

**Ghislaine Boddington** (shinkansen/ResCen) provides extracts from the reportage seminars at *Munich Dance 2000* and *Dancin' World Copenhagen* festivals. Both focused on the presentation of choreographic works from international artists and featured round table conversations involving the presenting choreographers.

# into intercultural

## **1. The 7th International Festival for Contemporary Dance of the City of Munich, Dance 2000**

### **Between the Worlds Akademietheater, Munich • 16-25 March**

An atelier for choreographers, evolving thoughts and discussions on the processes of creation in the many worlds of dance

**Process direction and moderation:** Ghislaine Boddington (shinkansen/ResCen Middlesex University, UK) and dance critic/dramaturg André Lepecki (USA).

**Festival director:** Gabriele Naumann

#### **Artists participating**

Germaine Acogny (France/Senegal), Lin Hwai Min (Cloudgate, Taiwan), Sen Hea Ha (Korea/USA), Sardono W. Kusumo (Indonesia), Maya Krishna Rao (India), Ong Keng Sen (Theatre Works, Singapore), Yuzo Ishiyama and Satoru Oyamada (NEST, Japan), Micha Purucker (Germany), Salia Sanon and Seydou Boro (Burkina Faso/France), Avi Kaiser (Jant Bi, Germany/Israel)

## **2 Copenhagen International Theatre Dancin' World Festival Part of the Images of the World Danish Millennium focus Institut Francais, Copenhagen • 3 -20 August**

Five seminars across two weeks for artists and other experts looking at the issues and concerns of dance creation in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and for the evolving form, Butoh

**Direction and moderation:** Ghislaine Boddington (shinkansen/ResCen Middlesex University, UK)

**Director Copenhagen International Theatre:** Trevor Davies

**Artistic consultant Dancin' World:** Lene Thiesen

**Programme co-ordinator:** Katrien Verwilt

**Artists participating:** Germaine Acogny (Senegal/France), Avi Kaiser (Israel/Germany), Robyn Orlin (South Africa), Boyzie Cekwana (Floating Outfit, South Africa), Desire Davids (Floating Outfit, South Africa), Nanna Nilsson (Denmark), Charlotte Schioler (Denmark/France), Ann Crosset (USA/Denmark), Carlotta Ikeda (Ariadone, Japan/France), Kitt Johnson (Denmark), Susanna Ekerlund (Sweden), Stuart Lynch (UK/Denmark), Mui Cheuk Yin (Hong Kong), Kazco Takemoto (Japan), Maya Krishna Rao (India), Alvaro Restrepo (Columbia), Anna Lise Gabold (Denmark), Birgitte Hansen (Denmark), Suraya Hilal (Egypt/UK), Ibrahim El Minyawi (Egypt/UK), Ali Abdelalim (Egypt), Lars Bo Kujahn (Denmark), Stuart Lynch (Denmark/Britain)

**Producers, critics and other participants:** Helmut Voigt (Austria), Kajo Nelles (Germany), Alette Scavenius (Denmark), Karen Vedel (Denmark), Catherine Le Guern (France), Mayumi Nagatoshi (Japan), Yogo Hideaki (Japan), Annemette P. Karpen (Denmark), Claudia Heinle (Switzerland)

## **Emerging issues and concerns**

### **1. Contemporary versus traditional**

The use of the word 'contemporary' as being synonymous with 'western culture' was acknowledged as unfortunate. Both East and West have traditional and contemporary cultures in co-existence at any time.

Contemporary expression is not dependent on the West. The innovative mix of folk and new is part of the role dance forms play in cultural heritage - the multi-influences of society across time - acknowledged within the creation processes.

It was noted that in **AFRICA** it is becoming more possible for Africans to be taught by African teachers rather than by foreign teachers. To learn from others can be seen as a betrayal of one's culture.

■ Dance in Africa is looked upon as part of life, not as a profession.

■ There is a decrease in the number of men involved in dance in Africa, which is having to be urgently re-dressed through the education of teachers.

■ Compartmentalisation (by others and by Africans, too) is unhelpful (for example, if you are African you should only be dancing traditional African dance).

**"I am so much more than what I am asked to confine myself to be"** says Bozie Cekwana, Floating Outfit, South Africa.

The works shown from **ASIA** illustrated the risks, and pinpointed the potential dilemmas of being isolated when communicating one's messages through seeking the new. These choreographers are on the edge of their own cultures through the nature of what they do.

# uralism



Volker Dierleth

■ It was pointed out that choreography by Asian artists can be labelled as 'modern' in their home countries solely because it uses western elements, such as music or costumes

■ Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks, Singapore, struggles with the 'real' or authentic in his work and acknowledging its true worth. The term 'contemporary', he feels, is leading towards the tyranny of a 'singular standard' rather than allowing multiplicity.

**"Feeling confident enough to trust ourselves, trust our traditions and 'feel' at home",** reflects Lin Hwai Min, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Taiwan.

Raq Sharqi forms from the **MIDDLE EAST** have survived intense repression across the ages. The music and dance have assimilated and sampled many global influences, and the traditional has been evolved through extensive research and regeneration by artists such as Suraya Hilal working outside of her home country.

**BUTOH** practise accepts its evolution is by individual practitioners, as this philosophy is at its base. It can continue to evolve.

Even though, at the outset, it may be important to preserve roots, the essence of dance is an ongoing dialogue with the universe, an evolving living museum. There exists a need for archiving and writing, allowing time and finding one's own rhythm.

Labelling, particularly in the methodologies of the Western theorists, was considered to be irrelevant to the extension of the new. Categories were government and theory defined,

holding back and misrepresenting the innovative and being judgmental from a non objective base.

The aim should be to transgress the traditional and have meaningful dialogue about this transgression. New traditions occur all around. Today they include club culture, Internet and global travel. The message was to avoid labelling, share with others, be connected here and now and be true to oneself.

Traditionalists must not determine the way but must regenerate within the modern context, or natural evolution is held back.

The evolution of traditional forms across time and place is a fascinating reflection of the history of the migration of cultures and the development of body expression within deep socio-cultural contexts.

Should one use tradition to find oneself today? To be a contemporary person with space for the powerful traditions within you.

It must be remembered that Europe also has its roots and heritage - traditions in dance in the form of folk are still strong in some European regions and court dance evolved folk further, all influencing the development of classical ballet. Ancient

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manifestations need to be re-found and re-explored in countries throughout Europe as well as globally.

## 2. Fluid identity and hybridity

**"Colonisation is a reality, coming to terms with it is a process. Is it really worth fighting something that I am? I am a colonised body - a colonised mind. I am aware of this. The process is about accepting this polarity - so much of me is European and so much is African. How much should I hold onto and how much should I rid myself of? Fusion and hybridity - this is what most of us are and I recognise it. I do not try, except in a few intellectual exercises, to make a fusion - it is what I am. There is so much baggage - yet it is interculturalism that influences the relationships I form today,"** Bozie Cekwana, Floating Outfit, South Africa

Germaine Acogny, Senegal, reinforces this: **"Know who you are and where you come from, but also be of 'now'"**.

It was good advice for us all to stay well aware of the problematic Western concept of orientalism. This is a western construct - a monolith which effects how the West/North views the South/East - as exotic.

The transposition of dance from local spaces, often site-specific and of different durational forms, to Western proscenium and black box stages for hour long evening performances, is delicate and sensitive work requiring a cultural dramaturgy engaged in the needs of the artists and the public.

## 3. Processes of making

The issues around the use and/or misuse of the body in dance were touched on several times. It is clearly a debate that will re-emerge linked to the politics and identity of the body - the

thin line between body anarchy and body fascism being questioned by many. The increased use of Butoh by western artists was debated as being an example of where choreographers must be very clear about the context and intent of their use of intense body work. In contrast, forms such as Raq Sharqi are based in the passion and power of the body and the deep joy of dance.

What is 'authentic' today in a world of sampling and pluralistic identities? Several discussions occurred around the issue of appropriation and the process of sampling. It was felt by some to be important that artists, particularly those from Asia, do not lean towards 'Western' techniques and processes in order to join the international circuit. Was this not then, creating restrained hybrids? Others were clear that extensive 'Western' appropriation of 'Eastern' concepts, techniques and forms across many centuries means that sampling is now a process accepted across all realms and is part of the evolution of forms.

Like NEST (Japan), Salia and Seydou (Burkina Faso), believe that African traditions enable and give equal place to music, movement and visuals in their work. A deeper examination of the NEST techniques showed creation methodologies using a decentralised system - all company members acting as equal authors in a creation formatted to include all elements equally. Rather than this being a creation methodology that could easily be seen as new and relating to digital integration, it is in fact the oldest of creation processes. Salia and Seydou found much in common with NEST's open state of structured improvisation, inter-authorship and constant evolution and felt fascinated by the potential of using the NEST software programme to give them a digital break down of their creations methodologies.

Others within the groups were working in an authored state, touring internationally for their country either with large companies and/or state backing, or working alone, as independents or solo artists, committed to conveying to the audience the deep essence of themselves.

Stars or gurus exist in the West and East, North and South but the discourse surrounding youth culture and digital technologies enabled a group and global overview as to the influence, through connectivity, of creativity by all.

Clearly the biggest need is for the creation of advanced learning projects,



helping professionals develop action and practice, aiding understanding of creation processes and of each other and/or other cultures.

#### 4. Universality?

The acceptance that there is no universal meaning in body language was definite. In India dance and drama are often inseparable, in Africa putting dance on an official form as your occupation is not possible because 'everyone is a dancer', in Korea most dancing women are seen as living lives of shame. Even in the western countries difference have abounded - Germany developed a dance theatre movement with the emphasis on the human character, whereas in the United States of America and other parts of Europe, the concerns of abstraction have dominated.

The cycles of dance through communities and/or societies across the world are hugely influenced by modern day globalism. These changes need to be documented and researched.

The question at present is how to look at the world and its connections in the 21st century. Do we approach it through concepts of internationalism, globalism or universality? The group concluded that Pluralism was the most positive approach.

It is clear that the concept of the universality of the body must not ignore the deep cultural differences in body. We cannot be free from culture - our own or that which surrounds us in our daily lives - but we can try to avoid fake constructs. The urgency of connections and deep exchange cannot be under-estimated.

We must continue to challenge the traditional/contemporary meeting point, both memory and the present being reflected through this challenge.

**"We still have much too learn to understand each others languages."**

Alvaro Restrepo, Colombia

#### 5. Networking and connectivity

For the quality of dance to improve in today's intercultural world, there is a need for serious debate and further meeting points - not only at European

based international festivals but within and between the countries themselves. These meeting points need to be true sharings of experience.

Inspiration is always gained by visitors - whether home is in Europe or Africa. It is very important to cross the bridge and talk and/or engage with a person of different race, who has grown up in a different country to oneself, as it is through this process that we learn so much more about ourselves. Encountering the other enables us to see the world around us and to discover many things in ourselves.

Networking is a process of thinking and being. It is about building trust and understanding and finding a joint language. Networking is hard work, it means opening ourselves up to others. First of all remember it is more conducive to find like minded people to work with in the long run, and this takes time. Time to understand each others working circumstances, processes and attitudes to life.

Local and national networking is more problematic than international networking because within one's own locality everyone is competing for the same opportunities and funds.

In innovative arts practice it is important to remember that often one's competitors will be key potential partners, particularly if one needs to get larger projects and research to happen. Remote networking can help to link similar thinkers in other countries which in turn, helps break down the sense of isolation that can prevail when working on new ideas.

#### 6. Conclusions

An overall feeling existed that the energy and essentialism of the participating artists work brought up questions about western art and its intent and reason for being.

To study the social project of the body and the role of dance in relationship to society and culture helps us all understand more about being human and about our own identity. This wider understanding can enable us all to negotiate and respect cultural difference.

**Ghislaine Boddington**, director and dramaturg (shinkansen/ResCen London), Working internationally focusing on the developments and effects of digital technologies and interculturalism on the performing arts. She has a research associateship at ResCen Middlesex University, where she is developing a summer 2001 performance project exploring interculturalism and new technologies.