a concern of political theory but that of the domain of ethics or morals. Antagonism was thought natural to politics, to the extent that Aristotle advised political allies to choose friendship of virtue over their alliance. But the twentieth century has been witness to such horrific violence being perpetuated in the name of politics, no longer is it being able for thinkers to separate the issue of friendship from politics. The question of the other- the colonial other, the racial other, the religious other, the national other has become crucial to philosophers as an unbelievable amount of violence have been perpetuated in these grounds. Thus politics today and our politics of future can no longer ignore the issue of friendship. So long, we have only had political regimes, and regimes by definition are constituted by unequals: those who govern and those who are governed. But

the future society, the community to come has to think beyond this dichotomy: for the sake of brevity, have to learn how to become a friend.

It is in theatre, more than any individual art perhaps that friendship is important and especially so in an amateur theatre groups as commercial prospective is sacrificed at the outset. In such circumstances it is only friends, who can be together and such difficult circumstances make easier to distinguish the friend from the self-centered selfish soul. Ajitesh's comrades in theatre or even those who were much younger to him and have worked with him have always identified Ajitesh with the term friend. Bibhas Chakraborty says-

Thus even friends of same age would often become his disciples. An intensely overpowering friendship. Nobody would be spared. In our times a rare personality who could make everybody his own and instill faith in them.^{xxviii}

Ajitesh though coming from a middle class family did never have middle class Bengali insecurities. He was always brave enough to take any risk for the sake of his passion, theatre. For almost two decades, he managed to run amateur theatre groups, first Nadikar, and then Nandimukh without having to ask for grants to either from the Government or commercial funding agencies. He had immense self-belief and achieved everything he could, because of it. It was definitely not easy for him to come from a small town and struggle his way to become one of the finest directors in the history of Bengal. We find some the instances of his self belief and courage in the recollections of his colleagues. Debasish Dasgupta remembers-

I said if you could run the show for at least once a week it would be good. At that time it would have been quite a risk for Nandikar to decide on doing one show per week... But Nandikar began doing shows at the Mukangan and they never had to look back thereafter. Once again it was risk to take a commercial theatre like Rangana but here too making the leap and coming out a success.^{xxix}

Ajitesh feared of nothing and nothing could convince him of doing things against his belief, though he was always open to suggestions from everyone. As Bibhash Chakraborty recounts-

Only he who has deep self belief can do such a thing and it is his self belief that gave Ajiesh immense courage. Regarding art, he had no fear and neither any compromising mentality. Many a questions arose on the context of foreign plays: Why so many foreign plays brother? Aha this is not Brecht! You did Pirandello! He is a reactionary! Again Pinter! He is absurd! None of the stupid criticism that he faced could shake him up. No political party or any person could instill fear in him. He used to listen to everybody with the same attention. But whenever he realized unwarranted criticism or advice is being made he could very easily become indifferent to it.^{xxx}

According to those who have worked with him, Ajitesh not only had self belief; but could instill belief in others and perhaps this formed the key to his being an unmatched coordinator. As a coordinator, Ajitesh's tremendous courage and uncompromising mentality has now become proverbial. The way, he had to begin, again and again from the scratch with all the humility of course bears testimony to such a conception. He had struggled himself to a position of importance within IPTA, but had to leave it. He then constructed Nandikar almost from a scratch. Nandikar did never receive in the time of Ajitesh any financial aid from any institution or political party. However, Nandikar did performances continuously not only in Kolkata; but also in towns and villages. The second blow came in form of fourteen members leaving Nandikar in 1966. Ajitesh in response produced "Sher Afghan" in the rehearsal only twelve days. Nandikar regained strength. Again in 1977 he left Nandikar with not a single penny in his pocket and through unmatched rigor formed Nandimukh and produced Paap-Punya".^{xxx1}

However, in spite of the being an extraordinary person, he according to his co-workers, never had airs of one. Humility was inherent in Ajitesh's character. Perhaps because of this he had to work more than others but he tried to never disappoint anyone. As Bibhash Chakraborty reflects-

This simplicity in the extraordinary had made him a true people's artist. Whenever he received a call for a show from anywhere in Bengal he never failed to do a show there. Never did the difficulty of the journey, meagerness of the allowance become a hindrance in his way. He used to say- how much you can, wherever you can, act; go to the people. In this manner he has taken Chekov and Brecht to even to the most remote parts of Bengal. He has made his group Nandikar the busiest of all Indian groups, we must remember without governmental subsidies or support from the embassy or patronage of a particular political group.^{xxxii}

Now let us come to one of the most important facets of his personality- Ajitesh as a teacher. Ashok Mukherjee had told this author, that even as a teacher, Ajitesh was a more a friend. His method of teaching acting to the young members of his group was also not hegemonic. In one his articles on Ajitesh he voices his views on this issue more clearly-

I have seen many individuals, who were never destined to do theatre have sacrificed their life at it's alter falling in love with Ajitesh. But the most important of all his virtues was that he never put himself before his art, overshadowing it. Like many a great yet proud theatre experts he never had the audacity to say that "my dear I am greater than theatre itself". The true humility learnt at the very outset of his life from the poor people has always saved him from such follies. Thus, he never imposed himself on his students. The only hard oath he had made his students take is: may their emergence be from inside, may they discover themselves by themselves.^{xxxiii}

Thus, we see Ajitesh never believed in any of his disciples mimicking him, neither did he believe in directing them in their every other action on stage. He always allowed them with space to develop in their own ways. Sandhya Dey, one of his disciples describes Ajitesh's method of teaching in her recollections, which presents us with a very similar picture-

I could understand Ajitesh Bandopadhyay as a director to some extent in the production of *Pappunya* at Nandimukh. He never used to create any sort of pressure on anybody. He always gave any actor or actress a certain amount of independence. His technique was to bring out of me the way I could play the character. He imposed nothing. Thus, one would realize that among those who have acted with or under Ajitesh there is none who imitate him. At many places, one can witness theatre or acting imitating Utpal Dutt or Sombhu Mitra but imitation of Ajitesh? It is not there in any of his plays, never-this is my realization. Say, Rudrada, Asitda, Chinmoy Ray, Radhuda and Bibhashda all of them have acted with Ajitesh; but none of them express any imitation. This is because, his technique of teaching was- 'I am saying it as I would; you have to express it as you would'. I think in such a process actors and actresses develop more completely. Thus, many actors and actresses of Nandikar are of high stature: all of them are skilled and well equipped. He has prepared numerous great actors like Rudradada, Bibhashda, ashokda, Maya Ghosh, Bina Mukherjee, Monju Bhaacharya, latika basu, ajoy Ganguly, keya Chakraborty, Deepali Chakraborti, Shelly Pal but none of them are mere imitators...^{xxxiv}

We hear from Radharaman Tapadar that Ajitesh not only taught the junior members of his group to act; but gave them responsibilities which would help them develop completely, adept at every aspect of theatre-

At Nandikar Ajiteshda wanted to make everybody technically sound in every aspect of theatre. When Rudraprasad got the responsibility of directing *Antigone*, I was given the chance to direct *Saudagarer Nouka*.^{xxxv}

Theatre is not only a reflection of life on stage but a microcosm of life in its institutional frame work too. Within that people are not only evaluated for their aesthetic imagination and artistic skills; but on also their role on being the part of a collective a community. Within the community of theatre too, as a teacher, as a coordinator, we find him practicing the same ethical imperatives that he practiced in his theatre practice. Here too, he wanted to break free from the mimetic frame work of pedagogy and appear as a presence at a threshold. He rejected the hierarchies that are inherent to such a framework. His was a struggle against middle-class mediocrity that plagued the majority of the theatre workers. He intended to know what seemed ethically right to him and follow it with all his ability and capacities. Compromise, as we see, was not his forte, neither ethical, nor economical, nor political. His allegiance was only to theatre and the theatre of

the people; not people of any group, party, community, class or religion but a category of generic people.



Saudagarer Nauka (1976) - Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay

Conclusion

The 1960's in Bengali theatre, before Ajitesh appeared on the Bengali theatre scene was the tale of exploits and limitations of two exceptional figures of theatre. While they were stalwarts by their own right, their limitations had begun revealing themselves in the middle and later parts of the decade. On one hand, the regimentation of the party on the other, the self, on one hand ideology and on the other ethics began clenching like shackles on the spirit of the group theatre movement. There were debates being raised over petty issues. Theatre which should have been the primary objective found itself in the backseat. New institutions of power had emerged in forms of the two leading amateur theatre groups: Bohurupee and LTG. Thus, a void was being created and craving for a new intervention was growing within: an intervention which would find a way beyond the interested ideology and aesthetics of indifference. What aggravated the crisis was a sheer dearth of good plays on one hand and on the other hand propaganda for the promotion of traditional and indigenous forms from the Central Government and finally the economical crisis and consequent risk of falling into the financial scaffolds of the Government or other financial institutions. Thus Bengali theatre was in the need of someone who would succumb to neither institutional pressure nor be lured by financial benefit and who can also find his way through the aesthetic problems of modernity evident to a post-colonial state. It was Ajitesh who appeared in the Bengali theatre scene with seemingly the promise to fill this vacuum. With only and only theatre in his mind and the

humility of a genius he negotiated with all these obstacles to guide theatre through these times of crisis. He was Passionate towards theatre; and along with passion had a very well thought out structure through which he wanted to receive and learn from both western and regional forms and ultimately, forging out a language of theatre unique in its own sense. Thus Ajitesh was a presence- a presence which perhaps cannot be summed up in a single theoretical formulation for every theoretical formulation is representative and thus exclusionary by birth. But; the only ethics and ideal that Ajitesh sacrificed his life to, was that of being a friend, an equal which perhaps is the most politically difficult task of our times yet a task which is ultimately beyond the capacity of all political theory: of a being a presence at the liminality, at the threshold of an appearance and a disappearance. But Ajitesh lost to life before he could fulfill his promise to the Bengali theatre; but today if there is any way forward for Bengali theatre or for that matter theatre in general, it would have to take into count the ways chartered by Ajitesh.

Endnotes

ⁱ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* Michael Hardt (Trans.), (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 18-19.

ⁱⁱ Bimolendu Dutta, 'Saontal Bidroho, Gana Natya Sangha o Ajitbabu', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 89.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ranjan Gangopadhyay, 'Ajitesh Bandopadhyay ebong Gana Natya Sangha', *Natyanashi* II year. Volume, 12-13.

^{iv} Radharaman Tapadar, 'Amar Ajitda', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 65.

^v Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Abhinetar Diary theke', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 13.

^{vi} In Sombu Mitra's writings too we find vivid descriptions of horrors of contemporary situation in Bengal. Mitra cites those experiences as the reason why he joined Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Organisation.

^{vii} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Theatrer Darshak: atyalpa Abhijog', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 11.

^{viii} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Baiplabik Theatre Ebong Amader Ajker Sangram', *Ajitesh Bandopadhyay: Godyo Sngraha* (Kolkata: Protibhas, 2010), 22.

^{ix} Ajitesh Gangopadhyay, 'Amar Chetanar Rang', in *Ajitesh Bandopadhyay: Godyo Sngraha* (Kolkata: Protibhas, 2010), 19.

^x Samik Bandopadhyay, 'Ajitesh: Theatre-Politics', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 127.

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- ^{xi} Dilip Dutta, 'Ajitesh Bandopadhayer Shakhatkar: Prosongo Theatre', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November, 2010), 148.
- ^{xii} Samik Bandopadhyay, 'Ajitesh: Theatre-Politics', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 127.
- ^{xiii} Frederic Jameson introduces the concept of Pastiche in his work *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (p-16): "The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche."
- ^{xiv} Theatre is inherently political as the audience of theatre is always people united in an arbitrary collective.
- ^{xv} Peter Brook celebrated what he called 'multiculturalism' in his production "Mahabharata".
- ^{xvi} Most of the African intelligentsia.
- ^{xvii} Utpal Dutt, 'Epic-er Sarkatha', *Utpal Dutt Gadya Sangraha Volume-I* (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2011), 280.
- ^{xviii} 'Problems and Directions: Calcutta's New Theatre: A Conversation with Two Critics Dharani Ghosh and Samik Bandyopadhyay', *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 15, No. 2, *Theatre in Asia* (Spring, 1971), 241-245 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144645>>, accessed on 22 October, 2011.
- ^{xix} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Anubad Natak o Moulik Natok', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 8.
- ^{xx} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Anudito Natok', *Ajitesh Bandopadhyay: Godyo Sngraha* (Kolkata: Protibhas, 2010), 26.
- ^{xxi} Ibid, 28
- ^{xxii} Ibid, 27
- ^{xxiii} Ibid
- ^{xxiv} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Anubad Natak o Moulik Natok', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 8.
- ^{xxv} Dilip Dutta, 'Ajitesh Bandopadhayer Shakhatkar: Prosongo Theatre', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November, 2010), 148.
- ^{xxvi} Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, 'Anubad Natak o Moulik Natok', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 9.
- ^{xxvii} Bibhash Chakraborty, 'Ajitesh Bhitore Agun, baire proshanti', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November, 2010), 82.
- ^{xxviii} Bibhash Chakraborty, 'Ajitesh Bhitore Agun, baire proshanti', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November, 2010), 58.
- ^{xxix} Ibid, 59.

^{xxx} Bibhash Chakraborty, 'Ajitesh Bhitore Agun, Baire Proshanti', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 83.

^{xxx}ⁱ Ashok Mukhopadhyay, 'Hey Shomoy uttal shomoy: ajitesh badopadhayer natyo protibha', *Prosongo Abhinay* (Kolkata: Kalabhrit, 2007), 118.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱ Bibhash Chakraborty, 'Ajitesh Bhitore Agun, Baire Proshanti', 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 82.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱⁱ Ashok Mukhopadhyay, 'Hey Shomoy uttal shomoy: ajitesh badopadhayer natyo protibha', *Prosongo Abhinay* (Kolkata: Kalabhrit, 2007), 119.

^{xxx}^{iv} Sandhya Dey, 'Nandikar Theke Nandimukh', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 74.

^{xxx}^v Radharaman Tapadar, 'Amar Ajitda', in 'Prosongo: Ajitesh Bandopadhyay', *Theatre Proscenium Natyapatra* (Kolkata: November 2010), 65.

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Balancing Tradition and Modernity: A reading of Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal*

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Abstract

India, the country of cultural diversity, has a long tradition of dramatic performance with regional specificities. More commonly, it is known as folk tradition/folk theatre. It is the folk theatre that gives the essence of the Indianness. During the 1970s, most of the prominent playwrights of India broke the barriers of regional language and produced many good plays at the national level. Most of their experimental works were centered on bringing the performance tradition or elements of folk theatre of India into the popular theatre. Thus we find Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* (1971) using theatrical devices of Yakshagana, a traditional form of theatre, widespread in Karnataka, Utpal Dutt using jatra in *Surya Sikar* (1972). Badal Sircar, experimented with folk elements of theatre and incorporated them into the proscenium theatre to evolve a new kind of theatre which he called the 'third theatre' or 'street theatre'. Similarly Vijay Tendulkar, like his contemporaries, experimented with various forms of folk theatre in *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). But *Ghasiram Kotwal* is also a different and more important play in balancing tradition and modern in the history of Indian theatre. For an eminently successful and subtle realization of its importance in the long run, it is necessary to discuss the play critically. This paper is therefore an attempt to read how Tendulkar adopted the different folk forms of theatre and used it to represent on stage a power politics and the effects of oppression, a very contemporary and modern/postcolonial issue.

[**Keywords:** Vijay Tendulkar; *Ghasiram Kotwal*; Indian theatre Yakshagana, Indianness, folk]

With the formal end of European colonialism in the 1940s in various parts of the globe a new revisionary phase in literary and cultural productions began. This was true for India as well. But as India is a land of varied culture and language, the search of an Indian culture and tradition that could represent the nation was difficult. After 1947 and during the fifties, therefore, the imaging of a 'nation' particularly in the Indian context of negotiating between tradition and modernity became one of the major preoccupations for several Indian playwrights. Vijay Tendulkar's plays in translation emphasize such ideological concerns very prominently.

Emerging as a Marathi playwright during the 1950s, more specifically known to be the post-Independence or transitional or experimental period of the history of Indian theatre, Vijay Tendulkar, along with his contemporary playwrights began experimenting with various forms in search of a 'new'

theatre – the theatre that could break the barriers of regional traditions and represent the ‘nation’. The search for the new theatre continued with experiments in both content and form. In the 1970s, by suitable mixing of various styles and techniques from Sanskrit, medieval folk and western theatre, modern Indian theatre saw another major experiment – the harnessing together of tradition and modernity. This gave modern Indian theatre a new, versatile and broader approach at every level of creativity.

India, the country of cultural diversity, has a long tradition of dramatic performance with regional specificities. More commonly, it is known as folk tradition / folk theatre. It is the folk theatre that gives the essence of the Indianness. During the 1970s, most of the prominent playwrights of India broke the barriers of regional language and produced many good plays at the national level. Most of their experimental works were centered on bringing the performance tradition or elements of folk theatre of India into the popular theatre. Thus we find Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* (1971) drawing on a twelfth century folk tale using theatrical devices of Yakshagna, a traditional form of theatre, widespread in Karnataka. Karnad’s *Nagamadala* incorporates two separate Kannada folktales but does not follow any particular folk form but gives human representation to inanimate objects through dance and music and with an extensive use of mime dispels the illusion of realistic action. Again, Utpal Dutt in *Surya Sikar* (1972) extensively used devices of Jatra¹, another form of folk theatre popular in Bengal. Badal Sircar, another very prominent playwright of the 1970s experimented with folk elements of theatre and incorporated them into the proscenium theatre to evolve a new kind of theatre which he called the ‘third theatre’ or ‘street theatre’². In addition to the above mentioned productions, there was also Karanth’s production of Chandrasekhar Kambar’s *Jokumaraswami* (in the bayalata form³) and *Barnam vana* (a Yakshagna version of *Macbeth*), Vijaya Mehta’s production of Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (as *Ajab nyaya vartulacha*) and *The Woman of Setzuam* (as *Dewajine karuna keli*) with the conventions of Tamasha. Similarly Vijay Tendulkar, like his contemporaries, experimented with various forms of folk theatre in *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). Through the use of elements of folk theatre, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is at par with the other experimental plays of the 1970s. But *Ghasiram Kotwal* is also a different and more important play in balancing tradition and modern in the history of Indian theatre. For an eminently successful and subtle realization of its importance in the long run, it is necessary to discuss the play critically. This paper is an attempt to read how Tendulkar adopted the different folk forms of theatre and used it to represent on stage a power politics and the effects of oppression, a very contemporary and modern/postcolonial issue.

Ghasiram Kotwal is based on the machinations of power and effects of oppression which was/is a very contemporary issue. To deal with a contemporary and avant-garde theme was not new during the 1970s. *Ghasiram Kotwal*’s uniqueness lies elsewhere. The clever dramatist skillfully dealt with popular and contemporary issues by setting it against the backdrop of the

history of late eighteenth century Maharashtra and using elements of folk theatre subsequently.

The concept of 'time' in Indian philosophy is like a 'wheel' that forever rotates and brings back the same situations again and again. Only the persons to enact those situations change. Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal* represents such a concept of 'time'. Time repeats itself to play the same game of power politics over and over again. Tendulkar works around a three-fold framework of 'time'. Set in the late 18th century, the plot deals with the time frame of the rule of Nana Phadnavis⁴ and documents the degeneration of the socio-political fabric during the last days of the Peshwa rule. Within the perimeters of this historical 'time' frame, the current political situation of the 1970s, – the Shiv Sena and the whole mechanism of that 'time', how everything worked/works, how everything functioned/functions, is explored. Such is the power politics explored in the play that it even has its relevance today in the twenty first century and can probably also go into the future suggesting the 'timelessness' of the theme. The play therefore suggests that the players can change from Nana Phadnavis to Shiv Sena and probably to some Mr. X in the future, but the situation and the game of power politics remain the same.

The plot of the play begins with the first visit of Ghasiram, a Brahman from Kanauj. He finds himself falsely accused of theft and slighted by the Pune Brahmans. This arouses anger in Ghasiram and he swears to take revenge on the city. He snares Nana Phadnavis, the Peshwa's chieftain and magistrate of the city using his young daughter Lalita Gauri. In return, Ghasiram demands to be appointed the Kotwal of the city. He is therefore put in charge of the law and order of the city by the Nana. He unleashes a reign of terror on the city and its Brahmans. These include pulling off the nails of people and then chopping off their hands. While in power, he doesn't even realize that the Nana is using him only to keep the Brahmans in check and that he himself will become a convenient fall guy for Nana once he has accomplished his mentor's dirty job. Thus Ghasiram scourges the city of Brahmans while the Nana savours the innocent charm of young Gauri. When it is quite late, Ghasiram learns that Gauri has died mysteriously when she had gone to the midwife, and Nana is marrying for the seventh time. Insane with rage, the livid father confronts Nana only to be reminded that his daughter's life was a small price to pay for power and privilege. By this time the city Brahmans have also united in a bloodthirsty demand for Ghasiram's death. Nana signs the death warrant as casually as he had granted Ghasiram the kotwali⁵. In the final scene Ghasiram is mobbed by the irate crowd where, semi-crazed, he asks for death. As crowds gather round Ghasiram's lifeless body, Nana appears to herald the end of an age of terror and proposes festivities to mark the purging of the city.

From the outline of the plot it is clear that the 'content' of the play deals with a universal issue. Though it portrays historical figures, it operates at an allegorical level, commenting acerbically on the political situations of the present day India where scores of Ghasirams are made and marred each time the political scene is cast anew. The key success of any play is a proper balance between its content and form. The form of any play should be such that it

enhances an easy understanding of the content. The choice of a suitable form and performance style is therefore very important.

The performance style of *Ghasiram Kotwal* is heavily influenced by the conventions and folk theatrical devices. Tendulkar made ingenious use of folk art to launch an attack on negative societal elements. But unlike *Hayavadana* that used only devices of Yakshagna; or *Surya Sikar* that used elements of Jatra, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is an attempt to integrate various musical forms into Marathi theatre. Tendulkar experimented not only with the Sangit Nataka genre but also borrowed ingredients from folk theatre that includes Tamasha⁶, Dashavatari Khel⁷, Yakshagna⁸, Lavani⁹ (love ballad), Abhanga¹⁰ and kirtan¹¹ (devotional songs). The dramaturgy of the play therefore appears in fact to be consciously constructed around ironic shifts between the elements of various folk traditions so as to prevent the privileging of any one performance code.

It is rather surprising that Vijay Tendulkar, who always preferred to use naturalism as a technique for his plays, would use folk elements in *Ghasiram Kotwal*. Not just in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, he has used the style in a couple of other plays as well. One was initially a play for children, *Raja Rani ko Chaiye Pasina*. Even before that he tried the form of 'Tamasha' in legitimate theatre but did not succeed. And after *Ghasiram*, Tendulkar's *Vittela* (1985) too has music as a key component. This shows that Tendulkar had an obvious interest in the musical form. But the question that arises here is - why did he choose the form of the musical for a play with such a serious content? Tendulkar himself answered-

...not that I was not interested in a musical but I cannot think of a form first and then look for a subject that will suit the form. I had a couple of folk forms (not the popular ones) in my mind for the last few years and yet have not been able to do anything with them. *Ghasiram* started with a theme, then came the specific 'story' or incident which was historical and then the search for the form began. I knew that the usual naturalistic treatment was out of the question. By a series of accidents I discovered the present form which is a combination of a variety of ingredients from different folk forms of Maharashtra. (Intro. *Ghasiram Kotwal*)

Though the incident of *Ghasiram Kotwal* is historical, the context has a universal and timeless quality. The play exploits the machinations of power politics, also called deputationist politics, where the person in power uses certain institutions to carry out tasks for him so that the common man does not see the real perpetrator of the crime. When the need arises the men at the lower rungs are removed to pacify the people for some time and the person in power become their saviour, protector, an upholder of their rights. Further the game of power politics is a class phenomena and not individual-oriented. So, this particular form, using elements of folk tradition, perfectly fits the playwrights' agenda of representing a class or a multitude as the central character. According to the dramatist, the present title also therefore suggests the incident and not the character Ghasiram Kotwal. It unites the public and the private beings of a man. It is the transformation of Ghasiram from a simple

unassuming man into a hubristic power-crazy monster. He is the unsuspecting victim of a Machiavellian system embodied in the machinations of Nana. The true villain, Nana, emerges unscathed from turmoil that marked the rise and fall of Ghasiram. Therefore, the form of indigenous folk tradition has become a very appropriate form for the representation of the context of individuals playing the game of politics, taking advantage of situations, rising to power, and crashing to impotence at the whims of the ones more powerful in the same game – a typical phenomenon in almost any political complex.

The opening of the play follows more or less exactly the rituals of the Dashavatari Khel where a song of invocation is sung by the sutradhar¹² and his orchestra. Tendulkar begins the play with the group of twelve men chanting the invocatory song as Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi, impersonated by actors enter the stage dancing. This song of invocation prays for a successful performance.

All that we ask for—

The success for this play! (Act I, 11)

Though Tendulkar begins the play with the rituals of Dashavatari Khel, his dramaturgy is completely innovative. He cleverly calls the group of twelve men as 'All'. The 'All' can be equated to the idea of 'chorus' of the western theatre. Though this group of twelve men is never called the "Chorus" by the dramatist, like the Chorus of the ancient Greek drama, this 'All' too is used by the dramatist to introduce, comment on the actions of the characters as well as itself play the role of a character. He only uses the concept of the Chorus sometimes breaking it to portray them as the Brahmans of Pune while at other times they form a line to represent the human wall. This shows that the dramatist is well aware of the western plays and possesses the capability of using the western form according to his own convenience.

The 'human wall' or the 'human curtain' that the group of twelve men forms is another very attractive and innovative a technique used by Tendulkar. According to Shanta Ghokale, "the human curtain of a dozen rhythmically-swaying Brahmans, which closes to hide or parts to reveal action, is not merely a theatrical device." (Gokhale, *On Ghasiram Kotwal*) The device is modified by the playwright from the curtain dance of the Yakshagna tradition. In the Yakshagna, people hold a small curtain and use it to hide the entry of the characters. Then they dance with the curtain. But in *Ghasiram Kotwal* the twelve men form a line to give it the shape of the human curtain. Tendulkar has used this device to create an environment of intrigue, hypocrisy, greed and brutality. This Brahman line or the Brahmans of the human curtain sing and dance the chants of saints and gods with their backs towards the audience. Again it is this curtain that serves as a screen of complacency or consolation cast over the yawning horror of corruption and tyranny. There are instances when the curtain drowns the scream of the tortured Brahmans, while at other times it is this curtain again that dissolves and the Brahmans stand as individuals with whom the Sutradhar converse. The same Brahman curtain that chants is made again at times to transform into a group sitting in Gulabi's hall

in Bavannakhani – the reiterated image of the red light district. Thus the formation and breaking up of the human wall serves as an excellent symbol of secrecy, hiding and revealing happenings by the human devices. What is most notable in the use of the human wall is the excellent harmony of its movement, taken from the traditional folk dance, with that of the music that sets the mood and tempo of the decadent and bawdy era.

The idea of the character of Sutradhar is also taken from Indian traditional theatre. In the traditional theatre, the Sutradhar appears only in the beginning of the play to introduce the play to the audience. Tendulkar uses the concept of the Sutradhar in a modified form. Tendulkar's Sutradhar functions at multiple levels. The Sutradhar enters the stage only after the benedictory scene is over and the impersonated Ganapati, Saraswati and Laksmi leave the stage. He is present throughout the play as a Sutradhar, linking the various parts of the plot as well as assuming various characters, like the Haridasa chanting the Kirtan or a city Brahman. At other times, the Sutradhar acts more as a coordinator between the audience and the actors and comments on the action of the play. In the very first entry the Sutradhar addresses the audience to introduce the Brahmans of Pune:

SUTRADHAR: (saying 'Ho Ho' to all, stops the singing)
 These are all Brahmans from Poona.
 Who are you? (Act I, 12)

This interaction with the audience as well as playing a part of the play by the Sutradhar itself is handled very technically by Tendulkar.

Ghasiram Kotwal is in most places termed as a musical historical play. But as pointed out earlier, Tendulkar never intended to write a historical play. But he also admits to have extensively used music and dance as well as a mixture of prose and verse to make the play entertaining. A close observance of the music and dance clearly reveals the author's implicit purpose of using it in the play. On behalf of the playwright's comment, the music and dance signify a lot.

Most of the songs used in the play are reintegrated into the narrative. They do not just indicate the mood of the situation but are also vehicles of comment, most often ironic.

SUTRADHAR (*to the beat of the dholki drum*):
 Night comes.
 Poona Brahmans go
 To Bavannakhani.
 ...
 They go to the temple – as they have done every day.
 The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani.

The Brahmans make a curtain with backs towards audience. The curtain sings and sways.

Ravi Shiva Hari
 Mukunda Murari
 Radhakrishna Hari

The street of Bavanna became for a while
The garden of Krishna.

(Act I, 16-17)

These and many more songs throughout the play ironically comment on the morals of the Brahmans of Pune. The lyrics, too, are written in several forms and prosodic meters therefore adding layers of ironical meaning to the text. For example in the above quoted song the Sutradhar sings is written in Kirtan mode. Kirtan, the traditional performing art, is meant to impart spiritual and moral instructions in the form of tales. The idea of the Kirtan leads to 'darshan' - a glimpse of the divine idol through its lyrics is its real meaning. But in this case the playwright wants by the use of the word 'kirtan' to hint at the lascivious songs sung by the dancing women and the 'darshan' indicates the glimpse of the dancing women. Sex, death and worship are all bound together in this song.

This song is followed by the swaying human curtain chanting the names of Krishna. This is again of the manner of the kirtankar¹³ who punctuates his narrative. The lyrics ironically bring together the images of institutionalized sexuality and institutionalized religiosity in an unholy combination - the reiterated image of Bavannakhani, the red light district, turned into the pleasure garden of Krishna.

Bavannakhani Mathura avatarli - Mathura descends on Bavannakhani.
(Act I, 18)

Here again the playwright juxtaposes the Brahmans nocturnal visit to the courtesans' quarters with Krishna sporting with the milkmaids in Mathura.

Tendulkar even used the Lavani, or the love songs accompanied by the dance of Gulabi to create an erotic mood. The lavani, the beatings of the Mridanga-drum and the entrance of the Nana in rhythm with the beats of the tabla is a classic creation where Tendulkar suggests the sexuality implicit in power. The dancing steps of the Nana, followed by his spraining of his foot, his limping a few steps on one leg and the string of rhythmical questions by the Sutradhar suggests the use of double visual pun by Tendulkar. While the dance steps create the pace of the play and Nana's hopping around on one leg becomes a visual image of lechery, the string of questions hints that the fall and spraining of the leg is the result of Nana's being where he ought not to have been.

In another scene, where Ghasiram is accused of being the thief and thrown into the audience so that he could rise up again to promise his revenge on the Brahmans of Pune, Tendulkar has used an excellent blend of classical music, dance, the abhanga and the lavani. And this is noted in the directions of the playwright itself.

A Hindi devotional song with the Mridanga-drum begins. The Brahman line, with no turbans, hands to ears, do accompaniments. End of Kawali, all turn backs. Soldier enters. Throws Ghasiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers, etc., all stand and look down on Ghasiram.

(Act I, 26)

This particular note of the playwright gives a complete picture of the scene. Tendulkar has used a Kawali¹⁴ here to depict the pathetic condition of innocent Ghasiram. Such is the condition of Ghasiram that he can recover only under the mercy of God. So probably, Tendulkar has used Kawali here to show how Ghasiram struggles and pines for a way to receive justice against the wrong. This is juxtaposed with the turning of the innocent Ghasiram into a devil. The Kawali is followed by a forceful beat of the Mridanga and Ghasiram's dance to its beat. The dance is vigorous and is called a 'war dance' which entails Ghasiram's banging his fist in the dust. This dance depicts Ghasiram's conversion from an innocent Kanauj Brahman to the revengeful Kotwal. Merged with this dance is another note of the playwright which features the blend of the different types of songs to explain the scene.

... Four stand as accompanists for the kirtan. Some Brahman women enter and sit in the stage audience. ...

The abhanga changes to a lavani – a change from a religious song to a love ballad. The Haridasa sings a lavani. Suddenly an abhanga. Back to lavani. Nana in lavani state of mind. The last of the sermon – repetition of God's names – comes loudly. Nana looks unblinkingly at a pretty girl. She is beautiful, shy, and innocent. .. The girl goes to bow at the Haridasa's feet. Falls at his feet. Nana steps towards her like a cat. All go but the girl stays behind, prays before Ganapati. Nana gestures to the servant to close the door. (Act I, 27)

In the above quoted direction of the author, the whole scene becomes distinct to the readers as well as to the performers of the play. At the same time this scene can be seen as the playwright's best experimental spot where he mixes almost every element of performance art that he has used elsewhere in the play. We find here the enactment of a Kirtan with the Sutradhar as the kirtankar narrating a religious tale. Amidst this narration another tale of lust and lechery is gestured by Nana and the women around. The whole scene depicts that it is time for the kirtan to begin, and time for Nana to eye the young maidens who come to listen. The blend of the abhanga – a devotional song and the lavani – the love song, by the Haridasa is also noteworthy. The mixer of the "abhangas" (devotional songs) with the "Lavanis" (Love songs) actually highlights the moral corruption of the Brahmans as they try to hide their lust behind the respectability of religion. Moreover the Abhanga also becomes a metaphor for the oppressor, who uses piety as a façade.

Tendulkar has also used the form of "Tamasha" in this play. In Tamasha, music and dance is the central attraction that reveals the story. *Ghasiram Kotwal* too has used a lot of singing and dancing. The use of the Tamasha also ensures the presence of some colourful language. For example, when Nana and Ghasiram are talking about the barter of Gauri for the kotwal-ship,

NANA: Bastard. You've got me in a narrow pass.

GHASIRAM: Yes, the narrow pass of my only daughter.

(Act I, 34)

we find in the conversation a repetition in dialogue. The same appears at other places of the play. Tendulkar specifically uses this repetition in dialogue to bring a comic relief in the play as it speaks ironically about a serious situation.

BRAHMAN: Oy.Oy. You son of bitch. Don't you have eyes and ears?

SUTRADHAR: I'm sorry, O priestly Brahman.

BRAHMAN: Don't you have any manners?

SUTRADHAR: I'm very sorry, O lordly Brahman.

BRAHMAN: Don't you have any brains?

SUTRADHAR: I'm very sorry, O honoured Brahman. (Act I, 14)

The technique of repetition is partly derived from the tradition of children's tales and partly from the tradition of Tamasha. Tendulkar twists the repetition from its normal shape with the questions in between. This kind of quick repartee occurs in the Tamasha, where the songdya, the comic character, generally has the upper hand over the sutradhar. Here of course the situation is reversed. The Brahman represents the establishment and the sutradhar has taken the role of the comic character.

It is therefore observed that Tendulkar has used various folk forms but twisted and turned it into the shape that suits the play best. The dramaturgy of the play appears in fact to be consciously constructed around ironic shifts between these elements so as to prevent the privileging of any one performance code.

The concept of traditional Indian theatre immediately brings into our mind the thought of the *Natyashastra*. "*Natyashastra*" is the compendium of Sanskrit dramatic and theatrical theory and practice. To some extent, most of the folk traditions have also incorporated the theory of *Natyashastra*. According to this *Natyashastra*, the whole aesthetic of Hindu drama and art comprises the conception of *bhava* and *rasa*. The grammar book of the Indian theatre describes 'bhava' to be of nine types: love, laughter, pathos, anger, energy, fear, disgust, wonder and quietude and 'rasa' to be also of nine types: erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrible, odious, marvelous and spiritual peace. Tendulkar's use of music and dance added ample scope to the expressions of the *bhava* and *rasa* of the play. Thus we find expressions of love and the erotic mood through the Lavani and Gulabi's dance in Bavannakhani, the expressions of anger, furious and terrible through the forceful dance steps of Ghasiram and in the very movement of characters on the stage. Through their dialogues all the *bhava* and *rasa* is expressed consistently in the play.

Moreover Hindu theorists from the earliest days conceived the plays in terms of two types of production: *lokadharmi* - realistic i.e., the re-production of human behaviour on the stage and the natural presentation of objects, and *natyadharmi* - conventional, which is presentation of a play through the use of stylized gestures and symbolism and was considered more artistic than the realistic mode. *Ghasiram Kotwal*, in that sense, can be said to be both *lokadharmi* and *natyadharmi*. The depictions of contemporary realistic issue of power politics make the play *lokadharmi* whereas the use of folk forms, music and dance to present the theme in stylized gestures and symbolism makes it *natyadharmi*.

Traditional theatre is predominantly an audience conscious theatre. There is always an intimate relation between the actor and the audience. Tendulkar paid attention to this aspect of actor-audience relationship as well. In the traditional theatre most of the performances used to take place in the open air theatre. The devices used were the entries and exits of the actors from the audience, addressing the audience during the action of the play, commenting upon a situation while the action takes place on the stage. Tendulkar managed to use these devices in a proscenium theatre. This was challenging as well as unique. In a scene, where Ghasiram is accused as a thief, the soldiers throw Ghasiram out in the audience with force.

...soldier enters. Throws Ghasiram out in audience with force. On stage: Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha lovers Etc., all stand and look down on Ghasiram. (Act I, 16)

And again it is the new, raging, tormented, changed, revengeful Ghasiram that rises from the audience.

Soldier wipes his hands. Those on stage, go. In the audience, the tormented Ghasiram. (Act I, 16)

In another instance:

Ghasiram walks into the audience looks at the scene on the stage and laughs viciously.

GHASIRAM: (suddenly cries out loud). Now he's in my hands ...Oh, my daughter...the beast ... (then yells at the audience.) oh, you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter- a whore. ... spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. (Act I, 31)

Tendulkar used the 'actor-audience relationship' technique of the traditional theatre with a broader prospect. Ghasiram's throwing into the audience symbolically indicates that Ghasiram is no one, historical character but a common human being who at times becomes the toy in the hands of the power players. Again Ghasiram's walking into the audience and delivering his dialogue as one of them clearly involves the audience also into the action of the play. The audience cannot sit back and relax but studies the situations on the conscious level.

A conscious attempt to utilize the kinesics and gestural codes of the Indian theatrical traditions has enabled Tendulkar to question the contemporary values and phenomena from a radical position. This ironic commentary through the use of traditional performance code made the play a great success worldwide. At the same time, it is for this ironic commentary that the play faced a number of objections during its first performance. It was objected to on the grounds that (a) it was anti-Brahman, (b) the character of Nana Phadnavis, a cult hero, was portrayed in an unsavory light and (c) there was fear of revolt in the audience.

These observations show that *Ghasiram Kotwal* is attacked on peripheral counts than on its basic assumptions. The basic assumption and intention of the playwright was to depict the power game in general terms. Tendulkar had in his mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghasiram; also those who create, and help Ghasirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghasirams. Incidentally, during the period that Tendulkar depicts in the play, the Brahmans were in power. So in order to set up the atmosphere of the late 18th century Maharashtra, Tendulkar had to expose the corruption and pretensions of the Brahmans then. This depiction, as the playwright admits is to recount the power game played out in terms of caste ascendancy in politics rather than to humiliate the Brahmans.

Again, the character of Nana Phadnavis has been used by Tendulkar for the sole purpose of highlighting all those who are in power and thus can exploit the downtrodden. It is true that Nana Phadnavis is a historical character. But in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, the character of Nana is historical only in his name. As a character, both Nana and Ghasiram are part of twentieth century society and their actions are therefore not melodramatic but in keeping with the form, expressing the natural.

Though the play faced a number of objections initially it still remains as the most popular Marathi/Indian drama of the twentieth century. Tendulkar's achievement resides in his ability to refashion a universal theme of power politics using traditional performance techniques in such a way that the play can stand up to the severest critical scrutiny.

It is true that *Ghasiram Kotwal* showcases the oppression and cruelty of rulers in the pre-Independence era. But its great success till date shows the universality of its theme. When Ghasiram, in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, uses the power to oppress the citizens of Pune, it can be seen as a glimpse of each power drunk official in any political complex. The metaphor of Pune tyrants can be visualized with the anarchy and annihilation of the marginalized, untouchables, Blacks, subalterns, aboriginals, the underprivileged, peasants and small traders and manufacturers and the like world over. Even the post-modern practices of Neoliberalism and Globalization may be explained well with Marathi folk theatrical device of human curtain containing Pune Brahmans. Again the Pune Brahmans are the best metaphors for the global ruling class and Indian Hindu hegemonic practices. In all respects, *Ghasiram Kotwal* happens to be most relevant in the present day scenario.

Therefore, both in its thematic and technical strategies, *Ghasiram Kotwal* is an outstanding and innovative experiment that offers a new direction to modern Indian theatre. *Ghasiram Kotwal* proves that the traditional forms need not be treated as precious artifacts, but can be adopted to explore modern themes suitable for the urban audience.

Endnotes

¹ **Jatra:** Jatra corresponds to folk theatre. It is the enactment of a play with a cast and comprises music, dance, acting, singing and dramatic conflict. Earlier, religious values were communicated to the masses through the powerful medium of jatra. Today, the style of writing or jatras has undergone changes. Jatra plays are now no longer limited to the mythological, historical or fantastical subjects but include social themes to suit modern theatre. Jatra is performed on a simple stage with the spectators surrounding it on all sides. The chorus and musicians take their position off stage. It is a great source of entertainment because of its traditional music with simple melodic lines, dance sequences, songs, action and humour.

² **Third theatre/street theatre:** Street theatre as a form of art and culture has its strength in the writings of Badal Sircar. He also calls it third theatre or free theatre. According to him, first and the second theatre describe the normal folk art form and the Victorian art form respectively. His plays bring out the social and political message in a more straight and simple way having a definite rhythm of its own. It is mostly performed in areas such as the market place, the parks, the playgrounds and even in front of office or house. It is a vehicle to provide social, political and domestic showcase. It is the parameter to develop more consciousness among the people.

³ **Bayalata form** or bayal atada is a form of Yakshagna found in the southern Indian region of Karnataka, featuring stories of Hindu mythology and Puranas rendered as dance/drama. Bayalata literally means open theatre drama, and marks the end of harvest season. The most popular theme for bayalata is the story of *Koti Channaye*, which has deep rooted mythical significance in Tulu Nadu.

⁴ **Nana Phadnavis**, according to history, was the chancellor of the Peshwa during the period 1773-1800. The Maratha Empire remained free of British aggression with Nana's astute political strategy and statesmanship. In an extant letter to the Peshwa, even Marquess Wellesley described him thus: "The able minister of your state, whose upright principles and honourable views and whose zeal for the welfare and prosperity both of the dominions of his own immediate superiors and of other powers were so justly celebrated."

⁵ **Kotwali:** the work of the city guard. It also means the authority holding the power of law and order of the city.

⁶ **Tamasha** literary means 'fun' or 'playful entertainment'. It is the most popular folk form of Marathi theatre. There are two main types of Tamasha, *Dholkibari* ('dholak's turn: private and outdoor) and *Sangitbari* ('music's turn: private and indoors). The *Dholkibari* is performed in an open air theatre and is accompanied by song and dance. In most cases the style of dance resembles the spinning movements of Kathak. Several instruments are used of which the Dholak is primary – from which it gets its name. The *Sangitbari* Tamasha is performed mostly by women. They do not dance but sing and act out in seated style and the Songadhya creates humour. Some researchers do not consider it to be true Tamasha.

⁷ **Dashavatari Khel** is another very popular Marathi and Konkani theatre form depicting the story of any one of Vishnu's ten avatars – from which the form gets its name. The original story of the Marathi theatre is traced to this folk tradition. The structure of the Dashavatari Khel retains some feature of the Sanskrit theatre. It

consists of two parts the Purvaranga or the prologue, and the Uttaranga or the latter performance. It begins with the Sutradhar sitting in front of a small curtain with his orchestra of musicians playing harmonium and other instruments. The Uttaranga deals with the mythological comic episodes of killing Sankhasur, a demon who had stolen the Vedas. This episode also satirizes contemporary socio-political life. The play proper presents an instructive dramatization of an avatar's story.

⁸ **Yakshagna** as a generic term refers mainly to a traditional form of Kannada theatre predominant in coastal Karnataka. 'Yakshas' form a class of demigods in Hindu mythology, but their connection to this genre remains unclear. It is generally performed in a plot demarcated on the ground or a raised platform with green rooms at the back and the audience sitting around the other three sides. The musicians sit on a table at the rear of the stage. No stage props are used. "the absence of scenery is made up for by theatrical conventions: a small hand-held curtain conceals the entry of characters, who then execute an elaborate and attractive curtain dance."

⁹ **Lavani** is a form of musical discussion popular in Maharashtra and southern Madhya Pradesh. The word Lavani comes from the word 'lavanya' which means beauty. It is a combination of traditional song and dance, which is particularly performed to the enchanting beats of Dholak. In most of the songs, meaningless chants are introduced to fill up the gaps between the lines. This music of the folk performance is called Maanch and has a texture of its own. Being a kind of love ballad that is sung, traditionally, the Lavani has been associated with prostitution to some extent.

¹⁰ **Abhanga** is a devotional hymn.

¹¹ **Kirtana** is generically Hindu devotional singing, but specifically an ancient Marathi performing art, popular even today. Its basic impulse is to impart spiritual and moral instructions in the form of tales. In Maharashtra two traditions exist: Naradiya, in temples and Varkari, taking place anywhere.

¹² **Sutradhar** in the traditional theatre, "it is the title given to a person whose role is to create a link between the performer, the performance and the audience. He introduces the play and never comes back. But in the modern plays, we find the functions of Sutradhar on multiple levels. He not only introduces the play but also raise certain issues which are to be discussed in the total scheme of the play.

¹³ **Kirtankar**- the main performer of kirtan

¹⁴ **Kawali** is a genre of Muslim devotional songs originating with Amir Khusru and sung mainly by Sufi devotees. The word Kawali comes from the Arabic word 'Qaol' which means "axiom" or "dictum". The language of the kawali is Urdu. It is usually sung in a group with a main singer, or kawaal and a chorus. The dholak is used to maintain the rhythm which is accompanied by clapping, a distinct peculiarity of kawali songs. There is a change of pace and tune between the kawaal and the chorus which claps in time to the rhythm. The clapping increases in tempo as the song proceeds. The development of the kawali up to the latter part of the Mughal empire closely parallels the development of the Hindu religious songs known as bhajan.

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Ravaged Bodies, Embodied Performance: Performativity in Dattani's *Brief Candle*

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Abstract

Brief Candle, Mahesh Dattani's latest play concerns itself with the plight of cancer patients but in the process takes important strides in performativity. This paper is an attempt to evaluate performance and performativity within the theatrical space through an analysis of the centrally dominant stage prop, the mask or 'Face of Cancer' and performing bodies. Touching upon the genealogy of Performance Studies as a discipline and its intricate and fraught relationship with the theatre I seek to explore performative elements in the play. I also seek to look at the 'derogated', cancerous body as a charged site of performativity and argue that bio-medical and technological intervention crucially transforms the human body. The play could also be read as a space that explores the post-human body and its performative possibilities.

[**Keywords:** Mahesh Dattani; *Brief Candle*; Performance Studies; human body, interdisciplinarity]

Mahesh Dattani's recent play *Brief Candle* deals with the plight of cancer patients. The play's social concern is part of Dattani's response to everyday social problems and the ways in which the urban individual has to live through an array of such hurdles. This paper is not an analysis of the thematic issues and concerns of *Brief Candle*. Rather it is an attempt to see how Dattani evokes these themes through an exploration of the performative within the context of the theatre.

Directed by Lilette Dubey, *Brief Candle* was first performed on the 5th of July 2009 at Mumbai by the Prime Time Theatre Company and the play was published by Penguin in 2010. In the words of Mahesh Dattani, "In the play you have survivors of cancer who are in the process of putting up a comedy play as a fund raiser for their hospice." (Dattani, 3) Hence at the very centre of the play lies another play, a play within the play, rehearsals for it and its staging. The play within is an energetic farce put up by the cancer patients of the hospital and is written by Vikas, an energetic and spirited young man who is also, ironically, a victim of cancer and is already dead by the time his play is staged. Dattani does it through nine brief scenes that alternate between rehearsals for the play and characters in their real life situations. At one level Dattani, seems to have picked up a cause here and is seeking to present the plights of cancer patients, their

gruesome pain and struggle as they carry on with everyday life. But beneath this message of social concern lies his keen sense of the performative and theatre. Hence while the play's message is important, it never overshadows or controls the performative/theatrical dimension of his play. In the manipulation of the rehearsals, in its metatheatricality, in the stagecraft and the use of performative symbols, and finally in its brilliant use of the bio-medical body that tends towards the post human, *Brief Candle* provides an imploring case-study of the performative and the theatrical. I seek to examine the play-text against these preliminary tropes and evaluate the nature of the performative and its intersection with material bodies in *Brief Candle*. I would return to the play but before that it is important to take a closer look at the idea of performance in a contemporary culture and its relation with theatre.

Recent academic activity has increasingly been emphasizing the dynamic multiplicity of performance and performativity in a global culture. In fact the very word 'performance' may mean a lot of things at the same time. A quick look at the etymological origins of 'performance' shows a consistent addition of meanings with the passage of time and any contemporary dictionary entry on performance points to an array of possible meanings suggesting the multiplicity of performance contexts in a contemporary culture. Moreover, even within a particular context, say of cultural performances, it may have a very different set of meanings and effects. For Shannon Jackson:

Performance conventionally employs bodies, motion, space, affect, image, and words; its analysis at times aligns with theories of embodiment, at times with studies of emotion, at times with architectural analysis, at times with studies of visual culture, and at times with critiques of linguistic exchange.... The many registers of performance thus have many registers of meaning. (Jackson, 13-14)

Although as a discipline, Performance studies has its origins in events roughly in the 1960s, it begins its journey as a proper academic discipline in the 1980s with Richard Schechner and the New York University. For Peggy Phelan, however, the origin story of Performance studies was an intriguing one in which "two men gave birth" (Phelan, 3). The other man was of course Victor Turner, and the narrative of the beginning, for Shannon Jackson,

focuses on Schechner's generative interactions with the anthropologist, Victor Turner, who took the study of performance beyond the proscenium stage and into the carnivals, festivals, protests, and other cultural rituals of an intercultural world....It is also a heroic story of disciplinary breaking and remaking, one framed by the language of the rebel, the renegade, and later, incorporating new schools of critical theory, the subversive and the resistant. (Jackson, 8)

For Schechner, '...The world no longer appeared as a book to be read but as a performance to participate in' (Schechner, 19) and that Performance Studies is 'a response to an increasingly performative world' (Schechner, 4). As Simon Shepard and Mick Wallis point out, for Schechner,

While globalisation promotes 'cultural sameness' Performance Studies promotes 'tensions and partialities'. It resists hierarchies of 'ideas, organisations, or people' and is 'sympathetic to the avant-garde, the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized'. It works best 'amidst a dense web of connections' (Shepherd, 105).

In *Professing Performance*, Shannon Jackson on the one hand establishes such a 'dense web of connections' and the interdisciplinarity of Performance Studies and on the other warns against easy binarizations in relation to other disciplines, especially theatre studies. In the chapter 'Discipline and Performance: Genealogy and Discontinuity', Jackson refers to the myriad ways in which the emerging discipline of Performance Studies connects and disconnects with other streams and disciplines, pointing to the 'varied and contradictory referentiality of performance'. In terms of reiteration, for example, on the one hand lies theorists like Schechner and Butler who emphasize repetition in performance while for Peggy Phelan, performance is fundamentally non-repeatable. This leads Jackson to observe that

In sum, performance is about doing, and it is about seeing; it is about image, embodiment, space, collectivity, and/or orality; it makes community and it breaks community; it repeats endlessly and it never repeats; it is intentional and unintentional, innovative and derivative, more fake and more real. Performance's many connotations and its varied intellectual kinships ensure that an interdisciplinary conversation around this interdisciplinary site rarely will be neat and straightforward. Perhaps it is time to stop assuming that it should. (Jackson, 15)

It is against this theoretical backdrop that I seek to examine the extremely fraught relation between theatre and performance. While it is evident that a contemporary performance context and hence performance itself seeks to move beyond the limits of theatre, there is also no reason to believe that performance and performativity profess an altogether ideological and ontological disconnect with theatre. Thus any academic engagement with performance would point to multiple possibilities rather than limitations and it is fascinating to observe how drama, theatre and performance extend upon each other in an extremely fraught, contrived and dramatic relationship. Jackson refers to Schechner's analogy of the pie in the context of performances; that

Richard Schechner's proposed "new paradigm" for performance studies positions theatre as "a very small slice of the performance pie," one amongst many instances that could also include "rock concerts, discos,

electioneering, wrestling, con games, and demonstrations, and a panoply of religious rituals.” (Jackson, 80)

It must be understood that since the emergence of performance studies and the fascinating fields of performance was a historical shift away from theatre studies and was the next step from traditional theatre, it had to relegate theatre to the margins. Yet even performance studies cannot actually deny or overlook the signification of performance within theatre, ‘the small slice of the performance pie’. Traversing between the genealogies of literature, drama and cultural studies, Shannon Jackson in the chapter ‘Culture and Performance: Structures of Dramatic Feeling’ hints towards this inherent relationship between theatre and performance suggesting that the project of performance studies is not independent of the project of modern drama. Jackson points out that not only is it difficult to maintain binary oppositions between old theatre studies and new performance studies but also difficult to elide it. It is with this awareness that I suggest that even within the framework of the theatre, the performative can be sought for and that the new inroads into performance studies can only enrich the theatre and theatricality instead of delimiting its concerns. The elements of the theatre, its props, set, lights, music, costumes and characters repeatedly perform and stretch the limits of theatre and performance.

This is all the more true for the plays by Mahesh Dattani. Scholarship on Dattani has been focusing primarily on his evocation of ‘invisible issues’, his attitudes towards gender and the marginalized in the context of the contemporary Indian society. But at the same time his sharp sense of the theatre and performance, of performing bodies in various contexts deserve more attention. Indeed stagecraft has always been an important concern in Dattani. He has been a playwright who has shown a keen awareness of the stage and his sharp use of the stage-space has always celebrated the plurality of theatrical communication. In an interview to Anita Nair, Dattani pointed out that, “I see myself as a craftsman and not as a writer. To me, being a playwright is about seeing myself as part of the process of a production. I write plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium” and again, that, “Theatre to me is a reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre.” It is this sense of the acute balance between the importance of the message and the performative mode of the theatre that crucially informs Dattani’s plays. The key themes of his plays never turn out to be overly didactic, nor does he seem to be preaching or professing ideas—they emerge softly, underscored by the performative brilliance of the elements onstage.

One particular feature of Dattani’s craft of the stage is the use of a multi-level stage set with different levels connoting different planes in time and space. *Brief Candle* also uses ‘a composite set’ and the stage direction mentions that ‘A gauze curtain will separate spaces’. (Dattani, 7) Dattani keeps the stage direction simple at the beginning and even in the later scenes it is simply a mention of the

changes in the basic set—whether it is the hospice, the hotel room or at the rehearsals. There is a 'Face of Cancer', a large mask, at the very centre and the stage levels are stroked around it. These levels separate the time and space of Vikas and the rehearsals, the hospice and the hotel. Through simple changes in the set and manipulation of the light, the director could suggest separate spaces in a performance.

However, the mask of cancer deserves more critical attention. Within the multi-level set structure, the centrality of the 'Face of Cancer' is too glaring to be missed and it dominates the set in terms of not only its position but also the size. Dattani had used masks elsewhere, for example, in *Final Solutions*, to signify the varying religious attitudes of the chorus. In *Brief Candle* the mask remains onstage throughout the play as a visible reminder to the pain of the cancer patients, their gruesome struggle in putting up a smile. It stays throughout the performance as a silent, persistent symbol, a repository of all the struggles and sorrows the cancer patients are passing through in the play. But the mask does more than simply emerge as a theatrical symbol and I would posit that the static 'Face of Cancer' in the play *performs*. This is also where Dattani extends the limits of his theatrical prop and transforms it, lending a performative edge to an otherwise static prop. In the stage directions, Dattani suggests that the 'Face of Cancer' is 'a large three-dimensional mask' and that 'it could be abstract'. (7) In its almost monumental presence, the mask remains a spectacle and immediately arrests visual attention of the audience. Even in its static presence the mask is thus exhibitionistic and performative. I am using the term 'performative' for the mask in the sense that in its overt, extended rendering, in its huge abstraction, its sheer theatricality and a 'spectacular' presence; the mask is performative—it performs the corporeal pain of the cancer patient and also carries with it the social markings of the pain. In this sense, the mask is akin to what Rebecca Schneider calls the 'explicit body' in performance, although in a different context.

In her monumental work, Schneider looks at feminist performance art and locates layers of signification and 'explication' of the body in such art. She notes that "much explicit body performance replays, across the body of the artist as stage, the historical drama of gender or race (and sometimes, brilliantly, gender and race)." (Schneider, 3) Although *Brief Candle* isn't explicitly about race and gender, the explication of the body on the mask suggests other social inscriptions. The performance of the mask is not only at the level of the materiality of the pain but also at the socio-cultural implications of being a cancer patient—the mask also performs the social stigma of the cancer patient. I am considering the idea of 'explication' with reference to the performative dimension of the mask because of its 'loudly' etched features, the inscription of destruction and ravage on the face itself, the huge abstraction of the face and the hollowness that it carries.

Having said that, I would suggest that there is yet another level to the performative dimension of the mask. This is when the static stage prop of the

mask is transformed as it were, into a dynamic entity and it participates in the dramatic action. At this level, the dynamic mask performs yet again the pain of the cancer patients but equally suggests a movement beyond that, developing intimate connections between different stage entities. This is brilliantly achieved in Scene III of the play. The scene begins with Deepika who makes an effort to sound professional about the play but is unable to conceal her sense of attachment to Vikas, the playwright. As Deepika, Shanti and Amrinder discuss the play and its author, Vikas appears at the higher, non-realistic level of the stage. The stage directions tell us that "Vikas appears strumming a guitar. At the top of the fret is tied a mask similar to the face. It dangles and dances almost to the music, sometimes in front of the actors." (Dattani, 23) The large, static 'Face of Cancer' is thus replicated and transformed into a smaller, mobile mask which is controlled by Vikas and dangles by turns in front of Amrinder, Shanti, Amol and even Deepika. The characters respond to the mask also in turns and gradually unveil their own stories of marginalization, as cancer patients. What is interesting here is that the characters always speak looking at, reacting and responding to the dangling mask. The mask hence is here used as a pointer to the unfolding of the story of each of the character. But again, while it is evident that the characters perform to the mask, I would suggest that the mask also performs to the characters, establishing important connections. If the large mask performs the materiality of the pain of the cancer patients, so does the smaller mask but since the characters reveal their individual truths responding to the mask, the mask acts like a mirror to each of them. Hence the smaller mask performs not only the painful and ravaged body but also those distinct and specific social markings that emerge from their pain. For Amrinder and Shanti it is about the anxiety of their identities and selfhood which is located in their bodies and for Deepika it is about effectively concealing her emotions for Vikas. The mask is performative because in each case it inscribes this specific sense of anxiety and discomfiture onto its body. The visual similarities of the larger static mask and the smaller mask are also evident at the outset and hence the performative dynamism of the dangling mask can be thematically connected to the performance of the larger mask. Having established this connection, the smaller mask then establishes rapport and connections with the other characters and hence by turns performs their pain and social isolation. What emerges in this scene is thus a dense web of connections between various onstage elements including the characters. In this scene, the smaller mobile mask is at the centre of the activity, and it connects at one level with the larger mask and at the other with the individual characters. It is worth mentioning that for Amol, the mask has an altogether different connotation and is a theatrical symbol that makes him recollect the rehearsal. While the mask 'dangles' in front of Amrinder, Shanti and Deepika at its, as already suggested, 'performative' moments, Amol 'takes the mask from its string and wears it quickly'. By wearing the mask and not looking at it, Amol has thus transformed it into a theatrical element and Vikas has to 'take off' the mask from Amol in order to cast it back into its performative space.

The mask thus assumes a dominant presence and its performativity is marked by its corporeality. I take this as a cue to move on to the next section of my argument—the body and the performative scope of the body. Recent advances in Performance Studies have been immensely enriched by academic discourses on the body. Newer ways of reading performance and performativity have emerged from fresh perspectives on materiality, the corporeal and the body, especially in the context of a digitally advanced and technological environment of the contemporary culture. The body is increasingly emerging as a charged site of representational paradoxes, where an array of experiences is being constantly inscribed. In a recent article, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett rightly identifies this premise of Performance Studies in the context of the body:

At a time when media--and, in particular, digital technologies--have altered our relationship to the material world, including our very own bodies, Performance Studies has much to offer to an understanding of materiality, embodiment, sensory experience, liveness, presence, and personhood as they bear on being-in-the-world and as they are mediated by technologies old and new. As the volume information increases and with it the artificial intelligence necessary to manage it, Performance Studies seeks to understand the kinds of knowledge that are located in the body.

Scholarly intervention in this field have also been diverse, ranging from Foucault and Butler to Otto Sibbum's notion of 'gestural knowledge', Pierre Bourdieu's 'habitus' and Rebecca Schneider's 'explicit body' among others. Foucault's anti-foundationalist histories had already suggested how the body is basically under the influence of 'power' which has been instrumental in later thinking about external agencies at work on the body determining or limiting materiality. Again as early as in 1991, Donna Haraway was already theorizing the cyborg in her monumental 'manifesto' recognizing that "communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies." (164) This has been crucially true in the years to follow as advancements in technology have continued to intervene the body and redefine selfhood and identity in a shift towards the post-human body. Biotechnological interventions like plastic surgery, organ transplants and cloning have significantly altered the body and have raised important questions about control and 'liveness'.¹ However, interventions haven't always yielded positive results and this is probably most evident in the biomedical intervention over the diseased body in an operation theatre. For the cancer patient, such an intervention almost invariably carries with it registers of physical pain, social stigma and a body that throws into tension assumed notions of the self.

It is within this theoretical backdrop that I seek to look at the performing bodies of *Brief Candle*. If the central thematic thrust of *Brief Candle* lies in explicating the plight and pain of cancer patients, then I would argue that the plight and grief is manipulated, controlled and performed through the bodies of the characters. The pain of the cancer patient, physical and otherwise, is inscribed

on their respective bodies and is theatrically performed, across their bodies. The performance, thus, in itself is heavily *embodied*. In a post-colonial context, Helen Gilbert had spoken of 'derogated' and 'diseased' bodies as important sites of representation:

In the theatre, the derogated body is a potent site of representation since the constraints and oppressions it endures can be visually displayed rather than simply described. Moreover, this body plays out a performative contradiction which can be used subversively when the (presumably) powerful physicality of the actor is harnessed in order to convey the disempowered body of the fictional character as colonial subject. (Gilbert, 221-222)

Though Gilbert's premise is post-coloniality and the theatre, the observation is important in a performative context and I would suggest that a play like *Brief Candle* adequately explores the performative potential of the diseased and derogated body. I would return to the 'Face of Cancer' as a point of entry to the text. I have already suggested that the large 'Face of Cancer' or the mask performs not only the materiality of the pain of the cancer patient but also the social markings of being a cancer victim and that its performativity is marked by its corporeality. Now if we take a closer look at the depiction of the mask, we find that the inscription of the body is central to its representation. Let us take a closer look at the stage directions where Dattani carefully describes the mask:

The Face of Cancer could be abstract, maybe an androgynous face that is melting. Hollow eyes, sallow skin, tufts of hair etc. A face that is ravaged by the effects of chemotherapy and is now ready to give up the struggle. (Dattani, 7)

The depiction carries with it significant performative pointers that are also embodied. 'Melting' and 'ravaged' are important markers among others that perform the physical pain of the cancer patient. Also since the 'ravage' is not the result of a human act, rather it is an effect of 'chemotherapy', a biotechnological intervention, I would argue that the visual rendering of the mask tends toward the post-human body. In its abstraction, its exaggerated features, its inscription of pain and intervention, its sheer size, the mask is not only performative; it is also post-human. In fact the theorization of the post-human body is a key concern in studies on body and performance today, especially after the emergence of the cyborg. In a recent book on digital theatres, Gabriella Giannachi locates among others, the crucial links between the post-human body and performance. She points out that 'Although the body presumes an identity, we are striving towards the possibility of becoming at once multiple and fragmented. We live in a post-human world. We are seeking to become trans-human, possibly even transgenic.' (60) The post-human body is also extremely fluid and resists easy categorization. As Giannachi adds:

The terrain of the 'post-human body' is unquestionably unsteady....One of the fundamental characteristics of the post-human body is its ability to exist *beyond* the human. However, while the prefix 'post' indicates that the posthuman comes after the human, i.e. that it is subsequent to the human chronologically, it also suggests that it is in the proximity of the human, in the sense that it still depends on the human ontologically. (Giannachi, 61)

When I am considering the mask as a visual rendering of the post-human body I have its 'unsteady terrain' and the performative links with the bodies of the characters in mind. The link that I have already established between the characters and the replicated mask is a bodied one and the mask could be seen as a rendering of the post-human body by virtue of its intricate yet unstable and unsteady connections with the bodies of the characters. On the one hand lies the physical bodies of the characters and on the other lies an abstract rendering of their 'ravaged' bodies in an unstable relation; this is the premise of the post-human body.

This would also lead us to the actual bodies of the characters in *Brief Candle*, especially those of Amrinder and Shanti. Again it is at the crucial third scene of the play that both characters pour out their secret feelings about being a cancer patient and it is done through a performance of their bodies. It must be noted that both Amrinder and Shanti reveal their 'embodied' pains and anxieties looking at the dangling mask and their bodies perform in response to the performance of the mask. Moreover it is in this climactic moment of the play that the characters incorporate the materiality of their pain and render their bodies visible in certain fine theatrical and performative manipulations. Apart from an extension of Shanti's narrative of the body in Scene V and few other stray moves, such an 'embodied' performance doesn't happen elsewhere in the play. Nevertheless, as both Amrinder and Shanti reveal their bodied anxieties, interesting facts emerge. The bodies of both Amrinder and Shanti are derogated, diseased and even scarred bodies with signatures of biotechnological intervention, intervention that has 'ravaged' not only their bodies but also their privileged sense of gender and identity. Looking at the dangling mask, Amrinder recounts:

They never told me that they will be drilling inside my body. At my core. What made me a man? Climbing a mountain, playing a game of hockey, knowing I could satisfy a woman in bed. All that was under attack with a group of needles probing at my prostrate, through the wall of my rectum. Like being sodomized with metal. (Dattani, 23)

Amrinder's narrative is heavily embodied and the performance of his body has to do with notions of maleness which is at stake owing to biotechnological intervention. The pre-operative body and the post-operative body is never the same. For Amrinder, significant changes have undergone in his body that throws into tension his assumed notions of the male gender and hence questions ideas of his selfhood as well. Similarly for Shanti, a victim of breast cancer, bio-medical

instrumentation has brought about crucial changes in her body. As Shanti recalls:

I lay exposed to the technicians, my breast pushed against the X-ray plate. One of them marked my lumps, treating my breasts as if it were already a piece of dead flesh...Their job was to invade my body and take out tumours, and they did. But they grew and came back till they took it all out. A part of me that I had barely felt. That I had never seen fully myself. Gone. (Dattani, 32)

For Shanti the effects are similar. Bio-medical treatment takes out her breasts before she has even properly realized and known her body parts. The effect that her changed bodied status has on other men in turn redefines her own awareness about her femininity and gender. For both Amrinder and Shanti, the pain is as much material and physical as social and arrives with the stigma of an embodied social embarrassment. What remains interesting to observe is the contingent nature of such bodies and how the biotechnological intervention over these bodies is repeatedly performed, *acted* out, transforming the nature of such bodies. In an extremely illuminating recent study on cancer 'previval', Coleman Nye suggests 'that the formulation of immaterial disease is a theatrical fact' (108). Drawing upon Rebecca Schneider's ideas of 'reenactment' and 'meantime' she locates theatricality in the biotechnological intervention on the clinical 'fact' of cancer. Nye points out that

Orders of knowing, within this line of thought, are multiple, contingent, and often contradictory. There is no single, rational, empirically knowable *thing* (a disease or a body) that is coherent unto itself. This fact-thing must be continually coaxed into existence, into visibility, into evidence. It must be *enacted*. Time is central to such efforts. (Nye, 108)

Although *Brief Candle* isn't about cancer previval but rather about the grim realities of the disease, the theatrical and performative dimension of the bio-medical and clinical 'fact' in the play cannot be overlooked. In this paper I have attempted to evaluate and enumerate the performativity in Dattani's *Brief Candle* in terms of theatrical bodies on the surface of which biotechnological intervention is scripted. The play-text also emerges as a space that reveals the contingent nature of the bodies throwing open crucial connections between the human and the post-human body. Dattani's play thus crucially explores key performative moments and strides.

Notes

¹ For an introduction to the liveness debate in the context of Cyborg theatre and the post-human body see *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* by Jenifer Parker-Starbuck, p 9-10.

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“Popart”: the ‘Global’ Avatar of Bollywood

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Abstract

Since its inception, the concept of “popart” – the interaction of popular cinema and art cinema – has been heralded as one of the most important contributions to Indian film scholarship. Drawing upon insights from Dev Benegal’s *English, August*, which is supposedly the first and the best example of “popart” film, I shall try to track down the genesis of ‘popart’ cinema and show how and why “popart” has become India’s countershot to world cinema. The first part of the article addresses the rise of Indian cinema through the process of imitation of its western counterpart either in terms of themes borrowed from Western mainstream cinema or cinematic techniques imitated from the “auteurs” of New Wave cinema. The second part of the article argues how a new art form popularly known as “popart” could become an Indian success story.

[**Keywords:** popular cinema; Dev Benegal; *English, August*; New Wave cinema; mainstream cinema]

I.

Bollywood, a commonly used metaphor for Bombay cinema, in the past few decades is marked by a trend that has revolutionized the production of Indian cinema and the global outlook on it. I shall refer to the trend as “popart” in that it *chutnifies* (a term used by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Midnight’s Children*, which means to mix to make it more flavorsome) elements from both the “popular” and “art” schools of film-making. Simultaneously, through its inclusion of both Indian and Western cinematic practices, “popart” becomes the global face of Indian cinema. Though the “popart” cinema has become a buzzword in Bollywood with the success of movies such as *Hyderabad Blues* (1998), *Split Wide Open* (1999), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* (2002), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *15 Park Avenue* (2005), *Being Cyrus* (2006), and *Breakaway* (2011) but verily, the credit goes to the movie, *English, August* (1994) by Dev Benegal that supposedly stated the trend. Thus, the article attempts to analyze *English, August*, and a new cinematic aura adopted by the Indian director Dev Benegal and through this analysis, I try to underline the thematic of the evolving new Indian cinema “popart” and what led to its rise.

Before the arrival of ‘popart,’ the face of Bollywood cinema was Manichean, which means Bollywood was caught up in the dilemma of either being popular or art. ‘Popart’ cinema from its inception stage carries an objective of overcoming the dilemma of binaries as it plans to make Bollywood – both popular and art. This

secret politics of desire on the part of 'popart' cinema can be associated with its urge to break out of the mold of stereotypical mainstream Bollywood cinema, which aligns with the colonial definition of the Orient: "Colonialism replaced the normal ethnocentric stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental by the pathological stereotype of the strange, primal but predictable Oriental -- religious but superstitious, clever but devious, chaotically violent but effeminately coward" (Nandy 1989: 72). Simultaneously, it also ruptures its tie with art cinema, which was restricted to the cinema of roots. Thus, 'popart' cinema with its Saidean discourse of 'enlightened postnationalism' competently, revamps the image of the Orient, and poses itself both – as a rightful cinematic heir to 'empire writes back' literary narratives and as an alternative 'of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world' (Said 277).

Dev Benegal (1960-), one of the earliest practitioners of the art of 'popart' belongs to what can be called as the second-generation of "art" film-makers in India, a generation in which he has played a pioneering role. He seems to have bridged the gap between what used to be designated as the "mainstream" and "art" sections of Indian cinema. Benegal's youth has probably helped him to make the crossover, given that "art" cinema has slowly but surely lost currency among audiences now.

Benegal's first feature *English, August* was an instant hit as it catered to the fantasies of Generation X and cultural critics with a *chutnification* of commercial cinema with art cinema. A humorous and oblique study of bureaucracy and the Indian Generation X, *English, August* won the Silver Grand Prix and the Gilberto Martinez Solares prize for the Best First Film at the Festival des 3 continents, Nantes and the Special Jury Award at the Torino International Film Festival. *English, August* became the first Indian independent film to be acquired by Twentieth Century Fox and became a theatrical success in the country. A brief history of Indian cinema is necessary before we can assess Benegal's contribution and what led to the rise of "popart" out of mainstream and art cinema.

The Lumière brothers' film *Arrival of a Train at a Ciotat Station* was shown in Bombay on July 7, 1896, just six months after it was projected on a screen in France. In 1901, a Marathi photographer from Bombay Sakharam Bhatvadekar made his own newsreel, *The Return of Wrangler Paranjpye to India*, echoing national sentiments, kick-starting an entire industry. *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), the first full-length feature, by Dadasaheb Phalke, marks the official birth of the industry. Early Indian cinema had its origins in Urdu-Parsi theatre, which apart from ready-to-use narratives supplied Bollywood with the British proscenium arch. The stage relations set up in the proscenium arch were different from those of open staging, which had existed in "pre-colonial and early colonial India" (Kapur 86). Another most important influence on Bollywood was that of Hollywood musicals, which in turn were influenced by "late nineteenth-century operatic and symphonic music, and Wagner was the crest of that influence" (Bordwell 33). Thus, like Hollywood music, Bollywood music is narrational. Furthermore, all Bollywood

films like the Hollywood musicals can advertise themselves as: All Talking, All Singing, All Dancing. Like Hollywood, the purpose of Bollywood is to entertain and often this urge to entertain is reflected in a redemptive ending. Thus, utopian ending is another thread that connects Hollywood and Bollywood and it also offers the image of cinema as 'something better' where one would like to escape into:

Two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as 'escape' and as 'wish-fulfillment', point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism. (Dyer 20)

This alternative space provides respite to a modern man who feels disillusioned and fragmented in his everyday life due to reasons such as urbanization of society. This alternative space is not restricted to any class or caste. It remains open to social outcasts such as gangsters who not only find an outlet in Bollywood but also an industry, where they can freely invest their black money.

However, the average Indian film adheres in some measure to the tenets outlined by Bharata in his classic treatise on theater, the *Natyashastra* (second century B.C.). In this book, which is often called as the fifth *Veda*, Bharata lays down his *Rasa* theory, which states that dramatic action should enfold song and dance, conflict, and a happy or redemptive ending. The mainstream or *masala* (formulaic) film exemplifies these four qualities of dramatic action, song-dance sequences, conflict of good and evil and finally, the happy ending with the victory of the good. These *masala* films cheerfully toss in several genres—romantic tragedy, family melodrama, comedy, action, adventure—according to the permutation and combination of these four qualities. It won't be wrong to say that the pining of the masses belonging to the lower strata of the society for an escapist entertainment finds its voice in the mainstream cinema of Bollywood (Nandy 1998: 10).

The latter half of the 1970s marked the inception of "New Indian Wave," or what is now popularly known as the art cinema. Directors like Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976), and Mrinal Sen (1923-) refused to follow the aesthetic yardsticks of commercial and mainstream cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Dissatisfied with the fantastical or melodramatic plots of mainstream cinema, with their superficial psychological portrayal of characters, and idealization of post-Independence India, these directors carved realistic plots with in-depth psychological portrayal of characters, and which also took an anti-establishment stance towards the social and political systems of society. In addition, these films also engaged explicitly with sexuality, in contrast to the implied scenes in commercial cinema.

One can argue that this dissatisfaction with mythological plots and a dialogue with realistic plots were: first, the result of the formation of the modern Indian self; second, they heralded the influence of Marxism on Indian directors.

With independence in 1947, modernity seeps into Indian democracy along with its various aspects:

the rise of a capitalist industrial economy, the growth of modern state institutions and resultant transformations in the nature of social power, the emergence of democracy, the decline of the community and the rise of strong individualistic social conduct, the decline of religion and the secularization of ethics. (Kaviraj 2010: 15)

These aspects subsumed under the umbrella term of modernity led to the formation of modern Indian self, which decided to have a dialogue with realistic narratives rather than mythological.

Secondly, like Frankfurt school theoreticians such as Adorno and Horkheimer, Indian filmmakers realized that how cinema has been integrated into capitalistic 'structures of social domination' (Adorno 229), and in order to fight it they participated in realistic narratives that can undercut structures of domination.

Unlike popular cinema, art cinema was almost always concerned with the plight of the common man. In this cinema, the heroes are not super-humans, inspired from ancient scriptures like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* but ordinary men and women with extraordinary ambition acting under the pressures of ordinary living. These heroes no longer have to represent stereotypical icons of society borrowed from ancient scriptures like the "evil step mother" of Ram, Kakeyi or the "tormented wife" (Sita or Draupadi). The form of these films is usually neo-realistic in conjunction with their European counterpart, "French New Wave," though there is a great variety in the films of different Indian directors like Girish Karnad, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

II.

New Canons and Anti-Canons

In the earlier part of the article, I outlined how Bollywood is categorized into two kinds of cinema. One is called mainstream that privileges four rules based on Bharata's *Natyashastra*, and the other is art cinema, a politically generated cinema. Now, I would like to focus on the reasons that led to the emergence of the third art form "popart," a fusion of the mainstream cinema and the art cinema, in Bollywood.

Mainstream cinema is often thought of as establishing patriarchal order through the instrument of the male gaze. The conditions of screening (the darkened room) and the narrative conventions of mainstream cinema essentially make the film viewer a voyeur. Phil Powrie and Keith Reader outline the basic narrative conventions of the mainstream cinema: first, continuity editing is used as a means of effacing the methods of production, and second, actors do not generally, while speaking, directly address the camera thus making the cinema a

store house of escapist fantasy where a spectator becomes a fugitive running away from his day to day social problem (Powrie 27).

In opposition to the escapist idiom is an art cinema that started as a reaction to bourgeois aesthetics that favors escapism to actual engagement with real issues. But though it started as a cinema for the masses, by and by, art cinema has become so technical and eclectic that the people for whom it was created decided to avoid it because of its techno-elitist jargonized quality.

Benegal's cinematic dialogue with Indianness of English along with Englishness of India, with narratives of belonging, and with the compacted heterogeneity of urban-industrial India, established in his early cinema which comprises of short documentary films such as *Anantarupam* (1987), and *Field of Shadows* (1993), seems to bridge the gap between popular cinema and art cinema. Moreover, it also provides us with Benegal's rationale for adapting Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel.

On the one hand, through the rejection of continuous shots, Benegal debunks the escapism associated with the mainstream cinema – he let the characters communicate directly with the camera, thus breaking the illusion of seamless "realism" as in the last scene of *English, August*, where the characters summarize their viewpoints on Agastya, the male protagonist in the movie. On the other hand, his use of melodramatic scenes and the incorporation of sexual fantasy through masturbation scenes, he is also taking a dig at the art cinema that has become obsolete because of its serious realistic objectivity.

If on the one hand Benegal negates the demerits of commercial cinema and art cinema, then on the other he remakes the merits associated with them. For instance, Benegal understands the gravity of the national metaphor of "unity in diversity", and tries to manifest it in the polyphony of various languages and different dialects – English, Hindi, and Telugu. Equally important are his "artistic" story-telling skills, a trait usually found in the art cinema: the capacity to create credible characters (human or otherwise, like Dadru, the frog) and cultures, skilful scene-setting, mastery of pace and timing, and power of imagination.

Now to vindicate the global perspective of "popart," I would like to enlist its hallmarks:

a) **Family Viewership or the Box Office:** Family viewership is a façade created by Indian directors participating in adaptation to hide the politics of commercial nature of the project. So the moot idea behind any mainstream film is not to embrace family ideals but to ensure the commercial success at the box office through the propaganda of family viewership. *English August* embraces the same aspect of commercial cinema but with a difference. This difference is visible as *English August* does not promote family values even at the superficial level. Benegal seems to cash the cult classic status of the novel, thus promoting individualistic and anti-puritan values in contrast to family ideals. Knowing the

complex nature of the novel *English, August* in terms of anti-social chapters discussing masturbation and breasts of Malti, Benegal intelligently shifts side and decides to woo the audience belonging to elite class with artistic bent rather than hoi polloi that uses cinema as a medium to escape the mundane realities of life. Thus the film does not appeal to the popular and puritanical taste of the middle class with their hidden sexuality or what Sudhir and Katharina Kakkar call as “dark ages of sexuality,” characterized by a lack of:

erotic grace which frees sexual activity from the imperatives of biology, uniting the partners in sensual delight and metaphysical openness. (121)

The evidence to this shift is steeped in the experimental nature of Benegal’s cinema. The arrival of talkies in India during the 1930s was received with much enthusiasm. However, the enthusiasm soon took the form of anxiety, as the mainstream cinema catered to the cultural tastes of the subalterns. To maintain the cultural divide between the high culture and the low culture, and ghettoised cultural practices, cinema became experimental. Thus, elite culture is often represented in Bollywood by cinema, “which includes avant-garde and experimental films” (Dwyer 8). Thus, this shift is a result of commercially driven motives on the part of Benegal.

b) **Global Language:** However, there is general agreement that English can overcome diverse linguistic differences in India and abroad alike, and combine diverse cultural influences. In fact, in the face of Hindi nationalism, which has become a bone of contention dividing the nation into North and South India, the rise of ‘popart’ should be interpreted as a significant development bridging the linguistic gap between the two halves. Alok Rai, one of the early critics to register this historical development observes:

The matter of Hindi has been agitating the public life of the country, in several different ways, for the past hundred years at least. And one may well wish that now, poised on the cusp of the twenty-first century, this particular file could be closed. After all, it is universally agreed that the emerging lingua mundo is English. And all classes of people in all parts of the country are desperate to learn English, as the rash of canonizations manifest in the names of mofussil primary schools, the Saint This and the Saint That, demonstrates with such pathetic clarity. (2)

Simultaneously, Benegal’s *English August* because of an explicit display of sexuality is specially characterized by its innate ability to woo the elite class and the world audience so obviously it has to embrace the medium of their communication, which is English.

Alternately, the rise of English in ‘popart’ cinema can also be read as the emergence of a much needed ‘hyphen’ combining the popular and the art cinema. Besides combining these two cinematic trends, it also functions as a realm where one can locate the alphabets to subvert the phallic discourse of male desire. The

use of a 'hyphen' between the two compounds of the word proper represents the hymen, as we contemplate the metaphoric value of that membranous fold of tissue occluding the vagina external orifice. With the help of hyphen-hymen:

Women treat the order of (male) domination in introducing chaotic syntactic structure, speaking in non-habitual ways, learning the alphabet of their bodies. (Panja 95)

Hence, Benegal's cinema initiates a new tradition of Indian English in Indian cinema resulting in movies like *Bollywood Hollywood* (2002), and *The Namesake* (2006) and thus raising Indian cinema to a global status.

c) **Diasporic Audience:** The use of English automatically promoted the popularity of *English August* among the diasporic audiences. In his classic introduction to the diasporic imaginary, Vijay Mishra argues that:

diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport. Diasporas are people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen, but perhaps not press the hyphen too far for fear that this would lead to massive communal schizophrenia. They are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted by spectres, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist movements. (1)

Though rooted in the soil of imagined home communities, diasporas lack linguistic versatility. These diasporic audiences look for themes in English language that remind them both of their Indian roots and the disenchantment caused by the Western surroundings. By showing the dislocation of the male protagonist Agastya and the clash of Indian values and Western ideals through the metaphor of Madna (a representative of India villages), Benegal is able to create the themes which sell amidst diasporic communities.

The feeling of disillusionment among diasporic audience in regard to the country of origin and culture is well established in these narratives of 'melancholia.' In mourning, as described by Freud in contradistinction to melancholia, one finds:

that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed. In melancholia, the unknown loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition. The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely....In mourning it is the world which become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. (269)

The 'popart' cinema articulates the state of dislocation of diasporic audience. Unlike the narratives of mourning, where the object of pain is visible, the object of

pain becomes invisible in melancholia. Thus in contrast to the early forms of Bollywood, which were either mourning for mythological entertainment or nativism, the sensibility of this “new” cinema is divided between conventional Indian ideals and Western mores leading to the invisibility of the object of pain. For instance in *English August*, Agastya’s disenchanted state throughout the movie is the result of untraceability of the object of pain. Benegal presents a large spectrum of objects of pain for the reader to choose from in *English August* without any final consensus. Some of these objects, which presumably emptied the “ego” of Agastya, are Madna, mosquitoes, IAS, food, heat, lack of women.

Figuratively, Agastya’s journey from the city to the village is symbolic of a diasporic audience journey from his new found home to his ‘origin-al’ home.

d) **Pastiche:** Furthermore, unlike Govind Nihalani or Mrinal Sen, who believed in instructing the audience through the use of satire, Benegal uses the concept of pastiche in a postmodern sense. Well-known academic Fredric Jameson defines pastiche in a postmodern sense as “blank parody” (Jameson 21), especially with reference to the postmodern parodic practices of self-reflexivity and intertextuality. By this is meant that rather than being a jocular but still respectful imitation of another style, pastiche in the postmodern era has become a “dead language,” without any political or historical content, and so has also become unable to satirize in any effective way. Where pastiche used to be a humorous literary style, it has, in postmodernism, become “devoid of laughter” (22).

First, pastiche, as used by Benegal in *English August*, gives him the freedom to not preach to or instruct the audience. Second, Benegal uses pastiche as an experimental cinematic device whereby he can pay homage to another filmmaker’s style and use of cinematography, including camera angles, lighting, and *mise-en-scène*: *English August*’s ending, for instance, seems to be a pastiche of Stanley Donen’s *Blame it on Rio* (1984) and the discontinuous shots strategy adopted by Benegal resembles the style of Godard. The village, Madna itself is a cleverly-designed pastiche of R. K. Narayan’s Malgudi. Some of the features of Benegal’s cinema have their counterpart in the “New Wave”, though one should not confuse Benegal’s cinema with the “New Wave”, which has its basis in the socialist reformation of the society. Though, Benegal’s cinema of pastiche is a reaction against the cinema of the 70s, which is an Indian version of the “New Wave” French cinema and which highlights “didacticism and programmatic” (Benegal 110). The term “New Wave” was coined by the French journalist Françoise Giroud. The five “core” directors in the French “New Wave” are Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Éric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette. The source of inspiration for all the five core members is the founder of the French art magazine *Cahiers du cinema*, André Bazin who is:

a passionate advocate of ‘realism, *mise-en-scène*, and deep focus (which he saw in opposition to montage) (Powrie 21).

e) **Narrative Intransitivity:** The cardinal reason, which lists Dev Benegal as one of the most famous experimental directors is his passion for narrative intransitivity as prevalent among the directors of "New Wave" cinema.

Narrative transitivity, which is embraced by the mainstream cinema, follows a casual chain of events: a) Exposition, b) Peripety, c) Climax, and d) Denouement. The purpose behind this fixed pattern is the straightforwardness, which keeps the plot of the film intact. Benegal challenges this continuity. His purpose, throughout *English, August* is to break the fetters of continuity and linearity, which are religiously followed by the mainstream cinema and the art cinema. He splits the narrative open by:

finding the right cinematic equivalence. What came to mind were the early broadcasts of Doordarshan where every (interesting) program would be interrupted at critical junctures with a title card saying 'Rukavat ke liye khed,' (apologies for the interruption). Since for me the narrative was rock solid I thought the aesthetic of interruption seemed to be the right cinematic equivalence to Upamanyu's writing; a fragmentary, hallucinatory journey in the mind of a young reluctant civil servant (Benegal 109-110).

Unlike, the "New Wave" directors who sided with narrative intransitivity as a form of social protest against the cinema of quality, Benegal only used narrative intransitivity as a cinematic device to catch the disenchanting nature of the male protagonist.

The Parallel Cinema in India: An Obituary

Furthermore, Dev Benegal shuns the stereotypical art and popular cinema and *chutnifies* them in the new avatar of "popart". This decision to blend is a very significant one in the present context where the success of the movie at the box is not the end but the beginning of innumerable television screenings by various satellite channels. Ziya Salam discussing the television screening aspect of cinema writes:

At a time when major box office hits like *Rang De Basanti*, *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, *Krrish*, *Dhoom-2*, *Phir Hera Pheri*, and *Don* have been lapped up for television screenings at whopping sums going up to Rs 15 crore, no channel is ready to push the envelope for serious cinema. Result? Parallel cinema is dying a second death (Salam 1).

Having lost out in the box office popularity stakes, worthies like Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Goutam Ghose, Kalpana Lajmi and others are being given the cold shoulder by satellite channels. Almost all the movie channels including Set Max, Zee Cinema, B4U and Filmy show four films a day, but on a safe average only about six parallel cinema films a month. In the face of different star festivals like Amitabh Bachchan's 'Navrasa' at Zee Cinema in April-May and Set Max had 'Ab Tak Bachchan.' There are no festivals on Mrinal Sen or Shyam Benegal films. At this juncture, what do you think an intelligent director to do? Benegal's decision to

incorporate both the mainstream and art is the decision guided by the need of the hour.

No wonder Kalpana Lajmi, who has directed films like *Ek Pal* and *Darmiyaan*, rues:

The channels only want films of the last five years. I am known to the new generation by some of my weaker films. Even I cannot see my favorite films like *Ek Pal* on television anymore. The classics are lost (ibid).

These decisions on the part of the satellite channels on one hand show Benegal's decision to fuse both the aspects as intelligent and on the other hand, they clearly show how "popart" has become India's success story and how it has become a commodity, which is especially designed to be exported.

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Revolutionary Roads: Violence versus Non-violence

A comparative study of *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *Gandhi* (1982)

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Considered one of the finest realist films ever which reconstitutes perfectly the revolution by the people of Algeria, *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo Gillo, *La Bataille d'Alger*, Igor Film/ Casbah Films, Italy, 1966) presents us an image of a world of anger and agony. The making of *The Battle of Algiers* possibly heralded the birth of Algerian cinema as it was the first film made just after their independence. In fact, this cinematographic masterpiece reveals to its viewers a plethora of images depicting the Algerian people in their quest for independence. Made in the year 1966, by Gillo Pontecorvo and based on the personal experiences of Yacef Saddi, Military Head of the FLN (Front de liberation National/ National Liberation Front) who also collaborated on the script of the film, *The Battle of Algiers*, interestingly, was directed with the aim to highlight the invisible aspects and unheard voices of this violent revolution by the people of Algeria as well as the counter measures taken by the colonial power to suppress the movement.

Similarly, Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (Attenborough Richard, *Gandhi*, Columbia Pictures, India/ U.K, 1982) made with the financial, logistical and political support of the Government of India during Indira Gandhi's rule depicts on celluloid using a largely Indian cast and crew, the story of Gandhi, and India's independence through non-violence. The film presents a screen history of India, by giving us an account of the life and struggle of Mahatma Gandhi. Non-violence as a principle is prevalent throughout this film. The whole philosophy of Gandhi is based on this principle which is depicted as a tool through which a revolution can be launched and won. Thus, the idea of non-violence is closely linked to the notion of independence and the creation of India as a political and sovereign country. The film opens numerous sequences depicting Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent struggle for dignity in South Africa. In this context, a noted Gandhian scholar, Anil Nauriya says:

Gandhi drew inspiration not only from his experiences in South Africa but also from his reading of the history of Africa as a whole. (Nauriya 2006: 7)

Thus, we observe that during the entire non-violent freedom struggle of Mahatma Gandhi in India, Africa was dominant in his mind as his early struggle for equality being initiated in Africa, a matter which prompts us to explore the influence and confluence of the independence struggle of the two countries this article.

We equally perceive that the directors of both films are from erstwhile imperial, colonizing powers, yet sensitive to the suffering of the subaltern, colonized peoples, be they in Algeria or in India. Gillo Pontecorvo was born in Italy but was forced to flee to France in 1938 as a victim of the anti-Semitic movement in his own country, and learnt film-making in Paris; whereas, Richard Attenborough was born in Cambridge, England, yet attempted to highlight the atrocities of war and human suffering through his films namely *Oh! What a lovely war* (1969), a satire on World War-I; *Cry Freedom* (1987), a strong comment on apartheid in South Africa and *Closing the Ring* (2007), which sensitively portrays human suffering in World War-II. We may also emphasize once again that *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi* were supported by the then governments in Algeria and India. In fact, both the films narrate, recount, portray (loosely) in a fictional form the resistance offered by the Algerian & Indian people to the oppression of the colonizers, be they French or British which explains our choice of these two films by two politically conscious and dedicated directors for this article. They do, as does other films like *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), inspire people across the world and especially in Algeria as well as in India (through regular telecast on national television channels) to appreciate the courage of the oppressed.

Despite a multitude of dissimilarities between the two films, we observe some striking similarities which make them an interesting area of comparative research. Freedom struggles have been highlighted in both the films, although through two entirely different means i.e. through violence in *The Battle of Algiers* and through non-violence in *Gandhi*. Moreover, one may note that both the films begin at the end. On the one hand, we find that *The Battle of Algiers* starts in flash-back, while highlighting the atrocities by the French to dilute the insurgent movement of the FLN (National Liberation Front) with the arrest of Yacef Saddi, the central narrator who also happens to be one of the most important activists in the freedom struggle of Algeria. Almost all the scenes of this film narrate touching stories of the chagrins of the Algerian people crushed by their callous colonizers. On the other hand, *Gandhi* begins with the assassination of the Mahatma on 30th January 1948 and his last rites, and then the story goes back in time and portrays Gandhi as a young lawyer in South Africa where he is thrown out of a train despite his first class ticket, as he refuses to go to the third class reserved for Africans and Indians. Gandhi committed himself to end the social disparities and racial oppressions in South Africa through non-violence. Here we may quote Montesquieu from his book *Les Lettres persanes/ Persian Letters* edited by Jean Starobinski:

It is not that great events are the result of great causes: on the contrary, small accidents produce great revolutions as unexpected for the people who initiate them as well as those who suffer them. (Montesquieu 1973: 200)

This brings us to the opinion that even small incidents can ignite great revolutions, altogether unexpected and unforeseen. According to this hypothesis, we can point out that the insults heaped by the colonizer upon the colonized

Algerian people such as blocking roads, frisking them randomly, using abusive language against them or in the case of India, throwing Gandhi out of a train despite his first class ticket, can be some of the reasons which paved the way for the two revolutions. They not only revolted against colonial authority but also resorted to either violent or non-violent means to achieve their ultimate objective i.e. absolute independence from the shackles of colonial rule.

We equally believe that nationalism provided the energy for the popular resistance in India or Algeria. In fact, the two films project us the images of nationalism through their touching sequences. We analyze the two images given below from *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi* in terms of our discourse on nationalism as a form of resistance.



Figure 1: The Algerian versus Indian nationalism: a comparative insight

The semiotic analysis of these two images clearly reveals a key difference between them such as the representation of the type of resistance which is quite opposite to each other in the two images. At one hand, we see that the Algerian nationalism supported by thinkers like Fanon and Memmi led to a resistance against the colonizers which was intensely violent. This is evident from the image. We also notice people confront aggressively with the police, hence resulting in the deaths of innocent civilians. Shot in black and white, the sequence of events in the film projects the planning of an armed rebellion by the FLN. We see the use of the technique of *Chiaroscuro* to demonstrate the cruelty of the French Empire in order to crush the popular nationalist movement. However, on the other hand, the image from the movie *Gandhi* leads us into a world of non-violent resistance of the Indian people under his able leadership. This image shows Gandhi surrounded by ordinary people. We find the role of Gandhi as an indisputable leader of Indian nationalism in the non-violent resistance of the people against the British rule. We also point out that Gandhi was a nationalist leader, but above all, was a supporter of equality and justice. He fought with a great zeal for the independence of India.

In a society as stratified as India, he supported the untouchables (inferior caste), who were deprived of all rights.

In this article, we also elucidate some unique links between the two films: both the cinematographic works are representations of more or less similar people, i.e. the colonized, and portray their suffering at the hands of the colonizer. In a broader perspective, these two films bestow us with enormous opportunities to understand the freedom struggles of Algeria and India, two lands under colonial rule, hence highlighting the universality of the theme of independence. A noted anti-colonial revolutionary writer, Frantz Fanon, who was an ardent supporter of total liberation from colonial control shares significant similarities with Gandhi when it comes to resistance to colonialism. Interestingly, both of them were educated in the colonizing countries i.e. Gandhi in Britain and Fanon in France and both stood against their colonizers. However their means for freedom were altogether opposed to each other. Leela Gandhi says in her book *Postcolonial Theory*:

If Gandhi's encounter with British imperialism generates a theology of non-violence, Fanon's experience of French colonialism produces a doctrinaire commitment to the redemptive value of collective violence. (Gandhi 1998: 18)

Gandhi's principle of non-violence against British imperialism stands equal to Fanon's conception of collective violence against French colonialism or vice-versa. She further elaborates in the same book:

Gandhi and Fanon are united in their proposal of a radical style of total resistance to the totalizing political and cultural offensive of the colonial civilizing mission. (Gandhi 1998: 19)

We may reiterate, once again, that Mahatma Gandhi stressed upon the means of non-violence for the independence of India, whereas Fanon was in favour of collective violence in order to achieve freedom for Algeria. In this context, Ashis Nandy explains in his book *The Intimate enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*:

It is crucial for postcolonial theory to take seriously the idea of a psychological resistance to colonialism's civilizing mission. (Nandy 1983: 13)

Here, Nandy clearly points out the importance of psychological resistance from the colonized to colonialism's civilizing mission. In fact, both Gandhi and Fanon shared the same opinion of total resistance to the colonial civilizing mission, however through totally different means.

It is to be noted that as a classic film of the nationalist struggle, *The Battle of Algiers* has been widely welcomed by the critics as a film of resistance. By putting the evidence of the ambiguous nature of terrorism and direct message of anti-colonial resistance, the film was widely praised as an example of *Third Cinema*

and as a resounding denunciation to terrorism. The *Third Cinema* has its roots in the social and artistic movement in 1968, launched by the Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino. They thought of a guerrilla cinema. The distinction between the *first cinema* commercial mode embodied by the Hollywood, and the *second cinema*, characterized by the European author's films, Gettino Solanas advocated that the *Third Cinema* stands in opposition to the other two forms of cinema as an aesthetic revolution. Their conception of Third Cinema comes largely from their experience while making the documentary *La Hora de los Hornos/ The Hour of the Furnaces*, in 1968. Pontecorvo was greatly influenced by the aesthetic principles of the Italian neo-realist wave given by the predecessors such as De Sica, Rossellini and Visconti. His early films embraced the documentary style and neo-realism that appear in his popular works such as *The Wide Blue Road* (1957) and *Pane e zolfo* (1959). Later on, *The Battle of Algiers* became a symbol of Third Cinema, including the other highly politicized films of Pontecorvo in the 1960s and 1970s such as *Burn!*, a film shot in the Caribbean and *Ogro* which represents the terrorism at the end of the Franco regime in Spain.

In terms of film technique, we find that *The Battle of Algiers* uses the long shot for distance and the long take for duration, but also relatively faster sequences and the close-ups for special characters or gestures. The camera is most often hand-held as this was not just an aesthetic choice, but the narrow streets of the Casbah do not allow the use of a platform for mobile camera. The camera is always in motion, creating a dynamic sense of movement and action.

In fact, the two films through their dazzling images bring us into the world where ordinary people involved in the fight for independence against the atrocities of the colonizer. In other words, the people are enchanted by the magnetism of their leaders of the revolution in such a way that even after the death of their leader, the film *Gandhi* shows us a deluge of common people who came to pay their respect for his last rites.

In *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi*, we notice the height of anger and hatred in both the camps: among the colonizer and the colonized. This is possibly owing to the increased distance between the two sides, born of the indifference of the colonizer to the plight of the colonized, who feels completely frustrated, alienated from power. As Gandhi says:

We brought the English, and we keep them. Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible? Your hatred against them ought to be transferred to their civilization. (Gandhi 1938: 66)

This quotation clearly shows that Gandhi urges the people of India to start hating the British civilization, which is based on the use of force to dominate people across the world, with the sole intention to defeat and end the British rule in the country. This ultimately led to the foundation of a non-violent Non-Cooperation movement as depicted through extensive scenes in *Gandhi*.

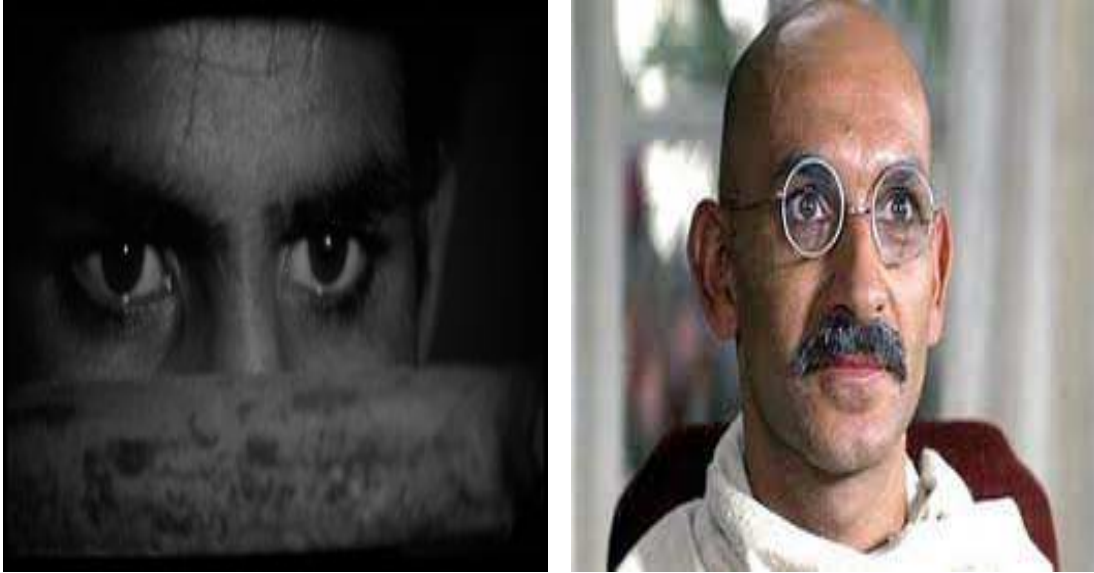
On the contrary, an overview of some of the scenes of *The Battle of Algiers* such as the ghettoisation scene and planting of bombs by the French police chief shows us that the inhuman and brutal measures taken by the French to suppress the movement led to the retaliation by the Algerian people. We find there a breakdown of administrative and social rules and regulations. We thus observe a forced relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which leads to a war-like situation with each party striving to exceed in violence, the adversary, which is extremely terrifying. As the Postcolonial scholar, Ashis Nandy elaborates:

The temptation is to use a psychological mechanism more congruent with the basic rules of the oppressive system so as to have a better scope to express one's aggressive drives. The temptation is to equal one's tormentors in violence and to regain one's self-esteem as a competitor within the same system. (Nandy 1986: 354)

Nandy thus argues that the oppressed tends to come down to the level of the oppressors in the use of violence in order to regain their lost self-esteem. This idea is also depicted in *The Battle of Algiers* where the people use violence as a mean to express their anger against the colonizer in pursuit of independence. Gillo Pontecorvo has chosen its title as *La Bataille d'Alger* (The Battle of Algiers), probably due to a remarkable parallelism in terms of the images of the film and the selection of words as its title. We perceive the use of violence as a medium of expression by the colonized in the film *The Battle of Algiers*.

We equally perceive that despite conspicuous dissimilarities in both the films regarding the medium of struggle i.e. violence in *The Battle of Algiers* and non-violence in *Gandhi*, they are interconnected; and the two different nations achieve independence through two entirely different revolutions.

To better understand the notion of resistance and then the revolt in Algeria and India, we would like to mention here the concept of the *colonial gaze/ imperial gaze* as projected through the images of the two cinematographic works. The colonial gaze, in our opinion, is the most important part of the whole colonial discourse. It plays a significant role in the process of colonization. The colonial gaze defines how the colonizer depicts the colonized visually and psychologically and vice-versa. The contemporary colonial rule was based not only on the military and economic power of conquering nations, but also on the domination of other forms of cultural representations. The period of political expansion of Europe, from the late fifteenth century witnessed the development of new important technologies such as the printing, photography, film and sound. These technical innovations have enabled new ways of documenting and disseminating knowledge about the meetings of Europe with the non-Western world. Through newspapers, travelogues, popular magazines and documentary films, the officials of the colonial empires and the European travellers made colonial images available to a larger, more diverse metropolitan public.



The notion of colonial gaze in *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi*

The images presented above from *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi* depict us the beginning of the end of colonization in Algeria and India. The semiotic analysis of these images shows the anger and hatred of the colonized against the colonial oppression, as if, the oppressed has become more ferocious in the fight against the oppressors. One can observe a lot of determination among the people who put forward the resistance against the imperial powers. At one hand, the eyes of Ali trigger the violent resistance against the French, on the other hand, the more flexible (but beaming with determination) gaze of Gandhi portrays the non-violent resistance against the British Empire. However the two different gazes intersect at the common objective which is the abolition of the colonial regimes from Algeria and India.

In addition, we find that the European practice for visualization and representation of colonial realities often made more rigid social differences and exacerbated racial and sexual hierarchies. The colonial gaze has played a particularly important role in the definition of gender relations in the colonial context by portraying women as objects of desire or as targets of sympathy. The Colonial officials also paid special attention to the social rituals related to the oppression of women such as *Sati* (a practice of suicide by the woman followed by the death of her husband in ancient India) and the use of veil (in Algeria). Although these practices were condemned, they remained as subjects of fascination, and often found their place in the travelogues and in the novels written in the colonial context.

We also feel that there exists a parallelism on the theme of the suffering of the colonized versus the oppression of the colonizer in *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi*. In the two films, we feel that the underground guerrilla revolution by the Algerian people in *The Battle of Algiers* shares resemblances with the over-ground political revolution of the Indian masses in *Gandhi*.

This article thus postulates that in order to understand the colonizer and the colonized, we must begin by understanding the prevailing circumstances in Algeria and India at the time of revolutions and the social as well as political status of the Algerian and Indian people in their own countries, as projected through the two films.

This article is primarily thematic in nature as we intend to explore the different paths of revolution: violence or non-violence as represented in *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi*. Moreover, as we know that a cinematographic work of art needs the analysis of images, scenes and sequences, hence, it demands that a semiotic approach be followed by the researcher. In order to further justify the approach, we may quote the definition of Cinema given by Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie:

The film is an autonomous work of art, susceptible to evoke a text (textual analysis) establishing its significations on the narrative structures (narrative analysis), on the audio and visual data (iconic analysis), producing a particular effect on the spectator (psychoanalytic analysis). (Aumont 2004: 8)

The above definition points out that the films like *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi* offer us immense opportunities to use these cinematographic tools in order to analyze their rich images and scenes. To go a step further, we remind ourselves that just as Linguistics studies verbal language from the point of view of sign, syntagm and discourse, in the same way, as per the semiotic method of film analysis proposed by Christian Metz (Metz 1964), we study the cinematic language of the two films from the point of view of sign, sequence and discourse. Thus, we have recourse to textual, narrative and iconic analyses viz. a diegetic as well as a mimetic analysis of the two works in a postcolonial perspective, i.e. the study of the two films from the perspective of an erstwhile subject of the Empire who remains, in the larger scheme of things, a subaltern reader.

It is to be noted that in the beginning of *The Battle of Algiers*, we notice the arrest of a key revolutionary of the FLN, who is hiding in one of the buildings. A semiotic analysis of this scene shot in black and white reveals the schism between good and evil where good is light and evil is darkness. The technique of “Chiaroscuro” has prominently been used through the medium of black and white in the film which we generally find in the *film noir*, or gangster movies. We perceive that the rapidity and swiftness of the images, one after the other, reveals the severity, the brutality of the measures adopted by the colonizer to crush the movement where justice, i.e. punishment, is quick, decisive, final and ruthless without any engagement with the other party, i.e. the accused. In fact, the totality of this sequence clearly indicates that during the suppression of the revolt, the fundamental rights of the colonized people were grossly violated.

Moreover, the analysis of the rhythms of *Gandhi* and *The Battle of Algiers* clearly demonstrates us that the slower sequences in *Gandhi* stress upon the

technique of *découpage*; whereas the faster sequences of the images of violence in *The Battle of Algiers* depict the technique of *montage*. We may also point out that the use of “close-up” in various scenes of torture shows the dominance of the colonizer over the colonized in *The Battle of Algiers*; whereas the use of “long shots” in the different scenes of crowds and *Satyagraha* (*non-violent resistance*) of the Indian colonized people in *Gandhi* highlights the spectacular mite, the formidable resistance of a suffering, crushed people yearning to be free. We point out that the presence of music in *Gandhi*, depicts the humanism of the chief protagonist, whereas, the silence in *The Battle of Algiers* suggests the complete dehumanization of the Algerians by the use of violence as a mean of resistance.

Furthermore, we perceive that *Gandhi* presents numerous images of colonial oppression which instigate the people to resort to violence. The juxtaposition of music with the images of people’s sufferings in *Gandhi* gives a sense of anger and hatred towards the colonizer which ultimately culminates into violence against them by some section of the colonized people. We find Gandhi as *agent provocateur* against the colonizer which also depicts the “temptation to use violence” by the colonized as argued by the Postcolonial scholar, Ashis Nandy in his book *Oppression and human liberation: toward a post-Gandhian utopia, in Political Thought in Modern India*. (Nandy 1986: 354) Whereas, in a scene in *The Battle of Algiers*, we perceive that a member of the FLN succumbs to the torture by French Army and reveals the location of his Military Head in order to avoid further violence. Hence, we point out the depiction of Algerians as traitors in the film, who supposedly take recourse to inaction, a form of non-violence and a euphemism for cowardice, in a bid to merely survive through the oppression. We believe that the use of non-violence causes less damage in comparison to violence. Hence, we would like to quote Ebert:

The nonviolent struggle of Indians against the British cost about 8,000 lives, whereas in the Algerian war for independence over 150,000 people were killed, even though the population of Algeria was one-thirtieth that of India. (Ebert 1976: 794)

The quotation clearly shows us that the use of non-violence causes less material and physical damages as in the case in the Indian struggle for freedom from the British imperialism. However, in the Algerian war of independence the damages were significantly higher.

Normally when we talk about revolt, we also talk about liberty. In fact, liberty often comes after a revolt. And independence is born of blood. The technique of montage is dominant in both the films, particularly in such scenes which deal with the crowd, rebellions, assaults and torture. Christian Metz believes that the idea of *montage-roi* (Metz 1964: 52) signifies the art of manipulation which gives freedom to the director to treat cinema as a language system. Metz compares a film *shot* with an *énoncé*, as its closest linguistic equivalent. He considers an image to be the equivalent of a sentence, arguing that

language disappears when a picture talks in a film. This idea is explicit in both the films as for example, the torture scene of a traitor of FLN automatically evokes the sympathy of the viewers in *The Battle of Algiers*. It is to be noted that several scenes of this film are silent, however, the technique of montage is so used in the film that viewers do not require sound to understand the sequences as the silent images of the film speak directly to them. Through the technique of montage, both the film-makers endeavoured to portray in these two films, the resistance put forward by the colonized by revolting against the colonizers in pursuit of their liberty from colonial oppressions.

We do, all the same, perceive that the brutalities of the colonizers serve as a connecting link between the History of the two countries and the diegesis of the two films. The two films, despite their authors' nationalities, are anti-colonial in nature. Furthermore, we also feel that the cinematic representation of the forms of revolution depicted in *The Battle of Algiers* and *Gandhi* brings us to the idea that the recent violent turmoil in Algeria may have its roots in its violent freedom struggle as people have a tendency to resort to collective violence to express their anger against the system. On the contrary, the non-violent freedom struggle of India has led to the foundation of a strong democratic system in the country which, despite its inherent problems, remains one of the most stable democracies of the world. Nevertheless, through the analytical re-reading of the two films from the perspective of an Indian scholar born in the postcolonial era, one attempts in this article to appreciate the efforts of the two film-makers, to rewrite History, and to write back to the Empire.

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A Poetics of Free Indirect Discourse in Narrative Film

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Abstract

This essay provides, for the first time, a model for identifying and analyzing “free indirect discourse” (FID) in narrative film, the most problematic mode of representing characters’ discourse which has received little attention from film theorists and critics. According to the established “dual-voice” hypothesis, FID is an ambiguous merger of the narrator’s voice and the character-focalizer’s, without one predominating over the other. The basic argument of the essay, then, is that FID occurs in a film at the moment when the spectator is not able to distinguish narratorial objectivity from characterological subjectivity. This characterizes the narrative text as polyvocal / polyphonic, leading to artistic ambiguity and such processes as “différance” and “deterritorialization.” Based on this theory, the researchers offer a detailed analysis of the textual markers and major functions of FID in filmic narratives. The model provided can be adopted for analyzing any narrative film.

[**Keywords:** free indirect discourse (FID), subjectivity, objectivity, focalization, artistic ambiguity]

Introduction

The same approach to the inner worlds of characters developed by modernist writers can be observed in what is generally referred to as “art cinema” or what Pier Paolo Pasolini terms the “cinema of poetry,” for example, those mid-century movies associated with neorealism. From this perspective, these films are comparable to modernist fiction. David Bordwell suggests that such techniques as subjectivization (= internal focalization) came into prominence in cinema with the advent of art films because it is in such films that individual subjectivities acquire significance. One of the major discursive devices adopted by modernist writers to depict the mental processes of alienated or self-conscious characters was “free indirect discourse” (FID). It is the most problematic mode among the four major modes of representing characters’ discourses, the others being direct discourse (DD), indirect discourse (ID), and free direct discourse (FDD). FID is generally defined as a “dual voice,” i.e., an ambiguous, polyphonic mixing of the narrator’s and the character-focalizer’s voices. Based on this established theory, in this essay,

we offer a model for identifying and analyzing FID in narrative film, including a detailed survey of its textual markers and major functions.

Free Indirect Discourse (FID) in Cinema

So far, several theorists and critics have, directly or indirectly, dealt with the concept of FID in film. What is shared by almost all these studies is the “ambiguous” character of FID, i.e., the intermixing of narrative voice and internal focalization, or, put differently, when the spectator is not able to distinguish whether a particular part of the narrative text is the FCD’s account of or judgment about the character in question (ID) or the character’s own unfiltered voice (FDD / DD). Of course, different researchers have employed different terminology for pointing out this feature. (“Filmic composition device” [FCD] is a term proposed by Manfred Jahn [*A Guide* F4.1.2.] to refer to the narrator in the cinema. The reason for adopting such a term is that the nature of narration in cinema is far different from that in prose fiction because, while the medium of prose fiction consists solely of words, that of film is composed of images, words, and sounds, among other elements, each of which provided by a separate agent or group of agents. Thus, the neutral term FCD is employed to indicate that the cinematic narrator is not a homogeneous, monolithic agent with a humanlike voice.)

The first film theorist who has focused on FID in the cinema is Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-75), the Italian filmmaker, poet, and writer. In his classic essay “The Cinema of Poetry” (1965), Pasolini claims that the cinema is in essence “poetic” or metaphoric because the primary objective of the cinematic language is not communicating but embodying man’s dreams with its expressive power, whereas literary works are created by means of a language (words), the primary function of which is communication (543 & 547). The truth of this claim is, of course, open to doubt; for instance, what about a televisual news report or a documentary? Does such a work not primarily communicate something to the audience? Afterwards, Pasolini states that the language of cinema, which he limits to images, however, can be communicatory only in the sense that the units of this language, i.e., “im-signs,” also compose the world of man’s memory and dreams. That is, human beings perceive many things around them or inside themselves through series of images or im-signs. Nevertheless, the language of im-signs differs from verbal language (linguistic signs) in that the former is instinctive, pre-grammatical, pr-morphological, irrational, and profoundly oneiric.

For Pasolini, true im-signs have a double character, i.e., they are at once objective and subjective: im-signs are by nature objective and conventional, but when a filmmaker employs specific im-signs to create an artistic work and convey his/her intended meaning, they take on a subjective aspect (548). Pasolini sees FID as the constituent element of cinema’s poeticality, on the grounds that this technique has the ability to represent the double nature of cinematic images. As

one can see, by “subjectivity,” which is mixed with objectivity in the cinematic FID, Pasolini means the author’s / FCD’s subjectivity rather than the characters’.

Therefore, Pasolini believes that FID is possible in the cinema, but he emphasizes that it is different from FID in fiction. In Pasolini’s opinion, “cinema does not have the faculty of interiorization and abstraction” (551), because the film medium, i.e., the image, is concrete, contrarily to the abstract medium of a writer (words). This is another way to say that full internal focalization is impossible in the cinema. However, he mentions that a filmmaker can represent a small part of characters’ internal world through the cinematic FID, which, because of the difference between the two media, does not perfectly correspond to the literary FID. To show the difference, he coins the term “free indirect subjectivity” as substitute for FID in film (*ibid.*), but using this new term does not make any real difference in the theory or practice of FID. We prefer to adopt “FID” because, having this term, there is no need to coin a new one: for sure, “discourse” implies in it “subjectivity,” whether we have in mind the narrator’s subjectivity or the character’s. Furthermore, as is discussed below, there is no essential difference between the cinematic FID and the literary FID; thus, it serves us better to adopt a single term for both.

Pasolini believes that FID is textualized in film whenever the FCD, the “filmmaker” in his own terminology, reveals the “original oneiric, barbaric, irregular, aggressive, visionary qualities” of the cinematic medium (= images / im-signs) (552). Nevertheless, Pasolini does not put forward any concrete or particular textual marker for FID in film, and contents himself with the technique of representing the story world from the subjective viewpoint of characters who stick to or are obsessed with details. This is simply a generalization that, in practice, does not help the film analyst to discern FID. Another problem with his account of FID is that by the cinema of poetry, the essential feature of which is FID, he refers to those films in which the director (= FCD) deals with the dominant mental state of a neurotic or abnormal character (555), but the point is that FID cannot necessarily be used to represent mentally sick characters, but also a character who simply reflects upon or is conscious of his/her existence or surroundings.

After Pasolini, the most prominent figure who has directly commented upon FID in film is Gilles Deleuze (1925-95), the Poststructuralist French thinker. He has pointed to and discussed FID both in his works on language and literature and in those on cinema. In his seminal books *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) (chap. 5) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985) (chaps. 6 & 7), Deleuze discusses the notion of FID in cinema. He builds his idea of cinematic FID upon V. N. Vološinov’s and Pasolini’s concepts. For Deleuze, FID is a key component of what he terms “perception image,” a subtype of the movement-image, the dominant mode in classical cinema, as opposed to modern cinema, characterized by the time-image. Perception-image is a “semi-subjective” image (see below), for which there is no equivalent in human’s natural perception: it represents a perception that is neither subjective (DD) nor objective (ID) (Deleuze, *Cinema 1*

72). The perception image finds a special status in FID (74 & 76); put another way, FID best manifests the semi-subjectivity of the perception-image. For this reason, Deleuze names this special case of the perception-image “dicisign” (76), a term originally coined by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the U.S. philosopher and semiotician, but appropriated by Deleuze to mean the particular sign of the composition of the perception-image. In cinema, FID develops the self-consciousness of the camera, thus leading to a correlation between two heterogeneous subjects, namely, the FCD (represented by the camera consciousness) and the character (represented through the perception-image) (Marks 239; see also Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 74). Thus, for Deleuze, FID in the cinema, or the dicisign, is the representation of a perception of another perception through the camera-consciousness (*Cinema 1* 217).

It is worth mentioning that Deleuze bases this idea of camera-consciousness upon Jean Mitry’s concept of the “semi-subjectivity” of the cinematic image, by which he means that the camera is neither totally inside the cinematic setting nor entirely outside it. Put simply, the camera-eye is, thus, neither purely objective nor purely subjective but semi-subjective— particularly, when its role is foregrounded, for example, in shots / sequences that seem as if the camera represented the eyes of an impersonal observer who is with the filmic characters or follows them. Using a Heideggerian term, Deleuze calls this the “being-with’ of the camera” (*Cinema 1* 72).

Like Pasolini, Deleuze does not mention any exact textual marker for FID in films, and instead goes to great lengths to talk about the meta-functions of this device (see below). Nevertheless, he seems to have his own reasons for not providing any description of the exact textual markers of FID, whether in literature or in cinema: he regards FID as a machine for producing subjects (“dual subjectivation”) rather than as a textual figure or a stylistic device; he believes that FID cannot be described or studied in linguistic terms or categories, because such terms are always homogeneous, whereas FID, indeed, suggests the heterogeneity of the system in which it is used (language / film) (Schwartz 125).

Deleuze’s notion of the “dicisign” (= FID) and Pasolini’s concept of “free indirect subjectivity” have a lot in common. However, one major point of difference between them is that Pasolini considers for FID in cinema a function similar to that of metaphor, resulting in a poetic cinema, whereas Deleuze treats FID as the exact opposite of metaphor because, to him, contrarily to FID which marks the heterogeneity of the system, metaphor “homogenizes” the system (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 73). Thus, to Deleuze, the fundamental act of language / cinema is FID not metaphor (see also Deleuze & Guattari 85).

According to Deleuze, FID, resulting in a “dividing-in-two” of the subject, characterizes not only cinema but also thought and art (*Cinema 1* 73). However, this is not a functional or practical thesis. It is totally at odds with the objectives of an analytic or Structuralist study, because such theses blur the boundaries and

categorizations provided by descriptive studies. What Deleuze does is only to take the established notion of FID as a dual voice and reformulate it in his own Poststructuralist discourse, linking it to such notions as split subjectivity or the system without a center / unity. In effect, he does not add anything to the theory of FID that could be adopted in a narratological study.

This considered, we turn to what film narratologists have proposed about FID in film. Inez Hedges, who has conducted one of the earliest works in this field, argues that, like verbal narratives, in films, too, there can be a situation like “dual perspective” or “substitutionary narration,” i.e., FID. This situation is a temporary fusion of the extradiegetic narrator and the intradiegetic character; in other words, the “narrator tells what the character subjectively feels, perceives, or thinks” (289-90). Nevertheless, seemingly, for Hedges, FID is ultimately the FCD’s voice, but imitating or colored with the character’s discourse. This can reduce the function of FID to discourse report or even ID, because in this case ambiguity and its corollaries would be completely irrelevant to the issue of FID.

Nick Browne believes that “a combination of narrative authority and spectatorial identification produces a perspective which overrides the represented, optical point of view” (Burgoyne 86). What Browne postulates as the fusion of the representing (= FCD) and the represented (= character) resembles the fusional nature of FID: the spectator is placed in two or more positions, identifying with the character but influenced by the FCD’s authority at the same time.

According to François Jost, in a narrative, sometimes, we may not know whether the FCD or the character-focalizer is telling the story, i.e., internal focalization and narration are confused (Burgoyne 93). Likewise, Mieke Bal argues that “the identification between the external focalizer [from within] in visual images and an internal focalizer represented in the image can . . . give rise to” a discursive conflation called FID (164).

Edward Branigan—like Gérard Genette (*Narrative Discourse*) and, in a different way, like Vološinov and Deleuze (*Cinema 1*)—treats FID, named by him “free indirect style,” as a subcategory of ID and suggests that its function in film is close to that of the subjective shot, i.e., the representation of a character’s inner world / mental processes (= “character projection”). For him, FID can be realized when a particular neutral or objective shot / sequence is metaphorically loaded by a character’s subjectivity, as if the character were telling the story with a third-person voice. Then, it is unclear whether we observe what the character perceives / thinks or the FCD’s report of it (*Point of View* 224-25 & 241). Furthermore, Branigan claims that identifying and understanding FID in film—which can be considered as a development of POV and perception shots—is often difficult because it has no specific textual feature and the viewer must infer it from various filmic signs (226).

In his *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, Branigan points to FID in film once again, but this time using the term “free indirect discourse.” Here, he does

not discuss the techniques or devices by which FID can be textualized in a filmic narrative and contents himself with a brief note about its nature. According to him, in FID, which is a version of internal focalization, portions of the character's actual thoughts are mixed with the FCD's interpretation of them in a way that the spectator "cannot separate the two nor evaluate the accuracy of the interpretation"; the spectator "knows only that there exists a mixture of internally focalized and narrated descriptions" (168-69).

In FID, since the exact point where narration and focalization overlap is not clear, we cannot be sure to what extent the information provided by the narrator is shared by the character (Forceville 121). The spectator, thus, shares with the narrator a knowledge of the narrative which the character may lack (*ibid.*: 125). Therefore, one might redouble Babak Ahmadi's statement that FID in film is neither purely subjective nor purely objective but perhaps "semi-subjective" (262)—a term Jean Mitry had used to characterize the film medium or cinematic images in general.

Finally yet importantly, FID in film seems to be mainly, not solely, FIP (free indirect perception) or FIT (free indirect thought). It is less probable that the FID shot / sequence is a character's free indirect "speech" (FIS), partly because most of the subjectivizing or semi-subjectivizing cinematic devices are concerned with the character's perception or at best his/her mental processes, though, in the final analysis, there is no clear-cut distinction among these categories.

The Textual Markers of FID

Unlike literature, in narrative film, there are no textual elements peculiar to FID. Therefore, to identify FID in film, we must examine those points in the narrative where objectivity and subjectivity or narration / external focalization and internal focalization merge together and the narrative becomes ambiguous from this viewpoint. Almost all devices and techniques used for subjectivization, stream of consciousness, internal focalization, or even external focalization from within may be employed to represent FID, as well, for instance, dialogue, voice-over narration, sound perspective, sound bridge, music, POV structure, eye-line match, shot / reverse shot, flash frames, freeze or still frames, slow motion, repetition of particular images, flashback, camera movement, superimposition, matte shot, snorri-cam, and double exposure, among others. The important point is that these devices can be considered to signal FID whenever they create ambiguity, i.e., when we are not able to decide whether they represent the character's discourse or the FCD's / external focalizer's discourse.

Apart from the above-mentioned techniques, some others might be utilized to represent FID specifically. One of them is "subjective voice." Subjective voice, or "internal sound," can signify FID when the voice is the internal voice of the character but talking about him-/herself as the "other" (Ahmadi 262), as in

retrospective commentary. Then, although the voice is the character's, the scene is not purely subjective, so it can be considered FID. More than that, an extradiegetic voice-over who retells the focal character's inner thoughts, while the character is shown to be reflecting, can be regarded as FID, too.

Hedges suggests that FID in film can be represented by splitting the narrative point of view (= focalization) between the narrator and the character, for example, the information on the image track can be attached to or controlled by one of them and that on the sound track to the other (290). The extradiegetic voice-over can be an example of this technique. Another example could be an open POV shot (i.e., a POV structure in which a point-glance shot is defined and promises a point-object shot, but we never see the promised object; see Branigan, *Point of View* 203-11) accompanied by an extradiegetic voice-over.

According to Julian Murphet, two kinds of focalization are possible in film, namely, associative and affective, between which there is sometimes no sharp distinction. He, furthermore, believes that if the two kinds are cleverly combined together, the produced effects will be close to those of FID in fiction (91). The eye-line match seems to be the best means for this end, particularly, when the point-object shot, to use Branigan's term, does not show exactly what the character could have seen; for instance, the distance between the object and the subject might become shorter via the use of zoom lens, or the angle of vision from which the object is shown might be slightly different with that of the character. Then, the shot in question is neither totally subjective nor totally objective because the FID's trace is clearly observable in the shot. Thus, this type of eye-line match can be treated as FID. Of course, this device appears similar to Branigan's cheated or forged POV structure (see *Point of View* 203-11); however, one can claim that, in the case of the latter, the character's discourse is so foregrounded that we do not hesitate to treat it as DD.

Another situation in film narrative that can be interpreted as FID happens when there are some contradictions in the relationship among the elements of a POV structure, as conceived of by Branigan, which could lead to a kind of ambiguity associated with FID. For example, consider a character who, in a point-glance shot, looks at a scene but, just before the point-object shot begins, s/he turns his/her face away from that scene (Branigan, *Point of View* 162). Is the following point-object shot his/hers or the FID's? Ambiguity in a POV structure may arise where more than one point, whether of glance or of object, are shown; these points can even be contradictory. Some other times, the transition between the two shots may not be very clear, thus leading to ambiguity as to whether the object has been seen by the character shown or not (FID). A similar point is implied by Charles Forceville (127-28). We can draw this conclusion from his argument that, throughout a film, some shots can appear to be (open) POV shots, but logically, at that moment, the character at issue could not have been in the place from which the camera frames the images. Therefore, finally, it is unclear

whether these shots should be attributed to the character or to the FCD; therefore, they are FID shots.

What Branigan calls an “implicit and indefinite” POV structure can also be possibly an FID structure, for example, an open retrospective POV structure in which “we [only] infer that someone sees” the object (*Narrative Comprehension* 163) (according to Branigan, a “retrospective” or “discovered” POV structure is one in which the point-object shot comes before the point-glance shot). In such a POV structure, the character-subject’s perception of the object is only implied, and the viewer does not know exactly how, when, and from where the character looks at the object. We may even seriously doubt if it is a POV shot because it is more like an objective shot. Thus, it can be a perfect example of FID in film.

The Major Functions of FID

In his study of FID in prose fiction, Michal Peled Ginsburg argues that FID is not a mere stylistic device for implying variety or impersonality; rather, it reflects on the microcosmical level, i.e., single sentences, the total thematico-rhetorical concerns of the text (53-54). Brian McHale offers a similar idea, proposing that the number of possible functions of FID is infinite: each FID sentence can have its own unique textual or thematic function, such that one cannot generalize about them (“Free Indirect Discourse” 207). In order to determine such functions, the reader must analyze FID by situating it in the overall structure of the text. However, he goes on to state that such functions are “second-order” functions and that there are first-order functions that have the capacity for generalization. Here, we explore the possible first-order or immediate functions and effects of FID in film.

We can consider three types of function for FID in fiction, namely, authorial functions, textual functions, and what McHale labels “meta-functions” (*ibid.*). Theoretically, all these functions can be enumerated for FID in film, too, bearing in mind the differences between the two media. Then, in summary, the authorial functions of FID in film would be as follows: 1) it is a labor-saving, economical narrative instrument for characterization or focalization, helpful in avoiding monotony in discourse representation (Fowler 174; Palmer 605); and 2) it is a useful device for reflecting “situations of tension, crisis, upheaval, turmoil, spiritual searching, and inward struggle” in film narratives (Palmer 605).

The textual functions of FID in film include: 1) it is a device for controlling the degree of distance between the FCD and the character: it can either raise empathy in the reader / FCD for the character or lead to the ironic repudiation of the character by the FCD (McHale, “Speech Representation” 437); 2) it may entail dramatic irony; 3) it can cause “irony of register” (McHale, “Free Indirect Discourse” 208) (the association of the objective or formal style of the total narrative and the semi-subjective style of the FID sequences); 4) it represents internal focalization or the presentation of the focalized from within; 5) it is a good

technique for representing stream of consciousness (Banfield 29; McHale, “Free Indirect Discourse” 209 & “Speech Representation” 437; Rimmon-Kenan 115; Jahn, *Narratology* N8.9.) (Pasolini sees FID as a useful technique for rendering a character’s stream of consciousness in film, though he does not mention the term “stream of consciousness” [554]); 6) it suggests polyvocality or polyphony (the FCD’s and the character’s voices directly interact with each other, without either of them being dominant) (McHale, “Free Indirect Discourse” 212; Rimmon-Kenan 117); 7) it enhances a film’s power of defamiliarization; and 8) FID adds to “the semantic density” of the cinematic narrative (Rimmon-Kenan 115).

Then, the meta-functions of FID in film are as follows: 1) it is an index of the filmic (its bi- or polyvocality reflects the most characteristic feature of the fiction film as a genre, a feature which this type of film has in common with the novel) (cf. McHale, “Free Indirect Discourse” 215); 2) it is both a representation of an object and in itself an object of representation (through FID, subject and object dissolve into each other) (Ginsburg 29); 3) it reinforces the process of *différance* in the film text (Jacques Derrida’s notion); 4) it is a miniature reflection of the nature of all filmic texts, including such qualities as iterability and intertextuality (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 116); 5) it is the driving force of film language in the course of evolution since it leads to the interplay of contradictory cinematic signs used by or attributed to different consciousnesses (cf. Schwartz 113); 6) it marks the filmmaker’s class consciousness as, through FID, s/he imitates the socially different language of characters who belong to a usually lower class (Pasolini 550); and 7) FID is a central feature of all great films because it “deterritorializes” the cinematic and creates “difference” (Deleuze’s idea) (Colebrook 113-14); in other words, it reveals the heterogeneity of cinema and shows that cinematic signs do not derive from coherent subjects, but it is the cinema that produces subjects.

In addition to the above functions, which were adapted from different studies of FID in fiction, several others have been proposed by various researchers specifically for FID in film. Another textual function of FID in filmic narratives is that the character is “neither totally aware nor totally unaware of” his/her significance (Forceville 124). This function resembles the one mentioned above concerning the creation of dramatic irony in the narrative. Sometimes, by reference to the context of the sequence under consideration, the viewer will probably be able to decide whether dramatic irony occurs or not.

There are also some other meta-functions served by FID in film, as well. For Pasolini, FID is a stylistic device for foregrounding narrative discourse (551-52): since in the cinema the medium is composed primarily of concrete images, the filmmaker (= FCD), in order to differentiate his/her “look” from that of the character-focalizer, must have recourse to such stylistic operations as FID. One can conclude that it has the same nature and function as the literary FID, as postulated by Ann Banfield and her followers, which is not used in casual conversation or everyday texts. Therefore, FID is not part of our natural perception but a complex artistic technique.

Filmic narrative, in general terms, is a mixture of mimesis and diegesis, mimesis being the larger proportion, i.e., unlike the literary narrative, it mostly “shows” through images, as the main narrative components, rather than “telling.” However, sometimes, it may not be possible to distinguish mimesis (showing) from diegesis (telling), or the direct presentation of the story world and the characters’ physical / mental states—roughly equal to what André Gaudreault calls *monstration* (Burgoyne 117)—from the FCD’s manipulations, comments, evaluations, or interpretations. This happens exactly in the case of FID. Thus, one might confirm Genette’s idea that, in the last analysis, all mimesis merges into diegesis and vice versa (“Boundaries” 5). Genette draws this conclusion after having analyzed some examples of the literary narrative. However, to the present researchers, not only it also holds true for all other forms of narrative and, in particular, film narrative, but in film narratives this merging is most manifest.

According to Bordwell, “ambiguity” is a characteristic feature of art cinema. He believes that “a realistic aesthetics [= objectivity] and an expressionist aesthetics [= subjectivity] are hard to merge. [However,] the art cinema seeks to solve the problem in a sophisticated way: through ambiguity” (212). By “ambiguity,” he generally means those moments in a film when the spectator finds contrary clues for whether to attribute a specific shot or sequence to characters or to consider it as the FCD’s commentary or interpretation. Thus, his notion of ambiguity is the same as our concept of FID. He further explains that in such films “uncertainties persist but are understood as such, as *obvious* uncertainties” (*ibid.*). Put simply, such indeterminacies results in various and, sometimes, contradictory interpretations on the viewers’ parts, and this maximizes the film’s value, making the text “writerly,” to use Roland Barthes’s term. Nevertheless, the present researchers do not concur with Bordwell’s view that realistic objectivity and expressionistic subjectivity lead to artistic ambiguity because they are “mutually exclusive” (*ibid.*); rather, the researchers prefer to treat these two categories in Derridean terms, i.e., his paradoxical logic. Then, objectivity and subjectivity, or the narrator’s and the character’s voices, supplement rather than oust or negate each other. It should also be mentioned that Bordwell’s “ambiguity,” in what we called FID in film, is close to Branigan’s idea of “indeterminacy,” which is a more neutral term. Branigan believes that FID is not ambiguous or vague in the negative sense of the word but only “implicit and indefinite” or “indeterminate”: it is “merely composite and open in a specific way,” and the viewer does not have to choose between the two possibilities (objectivity and subjectivity), nor is s/he perplexed by such a narrative (*Narrative Comprehension* 170). The result is that a competent spectator will have no considerable difficulty in comprehending narratives containing FID.

Following Pasolini, Deleuze believes that modern cinema, what Pasolini names “cinema of poetry,” is mainly composed of FID images, the free indirect vision or thinking of a “spiritual automaton” (Bogue 177-78). By this term, he roughly means what Walter Benjamin names “flâneur,” while talking about

modernist literature: distracted, mummified, passive, wandering, reflective characters commonly observed in modernist fiction or art cinema. Moreover, Deleuze claims that these spiritual automata represented in modern films are only indirect signs of the FID of a much more general spiritual automaton which is the film itself (Bogue 178). Thus, FID, in this sense, is an index of modern cinema.

Another meta-function of FID proposed by Deleuze is that FID indicates the essence of “the Cogito” and “the Cogito of art,” in particular; that is, FID shows that in general “an empirical subject cannot be born into the world without simultaneously being reflected in a transcendental subject which thinks it and in which it thinks itself,” and that, accordingly, in art, “there is no subject which acts without another which watches it act, and which grasps it as acted, itself assuming the freedom of which it deprives the former” (*Cinema 1* 73). As Ahmadi succinctly explains, in the case of FID, the FCD does not follow the Cartesian rule of subjectivity (262): a human subject is not able to think about him-/herself and at the same time think in someone else’s place, but the cinematic narrator can simultaneously see what it is supposed to see itself and see the story world through a character’s eyes—a character who is him-/herself seen by the FCD.

Still another meta-function of FID put forward by Deleuze is what he states about the nature of narrative truth. According to Deleuze, in classical cinema, the objective images provided by the FCD and the subjective images of characters are clearly distinguishable. Conventionally, the FCD’s discourse is thought of as authentic, reliable, and truthful, while the character’s is conceived of as an unreliable discourse that may not necessarily be true. By contrast, in modern cinema, where FID images are dominant, it is not possible to separate subjectivity from objectivity, and consequently the story does not any longer represent “an ideal of the true” but turns into a “pseudo-story,” in which seeking truth or discerning subjectivity and objectivity is minimized (*Cinema 2* 147-49).

Conclusion

This essay provided for the first time a model for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting free indirect discourse (FID) in the cinema, considered in terms of the established dual-voice hypothesis. This model was based on the same discourse representation logic that has been applied to prose narratives. We discussed the possible textual markers of FID and its major functions and effects. The most important function of FID can be considered its leading to artistic ambiguity and increasing the artistic value of the “text.” It was also argued that there are no textual markers peculiar to FID in film, but all the devices and techniques employed to manage internal focalization, subjectivization, and stream of consciousness in the cinema can be taken to represent FID, too, whenever they create vocal ambiguity in the text. Moreover, almost all the authorial functions, textual functions, and meta-functions counted for FID in prose fiction could be similarly attributed to FID in film.

The general hypothesis of this research was that there seems to be no clear-cut distinction between the different modes of representing characters' discourses in the cinema and that one can usually make a demarcation between DD and ID, but, most of the times, it is very difficult to distinguish FID from ID or FDD. Nevertheless, in the course of the study, it was revealed that the cinematic medium does have the full potential for establishing almost all modes of discourse representation, as well as internal focalization and, most importantly, such a semi-subjective mode as FID, although the language of cinema is substantially different from that of prose fiction.

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The “Politically Correct Memsahib”: Performing Englishness in Select Anglo-Indian Advice Manuals

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Abstract

Examining select Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and during the ‘high imperialism’ period of the British Raj, the essay proposes that this cultural artefact served the purpose of constructing and naturalizing the English Memsahibs’ gendered racial identity. By reiterating the performance of gender, class and race imperatives to construct a unique identity prerequisite for the Anglo-Indian community as well as the Indian colony, these texts aimed at the crystallization of this identity that will strengthen the idea of the British Raj. Such reiteration- apart from revealing the imperial anxiety of the subversion of the Memsahib identity- were useful to caution the English women new to the colonial environment. Reading these Anglo-Indian advice manuals produced for the consumption of the Anglo-Indian community, what the essay further proposes is that the performance of gendered-racial identity of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies and the Anglo-Indian spaces, but also their management of travel and material consumption including food. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* provide useful insights to study the performance of the “politically correct Memsahib” identity and its attendant relation to the imagining of the homogenous British Raj.

[**Keywords:** Anglo-Indian women, memsahib, advice manuals, British Raj, performance, identity, gender, race, class]

Introduction

We do not wish to advocate unholy haughtiness; but an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire. (Steel 18)

The above epigraph appearing in Flora Annie Steel’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* demonstrates how the governance of the British Empire is defined as the extension of the management of the Anglo-Indian domestic space. An investigation of Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 for the consumption of the English women in India show how the onus of strengthening the British empire was placed on these women residing with their men as wives, sisters, mothers and relatives. In her scholarly work, *Empire Families*, Elizabeth Buettner examined how the continuity of the British Raj relied on these English women when the interracial sexual liaisons –tolerated in the

earlier centuries- became a moral anathema from the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹ Alison Blunt has convincingly argued that the political implications of British imperial domesticity became significant even beyond the boundaries of the home.² Rosemary Marangoly George draws upon Maud Diver's *The Englishwoman in India* and *Captain Desmond V.C.*, and proposes that 'the imperial occupation of India allowed for the prescription of the domestic as the most fulfilling arena in which a modern female subject operate' (97). In their respective studies of British colonial writings on India, George locates a "public domesticity" while Blunt explores an "imperial domesticity". In a recent study of Alice Perrin's fiction, Pramod K. Nayar has effectively argued that the social sphere assimilates into itself the features of both the public and the domestic and calls the hitherto private space of domesticity a "political domesticity". To practice this politically charged domesticity, the English women in India had to perform an identity that will comply with the British imperial ideals. Many authors- specifically, the British imperial officers and their female relatives- of Anglo-Indian advice manuals took up the imperial task of promulgating this identity on themselves. They reiterated the need for the performance of what I term, the "politically correct Memsahib³" identity by the English women in India. Disseminating the imperial idea of the much needed Memsahib identity, the English women along with their male counterparts were conscious of producing the imperial knowledge of India. Examining both select Anglo-Indian men as well as women's advice manuals, the essay demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian writers- irrespective of gender differences- reiterated the "politically correct Memsahib" identity to arrest the unstable identities of the English women living in India. My point is that this distinctive identity necessitated by the specific historical moment is inflected by gender, class and race imperatives. The construction and reiteration of this Anglo-Indian woman- upper and middle class English women -ideal by these cultural artefacts helped in solidifying and normalizing it. In addition, the essay proposes that the performance of Englishness expected of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies and the Anglo-Indian household, but also their material consumption including food. The Queer thinker, Judith Butler's theory of performativity drawn from her texts such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* provide useful insights to examine how Englishness was performed in the Indian colonial environment where seeing and being seen underpins the imperial power relations.

Background Contexts

Examining the British migration during the nineteenth century, James Morris states that the most interesting migrants were 'the groups of young women who, carefully chaperoned and segregated, went out in batches from England to the white colonies' (Morris 68). The opening of Suez Canal in 1869 made the travel between Britain and India faster and easier for the English women. They recorded their lived experiences in India and represented their encounter with natives in

several empire texts that signalled their entry into the male dominated epistemological terrain.

After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the process of creating a distinctive culture intensified in the Indian colony. This process was informed by the participation of the English middle and upper-middle class men in the British Raj service leading to a paranoid obsession with the practice of social rituals and elaborate etiquettes. The English women settlers in India tried to transplant the Victorian domesticity that constituted the imagined separation of the gendered spheres of the private and the public. The middle class wife was at the centre of the household management and the middle-class husband went out into the public space to face the competitive world. Promoting gender and class differences in her household manual, Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* defines the ideal Victorian woman thus: AS WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMY, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house.... there are none which take a higher rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties; for on these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family (Beeton 23). By reinforcing the idea that 'She ought always to remember that she is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega in the government of her establishment' (Beeton 35) in the rhetoric of politics, she demands the citizen status for the Victorian women who ensure peaceful domesticity. J.E. Dawson writes, in an article titled 'Woman in India: Her Influence and Position' in *The Calcutta Review* that 'If ever motherhood deserved the dignity of being recognised as a mission, requiring all the exclusiveness of enthusiasm and of self-devotion, it is in India' (356). As Susan Zlotnick puts it, their domesticity became one of the most visible and remarked upon signs of their-and their nation's- superiority. Kumari Jayawardena has captured the essence of these English women's lived experiences thus: they were 'isolated in the home as a woman and alienated in the colony as a foreigner' (4). Though the Anglo-Indian domesticity was modelled on Victorian domesticity, it was not without certain negotiations needed to suit the demands of the Indian colonial environment. Often, the English women entered the public and social spaces in the empire alongside their husbands. However, they did not have contacts with natives other than servants who participated in the construction and the maintenance of the Anglo-Indian household. Swati Chattopadhyay and E.M. Collingham have usefully argued that the overlapping of the private and public spaces, made inevitable by the colonial situations, informed even the construction of bungalows in the colonial space.⁴ Mrinalini Sinha has demonstrated that though the European clubs tried to reproduce the Victorian sociability in colonial India, it was equally "vulnerable to the tensions and contradictions of inscribing a specifically "Eurocentric" logic in a colonial space" (493). The Anglo-Indian officialdom was anxious over their women's presence in these clubs; they were seen as potential threats to the carefully nurtured class and race differences. She points out that the English women in colonial India gained entry to the European clubs where the

gendered space for women was termed “special ladies’ quarters’ or ‘moorghhi khanna’. Chattopadhyay notes that ‘what passed as ‘Indian’ at these (Anglo-Indian, here) tables was a peculiarly Anglicized version of Indian food – the latter made suitable for English tastes’ (257) while Zlotnick contends that the ‘British women helped incorporate Indian food into the national diet and India into the British empire’ (65).

The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

To convert their presence in India into an imperial mission, the English women in India had to perform a distinctive identity embodying the essential Englishness. E.M. Collingham has effectively argued that though the body of the nabobs demonstrated a certain ‘Indianization’, the Anglo-Indian women’s body-the nabobinas’s body- did not undergo any much transformation even during the eighteenth century though there were exceptions like Marion Hastings⁵. It will be useful here to look at his argument: "Women’s position in British society as the repositories of morality meant that within India they acted as the primary indicators of the civilized state of the West" (42). He states that even in masquerades, only acceptable imitation of Indian costumes were allowed to be worn by the Anglo-Indian women. There was an intense fear that these women may fall under the native men’s gaze as the native women fell under the gaze of the British men. Deeply entrenched in gender differences, the English women's body suffered more severe restrictions from the early nineteenth century onwards. Any negligence to follow the rules of behaviour was equated to the loose morals by the rigid Anglo-Indian community. Studying the creation of the English female ideal as represented in the conduct literature and fiction of the eighteenth century, Nancy Armstrong writes thus:

Conduct books for women, as well as fiction in the tradition of Richardson, worked within the same framework as Locke, but they constructed a more specialized and less material form of subjectivity, which they designated as female... then pedagogical literature mapped out a field of knowledge that would produce a specifically female form of subjectivity. (Armstrong 14)

Her study of the eighteenth century fiction and conduct literature meant for women is relevant for the present essay. The essay helps to demonstrate the role played by the Anglo-Indian advice manuals to contain the "disorderly memsahibs"(Indrani Sen's term)⁶ facilitated by the alien Indian colonial spaces.

Judith Butler and Performativity

Insights drawn from the Queer thinker, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity elaborated in Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* prove useful to better understand and examine the formation and performance of the "politically correct

Mem sahib" identity, its process of 'recitation' and the discursive practices of the English women's body. In her influential work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler states thus: "Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (10). All bodies are gendered from the origin of their social existence and that there is no existence that is not social. She draws the conclusion that gender is not something that one is, but it is something that one does. She explains that gender is more of a sequence of acts- a doing rather than a being- imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality thus:

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of freefloating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. ... In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. ... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 33)

She emphasizes that the act of performativity determines who we are. In her viewpoint, there is a difference between performativity and performance; performance presupposes a preexisting subject whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject.⁷ For her, a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies. Further, her argument is that

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 43-44)

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler seems to draw her theoretical stance from Derrida's views on re-citation. Derrida emphasizes that linguistic signs can be transplanted into unforeseen contexts. They are vulnerable to appropriation and reiteration, and Derrida terms it 'citational grafting'. She notes that the heterosexual normativity alone does not work as the regulatory regime that condition the body and even, race is yet another imperative. However, her argument is that racial differences are not subordinate to sexual differences and emphasizes that both race and heterosexual matrix have its implications for the condition of subjecthood. Neither racial differences occur before sex and gender differences nor they are autonomous or discrete axes of power. Her core argument is that "the subject is produced by racially informed conceptions of sex" (Butler, *Bodies* 130).

Personal Care and The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

Advising on many aspects of colonial life like their sea voyage and arrival to India, personal care, child care, travel to many Residencies, household management, material consumption, relationship with natives and their retreat to the metropolitan Britain, the Anglo-Indian advice manuals reinforce the performance of Englishness by the English women in the Indian colonial space. This performance constituted, most importantly, their domestication of the hot climatic conditions, food consumption, consistent health care and adequate exercises. Many advice manuals start with instructions for combating the discomforts posed by the erratic sea voyage. *Tropical Trials*, a popular advice manual meant exclusively for the Anglo-Indian women starts its pedagogical logic thus:

Few can realise the sacrifices they will be called upon to make in taking such a decided step; many home comforts, and the host of nameless social fascinations, so dear to a woman's heart, have to be given up, while the attractions offered by the irresistible "day's shopping," the box at the opera, a few of our summer recreations and nearly all our winter amusements, must be temporarily relegated to the list of past pleasures. (Hunt 1-2)

Starting with a warning to the English women travelling to India, it represents the colony as a difficult space which demands sacrifices like giving up 'home comforts' 'the host of nameless social fascinations', 'day's shopping', 'the box at the opera', 'summer recreations' and 'winter amusements'. What the narrative seems to hint is that these women should not expect any fun or adventure in the Indian colonial space. Instead, they should be ready to devote themselves to the cause of the imperial mission. These 'past pleasures' should not be an integral component of their colonial life in India. The construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal is contingent upon the change in their attitude towards the purpose of their stay in India. They are expected to transform their identity even at the instance of their entry into India during the British Raj period. As Butler points out, norms have the potential to force a citation which is socially acceptable.⁸ During the British Raj period, the transformation of an identity to uphold the British imperial ideal became a political act. The reiteration of this norm was essential to naturalize it and this imperial task was taken up by writers of these Anglo-Indian advice manuals.

Representing India as a space capable of depleting physical strength and mental vigour, many narratives represent the English women as weaker than their male counterparts in combating the erratic Indian weather conditions. Expressing a sense of racial superiority, *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians* states that the Indian climatic conditions definitely have its impact on their physical and mental constitutions. Suggesting that the English women choosing to live in India must not be under eighteen years, it represents these women as weaker than their male counterparts and it is difficult for them to combat the hot summer in India:

Females suffer perhaps even more than males. Their lives, especially those in affluent or easy circumstances, are generally torpid, and too little relieved by occupation.... but little, often far too little, interest in domestic affairs; they become listless and apathetic, and they succumb to the climate sooner than men.

A lady's health is almost invariably so affected by the climate of India, after six or eight years' unbroken residence,... Great sacrifices and self-denial, financial as well as social, are often made and endured, by husbands, sending their wives and children "home", that they may be removed from the morbid influence of India that their constitutions may become invigorated by a residence in England,... (Mair 6)

Similarly, even the narrative in the handbook meant for women, *Tropical Trials* reiterates the Victorian medical thoughts implicated by gender differences. However, it advises them to exercise 'calm judgment' in managing the difficulties in India:

Notwithstanding this comparative physical inequality, much may be done by a woman of sound sense, to maintain body and mind in a healthy state,... she will exercise her calm judgment in meeting difficulties as they may arise, as there is no reason why she should not come off victorious in her struggle with *tropical trials*. (Hunt 6-7)

Both the narratives reiterate the gender specific Victorian idea of the health management.

Forewarning that life in India is going to be extremely difficult for these English women, the former narrative hints that the lack of occupation contributes to their deteriorating health conditions. It showers its sympathy for the tiring English men who choose to send their wives and children to England and protect them 'from the morbid influence of India'. The latter narrative states that 'a woman of sound sense' will take care of her health and tackle all sorts of difficulties. What these narratives imply is that being useful⁹ is an integral component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal established in discursive practices.

These English women residing in Anglo-India are even represented as more prone to mental sickness. It will be useful here to look at the narrative in *Tropical Trials*:

During your residence in the tropics, you will often come across many remarkable examples of the different effects which will be produced by the heat on women of various temperaments and habits. Some women are of a highly sensitive nature; their nerves, to use a common expression, are "highly strung." Such people become alternately elated or depressed by the most trivial occurrences. The tropical heat seems to exaggerate this

condition, and they often suffer, for days together, from fits of depression, which are not traceable to any sufficient cause. (Hunt 183-184)

Florence Marryat in her memoir, *Gup* confesses that it is extremely difficult for these women to combat the hot weather: "From whence the evil arises, heaven only knows; their minds and energies may rust and dull from the effects of the climate, or the tone of their morals become lowered from the want of spiritual instruction, in the up-country stations..." (39-40). She records her lived experiences further by stating that the Indian climate 'drains the mind of all desire to improve itself' (59). However, in the popular advice manual, *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, Steel notes that half the English women suffer from 'neurasthenia' and anaemia as 'they live virtually in the dark'. In fact, studying the case histories of many *memsahibs*, Waltraud Ernst has effectively argued thus: "Given the typical and stereotypical field of action of women, indicators of mental problems were necessarily seen in such things as a Memsahib's failure to fulfil her role as a good daughter, wife, or mother.... Each patient had thus failed to pursue their expected—gender-specific—role" (363-364). Instead of criticizing the undue onus placed on these English women, these narratives merely focus on the failure of these women to combat the difficulties as Nayar puts it in his study of Alice Perrin's¹⁰ fiction. To reinforce the idea that the Englishwomen in India must give up being indolent, Hunt's narrative even draws a contrast to the 'sickly-hued woman':

A painful contrast is afforded by the sickly-hued woman, who having taken her breakfast in bed, can just find strength sufficient to don a dressing-gown and slippers, and then resume a recumbent posture on a sofa, where, under a punkah, with closed doors and windows, and the lightest of literary trash for her eyes to the trifle with, she will remain until after sundown, when, the exertion of dressing over, she will recline languidly in an open carriage for an hour or so, and submit to be driven along a dusty road "for the benefit of her health." (Hunt 180)

The failure to adhere to the gendered imperial norm turns these women into a mental wreck. The shifting identities definitely damage the agency of the subject. My point is that this narrative strategy of presenting 'the sickly-hued woman' is an attempt to enforce and naturalize the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal.

The construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal constitutes the preservation of their health in spite of the adverse Indian weather conditions. So, Steel advises that these women should consider the sun as their friend and enjoy the morning ride in the early morning sun. She presents the need for spending some time in the day light in a tone of concern thus:

The writer believes that the forced inertia caused by living without *light* is responsible for many moral and physical evils among European ladies in the Tropics. In the chapter 'In the Plains' more is said on the subject of making the sun your *friend*. (Steel 171)

While Steel advises these women to befriend sun, Hunt in *Tropical Trials* instructs that the health in the tropics depend largely on their taking 'a regular and sufficient amount of out-door exercise, either in saddle or on foot' (Hunt 20). Even *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians*, inscribing gender differences, advises against indolence promoted by the Indian colonial space thus:

Ladies in India, as a rule, stand much more in need of exercise than men, and perhaps nothing sooner causes them to succumb to the influence of the climate, than the want of it. Confined, as they mostly are to their houses, during nearly the entire day, leading generally very sedentary lives, having little or no mental or physical occupation, they soon droop, become listless, languid, and apathetic, and eventually are incapable of any exertion at all. ... The amount of exertion which some will undergo night after night in ballrooms during the cool season in India, would, if directed in another way, namely walking or riding in the open air in the early morning, do much to preserve their health, and enable them to prolong their residence beyond the seven or eight years which is at present about the seven or eight years which is at present about the average during of their stay in India. (Mair 29)

Here, the narrative advises against the ballroom dances and encourages walking or riding in the open air. It appears that these narratives hint at the need to focus on the imperial mission at hand rather than enjoying the social life in the colonial space. Apart from physical activities, even the pursuit of mental activities is recommended by many advice manuals like *Tropical Trials*:

Ample mental resources may be found in the shape of reading, drawing, painting, fancy work, &c. &c.; occupations that will not unduly tax the energies, and that will agreeably serve to fill up time, that would otherwise be found to hang heavily on the hands. (Hunt 181)

The ideal memsahib's daily regime included a morning walk or a horse ride that were believed to have helped in safeguarding their health. Further, they were expected to focus on certain less demanding occupation like reading and drawing that will not draw more energy from them. Apart from being inscribed by gender differences, this narrative seems to reveal an imperial anxiety over the mobility of these English women in the colonial political space. Their mobility is restricted by the suggestions of just a morning walk or a ride and their possible adventurism is pre-emptively contained.

Many advice manuals condemn even over-eating as it induces indolence. Flora Annie Steel clearly advises against over-eating in the Indian colonial space. She states that people in the hot weather conditions 'seem to eat simply because it passes the time'. Her advice on food consumption is that one light entrée and a dressed vegetable can replace 'a meal of four or five distinct courses placed on the table' (Steel 57). Even *Tropical Trials* advises against excessive indulgence in food:

Not only the nature of the food, but the quantity partaken thereof ought to be carefully considered, for, while in temperate climates, any injudicious indulgence in the pleasures of the table, is only attended with temporary indisposition, a like course in a hot climate, would be followed by a train of disasters, often the gravest description, and which sometimes result in permanent injury to the health. (Hunt 116)

While Hunt's narrative suggests that the food should be 'plain, well cooked, and not highly seasoned' and 'fancy dishes should be but sparingly indulged in' (Hunt 117), Steel even insists that food and drink should be 'simple' and 'digestible'. *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians* provides advice against the consumption of alcohol by the English women as it will ruin their mind, character and health:

Many women, educated, refined, and in easy circumstances, take such quantities of alcohol in some form or other, at different times during the day, openly or secretly, as to cause the very symptoms just described, - precisely those, in short, of chronic or permanent alcoholization. ... In women, owing to physiological differences, and a more susceptible nervous system, intemperate habits paralyse the will earlier than in men; they become sooner the creatures of impulse, and less able to resist the seductive influence of alcohol, while its effects upon them are more ruinous to mind, character and health. (Mair 25)

Marked by the Victorian notion of gender differences, the narrative hints that even educated women indulge in excessive drinking. Hunt's narrative points out that the consumption of 'a few sips of sherry', 'a glass of stout', and 'a modicum of weak brandy' will become a confirmed habit and it places on record that 'except in cases of sickness, and under medical advice, a woman should abstain from the use of alcohol in any of its forms' (Hunt 120). Further, it suggests that fish, poultry and vegetable must become the staple food. Food consumption is translated into a norm to arrest the shifting identities of the English women promoted by individual choices.

Costume and The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

Many of these manuals advise even on the clothes to be worn by the English women in India. The list of personal outfits provided by *Indian Outfits and Establishments* includes:

- Two plain white dresses (washing).
- Two afternoon dresses (regular costumes).
- One black silk, with two skirts and two bodices.
- One cloth costume (cold weather wear).
- One ulster dress (waterproof).
- Two evening dresses (for ordinary wear, with bodies and slips).
- One lace ditto (ball dress).

One dinner dress (full toilette).

One dinner dress (demi toilette).

Total, twelve dresses (besides four wrappers) (An Anglo-Indian 9-10)

The above list of personal outfits demonstrates how different clothes were used for different occasions. An Anglo-Indian's narrative offers advice on the use of thin woollen clothes during the cold weather and the need to avoid using velvet dresses in the Indian weather conditions. Afternoon costumes were made of cashmere, tussore and merino. *Indian Outfits and Establishments* recommends many cotton wears to be taken: One dozen cotton nightdresses, thin; one dozen cotton nightdresses, usual thickness; One dozen pair of cotton drawers, thin; one dozen pairs of cotton drawers, thicker (An Anglo-Indian 9-10). The same narrative states that bonnets will not offer protection against the sun and hence, one bonnet is enough. Even A Lady Resident states that hats have replaced bonnets as they are too expensive in India. Specifically, it strongly suggests that they should not wear high 'brass-tipped affairs' which is fashionable in England but not suitable for India as comfort is more important than adopting the fashion of the day. Cautioning to treat the sun as an enemy, Steel provides a list of clothes to be worn during the hot summer in India thus:

The writer, however, never wore it day or night, and she never once went to the hills unless on leave with her husband, which means that two hot weathers out of every three were spent entirely in the plains. She wore silk, discarded stays, &c., and, as a rule, had her dresses of nuns-veiling or thin serge. And during the hot weather she used a thin white Rampore chuddar or shawl instead of a sheet. The aim and object is, however, to avoid chills and heats. ... unless, indeed, the claims of fashion are allowed to overbear those of comfort and health. (Steel 171)

Besides suggesting the suitable clothes for the Indian weather conditions, Steel emphasizes that she has not left her husband alone in the plains and escaped the summer heat and adds that 'sound good sense and energy' are essential to survive in India. What the narrative implies is that they must develop the imperialistic spirit and should not focus on 'the claims of fashion'. As the English women's performance of Englishness is dependent on their health, she states that 'the claims of fashion' should not dominate matters concerning comfort and health. It will be useful here to look at the narrative that insists on giving up the Victorian way of dressing thus:

And there is really no reason why the Englishwoman in India should burden herself with the same number of petticoats, shifts, bodices, and what not, that her great-grandmother wore in temperate climes. We do not advocate any sloppiness in dress; on the contrary, we would inveigh against any yielding to the lassitude and indifference which comes over the most

energetic in tropical heat, but we would have people as comfortable as they can be under circumstances. (Steel 209)

Steel makes it clear that the adaptation of dressing to the Indian weather condition does not mean 'any sloppiness in dress'. Her point is that the English women in India must wear clothes that will provide comfort and keep them in good health. However, she insists that they should not yield to 'the lassitude and indifference which comes over the most energetic'. Further, for social gatherings, she offers the following suggestions in a pedagogical tone:

For this the married lady will find tea-gowns very suitable, while girls are the better for at least two simple nicely-made dresses of nuns-veiling or pongee silk. Ball dresses are a necessity, and one should always be ready for an occasion. On the other hand, nothing suffers more from the voyage, and for girls especially it is better to have at least two silk bodices and slips, one white or cream, and to take out net, lace, ribbon, flowers, &c., for various trimmings and skirts. In addition, a black lace dress should be in every outfit. (Steel 211)

Her advice on outfits demonstrates that married women and unmarried girls wore different clothes. The emphasis on ball dresses show that costumes suitable for various occasions were worn. Hull suggests that they could wear 'low dresses of muslin or grenadine' to a ballroom 'with the thermometer at 85° or 90°'. A black outfit seems to be an important component of their wardrobe meant to be worn for the social and political spaces in colonial India. My argument here is that while these narratives hint at maintaining the essential Englishness, they also insist on adapting to India. It appears that the construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal does not depend on following the British imperial norm alone, but also on adapting themselves to the Indian climatic conditions and imperial environment.

Social Rituals and the "Politically Correct Memsahib"

The Anglo-Indian officer and his wife had the imperial task of demonstrating racial superiority in the colonial space. Specifically, the entry of the lower class English men into the British Raj service made them observe social rituals elaborately and their aristocratic life-style resembled the living pattern of the Victorian gentry. E.C.P. Hull's advice manual titled *European in India* comments on the stringent rule of precedence thus:

Rules of precedence in India are very minute and punctiliously regarded; a host sometimes finding it no easy matter to know which of the ladies he ought to give his arm to, or which of the gentlemen he should ask to support mistress of the house of the dining room. Then, at the end of the evening, the most important guests must leave first, and the rest of the company in due order: a grave offence being considered to have been

committed by anyone who, from whatever cause, is obliged to disregard the rule. (Hull 181)

The above narrative demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian rules of social behaviour are too rigid and complicated. Further, it shows how the code of precedence conditioned social relations in Anglo-India. It represents how even the Anglo-Indian women participated in naturalizing the Anglo-Indian social norms. Any negligence to follow the rigid Anglo-Indian rules was met with astonishment, as Florence Marryat puts it in *Gup*:

"Not going to attend the levee!" she exclaimed. "Why, it's your duty to go."

I told her that I could not view the matter exactly in that light, considering that it was only the invitation of one lady to another and that I was not under the orders of Mrs. A _____, as my husband was under those of the Commander-in-chief.

"No," she replied, compelled to agree in the truth of my argument, although evidently shocked at my audacity in coupling the names of Mrs. A _____ and myself together; "of course not, but you will allow that she is the rankest lady in Madras, and therefore I think we are all bound to show her respect." (Marryat 17-18)

In the above narrative, it appears that attending the calls is considered to be an important imperial duty though Marryat appears to be the 'disorderly Memsahib' keen on violating the rules of manners. The most important revelation in this narrative is that how the Anglo-Indian husband's rank has its implications for the *memsahib* and how their identity is defined by their husband's professional credentials. Referring to their garden-parties, Margaret Macmillan notes thus:

Garden parties were usually more formal. Women wore their most attractive afternoon dresses and huge hats, sometimes lined with paper against the sun's rays....Garden party food was fairly predictable: in Lahore, for example, it was lettuce and tomato sandwiches, curry puffs, little iced cakes and Nedou's toffees'. ... Then the band struck up God Save the King, and up walked Lord Curzon in frock-coat and top-hat,...walked to a large shamiana[marquee] and sat down with Lady Rivaz...and Lady Curzon presently moved out to converse pleasantly with friends. When the sun had sunk low in the clear heavens, the Viceroy and Lady Curzon left the grounds together, and thereafter the festive crowd dispersed.' (Macmillan 160)

The narrative here emphasizes on the formal way in which parties were organised. At the same time, it demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian social space was gendered and how their women's identity was constructed around these rituals and protocols. Identifying the differences in the social customs that were followed in India and Britain, Margaret Macmillan states that 'Calling cards, dance programmes, long white gloves lingered on in India well after they had

disappeared at Home' (154). Even Florence Marryat in *Gup* records this difference with regard to morning calls thus:

In the first place, the last arrivals are expected to call upon the residents, and the introductory visit is made by the gentleman alone. Even married men make their first round of cantonment calls without their wives, and (if her acquaintance should be desired) the return visit is made by the gentleman and lady together. This custom must, I fancy, have been instituted in those days when there was oftener an objectionable than an unobjectionable female amongst the officers' household furniture, and some such protection against their forcible entrance into respectable families was stringently needed. (Marryat 10-11)

Here, the narrative refers to the 'objectionable' female-native women- who got married to the English men. Thus, the social space seems to be a sanitized space free from the native intrusion and the contamination of racial purity. Bachelors can call at any house which they choose to enter and they were generally not denied entry. Marryat says that 'This species of free entrance to the houses of their countrymen has its origin in the spirit of patriotism which draws people of one nation so strongly together' (11). Social rituals were modified to suit the Indian colonial environment, however, they were strictly followed to demarcate the racial, class and gender boundaries in the colonial space.

Native Language and the "Politically Correct Memsahib"

These manuals advise the Anglo-Indian women to learn the native language to manage their servants. In the section titled "The Duties of the Mistress" in *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, Steel refers to language learning as the first duty of these women:

The first duty of a mistress is, of course, to be able to give intelligible orders to her servants; therefore it is necessary she should learn to speak Hindustani. No sane Englishwoman would dream of living, say, for twenty years, in Germany, Italy, or France, without making the attempt, at any rate, to learn the language. She would, in fact, feel that by neglecting to do so she would write herself down an ass. (Steel 12)

The narrative shows how native language learning is important to manage servants. Language performance is an integral component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal. Similarly, in *The English Bride in India*, Chota Mem advises thus:

Do not let it trouble you when you first arrive in India, that you cannot speak Hindustani. Nearly all servants, especially in the South, can speak a certain amount of English and you very soon pick up the ordinary every day words. I certainly advise trying to learn the language as soon as possible, as

the MemSahib not being able to speak Hindustani is the cause of many misunderstandings with her menials.(Chota Mem 59)

Though the narrative says that the new arrivals need not worry much about the language learning in the South as the natives 'can speak a certain amount of English'. However, she insists that they should learn Hindustani as the lack of it would 'cause many misunderstandings with her menials'(59).

Native Servants, Children and The "Politically Correct Mem sahib"

Advice on household management is an important chapter in many advice manuals like Steel's *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook* and Maud Diver's *The Englishwoman in India*. The narratives of household management reinforce the idea that the Anglo-Indian women must take up the role of a supervisor and manage the Anglo-Indian household, thereby, contributing to the British imperial enterprise in India. Steel advises against the intensive labour in the presence of native servants in *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook* thus: "Never do work which an ordinarily good servant ought to be able to do. If the one you have will not or cannot do it, get another who can." (Steel 15). Even Chota Mem's *The English Bride in India* reiterates the supervisory role to be performed by the Anglo-Indian women thus:

Half-an-hour should be sufficient time for your housekeeping, so after first seeing the cook (who by-the-way comes to you, instead of you going to him as is the English custom) sally forth to your store-room or godown, where your servants will come to you for their different requirements.... Go to your cook house and see that every utensil is spotlessly clean and that the sweeper has brushed the floor and put phenyle in sink, and while you are outside, some mornings look round the stables, and in places where water might lie have Kerosine oil put down to stop mosquitoes breeding. After finishing with the servants I advise you to enter up accounts, and do any necessary writing, and then you will always find plenty of work in the way of dress-making, and making things for the house, such as curtains, cushion covers, lamp shades, etc., etc. (Chota Mem 7)

The given narrative insists on the managerial skills essential for the English women and nowhere in the narrative, there are references to intensive manual labour to be pursued by them. Studying the role of the Anglo-Indian women and differentiating it with that of her British counterpart, Ralph Crane has observed thus:

Here, the housewife had to manage servants marked by racial and class difference; here, the accounts were carried on in a foreign currency and supplies were procured through bazaars and importers; here, her responsibility to uphold standards was overlaid with imperial assumptions about racial and cultural superiority (and by corollary, vulnerability to the strangeness of India). (Crane xviii)

Mary Procida sets up an argument that the British domesticity demanded intensive labour while the Anglo-Indian domesticity needed surveillance and managerial skills alone.¹¹ It must be stated here that the lower class English women like missionary and barrack wives definitely devoted themselves to intensive labour and these manuals are overtly silent about these women. In fact, Indrani Sen points out that despite "a fairly large social presence, poorer whites (barrack wives, especially) remained more or less peripheral to the discourse of Anglo-India" (13).

Without the labour of the native servants, the English women in India could not have managed their household. The Anglo-Indian home is the site where these English women encountered the native servants and gained the status of a national subject oft denied within Britain's boundaries. Here, the English women-subservient to the English men- subordinated the native servants who were largely male. She considered these effeminate male servants to be her children who have to be subordinated and domesticated. In the first chapter titled 'The Duties of the Mistress' in *The Indian Housekeeper and the Cook*, Steel advises the Englishwomen to treat them as a child. She wrote thus:

The Indian servant is a child in everything save age, and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly, but with the greatest firmness. The laws of the household should be those of the Medes and Persians, and first faults should never go unpunished. By overlooking a first and first faults should never go unpunished. By overlooking a first offence, we lost the only opportunity we have of preventing it becoming a habit. (Steel 12)

Even Chota Mem suggests the same in *The English Bride in India* thus: "Be patient with your servants and treat them more or less like children, remembering they love praise, and don't treat them as if they were machines" (55). Though many advice manuals represent the native servants as untrustworthy and unreliable, An Anglo-Indian in *Indian Outfits* provides a different view where the narrative suggests that a sympathetic treatment of native servants will help them immensely in the household management rather than being rude to them. It will be useful to look at the narrative here:

I answer, much, Indian servants are like English servants. If they are made happy and comfortable, they will be faithful, and often attach themselves to you surprisingly. If they are treated like dogs, cuffed here and kicked there, very naturally they will render you grudging service, will lie, cheat, steal, and circumvent, and think it fair play. (An Anglo-Indian 46)

Even E.C.P. Hull's narrative advises against 'too much harshness and severity' and adds that this advice is applicable to servants of all nations. By showering kindness and by treating them like a child, the Indian servants' obedience and subjugation are ensured. Further, there is no obvious threat to the honour of the English women staying in India. Steel's narrative suggests that *buksheesh* could be given to reward their good service and she refers to the administration of castor oil by

memsahibs who believe 'there must be some physical cause for their inability to learn or to remember' (13). Most importantly, all these narratives concerning the native servants hint at the judicious management of them upon which the "politically correct Memsahib" identity is dependent. Anglo-Indian advice manuals like Steel's advises these women to focus on taking care of their husband and children indicating that the feminine roles should not be given up for the want of amusements in the colonial environment. Insisting on the rearing of children by young mothers in the chapter titled 'Hints on Management of Young Children', she writes thus:

Nature can supply the demand, and the nursing mother retains her usual occupations and amusements in moderation, and enjoy cheerful society and ordinary wholesome food, though stimulants had best be given up. She must not let herself be worried nor imposed upon by the ayah, who, whenever she wants to run and have a smoke, will tell her that the child is hungry. ...during which the mother can fulfil her outdoor social engagements, and longer than which no woman who loved her home, husband and child would care to be away. (Steel 160)

Steel seems to hint that a woman who loves her family will not spend much time in outdoor activities. Thus, by indicating their gender role in the colonial domesticity and restricting their mobility outside the Anglo-Indian home, the Anglo-Indian women were expected to confine themselves within the domestic boundaries. Many narratives suggest that children must be kept under their supervision as dirt and cultural practices may pose threats to the young children's body and mind. The oft-repeated perception is that the proximity of the native servants leads them to pick up the ways of 'the lowest class of natives'. Referring to the accent of the Anglo-Indian children, E.C.P. Hull warns against the learning of the native accent thus:

The nasal twang and shrill unmusical tone of voice so generally found in native women of the lower orders, give a most unpleasing peculiarity of tone and pronunciation, often noticed in Anglo-Indian children, and one which may, if care is not taken, cling to them through life. (Hull 141)

Many advice manuals such as Hull's caution the Anglo-Indian community against the native language learning by the Anglo-Indian children. They had the imperial duty of motivating their children to perform their racial superiority linguistically. So, they insisted their children to speak English. Many Anglo-Indian women writers like Steel gave a personal touch to their advice manuals. Besides providing suggestions on food for infants, she says that the author herself has given bath to her child. Insisting that the young mother should take care of the infant herself in the first year without relying on the native servants, in an authoritative tone, she says: The mother should bathe her infant herself the first year.... The present writer bathes her own infants when fifteen days old, the tub being placed on her bed and the clothes all laid ready...(Steel 163). By indicating that she took care of

her infant herself, Steel not only sets an example but also adds credibility to her advice manual. E.C.P. Hull's narrative suggests that the Anglo-Indian children must be removed from India "before the evil influences of native servants have had time to produce an ineradicable impression on the young mind" (345). Suffering the separation from their children stoically was the major component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal. Nupur Chaudhuri rightly points out that the Anglo-Indian women 'merely exchanged the restrictions of Victorian society for those of the colonial world' (519).

Conclusion

Locating the relevance of Butler's theory of performativity, in this essay, I examined the select Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and during the 'high imperialism' period of the British Raj and proposed that this cultural artefact served the purpose of constructing and naturalizing the English Memsahibs' gendered racial identity. I argued that by reiterating the performance of gender, class and race imperatives to construct a unique identity prerequisite for the Anglo-Indian community as well as the Indian colony, these texts aimed at the crystallization of this identity that strengthened the idea of the British Raj. Such reiteration- apart from revealing the imperial anxiety over the subversion of the "politically correct Memsahib" identity- was useful to caution the Englishwomen new to the colonial environment. What the essay further demonstrated is that the performance of gendered-racial identity of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies, spaces, the Anglo-Indian household, but also material consumption including food.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India*_(Oxford: Oxford University Press)6.

² Alison Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24.4 (1999) :423.

³ The term 'memsahib' originates from 'madam sahib'. Alison Blunt states that the middle class women who read household guides were known as memsahibs and they were predominantly wives of army officers and civil servants.

⁴ Swati Chattopadhyay, "'Goods, Chattels and Sundry Items': Constructing 19th-Century Anglo-Indian Domestic Life," *Journal of Material Culture* 7.3(2002): 243-271, see E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) :100.

⁵ Marion Hastings is the wife of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of Bengal.

⁶ Indrani Sen, *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900)* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2008)16.

⁷ Lynne Segal and Peter Osborne, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy* 67 (Summer):32-9.

⁸ Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, ed., "Judith Butler- In Theory," *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006):4.

⁹ Utilitarianism and Evangelicalism played an important role in defining British attitudes towards India during the early nineteenth century. See Udayon Misra, *The Raj in Fiction: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Attitudes Towards India* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1987):34, Michael Mann, "Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India," *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed., Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004):1-26.

¹⁰ Alice Perrin is one of the popular Anglo-Indian women writers.

¹¹ Procida states that Steel and Gardiner highlighted the division of duties by including a separate chapter entitled "Advice to the Cook," in which they addressed the(implicitly male and Indian) cook directly, while the remainder of the text was clearly intended for the Anglo-Indian woman in her supervisory capacity. See Mary Procida, "Feeding the Imperial Appetite: Imperial Knowledge and Anglo-Indian Domesticity," *Journal of Women's History* 15.2(2003):133.

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“Last Seen Alive”: Lacan, Louise Bell and I in a Haunted House

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Abstract

Nobody notices me. That’s kind of normal. Nobody really noticed Ellen either until she was gone.

In 1983 a young girl called Louise Bell mysteriously disappeared from her bedroom in an outer-lying suburb of Adelaide. This story became part of the tapestry of fragmentary memories of my own girlhood. I used Lacan’s Borromean knot model of the psyche as a tool to guide my creative research and ideas towards a contemporary performance text titled *Last Seen Alive* which strives to translate newspaper accounts, and personal memories of the story into a fictional text. What is the symbolic order of the story of a girl who mysteriously disappears from her bedroom one night? How to conjure the ghosts and monsters of the imaginary which populate the print media stories of Louise Bell’s disappearance? How to represent my encounter with the man currently suspected of murdering Louise?

Introduction

In 1983 I was thirteen years of age and living in the small city of Adelaide, (capital of South Australia), when a news story broke about ten year old Louise Bell disappearing from her bedroom in the middle of the night. I was living in close proximity to Louise and perhaps for this reason her story had such a great impact upon me. In 2013 her case remains unsolved, her body never found. Louise became part of my girlhood. Her story inspires deep uneasiness at best, and visceral terror at worst. She has become a ghost that haunts my memories and imagination, gone but not forgotten. Gone where? I asked myself, how can I examine my relationship to Louise Bell as a public figure whose story became part of the tapestry of my own memories? How can I explore the fear her story embedded in me that still affects me today?

Using the Borromean Knot as a Dramatic Tool

Lacan proposes, “[w]e can extend analysis’ equations to certain human sciences that can utilize them—especially, as we shall see, to criminology—provided we perform the correct transformation.”ⁱ Here I attempt something similar, “rethinking” the use of psychoanalysis “in relation to a new object.”ⁱⁱ I ask how might Jacques Lacan apply his theory of the symbolic order, imaginary and the real

as a dramatist working with the story of Louise Bell? How might he identify the three overlapping fields within her story? For the purpose of setting some parameters on my analysis I work with the collection of seminars and writings edited together for the 2002 edition of *Ecrits*, and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*.

Source material for research are the editions of *The Advertiser*, *the Sunday Mail* and *The News* newspapers covering the years 1983, 1984, 1985 then those editions of 2011 covering the re-opening of Louise Bell's case. I followed through in my creative writing by drawing upon memories from these same years which I translated into fictional monologues.

There are three layers to my psychoanalytic analysis. The first is interpreting the newspaper articles detailing the story of Louise Bell's mysterious disappearance as a story in which the symbolic order, imaginary and real can be identified. The second layer examines my own memories of my girlhood into womanhood. In this second layer of analysis I seek an intersection where Louise's story and my own overlap in order to locate the real or the dramatic nucleus of *Last Seen Alive*. The third layer translates the first two layers (her story and my own) into a fictional performance text incorporating written and visual material.

“Last Seen Alive”

For *Last Seen Alive* I write monologues for a character called Me, who is narrating her experience of fear and desire during girlhood, and into womanhood in relation to the story of another fictional girl called Ellen who has gone missing from her bedroom in the middle of the night. I wrote secondary monologues for four Others who embody characters that appear throughout the newspaper stories; The Troubled Priest, The Unreliable Witness, The Brokenhearted Detective and The Curious Criminologist. I appear on film as the character of Ellen, a fifteen year old school girl. I intended these monologues to be conceived of as an audio performance of disembodied voices speaking about Ellen who appears only as video footage in an empty house abandoned long ago, bearing the traces of a crime scene investigation. I wanted to invite audiences into a bodiless performance experience taking part in a non-theatrical space, in order to heighten the sense of the uncanny whereby what was once familiar as a family home is now unfamiliar.

In *Last Seen Alive* I ask whether the girl left her bedroom willingly, or was she forced out the window? I speculate upon the answer to this question through exploring my fictional scenario about Ellen, proposing that desire and fear are both forces at work upon the girl's psyche and it is therefore possible she left through the window willingly with a predator she mistakenly thought of as desirable. A predator who had groomed her.

I propose a reading of the story of Louise Bell where the symbolic order is a crime scene as the 'world' of the story that the reader-as-subject is invited into, the

identikit images, and photographs of an arrested man function as monsters of the imaginary, and the unseen, unknown predatory gaze at the bedroom window is the real as an abyss into which Louise has disappeared. An abyss which opens up at the point in time where a victim is last seen alive. An abyss where the missing girl is both dead and alive until her body is found.

I apply Lacan’s theory of the psyche being structured like a Borromean knot in which three rings representing the fields of the symbolic order, the imaginary and the real are interconnected in such a way that to break one ring is to disconnect all three. This approach I take in lieu of using a more familiar narrative structure such as the three-act model which presents a story in linear, chronological progression from beginning to middle, crisis, then final resolution. As a guiding principle the progression of narrative for *Last Seen Alive* is one which circles a hidden truth rather than moving forward in time in chronological order. The story of Louise Bell is a *search* (for her body, for the abductor, for answers) which has yet to conclude. I mirror this searching and not-finding through writing and filming random fragments as memories in the hope of discovering a hidden truth.

The Symbolic Order

Of the symbolic order Lacan says it is the “order whose mass supports” the subject “and welcomes him in the form of language, and superimposes determination by the signifier”.ⁱⁱⁱ He suggests that “if man comes to think about the symbolic order, it is because he is first caught in it in his being” and “he has only been able to make this entrance” into the symbolic order “through the radical defile of speech” exemplified “each time the subject addresses the Other as absolute ... making himself into an object in order to deceive the Other.”^{iv} The symbolic order is language driven and pre-exists. We, as subjects, are born into this pre-existing language which defines us and constructs us.

Those who write for the newspaper determine the symbolic order into which I, the reader, enter. How is Louise positioned in this symbolic order created by the newspaper reports as an object in relation to the Other? In determining the world of the story of Louise Bell, how do I determine the fictional world of *Last Seen Alive*? I decided that the symbolic order for the story of Louise Bell is a mystery, a crime to be solved, an investigation into a criminal event which has taken place in the Bell family home.

In the story of Louise Bell the house functions symbolically in two distinct ways. Initially the house is presented as a family home inhabited by the Bell family until Louise mysteriously disappears. At the point at which Louise is removed from the family home, the house then functions symbolically as a crime scene. This transformation of the family home into a crime scene renders the house uncanny. What was once familiar is now strange.

The uncanny house has been rendered so by the presence of a predatory gaze. The missing girl is assumed to have fallen prey to this predatory gaze embodied by a criminal. The Other for the subject in the story of Louise Bell then, is a predator. Louise is objectified as the child-victim of the predator in a story about a child being taken from a family home. The predatory gaze is located at the bedroom window through which the girl is assumed to have disappeared. Lacan presents an idea that the darkened window of the house suggests the presence of an Other who watches. From this darkened window one becomes aware of the Lacanian gaze.^v

When the case was re-opened in 2011, the *Sunday Mail* ran a report which suggested there “are perhaps just a handful of crimes etched in the memory of South Australians. The abduction of 10-year-old Louise Bell is one of them.” The article mentions that Louise “wasn’t taken from a public place; she was snatched from her bedroom ... still wearing her pyjamas” and goes on to point out that “[T]hankfully, it remains the only abduction of its type in suburban Adelaide ... carried out so audaciously.”^{vi} The suggestion is because the girl was taken from her own home, and “no trace of the schoolgirl has ever been found,” this case has etched itself as a lasting memory for South Australians.

Gaston Bachelard suggests that a “house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.”^{vii} He casts the house in the role of the “non-I that protects the I,” an interior space without which “man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life.”^{viii} It operates both as a physical structure and an imaginary phantasy space into which a subject projects their desires, and in which “our memories are housed”.^{ix}

As a symbol, the house can evoke memories of ‘my’ house or ‘your’ house. I hear of a girl taken from a house down the street and her house becomes my house in my own mind, because of the symbolic likenesses between her and I, and between her house and mine. We are of the same age, living in similar kinds of houses in the same area therefore what differentiates her from me? Her home from mine? Not able to determine differences of any real significance I arrive at the conclusion that home is no longer safe for a girl like her, like me; for girls like us. Lying in my own bedroom at night alone in 1983, my house now *feels* different. The darkened bedroom window becomes vaguely terrifying. Lacan says that, “all that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there” is a “window if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straightaway a gaze.”^x The gaze at the bedroom window is predatory, carrying with it the threat of an encounter with an abyss into which one can disappear, like Louise did.

The role of the detective is to interpret the clues left in the wake of the crime but as for the analyst working with a patient, interpretation “cannot be bent to any meaning” for a crime scene “designates only a single series of

signifiers.”^{xi} Around a crime scene “the subject may in effect occupy various places, depending on whether one places him under one or other of these signifiers.”^{xii} In the story of Louise Bell, the subject positions around the crime scene are detective, criminal and victim.

It is the role of the detective to perform an exhaustive search for evidence. Anthony Vidler, writing on the subject of anxiety and architecture in modern culture suggests that the process of crime scene investigation itself actually exhausts space by reading Lacan’s essay on Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”,

Poe’s spatial field of crime scenes is, in a similar sense, three-dimensional; both the map constructed by the police search and the map of the displaced, purloined letter are construed in space and time ...

The poetics of crime and its revelation transform the geometrical space of rational detection into a knot of abyssal proportions.^{xiii}

The purloined letter is hidden in plain sight, but remains undetected despite an exhaustive search for it until the detective finds it, “in full view hanging from the mantleshelf” for he has already deduced that the evidence was placed “in full view so as to hide it from those who would think it hidden”.^{xiv} Similarly the detective investigating the case of Louise Bell reveals a suspect was living near the missing girl’s home, also hidden in plain view. Lacan describes three gazes at work in Poe’s detective story illustrating his point with “the technique legendarily attributed to the ostrich when it seeks shelter from danger ... as it is here among three partners, the second believing himself invisible because the first has his head stuck in the sand, all the while letting the third calmly pluck his rear.”^{xv} In the story of Louise Bell, the detective is calmly awaiting his opportunity to pluck the rear, so to speak, of the suspect who believes himself to be invisible (assuming the community and police have their heads stuck in the sand).

In *Last Seen Alive* the character of Me refers to a suspect hidden in full view of the student body of her school. I create a fictional teacher who is arrested for the abduction and murder of Ellen but is later released due to failure of the evidence to stand up to scrutiny in a court of law. I explore the ways in which the teacher reveals his guilt in subtle ways that only make sense in hindsight. For the character of Me her teacher is simply a figure standing in the periphery of her vision as her main focus is upon a student called James whom she has a crush on. Her ordinary world of girlhood desire is impacted upon by a crime narrative featuring a suspect hiding in plain sight. In the symbolic order he is signifying as a teacher, but this is a surface illusion. Where the imaginary impacts upon the symbolic order we have the surface illusions and deceptive images which lure the gaze away from the real, from the truth.

The Imaginary

I liken the predatory criminal as represented in the newspaper stories to the mythical bogeyman. Marina Warner, in her study of the history of the bogeyman writes,

Child-stealers, night-raiders, cradle snatchers: they inspired a rich and sinister body of tales that had every appearance of medieval and superstitious primitiveness, but continued to be retold at the height of the Enlightenment. [...] The unfamiliar in every aspect moulds the phantom, and so, like witches, bogeys are crooked or moley or warty, or they limp or suffer other unusual physical traits ...^{xvi}

Bogeymen, Stephen Krensky asserts, are sometimes “said to take human form”^{xvii} and he goes on to explain for his readers that,

Bogeymen are said to be dangerous. They are always evil, bad and hateful. [...] He is aggressive. Bogeymen do not need to know their victims. They don't need a special reason to attack. They are said to do it because they can. [...] They move silently through the underbrush or into people's bedrooms.^{xviii}

The bogeyman is an imaginary figure representing the unknown or unidentified predator who steals children from their bedrooms. Edward J Ingebretson, in looking at the role of monstrosity and the rhetoric of fear in society argues that monsters “teach us who we are and how we are to live.”^{xix} They are symbolic of what we are not to be or become. Krensky suggests the bogeyman is “a scary creature that doesn't fit into any neat and tidy category.”^{xx} The bogeyman is constructed as a symbolic monstrous figure that steals naughty children away to an abyss where they are never seen again. This monster teaches us, as children, to behave otherwise we might be targeted by the bogeyman. When looking at the figure of the criminal who abducts children from their bedrooms in the middle of the night the bogeyman is the fictional embodiment of the predatory gaze at the darkened bedroom window.

The monster offers up a place for the real to operate as a phantasy, as Lacan suggests:

The place of the real, which stretches from the trauma to the phantasy--in so far as the phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary [...] The real has to be sought beyond the dream--in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us ...^{xxi}

The monster is an effigy of the real upon which we can project our deepest fears; it is that something we put between ourselves and the abyss, the void that opens up at the location where a victim is last seen alive. The criminal monster acts as a screen upon which is projected a phantasy of an Other who is not-right, not like the rest of society.

In *Last Seen Alive* the character of Me talks about a presence she can hear breathing in her bedroom late at night, once the lights are turned out. This monster appears as a stand-in for the unknown sexual predator who has taken Ellen from her bedroom, across the road. As the character of Me experiences an increasing intensity of sexual awakening for the boy she has a crush on, the presence of this monster breathing in the dark of her bedroom at night escalates to such a degree that it climbs into bed with her and wakes her up. This monster in *Last Seen Alive* is a manifestation of the tensions between the forces of desire and fear acting upon the psyche of the character of Me. The bogeyman is a story about what happens to children who are naughty, but the sexual predator (criminal) who *also* abducts children and takes them away targets *innocent* children. Louise Bell is presented as innocent against the man accused of her abduction and murder referred to having committed a “sinister and audacious act.”^{xxii}

The bogeyman operates within the symbolic order as an imago. Lacan suggests, “the first delineation of the imaginary, whose letters associated with those of the symbolic and the real, will decorate...the pots—that are forever empty, since they are all so symbolic.”^{xxiii} In other words there is no real monster, no actual bogeyman that exists, rather this monster is pure imaginary, all surface illusion. Sexual predators who target children however are real and are named in the symbolic order as criminals, constructed by and through the laws which govern a society. Lacan asserts that “[N]either crime nor criminals are objects that can be conceptualized apart from their sociological context.” Criminals are transformed into monsters through the ways in which the story of their crime is told. “Every society, lastly, manifests the relationship between crime and law by punishments whose infliction, regardless of the form it takes, requires subjective assent.” A criminal is an Other to the law, and to society-at-large. Those who perform criminal acts do so knowingly embracing their role as criminal Other, risking the punishment that will be inflicted upon them if they are caught.

On 12 March 1983 *The Advertiser* ran a story about a potential suspect with an identikit image representing “a likeness of the man police want to speak to in connection with the abduction of Louise Bell”. The birth of a criminal monster begins with such images of ‘likenesses’ compiled from “information given by a witness”.^{xxiv} Witnesses memories are subjective though, and can be unreliable because, as Dylan Trigg suggests, “[W]e never experience an image directly because the same image is altered by the creative imagination”^{xxv} as it is recalled. He goes on to suggest, “the interplay between memory and imagination [...] precludes the witnessing of memory, and renders the imagination the guiding agent”.^{xxvi} A man “between 20 and 30, 183 centimetres (six feet) tall, with blond collar length hair, clean shaven, athletic build” is described and an identikit image of a face pieced together from a jigsaw puzzle of facial features is presented to the public.^{xxvii} The identikit image is drawn from and though the imaginary seeking a likeness to a real man who exists in the symbolic order. He is all image, only image at this stage. A potential man conjured from the intersection of memory and

imagination of a witness. The article goes on to set up a juxtaposition of Geesing as a ‘bad’ man against witness testimonies that Louise was a “shy, quiet, well-liked, pleasant, eager to please” child. In *Last Seen Alive* I write monologues for The Unreliable Witness who might recall seeing a suspicious figure, and The Troubled Priest who offers himself as a mediator between the evil monster and the family of the missing girl. Both characters attempt to narrate the criminal monster but fail, instead revealing their own monstrous desires.

On the front page of *The News* on 14 December 1984 a story announcing “Geesing Guilty” features photographs which depict him as wild-eyed, bearded, and mean looking, bordering on resembling a madman, against a photograph of Louise Bell, smiling at the camera, the tragic figure of an innocent girl robbed of her life (by the monstrous Geesing).^{xxviii} The girl’s innocence is in part constructed through the use of such an unflattering photograph of Geesing and likewise the criminal other becomes more monstrous through this juxtaposition of images. Desire is relegated entirely to the predator. Monstrous desire positioned against the innocent child-without-desire.

Lacan writes of desire, “it is in the Other that the subject is constituted as ideal, that he has to regulate the completion of what comes as ego, or ideal ego [...] to constitute himself in his imaginary reality.”^{xxix} He goes on to expand,

But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space. Now, this is also the point from which he speaks, since in so far as he speaks, it is in the locus of the Other that he begins to constitute that truthful lie by which is initiated that which participates in desire at the level of the unconscious.^{xxx}

In *Last Seen Alive* Ellen only ever appears to the audience through the gaze of the Other who is watching her through a camera lens. At times it is clear that Ellen is aware of the camera, as she looks directly into the lens. She knows she is being watched, and performs her ideal self for the Other. She plays with the very predatory gaze that will erase her from the symbolic order and hide her in the real. Lacan suggests, “[T]he true aim of desire is the other, as constrained, beyond his involvement in the scene. It is not only the victim who is concerned in exhibitionism, it is the victim referred to some other who is looking at him.”^{xxxi} What part, I ask, does desire of the child-victim play in the story of a girl taken from her bedroom window?

The Real

Lacan proposes that the real is that which is hidden from view and that which a subject unconsciously keeps returning to “*as if by chance*”.^{xxxii} In *Last Seen Alive* the character of Me eventually reveals a hidden truth about her relationship to the missing girl Ellen. She confesses that she saw Ellen leaving through the bedroom

window the night she went missing. The revelation that the character of Me watched a crime being committed and never told is her real. It is why the character of Me is stuck, obsessing about Ellen because she was the last person to see Ellen alive and she has been keeping this a secret. It is this memory that the character of Me is circling, making her ways towards.

The real is described by Lacan as being “between perception and consciousness” and he goes on to discuss the real as the noise that pulls the dreamer awake from a dream. He describes his own dream during which a “knocking occurs, not in my perception, but in my consciousness” wherein “my consciousness reconstitutes itself around this representation” and he becomes aware that he is “waking up”. Lacan poses the question, “*What is it that wakes the sleeper? Is it not, in the dream, another reality?*”^{xxxiii} The story of a father who has fallen asleep in one room, while his son is burned to death in the room next door is borrowed by Lacan from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* to further explain the real as being of another reality, that hints at the truth. The father dreams his son is trying to wake him, asking “Father, can’t you see that I am burning?”^{xxxiv} Lacan suggests the dream is “essentially [...] an act of homage to the missed reality” of waking up and saving the child from burning alive, “a reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly, in some never attained awakening.”^{xxxv} The missed encounter (with the real boy) “forever missed, has occurred between dream and awakening.”^{xxxvi} The encounter with the real exists where the truth lies; the son was literally burning in his bed and died. The dream repeats itself because the dreamer did not wake up in time to save his son. In the way that the open window of Louise Bell’s bedroom points to a missed encounter, a failure on the part of anybody to wake up and stop the events that caused Louise to disappear. For the character of Me the missed encounter was not intervening in Ellen’s departure from her bedroom, and then not telling her parents, the police, a friend, anybody who might have used the information to good outcome.

In a performance context, the real would be that which is hidden between the lines, so to speak. The performance itself is a phantasy. The real presents in the gaps where what is hidden in the performance is revealed. The real erupts in the moments of surprise, where an audience find unexpected meaning in the performance, or are brought to a visceral response which cannot be articulated, only felt; for example the kind of silence where ‘you could hear a pin drop’. I cannot produce the real, it must be discovered *by chance*. It is that which the performance does not knowingly achieve, but rather that which is revealed to be present by the audience, demonstrated in the ways they are responding. The audience must discover the real for themselves, and not every audience member will experience an encounter with the real during a performance. One could represent a traumatic event or encounter, but that is merely representation, not a genuine experience of the real. It is the difference between telling an audience member they should be feeling scared or joyful and their feeling either for themselves. I invite my audience into an abandoned house where they encounter

the ghostly images of a missing girl, and are filmed by the predatory gaze at the bedroom window, something they do not discover until the final moments. Perhaps it is then, when they realise they are the real performer of *Last Seen Alive* that they will encounter the real.

Notes

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- ⁱ Lacan, J. *Ecrits*. W W Norton & Company, New York, London, 2006 (English trans), p 128.
- ⁱⁱ Lacan, J, p 126.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Lacan, J, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. P 35.
- ^{iv} Lacan, J, p 40.
- ^v Lacan, J. *The Seminar, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique. 1953-1954*. Norton, New York, 1988, p 215.
- ^{vi} Hunt, N. "Louise Twist", *Sunday Mail*, 9 October, 2011, p 5.
- ^{vii} Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, USA, 1969, p 4.
- ^{viii} Bachelard, G, p 7.
- ^{ix} Bachelard, G, p 8.
- ^x Lacan, J. *The Seminar, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique. 1953-1954*. Norton, New York, 1988, p 215.
- ^{xi} Lacan, J, p 207.
- ^{xii} Lacan, J, p 207.
- ^{xiii} Vidler, A. *Warped Space. Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. MIT Press, USA, 2001, p 128.
- ^{xiv} Vidler, A, p 126.
- ^{xv} Lacan, J. *Ecrits*. P 10.
- ^{xvi} Warner, M. *No Go, the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Mock*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, USA, 1998, p 25.
- ^{xvii} Krensky, S. *The Bogeyman: Monster Chronicles*. Lancer Publication Company, Minneapolis, USA, 2008, p 7.
- ^{xviii} Krensky, S, p 8.
- ^{xix} Ingebretson, E J. *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture*. The University of Chicago Press, US, 2001, p 155.
- ^{xx} Krensky, S, p 7.
- ^{xxi} Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. P 60.
- ^{xxii} Hunt, N. "Louise Twist", *Sunday Mail*, 9 October 2011, p 5.
- ^{xxiii} Lacan, J. *Ecrits*. P 54.
- ^{xxiv} Ball, R. "Louise Bell: Police seeking this man", *The Advertiser*, 12 March 1983, p?
- ^{xxv} Trigg, D. *The Memory of Place. A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Ohio University Press, US, 2012, p 67.
- ^{xxvi} Trigg, D, p 67.
- ^{xxvii} Ball, R. "Louise Bel: Police seeking this man", *The Advertiser*, March 12, 1983, p?
- ^{xxviii} *The News*. 14 December 1984, p 2. The photograph of Geesing is dominant, and larger than that of Louise.
- ^{xxix} Lacan, J. *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. P 144.
- ^{xxx} Lacan, J, p 144.
- ^{xxxi} Lacan, J, p 183.
- ^{xxxii} Lacan, J, p 54. Italics in original.

^{xxxiii} Lacan, J, p 56. Italics in original.

^{xxxiv} Lacan, J, p 34

^{xxxv} Lacan, J, p 58.

^{xxxvi} Lacan, J, p 56.

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Semiotic Encryption of Women, Violence and Hysteria in Indian Women Dramaturgy

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Abstract

The juxtaposing depiction of women, violence and hysteria as semiotic elements in women-centric play-texts attempts to translate the theatrical meanings because of its demonstrable approach to unearth the textual meanings and its relational politics of representation. From semiological aspect, the interplay of women, violence and hysteria generates a kind of semiotic femaleness in order to prognosticate the feminist route of cultural politics imbedded in the narratives of female composed drama. The present paper intends to analyze the semiotic transformation of Indian women dramaturgy in the plays of Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta. Each of their plays tries to interpret new meanings hidden under the semiotic signs used by these playwrights and also attempt to project the gender politics visualized in the realm of feminist theatre.

[**Keywords:** feminist theatre, semiotics, politics of representation, gest, violence against women.]

In harvesting the performance discourse of gyno-centric play-texts, the presentation of women, violence and hysteria juxtaposingly through the translation of semiotic signs draws scholarly attention because of its demonstrable approach to unearth the textual meanings and its relational politics of representation. From semiological aspect, the interplay of women, violence and hysteria generates a kind of semiotic femaleness in order to prognosticate the feminist route of cultural politics imbedded in the narratives of female composed drama. Women, violence and hysteria as individual dramatic element try to construct a semiotic uniformity for analyzing the performative value of WOMAN as semiotic sign. If we attempt to scrutinize (i) *woman* as emblematic ideology, (ii) *violence* as her suffering or suppression, (iii) *hysteria* as the dramatic/ stagable outburst of her prolonged repressed voice within a single frame, then we can get a causal relation behind delving out the feminist theatrical aesthetics of semiotics. This relational performance strategy of female dramaturgy traces interlink with the trio while investigating the female body and sexual politics in terms of theatrical language. Hence, by bracketing off these heterogeneous dramatic elements trio together, we can perceive the texts of feminist theatre as network of meanings.

While discussing the presence of women, presentation of violence and hysteria as semiotic objects of performance, then staging of semiotization through female performer's physical attributes along with her mimetic and

representational power itself turns into an entire set of signs due to its dynamism. Actually, women-centric plays intend to put this analogous combination of women, violence and hysteria on stage in order to decode the social position of women in cultural domain. The body and voice of actor being the fundamental theatrical icon must have the capability to convey some social gestures for sensitizing social response against the atrocity encountered by women. In this respect, Indian women dramaturgy attempts to portray of how the victimized female characters caused by violence and subsequent violence, are presented as semiotic signs under the wrapping of apparel and make-up.

In women drama, both theatre semiotics and feminist semiotic theory functions jointly to focus on the meaning of play-text. Theatre semiotics is predominantly the study of signs that human put on stage for others to interpret. Theatre semiotician Elaine Aston points out that the potentiality of semiotics lies in its approach of how drama and theatre are made in manifesting the inner meaning before audience. By understanding of semiotics or study of science, meaning of performance/ play-text can be both exchanged and generated. Every aspect of theatrical performance is a signifier and the signified is the inner meaning or message conveyed by the collective unconscious of audience. While theatre semioticians stresses on stage related elements, feminist theory focuses on cultural encoding of sign as the foundation of communication. The galvanization of theatrical and feminist studies of semiotics has been adopted by female playwrights of postmodern era which can be called feminist theatrical semiotics that explores the semiology of women drama to chart the interplay of culture and society.

In formulating the semiotic/semiological effect/application on feminist drama, Brecht's performance theory has much relevance today as it theorizes the fundamentality of gender and sexual difference. In terms of signs system, Brechtian theatre put the audience in a specific position to understand the social and changeable world. Therefore, theatre involves into a politics of sign, i.e. in Brechtian terminology called as 'gestus'. While Barthes defines 'gestus' as 'the external material expression of the social conflicts to which it bears witness' (Fortier, 29), Pavis defines it as 'an intentional signal emitted by the actor ... in order to indicate the character's social attitude and way of behaving in order to indicate 'the relation among people'. (Fortier, 30). The Brechtian theorizations of the social gesture, epic structure and alienation effect provides the means to reveal the material relations as the basis of social reality, to foreground and examine ideologically determined beliefs and unconscious habitual perceptions and to make visible those signs inscribed on the body which distinguish social behavior in relation to class, gender and history. For feminists, Brechtian techniques offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behavior and their interaction with other socio-political factors. (Keyssar, 35-36). Brecht's gestural technique, the method for creating a central gesture or 'gest' usually employs by the feminists to reveal the relation between sexes.

However, semiotic performance theory examines the relationship between the signifiers and the signified in an attempt to understand how a given phenomenon creates meaning for its viewer and how that viewer participates in the creation of meaning. (Scott, 82). Feminist theatre theory primarily concerned with the sign Woman which is imprinted with ideology of the dominant culture, the normative values and belief of the culture control the connotations of the sign and prescribes its resonances with cultural biases. The cultural construct of 'woman' produced by dominant patriarchal ideology as an object has to be looked at by male who is assumed to be the subject of dramatic action and the female object of his gaze. The corporeal presence of a woman on stage in theatre makes biological and sexual phenomena cannot be denied by the viewer. The feminist approach to semiotics attempts to deconstruct the sign Woman in order to distinguish biology from culture and experience from ideology, bringing into question the entire notion of how one knows what the sign Woman means.

Women as a Semiotic Sign:

The presentation of Woman as sign onstage brings forth the issue of male gaze. The sign Woman constructed by and for male gaze. Both from the realm of production and reception, the female body onstage have been encoded with culturally determined components of male sexual desire. Indian women dramaturgy projects either female body or woman as sign in drama to interpret various angles of theatre semiotics. Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta create the sign Woman and then put it onstage, rather than put before male visuality to scrutinize the voyeuristic pleasure.

Padmanabhan depicts a trailer of gang rape onstage intentionally to record the dehumanized reactions of male in *Lights Out*. The play dramatizes the urban apathy for rape and a total reluctance of involving in such uncivilized incident. The spectacle of mutilated female body along with brutality of gang rape on stage characterizes psycho-semiotics of the male gaze. Feminist film critic Cora Kaplan asserts that the sign Woman is constructed by and for the male gaze. The projection of dramatic text is 'scripted' by the female body. The twitching female body – its agonized movements on public display for male consumption denotes the hierarchical male theatrical supremacy within capitalist patriarchy. The action of mutilated female body on stage symbolizes the 'speaking the body' too. Woman on stage never presents the subject position rather she is invested with those qualities which the masculine gazer desires to construct as 'other'. The reception of audience about the woman on stage is almost same as male gaze: she appears before them as a site of gratifying desire as well as transforms into a kind of cultural courtesan. The description of "Three men, holding down one woman, with her legs pulled apart, while the fourth thrusts his – organ - into her!" (39) denotes not only sexual victimization of woman, but also highlights the psycho-somatic pleasure of seeing by male duo. The ongoing pornographic scene, may not be

considered or appeared as dehumanized sense of obscenity to them, rather, it acts as a voyeuristic pleasure to their optic system. Their desire for watching 'domesticated porn' from and within household provides a double meaning of happiness to them. Psychologically, there is a causal interlink between pornography and violent sexual aggression of men. The visualization of porn plays a vital role in institutionalizing a subhuman, victimized, second class status for women. In addition to this, their planning for taking the live snap of gang rape and its monetary advantage shows their malignity towards the commodification of female sexuality. Hence, the sadomasochistic pleasure of 'seeing' the sexuality brings a jouissance to them.

Again, by placing the two binary oppositions of female presence – Leela's hysterical behavior on one hand and Freida's silence on the other hand, Padmanabhan tries to create a concatenation of contrast, comparison and contradiction at a time. While the former attempts to voice forth the ugliness of victimization, the later confines her in a tight-lipped situation. May be, the dramatist endeavors to decode some socio-cultural semiotic meanings through the physical placement of her dramatic personality on stage. While, Leela, as a representative of upper middle class background, always strolls in front of the stage, Freida her domestic help never appears on the front stage. It is, as if, Padmanabhan restricts her actional zone within kitchen. Freida's static confinement particularizes dramatic/ theatrical marginalization. Being a marginalized one, playwright deliberately puts her on a border line. Thus Freida's physical movement, muteness has close affinity with her physical placement on stage which mingles the theatrical semiosis with gest. The spatial and non-functional gest of Freida somehow merges with her silence which not only de-voices the suppression of women but also decodes the gender location of class.

Padmanabhan's another semiotic application by depicting three different sound effects: heart rending cry for help of the rape victim lady, Leela's hysterical outburst and Freida's constant reticence generates a series of antithetical verbal/ non-verbal gest which tries to configure the reality of barbarism. Crying is an oral gesture through which the raped lady wants to verbalize her inner turmoil and physical agony, while Leela's hysteria is a strong performative gest through which she likes to ventilate her suppressed emotional pangs of ignorance. Freida's silence indicates a kind of saturation and subsequent acceptance for survival. This three gradual diminishing of resonance modulations denote the fathom of violence against women. The bizarre sounds of screaming intermittently - screams emanating from a woman in the construction site – who is raped and brutalized every night in the midst of arch lights signaling to a gender oppressive society.

Padmanabhan's another play *Harvest* projects the Woman as sign from quite different angle. Due to its futuristic setting, the playwright designs the character of Ginni as electronic simulacra through the onscreen contact module. She is recasting as a decoy by Virgil to cajole the male donors of third world. Padmanabhan's presentation of Ginni as a blonde and white skinned woman and

her sudden flickering from the polygonal contact module for continuing the panoptic vigilance upon its sellers proves the fact that the feminine presence has vital importance for consumeristic pleasure. Apparently angel like ad-looking of Ginni has been exhibited for male seduction or to arouse male sexual desire. The male gaze of Jeetu has already been trapped and manipulated by it and even is ready to do anything for her. Thus the superimposed computerized beauty Ginni acts as a social gest to estimate value of female corporeality. The theatrical projection of Ginni as fame fatal in terms of sign Woman signifies that the sexual or biological events cannot be denied from male viewer. The polygonal contact module serves as a watch tower. The panoptic vision of it turns the inside of the Prakash household into a prison.

In Mehta's play *Getting away with Murder*, the portrait of sign Woman in the poster of sweet: "a female clutching a tray of sweets to her awesome bosom and saying, 'Chum Chum'? to this phallic male who answers with a leer, 'Yum Yum!' (69) again denotes the female commodification for male viewer. The semiotic signification of it brings forth the issue of commodity fetishism.

Costume as a Semiotic Sign:

In Sengupta's plays the concept of sign Woman follows the postmodern patterns by using costume and make-up of ladies cast. Costume may denote iconically the mode of dress own by the dramatic figure but, at the same time, stand indexically for his/ her social position or profession. Significance of drama-costume from a semiological perspective in post-modern era unfastens new areas of discussion. Barthes being influenced by Saussure's concept of semiology, applied his linguistic model to fashion, costume, clothing and by delineating the 'vestimentary code' brought to light the signifying correlation between clothing and the world at large. Theatre semiotics have been explored by modern thinkers like Umberto Eco, Tadeusz Kowzan and Keir Elam, yet the theatrical costume as a sign has not been widely discussed. Possible subjects for a semiotic investigation may include language, tone, facial mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, décor, lightening, music and sound effects.

Costume history, as an academic discipline, provides an opportunity for a study of signs within the world of performing arts, since costumes play an essential role in the creation and transmission of meaning. A costume is both a signification (by means of its materiality) and a signified (functioning as a semiotic element within a sign system). Thus, theatrical costume is a sign of a material thing. As artifact, costume represents fixed element within the semiotic system of a dramatic performance. Costumes are not subject to temporal constraints and are visually accessible even after the performance. The physique or materiality of costume does not usually change during the performance signify and modify by lightening, movements, narrative etc. 'Costume signs' helps audience to understand a specific character and its purpose of acting.

Rohnie Mirkin suggests that an awareness of the costumed body as a unified, functioning entity, embedded in social life can open new ways for studying cultural phenomena, but this reading of the costumed body as a part of the semiotic enterprise has already been explored by Foucault in his history of sexuality. Following Elam's differentiation between cultural codes (vestimentary and cosmetic codes) and dramatic subcodes, we may suggest that defining costume as an active sign when it is worn by a performer and allows an interaction between wearers of costume on stage, it creates a symbolic liaison between members of the same group. A costume on a person can be classified as an active sign, while a costume as an artifact is passive. A costume on a character is identical and therefore constantly in a motion at any point of stage.

In her sequel plays *Alipha* and *Thus Spake Soorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*, Sengupta introduces the costume as a social sign. By referring the dramatic costume as a theatrical *gestus*, Barthes describes it as 'a precise vestimentary code' that interprets a particular social role. The costume is not the real identity of a character, rather it's his/her doing role which s/he agrees to adopt. "The costume is a kind of writing and has the ambiguity of writing, which is an instrument in the service of a purpose which transcends it: but if the writing is either too rich, too beautiful or too ugly, it can no longer be read and fails in its function." (Fortier, 31). Gestic costume is therefore more like an index than an iconic which has the purport to look like reality than to point to it. In the beginning of stage direction, Sengupta deliberately stresses on the costume, make-up kit and mirror to display that dressing materials signifies lot to study the drama. Even the female cast of the drama WOMAN "dressed in contemporary travelling clothes." (Sengupta, 245) focuses on her modern outlook. With the development of the play, audience can notice that the WOMAN's average womanish looking is not so impressive for her co-traveler that resists him to talk with her. After that, her shifting into "the WOMAN dresses herself in a bright scarf which she winds round her neck leaving the ends hanging.. She accentuates her eyes and mouth with make-up, wears long earrings, a nose stud and a long glittering chain that swings as she moves. She changes her handbag to a more sophisticated slim bag and wears shoes with heels." (Sengupta, 257) shows the gradual process of attractiveness. Her changing from average to ultra modern 'uber sexy' looking denotes the socio-economic improvement which creates a magnetic appeal to her co-passenger MAN who is now totally paying attention to her. Thus her exhibitionism of attire acts as a social *gest* to aver that sign WOMAN has been put for male attraction. In *Alipha*, the dress code of WOMAN and MAN highlights the age and time coverage of narratives. The initial narrative of woman as a girl reflects through her childish gaits and actions, her fantasy about the epical characters ram and Ravana, her excitement about new school and frock. The teenage part of her replicates through wearing of long skirt or salwar kameez, while the grown up period of the woman "who is now dressed in a white sari" (225). Thus the gradual elevation from

girlhood to teenage to a lady mirrors by the sartorial alteration. Therefore apparel as a dramatic *gest* particularizes the social role of sign woman.

Hence, both Padmananhan and Sengupta project their women rather construct their women from the point of view of cultural consumerist of dress code.

Staging Violence through Textual Performance:

Indian women dramaturgy applies the Brechtian techniques of 'gest' and 'alienation effect' to chart the gender relation with theatrical performance. And in this respect, the projection of violence on stage seems to be a common thematic issue of Indian women plays. Gender violence and mutilation of female body performing onstage requires extra skill of playwrights as most of Indian feminist plays centralize on this agenda for sensitizing the mass against it. So, while the Brechtian hypotheses paves way for analyzing gender enactment, another European stalwart of drama Antonin Artaud brings freshness and innovation in presenting the violence onstage through his path-breaking concept Theatre of Cruelty. The very idea therefore has been employed by Indian women dramatists for examining the language of violence in theatrical performance. Again, Indian dramaturgy being inherited from oriental heritage has been habituated with scared and ritualistic mode of theatre. In this regard, the Artaudian notion 'theatre of cruelty' acts as an implement for stageability of violence in Indian women drama.

The performative/ textual version of violence in tandem with cruelty in Indian women drama usually recasting in form of rape, witchery, multi-dimensional physical abuse that needs concrete visual expressions for spectatorial response. Artaudian theory introduces a stage dialect primarily based on gestures and sounds. For him, gesture is a kind of signal through which performer can communicate as well as entail the audience into the core of violent feelings. The inclusions of screaming, controlled sounds, eerie atmosphere, twitching body movements, half-spoken words, silence etc. create fervor for projecting the cruelty of violence. The presence of onstage visual language of objects, movements, attitudes, gestures along with meanings, physiognomies becomes signs in order to clarify the performative objectives within theatrical space. Though Artaud avoids the written plays but Indian dramatists like Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta explore his theatrical idea and insert into their own in completely new way. The Artaudian vocabulary of violence in performance turns words into incarnation with the orientalist makeover practiced by the dramatist trio.

The Artaudian approach to feminist theatre gives a special recognition of using the body and nudity on stage. In terms of theatrical cruelty and its subsequent violence, the body on stage has become an image of overwhelming repression through gestures and movements. Staging the violence-thrashed female body as a more ambiguous, troubling sexualized object, Indian women playwrights

want to show how patriarchal assumption about women can be challenged in respect of Artaudian theatrical format.

Artaud maintains that theatrical cruelty “signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination.” Cruelty is a conceptual fanaticism through which a heightened material presence on the stage is consumed in the fire of theatrical performance as it signals its metaphysical message to the audience. In conventional theatre material presence, i.e. the body on stage and any violence it may perpetrate or withstand, is veiled by meaning. In the theatre of Artaud material presence vaporizes in meaning. For performative violence to remain theatrical there must be some sort of distance between the audience and the spectacle. For the violence to retain its materiality to avoid sinking into discursive space and becoming an image of itself, it must move in some way to rupture the frame within which it is viewed. (Graver, 49)

As Artaud’s theatrical language is laced with images of pain and cruelty, so, Indian women dramaturgy attempts to reconstruct it at presenting the savagery of women violence. Padmanabhan’s *Lights Out* creates the uncanny atmosphere at Leela-Bhaskar’s apartment by using the dimlight of candle along with the non-stopping screaming from outside. The phobia due to bizarre sound of gang rape, Leela feels is inexpressible: “I carry it around all day. Sometimes it’s like a shawl, it wraps itself around my shoulders and I start to shiver” (5). The imagery of shawl shows an indication of how appalling the tension may be. The fear wraps the innermost mind of Leela and she is struggling to free herself from this clogged situation. Just like a shawl we use to warm ourselves to protect from chilled weather, but fear chilled in her marrow, so there is no point of coziness. Padmanabhan’s dramatic setting promotes a situational imagery to portray her protagonist’s mental turmoil. Leela’s claustrophobia has merged with room’s light-and-shade. By availing the imageries of shawl and candle light together, dramatist tries to bring a feeling of uncanny to the audience. Again, the visualization of pain and cruelty of the victimized lady reminds the cause for putting the violence-thrashed body onstage for waving the agony of her towards audience. The gestural oscillation of a coercive sexualized female body onstage displays the fact of how patriarchal society engraving the pleasure of pain upon it.

Again Mohan’s looking for any sort of unusual objects like carved stones or figurines or ritual objects like relics, status, idols etc. around the spot along with “all the descriptions, the screaming, the wild abandon, the exhibitionism, yes, even the nakedness -” indicates the oriental practice of exorcism that creates a mystified aura within the theatrical space. Bhaskar’s opinion “illiterate people believe that when a demon possesses a woman, it is always via the – uh – lower orifice - ” (37) establishes the idea of exorcism more prominently. The issues of exorcism and demoniality along with its brutality in the Oriental context of theatre practice encapsulate the Artaudian approach to feminist drama. Padmanabhan very subtly applies the concept of theatrical cruelty to envisage the psycho-somatic agony of victim lady.

Mehta's both plays *Getting Away with Murder* and *Brides Are Not for Burning* (hence these are abbreviated as *GAWM* and *BANFB* respectively) somehow assimilate the theoretical and performative aspects of theatrical cruelty to display the Artaudian reflection on the technical discussion of Indian women dramaturgy. In her earlier play *BANFB*, Mehta projects the death scene at the end of Act II, scene 4. "The death of her sister by burning may be enacted, with visual effects, behind a scrim." (83) The dramatist includes the horrification of death by blazing that provokes Malini to scream loudly. Mehta wants to arouse the audience against dowry death by envisioning the cruelty of conflagration. Another play *GAWM* highlights the volume of savagery caused by witchery and female foeticide. Gopal, Sonali's brother and Malu's fiancé, a free-lancer photographer works on recent upsurge crime of witch burning in the remote areas of Bihar. His snaps on the montage on his wall displaying through slides fabricates the authentic stories of women like Indumati, Dulkha Devi, Minzari who are usually accused in names of witchery and sentenced to death by burning alive or beating. Though apparently these women happened to be victimized due to entrenched superstition but in reality, it's the foul plan of their relatives to usurp their lands. The allegation of witchery is nothing but a lame excuse for these widow and deserted women for coveting their lands. Mehta projects the cruelty of witchery through slide-show which is simultaneously narrated by Gopal. It shows the dread humiliation of these ladies who are either smeared with muck and then chased by the agitated mob who beat her ruthlessly until death and eventually throw her into river. Another common way of torment used by villagers for Dulkha Devi of Tharwari arouses awe feelings: "she was stripped naked within sight of police station, her face blackened, head shaved, forced to run around the village while the men beat her with burning brands and sticks till she died." (80). The close-up of witchery followed by Gopal's live experience adds extra visual effects within theatrical space. Artaud turns on visual imagery or gesture to decode the vocabulary of cruelty. Mehta arranges the same decoration to focus on the brutality of witchery and subsequently it makes double effects: it successfully draws spectatorial concentration towards atrocity against women. Mehta as a dramatist proves her acumen by using the minimal stage prop like a projector for discussing such vital agenda of contemporary Indian feminism. Like Artaud, she just moves from one slide to another to hold the audience attention and engross them into the harsh cruelty of life without uttering single words. Her transformation of words into signs via photograph reflects the Artaudian impact.

Mehta maintains another brief horrific spectacle regarding Sonali's female foeticide. During her first pregnancy when she came to know about the sex of her embryo through amniocentesis, she did a forceful foeticide to her unborn foetus. Her encounter with that painful memory "I remember – the terror of passivity ... and I see her twisted face – twitching thighs ... as they drag me out of her with forceps – a slimy, piteous mess" – (64) stirs us like chill in marrow. Again, in delirium, she talks like "nothing to tell. Happened fast. All in rush. Pain. Blood.

Then it – or what-you-might-call She. I flushed It or She away ...” (75) expresses her sadistic pleasure after eliminating the embryo ‘She’ from womb. The gore situation due to unscientific abortion brings forth the unbearable pain of Sonali. But, it’s the credit of Mehta to present such kind of ferocity only through two dialogues of Sonali. While staging the violence like female foeticide again reminds the Artaudian economy of words to express the innermost pangs of bestiality.

Semiotization/ Politicization of Hysteria:

The psycho-sexual barbarity against women portrayed by Indian women dramatists eventually flags out a major thrust of feminist drama: the projection of hysteria on stage. Usually, female dramatists have the proclivity to depict their females through this disease as it not only serves as a dramatic strategy to ventilate the suppressed feelings or melancholia of them but to propagate the clinical grand finale of the severity of violence against them. In this regard, hysteria along with trauma and melancholia stands as a cornerstone discussion in feminist theatre scholarship. The puzzling juxtaposition of hysteria, trauma and violence endeavors to justify the core principle of women dramaturgy that not only makes for cultural amusement but it legitimizes to roil the emotional equilibrium of human mind regarding the sociological concerns of women. Hence, the interaction of hysteria as a psychoanalytical discourse as well as a theatrical performance with that of semiotics invites an argument of gender performativity. So we may say that the Waldian term ‘performative malady’ is aptly applicable for performing the hysteria onstage.

Hysteria, being most strongly identified with feminism exists on a kind of continuum. Clinical observations of hysteria claim an intense sexual association with it and in this regard, the incident of unwanted rape and its aftermath ultimately culminates into hysteria. Due to its frequent linkup with female sexuality, hysterical gestures also assume as erotic. The cultivation of multilayered atrocities against women attempts to highlight the ongoing feminist debate about the criminality or assaultive nature of rape in terms of Foucauldian power/knowledge criteria. Though the act of rape is the most heinous crime against women but its aftermath seems more critical to overcome that sometimes culminate into hysterical outburst for them. The unbridled trauma affects them mentally, physically and emotionally. The recurring psycho-somatic trauma of rape usually exasperates the victim from time to time and hence gradually turns into a hysterical subjectivity. The trouble of self-distrust, masochism, depression due to sexual victimization imposes a sense of social skepticism upon the victim lady that may be called as a ‘second rape’. Scholar like Laura Hegenhold chiefly explores of how does rape ‘hysterize’ women.

Clinical history, however, archives hysteria as the ‘daughter’s disease’ which may be a mode of protest for women deprived of other social or intellectual outlets or expressive options. The feminization of hysteria traces the maze of feminism,

gender study, semiotics, discourse theory and psychoanalysis with that of medical science. The etymological links up between 'hysteria' and 'herstory' in feminist scholarship happens so frequently that it bolsters the feminine attitude of hysteria. Hysteria takes its gendered etymological roots from the Greek origin '*hystera*' that denotes womb. The fact that hysteria apparently favored a female disposition corresponded with the conflation of hysteria with the signifiers of both femaleness (sex) and femininity (gender) to such a degree that the terms female, femininity and hysteria actually became inter-exchangeable. (Preez, 47).

Feminist understanding of hysteria presents it "as a specifically feminine protolanguage, communicating through the body message that cannot be verbalized. ...a specifically feminine pathology that speaks to and against patriarchy." (Showalter). Hysteria has always been constructed as a "woman's disease" pregnant with characteristics of mutability. Biologically all women are more or less hysterical and they carry the seeds of it. It is a kind of temperament that rudimentarily constitutes the womanish nature. The hysterical seizure has been regarded as an acting out of female sexual experience, a spasm of hyper-femininity, mimicking during both childbirth and female orgasm. Generally representing of women as hysterical heroines from male point view either ignores or detours the inner feelings of loss, pangs, anguish of their torments. But now, intervention of women historians amplify that hysteria is caused by women's oppressive social roles which originates from male dominance. From feminist perspective, hysteria in women offers new dimension which decrypts physical symptoms, psychotherapeutic exchanges and literary texts as the presentations of conflict over the meaning of femininity in a particular historical context. Juliet Mitchell configures the hysteria as 'the daughter's disease' consists of a syndrome of physical and linguistic protest against the social and symbolic laws of the Father. Again, Lacanian feminist critics views hysteria as a women's language of body or pre-oedipal semiotics. Therefore, politicizing the hysteria, one can deploy the power or powerlessness of feminist narratives.

Hysteria, being a familiar mannerism in women's theatre, functions as a universalizing container for the repressed, silenced histories of female sufferings. The body of the hysteric is a repository trauma that represents the symptoms of what Elaine Showalter has termed as 'female malady'. The iconographic maneuvering of a corporeal language of female sufferings affords the visual translation of gender oppression. While the corporeal iconography of hysteria translates or speaks, there lies a risk of unveiling the wrongs or harms done to women. In this regard, we may say that depicting hysteria in women-centric plays intends to recreate the spectacularized and fetishized object of curiosity. Thus performing hysteria encourages rebellious behavior for breaking out of the male rules and regulations governing the socio-cultural space.

Addressing the status of hysteria, trauma and melancholia as powerful tropes in contemporary dramatic genre, female playwrights intend to highlight their extensive presence within theatrical space that might be helpful to

correspondence between dramatists' aesthetic concerns and established theoretical framework. The 'Madwoman' syndrome of women drama usually dramatizes through the hysteria. While performing the hysteria of females in women-made plays, the female dramaturges intentionally shifts her space from attic to living room in order to visualize her trauma and outburst. They dare to drag her from attic to living room for transforming her oppression, suppression into a kind of stageability. This prioritization attempts a step further towards liberation of women. Her hysterical voice functions as an agency of her pejorative claims before patriarchy. The leitmotifs of hysteria, trauma in women theatrical terminology not merely posits as conceptual or analytical category but it launches them as 'performative maladies'.

By adopting hysteria as an analytical implement for their plays Indian feminist dramatists endeavor to decode the agony of this silent suffering before audience. While trying to express the female tales of repression, playwrights apply the hysteria as a device to ventilate their bottled up feelings. Their language of repression, suppression and oppression transcribe the knowledge of sufferings. The rhetoric of hysteria as a performative strategy embodies the split between the languages of written/ spoken text and that of the speaking body of dramatic persona, in order to translate the public staging of a private trauma of a feminine subject. Both for dramatist and performer, hysteria functions as a dual performance strategy of vocal speech and silent expressive gestures to set the political awareness and to communicate with audience in terms of feminist performance theory. Padmanabhan and Mehta exemplify the hysteria in two different ways to convey their respective message to audience.

The play *Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan dramatizes the visualization of a gang rape which ultimately destroys two lives – the lady who is raped and Leela who witnesses it. Right from the beginning, the protagonist Leela appears as a neurotic one. The juxtaposing sound of help and brutalized ecstasy makes a sense of unnatural frightening feeling in her mind. She becomes so squeezed in tension throughout the day. The phobia she feels is inexpressible: "I carry it around all day. Sometimes it's like a shawl, it wraps itself around my shoulders and I start to shiver". (5) The imagery of shawl shows an indication of how appalling the tension may be. The fear wraps the innermost mind of Leela and she is struggling to free herself from this clogged situation. Just like a shawl we use to warm ourselves to protect from the chilled weather, but fear chilled her in marrow, there is no question of coziness. Leela's constant nagging over Bhaskar's overlooking mentality culminates into hysterization for her. The helpless and hapless condition of the raped lady is the reflective outcome through Leela's delirium. The pain and torment of molestation which the raped lady gets bodily, Leela, the psycho victim of this, takes it mentally and emotionally. But her torture is so subtle, that it is hard to recognize. She remains speechless for sometimes, only sobbing is audible.

Though, Leela is not the direct victim of such awful savagery, but the visual effect of gang rape acts as a great blow upon her psyche. The aftermath of rape i.e.

the trauma of rape is more horrific and painful than the rape itself. The threat of rape turns her into a paranoid one in quotidian life. The Foucauldian refusal of considering rape as a mere tool responsible for women's hysteria may be wholeheartedly acceptable for Bhaskar. His carefully carelessness attitude towards his wife enhances her suffering. The disapproval nature of Bhaskar hurts to Leela's hyper sensitive mind. By ignoring her subtle pangs, Bhaskar devalued her femininity that shakes the credibility of her own discourse and self-understanding. This very sense of ignorance, insecurity and self-distrust due to non-supportive mood of Bhaskar, makes her alienated and skeptic one and throws a psychological war to them. This condition experienced by many rape victims, is termed as 'second rape'. Leela, though not a typical, but in some different way, is the prey of this vulnerability of rape and its trauma which predominate the whole drama and becomes a destructive agent for Leela's mental tranquility.

Mehta presents more heart-rending portrait of her female lead Sonali's hysterical behavior during pregnancy. Sonali who has victimized in childhood sexual brutality for a long time, now often collapses by memorizing her retrospect. Her hysterical speaking body communicates via symptom that cannot be expressed in verbal language. Her doubly-split self wanders from a petulant 8-year old girl to a full grown married woman. From a dramatic point of view, Mehta utilizes the body of language and vocal intonation to explore and hint at the existence of her regression. Her practice of mirror-gazing demonstrates the in-between non-articulative position of a hysterical woman. Her hysterical outburst has close affinity with the Ibsenian heroine *Hedda Gabler* and Cixous's *Dora*. Through her hysteria, she wants to exonerate herself from guilt that was repressed in unconscious. Her hysterical gestures like fainting, headache, self-destructive anger and abuse denotes the psychosis which happens to sexually abusive survivors. Mehta creates a double-layered dialogue in scene III and IV for Sonali to communicate with audience in order to unveil her mental agitation. Her incoherent meaningless hysterical words are beyond read or realization but it offers an alternative picture of a woman who exceeds or subverts the bounds of patriarchal society.

The linguistic approach of hysteria discourse seems utterly relevance in studying the case of Leela and Sonali in the respective plays of Padmanabhan and Mehta as both dramatists follow the 'lost speech' mode for their hysteric girls. Their hysterical gestures are almost same as if they are searching or fighting for words to communicate with the world. Again their refusal and struggle for talking may be a kind of rejection of the patriarchal orthodoxy. Though hysteria signifies through quivering of body in performance but it's particularly a protest via unspeakable speech against social norms. Helene Cixous's minute observation "hysteria is a kind of female language that opposes the rigid structures of male discourse and thought. ... hysterics have lost speech... their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't hear because it's the body that talks and man doesn't hear the

body. The hysteric is the “woman-type in all her power...” is argumentatively applicable both for Sonali and Leela.

Again, some other stage prop or mimetic gesture use in plays simplifying the semiotic codification for audience reader. Like, a photo frame on the wall partly codifies the meaning of Sonali’s agony in hysteria. Her pointing towards a painting of uncle Narotom alias ‘the red monster’ in a wired colour somehow reminds the dark retrospective of her adolescence in which she was sexually victimized due to the filthy perversion of this oldie. At the same time Gopal’s miming of how they arranged the pseudo accident in bit of vengeance also serves as a performative psychotherapy to dig out the emotions and incidents from patient’s (here, Sonali) life in order to gain back her lost consciousness. Hence, we may truly say that performative malady i.e. hysteria onstage genuinely turns into a female mode of expression. So, the historiography of hysteria ultimately redirects from a female malady into a performative malady in terms of feminist theatre.

Wrapping Up

By wrapping up all these issues together, audience can able to get a comprehensible meaning of how women dramatists want to decode the central leitmotif of gender and politics of representation in their plays. The observation of women from three different semiotic lens projects a transparent pictograph of how the male society likes to see our women. But Padmanabhan, Mehta and Sengupta being determined to portray the real picture of women in their plays, they go reverse. So, their selection of semiotic signs like women, violence and hysteria is to some extent a feminist theatrical appraisal for conveying social meaning as well as receiving social response. They initially project their women rather construct their women from the point of view of cultural consumerist of dress-code. Next, they have been inspired by the Artaudian notion of theatrical cruelty to dramatize the female violence onstage. Their use of fragmentary dialogues, uncanny atmosphere, and least stage prop etc. translate the volume of brutality. Eventually the dramatist trio dramatizes the hysteria to articulate the acute pain and trauma of violence. The oscillation of violence- thrashed female body on stage renders the social mutilation of female folk which needs to pay attention from its grass-roots level in order to empower and ameliorate the women condition of this society. Hence, the amalgamation of women, violence and hysteria in a single diagram supposes to encrypt the multilayered theatrical meanings successfully.

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“Humans as Voices of God and Tradition?” Rethinking the Subjugation of the African Woman in Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*

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Abstract

Over the eons, man has posed as speaking for and on behalf of God and Tradition. His assumed positions on social issues, therefore, are regarded as infallibles. Polygamy as one of the issues is advantageous for male. This paper discusses, through a sociological consideration of Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* and the effects of polygamy, that a positive consideration be cast on the issue in the modern African world. Women need not be abandoned, children need not be cast aside, and men’s lives need not become loveless as much as the society need not be shackled with frustrated marriages and destroyed lives. The African world, faced with the negative effects laid on the table in this paper, should sociologically re-adjust itself into the modern world of love-giving, acceptance and sharing.

[**Keywords:** God, tradition, polygamy, african world, female subjugation, sociological.]

Man is one: greatness and animal fused together. None of his acts is pure charity.
None is pure bestiality.
(Ba 1981: 32)

Marriage is no chain. It is mutual agreement over a life’s programme. So if one of the partners is no longer satisfied with the union, why should he remain? It may be Abou: it may be me. Why not? The wife can take the initiative to make the break.
(Ba 1981: 74)

Introduction

Religion and Tradition have, from eons, controlled man. Within these institutions are hidden the main controllers of man who/which use these twin issues to regulate him. The controller of man unmasked is man: small cliques and caucuses in different societies who have always constituted themselves into the mouthpieces of God and Tradition (Freeman 2012). Most of the time, they portend and pretend to speak both for God and Tradition and not for the groups they represent. Man, the general man, therefore, becomes a slave to the precepts and the (in)direct commands of these groups in nearly all societal situations, (un)knowingly and (un)consciously.

In Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, man, in the small clique, acts out his iconic characterization. The group, which dictates and whose puppet-like influences, from the background, controls the opinions and sayings of others, is the clergy ably represented in this text by those who echo it: the Imam (within the Islamic religion), the female-in-laws and the 'sayings' of the society's men and women. Their clandestine influences are felt through their actions, sayings, supports and oppositions to societal issues like polygamy, underage marriage, burial ceremony and others. All these, directly or indirectly, impact on the society and the people. This paper, therefore, seeks to ask the relevant but disturbing question like Kloos (2012: 330) did: "How...is it possible that polygamy proponents think this is [these are] compatible with Islamic concepts of "justice" and "fairness"?" This question is extended to the sociological implications of polygamy and the societies in which it exists.

Voices and Polygamy

One of the major thematic foci of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is polygamy. This has been defined by The Free Online Dictionary (2013) as "The condition or practice of having more than one spouse at one time. Also called plural marriage." The Dictionary.com (2013), in its own definition, is more specific as it sees the legality and the face of the woman-fold in polygamy: "the practice or condition of having more than one spouse, *especially wife*, at one time" (italics mine). It is pertinent to point out that polygamy is not basically an African thing as it cuts across all continents and most cultures. The African culture, unlike other cultures, gives it more prominence and allows it more room to flourish. Again, but on the basis of religion, the Islamic and African Traditional religions give polygamy a big playing ground to spread its wings. The text is an exemplification of this scenario.

Islam and African Traditional Religion play a great part in the happenings in *So Long a Letter*. The text is a depiction mainly of what occurs in the everyday life of the African woman. The African woman, married under the Traditional Religion, needs not be told that her husband is free to marry more women (numerically unlimited). On the other hand, the woman married under the Islamic injunctions is told on the day of marriage that her husband can marry more (numerically limited to four).

The enforcers of these injunctions are the clerics - prophets and clergymen of both religions. Usually, they are the nuptial 'knotters' of the initial marriages and the subsequent ones (whether the already-wedded woman at home or the to-be-newly wedded agree to being knotted to the new woman or to the man). The clergy always posit that its authority stems from religion (God) like the Islamic religion as played out in *So Long a Letter*. When Modou first got married to Ramatoulaye and Mawdo to Aissatou, the clerics would have wholeheartedly participated in knotting the marriages. In the separation of Mawdo and Aissatou it is certain that the clerics would not have been participants only but major actors.

This is reflected in the second marriage of Modou to Binetou (the second wife). Ramatoulaye, the first wife, is left in the dark about the marriage and its ceremonial rites. The husband could not inform her personally: it becomes the job of the Imam (a cleric) and a few family males. Announcing to her, the Imam’s words look and sound like inanities:

There is nothing one can do when Allah the almighty puts two people side by side ... There is nothing new in this world... Some things we may find to be sad are much less so than others... *All he has done is to marry a second wife today.* We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place. (Ba 1981: 36-37) (Italics mine)

In this sort of situation, fate, not the man (his lustfulness) or the new wife (her greed), is blamed. This is something intangible and abstract. According to Tamsir, Ramatoulaye’s brother-in-law, Modou’s opinion about his second marriage is that: “...it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it” (Ba 1981: 37). A man decides in his heart to marry another wife due to various extenuating circumstances he could have controlled either at the beginning or along the line. When the die becomes cast, he posits that he is powerless. In this situation, he is also helped by the Imams, the clerics, who themselves are men and in polygamous set-ups.

Tamsir, Modou’s brother, along with the Imam and others, comes barely forty days after his brother’s death ‘to woo’ Ramatoulaye into a new marriage with him. When she refuses vehemently, the Imam, in reaction, “prayed to God to be his witness” (Ba 1981: 58) against a woman who refuses to be tied to another marriage according to the dictates of religion and tradition as propounded by men. There is basically no consideration for the woman in mourning (except for that which the men (the cleric included) would gain).

Another influencing voice is the ‘sayings of the society’ which encourage the men to become polygamous on one hand, and the women to be submissive on the other. Tradition, as earlier stated, gives the total right to the man to marry more women than one. Where this mandate was derived from none can say. All in the society continue to allude to tradition, especially the men as it is advantageous to them. The society, on the other hand, cows the woman whenever she wishes to struggle or fight against this faceless injunction that has no consideration for her. Reflecting on what her friend, Aissatou, faced during her divorce, and her strength in carrying on with her life, Ramatoulaye recalls:

You were advised to compromise: ‘You don’t burn the tree that bears the fruit’. You were threatened through your flesh: ‘Boys cannot succeed without their father’. (Ba 1981: 31)

She went on to commend her friend for having the strength so many women lack when faced with scenarios that were never in their nuptial agreements:

You took no notice.

These common place truths, which before had lowered the heads of many wives as they raised them in revolt did not produce the desired miracle; they did not divert you from your decision. You chose to make a break, a one-way journey with your four sons. (Ba 1981: 31)

Within these strength and action are embedded the negative repercussions on a woman who strikes out against the voice of the people. Counting the numbers of “the abandoned or divorced women of my generation whom I know” (Ba 1981: 40), Ramatoulaye avers that very few ever find happiness while the majority “had lost all hope of renewal and whom loneliness had very quickly laid underground” (Ba 1981: 40).

Polygamy is, therefore, a dicey situation for women who are considered like a ball; once a ball is thrown no one can predict where it will bounce. You have no control over where it rolls, and even less over who gets it. Often it is grabbed by an unexpected hand . . . (Ba 1981: 40)

This is a reference to women owing to the various parts played by the different segments of the society; even by them against themselves. This is the situation that Ramatoulaye finds herself when her husband, Modou, decides to marry Binetou, a girl the age of his daughter; in reality a friend of his daughter, Daba. This state of affair was orchestrated and initiated by another woman, Lady Mother-in-law, who was dissatisfied with her own low status in life. Binetou, the newly married, “like many others, was a lamb slaughtered on the altar of affluence” (Ba 1981: 39). This same situation was faced by Aissatou. Her marriage to Mawdo was not liked by Auntie Nabou, her mother-in-law, who went out of her way to groom a younger Nabou from childhood into adulthood as another wife Mawdo. She was extremely successful as Mawdo got married to Nabou, while Aissatou, not wanted from the beginning, was divorced.

The voices that portend to represent God and Tradition are, therefore, many, diverse, consistent and vitriolic. It is those on the receiving end who feel the pain. This pain, as feminine-restricted and limited as it is, is most of the time inflicted by the same group on its members. And others, from diverse backgrounds, become encouraged by this dog eat dog situation; they prey on the fallen dogs.

Voices, Groups and Effects

It must be pointed out that polygamy involves individuals, the couple(s) most concerned and other groups. The society, at large, is most of the time touched and affected. In most cases, these effects are more of negative than positive. They cut across societal divides and strata, sexes and ages. No one within the stated groups is exempted. Nurmila (2009) draws this same conclusion pointing out that the effects span the economic, emotional, and psychological lives concerned. It also

involves physical violence that affects the lives of the children and the wives (and even those of the husbands).

The first major group consists of the perpetrators themselves: the men. The over-riding question that should be asked of them no matter how hyperbolic and insulting one considers the question to be is: “Madness or weakness? Heartlessness or irresistible love? What inner torment led Modou Fall to marry Binetou?” (Ba 1981: 12) *as a second wife?* (Italics: my addition). Whether the man is able to answer this question, justifiably or not, according to the text, “In loving someone else, he burned his past, both morally and materially” (Ba 1981: 12). With this, love within the home flies out. Most times, the woman in refracting her love from the man turns it, full-blown, on the children or on religion. With this occurrence, the man suffers just like Mawdo after his estrangement from Aissatou. Lamenting his loss Mawdo states:

I am completely disoriented. You can’t change the habits of a grown man. I look for shirts and trousers in the old places and I touch only emptiness . . . My house is a suburb of Diakhao. I find it impossible to get any rest there. Everything there is dirty. Young Nabou gives my food and my clothes away to visitors. (Ba 1981: 33)

Modou is not left out too. From the day he gets married to Binetou, his life of lies starts. His message to his wife is that he had been destined to marry more than one wife. He continues with the lies while trying to meet up with young Binetou’s social demands: he dyes his hair, avoids his first wife and sows tight fitting clothing to hide his aging body fat. These are done in order to hide his old age but all he gets in return are Binetou’s “laughing wickedly” at him. Men will always try to create make-believe worlds but always, they find the reality that stares them in the face.

Women, as a group, are also affected. This assemblage can be sub-divided into three based on how they perceive, react to and are touched by polygamy. There are the first wives, the other wives and the women-victimizees. The most touched and the first mini-group are the first wives i.e. those already married. One of the major reasons women are treated with levity in the African world is that they are regarded as part of inheritance - part of the common household furniture to be passed on to another man. When a man, therefore, decides to marry again, tradition plays its havoc on the first wife. She is abandoned, turned into a second fiddle, and is scorned not only by her husband but also by the society. She becomes, in addition to being a mother, a father to her children because the husband, like Modou, no longer has time for her and her children. This is summed up in Aissatou’s case when Mawdo marries young Nabou:

From then on, you no longer counted. What of the time and the love you had invested in your home? Only trifles, quickly forgotten. Your sons? They counted for very little in this reconciliation between a mother and her one

and only man; you no longer counted, any more than did your four sons: they could never be equal to young Nabou's sons. (Ba 1981: 30)

Usually, there are just about two choices for the woman. The first choice, that of acceptance (emanating from the docile characterization of women as weak vessels), is an offshoot of and as preached by both the Islamic and African Traditional religions. This choice, Ramatoulaye sticks with to the chagrin of her loved ones, admirers and even her children: she finds solace in the religion that imposes polygamy on her! Kloos (2012) calls this situation "the inward turn". The second opening is for the woman to opt out of the marriage. This modern, untraditional choice advocated in *So Long a Letter* is vehemently opposed by religion and society. The woman, though on the receiving end of the broken marriage, will be ostracized and labelled by both religion and society. Aissatou takes this path. Out of the many that tread this road, as an exemplification, she is seen as lucky because she has a job. Most, who decide to walk this lane while jobless, either remarry - falling into the old trap (as they become second, third, or fourth wives somewhere else) - or are totally abandoned (dying early of loneliness or from societal scorn). In this wise, women are encouraged to submit to polygamy. In this 'piety', like Frisk's (2009) paper topic *Submitting to God: Women and Islam in Urban Malaysia*, they are aided into submitting to God, and advised that they would be well rewarded spiritually, especially when they get to heaven.

The second mini-set in the women's group are the other wives. Half of the time, these are not yet women but female adolescents who are withdrawn from schools. The men who marry them, whether they like it or not, are aware of it or not, play the part or not, are regarded as 'Sugar-Daddies' - they are basically out of the generation of the adolescents whose lives are crippled to satisfy their own ego, lust and demands. Wooed by wealth, betrayed by their own mothers and confused by their innocence and societal failings, these young, developing women usually become estranged from their own social class, the married class and even from their husbands (from the moment the men are satiated). They, therefore, become floaters, abandoned to their fates, lonely ghosts with lives truncated and ambitions cut short; they are "lamb[s] slaughtered on the altar of affluence" (Ba 1981: 39). And like Binetou, who watches "The image of her life, which she had murdered, broke her heart" (Ba 1981: 50), they die instalmentally like the Nigerian war victims in John Pepper Clark's poem "The Casualties" (Solanke 2005: 15-21).

The third mini-set in the women's group are the women-victimizers. These are the core traditionalists, the women who stand to gain from more marriages, the mothers and mother-in-laws who carelessly, for the love of self, destroy other lives. They are the women who perpetrate and perpetuate polygamy on other women. In the text, they are about three: two succeed because they have adolescents they could confuse while the third (the griot-friend of Ramatoulaye) has a matured woman (Ramatoulaye) who thinks with her head and not her heart to attempt confusing. Lady Mother-in-Law is able to ensnare both Binetou and Modou. She wants out of poverty. For this, she helps by confusing Binetou to

forfeit her education and life ambition. The other woman, Aunty Nabou, “planned her revenge” (Ba 1981: 20), installs young Nabou as a second wife and succeeds in having Aissatou divorced from Mawdo. This is because Mawdo and Aissatou are not from the same social stratum. In both cases, women go out of their ways to hurt and destroy other women. As voices of God and Tradition, enforcers of polygamy, women become acidic canes on other women destroying their own lives and that of others.

Another major group affected by polygamy are the children. As young as they usually are, they suffer at the hands of nearly every adult concerned. Like Daba, their prides are usually wounded when they see their fathers consorting with girls their own ages. When the new wife is brought in, they become enemies to her and their father. In her case, Daba wants her mother to be divorced from her father. At the mother’s refusal, she vehemently tells her, “You have not finished suffering” (Ba 1981: 46). After Mawdo’s divorce, his sons go to live with Aissatou, their mother. It is a certainty that their lives will lack the fatherly touch. In this line, Modou’s children, who are left with their mother, Ramatoulaye, develop various degrees of problems associated with divided homes: Mawdo Fall, a son, has academic problems with his teacher; Aissatou, a daughter, gets pregnant; the feminine trio of Dieynaba, Arame and Yacine smoke secretly. While these problems look insurmountable, Ramatoulaye, in all outlooks, a single mother, is supported by her first daughter, Daba.

Conclusion

These physical voices, as much as they are participants in the polygamic process and structure, are painfully hurt and affected to different levels. As much as they are supposedly voices for God and even Tradition, they serve themselves first looking for material things which are advantageous to the self. These voices are emblematic of the current African world that is slow from moving from the shadow of polygamy to that of the full light of monogamy. The African world is still faced by the problematics encountered in polygamous environments with its nefarious and octopoid effects. Africa, through these voices and the submissions in this paper, is encouraged to take a second look at the issue of polygamy and have a rethink. One cannot but agree with Nurmila (2009:146) who states that (Indonesian) Marriage Laws should undergo changes and be “modified to abolish the practice of polygamy.”

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Spiritual Vacuity and Corporeal Disobedience: Contemporary Plays on Organ Transplants

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Abstract

This study will look at dramatic representations of organ transplants because contemporary plays address the more subterranean fears surrounding the medical endeavor called transplantation. The conflicts of the dramas have their origin in debates that took place among bioethicists. The theater, however, “becomes the domain where the debate is acted out before a live audience” (Belli 2008: xiv), thus rendering the involved questions visible in a public setting. Dea Loher’s *Hände* (2002) and Tomio Tada’s *The Well of Ignorance* (1991) use the dialogical quality of drama to reveal the absurdities and grotesqueness of modern medical technologies. With emotional discomfort these plays question what it means to receive a donated body part and whether it is justified to endlessly repair the human body.

[**Keywords:** transplantation, Dea Loher, *Hände*, Tomio Tada; *The Well of Ignorance*; dialogical, human body]

Without release from the endless agony of my karma,
My soul can have no rest.
(*The Well of Ignorance*)

Introduction

The past hundred years have seen many spectacular scientific breakthroughs (see Roos 2008: 41), with achievements in biotechnology being perhaps the most noteworthy ones (Friebe 2012: 64). In an interview with *Wired*, Bill Gates even claimed that if “he were a teenager today, [...] he’d be hacking biology” (Levy 2010). Among the greatest advancements is organ transplantation, “a thrilling new option of modern surgery yielding hope for chronically ill patients” (Schick Tanz et al. 2010: 3). Through its practical application, along with its financial and political implications, transplant medicine has had an unequalled influence on essential questions of life.

With very few plays written on organ transplants, two plays written around the turn of the millennium come into view – one German and one Japanese – that both belong to the so-called ‘rejection front’. The inspiration for Tomio Tada’s play *The Well of Ignorance* was a 1968 lawsuit in which the Japanese cardiac surgeon Dr. Juro Wada was accused of murder. The ‘transplant play’, Tada’s debut, was first performed in 1991 at the National Noh Theater in Tokyo. Contributing to a

particularly emotional public discourse, the play garnered a great deal of interest (Sanger 1991a) when first staged. This is unsurprising given Japan's resistance to adopt transplant technology. With the very first heart transplant in Sapporo (1968) and its critical media coverage, there arose a public debate on a scale unparalleled in any other nation. This discourse, whose prominence in the public eye fluctuated over time, continued for many years. The play can therefore be read as an "allegory" (Lock 1995: 7) for a larger national debate.

Dea Loher's *Hände* [*Hands*] belongs to a series called *Magazin des Glücks* [*Warehouse of Fortune*] that was staged in Hamburg's Thalia theatre. Analyzing the psychological difficulties of the individual confronted with organ transplantation, the play seems to have been influenced by the Clint Hallam case. Hallam volunteered in 1998 for one of the first hand transplants and received the donation from a deceased motorcyclist. Later, he asked the doctors to remove the new appendage, as he did not feel comfortable with the hand of a stranger. Speaking about forms of transplantations that from a medical perspective are neither necessary nor life-saving, the play attacks the commodity culture that strips organs of their value.

Intercultural comparison

In the *The Well of Ignorance*ⁱ, a Japanese fisherman and his crew experience a serious storm in which the former is knocked unconscious. As brain death is almost indistinguishable from a coma, the man found washed up on the seashore is mistakenly assumed to be brain-dead. Doctors consider him the perfect organ donor for a young woman suffering from heart ailments. "His soul has left this world forever. / Only his body remains on earth / With his heart beating feebly. If we leave him here to die / All will be lost" (*The Well of Ignorance* [TWoI] 1994 I). The young woman, who is the daughter of a rich merchant, has "developed a serious heart disease" in her "eighteen[th] year" and can "no longer leave her bed" (TWoI I). A foreign doctor is called in to remove the heart of the fisherman and perform the transplant. "Then as now this woman's position in the upper echelons of financial mobility made such a critical operation feasible" (Jennings 1994: 56).

Though the difficult operation saves her life and she "lived happily for a while" (TWoI I), the woman later regrets what was done. She is "plagued by a guilty conscience" (TWoI I) at the drastic measures taken to restore her health. "How can it be my life was saved / By taking the heart from a living man?" (TWoI I). And while the young woman grapples with the guilt of having received a new heart, the ghost of the fisherman hovers over the play. Without his heart he is unable to fully die and remains a "vengeful spirit" (TWoI I) who is "caught between the worlds of the living and the dead" (Gellene 2010: 11). Act II begins with his sorrowful lament: "In this desolate place / Is it only beasts that hunt for bodies in empty graves? / No! I, too, am wandering in the moonlight, / Seeking my separate body. / Am I of the living or the dead?" (TWoI II). With both donor and recipient

haunted by their respective states of being, the drama ends, leaving open the question of how the conflict can be overcome.

In Tada's work, it is primarily the fate of the donor that is scrutinized. Both the play's opening and the final scene with the chorus on stage emphasize the underlying notions of theft, cruelty and unnaturalness: "The woman lived a while longer, it is true. But, then [...] she died after all..." (*TWol* II). Tada's work of fiction thus emphasizes "the intractable paradoxes and defeats that techno-science leads to" (Csicsery-Ronay 2006: 148) by showing a collision between pure science and cultural tradition. Traditionally, dying is considered in Japan as a process bridging different spheres (see Lock 1995: 21) and Japanese people regard the equivalence of death and the cessation of brain activity therefore as 'unnatural' and 'contrary to basic human feelings' (see Hirosawa 1992). Instead they believe that a person dies slowly, with the spirit gradually leaving the body and the earthly world. Moreover, many Japanese subscribe to the idea of the body as a "unique microcosmic unit embedded in the larger cosmic order" (Lock 1995: 22). And it is this notion that demands careful treatment of the body.

The conflict between applied medical technology and traditional ways of life is also visible in the tension between the drama's content and its form. *The Well of Ignorance* is a Noh play – a theatrical form mostly unknown to Western audiences, although Bertolt Brecht, William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound (Cuddon 1998: 549) adapted it for experimental purposes. Noh is a highly stylized form (see Terasaki 2002: ix) deriving from the 14th century and exploring the relationship between the "world of spirits and earthly life" (Lock 1995: 7). In its classical form, it is a drama with music furnished by a chorus and chanters accompanied by traditional instruments. "Noh characters themselves are often the spirits of the dead, appearing in fearsome wooden masks and chanting their poetic dialogues to the heavy beat of drums" (Sanger 1991b). David Mikics defines Noh as a "brief Japanese dramatic form drawing on poetry, prose, dance and music" (2007) that can be compared to the ancient Greek tragedy. Originating from both folk and aristocratic art forms, Noh performances are rather minimalistic in style, while at the same time highly "ritualistic and codified" (Terasaki 2002: x). The actors, all male, wear masks and decorated costumes and perform without having practiced more than once together. The play's interest derives primarily from the power of its content and symbolism (see Terasaki 2002: x), rather than from the facial expressions or spontaneous emotions of the actors. Similarly, the stage is spare and the singing involves a limited tonal range but is poetic and complex in its content (see Terasaki 2002: ix).

As one might deduce from the above information, Noh is a rarely used form when dealing with biotechnological questions. Accordingly, journalist David Sanger's tone is one of surprise in his review of the first performance of *The Well of Ignorance* in Tokyo: "But if the usual plots of Noh plays are drawn from ancient Japanese legends, Tada's play emerged from the operating room" (1991a). Apart

from its modern content, however, the play contains all the elements one would expect from a typical Noh work, starting with a spirit that hovers over the earthly world, a chorus and an unresolved ending.

Indeed, *The Well of Ignorance* is a modern play in an ancient disguise, which enables the work to build a bridge between Japan's past and present. The audience is reminded that Japan is quintessentially different from many other countries in that it represents a "technologically sophisticated, highly literate, economic superpower" (Lock 1996: 142) that was drawn toward the modern West in certain respects, but at the same time went to great lengths to preserve a strong cultural heritage. Transplantation is thus portrayed as a sort of cultural interloper, intervening in and transforming many aspects of human existence. In choosing Noh, Tada was able to infuse his play "with mystical and nostalgic associations" (Lock 1996: 144). In Sanger's words: Tada effectively uses an "old art form to tap a deep modern sense of ambivalence" (Sanger 1991a) – the ambivalence about what it means to be human. Fusing disparate form and content, the play succeeds in convincing its audience that the question at stake is indeed a very old one: transplantation provokes question of the boundaries between life and death, between body and spiritual soul, between the material and the intangible value of body parts.

*Hände*ⁱⁱ by the German playwright Dea Loher, by contrast, concentrates on the psychological difficulties of the individual confronted with organ implantation. Yet these individual concerns reveal as well something about the culture they sprung from. To further illustrate this I would like to elaborate on *Hände*. Two women and two men are present on stage, all of whom are anonymous, distinguished only by a number. The setting is non-specific, as are two characters that appear on stage almost without speaking. They are called Killer (Unbekannter toter Mörder [unknown dead murderer]) and Untomo (Unbekannter toter Motorradfahrer [unknown dead motorcyclist]). The play begins *in medias res* with Man #2 explaining how he lost something due to an accident with a saw. Calling the lost object "my old one" (*Hände* 31), the man leaves the audience to guess whether he is talking about his hand or maybe even his wife, whom he deprecatingly calls old.

The next time the two men meet, the former amputee proudly recounts how he has received an organ donation. Like other organ recipients and maybe even the woman in Tada's play, he is thrilled by the immediate change after the operation. Euphorically he describes the way in which he was able to skip the waitlist (*Hände* 38): "How I have fought for it. / And indeed, / so much can I say / already. / No comparison. / Everything will be fine. / Everything will be much better. / Everything will be different" (*Hände* 38 f.) With the reception of the new donor hand, the fissure between imperfect reality and perfect self-image has been healed – at least temporarily.

Connected to the transplant, however, are expectations that seem

inappropriately high – expectations of ‘progress’, ‘self-discipline’ and, above all ‘happiness’ (*Hände* 39). The recovery of his tactile sensations seems to mark a significant turn in the man’s life: He speaks of ‘growth’ – referring to the regeneration of nerves – claiming that his cells grow faster than those of an embryo (see *Hände* 39). Yet the disappointment is soon to arrive, as the transplant cannot fulfill all the expectations projected onto it. The donated hand remains a foreign object that does not work in accordance with its owner’s lofty demands.

Feelings of enthusiasm thus turn abruptly into skepticism: “So little do they belong to me, / I recoil when I accidentally lay eyes upon them” (*Hände* 51). The relationship between Man #2 and his hand suffers tremendously when the man thinks about his donor and begins to believe that a murder-gene might penetrate his body and affect his behavior. With the donor’s history kept under wraps, the man resorts to wild speculation. In an existential howl, he screams that he has lost “all control” (*Hände* 52) over his life. Misleading ideals of happiness have turned him into an emotional cripple. He suffers from the transplant, yet in contrast to Tada’s heart recipient his concerns appear completely egotistical, as no pity for the donor is ever expressed. Instead, the transplant becomes the object of projection for his failed dreams. Outside this vacuum of self-absorption, there is nothing of relevance for him.

In the play’s final scene, he asks Man #1 to cut his transplanted hand off. His maniacal pursuit of perfection has brought him only misery. The real happiness he was searching for, however, has not materialized. Within this last scene, his language again points to a spiritual vacuity: In the absence of profound beliefs, “everything becomes invested instead in this life, in this body” (Dickenson 2008: 152). The metaphysical message becomes obvious when Man #2 declares that he had trusted in modern medicine and had believed that “EVERYTHING” (*Hände* 31) would be all right. This quotation shows that beneath the personal crisis, of course, lies a philosophical crisis: Living in an oversaturated consumer society where everything is possible and stripped of any real ideals, Man #2 has come to associate the emotion of happiness with physical superiority alone.

Conclusion

Loher’s play, much like Tada’s, leaves an exasperated person on stage. Both, donor and recipients suffer – and Tada’s title implies that only those who are ignorant of transplantation’s implications will feel well – a little jab at those countries, where the ethics of organ removal are often subordinated to the successful implantation of the organ. With *The Well of Ignorance*, Tada presents his insight into the “malaise of modernity” (Lock 1997: 132) as a universal warning of uncontrolled technical progress. But Loher’s play also contains many utterances that should make any Western audience prick up their ears. Man #2’s decision mirrors that of the consumer who goes into a shop and wants to buy himself a

brand item to make his life better as promised by an advertisement. The protagonist transfers this same logic to transplant surgery. Being physically damaged, he believes that his life would be more satisfying if he had a new hand. Loher observes this outlook and lifestyle with skepticism and casts doubt.

Though each play has its own cultural emphasis, both plays show the struggle between human values/beliefs and rapidly changing health technologies. As a possible answer, the German as well as the Japanese playwright show individuals who deeply regret having undertaken their medical (mis)adventure into the realm of transplant technology. Tada calls them “[p]itiful souls” (*TWoI I*) and points to the spiritual dilemma at hand. The violence of the procedure seems to preclude the possibility of a calm and smooth separation of body and mind and similarly a peaceful transition from life to death is presumably corrupted by hasty organ removal. Writing from an overtly secular background, Loher focuses instead on what transplantation does to the living: Man #2 seems morally exhausted by the consumer culture that promises a better life through endless gratifying pleasures of the self. Striving for physical perfection leaves him shallow and void. Leon Kass calls this the sad irony of biomedical projects: “We expend enormous energy and vast sums of money to preserve and prolong bodily life, but in the process our embodied life is stripped of its gravity and much of its dignity. This is, in a word, progress as tragedy” (1992: 85).

It holds true that the two works address organ transplantation from different angles, nonetheless they both deal with the concomitant ethical questions. The thought-provoking impulses that stem from *Hände* and *The Well of Ignorance* enrich public discussions on organ transplantation. Even more, Loher’s and Tada’s play on organ transplants can be potent and exciting instruments of knowledge.

Notes

ⁱTo date, there exists no official translation of the play into any other language. My analysis is therefore based on the unauthorized translation of a theater performance staged in Cleveland, USA. As to whether this translation, only five pages in length, does justice to the original Japanese is beyond my assessment. However, it can be assumed that the original is also relatively short, as Noh plays are usually dense in metaphorical allusions and non-verbal elements. Within the following analysis I will refer to the material provided by S. Kita and B. Parker (1994), which is divided into acts I and II.

ⁱⁱ The subsequent quotes from *Hände* have been translated into English.

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'A Skin of Ink': *The Tattooist* and the Body in Performance

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Abstract

The body is the link between us and the outside world, and its creation and exhibition shapes its performance and presentation. This paper using Peter Burger's directed movie *The Tattooist* as a referential frame, analyses relational, dynamic and procedural transformation of the body through tattooing. In the film tattoo artist Jake Sawyer, unknowingly plays a role in releasing a deadly spirit as he cuts himself with 'au ta (Samoan tattoo instrument) in his attempt to learn pe'a, the Samoan tradition of tattooing. In the movie not only cultures overlap but also distinctions are blurred between art and life and also after-life. The film amazingly explores varied meaning of the human skin, and unravels the spectacle of the tattooed body. This paper explores the psyche of tattooing from the perspective of fashioning oneself both within-and-out the norm – a type of ritual-performance on the body, transforming it simultaneously into actual and contrived, corporeal and celluloid, palpable and non-physical (feigned or eidetic). This study draws on New Zealand tradition about tattoos and focuses on tattooing as a performance, primarily seeking to elucidate on how we might conceive the performance of tattooed identity among individuals.

[**Keywords:** Body, ink, modification, performance, Samoan, sign, tattoo.]

The relationship between the human body and cultural discourse has often been taken for granted, the body merely being an "absent presence" (Shilling 16) – a fixed/ inert site of mind, where the operations of a universally prevalent reason can take place. But contemporary scholarship has forcefully contested this view, and the body has emerged from a neutral space to an active agent – our point of insertion into cultural discourse and structural relationships – a sign, invested with meaning that forms the linguistic/discursive constitution of the subject. As Synnot suggests, we can "usefully reconsider the body at the heart of sociology, rather than peripheral to the discipline, and more importantly at the heart of our social lives and our sense of self"(4). Even a perfunctory critique reveals body/ embodiment as underlying to numerous social behaviours including gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, health and medicine, disability, sport, aging, death and dying. From the dissemination of plastic surgery to the mainstreaming of tattooing, from fashion to grossness, the body and feelings of embodiment are

structured and multi-dimensional (Waskul and Vannini). As explained by Waskul and van der Riet:

A person does not 'inhabit' a static object body but is subjectively embodied in a fluid, emergent, and negotiated process of being. In this process, body, self, and social interaction are interrelated to such an extent that distinctions between them are not only permeable and shifting but also actively manipulated and configured (488).

The human body is ever 'performative' – systematically reproduced and sustained through a plethora of social activities– the myriad continuums of performance. To be more precise, we do not 'have' a body, we actively perform to produce a body. According to Goffman, the body is fashioned in ritualized social and cultural conventions,

a performed character... not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be borne to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited" (252-253).

In a consumerist society, subjective position of the body is heavily downplayed to outward appearance. There is no culture in which people do not, or did not paint, pierce, tattoo, reshape, or simply adorn their bodies. Fashions change and forms of body art come and go, but people everywhere do something or other to 'package' their appearance, with the desperate hope to own and find meaning of their own bodily selves. They are like performers in space drawing together all the elements of scenographic practice, invoking interpretations which are themselves the product of ideologies enclosed within the limit of a particular time and place. As Auslander has aptly commented, "In performance, physical presence, the body itself, is the locus at which the workings of ideological codes are perhaps the most insidious and also the most difficult to analyse, for the performing body is always both a vehicle for representation and, simply, itself" (90).

In this paper I have tried unravelling the psychology of body art, more specifically tattooing¹, from the perspective of performance studies, and have used Peter Burger's directed movie *The Tattooist* as a referential frame in elucidation of my points. The movie draws on Samoan tradition about tattoos and focuses on tattooing as a performance, primarily seeking to elucidate on how we might conceive the performance of tattooed identity among individuals. With tattoo artist Jake Sawyer's cutting himself with 'au ta (Samoan tattoo instrument) in his attempt to learn pe'a, the tradition of tattooing, not only a deadly spirit gets released, but also cultural meanings surrounding the tattooed body gets unravelled.

In the scope of the paper, I have tried showing the movie's handling of the skin like a stage, where art is being performed to complete a process of signification. Tattooing is shown as a visual language, having its own vocabulary – a kaleidoscopic mix of traditional practices and new inventions, through which, like artists, we everyday cross boundaries of gender, national identity, and cultural selves. Since it is an 'intimate' art form, it continually formulates and re-formulates cultural assumptions about the desirable, and the appropriately presented body. In the movie tattooed bodies are invested with a kind of plastic significance, not only meant to decorate, but also to disturb both artist and viewer, forcing us to question its social project. Here I would also like to refer to Peter Greenaway's film *The Pillow Book* (1997) and Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* (1951/ movie 1969), where we see that calligraphy on skin becomes a means to perform life. Like calligraphy, tattooing puts a mark on the lives of late modern subjects and establishes a dialectical relation between tattooing and performance, where on the one hand the body constructs a personal history of experiences – an opportunity for subjective security; and on the other hand, like any other performative act, is an object subject to the gaze of other/audience.

Being tattooed can be seen as a form of permanent diary that cannot be taken away, a notion that apparently seems to contest the basic precepts of performance studies, as elaborated by Peggy Phelan for whom "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (146). But in the movie we see that though ink on the body is permanent; the performance of it is not. With each display, it is being performed and every time as Lomi's ghost reshapes the tattoos drawn by Jake, a new conduit of communication gets created between them and the audience. Even the tattooed individual at times becomes his/her own audience, because every gaze to his/her tattoo generates different emotional response between the embodied mark and the conceptual self, thereby extending the performance of the tattoo.

Atkinson notes the tattoo possesses both communicative and performance aspects in its ability to be 'read' by others, and hence it is part of a person's 'doing identity' by transmitting a definition of a person, who becomes the object of *gaze* (2003: 141, 229). Richard Schechner's claim that any performance must have an audience is applicable in tattoo performances, through its display to an observer, who not only receives the performance but also validates the individual's transformation into a new identity from non-tattooed to tattoo-*ed*. The film in its revival of the Samoan tradition also links identity transformation through tattooing with a rite of passage, where as Alipathi tells Jake, "The pain of the tattoo, it changes you". It is a tradition where "designs are handed down from father to sons" (Sina); usually performed on young boys serving as an initiation into manhood, and is a cause for celebration. In the movie we see that men of the same age group get tattooed at the same time, making them ink-brothers. A

'tufuga' (tattoo artist) presides over the occasion, and as shown in the movie it assumes a ritualistic import, where tattooing becomes a community's symbolic demarcation of a territory in space and time by complex acts and techniques affecting the experience of identity of the participants away from individuality – clothed not to cover nakedness but to show that one is ready for life and service to his community; a chain where non-believers like Jake cannot be admitted. In the Samoan tradition, it is a technology with a very clear purpose. Its aim is to reduce the sense of individual self of the participants in order to achieve a sense of 'communitas' with respect to a territorial model. Tattooing in Samoan tradition is shown as symbolic acts through which the individual reclaims his own body. The body is freed from the Western regulatory beauty and sexual norms and it becomes a limitless field of experimental performance – transforming the body into a malleable medium for expressing their compliance to social norms.

The importance of the creation of a marked body and the development of a new language is central to *The Tattooist*. The bodies presented and transformed in the course of the movie are sites of encoding and decoding: messages are produced and are simultaneously received and understood by an audience. The film serves as a cultural text, an apparatus for transmitting cultural values and also a site for struggle over meaning. The term given to describe the constant shifting and multiple possibilities of meaning a text may have is polysemy, that is, a text has no one fixed meaning: aptly created in the movie through Jake's double Lomi, the ghost tattooist that Jake unleashes as he cuts himself with the cursed 'au ta. Everyone Jake marks after incident is remarked and their tattoos re-signified by Lomi, and their blood transforms into ink, making tattooing more than a skin deep thing.

If performance, as Phelan suggests, is comprised of the following: 1) "implicates the real through the presence of living bodies"; 2) requires consumption; 3) "plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory" because it cannot be reproduced; 4) offers the "possibility of revaluing that emptiness", I maintain the tattoos by Jake and its remake by Lomi fits into each of these categories. In all these ways, the tattoo is "simultaneously permanent and impermanent, a lasting performance upon the living body" (Phelan qtd in Wilson 6). This then gives us the opportunity to analyze audience response to the tattooed bodies as 'open' rather than 'closed' and the study of how cultural differences work in the reception of texts become productive.

French philosopher Jacques Lacan proclaims that a tattoo is the first mark that signifies, that points toward a meaning. He declares that "the subject himself is marked off by a single stroke, and first he marks himself as a tattoo, the first of the signifiers"(qtd in Ellis 46). The first signifier – first symbol that represents a meaning – is a tattoo. As Lacan tells it, a tattoo is the initial meaningful mark, and making such a mark creates both human subject and signifier. Creating a tattoo, one marks oneself, and then one becomes evident as separate from that mark. So,

one becomes a subject – a distinct individual – one who must come to terms with expressive marks (Ellis 46).

Tattoos in the movie readies one for the world. In an independent tradition that long predates Lacan's theories, Samoan tribes, too, see tattoo as making room for language. A tattoo is a first sign that seems to declare: 'I am tattooed, therefore my community speaks through me and I am able to speak in my community'. The Samoan believes it to be a gift from God, and if left incomplete, brings shame to the individual and his family. Samoan tattooing offers a distinct philosophy. Where criminologists see the practice as cutting an individual off from other humans, and where Lacan's lone hunter stalks through the forest without reference to other human beings and marks himself spontaneously, Samoan tattooing is created ritually in community, by community. Person and public shape one another mutually, with tattoos signaling their interaction. Designs are more than personal, carrying culture beyond a single individual's life span. A person's patterned skin is mortal, but designs travel onward, connecting future to past, creating a passageway that shows where an individual and a people have been and where they are going. Tattoos, moreover, help propel such a journey – a performance that precedes a lifetime.

The tattooed body emerges as a performative site for the Samoan community in the film, where ink on the body upholds social norms transforming identity into a manipulable 'mise en scene' of physical accoutrement and the 'self' becomes something as shifty as experimental tattoos on the skin. The subject of the 'appropriate' locus for the denotative body becomes most clearly "an issue not only of who bears the right to wield the explicit body in the frame of art, but, who bears the rights to explicate the socio-historical significances of that body and that frame" (Schneider 42).

Tattoos also generally assume a multiplicity of interpretations from self-adornment to a dramatic structuring of life history to a protective shield – almost a second skin, representing a narrative map. As Sina explores Jake's tattoos we see his skin at the intersection of various cultures. Life history gets easily narrated through the tattoos and memory moves across continents from Berlin to New York to Brazil. Tattooed bodies become a three dimensional performative representation bridging space, significant moments and affects together. Sina's transformation in and through tattoos is also very important. Initially she allows Jake to make a red flower on her waist, but this stray tattoo allows Lomi's chaotic designs to be implanted on her back. But Jake in the end not only saves her, he also restructures and redesigns her skin into a beautiful landscape. In the movement from stray tattoos to structured and re-structured tattooing, we see that ink helps Sina in giving a new coherence to life.

In post-postmodern society, ink usurps the function of blood, not only providing a sense of belongingness, but also pulsating social performance of the individual, whose subject position gets directly inscribed onto the skin – the most

expressive part of our body. While protective and waterproof, it remains frail and 'telling' – a canvas onto which our personal and social histories are engraved. In *The Tattooist*, we are presented the “anxious concern with the abject frailty and vulnerability of the skin, and the destructive rage against it exercised in violent fantasies and representations of all kinds” (Connor 9). Jake’s father’s peeling of his son’s tattooed skin as ‘devil’s mark’ to the Japanese man’s insistence that his dying son “needs a tattoo” to Alipati’s remarks that one breathes into a tattoo to Victoria’s joke “Think of it as losing your virginity”, all shows concern with the skin and its diverse meanings.

Tattoos tempt rendition in light of the worldview of the persons sporting them because they raise questions about a person’s identity and self-representation. Indeed, the body, especially the skin covering it, can be considered a powerful aesthetic and political tool. Drawing on Bourdieu, tattooing can be viewed as one of the many strategies for providing exclusivity to oneself, and provides a continuum of possibilities for the construction and display of identity, aesthetics/politics of the self. For Bourdieu, aesthetics and politics are matted: aesthetics is invariably political because it is about arrogating distinction, branding oneself as dissimilar within a social field which renders these meaningful. But the body is not only a site where identity is freely enacted; it is also the space that is socially patrolled. Tattooing responds to and is also shaped by the larger societal contexts that shape the bodies in question.

The pointless leisure and alienation of modern life seems to be captured in the tattooed bodies, both of Jake and those he tattoos. Subjects run the risk of being exposed, and yet are happy taking it – what is defined as personal is, in reality shared (Oksanen & Turtiainen 112). In a sense technological advancement seems to call for a new kind of primitive performance, as shown in Jake’s exposure to Samoan tradition in the post-modern Tattoo Expo. When life is distant, the skin starts speaking, but to what extent? – A question that is aptly raised and answered in the movie through the binary Jake/Lomi’s ghost. Reckoning one’s body as art is used to refer to its durable quality – no matter how devouring current culture is.

The tattooed body can be viewed as a performative project, where the skin is constantly worked and reworked like a theatre practice until it becomes ready for the final show – life itself. Dramatic changes in life calls for new marks on the skin, where the body’s revamping refers to the maximization of the visual capacity and outward appearance. The body is like a script constantly improved and adjusted upon. The ‘jouissance’ associated with tattoos springs from the sense of bodily control achieved through modifications. The ramifications of the ritual of tattooing, then, lies in the fact that the substantiation of individuality is based on distinguishing the body from a large non-marked portion of the population and attaching it to a non-standardized enclave characterized by similar mark.

Postmodern sociological and literary representations of tattooing have moved ahead from the earlier tendencies to defend tattoos by merits of socially

defined parameters of art to a focus on tattooed demographics and, more significantly the aesthetic tendency that has led to the recognition of tattooing as a tolerable form of social expression or artistic endeavour, integrating it with popular culture and mass media. In the effort to be deviant, the whole body is transformed into a picture gallery, and the idea of tattoo is elevated from a site specific sticker, towards what Modern Primitives call 'a full body concept'²² as seen through Jake or later Sina's body. As a way of expression, indeed of performance, the tattoo is at once both multifariously telling and communicative.

Society has moved beyond the hunter-gatherer principle with innovative vistas of knowledge and ideological experimentations being opened up for us. In this restructuring of values, the urge for skin ornamentation is again undergoing a revival. In today's world, in the world of skyscrapers, tattoos are again being used to forge tribal affiliations – representing common aesthetic values, sometimes even invested with magical beliefs, reminding us of our ritual-oriented ancestors in the Amazonian jungles.

The modern industrial city is not only a space for limitless possibilities, but also a structured site where rituals are enacted from the cradle to the grave. From watching a cricket match to marriage to first day at work, rituals marks rites of passage, through which we continually play our desired role and are manipulated into unconsciously conforming to the hegemony of society. Tattooed individuals remind us of the constricting daily rituals, and their experimentation with body leads to a search for a new ideology. Tattoos provide the potential to belong to a different culture, where we can continually evolve from our past into a new future – from a mere societal being to a state of multiple becoming(s). The tattooed bodies provoke a viewer/spectator to think again – leading us to the messy impasse between essentialist and constructivist critiques of the body. The ultimate meaning of tattoos as sign consists either of "feeling or of acting or being acted upon" (Peirce 5). Tattoos actively project one's identity to others, where a single mark is invested with multiplicity of meanings, having potential significance across a vast array of cultures and time periods. At all levels – conceptual to performative – tattooing is inextricably linked to socio-cultural elements.

Tattoo is a sign that bears explicit significance for the tattooed individual in a world of endless signifiers. It performs for and on the body, reminding it of its concreteness. New tattoos also mark identity evolution, and alter the performance of the initial ones by extending it beyond its basic scope. Yet again one may see in this performance a process that unites permanence and temporality, a performance that changes in its repertoire but not in its archive, to use Diana Taylor's term (see Wilson 61).

This paper examines tattooing from the perspective of performance among ethnic groups and modern individuals, and tries to elucidate the negotiation of marks, meanings and the body into a process of embodied performance. Tattooing is considered in this paper as a performative practice that, through such inter-

subjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentring of the Cartesian subject of modernism. This dislocation is the most profound transformation constitutive of what we have come to call postmodernism. I would like to conclude, with few words borrowed from Antonin Artaud, which I feel provides a befitting conclusion to *Tattooing as Performance*:

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it (52).

Endnotes

¹ Etymologically the word 'tattoo' can be traced back to the Tahitian term 'tattaw'. In India it is popularly referred to as 'godhna'.

² Modern primitives are people engaging in body art thereby forging affiliations to ancient tribal rituals. Roland Loomis, also known as Fakir Musafar, is considered the father of this movement.

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Cooking as Performance: Negotiating Art and Authenticity in *Ratatouille*

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Abstract

Be it quotidian or haute cuisine, 'Caviar' or 'Quesadillas', cooking has always been a performance, in its experimentation to create an "appetite appeal" (Carafoli 146). This paper, through an analysis of Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava's directed, Disney animation *Ratatouille*, explores the engaging analogies and correlations between the processes in cooking and performance. The stage is being replaced by a single performative site – the kitchen, which becomes the theatre of action, producing the ultimate 'orgy of olfaction' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 7). A direct communication is shown to be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator is invited to share the secret of the kitchen, and ultimately, is, not only affected by the sight, feel, taste, or smell of the final performative outcome – the food, but also impacted upon by the identity of the performer – Remy, the 'tiny chef' – nothing but a provincial rat.

[**Keywords:** Cooking, food, performance, art, authenticity]

The proliferation of television cookery shows, food advertisements, food photography and other popular representations of food, has made food assume a multiplicity of meanings with 'enormous expressive potential', and content value, from being a necessary commodity for consumption and sustenance to an object of *fetish* because food as an object of performance recognizes the heterogeneity and diversity in its target consumers. Today, food media caters to everyone from complete beginners in the kitchen to celebrity chefs; from *foodies* to those who find pleasure in watching embarrassments and victories in cooking contests; from food activists to those who delight in defying the so-called *food police*.

More importantly food that is consumed and the way it is consumed and the cooking that goes into preparing it, not only determine cultural practices, but also contribute to our "personal identities, in our rhetorical performances of social styles, because it is a commodity that involves aspects of performance, creates a language or discourse, and involves aesthetics" (Greene 34). Food, as one of the markers of *social style* "employ[s] a system of signs as a means of creating who we are, who we are becoming, and who we want to be in terms of our identities. It also is a way that we both communicate who we are to others and is a means by which we identify people." (Greene 32). Cooking, as a social style has four dimensions: performance (cooking), use of language (*sazon*), commodities (ingredients, spices, and raw materials) and aesthetics (garnishing and presentation of cooked food).

Food and/or Cooking as a performance, quite conveniently binds multiplicity, and uniqueness and projects a 'dual ontology'. Cooking, like Music, Dance and Drama is a *multiple art-form* as an event that can be repeated in time and space; whereas presentation of prepared food like any enduring physical, aesthetic object makes it a singular, *non-performance art form* like Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, thereby ensuring the possibility to appreciate its formal qualities and contemplate its aesthetic design, through sight, smell, and taste. Paradoxically, such an appreciation results from consumption and in its consumption lies its death, disappearance. But despite its transience, "It manifests itself as physical entity and as abstract performance" (Arouh 57).

Since the physicality of the food is at stake to elicit an aesthetic response, the food needs to be reproduced, and any act of reproduction whether in "art, rituals, or ordinary life – are made of 'twice-behaved behaviours,' or 'restored behaviors,' i.e., performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse" (Schechner 22). Practice is shaped through 'habitus' (Bourdieu) forming a social pattern of behaviour, reproducing structures of domination. Cooking becomes one of the many ways of learning to inhabit and reproduce a complex network of 'habitus' through practical means.

Through an analysis of Jan Pinkava and Brad Bird's directed Disney animation *Ratatouille* (2007), this paper tries to show how an exclusive performative status can be ascribed to cooking. Comparable to any *Künstlerroman*, the movie plots out the growth of an artist-chef (ironically a provincial rat) from the gutters to the gourmet kitchen of a reputed Parisian restaurant, where it/he finally exhibits exceptionality in the preparation and presentation of dishes appealing to the tastes of food-connoisseurs. Remy, the rat in assuming the chef's position, and climactically offering a peasant dish (*ratatouille*) to the most critical of the food critics, Anton Ego, truly invests the movie with a multi-layered and multi-dimensional approach to performance, where we witness the emergence of the diasporic-performer – rat, the 'tiny chef' - in the complexity of cooking. Although his brother Emile considers him an exclusive, his father treats him as unnatural because of his capacity to appreciate food which is why he is forced to keep his interest in cooking, a hidden affair that he discloses only occasionally and confidentially to Emile.

The film, intelligently, chooses Paris as the backdrop because Paris, unquestionably, has been for ages, a centre stage of culinary art, cuisine and sophisticated kitchen innovations:

The French...have surrounded food with so much commentary, learning and connoisseurship as to clothe it in the vestments of civilization itself... Rating restaurants is a national preoccupation. Cooking is viewed as a major art form: innovations are celebrated and talked about as though they were phrases in the development of a style of painting or poetry...A meal at a truly great restaurant is a sort of theatre you can eat. (Bernstein 168)

Gusteau's cookery shows and recipe books become an abiding presence and constant influence on Remy and Gusteau's clichéd motto 'Anyone can cook' becomes his mantra. However, Anton Ego, the grim eater, thinks Gusteau's motto is blasphemous: "Amusing title, 'Anyone can cook!' What's even more amusing is that Gusteau actually seems to believe it. I, on the contrary, take cooking seriously. And no, I don't think anyone can do it" (*Ratatouille*, 2007, henceforth referred to as *R*). Lizabeth Nicol observes that for centuries, cuisine has been one of France's greatest treasures so that: "Eating in France is not simply seen as necessary for survival and health but also as a statement of culture" (Nicol 345). For the French, besides eating and drinking, discussing food constitutes one of the major 'taste acts' (Ferguson 17) through which they *perform* their connections to taste community and also make the process of eating, a pleasurable, social activity: "In France one must not just eat and drink, but talk also. Talk stimulates new ideas about food.' They want to know all the details concerning their food: where it comes from, how it was produced how long it took, who produced it, how it should be cooked and served. They are justly proud of French cuisine" (Nicol 345). Therefore, while Gusteau's dictum 'Anyone *can* cook!' is apparently simplistic, in its deceiving projection of cooking as a democratized and popular activity, cooking as *performance*, is, Remy clarifies later, not something anyone *should* undertake.

When exploring a sleeping old woman's kitchen while Gusteau's cookery show is on, Remy watches and is inspired, as Gusteau speaks: "Good food is like music you can taste, color you can smell. There is excellence all around you. You need only be aware to stop and savour it" (*R*). Albert Arouh confirms "Music is perceived bodily, as sound waves enter our ears, while there are sensual pleasures in music akin to those associated with food. A good melody titillates the senses as much as a good flavour does....Food is like music; it needs a performance to be realised" (55).

Remy is a self-confessed addict to cookery shows that are a 'new pornography: it's people seeing things on TV, watching people make things on TV that they are not going to be doing themselves any time soon, just like porn' (Rousseau x). But Remy dreams to actually cook by borrowing human tools, techniques, and technology. The rubbish that Remy collects is his raw materials; he prefers to process the garbage rather than gobble it instantly for he states to his father: "If you are what you eat, then I only want to eat the good stuff" (*R*). Bodies "eat with vigorous class, ethnic and gendered appetites, mouth machines that ingest and regurgitate, articulating what we are, what we eat, and what eats us" (Probyn 32). Remy, through his queer *foodways* and in his attempts to transgress his usual 'habitus' and practice, becomes the *Other*; his appetite becomes "a powerful, highly charged, and personalized voice" (Hauck-Lawson 6) for self-assertion. His food voice "emerges as a term that crystallizes the dynamic, creative, symbolic, and highly individualized ways that food serves as a channel of communication" (Hauck-Lawson 6).

When Remy finds a piece of mushroom, and his brother Emile, a piece of cheese that Remy identifies as Tomme de chevre de pays, he immediately looks out for some Rosemary and dew drops from the tip of some sweet grass.

He says: “There are possibilities unexplored here. We got to cook this” (R). Risking his own life, he mounts on a rooftop, pins his ingredients to an antenna rod, and starts barbecuing: “The key is to keep turning it. Get the smoky flavour nice and even” (R) after which the lightning strikes, jolting them. But Remy has no regrets. At least, he has taken his first step to cooking and to creating a new flavour: “Each flavour was totally unique... But combine one flavour with another, and something new was created” (R). With a ‘highly developed sense of taste and smell’ (R), Remy, though a rat, acts as a mediator between nature with culture, through cooking, where raw materials are transformed into a cooked product. Levi-Strauss concludes that cooking becomes a symbolic marker “We thus begin to understand the truly essential place occupied by cooking in native thought: not only does cooking mark the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes” (164).

In *The Culinary Triangle*, with raw, cooked and rotten at each apex, Levi-Strauss proceeds to map different cooking processes - roasting, boiling, smoking - onto those terms and argues that roasted food embodies the raw, because it often resembles bloody, uncooked flesh in the middle, while smoked food, because it is cooked right through, symbolises culture. Thus, Remy, through his attempts to ‘cook’ not only sets his foot onto culture but also into ‘Thoughtful Cooking’, an emerging concept in the field of molecular gastronomy and mode of scientific and creative cooking that requires: “paying attention to what our senses tell us we prepare it, connecting that information with past experience and with an understanding of what’s happening to the food’s inner substance, and adjusting the preparation accordingly” (McGee 4).

Gusteau becomes his guardian angel whose valuable comments on cooking become commandments: “Great cooking is not for the faint of heart. You must be imaginative, strong hearted. You must try things that may not work. And you must not let anyone define your limits because of where you come from. Your only limit is your soul. What I say is true. Anyone can cook. But only the fearless can be great” (R). But Remy is heart-broken to know that Gusteau is dead after one of the scathing reviews by Anton Ego that resulted in the loss of one star from his restaurant.

When Remy and his brother Emile are discovered in the kitchen by the old woman who tries to shoot them, the whole endangered rat colony is forced to dislocate and Remy gets separated. Holding Gusteau’s cookery book, tight to his chest, as his sole resource and soul-resource, Remy survives and migrates to Paris. Forlorn, fatigued and famished, Remy hallucinates Gusteau’s spirit saying: “Food always comes to those who love to cook.” and Remy finds his way to the glass roof of Gusteau’s restaurant from where, for the first time, he gets to watch a gourmet kitchen working. Gusteau’s spirit asks him to identify the *chef* and the *sous chef*, the *saucier*, *chef de partie*, *demi chef de partie*, *commis*, and the *plongeur*, and Remy qualifies.

Remy’s migration from the country to the city, from the rural to the urban also shifts him and his perspective from the *space* of the popular kitchen

to that of the professional. He is mesmerised to see shelves stacked with pots, pans – sauce pans and frying pans - and other utensils, racks displaying cutlery, and crockery, rows filled up with small spice containers, mostly used up or in the process of being so, sleek bottles – some of them full and some half filled with oil, and all this accompanied with the sound and fury of the whistling cooker, the sizzling pans, the buzzing chimney, and the woody rhythm on the chopping board, interrupted sometimes by the beeping of the microwave, the buzzing of the grinder or the deafening noise of the blender. As he sees the chef and the cooks performing on food, he realises that an important element of the culinary artistic expression is “the art-in-process”, suggesting that the artistic and aesthetic value of food is imbricated in the entire technicality of cooking, emanating not only from the end result, that is the literal, material dish on the table; but also the performative act of preparing, and the art of eating it: “Everyday culinary art reveals itself through the senses, through the rhythms of the body while cooking, and by the effect caused by the process of sharing a meal” (Abarca 79). It indicates that the artistic expression reveals itself in the very moment of its creation, making cooking the single site that becomes the theatre of action. The actual moment of preparing and/or sharing the meaning of a culinary practice establishes a direct communication between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, where the spectator gets slowly involved in the process and physically affected by it:

Deconstruction has turned the restaurant experience into something increasingly theatrical...In that they have created ritualised menus aimed at an elite audience, it could be said that this theatricality returns us to the ritual value of food and the deconstructionist chef is in fact reintroducing ritual to the restaurant experience. (Guttman 227-228)

The kitchen evolves like the theatre-stage, where the chefs are performing and also the greenroom from where the food makes its exit like a character. This dual ontology of food as an art-in-process and an art-of-object makes it, like Painting, Architecture or Sculpture, an abiding physical source of beauty, the artistry and the authenticity of which lies in the eye of the beholder or the eater.

Gusteau’s spirit motivates Remy to secretly intervene and fix the soup, when he finds Linguini, the garbage boy hired by Skinner, the new owner of Gusteau’s restaurant, accidentally spoiling it. Eager to fire Linguini, Skinner thrashes him for having dared to cook but before he can prevent the soup from being served, it is carried out of the kitchen door, to be laid out to its diner-critic Solene LeClaire who reviews: “the soup was a revelation. A spicy yet subtle taste experience. Against all odds, Gusteau’s has recaptured our attention” (R).

Quite strategically then, *Ratatouille* crucially highlights the importance and impact of restaurant reviews in helping to flourish or demolish a restaurant. The tension embedded, and the finesse demanded in the performance of cooking gets crucially merged with the politics of restaurant-

business that thrives equally on performance and on reviewing: “*Having something to say* isn’t just a social imperative, it is the mechanism through which restaurant reviews, like criticism of other cultural products, shape aesthetic judgements.... Restaurant reviews enrich our cultural capital” (Davis 1 - 2). The meta-conversation about restaurants is in many ways effective in creating, giving shape to and sometimes manipulating some sort of consensus about ‘taste’. Therefore, inspite of someone claiming a taste to be one’s personal and innate, what tastes good or bad is constructed and reinforced by the system that privileges the judgements of those with the economic and cultural capital to say so. Hence such a power to privilege certain cultural products over others is the power to define ‘taste’.

Food historians like Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson and Stephen Mennell have revealed in their studies how negotiations in the public sphere, some 200 years ago in France, led to a consensus of ‘taste’ that has produced what is today considered as French cuisine. Pierre Bourdieu, while tracing correlations between French aesthetic preferences for the arts and ‘taste’ preferences for food or fashion, has shown that ‘taste’ is not only an ideological category based on the distinction between different levels of socio-economic status and that of cultural refinement, but also between the product of cultural variable that include class, education, economic and symbolic capital, and the resulting positions these variables produce in the field of cultural production.

A review that had led to Gusteau’s restaurant losing popularity and Gusteau’s losing life, finds redemption in this performance by an agent who is ironically both alien and subversive to the human world. The soup’s success is the experimental outcome of Linguini’s accidentally adding the wrong ingredients and Remy’s incidentally administering the right ones. One remembers Gusteau’s lines: “Great cooking is not for the faint of heart. You must be imaginative, strong hearted. You must try things that may not work. And you must not let anyone define your limits because of where you come from. Your only limit is your soul. What I say is true. Anyone can cook. But only the fearless can be great” (R).

Linguini, however, proves that not anyone can cook. And because he is human and Remy is not, Remy is arrogated the performative position of the Chef. But our main concern is the act of reproducing the soup that implies negotiating art with authenticity. Reproducing a recipe demands a duplicative use of the same ingredients and implements although the context and the motives can keep changing. Therefore, every time a dish is prepared, it is *original*, even though it is replication of the same, abstract recipe. Gusteau’s restaurant claims to be recreating the signature dishes of Gusteau even after his death. However, chefs do have gone ‘missing’, opening one restaurant after another. So the question of authenticity in cooking arises not only from the chef’s figurative and literal absence in the kitchen but also from the fact that in case of food, the original is always transient:

A chef has artistic authenticity if s/he cooks in a style that follows his/her personal aesthetics in which s/he believes and onto which s/he holds

against all odds. By contrast, a chef is artistically inauthentic if s/he uncritically copies other styles, thus sacrificing his/her personal aesthetics for the sake of commercial or other gain. (Arouh 59)

For Remy, authenticity in cooking is a creative performance: “Imagine every great taste in the world being combined into infinite combinations. Tastes that no one has tried yet! Discoveries to be made!” (R) as opposed to the notion of authenticity upheld by Colette for whom artistic excellence lies in skilful execution of the original recipe: “Chef Gusteau always has something unexpected.... It was his job to be unexpected. It is our job to follow his recipes” (R). Remy sticks to his conviction when later he modifies or rather improvises Gusteau’s recipe of ratatouille for serving it to Ego.

But authenticity is under threat when Skinner, after taking charge of Gusteau’s restaurant, plans to make easy money by exploiting Gusteau’s brand name to launch a chain of cheaply, ‘American’ frozen foods. The concept of canned food or fast food technology also negates the performance act in cooking.

Cooking gets more focus as performance art through the patriarchal non-acceptance of women in the professional kitchen, validated by fewer participation and even exclusion of women from it. Cooking, a determiner of gender *performativity* (Butler), through “the inseparability of women and domestic cooking” (Mennell 65), has always dwindled between the binaries of being a privilege/ priority, a performance/ pain. However, just as cooking graduated, from its basic, and emotional functions of providing nurture and nourishment, to a profession, the *space* of the kitchen also evolved as a public site of performance. Accordingly, the distinction between popular cuisine and erudite cuisine also becomes gender-based: “‘erudite cuisine’ is what ‘fathers’ do in professional kitchens; ‘mothers’ in the home kitchens do ‘popular cuisine’” (Narayan 102).

Colette, Linguini’s mentor, mocks him, showing the difference:

You think cooking is a cute job, like Mommy in the kitchen? Well, Mommy never had to face the dinner rush when the orders come flooding in, and every dish is different and none are simple, and all of the different cooking times, but must arrive at the customer’s table at exactly the same time, hot and perfect! Every second counts, and you cannot be Mommy! (R)

Patriarchy that associates kitchen with women also associates drudgery, monotony, and non-creative repetitiveness to what they cook in the kitchen, precisely because it assumes “that no culinary art is created in a home kitchen, ... based on the belief that any activity performed in a domestic traditional setting leads to routine, and routine allegedly throttles creative energy, creative inventions”(Abarca 86).

Not only does Colette highlight the panic, pressure, and propriety implicated in professional cooking but also manifest the duplicity in patriarchal ideology in relegating the task of executing this high performance only to men.

When Colette asks Linguini “How many women do you see in this kitchen?”, she clarifies “... Because haute cuisine is an antiquated hierarchy built upon rules written by stupid old men. Rules designed to make it impossible for women to enter this world... People think haute cuisine is snooty. So chef must also be snooty” (R). In this context, “...the word *cuisine* resonates with high culture, whereas cooking is what working-class people do with their raw edible material since they are, supposedly, unable to transform the raw material into *haute cuisine*” (Abarca 82). Revel claims that the raw edible materials can be metamorphosed into culinary arts by making “popular cuisine” enter the domain of “erudite cuisine”. By “popular cuisine”, he means that grounded in peasant traditions, by way of imitation or habit and executed by exploiting different regional and seasonal products through the use native cooking methods, recipients and utensils; whereas, “Erudite cuisine” is achieved only through training and education. It is “based [on] invention, renewal, [and] experimentation”; it is “a true international cuisine.” (Qtd. in Abarca 84)

Unquestionably, Revel is misogynistic in believing that the raw edible materials in the hands of “mothers” can lead to some fine “craftsmanship” but not great art, whereas the chefs have to transcend everyday methods to realise a grand cuisine which should be restricted only to professionals, who are undoubtedly men.

For Revel “The history of gastronomy is above all that of erudite gastronomy, for this is the tradition that has left the greatest number of written traces. The great cookbooks are obviously the fruits of study, of invention, of the reflection of a change, rather than the fruit of the everyday run of things” (144). This hierarchical stance in Revel’s gastronomical history creates binaries - art/craft, cultivated or educated professional cuisines /local cooking, and male chefs/female cooks. Paradoxically enough, no sooner is cooking transformed into a socially prestigious commodity than it ceases to be “popular cuisine”, and becomes a culinary art, fostered within public institutions that have historically excluded women from entering the professional kitchen via culinary schools or by promotion. Even worse, when women have entered the professional kitchen there have been efforts to “forbid women from wearing the chef’s hat, the symbol of the profession.” (Boydston xv).

The climax in *Ratatouille* approaches in Ego’s sudden entry, during Linguini’s press conference and challenging his cooking when he would come to dine and review his restaurant, the next day:

Restaurant reviews, which, in addition to recording eating experiences, educate and inform us about how to culturally contextualise, judge, and compare eating experiences in both explicit and implicit ways. Restaurant reviews are one cog in the synchronic concatenation of cultural symbols that defines a nation by binding an imagined community of people with shared tastes, similar dining habits, and widely held opinions about food.” (Davis 15-16)

In this climactic act of performance that can either seal the success of the restaurant or permanently jeopardise it, Remy faces the ultimate challenge

and Linguini almost a catastrophe now that, his colleagues have deserted him after knowing the pretence behind his performance. But on that dramatic night Remy acts as the chef-leader by effectively regimenting the process of cooking, efficiently directing and monitoring his rodent community that had decided to help him in his unique endeavour. It is *perspective* that Ego orders – *perspective* that should not only reflect performance but also a point of view. Perhaps, that is why Remy deliberately chooses to prepare rat-atouille, a popular cuisine that offers a *perspective* of the *terroir* - linking the food to the land through a time-honoured agricultural tradition. It is about bonding food to the soil that is tilled, the farm that fetches fresh vegetables, the poultry that yields warm meat, the diversity of the soil and the variety of micro-climates. Braudel aptly acknowledges the French farmer as ‘the architect and labourer’ (65).

Ratatouille underscores the mnemonic and cathartic function of taste when the frowning Ego bites into the rat-chef’s ratatouille and is transported back to his blissful childhood days when he used to return home, depressed and was cheered up as his mother served him ratatouille: “In a Proustian sense, taste ... serves as a mnemonic device, allowing us to recollect situations, recall feelings, remember places, and reconnect with the past.... Such mnemonic tastes are often invoked by restaurant critics searching for traditional or authentic flavours in otherwise ersatz settings” (Davis 58).

Through the evocation of such restorative nostalgia, Ego instantly connects to his origin, feels distant and distinctive from the glam and sham of the elite world of haute cuisine. For Ego, ratatouille is a revelation of his true identity; it is a realisation of the rusticity producing food.

Finally Ego’s insistence to meet the actual chef marks the return, reappearance, and recognition of the “missing chef” and his final remarks, besides exposing both the easiness and the edginess of a critic’s task, shows that:

... the average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so. But there are times when a critic truly risks something and that is in the discovery and defence of the new. Last night, I experienced something new, an extraordinary meal from a singularly unexpected source. To say that both the meal and its maker have challenged my preconceptions about fine cooking is a gross understatement. In the past, I have made no secret of my disdain for Chef Gusteau’s famous motto, “Anyone can cook.” But I realize only now ...what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere. It is difficult to imagine more humble origins, than those of the genius now cooking at Gusteau’s, who is, in this critic’s opinion, nothing less than the finest chef in France. (R)

Needless to say civilisation is hardly patient and permissive with such deviant patronising and this controversial review brings an end to Ego’s career as a critic and Gusteau’s restaurant business. However, this doesn’t end the career of Remy who continues to cook in an alternate eatery set up by Linguini, named ‘Ratatouille’ – a symbol of the rat-performer and firmly establishes

food/cooking as a performance act. The movie, in its magical-realistic handling of the performer's body (Remy) and the act (cooking/food), fulfils all the parameters of performance art that "plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory" (Phelan 148).

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Theatre(s) of Resistance: Those ‘Other’ Performances in Simulation

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Abstract

The word “performance” is one laden with immense—if sometimes only theoretical or even metaphysical—possibilities which stretch the known boundaries of conventional representation. “Performances” can be mimetic, and in certain cases, ones based on simulation. Ideologically motivated theatre for activism is too common for our own times, but the ramifications of present global power relations demand ephemeral forms of protest, opposition and self-expression. This article attempts to present a relatively uncharted terrain of performance studies: the Virtual Theatre, its Siblings and undertakes an enquiry into the ethos of simulated performance and the implications thereof that challenge essentialist conceptions of the Self and Personality. In addition, it also tries to unearth the hidden possibilities of such types of performance which might prove to be influential forms of ‘affirmative action’ for the future, in trying to arrest the unrestricted growth of forces that assist globalization and its resulting cultural legacy.

[**Keywords:** Performance Studies, Virtual Theatre, simulation, resistance, online]

“The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth--it is the truth which conceals that there is none...the simulacrum is true”—Baudrillard quotes *Ecclesiastes* as he begins ‘Simulacra and Simulations’. (Baudrillard). For the simulacrum is never merely a replica of the real order; it is what masks, with increasing degrees of accuracy, the presence of the “real” as it is not. Presence, as it is not, in other words, absence—its objective is not to reveal, but to conceal. It is precisely the inability to differentiate appearances and reality which forms the basis of the hyperreal. Baudrillard’s essay itself is of course a predecessor to an equally illustrious, if not more visionary book by Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* where the author’s trip to Disneyland leads him on to discover the collective presence of the United States within Disneyland, which itself is situated within the United States. By projecting the values inherent within the hyperreal maze that is Disneyland, the United States unconsciously conceals the fact that it itself is a larger and certainly more ‘original’ Disneyland of which the latter is only a more diminutive and imperfect replica. (Eco)

The age of globalization itself is marked by what critic Paul Virilio calls the “industrialization of simulation” where cyber-media and visual images leads to a

“dissuasion of perceptible reality” and instead gives rise to new perceptions of reality and the sense of the real. (Virilio) The introduction of the virtual dimension in modern life demands a radical reorganization of cartography to take into account these simulated spaces which he calls the “cybernetic space time”. This not only creates new space and time but leads to an expansion of individual identity and self through creation of virtual bodies or Bodies without Organs (BwO)ⁱⁱ. The expansion of the self occurs through different modes of representations, notably through different imaging technologies which lead to the performative matrix being cluttered with simulated personae usurping the role of organic self-presentation. As representation, the body is displaced from its sovereign position leaving behind its image available for appropriation and allowing itself to be placed in different sign networks. This leads to constant reinvention of one’s own character identification so that all essentialist conceptions of terms such as “self”, “personality”, “body” are challenged and the person takes roles within the dramaturgical grid of everyday life. Abstracted representations of the self and the body, different and separate from the individual, are present simultaneously in numerous locations, interacting and recombining with others, beyond the control of the individual and often to his/her disadvantage. However it is this floating, delocalized quality of the virtual self that makes it especially suitable for combating the liquid flow of power in the virtual realm.

According to Arjun Appadurai contemporary globalization takes place through the shifting disjunctures between social landscapes of technology, media, ethnicity, ideology and finance. (Appadurai) In this context the Critical Art Ensemble contend that in such a situation of liquescent capital and cultural flow, power becomes nomadic and hence progressively difficult to resist. The retreat into the “invisibility of non-location” of authority ensures that those resistant populations caught up within the panopticon form a defining site of resistance—a theatre of operations. CAE believes that in face of the challenge posed by nomadic power the traditional forms of resistance fails. According to them nomadic power must be resisted nomadically.

The new geography created by the deterritorialization of power is a virtual geography and hence “the core of political and cultural resistance must assert itself in the electronic space.” A small, but coordinated group of hackers, they argue, could introduce electronic viruses, worms and bombs into the data banks programs and networks of authority bringing about prolonged inertia, thereby effecting the collapse of nomadic authority in a global scale. (Critical Art Ensemble)

In their book *The Electronic Disturbance* (1993), Critical Art Ensemble used the metaphor of the nomadic community of the Scythians described by Herodotus in his *Persian Wars*. The warlike community of the Scythians never settled down in one stable location, nor did they build up a sedentary civilization at one place. They were always on the aggressive and it became impossible to trace until the

moment of their appearance. They did not build up a 'civilisation', in the conventional sense and protracted their nomadic condition during a period when many other civilizations of Antiquity had already evolved themselves into stable polities. In Herodotus' words, they had no cities but were *pheroikoi* (like the snails in Hesiod). Their nomadic condition is described by Herodotus as a political and economic strategy of survival rather than an externally imposed condition of life. They maintained a system of floating borders, never settling down at one place; it was movement that preserved their autonomy. Consequently, the impossibility of locating them to a stable spatial point also meant that effectively, they could never be colonized. Using this metaphor of the Scythians, the nomadic nature of power systems of the elite in a global economy of late capitalism is emphasized. The added efficacy of this power model is due largely to the advent of technocracy and the opening of the cyberspace where speed/stability and presence/absence always collide in a domain of hyperreality.

The performative aspect of the act of resistance here is not to be missed. In the case of theatre to be particular, the tendency is to lean to the construction of the virtual theatre. At present the form may be regarded as acting on two fronts: the use of the information technology as a new display technology for older media intersecting performance practices. For example, the streaming of pre-recorded video technology over the net. The second front is the virtual theatre proper, which manifests itself within the virtual community through any text based or a graphic user interface creating a simulation of sociability. Through the use of the virtual self it eliminates the mediation of the body and thus escapes authority. Information Communication Technologies virtually extend the spatial codings and parameters of theatrical space and allow for otherwise impossible simulations—technology here being used as a unidirectional performative component for the use of projections; for example, CAE's performance at Rutgers University to call attention to sperm and egg donor recruitment on university campuses for the use in neo-eugenic practices. CAE provided the illusion that a Reprotech company visiting Rutgers was actively recruiting a sperm donor for a woman who was monitoring the process online from Florida. In actuality the performer was in a back room of the building. The effectiveness of this technology was due to the looping back of the virtual into real space and a surrendering to interactivity in favour of participation. The virtual theatre itself, however borrows heavily from the earlier model of Recombinant Theatre, consisting of performative environments through which participants may flow—like the Theatre of Everyday Life including street theatre, Allan Kaprow's Happenings or Utpal Dutt's People's Little Theatre. However, the very dominant tradition of political theatre, making pre-determined narratives for the people is debunked to produce performances that invent "ephemeral, autonomous situations from which temporary public relationships emerge that can make possible critical dialogue on a given issue." (Critical Art Ensemble) But while the earlier forms such as Happenings were systematic performances in a predetermined narrative trajectory in which the

artist occupied the central position, recombinant theatre attempts to include compelling anti-authoritarian models of performative explorations. Participation, process, pedagogy and experimentation are the key components for further recombination and in the process the privileged position of the auteur is done away with.

The resistance to nomadic power was exemplified through an illustrative example by CAE in the essay “The Recombinant Theatre and the Performative Matrix”. Let us consider this hypothetical scenario (A): A person (P) walks into a bank with the purpose of securing a loan. In order to present himself as a trustworthy and responsible loan-applicant, on whom the bank can depend with respect to getting back the loan to be granted, P dresses himself/herself adequately so as to feign a guise of respectability. P also memorises a pre-determined narrative (one which we might call the “script”), combined with affirmative behavioural gestures (say, and open stance, a smiling face, a warm handshake). When he meets the bank manager, P employs all of his skills to use and convinces the bank manager to interview his/her electronic double, the body of data that contains P’s past credit statements. P’s performance, which has been largely successful till now, passes onto its second phase. In fact, it is now P’s electronic double, the body of data that has taken centre stage and is controlling the performance right now. It is also the only body of P’s existence which interests the manager. The bank manager reviews his credit statement, which states(say) that P has been late in his/her payments in the past. The loan is denied; end of performance.

Now the performance could have just as easily ended as a successful one had P’s credit statement been otherwise. But it illustrates, within the virtual domain, the ability of electronic body doubles to control performance. Now, let us consider another typical situation (B):

A hacker is seated on a stage with a computer and a modem. His objective is enter databases and corrupt/alter them. The individual hacker changes, erases and manipulates his electronic body-double (his body of data) so as to suit his purposes in everyday life. The performance ends when he has adequately achieved his set objective and the computer is shut down.. The action of the hacker creates a loop nomadically interlocking at once the theatre of everyday life, traditional theatre and virtual theatre. The resistant performer here adopts two strategies:

- a. Contaminating and calling attention to corruption of data structures.
- b. Passing counterfeit data.

A third situation (C) might be called up to understand more clearly the complexities of such performance. A female hacker enters a governmental website, calls up his/her electronic body of data and manipulates it, so as to change is gender from “female” to ‘male”. Now, she leaves the stage, dresses up and accessorizes as a man and walks on to the streets. The gender of her choice i.e.

“male” is the same as the gender indicated in her electronic body-double, the body of data. No other contradictory data resource exists, so as to call into question her gender. Now the performer walks about the streets shirtless. For convenience, we shall consider her to be a citizen of a country where roaming about shirtless in a public space for a woman is considered illegal. Now, the performer will be immediately arrested by the police, but she will claim, in her defense, to be a “man”. The officials will now turn to the body of her electronic data and will be dismayed to find that she is described as a “man”. Biologically, they will notice that there is clear proof from her organs that she is a woman. But they will be forced to release her, since it is not illegal for a man to roam shirtless on the streets. This is of course, an exaggerated and extreme example of the limits to which the potential of performance can extend. There are practical dangers involved in it, and it is highly unlikely that in real life, the performer will actually be released. Yet these extreme examples outline the necessary mode of resistance which a postmodern theatre can adopt.

The use of virtual theatre and simulated performance, commencing in the successful act of resistance is perhaps best illustrated by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation Movement of January 2000. There were two aspects of the movement. In the first stage the Zapatistas bombarded the federal barracks of the Mexican Army in the Chiapas by throwing paper airplanes, each carrying a discursive missile: messages and poems for the soldiers themselves. One year later, a companion digital Zapatista Air Force was set to flight by the Electronic Disturbance Theatre through the Zapatista Tribal Port-scan (ZTPS), later known as “the FloodNet” which is an interactive software by means of which artists and activists could mount their attack on any website— the US government or the Mexican military through the ports open to the cyber network. The automated features of FloodNet were used:

- 1) To reload a targeted web page several times per minute.
- 2) For the conceptual-artistic spamming of targeted server error logs.

The messages were drawn from a bilingual poem about the Zapatista struggle for peace with dignity. With each port scan fragments of the poem were sent ensuring that the targeted system would log the text. The system thus begins to rewrite the poem at incredible speed, ensuring the collective presence of the Zapatistas in the publicly accessible spaces of the internet.

However, this form of protest pioneered by the EDT does not, as a rule, take recourse to illegal action. Instead, what is exploited in this case is the decidedly public spaces on the internet (access ports) to reiterate the conviction that cyberspace is a public space, and therefore is liable to be governed by the same rules as public spaces offline. EDT does not promote any form of action carried out “in secret” but instead “proposes a transparent, public act of protest.” (Jill Lane). Transparency ensures that the act of protest is also in an instance of collective

public presence, which would be hampered if the act were to surreptitiously carried out.

Both the performances of Zapatistas combine, as Jill Lane concludes, “political protest with conceptual art in the act of social revelation.” (Lane) The simulated act of airplane flight and digital protests reveal the way in which cyberspace itself is occupied and organized as a commercial and private, rather than public space guarded by full force of the law and the military. The EDT through their marshalling of the Zapatista protests, have put forward a new set of possibilities for understanding the relation between performance, embodiment and spatial practice in cyberspace. The Zapatista movement revitalized abandoned notions of “traditional” civil disobedience on behalf of indigenous peoples. The particularly theatrical character of their actions like the use of the innovative “pasamontanas” (black ski-masks) and wooden rifles as props further emphasized their tactical use of embodied as well as theatrical presence. Such a use of the internet as a means to build a global grass-root support network was described by Dominguez as “virtual actions for real peace in the real communities of the Chiapas.” (Dominguez) Thus the digital Zapatista’s own recombinant theatre of operations meshed virtual and embodied practices in a struggle for real material and social well-being in Chiapas.

Both the real Zapatistas and the digital Zapatistas rely on simulation to create a disruptive presence in the material, social and discursive contexts in which they operate. In both cases, simulation occurs at the level of semantic disturbance----- simulated versions of airplanes disturb a semantic code making visible the underlying and hidden relations of power on which government operation demands. Semantic resistance here functions as an effective and viable form of contesting power from the margins.

In 1996, CAE published their seminal book, *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas*, where the ideas of “civil disobedience” as put forward by Henry David Thoreau in his 1848 essay “Civil Disobedience” are carried over to the virtual domain. Electronic Civil Disobedience refers to any form of protest that is non-violent, yet disruptive and protracted, carried out with the help of information technology. ECD typically adopts the virtual counterparts of popular methods of conventional protest such as the “sit-in”, used extensively during the Civil Rights’ Movement of the 1960’s in the United States. The “virtual sit-in” attempts to recreate the traditional “sit-in”, whereby hundreds of activists attempt to access a target website simultaneously and repetitively, causing it to run slowly or even collapse entirely. This act of protest therefore, uses the technique of the “distributed-denial-of-service attack” (DDoS) whereby a large majority, or even the entirety of the bandwidth of the targeted system is used up by multiple attackers, attacking from different spatial points. Collective attack is harder to track down and withstand; and the behavior of each individual attack machine can be ore and more deceptive, causing a host of “unknown errors”.

In 2001, CAE's *Digital Resistance* identified virtual theatre as still a budding form of recombinant theatre, the deployment of which in manifold situations depends upon the increase of computer literacy beyond the technocrat classes. Experiment with the form of virtual theatre is still in its infancy and it has to go a long way to realize its full potential as delineated by CAE. Though it is still premature to claim the mode of virtual protest as the most potent antidote to the nomadic power of global capital, movements like that of the Zapatistas have proved beyond doubt that in future it will emerge as a force to reckon with.

The 2011 Border Haunt Project, organized by Alan Paul serves as a modern example of digital resistance. On 15th July, 2011, 667 participants from 28 countries joined in a collective act of protest against the policing the U.S.-Mexico border. In the words of its chief coordinator Ian Alan Paul,

“Border Haunt is an attempt to bring two different databases associated with the U.S.-Mexico border into contact with one another for the duration of one day. It is an invitation to join a temporary network of people from across the world and participate in an aesthetic and political experiment, in what I'm calling a border database collision.” (Networked Performance).

The first of the two databases in question is an archive of “illegal” migrants who have died through the act of undocumented crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border due to extreme environmental conditions and/or “the anonymous violence of the vigilantes and abusive law enforcement officers”. The database contains over 2000 entries. The second database is a record of undocumented crossings of the border and is created by volunteers to police the border by watching videos of the border to suspect any such undocumented crossings. The Border Haunt project sought to collide the two databases for the duration of a single day (15th July, 2011). By the surreptitious mixing up of the data of the dead and the data of border security structure the project successfully coordinated “a collective and networked “haunting” (Paul) of the border”. The project can be seen as a collective performance and intervention that reflects on the atrocities committed on the “illegal” immigrants across the borders as well as a form of disruptive action that interrupts surveillance mechanisms used in the border territory.

Virtual protests have thus, not only opened up new vistas in the field of performance theory, but have also created an alternate geography of struggle, an alternative embodiment against the nomadic powers of authority. The social segments in this type of theatre lead to varieties of knowledge spheres interacting with each other, leading to newer varieties of political interconnectedness. The resistant potential of such a theatre does not end at the close of the theatrical event, but extend into the performative matrix of everyday life, creating a never-ending theatre of becoming.

Endnotes

ⁱ The word “performance” has a definitive function for this article and is used here inclusively. It covers not only theatricality in a restricted sense but also other forms of simulation including, but not restricted to, hacking, data corruption, re-encoding, etc. The Electronic Disturbance Theatre has coined the word “Hacktivism” to describe such performances.

ⁱⁱ Borrowing the metaphor of the “Body-without-Organs” (BwO) from Deleuze and Guattari (who in turn borrowed it from the schizophrenic playwright Antonin Artaud), the authors of *The Electronic Disturbance* describe the electronic body-double as replicating the organic body through a mode of excess. Every organic body has a set of actual traits, habits, affects and movements which are limited in nature. But the virtual dimension of each organic body also contains a reservoir of potential traits that can be activated only when the fixed identity of the organic body is made mobile in essence and experimented with through a recombination with other virtual doubles. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) The electronic body here serves as a BwO, in sympathy with the organic body but also arousing envy within it since the markers of fullness and excess abound in it in a sense it can never inhabit the organic body.

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Performance Review

Buddha Chingtham's Mythical Surrender

Review by

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&

Krispa Ningombam, Independent theatre critic

For many Indians, the achievement of independence on 15 August 1947 marks the end of a long struggle, the moment when, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words, 'the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance' (Brecher 355-6). People looked forward with hope to the creation of a new political order, one in which the problems associated with the British Raj would disappear. *Mythical Surrender* is an attempt to destroy these sanguine narratives of the people by challenging the imperial metropolitan discourse of the centre, which is at the heart of these narratives.

Mythical Surrender, a play written by Buddha Chingtham, is the first instalment of the Manipuri trilogy. The other two plays are *A Far Cry* and *The Priestess*. The play directed by Ningthouja Deepak of NT theatre, an Imphal based theatre group was staged at Shri Ram Centre for Arts and Culture, New Delhi on 17th January, 2011 as a part of the 14th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, the annual theatre festival of the National School of Drama (NSD). This review, through an analysis of the performance of the play held at NSD, intends to examine how both -- the form and the content of the play -- defy the metanarratives of Indian nationalism and hybridity.

Beginning with its title, the play invariably invokes Suresh Awasthi's idea of the "theatre of roots," which was later popularised by Erin B. Mee's book of the same name in which she analysed the work of three major Indian directors, all practitioners of the "theatre of roots": K. N. Panikkar of Kerala; the Kannada playwright, actor and director Girish Karnad; and Ratan Thiyam of Manipur in the extreme northeast of India, as it depicts the harsh realities and miseries of the common people of the north-eastern Indian states caused by the counter-insurgency forces deployed in these states, through a word game of ancient myths. Awasthi, in 1989, claimed that the "theatre of roots" is an unconventional theatre "which has been evolving for some decades in India as a result of modern theatre's encounter with tradition....It is deeply rooted in regional theatrical culture, but cuts across linguistic barriers, and an all-India character in design" (Awasthi 48). Furthermore, he adds that "the return to and discovery of tradition is inspired by a search for roots and a quest for identity. This is part of the whole process of decolonization of lifestyle, social institutions, creative forms, and cultural modes" (Awasthi 48). In the wake of the argument generated by the theatre of roots,

Mythical Surrender attempts to demystify the monolithic construct of north Indian nationalism.

The play through an interaction of centre (representative of North India) and periphery (representative of north eastern region) shows the horrors of absolute power exercised by the centre on the periphery. Indian nationalism is posed in the play as a cunning word, which is used to mask the metonymic extension of north Indian states dominance over north eastern states.

Furthermore, it focuses on how the armed forces challenge and demean the 'right to life' of the people in the name of Indian nationalism. It is ironical that the Indian forces which are meant to protect the lives of the people instead rape women and murder innocent people. It highlights the plight of the lives of the common people in north east who are caught up in the armed conflicts, through symbolism and theatrical gestures. The authority or more precisely the military forces are represented by serpentine-like characters whose real face is shown through a combing operation carried out by them in one of the villages of the Loktak Lake of Manipur whose inhabitants are largely fishermen and fisherwomen. During this operation, they killed a man and raped his wife (Shanarei), the protagonist played by Nepram Dhanapati Devi. By assigning a name Shanarei, which means marigold, the play shows how the centre rapes and contaminates the pure cultural hybridity of the periphery.

The imbrication of north and north eastern discourses, and its impossibility is shown through the illegitimate son of Shanarei whose appearance and actions resemble the serpentine-like characters. The son, like his rapist father joins the army and returns only to terrorize his mother and kills her father-in-law who comes for a visit to Shanarei's place. Finally, Shanarei's act of killing her monstrous son should be read as an act of exorcism of the evil. Alternatively, the killing of a son (a representative of the centre since his appearance and actions resemble his father) by the mother (who represents the peace loving people of north east) signals the impossibility of a hybrid narrative. The internationalism embedded in contemporary discourses of hybridity is challenged as the play shows how hybridity has become synonymous with political intervention and interjection.

Mythical Surrender is a ritual display – “not simply a doing but a showing of a doing” (Schechner 105), which means that the entertainment itself is a vehicle for complainant and accused to exchange places. Ningthouja Deepak, in the teeth of crumbling democratic values, redefines ritualistic dancing, which used to be a performance, and “a way of facilitating trade, finding mates, cementing military alliances, and reaffirming (or reordering) tribal hierarchies” (105) as a subaltern's articulation of existential angst or a call for survival. Thus, every dance performance, in the play, at first, becomes a constant portrayal of Marshall McLuhan phrase that “the medium is the message” (7) as the actors in the garb of serpentine characters struggle to keep imminent doom at bay. Secondly, the presentation of a dance sequence by the actors while playing the role of serpentine

characters, in a dim light and a gothic setting, does not fail to benumb the audiences by showcasing innate lust of the evil characters for violence and sadism. Through a masterful use of kinesics - the swaying of the bodies and the serpentine movement of the hands and the feet in sync with the drum beats, the choreographer conveys the capitalist urge of the democratic nation to subvert and homogenize regional differences.

The director juxtaposes the picturesque imagery of *phumdis* (a series of small floating islands exclusive to Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in northeast India) and a noose hung outside Shanarei's hut, in order to demonstrate alienation. The alienation of the people is further emphasized through long tragic monologues of Shanarei, accompanied by hysterical convulsions. The direct Brechtian like address of Shanarei to the audience is one of the most important theatrical techniques employed in the play. It not only enhances the relationship between the actors and the audience but it also serves as a warning message to the people of the impending danger.

Critical discussions on what is generally referred to as "human identity," a continuous state of being both oneself and human, have been "predominantly psychodynamic or sociological and informed or intertwined by ideas often associated with subjectivity and subject position" (Reynolds 4). The play, by harping on the predilection of the Indian government, concentrates on the means by which North eastern people develop a cognitive sense of themselves as separate from the North Indians. According to the play, this divisional process which creates two positions of "out there" and "in here" is the aftermath of the Indian government's step-motherly treatment of the North-East states. This remorseless treatment by the Indian government is reflected in one of the instances when a group of fisherwomen who sets out to fish in the lake instead of catching fish, catches corpses of infants which have similar appearances with that of the serpentine-like characters and the sudden chaotic cries of the women that follows makes the audience go numb and lost in shock for a moment and yet it manages to show how many other incidents of rape and murder are kept under-cover and unnoticed. The background *Khunung Esei* (a form of traditional folk-song) which accompanies the cries of the women, though in a fading tone, elevates the fear factor and symbolises the utter distress and helplessness of the women. Simultaneously, the employment of *Khunung Esei* as a background song, and *Pena* (a folk musical instrument) gives a vivid picture of the rich cultural heritage of north eastern region. With the aid of the archaic language spoken by the women folk, the play also succeeds in providing a sense of timelessness to the horrors faced by the womenfolk.

It is striking that many north eastern plays not only of today but also of the past write almost obsessively about the invasion of identities in the name of nation building. Indubitably, the performance manages to send the message to the centre that something is rotten in the state of India.

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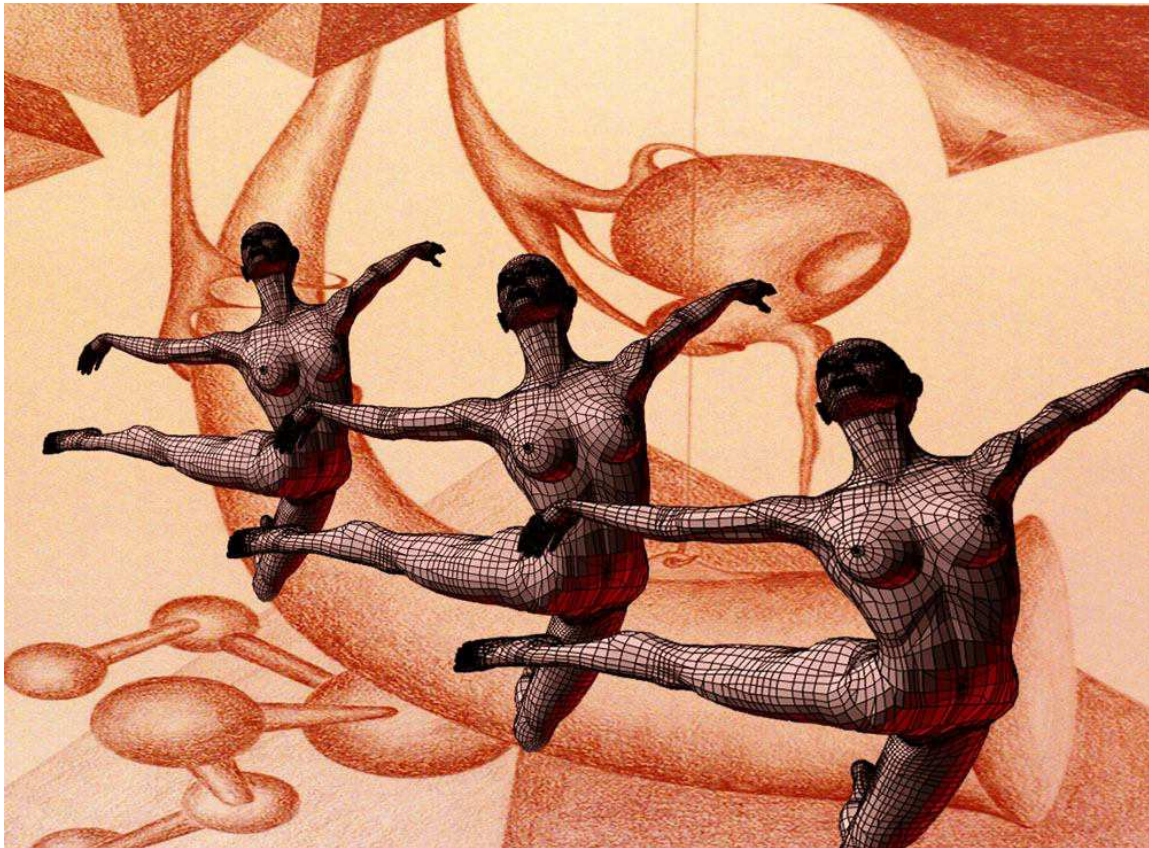
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Creative: *Dancing the 5th Dimension*

By Rob Harle

Dancing the 5th Dimension is a techno-surrealist work combining traditional drawing with computer generated figures. The background hints at objects of the 3D material world—molecules, pyramids, a page (knowledge), a musical horn and organic life forms. The figures are androids dancing through a higher dimension such as the Occultists' Akashic Record. The 3D world we perceive is not the only reality! In the words (paraphrased) of T. S. Eliot:

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point,
... there the dance is, and there is only the dance.*



Dancing the 5th Dimension

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