

The Creation of New Meaning in Contemporary Intercultural Performance

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ABSTRACT

The global movement of peoples and the changing demographics of an ever-more globalized world are undoubtedly becoming increasingly reflected in theatrical practice. Contemporary intercultural performance has become a way for first/second-generation, migrant, immigrant, and exilic artists to re-inscribe and reclaim their agency and cultural identities. This thesis argues for a new method of analysis of intercultural theatre that moves away from the historically “alimentary” relationship between performance cultures – in which one (often the West) borrows and takes from the other (often “the Rest”) for its own benefit – towards a methodology of performance analysis that encourages agency of creation with the performer through a more bi-directional or fluid process of intercultural exchange (Lo and Gilbert 43).

In looking at three contemporary performances, *Fish Eyes* by Anita Majumdar, *Obaaberima* by Tawiah M’Carthy, and *DESH* by Akram Khan, I argue for a four-point model of performance analysis: encounter, intention, negotiation and emergence.

I argue that these four elements are all present within the process of construction and reception of an intercultural performance, and that in deploying them, the artist is able to usher in the creation of new meaning – both semantically and aesthetically – through the means of intercultural exchange.

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Introduction

The urgency of intercultural performance, to no small effect, has been renewed in recent years. In 2017, as I write this thesis, the importance of critically re-examining of movement of peoples across the globe needs little explanation. It is no question that in a world that contains Trump's America, Brexit, and the global refugee crisis, the critical examination of how we exchange and interact between cultures bears importance. Even in the process of writing this thesis, as I did so on a university campus in Montreal, that campus was evacuated by the Police Service after an Islamophobic bomb threat by a white supremacist group of students threatened to detonate an explosive, targeted specifically at Muslim students at the university. Students who look like me. The necessity to critically re-examine intercultural exchange is a pressing one, and I intend to do so within this study. To quote Ric Knowles directly,

Interculturalism is an urgent topic in the twenty-first century. As cities and nations move beyond the monochromatic, as human traffic between nations and cultures (both willing and unwilling) increases, as hybridity and syncretism (the merging of forms) become increasingly characteristic of cultural production everywhere, and as nineteenth-century nationalism gives way to twenty-first century *transnationalism* [emphasis in original], it becomes imperative that the ways in which cultural exchange is performed be critically re-examined (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 3).

New Interculturalism and the Four-Point Model

The field of intercultural studies in performance is still searching for a concise and accurate definition of just what intercultural theatre is. In this study, however, I build on Royona Mitra's proposition of the concept of New Interculturalism: the location of the intercultural encounter within the bodies of its performers (10). She describes this

concept as “driven by the lived experience of diasporic realities, which necessitates subjects having to simultaneously negotiate multiple cultures, new interculturalism is a life-condition as much as an aesthetic and political intervention” (Mitra 11). In describing it as such, Mitra moves interculturalism in theatre away from the largely intellectually-based practice of the intercultural theatre of the 1980s, and locates it within the embodied reality or “life-condition” of contemporary artists.

In building on this postulation by Mitra, I am by no means going to attempt to suggest a concise or accurate definition of intercultural theatre; rather, I am inquiring into the tools and processes of the creation of meaning within new intercultural performance. The aim of this thesis is to move away from an “alimentary” method of intercultural analysis, which has historically been the approach of “West and the Rest” interculturalism, in which the source cultures serve only as resources for Western performance to draw upon (Lo and Gilbert 43). Consequently, I would like to move towards a more bi-directional, reciprocal, or fluid approach to discussing the relationship between performance practices and cultures, and the analyses thereof. In order to do so, I will investigate three specific case studies of contemporary intercultural performance, specifically inquiring as to how new meaning is created within each.

In this thesis, I am proposing a four-step method of analysis, described below. Another aim of this study is to test the methodological rigour of this model, in using it to engage with contemporary intercultural performance. The four steps are:

- **Encounter:** that two (or more) cultural performance practices are met
- **Intention:** that that meeting is not accidental, and is conscious
- **Negotiation:** that there is a movement and exchange between the practices
- **Emergence:** that from that exchange comes new a new performance practice, specific to the encounter, intention, and negotiation that preceded it.

I arrived at this model of analysis by synthesizing the extant literature on the subject (a detailed review of which is in Chapter 1), and by observing the three cases of intercultural performance discussed in this study. I focus therein on the methods of meaning creation within new intercultural performance. Simply put: How, in the moment of performance, do we arrive at the creation of new meaning?

In moving away from the historically alimentary approach towards a more fluid one, a re-evaluation of the methods of performance analysis is also required. The model which I describe and deploy within this thesis is one that is flexible, fluid, and allows for uncertainty and openness within it. My inspiration for this approach, and what I find to be a helpful intellectual exercise when imagining this model (and the questions I am asking through its deployment) is the thought experiment known as Schrödinger's Cat. Taken from the field of quantum mechanics, it is a relatively simple thought experiment used to explain a much less simple concept. Schrödinger's Cat is an imaginary cat kept in a box, along with a radioactive substance whose half-life decay (and therefore ability to poison the cat instantaneously) is unpredictable. The cat, then, in the thought experiment, is both simultaneously alive and dead, so long as the lid to the box is closed. Once the lid is opened, the state of the radioactive substance can be ascertained, as can the life (or death) of the cat. However, until that moment when the cat's life, and the half-life of the substance, are frozen in stasis, the two remain in a dynamic and flexible relationship: both dead and alive, decayed and not decayed.

This flexibility and dynamism served as a major inspiration for the simplicity and flexibility of my four-point model. Yes: there are only four components to the model, but they interact and meet with endless possibility until they are caught in stasis. Just as the

intercultural exchange found within the performance of one artist will be completely different than that of another artist, which will, in turn, be completely different than that of every other intercultural artist, ad infinitum: until we open the “lid” on the “box” of that specific intercultural encounter, we cannot know what the performance practice, and its way of creating meaning will be.

In order to open the lid on three specific boxes, I am looking at three case studies: *Fish Eyes* by Anita Majumdar, *Obaaberima* by Tawiah M’Carthy, and *DESH* by Akram Khan.

Within these three case studies I attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How is new meaning created within contemporary intercultural performance?
- What is the methodological rigour of this proposed four-point model?
- Does the flexibility of the proposed model allow for a move away from alimentary modes of intercultural practice, and towards a more fluid exchange?
- Can this model refute any imposed social hierarchies within intercultural exchange in the theatrical milieu?

In the interests of a consistent methodology, the performances selected for this thesis are all solo performances. Though they do differ vastly in many ways, they do share some common ground: firstly, that I have seen each of them performed live (*Fish Eyes* at the Great Canadian Theatre Company, and both *Obaaberima* and *DESH* at the National Arts Centre) and was also able to procure archival video recordings of each. Secondly, in addition to all three being clear examples of interculturalism in performance,

each creator-performer deployed aesthetic methodologies that challenge the prototypical form of solo performance.

Within my methodology, the conventions of solo performance will serve as the measure against which to describe and discuss traditional “Western performance practices”. In order to avoid any nebulous descriptions of “Canadian” or “western” theatre, and indeed to avoid reifying a “West and the Rest” dichotomy, the convention of solo performance will act as the “control group” within this analysis. Patrice Pavis defines the term “One-(Wo)Man Show” as “a performance by a single person playing one or more characters. It lasts for a limited time and is frequently centered around one character” (*Dictionary of the Theatre* 242). Solo performance, one-man/woman/person show, monodrama, autoperformance – this form takes on different names, but its simplest definition is self-evident: one person onstage.

In her volume *Solo Performance*, Jenn Stephenson describes a one-person performance as one that directs “critical attention to the basic building blocks of theatre and theatricality: the audience, the solo speaking voice, and now also the performing body” (xi). In its simplest definition, yes, solo performance really is performance using the bare minimum: an audience and a performer, together in the same space. Solo performance, however, also “condenses the theatrical experience and changes the emotional geography of the audience-actor relationship” (Stephenson vi). As those who have attended their fair share of solo performance will note, they often tend to be (for better or for worse) as “intimate as a confessional” (Stephenson xiii). Running the gamut between the prototypical black-box storytelling found at any Fringe festival the world over, to the soaring monodramas of Spalding Gray, solo performances are a mainstay in

the English-speaking theatre tradition. Appearing globally, and with its roots tracing back to “the middle of the eighteenth century, the form experienced a resurgence in Canada in the mid to late 1970s” (Stephenson vi). It is no mystery that this resurgence was evidently a result of the economic benefit to producing solo performance: quite simply, less people to pay (Stephenson vi).

This minimalism, however, supports the intimate and often personal nature of solo performance. Solo performance draws attention to the relationship between actor and character, through a shared body. This critical attention towards the body also informs the proclivity in solo performance towards “performing subjects who are lesbian, gay, transgender or are members of racialized groups” (Heddon 2). As the sole body, voice, and point of focus onstage, solo performance offers the creator-performer full command of the stage – and therefore an opportunity for complete agency over the narrative. In that way, solo performance is an apt vehicle for the exploration of culture and identity. It is used in this way in each of the three performances analyzed in this thesis, and also serves as a useful constant against which the intercultural artistic practices present in each performance can be measured.

In the first case, I apply the four-point model to *Fish Eyes*, by Anita Majumdar, investigating the process of meaning creation at the end of which, the emergence of a new (and specific to the performance) movement language arises, out of the fusion of the *mudras* in classical *Bharatanatyam* Indian dance and the construction of character in solo performance.

In the second, I inquire into the process of the creation of new meaning within *Obaaberima* by Tawiah M’Carthy through its use of sound. I contend that new meaning is

created through the emergence of a tonal use of the English language, achieved by fusing non-translated Twi and music within the performance.

In the last case, I apply the model to the aesthetic construction of *DESH*, by Akram Khan. Here, I examine the manipulation of liveness through the use of mediated elements, in order to achieve the presence of cyborg bodies onstage as well as a posthuman aesthetic within the narrative.

In terms of a methodology, within the use of my own four-point model, I use a specific sub-methodology tailored to each performance. In the first case (*Fish Eyes*), I use Erika Fischer-Lichte's writings on self-referentiality and Christopher Balme's postulations on theatrical syncretism to discuss Majumdar's creation of character. In the second (*Obaaberima*), I use Marcus Cheng Chye Tan's writings on acoustic interculturalism to dive into M'Carthy's creation of the tonal use of English, and in the final case (*DESH*), I deploy Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan's writings on liveness to discuss Holly Willis' description of the device known as live cinema, in order to dissect Khan's posthuman aesthetic.

Chapter One:

Interculturalism in Theatre - A Brief Historical and Practical Context

Intercultural Theatre: Outlining the Field and Defining its Study

Intercultural theatre, as we know it contemporarily, began to take shape in the 1980s – and is currently experiencing a resurgence in popularity. Whether this resurgence is the result of an organic impetus within the artistic community, or the result of economic incentives offered by funding bodies – or perhaps a mixture of both – remains to be seen. The result, however, is that performances that engage directly in questions of identity through the means of intercultural aesthetic practice are garnering more attention.

Specific to this study, the three plays being analyzed represent this resurgence in popularity on both the national and international scale. *Fish Eyes* by Anita Majumdar, and *Obaaberima* by Tawiah M'Carthy, are Canadian productions, commissioned by Nightswimming and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, respectively, whose themes and forms engage in and complicate those very questions of culture. *DESH* from the Akram Khan Company, and performed by Akram Khan himself, is a British production that has gone on to tour internationally, enjoying a stint at the National Arts Centre, in Ottawa, in 2013, where I came to encounter it. All three performances have toured, with *DESH* appearing internationally, and the two Canadian productions still being programmed coast-to-coast. Artists who practice intercultural theatre have an audience. I believe it is safe to say that this demand reflects a larger question at hand: are we so thirsty to see the encounter of cultures onstage in order to understand the encounter of cultures in our own lives?

Defining interculturalism in theatre can be a tricky thing: how can one define something that, by its very nature, exists at the interstices, the meeting points, the joining of two things? Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, authors of “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis” encourage their readers to “appreciate the range of approaches encompassed by the term ‘interculturalism’ and the extent to which it evades any neat definition” (37). In the same vein, Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, in *Women’s Intercultural Performance* insist on the site-specific nature of the practice to assert that it is too varied to fit neatly into a general theory.

A concise definition of interculturalism in theatre still proves to be evasive. However, in building on the extant literature on intercultural theatre, and in observing the three performances studied within this thesis, I am proposing a four-point model for the analysis of intercultural performance, through which the creation of new meaning can be analyzed:

- **Encounter:** that two (or more) cultural performance practices are met
- **Intention:** that that meeting is not accidental, and is conscious
- **Negotiation:** that there is a movement and exchange between the practices
- **Emergence:** that from that exchange comes new a new performance practice, specific to the encounter, intention, and negotiation that preceded it.

In order to explain my arrival at this model, it might be helpful to take a few steps back, and begin, as Erika Fischer-Lichte does, in defining culture itself. Drawing on the work of Camille Camilleri, she defines culture along four axes, and relates each of them to the practice of theatre:

1. *Culture is a shaping that affects every aspect of our mental – and even biological life, through the influence of the group.* In a theatrical context, every element of a stage production is affected by that same shaping by the group... Theatrical performance and dance visualize this inscription of culture on and through the body. They show its

movement, as if the skin were a palimpsest upon which, over and over again, cultural differences as well as similarities were inscribed.

2. *Culture is artificial, separate from nature.* In a theatrical context... culture is opposed to nature, the acquired to the innate, artistic creation to natural expressivity. The body of the actor is the site where the person acquires the value of a sign.

3. *Culture is transmitted through "social heredity".* In a theatrical context, actors and theatrical traditions operate and are passed down according to unwritten rules of the stage.

4. *Cultures may be defined in terms of their power relationships, their inner dynamics, and their economic or political strength* [emphasis added] (Fischer-Lichte, *Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre* 3-4).

On this fourth point, Fischer-Lichte breaks from simply listing and explaining Camilleri's definitions of culture to warn the reader that they might be better off avoiding "the dichotomy between dominant and dominated, between majority and minority, between ethnocentric and decentered cultures. [For] from there it is only a small step to seeing Interculturalism as an ethnocentric strategy of Western culture to reconquer alien symbolic goods by submitting them to a dominant codification, and exploitation of the poorer by the richer" (Fischer-Lichte, *Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre* 4).

This warning is telling of one of the major contentions in defining intercultural theatre, and indeed one of the major contentions of the practice of interculturalism in theatre, in and of itself. Who does the project serve? The "for whom?" and the "by whom?" of intercultural theatre make it necessary to consider various viewpoints, when attempting to define it.

In this fourth point, Fischer-Lichte asserts the virtue of Interculturalism in theatre as separate from the economic or political factors present in the cultures themselves, stating "it is precisely the merit of a Barba or of a Mnouchkine never to reduce or destroy the Eastern form from which they gain inspiration, but to attempt a hybridization with

which it is situated at the precise intersection of the two cultures and the two theatrical forms, and which is therefore a separate and complete creation (Fischer-Lichte, *Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre* 4). Here, Fischer-Lichte insists on separating Interculturalism in theatre from the cultures themselves, and it is this point perhaps, this insistence, that is located at the heart of the difficulty to define intercultural theatre. It is also telling of a rift in the scholarship centred around whether or not to remove the discourse from the real-world power dynamics and hierarchical structures of the cultures which are exchanging artistic practices.

She defines it, “in the strictest sense... [as] hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas” (Fischer-Lichte, *Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre* 8). In what is often regarded as one of the founding texts on the discourse of intercultural theatre, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patris Pavis defines it as a method of creation in which “the grains [of culture] rearrange themselves in a way which appears random but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer” (Pavis, *Crossroads* 4). These filters come by way of Pavis’ Hourglass model of interculturalism which is to be discussed later in this study. Others, however, who may not share Fischer-Lichte’s desire to remove interculturalism from the power dynamics of the cultures themselves, and Pavis’ relatively optimistic view on the subject, would define it otherwise, and less convivially – again, returning to that rift in the discourse. Daryl Chin, in “Interculturalism, Postmodernism, Pluralism,” sees it as a “debased contemporary form of cultural imperialism” and Una Chaudhuri, goes so far as to call it “cultural rape” (Chin 94, Chaudhuri 194). To ignore the structures

of power and economics of theatre production that dictate the flow of intercultural exchange would be to ignore the Orientalist tendencies of the practice and discourse, defined by Edward Said as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (11).

Is there, then a middle ground? A definition that does not disregard the very real economic and political aspects of intercultural performance without dismissing the entirety of the practice as abominable? Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, in *Toward a Topography of Cross Cultural Theatre Praxis*, propose one of the first major moves away from Pavis’ Hourglass model, and define intercultural theatre as “a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions” (Lo and Gilbert 37). Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins offer up their definition as “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions” (Holledge and Tompkins 7). Ric Knowles in *Theatre and Interculturalism* focuses his conception of interculturalism within “the contested, unsettling, and often unequal spaces *between* cultures, spaces that can function in performance as sites of negotiation... where cultural exchange can effectively occur and new hybrid identities can emerge” (Knowles 4).

Again, in placing these definitions side by side, I contend that there are four identifiable factors that define intercultural theatre: encounter, intention, negotiation and emergence. The reader will note that these four commonalities also make up the model of analysis I am proposing within this study. These four points are not intended to discuss the process of creation, but rather are intended for use in analysing the tools and methods

used within performance, in order to understand how meaning, both semantic and aesthetic, is created.

A helpful tool in visualizing this argument are the following two figures.

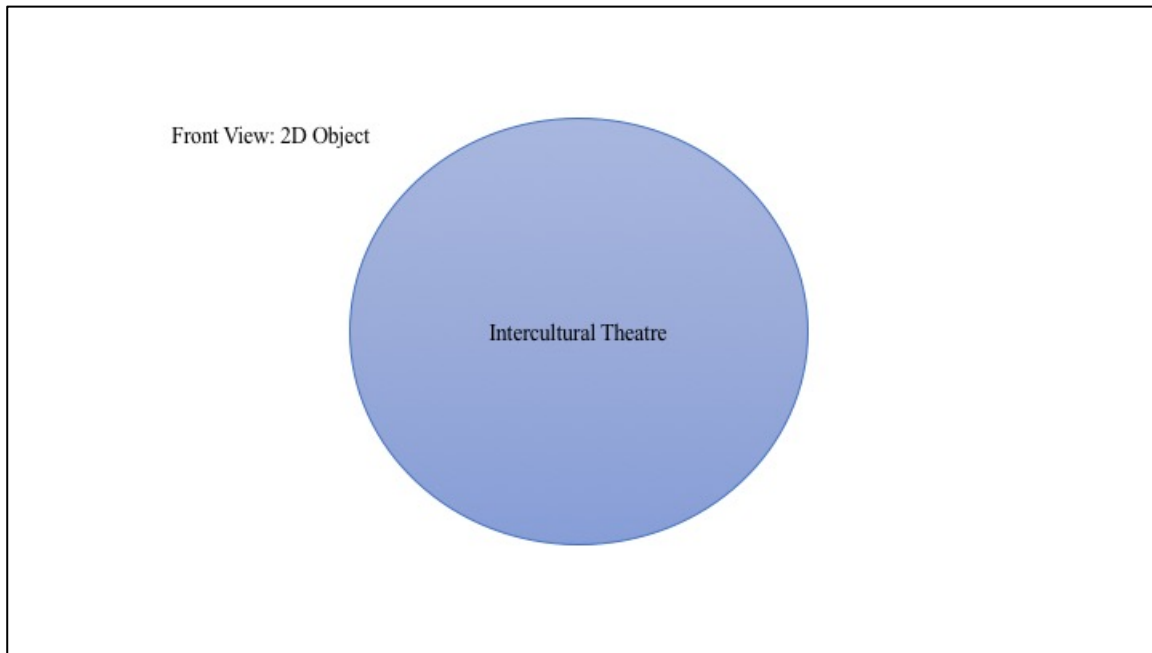


Figure 1 – The 2D View of a Performance as an Aesthetic Object

In the first is a circle, representative of the intercultural performance as an object of aesthetic construction. This is the form in which it is brought to the moment of encounter with an audience. If seen face on, it is perceived as a 2-dimensional, flat object: a circle, with all of its constitutive elements contained within, in a fixed and singular moment of time.

The second, on the following page, is the object (again, an allegory for the performance) seen from its side, in 3-dimensions – much like a sphere. There, its constitutive elements are seen operating together: encounter, intention, negotiation, and emergence. Existing together in the same moment of time, as one larger unit, they

simultaneously exist as their own discreet components of performance, and work together to create the performance and contribute to its construction as an aesthetic object.

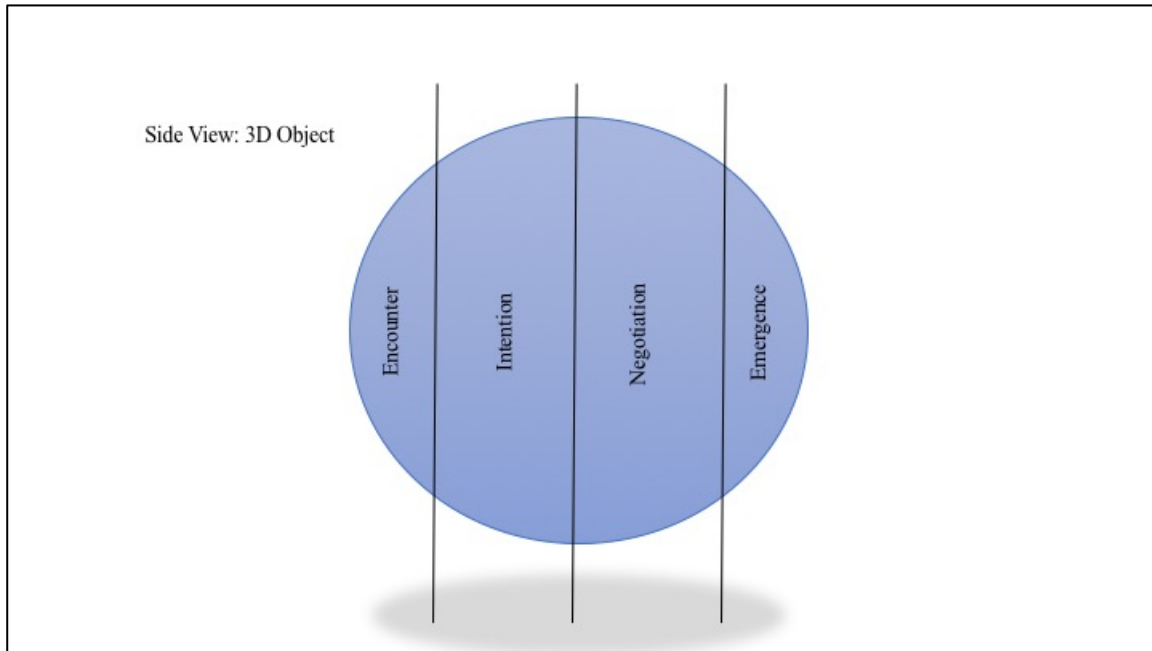


Figure 2 – The 3D View of a Performance as an Aesthetic Object

These images serve to explain my conception of the four-part model: though the four steps may have also taken place during the process of creation, they are present simultaneously in performance, and can be examined independently of creation.

A Brief Chronology of the Practice and Discourse of Interculturalism in Theatre

In discussing the definitions of intercultural theatre, and in discussing my proposed analytical model, the necessity of tracing its chronology in order to understand its practice becomes apparent. Knowles asserts that “theatre has always been intercultural... intercultural performance is not new, though its widespread, conscious practice in the western world began only in the twentieth century and its theorization in the western academy in the 1970s and 1980s” (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 6). Knowles traces a long-standing history of the negotiation of difference and the trading of

performance forms by the Indigenous peoples of North America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Korea and India (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 6-8). It comes as no surprise that with the introduction of Imperialism and the appearance of the European Empires in the sixteenth century, intercultural theatrical exchange, “derived from ‘negotiations’ (on unequal terms) with western forms” also came about (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 8). This turn continued throughout the following centuries, with travel between nations, and the economic and cultural exchange increasing rapidly. This trend played an important part in the development of intercultural theatrical exchange: at the beginning of the “twentieth century, theatrical interculturalism developed primarily in response to, and as a result of, colonialism” (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 9).

It is at this historical and cultural moment, where interculturalism in the west really hits its stride, “insofar as it involved contact or integration with, or appropriation of, the cultural forms of ‘other’” (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 11). It is also here where the history of intercultural theatre in the west – as we recognize it today – can be said to begin. The early twentieth century was a time of convergence between economic exchange, political exchange, and theatrical opportunity; it was a time when many notable western theatre practitioners fell upon or “discovered” the theatrical practices of the “other” and pulled from those encounters inspiration and methods that they then incorporated into their own work. A notable example of this approach to intercultural performance is the meeting between Antonin Artaud and a troupe of Balinese dancers at the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931. The exposition was a 6-month event whose intended purpose was to showcase the fruits of France’s colonial efforts, and

to paint the French Empire in a light of benefaction rather than an exploitative one. The result and impact of Artaud's "discovery" of these dancers is clear in the review he penned that year for *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, and even more so in the work he wrote "seven years later in the form of a longer and more complex essay in *The Theatre and Its Double*" in 1938, a revered and influential work in the Western theatrical canon (Savarese and Fowler 51). Another notable Western artist whose "discoveries" had a similar impact on their artistic practice is Bertolt Brecht, whose "first use of the term *Verfremdungseffekt* ('defamiliarization effect') [was] in his 1936 essay 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,' upon which much of his subsequent work was built" (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 12-13).

Brecht and Artaud continued to be inspired from these encounters with the theatre of the other. Brecht's mining of the defamiliarization effect was a way for him to react against Aristotelian notions of theatre. It was a way wherein he could strive for a diegetic practice of theatre (which he dubbed "Epic Theatre"), focused on the communication of historical, ethical, and social concepts, rather than the mimetic (and therefore Aristotelian) practice of theatre, aimed at creating empathy through the psychological and emotional manipulation of the audience, culminating in a moment of catharsis. For Artaud, however, his mission in borrowing from the theatrical practices of the other was decidedly opposite from Brecht's: "he valued oriental theatre primarily because it eschewed naturalism, and, seen from his outsider's point of view at least, approached the intensity and frenzy of (primitive) ritual" (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 17). Rustom Bharucha, in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* disparages Artaud's practice, describing it as an "eclectic, almost frantic need to absorb

non-western cultures[...] decontextualiz[ing] their realities within the incandescence of his vision” (Bharucha, *Theatre and the World* 14).

This lack of focus on the cultural context, or the social and political ramifications of intercultural “borrowing” (from which, usually only one culture benefits) became emblematic of some of the major Western intercultural theatre practitioners, who were, themselves, taking after Artaud’s approach. This approach, which Knowles describes as “universalist” can be traced from Artaud, through Grotowski, Barba, and arrives finally at Peter Brook (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 17).

An important turning point in the discussion of western interculturalism in twentieth century theatre can be found in Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata*. A 9-hour long stage production, *The Mahabharata* was an adaptation of the sacred Hindu epic, one of two major sacred epic texts, the other being the *Ramayana*. Brook’s production toured the world for four years, with an international cast, and has been described as one of the most “blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years” (Bharucha *Theatre and the World* 68). Royona Mitra points to *The Mahabharata* as the epitome of Brook’s “neo-imperialist intercultural theatre practice” (5). Brook’s production came under fire for contributing to the longstanding tradition of appropriating and taking from Eastern culture (in this case, a sacred text, integral to the Hindu religion and the cultural mythology of India) parts or elements of the sources that are useful in the eyes of the western theatre practitioner, reducing it to little more than its most basic components, and presenting it in a way that is then palatable to a western theatre audience. Culturally, socially, and economically this serves the western practitioner, and does little to further or highlight the source culture itself. However, the status of *The*

Mahabharata as an important turning point in intercultural theatrical practice is undeniable. Brook brought – for better or for worse – western conceptions of intercultural theatre practice to light on a global scale. As Mitra puts it, “condemned or acclaimed, Brook is a seminal figure in the field of intercultural theatre and the criticisms waged against *The Mahabharata* are in many ways representative of critiques against the Western project of intercultural theatre as a whole” (12).

Similar criticisms have been leveled against Ariane Mnouchkine, a French theatre director, active at the same time as Brook. Some of her most famous (or perhaps, infamous) works are her productions of Shakespearian plays, such as *Richard II*, *Twelfth Night*, and, *Henry IV (Part I)*, which pulled heavily from Japanese Kabuki, and her cycle of Greek tragedies, which in turn pulled heavily from traditional *Kathakali* Indian dance. Adrian Kiernander describes Mnouchkine’s approach as “using Asian theatre as a technical device for renewing Western Theatre” (94). It is clear here how, in the work of Mnouchkine, Brook, and their contemporaries, the source culture simply existed as a function of the artist’s final goal: to appeal to the target culture.

This approach in practice is made clear in Pavis’ “Hourglass” model of intercultural discourse. Pavis describes this Hourglass, pictured below, as “a strange object, reminiscent of a funnel and a mill” (*Crossroads* 4). He describes the process of intercultural theatre creation as a way in which “the grains [of culture] rearrange themselves in a way which appears random but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer” (Pavis *Crossroads* 4).

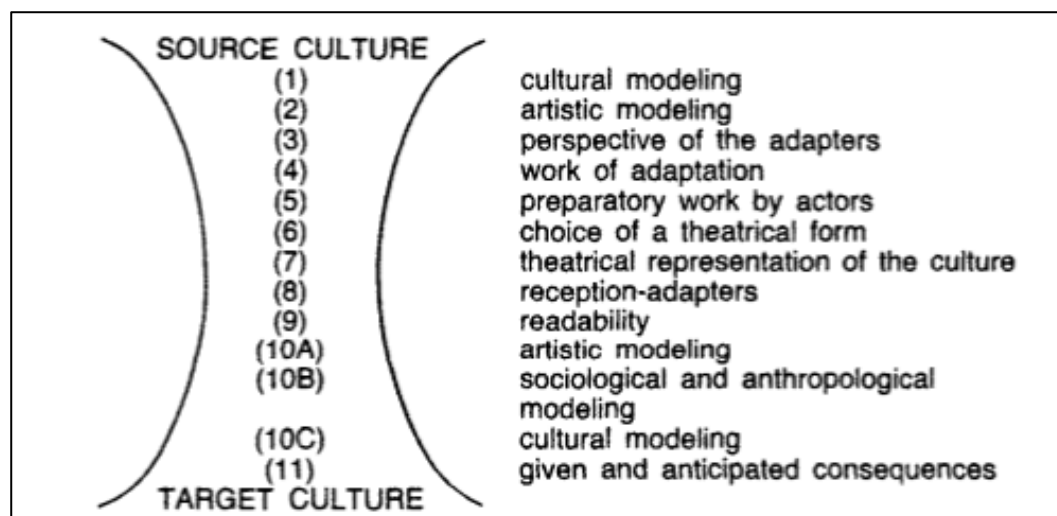


Figure 3 – The Hourglass of Cultures¹

As is evident by the “dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer,” the onus for creation and the dominant methodologies of intercultural exchange happen at the hands of (and by the hands of) the target culture (Pavis *Crossroads* 4). As Knowles describes it, the hourglass “set the terms for a debate in the 1990s that circulated around the explicitly appropriative relationship between source and target cultures... Pavis’ model posits a one-way flow and filtering of information from source to culture rather than any kind of fluid exchange” (Knowles *Theatre and Interculturalism* 26). However, the influence of Pavis’ discursive model of intercultural theatre performance is undeniable, and the hourglass model served as the basis for much of the intercultural discourse surrounding intercultural theatre practice in the 1990s.

A more fluid discursive model was presented in Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert’s “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Practice,” which appeared in *The Drama Review* in 2002. Therein, their aim is to adapt what is essentially an appropriative/assimilationist model into a more collaborative/negotiated one (Lo and

¹ Pavis, Patrice. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. Routledge, 1992. Image: Page 4.

Gilbert *Toward a Topography* 44). They propose that all intercultural theatre practice takes place along the following continuum:

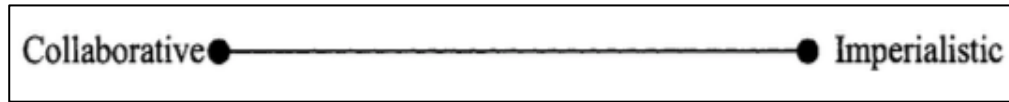


Figure 4 – The Continuum of Conducting Intercultural Theatre Practice²

At the “Collaborative” end of the continuum is practice that “tends to emphasize the processes and politics of exchange rather than the theatrical product per se” (Lo and Gilbert *Toward a Topography* 39). On the other end, the “Imperialistic” pole of the continuum, lies exchange that is “often driven by a sense of Western culture as bankrupt and in need of invigoration from the non-West” (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 39). Though Lo and Gilbert hail Pavis’ Hourglass model as the only sustainable “comprehensive model of intercultural exchange,” they are indeed wary of its leaning towards the Imperialistic side of the continuum (*Toward a Topography* 41). As Lo and Gilbert aptly state in their section entitled “Critique of the Hourglass Model,” Pavis’ conception of intercultural exchange cannot make space for bi-directional collaboration between cultures. They state,

The main problem with this mode is that it assumes a one-way cultural flow based on a hierarchy of privilege, even though Pavis attempts to relativize the power relationships by claiming that the hourglass can be turned upside-down “as soon as the users of a foreign culture ask themselves how they can communicate their own culture to another target culture [Pavis *Crossroads* 5]. This, however, assumes that there is a ‘level-playing field’ between the partners in the exchange and does not account for the fact that the benefits of globalization and the permeability of cultures and political systems are accessed

² Lo, Jacqueline and Helen Gilbert. “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis”. *The Drama Review*, vol. 46, no. 3, Autumn, 2002. pp. 31-53. Image p. 38.

differentially for different communities and nations (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 42).

In order to address this shortcoming of Pavis' model, they matrixed the discursive conceptions of intercultural theatre practice with postcolonial theory. In combining the two, Lo and Gilbert believed that "what postcolonial theory offers to current debates about interculturalism is a framework for analyzing such thorny issues as agency, hybridity, and authenticity, issues that lie at the heart of intercultural praxis" (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 44). Instead of simply occupying itself with the aesthetic venture of cultural exchange, as had been the habit of discourse, Lo and Gilbert's bringing together of postcolonial theory and intercultural theory addressed the political impact of such artistic practice.

In doing so, their model "is represented as a two-way flow" (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 44). Therein both cultures are considered source cultures, and the target culture's position is found between the two. However, Lo and Gilbert make sure to state that the location of the target culture is not fixed; its position is fluid, and moves along the continuum. In this way, the postcolonial influence on their theory is made apparent, as it not only highlights the "dialogic nature of intercultural exchange but also takes into account the possibility of power disparity in the partnership" (*Toward a Topography* 44).

This model, seen below, represented an important moment in intercultural performance theory: intercultural practice and discourse in the west was moving past the alimentary relationship between the "west and 'the rest'," wherein western theatre practitioners were simply nourished by eastern practice in pursuit of their aesthetic endeavours. Lo and Gilbert's impulse to matrix their contemporary intercultural

discourse with postcolonial theory was not only indicative of the need to consider the political and social impact of intercultural theatre (over and above its aesthetic considerations), but it is also telling of the schisms, rifts, and divides that were emerging – or perhaps had always existed, and had not yet come to the fore – within this area of theatrical discourse.

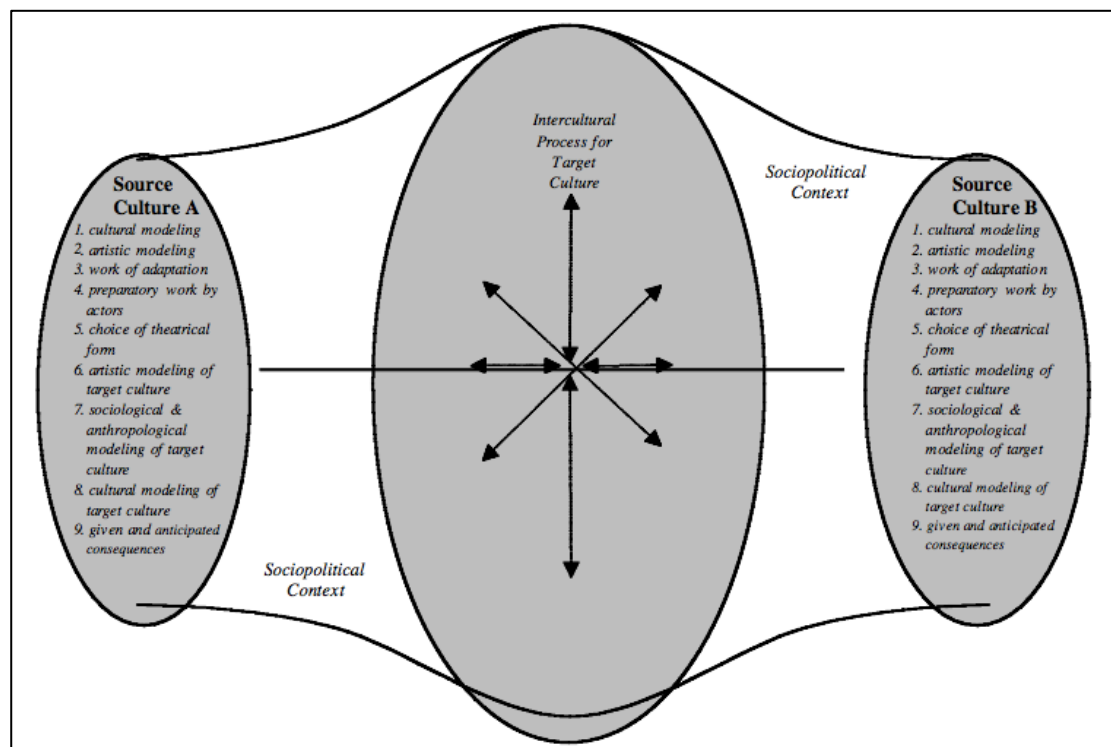


Figure 5 – Lo and Gilbert's Topographical Model³

Schisms in Nomenclature

Interculturalism in theatre – as Lo and Gilbert's matrixed model exemplifies – operates, more often than not, at the messy boundaries between various more distinct definitions of cross-cultural performance. Though intercultural theatre fits under the

³ Lo, Jacqueline and Helen Gilbert. "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis". *The Drama Review*, vol. 46, no. 3, Autumn, 2002. pp. 31-53. Image p. 45.

umbrella of cross-cultural work (detailed below), intercultural theatre, I contend, possesses the four elements named earlier: encounter, intention, negotiation, and emergence. However, it is also important to place interculturalism, relative to the other forms of “cross-cultural” theatre that exist, and that can be found in Figure 6. Lo and Gilbert offer the following chart as a way to visualize the “cluster of related practices subsumed under the broad banner of “cross-cultural theatre” (*Toward a Topography* 31).

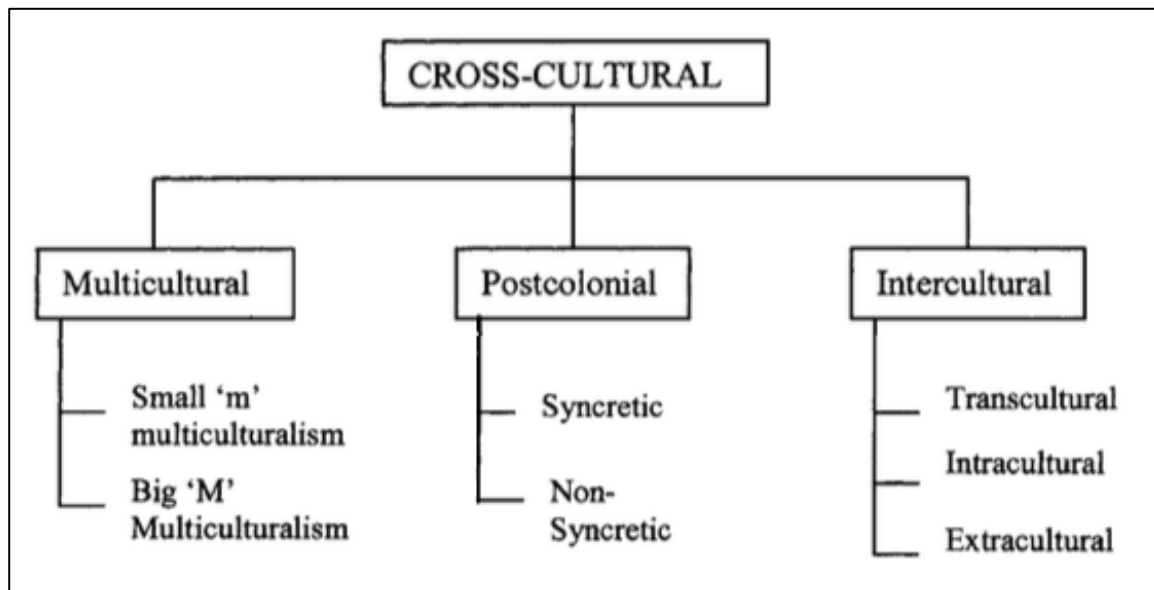


Figure 6 – Lo and Gilbert’s Conception of Cross-Cultural⁴

Beginning left to right, with multicultural theatre, Lo and Gilbert specify a difference between “small m multicultural theatre” and “big M Multicultural theatre” (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 33). As they state it, “small ‘m’ multicultural theatre refers to works featuring a racially mixed cast that do not actively draw attention to cultural differences among performers or to the tensions between the text and the production content” (Lo and Gilbert, *Toward a Topography* 33). While this style of

⁴ Lo, Jacqueline and Helen Gilbert. “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis”. *The Drama Review*, vol. 46, no. 3, Autumn, 2002. pp. 31-53. Image p. 32

theatre practice, economically, affords opportunities to performers and theatre practitioners from all backgrounds, its mission is not explicitly to engage with the confluence of cultures present within a theatrical performance. Though it may give the appearance of an inquiry into culture, it does not necessarily achieve, or even more simply, set out to achieve that goal. Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre, however, is practice that is specifically mandated to not only include performers and practitioners from various cultures, but engages in the decision to do so, placing the cultural exchange at the forefront of the performance’s intent. Fischer-Lichte describes it as the crossing between “various ethnic or linguistic groups in multicultural societies... that have been the source of performances utilizing several languages and performing for a bi- or multicultural public (*Interculturalism in Contemporary Performance* 8). Lo and Gilbert describe big ‘M’ multicultural theatre as a “general counter-discursive practice that aims to promote cultural diversity, access to cultural expression, and participation in the symbolic space of the national narrative” (*Toward a Topography* 33). All three authors, in all three works, cite countries such as Canada and Australia (countries whose governments have officially mandated multiculturalism into the political makeup of the nation) as the frequent site for big “M” multiculturalism. Fischer-Lichte argues for the necessity of the state’s recognition of the validity of the project in saying, “this sort of exchange is only possible when the political system in place recognizes, if only on paper, the existence of cultural or national communities and encourages their cooperation, without hiding behind the shibboleth of national identity” (*Interculturalism in Contemporary Performance* 8). Perhaps big ‘M’ multiculturalism is not only possible in the company of state-mandated policies aimed at creating tolerance and cultural well-being within a country, but also

because of those very policies: begging the question, which came first, the state-mandated desire for cultural harmony, or the artistic practice thereof? Knowles and Mündel tackle this question within the context of contemporary Canadian theatre, discussed later in this chapter.

Moving laterally across their model, under the umbrella of Postcolonial theatre, Lo and Gilbert differentiate between the syncretic and the non-syncretic. Christopher Balme, in *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-colonial Drama* is responsible for bringing the term syncretism from the field of comparative religion, to the field of performance studies, wherein it “denotes the process whereby elements of two or more religions are merged and absorbed into one another,” (Balme 2). Syncretism, as Balme describes it, “has always been a feature of religious change, [but] it has been particularly noticeable during periods of colonial contact” (Balme 2). Theatrical syncretism is defined as “the process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together” (Balme 1). Fischer-Lichte succinctly defines syncretic theatre as a term “for the creative reinterpretation of heterogeneous cultural material, resulting in the formation of new configurations (*Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre* 9). Conversely, Lo and Gilbert define non-syncretic theatre as theatre that “does not merge cultural forms but rather uses imposed imperial genres/aesthetics or, less often, wholly indigenous ones, to voice postcolonial concerns” (36).

On the far-right of Figure 6 lies intercultural theatre, which I have defined above, and is the umbrella under which the 3 following terms operate: transcultural, intracultural and intercultural. The first is transcultural theatre, which Lo and Gilbert define as theatre “aimed to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal

human condition” (*Toward a Topography* 38). They associate this practice with artists such as those mentioned above, like Brook and Mnouchkine (*Toward a Topography* 38).

Next, intracultural theatre can be attributed to Rustom Bharucha (a notable critic of transcultural theatre), which denotes “cultural encounters between and across specific communities and regions within the nation-state (Lo and Gilbert 38). On the surface, this might seem interchangeable with notions of multiculturalism (both small and big “m”), however, Bharucha cleaves between the two, stating that “insofar as they [both] assume either the interaction or the coexistence of regional and local cultures within the larger framework of the nation-state. However, while the ‘intra’ prioritizes the interactivity and translation of diverse culture, the ‘multi’ upholds a notion of cohesiveness” (Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice* 9).

Lastly, extracultural theatre is the inversion of intracultural theatre, and is descriptive of much of the “alimentary” intercultural theatre that has been critiqued within this thesis. As Lo and Gilbert describe it, extracultural theatre exchanges “are conducted along a West-East and North South axis... this form of interculturalism goes back to the modernist pioneers who looked to the non-West to rejuvenate Western art” (38). This style of performance, citing Brook’s *The Mahabharata* has already been discussed within this thesis, as has its problematic nature.

New Interculturalism

In this thesis, I choose to locate my discussion of cross-cultural theatre practice within the framework of interculturalism. In doing so, I am following in Royona Mitra’s footsteps by engaging in critical dialogue with the term. Mitra describes her choice to critically engage with the term “intercultural” as a “semantic tribute to the post in

postmodern in its ability to signal both an aftermath and a dialectic exchange with its predecessor” (22). She notes many other scholars’ decisions to move away from this terminology, listing examples such as Erika Fischer-Lichte’s “interweaving cultures,” Rustom Bharucha’s use of “intracultural” and Rachel Fensham and Odette Kelada’s proclivity towards “transcultural”. Mitra claims that the use of the qualifier “new” in new interculturalism allows her to engage critically with the term of interculturalism itself. Mitra argues for her choice of terminology by citing Ted Cattle, who in turn identifies five elements of interculturalism not found in other forms of cross-cultural discourse:

- Identity as a dynamic concept,
- From ‘race’ to recognition of all other forms of difference
- From national to global/international drivers of difference
- New power and political structures
- An inter-disciplinary approach (Cattle “About Interculturalism” np)

New Interculturalism is a reimagining, or a bringing-up-to-speed of the theories listed above, that describes the current state of intercultural theatre as it often appears in the contemporary context. Much of the discussion above has been fuelled by and focused upon the interculturalism that took place in the 1980s, and was largely situated within the “extracultural” label on Lo and Gilbert’s topographical model of cross-cultural performance. Mitra describes this twentieth-century era of interculturalism as one featuring “Orientalist depictions of non-Western cultures, and neo-liberalist tendencies to silence or at least suppress the marginal voice(s) in favour of Western perspectives” (11).

In defining her term against this history, Mitra uses the contemporary example of Akram Khan’s oeuvre. Through it, she defines new interculturalism as one that “emerges at the intersection of [Khan’s] two mutually linked embodied realities” (10). Here, Mitra squarely positions the two halves of the intercultural artist within the body. The first half

occupies space within the body by way of one's cultural identity: through the political and philosophical negotiations encountered by the artist on a day to day basis (Mitra 10). The second occupies space within the body through specialized training and the process of acculturation, described by Barba and Savarese, in which the performer is trained in ways of "standing, walking, stopping, looking, and sitting, which are different from the daily" (190). To illustrate what is meant by this, Mitra uses Akram Khan's extensive training performance training in various dance and movement languages (including classical *kathak* and western contemporary dance), his "particular emphasis on South Asian dramaturgical practices," as well as his lived experience as a second-generation British-Bangladeshi artist, to exemplify the location of new interculturalism within the body (10).

It is this tension between the two halves of the intercultural body – the daily, lived experience, and the specialist performance training, that distinguishes Mitra's new interculturalism from the intellectually-fueled interculturalism of the 1980s (11). She moves the focus away from the historically mainstream methodologies of intercultural performance – whose structures so often implicitly carried with them power dynamics, and the alimentary mode of operating described above between "The West and the Rest" – to an embodied definition of new interculturalism, whose refocusing seeks to reassign the site of intercultural encounter from without the body to within: from the hands of those controlling the performance to the hands of those creating and performing the pieces themselves. She describes this new style as "driven by the lived experience of diasporic realities, which necessitates subjects having to simultaneously negotiate multiple cultures, new interculturalism is a life-condition as much as an aesthetic and

political intervention” (11). She highlights the special position occupied by hybridic artists, stating that the historically neo-liberalist and orientalist dynamics of intercultural theatre “can be potentially interrupted and complicated when one’s simultaneous insider-outsider status between and across multiple cultural and national contexts changes the power dynamics at play by dismantling historical us-them hierarchies, by simultaneously embodying us, them, and phases in-between” (Mitra 14-15). In reaffirming the position occupied by hybridity, she returns agency to the artist, stating that hybridity can be a “powerful interventionist tool that harbours agency for a diasporic subject’s identity formations” (18).

Finally, to succinctly state the “new” in new interculturalism, Mitra enumerates the following points:

- An embodied, corporeal language
- An auto-ethnographic, self-referential inquiry
- Perpetual identification with a state of in-betweenness (between cultures, nations, disciplines, and versions of the self)
- Queering of normative understandings of the diaspora
- Dismantling of the concept of othering (Mitra 29-30)

I contend that Mitra’s concept of new interculturalism leaves possibility for the reassignment of the specific intercultural project along the continuum of Figure 4 (the collaborative/imperialistic continuum posited by Lo and Gilbert), to a position closer to the collaborative end of the spectrum – and in reassigning the moment of encounter to the body of the performer, agency is returned to the artist. My contention is mirrored by Knowles, as he states,

The new Interculturalism, as I see it, involves collaborations and solidarities across real and respected material differences within local, urban, national and global intercultural performance ecologies... These performance ecologies

function as heterotopias – ‘space of alternate ordering,’ in Kevin Herthington’s definition in *The Badlands of Modernity* (1997, p viii) – and they serve to forge what Holledge and Tompkins in *Women’s Intercultural Performance*, call ‘new identity spaces’ (p 178). These do not function merely as sites of semiotic intersection, or as post-modern collages, but as politicized sites for the constitution of new, hybrid, and diasporic identities in space (Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* 59).

Knowles was, of course, writing this statement five years before Mitra wrote *Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism*, and although Knowles uses the words “new interculturalism,” it is Mitra, who changes the use of “new” from a simple qualifier to a proper noun and a part of the nomenclature itself, and solidifies the concept of the site of the performance ecology (or the heterotopia – as Herthington calls it, of course taking after Foucault – or the “new identity spaces,” as Holledge and Tompkins describe it) as the body itself.

In addressing the location of performance within the body, in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* Sara Ahmed asks and states the following,

In order to avoid reading the differentiated body through the figure of race, we need to think through the questions: How do ‘bodies’ become marked by differences? How do bodies come to be lived precisely through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby the differences in other bodies make a difference to such lived embodiment? Such questions require that we consider how the very materialization of bodies in time and space involves techniques and practices of differentiation. To differentiate between the familiar and the strange is to mark out the inside and the outside of bodily space (to establish the skin as a boundary line). What is required is, not only an analysis of body images or representations of bodily difference, but also an analysis of how bodily habits and

gestures serve to constitute bodily matter and form... To examine the function of cultural difference and social antagonism in the constitution of bodily matters is not to read differences on the surface of the body (the body as text) but to account for the very effect of the surface, and to account for how bodies come to take certain shapes over other, and in relation to others (42-43).

Here, Ahmed points to the function of cultural difference and locates its effect squarely within the body: within embodiment and lived experience. It finds its location there through its performativity. Similar to the way that Judith Butler positions gender identity as performative in her milestone work “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” the “complex identity-positions” that are described by Mitra and occupied by artists like Akram Khan, Anita Majumdar, and Tawiah M’Carthy are equally brought into existence through the performativity of the body.

Within the context of Mitra’s new interculturalism, I have selected the three works for analysis: *Fish Eyes* by Anita Majumdar, *Obaaberima* by Tawiah M’Carthy, and *DESH* by Akram Khan. They each engage in, question, and unpack the very “complex identity-positions,” that Mitra describes, both in their form and in their content. These artists occupy such positions that allow them to consciously participate in the dynamics of that interstice. Additionally, they each satisfy the criteria put forth by Mitra to describe the “new” in new interculturalism: an embodied, corporeal language, an auto-ethnographic, self-referential inquiry, perpetual identification with a state of in-betweenness (between cultures, nations, disciplines, and versions of the self), queering of normative understandings of the diaspora, and dismantling of the concept of othering

(Mitra 29-30). Therein lies their importance as artists operating within new intercultural practice.

Contemporary Intercultural Theatre Practice in English Canada

Though only two of my three case studies are Canadian (with the third being British), it is important to situate the discussion of contemporary interculturalism in theatre in English Canada. In tracing this lineage, it is important to remind ourselves, as Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel do in *“Ethnic,” Multicultural and Intercultural Theatre*, that “public performance in the land now called Canada has been intercultural ever since the first potlatch... The critical analysis of ‘ethnic,’ cross-, multi-, and intercultural theatre, however, arrived rather late” (vii). Jill Carter echoes this statement in *“Decolonizing the Gathering Place: Chocolate Woman Dreams a Gathering House in Toronto”*. Therein she states that interculturalism in Toronto’s professional theatre landscape appears in the latter half of the twentieth century, though it was present in Indigenous performance on Turtle Island for “many thousands of years” (176).

In acknowledging this often-omitted history of intercultural theatre in Canada, the genesis of its practice – as we have come to know it – within the current theatrical landscape can be traced back to 1962, and the “liberalization of Canadian Immigration policy” (Knowles and Mündel ix). This liberalization was then formalized within the 1967 Immigration Act, which “initiated an idealist system that eschewed discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, or culture” (Knowles, “Multicultural Text” 121). The effects of this influx of immigration were twofold. One effect was that, for the first time in the country’s history, a significant portion of the next generation, and of the overall population identified as members of a “visible minority” (Knowles, “Multicultural Text”

121). The second effect was that this changing makeup of the population became a defining feature in the country's growing desire for a national identity. This search for a national identity stemmed from Canada's centenary in 1967, the global upheaval of the first half of the twentieth century, and was fueled by the growing presence of American culture and identity, from the south (Knowles, "Multicultural Text" 121). Canadian multiculturalism and its "tolerance" of diversity became the country's calling cards.

After the adoption of the 1967 Immigration Act, however, both the population's and the federal government's ability (or lack thereof) to grapple with the changing demographics of the country became evident in the slew of legislation that followed. As Barry Freeman describes it, "Canada's colonial history, its broken relationship with its indigenous peoples, and its proximity to the United States created a particular need for ideological structures that could manage difference" (9-10). This need manifested itself nefariously in the federal government's attempt to mitigate this "difference" through the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969, colloquially known as "The White Paper". This policy intended to abolish all pre-existing legislation concerning Indigenous peoples in Canada, including the Indian Act and the treaties, with the intention of full assimilation. Though not a policy against immigration from other nations, this attempted erasure by the state of the country's First Peoples was clearly a result of the unrest felt in the face of its changing demographics.

The public backlash from the White Paper, however, was swift and forceful, and the federal government reacted by introducing its "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" policy in 1971. This policy also came about as a response to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, in which "ethnic minorities" had

expressed concern over being omitted from federal culture policy if its focus remained limited on a bi-cultural state, rather than a multicultural one (Knowles, “Multicultural Text” 121). In the 1971 policy, French and English cultures were referred to as “charter groups,” with “other ethnic groups” also being included, though secondarily (Knowles, “Multicultural Text” 121). This lead up, through the 60s and 70s came to a head in 1982, with the entrenchment of multiculturalism in Canada as a core value in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a status it enjoys to this day, and the adoption of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (Knowles and Mündel vii).

This focus on legislation in terms of tracing the history of intercultural theatre performance practice in Canada comes as a framework through which to discuss intercultural artistic production in Canada. As Knowles puts it, the practice of contemporary interculturalism can be seen as a performance or articulation of “multicultural *texts* [emphasis in original] – the policies, documents, and official discourses of Canadian multiculturalism” (“Multicultural Text” 119).

Though the articulation of these texts (as Knowles refers to them) came about during the 60s through to the 80s, professional intercultural theatre practice in Canada only began appearing in the second half of the 1980s. Due to the privileging of French and English performance traditions – as opposed to the “static, folkloric ‘ethnicities’” – throughout these texts, intercultural theatre was “systematically relegated to amateur status” (Knowles and Mündel viii). In *Love Loss and Longing: South Asian Canadian Plays*, the first ever anthology of its kind, Dalbir Singh describes his experience as a young South Asian theatre-goer:

While I was growing up, theatre created by South Asian Canadian artists was scarce and virtually non-existent or was

relegated to predominantly Hindi- or Punjabi-language dramas performed in suburban school gymnasiums and community centres (v).

The change from amateur to professional, however, did start happening in the late 80s, with Toronto serving as the hotbed of activity. The marketing, tourism, and advertising campaigns for the city of Toronto often make mention of “two significant claims: to be the world’s most multicultural city, and to be the third most active theatre centre in the English-speaking world” (Knowles and Mündel 119). While the latter claim may be true, Freeman points out that the former may not be entirely accurate, asserting that it was “a boast first made publicly in a 1989 speech by then mayor Art Eggleton... In 2001 Toronto-based geographer Michael J. Doucet convincingly debunked the claim by demonstrating that Eggleton was exaggerating a United Nations report that had said only that Toronto was ‘one of the most multicultural cities’” (5-6). However, whether or not it has earned the title of the foremost multicultural city, Toronto’s position in Canada as a multicultural city as well as a major theatre centre is evident. In the 70s – at the same time as the legislative texts were shaping the foundation for multiculturalist ideology (and therefore intercultural practice) in Canada, Toronto was becoming a hub for alternative theatre and experimentation. Laura Levin, in *Theatre and Performance in Toronto*, however asserts that this explosion in opportunities to create new and alternative works was accessible only to a few, and did not necessarily embrace the forms of “alternative” offered by intercultural, indigenous, or feminist practice. She states,

It is worth noting that alternative theatre’s appeal to an ‘indigenous’ and ‘post-colonial theatre’ – one that would free Canadians from the tyranny of Euro-American culture – often effects a troubling erasure of Toronto’s *other* Indigenous past... Further, Toronto’s alternative theatre did not translate

into radical alternatives for women. The official history of alternates is a story of young rebellious men... not only are women almost nowhere to be found in these origin stories, but the anti-establishment rhetoric in such narratives is often thoroughly masculinist (ix).

Therefore, just as the practice of professional intercultural theatre in Canada emerged out from under the shadow of the legislative privileging of the two linguistic cultures of the country, it also emerged from under the white- and male-dominated alternative theatre scene in Toronto in the late 80s. Cahoots Theatre, in Toronto (originally named Cahoots Theatre Projects) was founded in 1986 by Beverly Yhap, and boasts the title “the first professional company in Canada with a mandate to present culturally inclusive work” (“Company History”). Notably, Native Earth Theatre Performing Arts precedes Cahoots as a professional theatre company specifically mandated to present and produce theatre with a culturally-focused mandate, as it was founded in 1982, and Montreal’s Teesri Duniya Theatre was founded the year before that (and created *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*, is literary publication, in 1988), however Native Earth is mandated to focus exclusively on Indigenous Voices (and is therefore Canada’s oldest Indigenous theatre company) and Teesri Duniya did not incorporate as a non-profit organization until after Cahoots, in 1987, allowing Cahoots to retain its title. Many other culturally-focused and culturally-mandated companies followed suit, around the country (“About Us”). Modern Times Stage Company was founded in 1989, b current performing arts in 1991 (both in Toronto) and Newworld Theatre in Vancouver, in 1994. b current, Obsidian Theatre Company, and Black Theatre Workshop, in Montreal, all share a similar journey with their mandates, with b current’s description reading as “originally founded as a place for black artists to create, nurture,

and present their works, our company has grown to support artists from all diasporas” (“What We Do”). Obsidian echoes this statement, “focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the works of highly acclaimed Black playwrights” (“Mission and Mandate”). More recently, fu-GEN Theatre Company, billed as “the nation’s premiere Asian Canadian theatre company” and described as “devoted to providing a home for the Asian Canadian theatre artist, nurturing their voices and producing works of the highest artistic calibre that explore the Asian Canadian experience,” was founded in 2002 (“Home”). In 2004, the city of Kitchener-Waterloo founded the MT Space (short for “Multi-Cultural” Space), mandated to “explore cultural intersections amongst people, their histories, and their forms of expression” (“Mission and Vision”).

Since then, in the last decade and a half, the artistic presence of these companies (and many others like them) has been felt all over the country, and intercultural work is undoubtedly part of the professional Canadian theatre community’s makeup. Looking forward, the National Arts Centre recently announced the creation of an Indigenous Theatre department, to operate alongside its French and English counterparts, with Governor General Award-winning artist Kevin Loring named as its inaugural artistic director, and its first season slated for 2019. Though not explicitly intercultural in its nature, the incorporation of the artistic voices of Canada’s First Peoples into its national performance space is indicative of the NAC’s desire to diversify its programming and to incorporate all voices into the national canon of the Canadian people.

To conclude with a return to the legislation and policies that act as performative texts, to then be articulated by theatre artists around the country, it is important to note that arms-length funding bodies such as the Canada Council for Arts and the Ontario Arts

Council have recently rewritten their funding policy guidelines in order to emphasise the need to fund diverse, culturally-focused, or inclusive theatre, in the interest of achieving equity in their practices. The Canada Council for the Arts' Equity Policy was published (and came into effect) on April 1, 2017. Within it, it identifies and prioritizes equity-seeking groups that "receive targeted funds and initiatives are from the following communities: culturally diverse, deaf and disability, [and] official language minorities" (Canada Council for the Arts 5). Similarly, the Ontario Arts Council lists the following priority groups: artists of colour, deaf artists and artists with disabilities, francophone artists, indigenous artists, new generation artists (18-30 year olds), and artists living in regions outside Toronto ("Priority Group").

As these new texts – legislation and policy – continue to form and inform artistic production all over the country, so too will they continue to shape the production of contemporary intercultural performance in Canada. The three case studies selected for this thesis can indeed be seen as articulations of these legislative texts and policies. *Fish Eyes* and *Obaaberima* are homegrown Canadian creations, which have been – and continue to be – programmed at large venues across the country. Additionally, *DESH*, though a British production, was presented at the National Arts Centre, notably a crown corporation, mandated to "collaborat[e] with artists and arts organizations across Canada to help create a national stage for the performing arts, and act as a catalyst for performance, creation, and learning across the country" ("About the National Arts Centre"). In this way, Akram Khan's *DESH* is as much of an articulation of the legislative texts and policies dictating the national mandate of multiculturalism as Anita Majumdar's *Fish Eyes*, or Tawiah M'Carthy's *Obaaberima*. Lastly, in addition to the role

that these creations play in creating and performing the national identity as multicultural (or at least the perception of the national identity as multicultural), at the end of the day, these creations are enjoying success because they have an audience. They are well crafted creations whose box office and programming records are telling of the public's desire to consume such content. Just as there is a need to critically re-examine the way we discuss interculturalism in theatre from the changing landscape of its discourse, there is also a need for this critical re-examination due to the simple fact that people are going to see these plays – in droves, no less.

Chapter Two:

Gestural Syncretism and The Construction of Character in Anita Majumdar's *Fish Eyes*

The first piece I have selected for my analysis is Anita Majumdar's *Fish Eyes*. The performance is a sixty-minute solo work originally conceived over a decade ago by Majumdar during her tenure as an acting student at the National Theatre School. The play centres around the character of Meena, short for "Meenakshi," meaning "Fish Eyes." Meena is a teenage girl in her final year of high school, growing up in Port Moody, British Columbia, trained – and skilled – in the classical Indian dance of *Bharatanatyam*⁵. Throughout the hour, Meena navigates the murky waters of adolescence, in the year that leads up to her graduation, or as she describes it, with all the nasal fervour and earnestness of youth in her voice, "Grad Two-Thousand-and-Thirteen!"

In *Fish Eyes*, Majumdar is participating in a history of solo performance by women in Canada. This tradition takes after Jill Dolan and Peggy Phelan's understanding of the gendered gaze and desire in theatre, and *Fish Eyes* delves into the dynamics of seeing and being seen, performing one's culture and performing one's gender, and the unpacking of "the viewers' unconscious commitment to shared social and cultural expectations about how man and women *should* appear, act and speak, both on stage and in the world in a given place and time" (Solga 19).

This style of performance has often been used as a way of carving out a place for the female voice in the narrative of the Canadian identity, in works by authors such as

⁵ The spelling of this specific style of dance often differs between combinations of its two composite parts "Bharata" and "Natyam", translated literally from the Sanskrit as "Bharata's dance," and seen either as one word or two. However, for ease of reading within this document, I will favour the spelling used within the published text of *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*, as one word: *bharatanatyam*.

Linda Griffiths (*Maggie and Pierre*) and Joan McLoed (*Shape of a Girl, Gracie*) – to name just a few out of many. It is a useful tool in doing so, as solo performance often serves to “re-inscribe the subjective ‘I’... [acceding] to the rank of subject” (Verduyn 27). This re-inscription of subjectivity, and assertion of one’s place as a subject within the overall social fabric of the state is also a ripe opportunity to problematize what Lo and Gilbert describe as the “divisions between subject/object, victimizer/victim and self/other... [solo performance provides] a very powerful avenue for engaging with, inhabiting – or embodying a hybrid subjectivity” (“Performing Hybridity” 92). In this way, solo performance becomes a convenient tool to reclaim one’s subjectivity. Therefore, as much as *Fish Eyes* is part of a tradition of female solo performance in Canada, it also adds to the rich tradition of female solo performance by multicultural and hybridic artists: creator-performers like Anusree Roy (*Pyasa*), Carmen Aguirre (*Blue Box*), Djanet Sears (*Afrika Solo*), Nina Lee Aquino (*She Speaks*) and many others.

Majumdar fits neatly into this tradition, and is also participating in the creation of a history of South Asian theatre performance in Canada. South Asian performance has an extensive presence in theatre practice in the UK (a clear result of the imperial relationship between the two nations) as is evidenced by the work of Akram Khan, the artist of study in the following chapter. However, as Ley and Dadswell state, in *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre*, South Asian Theatre in the UK is an academically “neglected field,” and their anthology (the first of its kind) serves to “[expand] critical interest in diasporic fiction in Britain” (3).

Though Ley and Dadswell describe this field as neglected in the UK, it is even more so, here in Canada. Though no such comparable critical study on South Asian

Canadian Theatre in Canada exists, in 2015, *Love, Loss and Longing: South Asian Canadian plays* was published: the first major anthology of South Asian Canadian plays. In it, Dalbir Singh, the editor, situates Rahul Varma's *Bhopal* the first South Asian Canadian play to rise to prominence. He describes Varma as,

One of the first Indo-Canadian artists to craft English-language work that challenged the status quo by focusing on issues such as immigration, racism, global terrorism, and corporate malfeasance. His founding of Teesri Duniya Theatre in Montreal and the magazine *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* helped promote not only the productions of his and other South Asian artists' plays, but many minoritized writers as well (vi).

The sequel to *Fish Eyes* – and the second installment in the *Fish Eyes Trilogy* – *Boys with Cars*, is also notably featured in this collection. Singh describes Majumdar's work as “often characterized by feminist-oriented political relevance, breathtaking choreography, and a balance between dramatic and comedic tensions” (ix). The *Fish Eyes Trilogy* is still enjoying a successful life around the country, and recently opened, at the Factory Theatre in Toronto, as the first play of its 2017-2018 mainstage season.

The Four-Point Model and Fish Eyes

In applying the four-point model of analysis to Anita Majumdar's *Fish Eyes*, I trace a process of creation of meaning, beginning with the artist's embodied encounter of cultures, her stated and evident (within the content of *Fish Eyes* itself) intention to investigate that cultural encounter through performance, the negotiation between the use of *mudras* in traditional *bharatnatyam* dance and Western theatre practices, and the emergence of a codified system of meaning, specific to the world of *Fish Eyes*.

The Artist

Born to Hindu Bengali parents from India, Majumdar grew up in Port Moody, a relatively small suburb North-East of Metro Vancouver, whose population is vibrant, diverse, and home to a thriving South Asian community (“Census Profile: Port Moody”). Growing up in this dynamic community, Majumdar trained from an early age in multiple modes of classical Indian dance, such as *bharatanatyam*, *kathak*, and *odissi*, and stated in a 2008 interview with the North Shore News that she feels dedicated to exploring the cultural tensions experienced by second-generation Canadians, describing it as a “poignant issue, this living in between two worlds” (North Shore News, “Mom Scolded Majumdar”).

Majumdar holds a bachelor’s degree in English, Theatre, and South Asian Languages from the University of British Columbia, and went on to train as an actor at the National Theatre School of Canada, graduating in 2004 (“Anita Majumdar” Playwrights Guild of Canada). Today, her work is garnering national attention, and she was named as the 2013 Protégée for the Governor General Performing Arts Awards Mentorship Program. *The Fish Eyes Trilogy* manuscript in its publication format was released by Playwrights Canada Press in June of 2016 and the trilogy continues to tour across the country (“Mentorship Program”).

The Play

Building on the piece originally conceived as a twelve-minute performance, and created as part of her training at the National Theatre School, Majumdar went on to extend *Fish Eyes* into a twenty-five-minute version, which was presented at Toronto’s 2004 SummerWorks Festival. In the years immediately following, it was critically and commercially well-received at productions at Theatre Passe Muraille, also in Toronto,

The Cultch in Vancouver, as well as performances in India (“Bollywood Meets High School”, Penticton Western News). The play later went on to be picked up for development by Nightswimming Theatre in Toronto, under the guidance of Brian Quirt, and then-Producer Rupal Shah in 2011. From there, *Fish Eyes* was developed into a full-length solo-piece, and became the springboard for the creation of two additional pieces, which together form *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*. The second installment of the trilogy, *Boys with Cars*, was commissioned by Nightswimming, and premiered at the Great Canadian Theatre Company in 2014, as a double bill with *Fish Eyes*. The final piece, *Let Me Borrow That Top*, was co-commissioned by Nightswimming and the Banff Playwrights Colony in early 2015. As Brian Quirt describes it, “throughout these many workshops, readings, residences, and rehearsals, the vision driving us forward was the idea of presenting the three parts as a single performance with two intermissions,” a dream ultimately realized at Victoria’s Belfry Theatre on March 15, 2015 (xiv). The trilogy lives on, now in its published format, and is currently opening the mainstage season at Toronto’s Factory Theatre.

All three pieces are coming-of-age stories that focus on “the straightjacket of high school” (Quirt xiv), with each protagonist existing in the in-between, flanked on either side by adulthood and adolescence, belonging and othering, hope and fear. However, for the purposes of this study, my discussion will only be focusing on the titular first show within the trilogy. *Fish Eyes* fits neatly within the subject matter of this thesis, since the character of Meena finds herself directly at odds with both her Canadian and Indian identities. Rupal Shah, the Producer, states that “by writing [this play], Anita is

demanding that we accept the validity, the legitimacy, and heterogeneity of the South Asian Canadian experience” (Shah xvii).

As for *Fish Eyes* itself, Majumdar makes good on her promise to delve into this “living in between two worlds” (North Shore News, “Mom Scolded Majumdar”). Throughout the solo piece, Majumdar flawlessly trades off between the characters of Meena, our teenage protagonist who loves Bollywood movies – especially actress Aishwarya Rai, or as Meena energetically refers to her throughout the piece “Nineteen Ninety-Four Miss World Turned Bollywood Superstar *Aishwarya Rai!*” – and the matriarchal figure, Kalyani Aunty, Meena’s *bharatanatyam* teacher. There are also a few secondary characters, whose presences are largely seen onstage through Majumdar’s manipulation of the codified hand gestures of *bharatanatyam*. Meena and Kalyani Aunty are the audience’s guides through their complicated relationships with culture, sexuality, and belonging.

The play opens with Kalyani Aunty taking centre stage, in the intricate traditional dress of a *bharatanatyam* performer. The stage directions state,

Kalyani Aunty is sitting on her stool with a tray of flowers in her lap and her ankles adorned in dancer bells. She performs a *bharatanatyam* hand-gesture series, silently narrating the Fishperson Story. She ends with the gesture for “one with eyes like a fish.” Kalyani Aunty lifts the tray from her lap, performs a short prayer towards the Natraj statue behind her, and then turns to the audience (Majumdar 6).

Meena and Kalyani Aunty then take us through the last months of Meena’s graduation year, after which Meena is convinced she will have a “Summer of Meena and Buddy,” referring to the popular boy at school she adores, despite the fact that he doesn’t know her name, whereas Kalyani Aunty is convinced they will both enjoy a “Summer of

Meena and Kalyani Aunty,” in which the two will travel to India together so that Meena might perform the *Nimbooda*, or “Lemon-Lime Lover Dance,” at competition.

Throughout the one-hour journey, Meena takes us through these last months of high school describing encounters with Candis Paskis, the most popular girl in school, whom Meena describes as “skinny and pretty and BLOND!”, and Buddy Cain, the object of her unrequited affections (Majumdar 28). Throughout these encounters, the tensions between Kalyani Aunty and Meena rise, until the final scene of the play: Grad 2013⁶. Candice Paskis, head of the Grad committee, continuing in her appropriative vein that we have come to know throughout the play, decides on a “Starlight Taj Mahal” theme for the big event (Majumdar 45). In this final scene, Meena is overwhelmed by the isolation she feels both in seeing her peers “dressed the way I am all year round! Like a bindi... or a henna tattoo... or some weird scarf in colours no Indian person would be caught dead wearing” and in being the only girl in her social circle to be at the event without a date (Majumdar 45). In a moment of panic, she steps outside for some air, where she happens upon Buddy and Candice in the midst of ending their relationship. When Candice storms off, Meena attempts to console the weeping Buddy by performing the *Nimbooda* dance for him, blurting out at the end, “I LOVE YOU! YOU’RE MY LEMON-LIME LOVER,” to which Buddy responds with silence (Majumdar 48). Retreating dejectedly into the dance hall, Meena finds herself approaching Kalyani Aunty, who has been chaperoning the event. Meena sheepishly asks if she can still travel to India with Kalyani Aunty and take part in the dance competition, to which Kalyani Aunty says yes, and tells Meena the following story. Kalyani Aunty, then:

⁶ In British Columbia, “Grad” refers not to the cap-and-gown graduation ceremony at the end of high school, but rather to a formal dance at the end of the year, similar to Prom.

Is suddenly transported to her basement dance studio. She sits in the same place she did at the beginning of the play and uses the same Indian hand-gesture series she used at the top of the show.

Kalyani Aunty: See. Poor fisherman go home to his beautiful wife and say, “Not one single edible fish left in river! Only fish I find was this one! With red eye! Skin so oily, but eyes good! You’ll get at least six gold pieces at market.”

Fisherman’s beautiful wife about to cut, but then great voice come from fish. “Please! I beg you! Don’t cut me up!”

Fisherman’s beautiful wife ask, “How can you be happy being so undesirable?”

Fish say, “I not be happy if I was desired, because then my life would be so much shorter. See. I no look like other fishes. All fishermen throw me back into river because I so ‘undesirable.’ So I keep swimming, keep seeing new parts of river. Please. Let this useless creatures live happy in river!”

Fisherman’s beautiful wife look into fish eye. Then that night she run to the riverside with fish and look at her reflection in water. She looked at her beautiful locks of hair, her moon-shape face, and feel empty inside. But then! Look at fish with oily skin and red eye? And feel *joy* like she never feel before.

Fisherman’s beautiful wife look back at house, but then, *suddenly*, find herself turned into fish! Swimming in river! Swimming... Right next to fish? With red eye.” (Majumdar 51-52)

With this image, the play ends just as it began, with Meena’s journey coming full circle, and our understanding of “Fish Eyes” coming to fruition.

The Encounter: Locating Culture

To reiterate Mitra’s definition of New Interculturalism, and its delineation from its predecessors, she locates the encounter of culture within the body. This embodied nature of the encounter of cultures, however, is not an exercise in essentialism. It is not an embodied encounter that takes place by virtue of one’s cultural identity, but is one that

takes place within the body as a result of the practices encountered through the navigation through one's culture. Majumdar's extensive training in classical Indian dance constitutes the process of "acculturation" described by Barba and Savarese. They define this term as the "utilization of specific body techniques which are separate from those used in daily life" (190). They specifically use the example of classical Indian dancers, as well as traditional Japanese styles of performance, mimes, and modern dancers, describing them as having undergone a process of "acculturation, imposed from the outside" (190). This intensive method of training is aimed at distorting and reinventing the quotidian or natural ways of behavior – essentially, a process of the defamiliarization of behaviour, which "activates the pre-expressive level" (190).

However, in borrowing this terminology and applying it to Mitra's new interculturalism, it serves to locate the intercultural encounter within the body. This is the case with Anita Majumdar, whose embodiment of intercultural encounter can be seen as a result of her extensive training both in classical Indian dance and as an actor, employing the dramaturgical techniques of solo performance. Majumdar has extensive training in both types of performance, with over fifteen years of classical Indian dance training under her belt, and significant actor training by way of both the University of British Columbia and the National Theatre School. Furthermore, respective to the intercultural encounter found within the performance itself, the presence and use of the acculturative movements described in Barba and Savarese are evident throughout the piece. The character of Meena describes the omnipresent – and almost insidious – role that Indian dance plays within her life:

Meena: I love being an Indian dancer! And the questions about “the dot” NEVER get old! I LOVE how Indian dance gets into everything I do! For example, brushing my teeth!

Meena pulls out a toothbrush and dances a short but impressive classical Indian phrase in front of the bathroom mirror. She ends by spitting out the toothpaste into the bathroom sink in front of her (8).

This statement that “Indian dance gets into everything I do!” though stated by the fictional character of Meena is telling of the embodied intercultural encounter inhabited by Majumdar herself.

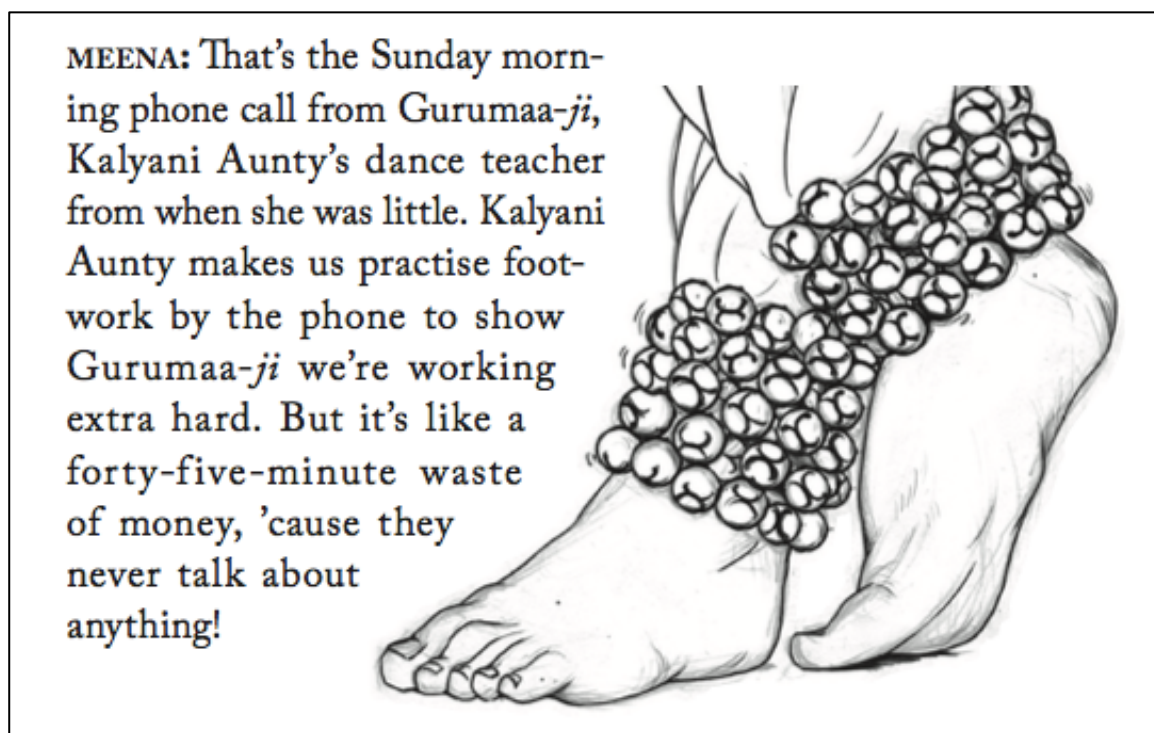


Figure 7 – An illustration of the *ghungrus* or traditional ankle bells worn by Majumdar in performance. Illustrated by Maria Nguyen.⁷

Just as the character of Meena and the embodiment of Majumdar's process of acculturation both exist at the intersection of cultures, so too does the dramaturgical

⁷ Majumdar, Anita. *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*. Playwrights Canada Press, 2016. Illustration by Maria Nguyen. Image: Page 13.

structure of *Fish Eyes* as a whole. The “Fish Eyes” myth is used as the framing device, beginning the play with Kalyani Aunty’s silent rendition of the “Fishperson Story,” and ending with her verbalization of it. This juxtaposition of traditional Indian mythology and the Western dramaturgical device of solo performance is very telling of the intercultural encounter within the work. As Majumdar flits between characters, in addition to the physical and vocal differences between Meena and Kalyani Aunty, Majumdar often stamps her feet on the ground to indicate the switch between characters. This stamping of the feet, characteristic of many types of classical Indian dance, and very present in *bharatanatyam*, would sound the *ghungrus* (ankle bells, seen in Figure 7) worn in performance. The stamping of the feet – a staple in traditional Indian dance, which bears its roots from the militaristic influence on the movements – is a clear example of code-mixing between the dramaturgy of one-person shows, and *bharatanatyam*, and illustrative of the intercultural encounter found in *Fish Eyes*.

Intention: Shedding Otherness and the Common Canadian Paradox

The next step within the four-point model of analysis is the intention. This step resists the essentialist notion that artists whose cultural identities exist at the intersections of various cultures are inescapably predestined to create artistic works located within those same intersections. It also helps to address one of the areas of inquiry of this thesis, in that the model moves the intercultural project away from the Imperialistic pole and towards the Collaborative pole, found on Lo and Gilbert’s continuum of intercultural practice. In this way, it resists hierarchical structures (in terms of the source and target cultures) and resists essentialism.

In order to ascertain the intention of the work, I ask the following questions: Does the artistic work actively engage in questions of identity? Does the performance as aesthetic object actively inquire into questions of interculturalism? Simply put: is an intercultural aesthetic the intention?

In Majumdar's case, the answer is yes. In the preface to the published manuscript of *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*, Rupal Shah (producer at Nightswimming Theatre) states,

In *Fish Eyes*, Meena's desperate desire to shed her 'otherness' while simultaneously depending on her South Asian cultural identity to help create her sense of self is a common Canadian paradox (Shah xiiv).

This tension between the protagonist's desire to eschew her position as "other" to comfortably blend in within the straightjacket of high school to which Quirt alludes, and the necessity with which she clings to that very position in order to define her identity as a person, is the explicit subject matter of the performance. This paradox is ripe territory for Majumdar's exploration within *Fish Eyes*. In her playwright's message for the house program at the 2014 double-bill performance of *Fish Eyes* and its sequel *Boys With Cars* at the Great Canadian Theatre Company, Majumdar states,

As an actor at the National Theatre School of Canada, I was told year after year that while I was a 'good' actor, I was a 'great' dancer... A lot of people assume that Meena is me. That I too struggled to find a balance between my Indian dance life and my Canadian school life. But what's closer to the truth is that these plays run parallel to my pursuit of defining what 'Canadian' looks like to me ("Playwright's Message")

Majumdar explicitly states that all three plays within *The Fish Eyes Trilogy* are an exploration of the ever-changing definition(s) of being Canadian. Her exploration of the "Common Canadian Paradox" is the battleground for Meena's continuous struggle for

identity. After admitting to the audience that her romance with Buddy is merely a fiction in her own head,

MEENA abruptly stops her footwork when she realizes what she's just revealed. She buries her face in her hands.

Meena: This is so embarrassing! I really want to be normal, and I'm going to be! Grad 2013! The last dance of the year! I know this is my big chance! That's why I'm gonna wear this tight red dress... with SHOES! And I'm gonna look just as pretty as Nineteen Ninety-Four Miss World Turned Bollywood Superstar AISHWARYA RAI from her summer of '99 blockbuster hit movie *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam!* Everyone's gonna notice. Buddy Cain's gonna notice. (Majumdar 14)

In this passage, Meena's desperation to fit in, or "be normal," is made plain. However, this desired ability to fit in is still steeped in her wish to shed her otherness, and her contradictory inability to define her identity without it. Her desire to attend Grad 2013 with all the trappings of high-school-graduation clichés, such as the red dress, and fancy shoes – or shoes at all – is still entrenched in her own adopted obsession with the famous Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai. This obsession with Rai came about organically, through Meena's own love of Bollywood movies, but it has also been thrust upon her, as she states earlier "some people even think we kinda look alike?" (Majumdar 11). Her desire to fit in operates within the contradiction of the "common Canadian paradox" described by Shah, and is still predicated on the validation she may be afforded by way of Buddy Cain: the ultimate representation of Canadian normalcy, as Meena sees it.

Meena's desire for Buddy cannot be separated from her struggle to both fit in, and (comfortably) define herself and her culture. In her fantasies about Buddy, Meena describes that "he's in love with me, even though we come from such different, different

worlds” (Majumdar 15). The impossibility that Meena feels in making this dream come true is seen in a pivotal scene when, in the company of Kalyani Aunty, Meena spots Buddy and Candice kissing at the local Punjabi Market – all while Candice is sporting an appropriative bindi and henna, to boot. Meena insists that she and Kalyani Aunty leave the market immediately, and when Kalyani Aunty presses her further, Meena confesses the reason for her sudden desire to depart. This prompts Kalyani Aunty to recount her own tale of unrequited love for a white man, back in India, when a British architect by the name of Victor (whom she calls “Vicky”) left her waiting for an unfulfilled promise of marriage, instead choosing to return to England and marry a white woman. In a fit of rage, spurred on by the sight of Buddy and Candice, Meena declares to Kalyani Aunty that she is quitting dance, yelling “I QUIT! I’M NOT DANCING ANYMORE!! I’M NOT GOING TO INDIA IN YOUR STUPID DANCE COMPETITION!” (Majumdar 30).

The intention of the character and the playwright, in this sense, are one and the same; they are caught in this paradoxical relationship between the desire to eschew one’s cultural identity (for the sake of perceived normalcy), and the inability to carve out one’s identity at all, without one’s culture holding an important stake therein. Therefore, the intention is clear: both in the playwright’s commentary about *Fish Eyes*, and within the content of the play itself. The next step of the four-point model of analysis can then be deployed, and the negotiation between cultural aesthetic practices can then be investigated within *Fish Eyes*.

Negotiation: The Self-Referentiality of Gesture

As stated within my description of the four-point model, the “negotiation” refers to movement and exchange between cultural theatrical practices. In *Fish Eyes*, Majumdar engages in a negotiation between the techniques and conventions of *bharatanatyam* and the conventions and techniques of solo performance. Specifically within Majumdar’s performance, this negotiation of cultural aesthetics cannot be separated from the creation of meaning within the construction of the play. Majumdar uses *mudras*, a codified system of hand-gestures in *bharatnatyam* in order to construct the secondary characters within *Fish Eyes*. Up until now, I have largely discussed the performance through the characters of Meena and Kalyani Aunty, who are both fully inhabited by Majumdar, through whole-body physicality changes and the use of vocal mask, when they appear onstage. The secondary characters in the performance, however, whose appearances are fleeting, come by way of a different dramatic construction, which calls into question the relationship between materiality and semioticity within the performance.

In order to discuss Majumdar’s use of this relationship, I take my cue from Erika Fischer-Lichte, who postulates that members of the “historical avant-garde” concerned themselves with the creation of meaning (and sometimes eschewed the creation of meaning) by investigating “the relationship between materiality and semioticity and between effect and meaning” (*The Transformative Power of Performance* 139). She states,

Fundamentally, [theatre and performance artists] do not think of materiality and semioticity or effect and meaning as mutually exclusive... Instead they persistently question how these categories relate to one another and take multiple approaches to proving these relationships in every performance (139-140).

In turn, Majumdar does as these avant-garde artists did by questioning the relationship between materiality, semioticity, effect and meaning, through her use of *mudras*. In *bharatnatyam*, there are approximately fifty-five *mudras*, divided into *asamyukta hastas* (single-hand gestures), and *samyukta mudras* (double-hand gestures). They can signify characters, events, things, ideas, and concepts ranging anywhere from *bherunda* for “a pair of birds” to *chatura* for “clever and witty” (Banerji 96). In *Fish Eyes*, Majumdar uses these codified hand gestures to construct and present the secondary characters onstage, thus engaging in a process of creation of new meaning.

The participation of the audience in the creation of meaning, and their relative ignorance of the *mudras* is imperative in this process. The original meaning of the *mudras* is not integral to the aesthetic construction of the final performance, however the fact that they *do* bear an original meaning is. As Fischer-Lichte states,

Once perceived in their materiality, these isolated phenomena trigger a wealth of associations, ideas, thoughts, memories, and emotions in the perceiving subjects, enabling them to make connections to various other phenomena. They are evidently perceived as signifiers which refer to diverse ideas and contexts and can be related to a range of signifieds... This technique does not de-semanticize but highlight the gestures’ self-referentiality. A gesture therefore means exactly what it performs; it is perceived as a movement (*The Transformative Power of Performance* 140).

Here, in the aesthetic negotiation taking place within *Fish Eyes*, I argue that Majumdar places the *mudras* in a position of self-referentiality. The *mudras*, devoid of their original meaning, yet recognizable in that they bear *an* original meaning, refer only to themselves as *mudras*, for the audience largely (and admittedly, assumedly) ill-versed in the traditions of *bharatanatyam*. Simply put, when these *mudras* are first presented to

the audience, it is clear that the hand-gestures mean *something*, but it is not clear just what it is that they mean.

In exploiting the *mudras*' self-referentiality, Majumdar places them in a position where they are open to being imbued with meaning throughout the course of the performance. It is here, where I move from the third step of the model to the fourth: emergence.

Emergence: The Semiotic Syncretism of *Mudras* in *Fish Eyes*

Building on Fischer-Lichte's postulations of self-referentiality, I now turn to Christopher Balme's notion of theatrical syncretism to discuss the creation of meaning through intercultural exchange as constructed in *Fish Eyes*. The notion of the body and gestures as a vehicle for semiotic meaning is iterated by Balme in *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, specifically within the section "Dance and Body Language." Therein, he articulates that "the actor's body functions as a dominant sign vehicle for performance," which is clearly the case in *Fish Eyes* (221). Balme also stresses that "the kinetic art of syncretic theatre is by no means exclusively a danced art," and goes on to impress the importance of "kinetic codes" as tools for syncretic deployment upon the reader (221). He describes their varied phenotypic attributes: "kinetic codes can range from sign language, to mime, to dance, to stylized, sculptured movement" (Balme 221). Using the example of an indigenous sign language, Balme states,

Aboriginal sign languages are neither language-supportive in the way most gesture is, nor limited in terms of their vocabulary. On the contrary, they are characterized by complete semantic openness independent of linguistic signs, meaning that they can generate a potentially infinite number of messages (223).

In Balme’s example, the indigenous sign language used in performance is “used as a conscious strategy to incorporate a traditional communicative code into the conventions of Western theatrical realism... [And] above and beyond its function as a means of communication the sign language takes on another signifying function” (Balme 223-226). In Balme’s example, the sign language, which already bears its own code of meaning outside the realm of the performance, is then brought *into* performance, where the code is combined with the meaning-creation process of the performance itself to create a new, syncretic, code of meaning. This is precisely the process deployed by Majumdar in *Fish Eyes*.

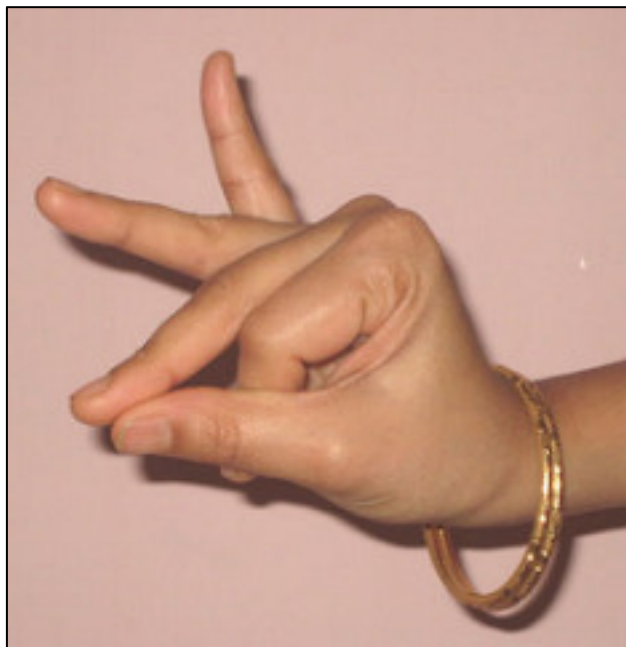


Figure 8: *Bhramara Mudra*, or Candice Paskis⁸

⁸ Figures 8, 9 and 10: “*Asamyukta Hasta* or Single Hand Gesture.” *Online Bharatanatyam*. 2017. www.onlinebharatanatyam.com/2008/01/03/asamyukta-hasta-or-single-hand-gesture/. Accessed 8 August 2017.

Majumdar does so in three specific instances, in ways that present secondary or tertiary characters onstage. Majumdar uses the *bhramara mudra* (traditionally signifying a bee) to denote Candice Paskis, the *sikhara mudra* (traditionally signifying a hero or heroism) to represent Buddy Cain, and the *trishula mudra* (traditionally signifying a trident) to play Candice Paskis’ friends, or her “Yes Men”, as she calls them – all pictured below.

In performance, each of these *mudras* is reassigned meaning – coming to signify each of the characters indicated above, and that creation of meaning can only take place in the encounter between performer and audience: in the syncretic combination of the specific *mudras* and the dramatic structure of solo performance. However, I argue that this process differs from the usual process of the creation of semantic meaning onstage, in that though the audience might be unaware of the original signification of each *mudra*, they *are aware* that each *mudra* does in fact carry with it an already codified meaning, and that that meaning is being twisted and re-invented within Meena’s storytelling.



Figure 9: *Sikhara Mudra*, or Buddy Cain

For instance, Candice Paskis is represented by the *bhramara mudra* (seen in Figure 8), signifying a bee. Those in the audience who might have prior knowledge of the use of *mudras* in *bharatanatyam* may already be aware of this meaning, and can therefore draw their own connotative connections between the image of a bee and the skinny, blond, culturally insensitive antagonist that is Candice Paskis. However, for the majority of the audiences, say, at the Great Canadian Theatre Company's presentation of the piece, that knowledge will be unavailable to them prior to the curtain's rising. Therefore, when they are presented with the *bhramara mudra*, they know that the clearly defined hand-gesture bears some weight within the movement vocabulary that Majumdar is constructing, but that the meaning they are being given, and indeed are helping to create, can only be constructed once the audience is aware that the traditional meaning of the symbol is being eschewed for the meaning created in performance. For example, in *Fish Eyes* the *bhrama mudra* (the hand gesture with the index finger curled into one's palm, with the other fingers fanned out behind it) does not signify a bee, as it traditionally does. Rather, it signifies the blond-haired, bindi-wearing, boyfriend-stealing, Starlight Taj Mahal-loving, Candice Paskis.

To this effect, Majumdar's use of the *mudras* is analogous to the use of indigenous sign languages studied by Balme. He states:

“Above and beyond its function as a means of communication, the sign language takes on another signifying function. It stands here metonymically for several larger complexes. The signifier ‘sign language’ has several referents” (Balme 226).



Figure 10: *Trishula Mudra*, or The Yes Men

Balme lists those “several referents,” enumerating the destruction of such encoded kinetic languages through colonization, the resulting necessity for translation in performance for a Western audience, the counter-discursive nature of the selection of which signs to incorporate in performance, and the complexity of the choice and process to share this indigenous sign language to a wider audience (Balme 226). He goes on to impress the ability of codified kinetic languages such as indigenous sign language, in his own example, or the use of *mudras*, in the case of *Fish Eyes*, to be “one of the cultural texts on which indigenous [and intercultural] dramatists can and do draw to create a syncretic dramatic form. It is important to stress that sign language, because by definition it depends on the body, draws attention to the body as a semiotic instrument” (Balme 226).

In *Fish Eyes*, meaning is created syncretically, through the use of *mudras*, with repetition and the establishment of patterns over the time of the performance. Majumdar

takes the already encoded sign system of the *mudras* in *bharatanatyam*, which other than bearing the significance of a clearly recognizable cultural code, is imbued with meaning through the encounter with the audience.

Conclusion

In addressing the major research questions of this thesis, my analysis of *Fish Eyes* serves a good place to start. Within this study, I am investigating the rigour of my four-point model of analysis into the creation of new meaning within intercultural performance. Moving through the four steps in Majumdar's piece, the analysis begins with Majumdar's embodied encounter of cultures (taken from Mitra's writings on the subject) and moves to her self-stated intention to inquire into that encounter within *Fish Eyes*, as well as the dealings of that same subject within the play itself. The negotiation takes place between Majumdar's knowledge and use of *mudras* within performance, and exploiting their self-referentiality in the context of English Canadian solo performance, and the final emergence of new meaning takes place in Majumdar's creation of a codified sign-language in which specific *mudras* take on the meaning and signification of the secondary characters within the plot of *Fish Eyes*.

In terms of the creation of new meaning, Majumdar's ability to do so is quite clear, especially when discussed through the lens of Fischer-Lichte's notions of self-referentiality and Balme's postulations on theatrical syncretism. Majumdar imbues an already existing sign system with new semantic meaning, creating the secondary characters onstage, along with the participation of the audience.

Chapter Three:

Acoustic Interculturalism and the Creation of Tonal Language in Tawiah

M'Carthy's *Obaaberima*

The second piece that serves as a case study in this thesis is *Obaaberima*, written and performed by Tawiah M'Carthy. The 2013 winner of Outstanding Production, Outstanding Sound Design/Composition, and Outstanding Lighting Design at the 2013 Dora Mavor Moore Awards in Toronto, *Obaaberima* was produced in residency at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. The show's title translates to "girlboy," and was directed by the now-artistic director of Buddies in Bad Times, Evalyn Parry, with music by multi-instrumentalist and composer, Kobena Aquaa-Harrison. The show follows the journey of its central character, Agyeman, from childhood and adolescence in Ghana, to adulthood in Canada, all while navigating the tumultuous waters of sexuality, gender, and race.

To situate *Obaaberima* within the larger context of Canadian English theatre, it is critical to locate it at the intersection between queer theatre and African-Canadian theatre. The history of queer theatre in Canada is often considered to have begun in 1967, with the premiere of John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, which is "usually considered to have introduced the taboo topic of homosexuality to Canadian Theatre" (Kerr vii). Though the presence of queer narratives and queer aesthetics in Canadian theatre began appearing in the 1960s, academic discourse on the subject developed much later, and it was "only in the mid-nineties that articles dealing with queer theatre pertaining to English Canadian scholars... [began] to appear" (Kerr vii). Queer theory, however, has become an indispensable tool in the academic discourse of theatre, and as David Savran states

“theatre is the queerest art [because of its ability to] disarticulate and disrupt identity” (70).

Commissioned by Buddies in Bad Times theatre, one of Canada’s leading queer theatre companies, *Obaaberima* participates in in the recent turn in discourse surrounding the queer theory, described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as “spin[ning] the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: [such as] the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and *other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses” (8-9). J. Paul Halferty describes the flexibility of the term queer in a similar fashion to the flexibility of my proposed model, stating, “Queer’s lack of definitional value positioned it as a method to address and satisfy (at least theoretically) the various problems and complexities that had been experienced in gay and lesbian organizations in the 1970s and 1980s by performing a broad-based deconstruction of identity general, and sexual identity specifically” (127).

In its intersection with race, however, Kerr notes that historically, there has been an imbalance between theatre by “gay white men and all other sexual and racial minorities” (xvii). She insists on the need to make “queer theatre that takes responsibility for the ways in which our sexualities/nationalities continue to be produced inside the prevailing assimilationist discourses of consumer capitalism” (xvii). Essentially, there has been a skewed perception of what kind of queer theatre is “permissible,” but that is slowly starting to change, with companies such as Buddies in Bad Times, in Toronto, the Frank Theatre, in Vancouver, and with creations like *Obaaberima*.

Intersecting with the tradition of African-Canadian theatre in Canada, *Obaaberima* draws on an inheritance which debuted with Djanet Sears’ *Afrika Solo* in

1987. Jacqueline Petropoulos states that *Afrika Solo* “stands apart as the first theatrical text to self-consciously explore the question of how African Canadian identity fits into the diasporic imagination” (105). Tawiah M’Carthy follows in the same vein, and continues the same work as other artists like Trey Anthony, and companies such as Obsidian Theatre (Toronto), Cahoots Theatre Projects (Toronto), b current (Toronto), and Black Theatre Workshop (Montreal). These artists and companies explore the idea that black identity, black Canadian identity, and African-Canadian identity are “always under construction” (Walcott xv). Notably, performativity is a “central strategy” in creating African-Canadian identity, and “black musical expression... remains the most important form of African diasporic cultural exchange”, according to Petropoulos – both of which are explored at length in *Obaaberima*, and help to reinforce its location at the critical intersection of queer and African-Canadian theatre in Canada (107).

The Four-Point Model and *Obaaberima*

In applying my four-point model to *Obaaberima*, the focus of this case study will be on the use of sound, music, and aural objects within the performance. Though billed as a one-person show, and fitting dramaturgically into the tradition of solo performance, the interchange and exchange of music and sound between M’Carthy (the principal performer) and Aquaa-Harrison (the musician, visible – and of course, audible – throughout the performance) is a central feature of the performance. It is my contention that this use of sound is the medium through which much of the intercultural exchange takes place, and is the method through which M’Carthy is able to create new meaning within the performance. As *Obaaberima* moves through the four points of my model of analysis, it becomes clear that the spoken text of the performance and its musical

elements fuse together and become indistinguishable halves of the whole of the show's aural presence. Throughout this process, I contend that M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison manage to imbue the English language with tonal qualities. This process is informed by the performance of music, and by the presence of non-translated Twi, and creates a performance language that is experienced both semiotically (as spoken English) and phenomenologically (as pitched). This is to say: that pitch is used while speaking in order to communicate meaning, and in this way the two performers create a new semantically loaded method of communication.

The Artist

Obaaberima's creator and principal performer, Tawiah M'Carthy is a Ghanaian-born, now Toronto-based theatre artist, having studied theatre at the York University conservatory program, graduating in 2006. M'Carthy has gone on to perform at the Summerworks Theatre Festival, the MT Space, with Suburbanbeast, and was the Artistic Director of TheNextEdition from 2010 – 2012 (“Artists: Tawiah M'Carthy”). After its successful run at Buddies in Bad Times, *Obaaberima* went on to be performed at the Cultch in Vancouver, and was programmed as part of the 2014-2015 season at the National Arts Centre, with M'Carthy himself also performing as a member of the 2014-2015 National Arts Centre English Theatre Ensemble. *Obaaberima's* description reads on the National Arts Centre's website as follows,

Coming out to yourself can be as hard as sharing it with others. Tawiah M'Carthy's captivating hero is caught between worlds – gay and straight, black and white, African and North American. Through storytelling, dance, and live music, *Obaaberima* (“girlboy”) chronicles young Agyeman's journey from confused childhood in Ghana to mature Canadian adulthood. M'Carthy explores sexuality and socialization in his

uniquely layered world, morphing effortlessly into the many characters he encounters. *Obaaberima* is a fulfilling and well-rounded emotional experience – funny, serious, sad and extremely moving (“Obaaberima”).

The Play

Originally conceived as a twelve-line poem written by M’Carthy in 2008, “in which a boy stands in his mother’s high heels and falls in love with how he looks”, the poem was then brought to the Buddies in Bad Times Young Creators Unit (M’Carthy “Interview”). Over the next few years, it was reworked into a full-length solo show, with the directorial and dramaturgical help of Evalyn Parry. The resulting dramatic, heartwarming, and searing story of one man’s journey across an ocean, and finally to discover himself, can be described as “a multidisciplinary production that relies on music, song and dance to tell the tale of a young man’s journey into his outer and inner worlds” (“Interview: Tawiah M’Carthy”).

Though *Obaaberima* is a solo performance, it also features the live musical stylings of Kobena Aquaa-Harrison. With performance elements of storytelling, movement, a coming of age story, and of a memory play, *Obaaberima* opens with its principle character, Agyeman, in prison, just before his release – from the sentence he is serving for a crime that is not yet known to the audience. Agyeman frames the story using the traditional Ghanaian ceremony of an “Out-dooring,” in which a newborn baby is kept at home for seven days. If the infant survives the first seven days of life, it is then given an “Out-dooring” ceremony, in which it is presented to the community, and (most importantly) named. Agyeman tells the audience that they are there for his second Out-dooring; he has survived his period of isolation, and will soon be re-named and re-presented to the world. He then takes us back on the journey that leads to his

imprisonment. The story begins during Agyeman's time as a young boy in Ghana, struggling with his sexuality, and experiencing his first romantic encounters with people of the same sex. It then follows him on his eventual journey to Canada as a closeted law student, and to the eventual violent street-fight (brought on by a homophobic slur) that landed him in prison. Throughout the story, Agyeman slides into his alter ego, the beautiful woman Sibongelé, and the tale concludes with Agyeman/Sibongelé walking out of the prison, inviting the audience with the words "watch me walk," to witness the ceremonial rebirth, and the return to the image of a boy, walking in borrowed shoes, who "stands in his mother's high heels and falls in love with how he looks" (M'Carthy "Interview").

The Encounter: Living in Exile at Home

In contrast to the two other artists being studied within this thesis, Tawiah M'Carthy is a first-generation immigrant whose relationship to the intercultural encounter differs from that of Majumdar and Khan, who are both second-generation immigrants. M'Carthy underwent his intercultural encounter by way of the experience of emigrating from Ghana to Canada at age 14 ("Telling Stories"). This different position occupied by M'Carthy can more accurately be described as an "artist in exile," as described by Meerzon in her book *Performing Exile, Performing Self*. Therein, she describes the condition of the exilic artist as one living in "a permanent journey in time, space, and language" (2). This permanent journey, and the artistic preoccupations that so often accompany it, however, can still be located under the umbrella of Mitra's New Interculturalism. To Mitra, the intercultural encounter is an embodied one – it is of little

importance whether that embodiment comes by way of the lived experience of the first- (and exilic) or second-generation artist.

In looking at M'Carthy's oeuvre (detailed below), his work often engages in the existence of "exilic children." Meerzon describes these subjects as children who "exist between several worlds – cultural, political, and generational – so they rebel against the conventions of many discourses" (Meerzon 218). Characters such as these often appear in M'Carthy's work – young people who are navigating the demanding tensions of the intercultural experience, told through a coming-of-age narrative. Elzbieta Rokosz-Piejko in "Child in Exile" similarly states that exilic children are "torn between the urge to remain faithful to old friends and old ideas of what a place or a friend should be, and the need to belong... the feeling of Otherness can be entertaining, because it makes a person feel in a way exceptional and more 'interesting' but the identity of 'the Other' is very disquieting for a teenager." (Rokosz-Piejko 178-179). That exilic condition is the pathway by which M'Carthy's intercultural encounter takes place. Again, not to reify any essentialist arguments that M'Carthy's experience as a Ghanaian-Canadian artist necessarily defines his self or his work as intercultural, but this position is described succinctly by Meerzon as one "for whom the hardship of exile is both an existential ordeal and an opportunity to exercise their creative abilities (*Performing Exile 2*)".

This is the position occupied by M'Carthy, and this 'opportunity to exercise [his] creative abilities' is clearly present in his work. As mentioned above, M'Carthy's work as a theatre creator often engages the same questions of intercultural identity, race, gender, and sexuality found in *Obaaberima*. This artistic preoccupation is telling of the

importance of M'Carthy's own intercultural encounter, and is evidence of the next part of the analytical model: intention.

Intention: Caught Between Worlds

Here, I ask the same questions of M'Carthy's work that I did of Majumdar's in the previous chapter: Does the artistic work actively engage in questions of identity? Does the performance as aesthetic object actively inquire into questions of interculturalism? Simply put: is an intercultural aesthetic the intention?

The evidence of an answer of "yes" is clear both in *Obaaberima* and in M'Carthy's oeuvre as a whole. M'Carthy first rose to prominence in 2008, with a piece at the SummerWorks Festival entitled *The Kente Cloth*. Written and performed by M'Carthy, *The Kente Cloth*'s narrative centres around the traditional Ghanaian coming-of-age ceremony, which ushers a young person from boyhood into manhood. "By wrapping [the kente cloth] around his body like a long skirt and draping the rest over his shoulders, [a man] can take pride of place [sic] in his community" (Citron "Summerworks 2008"). Using this traditional ceremony as the framing device for the plot of this first major performance clearly indicates the intention to actively engage in questions of cultural identity. This same intention reappears in *Obaaberima*, and in M'Carthy's newer works: *Blue Bird* and *Black Boys*. The former was programmed into Kitchener-Waterloo's MT Space (short for Multicultural Theatre Space) theatre in 2016. Though it was only programmed at the MT Space in 2016, *Blue Bird* has been in development for over four years. Described in the Waterloo Region Record as "intercultural, interdisciplinary performance art," *Blue Bird* features M'Carthy in the role of Kwame, a Ghanaian schoolteacher, and Brad Cook, in the role of Will, the son of

Canadian Mennonite missionaries, growing up in Ghana (de Groot). Years later, Cook's character returns to Ghana after the death of his father, and reconnects with M'Carthy's character. Director Anne-Marie Donovan describes the characters' journeys as exploring "the meaning of reconciliation and forgiveness, memory and myth, fathers and sons, what it means to 'become a man,' colonialism and race and how they impact us" (de Groot).

Most recently, M'Carthy's inquiry into the Ghanaian-Canadian experience, can be seen in his play *Black Boys*, which has been programmed into the upcoming 2017-2018 season at Buddies in Bad Times – the same theatre where *Obaaberima* was originally developed and commissioned. The play, which features three perspectives on the experience of queer black men in Canada (one Ghanaian, one biracial, and one from North America), is billed as "a raw, intimate, and timely exploration of queer male Blackness" ("Black Boys"). Created by M'Carthy and collaborator-performers Stephen Jackman-Torkoff and Thomas Olajide,

Black Boys is created from the lives of three Black men seeking a deeper understanding of themselves, of each other, and of how they encounter the world. As they explore their unique identities on stage, they subvert the ways in which gender, sexuality, and race are performed ("Black Boys").

Taken together, M'Carthy's oeuvre clearly demonstrates an intention in investigating the position he occupies as a queer exilic artist.

That position is just as thoroughly explored in *Obaaberima*, through the plot and its conflicts, as well as its use of movement and scenography. In its plot, *Obaaberima* demonstrates the tension that Agyeman feels being caught between two worlds, and intentionally engages in these questions most starkly after Agyeman's arrival in Canada. He says:

Agyeman: I spend most of my time in the library, hiding from conversations that have me repeating everything I say. I am now “Agyeman, the black African”... The one who speaks with an accent. I become quiet, afraid to speak: ashamed to be seen as “Other”.

(mimicking another voice) Where do you come from?

Ghana... No no no, not Guyana, *Ghana*.

Some treat me differently, every so often interpreting my tone as idiocy. Some, in the attempt not to offend me, treat me like a discovery on The Discovery Channel.

(mimicking another voice) Do you have elephants in your backyard? Do you eat monkeys? Do you know how to throw a spear? Do you have a big...?

I like to ignore them. If I don't see them, they don't see me.⁹

This feeling of being Othered, being unseen, is present in the first half of Agyeman's journey, in terms of his sexuality being taboo in his native Ghana, and in the second half of his journey, as being the “black African... the one who speaks with an accent.” Upon Agyeman's graduation from law school, we see him working in a law firm, performing his role of “successful lawyer” through a veil of performed whiteness:

Agyeman: Come on in, have a seat. *Steffie, I'm in a meeting, please hold all my calls.* It was a pleasure. I will see *you* at the golf course. *Steffie, I'm gone for the day.*

M'Carthy couples this new, stiffened way of speaking with a new, stiffened way of holding his body, all while wearing an all-too-wide smile. This repression of the self, both as a sexual being and as the racial Other, present in the plot of *Obaaberima* is indicative of the intention to actively engage in questions of identity. This intention is

⁹ Dialogue from the performance of *Obaaberima* has been transcribed by the author from an archival recording of the production, obtained via Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, and recorded in 2012.

also evidenced by the stylized body movements of M'Carthy and through the scenographic choices made in performance. M'Carthy's body movements run the gamut between comically stylized Western dancing (during a scene in which Agyeman finds himself in a club, cruising for homosexual intercourse on the "down-low") and the beautifully stylized traditional dancing that M'Carthy performs as Sibongelé in moments of physical and sexual intimacy.

Lastly, the intention to engage in questions of identity that come with traversing an ocean can be seen within the scenography, specifically the lighting of *Obaaberima*. Stark boxes of light often delineate specific spaces in Agyeman's journey, such as his home, Nanosé's home and Opéin's shop (the domains of two secondary characters, whose roles in Agyeman's journey are detailed below). Later, however, they come to dictate the divide between his Ghanaian homeland and his found homeland of Canada.

Throughout all these layers, M'Carthy's intention to engage in questions of intercultural identity is clearly present. This brings us to the next stage of the four-step model: negotiation.

Negotiation: Acoustic Interculturalism

In my analysis of *Obaaberima*, the intercultural negotiation (that is to say the movement and exchange between cultural theatrical practices) upon which I will focus is to do with sound, music, and the aural quality of the performance. As Marcus Cheng Chye Tan points out in *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance*, the focus of academic analysis of performance (not only when discussing interculturalism, but generally) has often been heavily weighted on the visual aspects of performance, despite the fact that "music, sound and song in intercultural performance are consequently

integral texts, actants that assist in the construction of the culturally kaleidoscopic *mise en scène*” (22).

A good place to start is always at the beginning, so I turn to Tan for a definition of music, which he supplies as follows,

Music [is] here defined as the organized sounds occurring in a temporal sequence and expressed in terms of pitch, melody and harmony, rhythm (tempo and metre) and tonal quality (timbre, articulation, dynamics and texture), constitute the *mise en scène* either as essential and composite to the narratives or as insertions or interludes (49).

It is my contention that the musical elements in *Obaaberima* are not insertions or interludes at all, but rather are essential and composite to the narrative – as Tan puts it. As mentioned earlier, the music onstage is played live by multi-instrumentalist Kobena Aquaa-Harrison. Aquaa-Harrison’s presence may not constitute a second character or actor in the dramaturgical sense of the word, since the music does not necessarily advance the plot of *Obaaberima*, nor is Aquaa-Harrison an agent of action within the performance, but the musical score throughout the performance undeniably accentuates the plot, emphasizes and articulates the many characters that M’Carthy inhabits, and Aquaa-Harrison’s position upstage centre, on a raised level, acts as a foil to M’Carthy’s physical presence in the downstage, lower level of the playing space.

It is important to note that Kobena Aquaa-Harrison’s musical stylings throughout the performance straddle both modern Western music and instrumentation as well as traditional Ghanaian music and instrumentation. In addition to Aquaa-Harrison’s music, M’Carthy’s singing, use of vocal mask and a tonal quality to his language, as well as a mixture between speaking English and Twi (a dialect of the Akan language, spoken in Ghana) also straddle that same distance between Canada and Ghana. To that effect,

M'Carthy's and Aquaa-Harrison's use of sound, music, and aural elements fit neatly into Tan's definition of the deployment of music in intercultural performance,

The emplacement, performance and juxtaposition of varying musical traditions – in an attempt at harmony both musical and dramaturgical – create a soundscape characteristic only of intercultural performances (50).

In characterizing certain musical elements as “Western” and others as “Ghanaian,” I will briefly address the fact that it is not my aim to pigeonhole or essentialize the use of these instruments as discretely belonging to one or the other. Rather, as Steven Spinner Terpenning states in his article “African Musical Hybridity in the Colonial Context,” identifying specific sounds, instruments, and modalities to specific geographies and cultures does not intend to reify any essentialisms, rather the “integration of elements associated with African and European musics suggests compatibility and challenges the geographic determinacy of stylistic references” (466). Here, my goal is the same: to investigate the way these seemingly discrete elements of musicality, can – and do – come together, in the context of M'Carthy's explicitly intended negotiation of intercultural musicality in *Obaaberima*.

The first way in which *Obaaberima* negotiates the counter-intuitive compatibilities between Western and Ghanaian musicalities is the fluidity with which the musical score switches between pentatonic and diatonic scales. In a manner of code-switching that almost mimics switching swiftly between languages, M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison flit between the two effortlessly. To briefly define these terms, a diatonic scale is the musical scale, comprised of seven musical pitches, which in turn includes five whole-tones and two semi-tones. It may sound most “natural” to the Western ear, and can be easily called to mind when imagining the phrase: “do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do”.

Contrastingly, a pentatonic scale, as its name suggests, is a scale with five notes, and may or may not have semi-tones. A pentatonic scale can be easily called to mind by imagining going up the five black keys in a piano's octave. In "Is the Pentatonic Universal? A few reflections on Pentatonism" Tran Van Khe muses on the often foreign or exoticised nature of the pentatonic scale, stating "a melody based on pentatonic structure always seems to be... 'exotic' to the average Western listener" (76).

Over the course of the duration of *Obaaberima*, Aquaa-Harrison scores the performance with various stringed, percussive, and wind instruments, some which are more typical of Ghanaian music, and some which are found more commonly in Western music. Additionally, he and M'Carthy both sing. In the case of both performers, they sing in both scales, and Aquaa-Harrison plays in both scales on the instruments, regardless of whether or not that instrument is more commonly correlated to either scale. This appearance of the diatonic scale on traditionally Ghanaian instruments (and conversely, the appearance of the pentatonic scale on traditionally Western instruments) mimics the real-life developments of Ghanaian traditional music, closer to the 1950s, when major musical shifts were taking place due to a growing international musical economy. In "Changing Traditions of Folk Music in Ghana," J.H. Nketia describes, the impact of "the West [as] perhaps most evident in the growing popularity of the diatonic scale among certain sections of communities in areas with pentatonic traditions, and in the enlargement of the harmonic ideas" (34). In this way, M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison are actively engaging in the negotiation between Western and Ghanaian cultural musical practices.

Similarly to the previous chapter on Anita Majumdar's *Fish Eyes*, in which I argued that when an audience member comes into contact with a codified sign system with which they are unfamiliar, they may not recognize the meaning with which that sign is previously imbued. They will, however, most likely recognize that it belongs to a system and has a meaning. Such is the case with the switching of scales mid-way through a musical phrase, or multiple times over a performance. Though an audience member who does not have an extensive musical vocabulary may not be able to explicitly identify that a shift in scale has taken place, the shift itself will be noticeable. A shift in scale is as prominent as a key change in a pop song. A key change in a pop song typically appears once, at most twice, as the shift, this moment of code-switching, produces a dramatic effect. In the case of the overall score of *Obaaberima* however, the switching between the diatonic and pentatonic scales happens so often and so frequently that the flurry of code-switching becomes part of the overall *mise en scène*. This negotiation between the two scales is prototypical of the "juxtaposition of varying musical traditions" described by Tan, which "create[s] a sound scape characteristic only of intercultural performance" (50).

Another way in which the intercultural negotiation takes place in the music of *Obaaberima* is in its use of musical instruments. Returning to Tan's definition of acoustic interculturalism ("the emplacement, performance and juxtaposition of varying musical traditions – in an attempt at harmony both musical and dramaturgical") the use of instruments in *Obaaberima* provides the dramaturgical harmony of the piece, achieved through music (50). It does so in two ways: the first is the divide between acoustic and electric instruments, with the first being reserved for use during Agyeman's time in

Ghana, and the second used only after his emigration to Canada. The second is the dedication of certain musical instruments to mark the voices of specific secondary characters.



Figure 11: A traditional wooden Gyil (when specific to Ghana) or Balafon/Marimba¹⁰

I will touch on the latter – the dedication of certain musical instruments to secondary characters in the section on Emergence – but in terms of the divide between acoustic and electric instruments, and the corresponding divide between Agyeman’s time in Ghana and his time in Canada, it is most apt, perhaps, to compare the following three moments. First, the aural qualities of the opening of the performance, second, the moment when Agyeman’s crossing to Canada occurs, and lastly, the final moments of the performance. When the play opens, the sounds of Aquaa-Harrison’s playing begins the

¹⁰ “Balafon.” *Stream Africa*. 2017. www.streamafrica.com/culture/the-balafon/. Accessed 8 August 2017.

performance off before the lights come up onstage. He plays a flurry of notes on the Gyil (also known as the Balafon or Marimba, pictured above in Figure 11), accented by stark percussion on a gourd drum and a gourd rattle. As the lights slowly come up, M'Carthy is revealed upstage centre, with Aquaa-Harrison (and his musical instruments) positioned on a second level directly above M'Carthy, behind what appear to be prison bars.

As the two are eventually illuminated, M'Carthy begins to sing in Twi as Aquaa-Harrison continues to score the moment with a simple syncopated percussive beat (a rhythm in which the non-dominant beat is stressed to create a temporary feeling of being “off-beat”) as M'Carthy approaches the audience, and different sections of the stage are illuminated (which, in turn, sets the tone for those different sections of the stage acting as different locations within the plot of *Obaaberima*). As M'Carthy approaches the audience (moving from upstage centre to downstage centre) the percussive underscore becomes more complex, with the sound of the Gyil, the gourd drum, and a metallic percussion instrument (either the striking of the rim of a snare drum, or a cowbell-like instrument) are all incorporated together in swift rapid-fire, with M'Carthy's vocalizing overtop. The music swells to a climax and suddenly stops, as M'Carthy strikes a pose, and introduces the character of Agyeman to the audience. This begins our journey into the world of *Obaaberima*.

Comparatively, mid-way through the play, when Agyeman arrives in Canada from Ghana, he says:

Agyeman: Eighteen years old, I fly from Accra's International Airport. I land in Canada on the 13th of October, 1998. It is cold. Very cold. And I am alone.

As Agyeman speaks, Aquaa-Harrison slides a guitar pick up and down the length of the strings on the electric guitar's neck, eliciting a tinny, metallic sound, reminiscent of

the sound of a plane's engine: almost like an electronic slide whistle. This marks the second chapter in Agyeman's journey, and it is also the first time that an electric/non-acoustic instrument is used onstage in *Obaaberima*. The cold, mechanical, and unfamiliar sound echoes Agyeman's feelings of isolation in this new land.

Finally, in the last moments of the performance, Aquaa-Harrison fades away, and we are left only with M'Carthy's voice as he speaks through the final moments of Agyeman's journey, before his new Out-Dooring ceremony. Finally coming to terms with this new self as "Obaaberima" (translating into "girlboy"), Agyeman asks the audience to "watch me walk," and walks towards upstage centre, towards freedom in this new self.

In comparing these three moments, it becomes clear that the use of electric instruments marks a clear turning point in Agyeman's journey, and is a dramaturgical tool deployed in the musical make-up of *Obaaberima*. Another telling example of this divide in instrumentation that plays a part in the intercultural negotiation of the play is the moment in which Agyeman meets his first homosexual romantic peer, Nanosé. Another young boy in Agyeman's village, the two boys first meet when Agyeman is delivering a parcel to Nanosé's house. Coming from inside the house is a faint tune to which Agyeman begins to sing along: "My Prerogative" by Britney Spears. What is notable about this moment, however, is that the melody is not conveyed through a recording, or a sample of the song. Rather, it is played by Aquaa-Harrison on the acoustic guitar – a far stretch from the heavily produced electronic pop instrumentation of the Spears song. This is a stark example of the relegation of certain instruments to certain geographic locations, in the plot of *Obaaberima*, with acoustic instruments indicating the location in Ghana,

and electronic instruments exclusively being reserved for use after Agyeman's crossing into Canada. This comprises the "harmony both musical and dramaturgical," that is necessary for acoustic interculturalism, described by Tan (50). Though, as stated earlier, the music played on the instruments varies in style, tradition, and scale, the reservation of the electric instruments for use exclusively after Agyeman's arrival in Canada marks a turning point, and M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison construct a dramaturgical journey in the deployment of the instruments themselves.

Following the structure of the four-step model of analysis, the encounter, intention and negotiation found in *Obaaberima* create a structure in which M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison are able to facilitate the emergence of what I argue to be a tonal use of language not usually seen (or, more specifically, heard) in English, and that tonal language (defined below) is at the intersection of sound as phenomenological and language as semiotic.

Emergence: Sounding Language

In *Acoustic Interculturalism*, Tan draws a sharp distinction between the phenomenological nature of sound and the semiotic nature of language. He touches upon the chasm between the two in describing his inability to accurately and appropriately describe music in writing,

Sound is distinctly a phenomenon, unlike a language which is a semiotic system and one that is... capable of interpreting another semiotic system... Sound, in nature, can then be said to exist as pre-symbolic, to adapt loosely Lacanian concepts, for it is what is instinctual and prior to the symbolic realm of representation and language (35-36).

However, my contention here is not that M'Carthy somehow bridges this gap entirely. Rather, I am arguing that the emergence (that comes by way of M'Carthy's

encounter, intention, and negotiation) gives way to a pseudo-tonal use of the English language, that can only be produced through and during the performance of *Obaaberima*. In this way, M’Carthy is able to arrive at the creation of new meaning by affecting a tonal use of the English language. This result is touched on in Roland Barthes’ “The Grain of the Voice” where he describes meeting within “the friction between music [and] language” (185). This friction is the meeting place in which M’Carthy manages to straddle the divide between phenomenology and semiotics.

A tonal language is one (such as Vietnamese, Mandarin, or in this case, Twi) whose comprehension and communication of meaning is dependent on “the ability to perceive pitch and relationships between different pitches” (Ngo et al. 125). For example, according to the entry for Twi in the Stanford Department of Linguistics’ encyclopedia of Languages of the World, the following are three different meanings for the word *papa*, depending on the pitch with which each syllable is pronounced (“Twi”):

<u>Word</u>	<u>Pitch</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<i>Pápá</i>	High-High	“Good”
<i>Pàpá</i>	Low-High	“Father
<i>Pàpà</i>	Low-Low	“Fan”

English, as the reader well knows, is not a tonal language, and differentiations in pitch are often used only to indicate sentiment, exclamation, or a question in speech; not to communicate semantic meaning. I am arguing, however, that M’Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison are able to achieve a pseudo-tonal use of the English language throughout *Obaaberima*, and in doing so, create a method of communicating new semantic meaning throughout the performance. M’Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison are able to imbue the

semiotic use of the English language with the phenomenological experience of pitch, bridging the gap between those two cognitive solitudes, and through this intercultural exchange, create a new way of communicating meaning through the aural qualities of *Obaaberima*.

M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison are able to do so over the course of the performance in a process that involves two steps: Priming and Presentation; and two methods: Call & Response and Construction of Characters. In the first step of the process, Priming, M'Carthy prepares the audience by speaking in Twi with no English translation supplied. In doing so, the audience is prepared, or primed, to receive language without being able to access to its semantic meaning. In other words, the audience is primed to receive language not as semiotic signifiers, but as aural objects. In the second step of the process, Presentation, the audience is presented with the tonally imbued use of English. Now that the audience has received language both as a signifier (English) and as an aural object (Twi), when English is spoken tonally, it can be received simultaneously as both. That is to say, it is received both semiotically and phenomenologically. This second step, the Presentation, occurs through two methods: Call & Response and Construction of Characters.

The first, Call & Reponse takes place between M'Carthy and Aquaa-Harrison. In this method, Aquaa-Harrison plays a melody on an instrument (or sings the melody), and M'Carthy repeats that melody, not through sung text, but through tonally imbued text. Finally, the other method in which the Presentation takes place is within the Construction of the secondary Characters of the play. Specific characters have specific sounds or instruments dedicated to them and inform their appearances onstage.

In unpacking these steps and methods it is important to call upon salient examples from the performance. To begin with Priming, a term taken here from Psychology, it can be defined as,

Priming is a nonconscious form of human memory concerned with perceptual identification of words and objects. It refers to activating particular representations or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task. For example, a person who sees the word 'yellow' will be slightly faster to recognize the word 'banana' ("Priming").

When discussing *Obaaberima*'s use of Priming, the first moments of the play again come in handy. These first crucial moments are our introduction not only to Agyeman, but to the world of *Obaaberima*: a world of in-betweens. For lack of a better word, in the musical "overture," M'Carthy's choice to speak only in Twi serves to acclimatize the audience to the reception of language not as a semiotic sign system, but as an aural object. This intention is clear in the way that the overture is structured. Starting off, as described above, with Aquaa-Harrison's percussive instrumentation, M'Carthy then joins in by voicing a long guttural moan, with his back to the audience. Then, turning to face us, M'Carthy repeats the moan again. Now, as he walks slowly upstage, the moan is then repeated twice in quick succession, and distinct vowels and consonants appear in a short, repeating pattern. The pattern increases in complexity, and it becomes clear (as the patterns of light described earlier appear onstage) that M'Carthy is speaking in language, not just in guttural moans. The audience can clearly recognize that he is speaking, but they are also explicitly aware that we are not meant to *understand what* he is saying. This slow build from a guttural moan, to vowels and consonants, to an (aurally) recognizable language, serves, in and of itself as a microcosm of the priming process. What I mean by that is that the audience begins in a place of non-understanding, is guided to a place of

recognition of a sign system (without access to its semantic meaning) and then comes to a place of *aural* understanding, though devoid of semantic meaning.

For the second step, Presentation, it manifests itself in the two methods of presentation: Call & Response and Construction of Characters. For the first, Call & Response, it is perhaps most clear during an encounter between Agyeman and Opéin, the local taylor and dress-maker in Agyeman's village. Agyeman begins to spend time in, and eventually work in, Opéin's shop as a way to escape the constant taunting and bullying he experiences at the hands of his classmates. Agyeman's peers incessantly jeer and ridicule him by calling him "Obaaberima" ("girlboy"), to the point where Agyeman one day seeks refuge in Opéin's shop and tells the taylor that

Agyeman: Now everyone is calling me "Obaaberima." No one knows my name is Agyeman anymore!

In response, Opéin tells Agyeman a creation myth:

Opéin: You should have no shame in who you are and what makes you different. Let me tell you a story*. When Onipa, humankind, was first created by Unamé*, the creator, Onipa* was both obaa and obarima in one * like the great one. It says so in the bible.

In Genesis, chapter one, Unamé says* "let us create humankind in our own image, * according to our own likeness. Let Onipa have dominion over the fish in the sea * over the birds in the air * over all the earth and everything that creeps on earth. *"

So Onipa was created * in the image of Unamé*. Male* and female*. Obarima* and Obaa*.

But with time, all that has been forgotten. Our fear of the power we hold within has limited our ability to understand and honour * who we are*. You* are as perfect as you were meant to be*.

In recounting this creation myth informed by both Christian and Ghanaian mythologies, Opéin's text is dotted throughout with musical interjections from Aquaa-Harrison on a stringed instrument, indicated above with asterisks. These interjections are at times cascading arpeggios, at other times percussively-struck chords and at other times short melodies. What is important, however, is that these interjections do not just serve as an underscore to Opéin's text. Rather, they have a reciprocal relationship of Call & Response, between Aquaa-Harrison's music and M'Carthy's voice. When the music is cascading, so too is the text. The percussively-struck chords emphasize key words like "Obaa" and "Obarima" just as much as those key words elicit the chords themselves, and the short melodies are reflected tonally in the way that M'Carthy delivers the lines.

This Call & Response occurs throughout the performance. In longer sections of texts, such as the aforementioned creation myth, and in smaller, much more discrete moments as well. Later, when Opéin, who eventually initiates a sexual relationship with the young Agyeman, asks the young boy to don a dress he is making, he says:

Opéin: I want to see how it floooooooooows on the body.

As Opéin utters the long, extended open vowel in "flow," Aquaa-Harrison answers the call with the response of a beautiful cascading melody, climbing down the scale in major fourths: a universally pleasing interval, reminiscent of water flowing down a river, or gushing down a waterfall. The musical interjection reinforces the image of "flow" that Opéin conjures up with his text, and helps to visualize dress that Agyeman is to wear. M'Carthy mimics this musical quality in the word, which begins high-pitched and ends low-pitched, reinforcing the meaning of the word, and imbuing the use of language with pitch: the marker of a tonal language.

The other method in which the Presentation of the tonally imbued use of English appears is in the apparent pairings of secondary characters with specific instruments. To enumerate, Opéin's text is often accompanied (and influenced by) a plucked string instrument, similar to an acoustic guitar. Sibongelé, the female alter ego who Agyeman discovers is a large and undeniable part of his identity, and who is inspired by his mother's red shoes and a painting of a beautiful woman in a red dress, always appears accompanied by a sensuous melody on the *gyl*, paired with a heartbeat-like rhythm on the gourd drum. When Sibongelé appears, in addition to the changes in M'Carthy's physicality, the percussive, sensuous and melodic quality appears in M'Carthy's vocals, as he says:

Sibongelé: I am her now, the one in the painting. Look at me,
now you know me.

Sibongelé's vocal mannerisms often mimic the pitch of the melody and the heartbeat percussion of a non-dominant followed quickly by a dominant beat, which can be easily called to mind by reading or hearing the phrase: "pa-PUM-pa-PUM-pa-PUM".

This musicality is contrasted by that of Phillipa, the other major female character in the *Obaaberima*. After Agyeman's arrival in Canada, he meets Phillipa at university, and the two strike up a relationship that Agyeman uses largely as a cover to appease the social expectations he feels to have and maintain a heterosexual relationship. Phillipa's musical accompaniment is exclusively major chords played on the acoustic guitar, with a fingering pattern that mimics the fingering patterns one would expect to hear played on a harp. This "angelic" quality to her music is reflected in the construction of her character as a pious, devout, religious young woman, the pitch and melody of which is then, in turn, then reflected in her vocal quality.

Additionally, Agyeman's crossing to Canada, and the resulting introduction of electric instruments into Aquaa-Harrison's soundscape, also impact the tonal quality of other characters' vocal masks. Two of Agyeman's male love interests in Canada, (with whom he has sexual relations "on the down-low," while still maintaining his relationship with Phillipa), Ray-jay and Elijah, also have dedicated musical sounds which inform their respective vocal tonalities. Ray-Jay, a casual fling for Agyeman is depicted as a "stoner"-type character, and his appearances are accentuated with slow, electric guitar riffs, that are distorted with a wah-wah pedal, which manipulates the frequency of the guitar in such a way traditionally found in funk and rock music. After Agyeman notices Ray-Jay outside of the library, he asks,

Agyeman: Are you studying for the exams tomorrow?

Ray-Jay: Yeah... I'm just smoking a joint before I go to the library.

Ray-Jay's speech is decidedly slower than the other characters in the play, and his vowels mimic the same wah-wah quality that his guitar licks possess.

Lastly, when Agyeman meets Elijah in a nightclub, the man with whom he has his most significant homosexual relationship after his move to Canada, Elijah's appearance is accompanied by a funk-infused dance melody played on a synthesizer. The way in which this melody – which is simultaneously staccato in the way that Aquaa-Harrison strikes the keys, and smooth, in the way the melody is constructed – mimics the construction of Elijah's character. Elijah is a poor dancer, as Agyeman witnesses first hand during this first meeting, but is a kind hearted person, and is a smooth talker.

It is important to note, however that the musical accompaniment that creates each of these secondary characters, again, is not simply an underscore to their dialogue. The difference between a simple musical accompaniment, singing text (like in a musical) and

tonal language is that the differences in pitch, in a tonal language, impart and dictate meaning. The information that the audience receives about the characters is, in fact, informed by the tonal differences in pitch imparted in the spoken words, and by the reciprocal relationship between M'Carthy's voice and Aquaa-Harrison's instruments. Just as the variances of the word *papa* in Twi change the definition of the word, it is my contention that the differences in pitch, and the mimicking of the instruments for both the Call & Response and Construction of Character methods of the Presentation of the tonal language help dictate the meaning of the dialogue being spoken in *Obaaberima*.

Conclusion

In this way, by navigating through the intercultural encounter, intention, negotiation, and with the resulting emergence being a tonal use of the English language, informed by the musical accompaniment on stage provided by Kobena Aquaa-Harrison, it is my contention that Tawiah M'Carthy manages to produce a tonal use of the English language that straddles the gap, described by Tan, between semiotics and phenomenology. He does so through the steps of Priming and Presentation, using the methods of Call & Response and Construction of Characters, in order to marry semantic meaning with phenomenologically detected differences in pitch: the marker of a tonal language.

In doing so, M'Carthy creates a unique way of communicating and creating new meaning within the performance. The results of the use of the tonal language (presentation and construction of character) are dependent on the pitch while speaking this pseudo-tonal English in order to fully communicate the semantic meaning of the text, or the dramatic construction of the characters within the performance. In this way,

M'Carthy not only manages to straddle the line between semiotics and phenomenology, but he also achieves a new method of creating and communicating meaning within performance.

Chapter Four:

Live Cinema and the Construction of a Posthuman Aesthetic in Akram Khan's

DESH

The third and final piece selected in this study is *DESH* by Akram Khan. It is a ninety-minute whirlwind solo performance, created in 2011, the title of which is the Bengali word for “homeland.” The piece explores Khan’s deeply complex and personal relationship to his family, his cultures, and his countries – both British and Bangladeshi. *DESH* darts seamlessly back and forth between England and Bangladesh, between languages, and through three generations of Khan’s family, in what can be described as “a multidisciplinary, emotive and theatrical journey through the fragile, vulnerable and volatile landscape of Khan’s fragmented reality (Mitra 93).

In order to frame my discussion of *DESH* (a British production) in conjunction with the two selected performances in the previous chapters (two Canadian creations), it is important to note that *DESH* is methodologically consistent with the selection criteria used for the previous two performances: a show created and performed by a hybridic artist, engaging in intercultural theatre practice that can be measured against the “control group” of solo performance. In addition, though it is not a Canadian production, it engages in the same tradition of post-colonial theatre creation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Khan’s oeuvre serves as the basis for Mitra’s coining of the term new interculturalism.

To position *DESH* within its own practical context, as Ley and Dadswell write, South Asian Performance in the UK has been prominent within the national theatre scene since the 1980s, but has had a curious “absence from the academic or critical record” (1).

Recently, this absence is slowly being rectified, as the presence of South Asian performance in the UK becomes more and more popular. Cochrane describes its emergence from under the shadow of the “in-yer-face” theatrical movement in Britain in the 1990s, in which more provocative and controversial work was celebrated in the mainstream (such as at companies like the Royal Court) but was not tolerated or supported in the South Asian performances of the time (113). Citing the example of Gupreet Kaur Bhatti’s *Behzti* (“Dishonour” in Punjabi), a play depicting a rape in a Sikh Temple, which was “closed after two nights due to rioting outside the theatre,” Cochrane illustrates how this play is not out of place with the work of Bhatti’s contemporaries, like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Patrick Marber and Martin Crimp, save for one difference: it was a South Asian play. Until recently, the commercial success of South Asian performance in the UK was reserved for creations that made use of the tropes more often found in Bollywood than on British mainstream stages (Bhuchar 135). The integration of South Asian performance into the mainstream, however, is becoming more and more evident, and companies like Akram Khan’s are at the forefront of that movement.

The Four-Point Model and *DESH*

In the two previous chapters, I deployed my four-point model into the creation of new semantic meaning onstage, through *Fish Eyes* and *Obaaberima*. Here, however, I am extending the use of the model to investigate the creation of *aesthetic* meaning through intercultural exchange onstage. My intention here, is to explore different possibilities and different kinds of analysis through this model, in order to test its limits and expand its rigour. By this I mean that the intercultural exchange in *DESH* creates new codes of meaning within its *mise-en-scène*, rather than through its dramaturgical construction, as

was the case with the first two plays analyzed in this thesis. In *Fish Eyes* and *Obaaberima*, a similar process took place: the performers manipulated existing codified sign systems and imbued them with new semantic meaning throughout the performance. In this way, new meaning was created through intercultural exchange in terms of the shows' content. In *DESH*, however, I contend that Khan is manipulating and imbuing an *aesthetic* code, and disrupting the way we see performance in terms of liveness. In other words, he is creating new meaning via intercultural exchange in terms of the show's *form*. In doing so, Khan manages to create a performance space in which a posthuman aesthetic emerges, moving the narrative structures *past* the limits of a live body and into the realm of the mediated (and therefore simultaneously live and not-live) body. In this way, my analysis of *DESH* through my four-point model, helps to extend Royona Mitra's postulations of New Interculturalism as located *within* the body, to opening up possibilities of New Intercultural performance as *beyond* and *through* the body.

The Artist

The Artistic Director of, and a choreographer and dancer for his self-titled company, Akram Khan has undoubtedly become a force to be reckoned with on the world stage. Khan's work tours internationally, and his name and choreography have been associated with many high-profile projects such as the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, the English National Ballet, the Glastonbury Festival, the Sadler's Wells Theatre, and Khan has been nominated for the prestigious Laurence Olivier Award ("Akram Khan Company: About Us").

A second-generation British-Bengali man, born in Wimbledon to émigrés of Bangladesh, his fusion of East and West is evident in his use of both Western

contemporary dance styles as well as classical *kathak*. Khan began his classical training at the age of seven, and began performing professionally, even as a young child. Notably, he was cast as “The Boy” in Peter Brook’s rendition of the *Mahabharata*, touring internationally with the company, and even appearing in the televised version. Khan later studied contemporary dance throughout his post-secondary education, and went on to found the Akram Khan company in 2000. Khan has been performing as a world-renowned choreographer and dancer ever since. Additionally, as has been referenced throughout this thesis, Khan’s work has served for the basis of Royona Mitra’s extensive study in new interculturalism. Here, I intend to extend that study, using him now as a basis to stretch the limits of my four-point model, which was largely inspired by Mitra’s writings.

The Play

DESH is a masterful solo-piece that fuses contemporary Western dance, traditional *kathak*, vivid storytelling, a haunting musical score, and stunning visuals to create an accessible yet poignant portrait of Khan’s complicated and nuanced relationship with his family, his heritage – as well as his identity as an artist. The semi-autobiographical performance spans three generations of Khan’s family – his father, his niece, and Khan himself. Indeed, those facets of himself are all entrenched in one another. His company describes the piece as,

The most personal work to date from celebrated choreographer and performer, Akram Khan. *DESH* meaning ‘homeland’ in Bengali, draws multiple tales of land, nation, resistance and convergence into the body and voice of one man trying to find his balance in an unstable world.

Moving between Britain and Bangladesh, Khan weaves threads of memory, experience and myth into a surreal world of surprising connection. At once intimate and epic, *DESH*

explores fragility in the face of natural forces, and celebrates the resilience of the human spirit in the rhythms of labour, in dream and story, and in transformation and survival (“*DESH*”).

It is clear, then, that *DESH* occupies the very “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” that Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* (4). The plot of *DESH* is less linear than the plot of the other two performances studied within this thesis, as *DESH* is primarily a dance performance, rather one of strictly theatre. The overall journey, however, begins with the figure of the father (the eldest character of the three generations of the Khan family that feature throughout this semi-autobiographical piece) struggling to leave Bangladesh during a politically tumultuous time. We then (in a non-linear and non-chronological order) encounter Akram himself, as an angst-ridden teenager struggling to fit in, and as a grown man struggling to reconnect with his roots, while on a trip back to Bangladesh. The third generation we encounter is the character of Ishita, Khan’s niece, who connects to her roots through language and traditional children’s stories. These three members of the Khan family orbit each other, each while trying to make sense of the in-between positions they occupy. The performance ends with Akram receiving a phone call from his father, telling him that he has reclaimed a piece of land in his native village, bringing the titular theme of “homeland” full-circle.

The Encounter: Dancing New Interculturalism

As mentioned above, Khan is expertly trained in *kathak* and Western Contemporary Dance, and his work serves as the foundation for Mitra’s entire conceptualization of New Interculturalism. The intercultural encounter that he embodies is well-described in Mitra’s work, and I take them here as a jumping-off point. It is clear that by way of his training, and throughout his oeuvre as an artist, Khan is highly aware of the intercultural encounter that he embodies. His work explicitly plays “a role in the

reproduction of ideas about multicultural identities through the fluid and responsive dialogue which it has initiated between *kathak* and contemporary dance,” (Burt “Contemporary Dance” 11).

Intention: A Return to the Homeland

Moving then to the next step, Intention, I ask the same questions of *DESH* that I asked of the other two works analyzed in this thesis: Does the artistic work actively engage in questions of identity? Does the performance as aesthetic object actively inquire into questions of interculturalism? Simply put: is an intercultural aesthetic the intention?

Within *DESH*, the answer must unequivocally be: yes. The title itself acts as a constant reminder of the artistic preoccupation of the project, and perhaps suggests that the performance functions as a return to Khan’s homeland, or a desire to explore and understand just what this homeland might be. In *Performing Exile, Performing Self*, Meerzon uses the parable of the Prodigal Son to discuss the works of second-generation artists, stating that “although not every exilic experience ends with a gesture of return, [she] claims that even if the exiles do not, then their children eventually will seek their way home” (213). She describes the Prodigal journey as “a tale of recognition, return, repentance and forgiveness, with the image of the accepting father and his almighty love at its center” (246). This parable, of course, stems from the Christian tradition, and the “accepting father” to which Meerzon refers is a mythological and theological one. However, in the parallels between the narrative of *DESH* and the parable of the Prodigal Son, the “accepting father” is a much more literal one. Khan embarks on a journey to find acceptance from his father and reconnection to his homeland. We see a fictionalized version of Khan at various points in his life, struggling with that pursuit.

When he first appears, it is as a middle-aged man, caught in a busy street in Bangladesh. Though instead of being romantically swept up in the sights and sounds of his cultural homeland, we see Khan struggling to keep his head above water, fighting against the rabid traffic and cacophonous hubbub of the city. Later, we see Khan as a teenager, caught up in a conflict with his father about his identity as the British-born son of Bangladeshi immigrants. In this moment of conflict, Khan's father is chastising him for not answering his calls and being unwilling to come and help with the family restaurant. Instead of answering his father earnestly and with sincerity, the adolescent Khan breaks off into a sarcastic dance sequence in which he imitates the emblematic dance moves of Michael Jackson while chanting "I'm bad, I'm bad!" while maintaining that he does not have time to help in his father's kitchen as he is practicing his "flow".

The two continue to bicker over the adolescent Khan's obligations to help in his family's restaurant, when the discussion switches to a heated argument over Khan's manner of speaking:

Father: What kind of accent is that?¹¹

Khan: I don't know, I was watching this soap on TV and it was from up North, and... Can I go now?

Father: Yesterday, you were talking like a black man, and now... If you don't believe in one thing, Baba, you will fall for anything! Be serious for once.

Khan: Alright Dad, yeah, ok... Oh, you know, [*Singing to the tune of Michael Jackson's "Bad"*] 'I'm bad, I'm bad, you know it! I'm bad, I'm bad, you know it!' *Beat*. I'm just joking, Dad.

¹¹ Dialogue from the performance of *DESH* has been transcribed by the author from an archival recording of the production, obtained via The Akram Khan Company, and recorded in 2011 at the Sadler Wells Theatre.

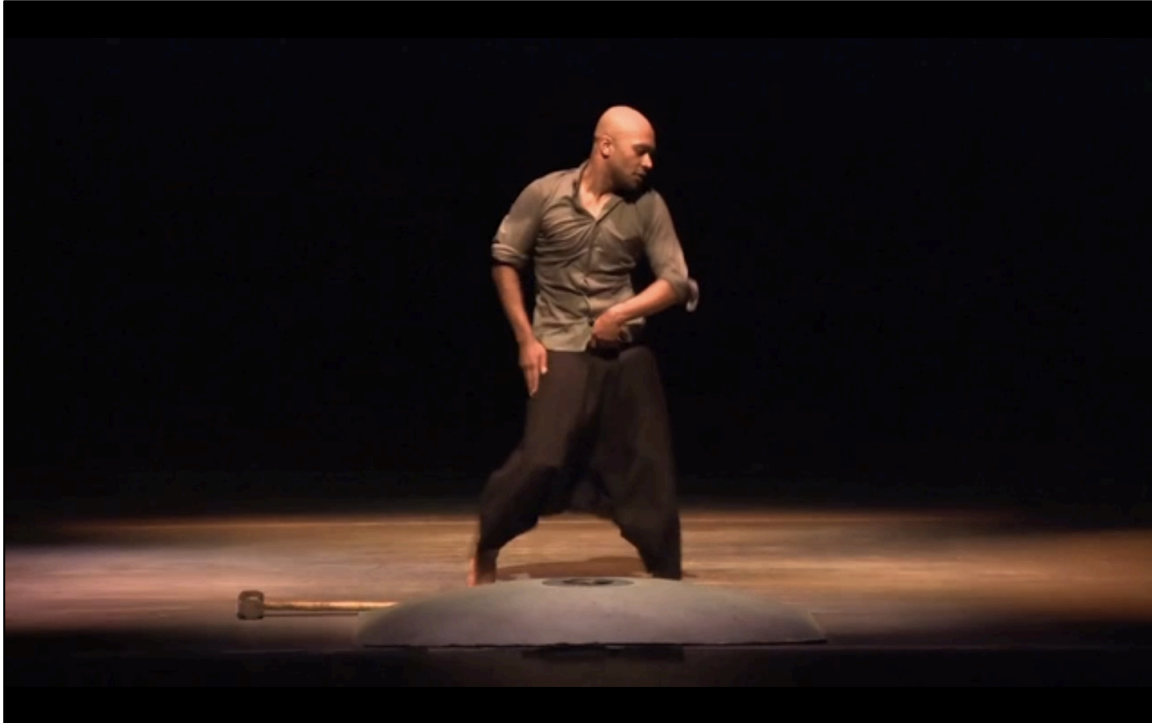


Figure 12 – the adolescent Khan striking the classic “Michael Jackson” pose¹²

Father: I don’t understand you...

Khan: Yeah, and I don’t understand you, so we’re quits, right?

Father: Why don’t you stand still for one second? Why you always moving from one thing to another? And If you want to move so much, I told you many times to come to Bangladesh with me! I have acres and acres of fields, of long grass in my village! *Beat.* In *my* village! Grass that’s even taller than you and me, huh? It’s so tall, sometimes it looks like it’s touching the sky... I know it’s silly, but... Sometimes, even, it feels like the grass is growing out of the sky... Can you believe it? No. Of course you can’t. But listen, Baba, When I was a little boy...

Khan: Dad, dad, dad... Hold on... Is it the kind of grass you smoke?

Father: Why would I want to burn my own bloody field?! Huh? What kind of stupid thing is that to say?! *Beat.* You are not one of them. Just because you do their stupid accents doesn’t make you one of them!

¹² Still image taken from: *DESH*. Archival Recording. Dir Akram Khan. Sadler Wells Theatre, London, 2011. Videorecording.

Khan: Stupid accents? Well... I feel like a man, then!

Father: Man? Man?! Do you even know what it is to be a man?!

The Father grabs Khan angrily by the shirt collar.

Khan: Can we fucking stop now?! Why don't you go wobbly-wobbly back to your country?! And fuck off! Huh?! And leave me the fuck alone!

The scene is one of acute tension between Khan and his father: an accurate and biting depiction of the tension Khan feels, not only towards his father, but between the two halves of his cultural self. That selfsame tension is then passed on to and seen through the character of Ishita, Khan's niece. It is scenes like these, whose subject actively engage in and deal with the intercultural – and ensuing interpersonal – tension that Khan feels as an artist, that are telling of the show's explicit intention.

The first and last images of the show are also extremely telling of Khan's intention to engage in questions of his cultural identity and his relationship to the notion of homeland. As the curtain is drawn up, we meet Khan as he is silently hammering on a small piece of land with a large sledgehammer – complete with sound cues to emphasize the force of the impact. Behind him stands a contraption, one that we later learn is the engine of a fighter plane. Over the course of the performance, we learn that the engine behind him is one on which the character of Khan's father worked (as a private citizen) during the Bangladesh Liberation War – an armed conflict in 1971, in which then-named East Pakistan fought for of Independence from Pakistan, and was renamed Bangladesh. At the end of the performance, we return to the same image, with Khan standing in front of this small piece of land. This time, however, the sledgehammer is no longer in sight,

and he is now wearing traditional Bangladeshi clothing, as a voicemail from his father plays over and over again, repeating:

Father: Hello, Akram, your father is speaking from Bangladesh.
We got some land in the village. I can get back my land.

In the final moments of the performance, Khan walks slowly towards the engine, as it begins to work, looking puzzlingly at the contraption and at his clothes, all while his father's voice repeats the same message – as if to signal his difficulty in understanding just what this journey has come to mean. As the engine begins to rev up, the force of its gust pushes Khan away, with growing force and speed, as his desire to resist its pushing grows, too. Khan is pushed further and further back, all while he struggles to remain connected to the engine, and ultimately to the part of his cultural identity that his journey to the homeland as the Prodigal Son has come to represent.

Lastly, in examining the intention within *DESH* to investigate questions of identity, it is also helpful to contextualize it against the whole of Khan's extensive oeuvre. In over a decade of making work with The Akram Khan Company, *DESH* represents both Khan's first solo performance, and his first performance to engage directly in the story of his own family's journey from Bangladesh to England. In *Homeland*, a documentary film produced by The Akram Khan Company about the making of *DESH*, Khan states, "I think the reason I never made a solo in the eleven years that I've been making work... is that I was afraid of myself" (*Homeland*). In *Homeland*, Khan talks at length about his long-held fascination with Bangladeshi culture, but his equally long-held resistance to investigating it in his work. He states within the film "My mother's been asking me for many years, 'You know, you're always doing shows about India, mythology... What about us Bangladeshi people?'" Later, he recounts what he

describes as “the most important contribution of Tim [Yip, the visual designer of *DESH*]”, stating,

I said, ‘I don’t know what to do the solo on,’ and he says, ‘do it on your roots,’ I said ‘Yeah, well I’ve done London and India,’ and he says, ‘no, do it on your *roots*... go deeper. Do it on Bangladesh.’ I said, ‘no, no, I’ve never done anything on Bangladesh, why would I?’ He says, ‘that’s exactly why you should do it, because you’re uncomfortable with it’ (*Homeland*).

Finally, Farooq Chaudry, the producer of the performance describes “*DESH* [as] a project about a journey: a man on a journey about himself.” (*Homeland*).

Negotiation: Intercultural Exchange as Live Cinema

The next step in the four-point model, negotiation, again refers to the movement and exchange between cultural theatrical practices. In this chapter I aim to push my model further in discussing the aesthetic negotiation between cultural theatrical practices. Specifically, I contend that the aesthetic negotiation between practices takes place between mixing traditional *kathak* and the mediatized elements of performance. That is to say that Khan executes the intercultural exchange of *DESH* through the live and not-live elements of the performance. Furthermore, it is my contention that Khan is able, through this aesthetic and explicitly intercultural exchange, to move *beyond* the relegation of interculturalism to the body (as described in Mitra) *through* to a post-human intercultural aesthetic, through an aesthetic device known as Live Cinema.

Beginning with liveness (and consequently, not-liveness) I turn to Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan. A notoriously difficult concept to define, Phelan does so in relating liveness to notions of reproduction and disappearance, taking her cue from

Walter Benjamin's foundational text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." She describes the foundation of live performance in that,

Only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance... Performance's being becomes itself through disappearance (Phelan 146).

Here, liveness is equated with the ephemeral quality of performance. A live performance can never again be what it once was in the moment of its realization: its fragile susceptibility to the threat of time is indeed its greatest asset, and its defining quality. Liveness is the ability to disappear, to fade away, and to resist reproducibility. Phelan's definition serves to resist what Auslander describes as "traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of "liveness" than invoking clichés and mystifications" (Auslander *Liveness* 2). He continues to expound on his frustration with the traditional view of the concepts as a mutually exclusive binary, that is endlessly circular in that "the live is premised on the absence of recording, and the defining fact of the recorded is the absence of the live" (Auslander *Liveness* 3).

Media, or not-liveness, on the other hand, suffers from "the common assumption that the live event is 'real' and that mediatized events are secondary" (Auslander, *Liveness* 3). Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon, in *Performance and Technology: Practices of Virtual Embodiment and Interactivity*, state that the two necessary and sufficient components of mediatized performance are the digital and the corporeal (xvi). To put it in perhaps more dramatic terms: the interplay between man and machine is what makes mediatized performance.

In *DESH*, Khan seamlessly fuses live and not-live – or mediated – elements of performance together to create one unified whole, in which the mediated elements (such as sound, projections, and lighting) become inextricably linked to the live body of the performer onstage. What is important to note, however, is that over and above the usual tension between man and machine described by Broadhurst and Machon, the negotiation between the two is also the site of much of the intercultural exchange in *DESH*. While Khan’s live body is masterfully executing the complex sequences of *kathak*, the mediated elements of performance are executed in vein of solo performance and Western dramaturgical techniques of storytelling.

This negotiation happens in such a way that fits within the definition posited by Holly Willis in *Fast Forward: The Future(s) of the Cinematic Arts*, of the term “Live Cinema.” Willis defines Live Cinema as:

The staging of a live event that includes the presentation of moving images and sounds for an audience with a performance component that calls attention to presence and liveness, as well as to the specifics of site, space and time (68).

Willis describes this mode of performance as an apt vehicle for the artistic exploration of matters that are “expressly political,” and to do with identity politics, noting that Live Cinema interrogates the position of and performance of the body (74).

The body in Live Cinema is:

A body with blurred boundaries, one often entirely coincident with the mediated environment within which it is situated. This is a body – and a subject – that is produced in relation to the world; the self is not an isolated entity, but an ongoing conjuring with its environment (79).

A succinct example of Live Cinema within *DESH* can be found within a particular section entitled the “Honey Bee Sequence,” in which Khan tells traditional Bangladeshi children’s stories to his niece, Ishita. The story begins with Khan’s niece discovering that her shoelace has become untied. Khan kneels to help his young niece tie her shoe, when suddenly, a stage-long scrim becomes visible in front of Khan’s stooped figure, and the foreground is overtaken by animated projections. The projections begin as faint and relatively small, compared to the large size of the performance, but as Khan begins to weave through the children’s story, the projections become larger and larger, fully surrounding Khan and inhabiting the entirety of the stage.



Figure 13 – The “Honey Bee” Sequence¹³

¹³ Still image taken from: *DESH*. Archival Recording. Dir Akram Khan. Sadler Wells Theatre, London, 2011. Videorecording.

Khan recounts a story of young man in a forest, and as he does so, he himself becomes the young man in the story, interacting with larger than life creatures: an alligator and an elephant. He then stumbles across a giant honeybee hive, perched on a low-hanging branch. After enjoying the sweet treat of the honey, Khan begins to climb up the tree, with the projections moving vertically as he moves skyward, giving the illusion of ascension. Khan climbs to the top, but as soon as he does, the sound of a chainsaw is heard, the great tree shakes, and Khan falls from its top to the forest floor. Running through the forest, the projected image of a young boy, dressed in traditional dhoti pants – just like Khan – enters stage right, and runs across the stage in the same manner and in following the same path as Khan did moments ago. The young boy exits, and Khan enters, and they repeat this mirrored pattern of running, creating the impression that they are fleeing something, or someone. The two then stand to face each other when, from behind Khan's figure, a tank appears, with its giant canon pointed directly at the pair. In the rain, we feel the tension of the moment, as all three are held in suspension for a brief second. Then, the boy flees, and Khan is made aware that he is staring down the barrel of a gun. Khan slowly lifts his arms in surrender, as the tank slowly fades from view and we are left with only Khan, in the rain. The sequence ends as Khan brings a close to the adventure into the fictional world by literally "erasing" the rainclouds by waving his arms back and forth over the projections. With that, the foray into the dreamworld of the children's story closes.

In this sequence, Khan's simultaneous negotiation of both live/not live and Western/Eastern theatrical elements are clear, and serve to satisfy the conditions put forth by Willis in her definition of Live Cinema. This sequence includes the "presentation of

moving images and sounds for an audience with a performance component that calls attention to presence and liveness, as well as the specifics of site, space and time” (Willis 68). Respectively, those elements are: the projections and pre-recorded sounds and Khan’s live body – which necessarily draws our attention to the passing of time, decay, and the reality of Khan as a living being within the space of performance.

In addition to satisfying Willis’ conditions for Live Cinema, I contend that this particular sequence also illustrates a causal relationship between Khan’s dancing body and the mediated elements of performance, solidifying the *gestalt* of the interplay between live and not-live as a succinct whole. What I mean here is that neither the non-live projections nor Khan’s live body are the main agent of action in the sequence, with the other simply being an accessory, or a participatory figure within the action. Rather, the two are both equally responsible for moving the action forward. As Willis puts it, “the body is at once entirely physical, but also subject to projection and reconfiguration via the media with which it interacts” (80). I argue that this relationship is reciprocal. For example, when physical movement within the geography of the forest is created, it is not simply the projections that move around Khan’s body, nor is it Khan’s body that wanders aimlessly through the vast forest of the scrim. Rather, it is *both* the movement of the projections as well as Khan’s shifts in space that create the dynamism of the forest.

A second example of the same assertion is the relationship between Khan and a second honeybee hive. At one point, Khan knocks this second hive down from its safe perch upon a branch, and is subsequently swarmed by the bees. It is Khan who knocks down the hive, and while that hive and its inhabitants may be strictly relegated to the realm of the projections, the effect that they have on Khan’s character is real. When they

swarm him, we see his body react to the torrent of insects. When they sting him, we see his body convulse in pain. He affects them as much as they affect him. Both Khan's live body and the mediatized projections have agency within the world of the performance.

Finally, I will call upon the moment between Khan, the boy, and the tank as an example of the causal relationship between Khan and the projections, which in turn solidifies the aesthetic of live cinema deployed by Khan. When the three meet each other in the space, with the tank's canon pointed directly at the bodies of Khan and the boy – one of which is live and one of which is non-live – we feel the immediate tension. We sense that there is a real danger to both the live and non-live bodies, and the threat of what would happen if the canon were to go off appears real within the image; there is clear potential for a cause and effect relationship in that moment – and a menacing one at that.

To return to the conditions of liveness as posited by Auslander and Phelan, I am reminded that the liveness of a performance is defined by its resistance to reproducibility. Willis echoes this sentiment, insisting that “the images and sounds may be pre-recorded... but a core element within live cinema is that the project is not complete until it is performed, nor is it precisely repeatable” (69). While the projections themselves, taken in isolation, may indeed be reproducible, the entirety of the sequence is not exactly reproducible just as any other live performance is not reproducible. Due to the presence of Khan's live body, and its agency and effect on the projections as described above, the sequence refuses reproducibility.

This same execution of live cinema seen within the Honey Bee Sequence can also be seen at the top of the show, as Khan sets the scene for his arrival in Bangladesh. As

the action moves from the opening scene of the show (described above) in which Khan repeatedly slams a sledgehammer into the small piece of land, the lighting and music cues change from the desolate and isolated image of Khan, alone downstage centre, to a busy and bustling city street in Bangladesh. This shift, however, is not achieved with the addition of any other bodies, or even projections. Rather, the sound of voices, cars, and other city hubbub fills the space, and rectangular blocks of light begin to dart around the stage, just as the unpredictable traffic of cars, pedestrians, motorcycles, and other goings-on in a busy city street would. Khan's movements begin to be dictated by the movements of the blocks of light, as well as by the sharp 'turns' in the musical score. Upon these sharp, percussive turns in the music, Khan's body seems to be arrested – pulled by the elbow, the hand, the knee, to take him mercilessly in a new direction, and at times, to knock him to the ground, as seen in Figure 14. It seems as though his body is not under his control, but under that of the musical score, and the ominous moving blocks of light. Here, we feel the same danger that we did with the appearance of the tank in the Honey Bee Sequence: Khan's body is no longer operating as a live object separate from the not-live elements of performance. His body is being influenced and controlled by the not-live element, in a causal relationship.

But where does this negotiation between live and not-live leave us? What emerges from Khan's negotiation and his use of live cinema? And most importantly, how does this relate to the creation of new aesthetic meaning?

Emergence: Beyond the Body – Live Cinema, Cyborgs, and a Posthuman Aesthetic

I argue that through the technique of live cinema, Khan is able to create the presence of other characters (and subsequently, other bodies) onstage in such a way that

supersedes the necessary tethering of characters and subjectivities to bodies, therefore achieving a posthuman aesthetic within the narrative. In this way, new aesthetic meaning is created *through* the process of creating this narrative. As Willis describes it, “rather than finding pleasure only within the story, we now enjoy understanding how the story is produced” (82). Simply put: what emerges is a posthuman aesthetic in which multiple subjectivities are fluid through live (Khan) and not-live (pre-recorded and projected) bodies.

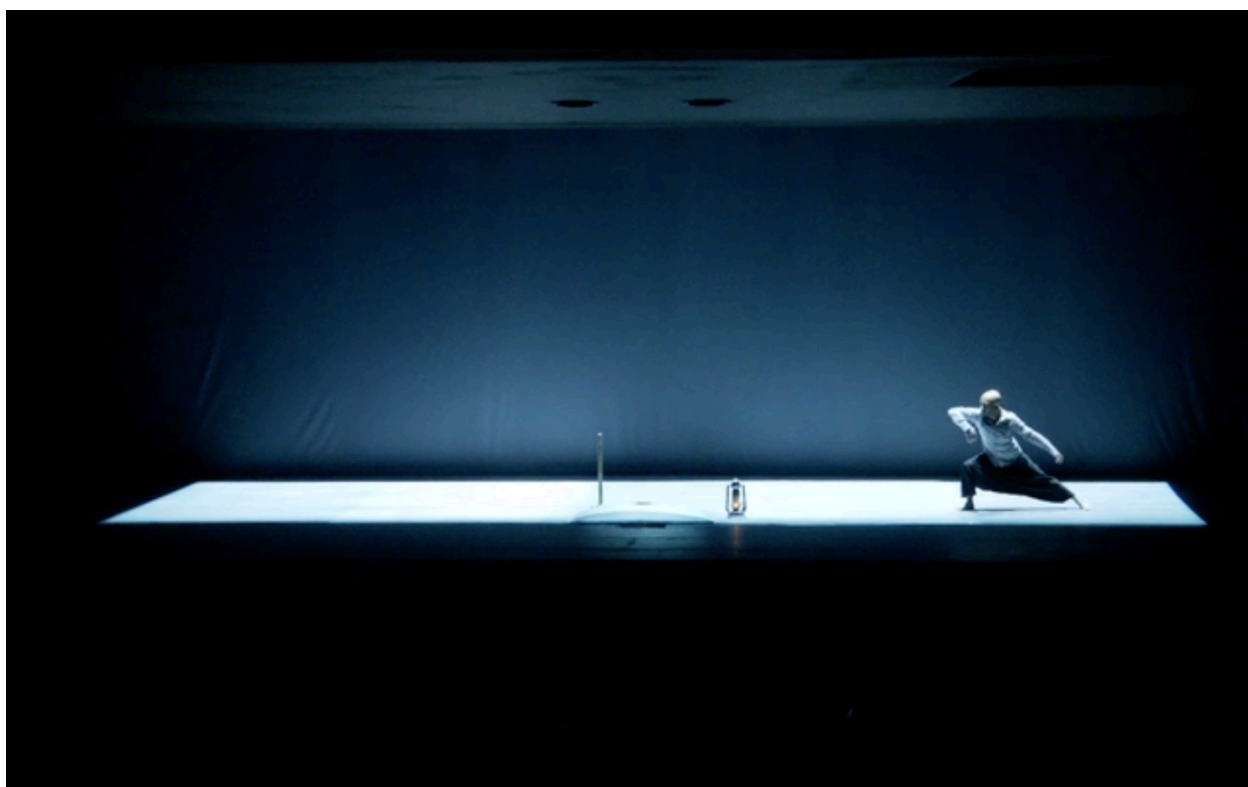


Figure 14 – The causal relationship between Khan’s body and the musical score¹⁴

The pleasure of understanding how the story is produced, in witnessing these fluid subjectivities, comes by way of the fusion of Khan, the characters within the narrative, and their presence onstage, achieved through live cinema. This fusion of the live body

¹⁴ Still image taken from: *DESH*. Archival Recording. Dir Akram Khan. Sadler Wells Theatre, London, 2011. Videorecording.

and the mediated body bears a similarity to the concept of cyborgs. Pavis describes the concept by reminding us of the interplay between the live and the not-live:

We can no longer distinguish between live presence and recording, flesh and electronic components, a being of flesh and blood (as the poet might have put it) and performative cyborg (Pavis *Contemporary Mise en Scène* 135).

The concept of the cyborg has gained much traction in the fields of gender and feminist studies, as a useful tool through which to discuss the construction of identity. In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (149). This notion of a character as a creature both of social reality as well as one of fiction is extremely useful when discussing the characters of *DESH*.

Describing the bodies of the characters onstage in *DESH* as cyborgs may seem strange, since upon hearing the word “cyborg,” what often comes to mind are Terminator-type images of a man with a face half-covered by skin and half-revealed to be little more than a maze of metal and a red glowing eye. In the case of *DESH*, however, what I mean by cyborg is simply the fusion of live and not-live elements to create a character. A salient example can be seen below in Figure 15, in which we see the image of Khan’s live body and the projected body of The Boy. The two form a whole, as Pavis says, in which “we can no longer distinguish between live presence and recording” (*Contemporary Mise en Scène* 135).

In this moment, the two are visually separated: the live body of Khan stands in stark contrast to the mediated body of The Boy. What is important to note, however, and what stands to confirm my argument for the characters within *DESH* as cyborgs is the

fluid subjectivity between Khan and The Boy. At times, Khan’s live body is the vehicle for the subjectivity of the character of Khan. At others, his live body is the vehicle for the subjectivity of The Boy. Reciprocally, the opposite is true: at times the mediated body of The Boy is inhabited by Khan’s subjectivity. This fusion of the two, and what Pavis describes as the inseparability between “live presence and recording” is what constitutes their existence as cyborgs. In this way, Khan moves past the polarizing dichotomy between live and not-live to join what Guy Garnett describes as “the mechanical power of the machine to the nuanced and ‘subjectivizing’ control of the human performer. This, ultimately, is itself an aesthetic value for our new age” (32).



Figure 15 – Khan and “The Boy”¹⁵

¹⁵ Still image taken from: *DESH*. Archival Recording. Dir Akram Khan. Sadler Wells Theatre, London, 2011. Videorecording.

In the fluidity of subjectivities through bodies (both live and not-live), Khan is able to achieve a posthuman aesthetic. Willis describes a posthuman concept of identity as one in which “characters are not anchored to bodies; they morph and return” (82). To illustrate this point, I turn to the use of pre-recorded voices in the show. At different instances, for three different characters, Khan makes use of recordings for the voices of secondary characters: for the voice of his father, his niece Ishita, and for a young Bangladeshi tech support employee named Chewey, whom Khan calls when he is unable to access the voicemails on his phone. Each of these characters are also physicalized by Khan at various points throughout the show, and not every instance of their being voiced onstage is via recording. For example, Khan often speaks in his father’s voice. The subjectivity of each is interchangeable in the way it is presented onstage: through Khan’s body, through his voice, through pre-recordings, and through projected images. It is this flexibility and openness in how each character is depicted onstage that plays into the pleasure that Willis describes in the understanding how the story is produced. The new aesthetic meaning that Khan constructs, with the participation of the audience, is the sifting through of these fluid subjectivities. Willis describes this pleasure as a process in which “rather than suspending disbelief, we enjoy an awareness of suspension itself” (86).

This posthuman aesthetic is one at which we only arrive by virtue of the negotiation between live and not-live, and is the emergence that is the result of the intercultural preoccupations within *DESH*: this manifestation of other bodies and other selves through fluid subjectivities moving through cyborg bodies.

Conclusion

In this way, I argue that the four-point model of analysis is able to take Mitra's location of interculturalism within the body and move it *beyond* the body into new posthuman conceptualizations of the body. In deploying the device of live cinema in order to achieve the presence of cyborgs onstage, the subjectivities presented onstage by Khan move fluidly from live body to cyborg body to mediated body, and back. In this way, the participation of the audience is required in sifting through these fluid subjectivities, and pleasure of the narrative (described by Willis) is shifted to be the pleasure of creating the ways in which the narrative is constructed. In this way, Khan extends the intercultural exchange deployed by the other artists in this thesis (in which new meaning is created semantically through performance) into the realm of creating new meaning *aesthetically* through performance.

Conclusion:

An Analytical Model for the Creation of New Meaning in Intercultural Performance

This thesis intends to create and evaluate a model for the analysis of the creation of new meaning in intercultural performance. Following in the footsteps of Royona Mitra by situating this research within the context of New Interculturalism, my intention was to devise a methodology of discussion for new interculturalism. This concept creates discursive space for hybridic artists to re-inscribe their subjectivity and to reaffirm agency within their own identity formations. I hope that this model of analysis achieved that same effect within the discussion of contemporary intercultural analysis.

To draw this study to a close, it is fitting to return to the initial research questions and address whether or not they were sufficiently answered, and how they were answered through the course of this study. They are:

- How is new meaning created within contemporary intercultural performance?
- What is the methodological rigour of this proposed four-point model?
- Does the flexibility of the proposed model allow for a move away from alimentary modes of intercultural practice, and towards a more fluid exchange?
- Can this model refute any imposed social hierarchies within intercultural exchange in the theatrical milieu?

How is new meaning created within contemporary intercultural performance?

My creation and use of the four-step model was aimed at investigating this process: the creation of meaning during the moment of performance. In the three examples found above, I found that the most successful and efficient way of creating both semantic and aesthetic meaning was the manipulation of pre-existing sign systems or

methods of communication. Rather than starting from scratch, I found that each artist in the three case studies manipulated an already existing sign system, whose semantic or aesthetic meaning was not known to the audience, but the audience was aware that there was *a* meaning. The process of this manipulation was to imbue the sign system with *new* information, that was then communicated through the performance.

What I mean here can be visualized as a journey of communication not simply from “A to B”, but rather:

$$\Omega \textit{ through A through B} = \Omega \times A \times B$$

Here, the symbol Ω represents an already existing sign system, whose pre-existing meaning is unbeknownst to the audience. A represents the artist’s manipulation of that sign system, and B represents the encounter with the audience. It is important to note that that the movement from $\Omega \textit{ through A through B}$ is a process of information creation (in performance) that cannot happen without the audience. Though the artist creates the conditions *in which* the semantic code can be imbued with new meaning, it is the audience *in partnership* with the artist, over the course of the performance, who create new meaning together. The result, then, is not a simple addition of the three components (Ω , A and B), but rather their multiplication: truly a sum greater than its parts.

What is the methodological rigour of the proposed four-point model?

Overall, it was my experience that the four-point model was a useful tool in dissecting and analysing contemporary intercultural performance. If I were to place this model for discussion along Lo and Gilbert’s Continuum of Conducting Intercultural Performance (the two poles of which are “Collaborative” vs “Imperialistic”), it would

skew further towards the collaborative end. Because of this, I found that it was an effective tool in discussing contemporary intercultural performance, as contemporary practice itself (or more specifically, these three case studies) is moving away from the neo-liberal and Orientalist intercultural projects of the twentieth century, and towards more collaborative intercultural exchange. In this way, the model was adept at discussing contemporary examples.

Additionally, it served as a means to discuss the three selected case studies without necessarily adhering to a strict (and insufficient) definition of intercultural theatre practice, as discussed in the introduction. Furthermore, I also found the model to be extremely proficient in resisting the oft-found proclivity for the dominance of text in Western performance, finding that it favoured the all around “performance text” or *mise-en-scène* of a performance, in its analysis.

What I gleaned, however, is that the majority of the analysis, and indeed the majority of the intercultural exchange came by way of the latter two steps of the model: negotiation and emergence. What I would perhaps envision for a next version of the model is a change from a four-step process of analysis to the following: a two-step model of analysis with two necessary and sufficient conditions.

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Intercultural Exchange	Steps for Analysis of Contemporary Intercultural Performance
Encounter	Negotiation
Intention	Emergence

Here, the two steps of analysis (negotiation and emergence) retain that same fluidity and flexibility of the initial version of the model, but the first two components instead become necessary and sufficient conditions for intercultural exchange.

Does the flexibility of the proposed model allow for a move away from alimentary modes of intercultural practice, and towards a more fluid exchange?

In the three case studies above, the flexibility and fluidity of the model served as a great asset in its ability to assume specific sub-methodologies. As the case studies covered ranged vastly in style, source cultures, aesthetics, narrative, and dramaturgical strategies, so too did the specific sub-methodologies deployed within the context of each individual study. I see this flexibility as a great asset, however I am indeed wary of the fact that the flexibility of the model may indeed seem endless, perhaps to a fault.

If any and all sub-methodologies can be slotted into the model for use, where, then lies the specificity of the model itself? How can it escape the realm of generalization, to remain particular to intercultural performance? To that, I again return to my initial inspiration of Schrödinger's Cat and the openness necessary when discussing intercultural theatre. Just as every intercultural encounter is unique, and every subsequent artistic intercultural inquiry is unique, so too must the methods in which they are discussed be. This proposed model operates more as an umbrella for the deployment of specific sub-methodologies when discussing intercultural performance.

Can this model refute any imposed social hierarchies within intercultural exchange in the theatrical milieu?

I found that the model was successful at refuting socially imposed hierarchies (i.e. West and the Rest, an alimentary approach to intercultural exchange, or an "us vs. them" mentality) when it came to the semantic exchange between existing cultural codes. However, I did not find the model to be as successful in this vein when approaching aesthetic intercultural exchange. I, perhaps, fell into a bit of a pit hole when specifically

comparing “traditional” performance (i.e. *kathak*) with technological or mediated performance elements. In doing so, I automatically relegated the technological and mediated elements of performance to the “Western” performance tradition, and the “traditional” elements to the Eastern, when that might not unequivocally be the case. However, other than that instance, I found that the model was extremely helpful in resisting any essentializing of identity politics, or the relegation of any cultural practices into a “source” and “target” position.

One important addendum to consider, however, may perhaps be the fact that my methodology was structured around solo performance as the “control group” for “Western performance.” In this way, each performance was, indeed, skewed towards the rejection of social hierarchies and/or power dynamics, as the performers were also the creators of the plays. *Fish Eyes* and *Obaaberima* were each staged by directors other than the creator-performers (Brian Quirt and Evalyn Parry, respectively), but *DESH* was also directed by its creator-performer. In this way, there is a possibility that social hierarchies were de facto eliminated by the choice of methodology. In response to this possibility, however, I would simply argue that the selection of solo performance as the “control group” was aimed at analyzing the foundational rigour of the model in having a consistent style of performance against which to measure the intercultural exchange. The next step would be to deploy the model in the analysis of performance styles that do not share solo performance’s strength as a “powerful avenue for engaging with, inhabiting – or embodying a hybrid subjectivity” (Stephenson, “Performing Hybridity” 92).

An Out-Dooring of the Model

To conclude this study, and to borrow a leaf from the plot of *Obaaberima*, in which the infant is kept at home for the first seven days of its life, then presented and named to the world in an “Out-dooring Ceremony,” after executing my study of the creation of new meaning in intercultural performance and testing the rigour of my proposed four-step model of analysis, I bring this thesis to an end in the naming and presentation of the model:

“An Analytical Model for the Creation of New Meaning in Intercultural Performance”.

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