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A new space

First reactions to Pointe-to-Point Asia-Europe Dance Forum, Tokyo, Japan, 5-13 September 2005

Forty-eight lights flashing around a circle signaling the shape of space, signaling the pulse of the city, the flow of time. Inside this space the stage appears as an altar of reactions. Once you enter it you are faced with the question: “ Do you know where you are? Do you have a connection with Japanese culture? Is it confusing to have this connection?” If this is considered to be a simple question, the answer is as colorful, vivid, chaotic and contrasting as it is experiencing the city of Tokyo.

The pulse of the city continues, until it is enriched by the vibrations of a point in space, a human monad that enters its atmosphere. Another comes to join in, until 22 of them enter the space and react to it in their own way, as much chaotic, loud, incomprehensible as it might turn out to be. Time flows. The city pulse continues to pump. We get a grasp of the city’s lifestyle, with a photographic storytelling of various moments that grasped the dancers attention. We see them making a point with their movements, reacting abstractly, mimicking the Japanese lifestyle, connecting in smaller groups or left alone in an empty stage, until an explosion of sounds and lights leads to the upcoming stillness. A cathartic standstill to a fully sensed performance.

This was the interpretation of the city of Tokyo by 22 dancers from Asia and Europe who worked closely for one week with 20 artists from Japan and Germany to the subject matter of localism and globalism, under the guidance of Mr Naoto Ina, dramaturg and director from the artists collective Dance and Media Japan. The initiator **ASEF’s, the Asia Europe Foundation**, aim was to aspire young artists from Asia and Europe to present their views on contemporary society through emphasizing dance as a medium of communication that reflects the constantly changing society, or simply, as put by Professor Takayuki Kimura dealing with the problem of “not knowing the other side”.

For most participants the other side was not only Japanese culture, but also all the participants differing cultures. When they presented themselves in the first session with samples of their idiosyncratic artistic techniques, I feared that by pointing out their “differences” they would end up enhancing them, instead of finding a common ground of expression. Mr Ina went a step further as to see these differences as points of the same puzzle that act at the same time. They were not grouped harmoniously or softened their odds, but brought together in such a “situation” as to network with one another in order to create a bigger “reality”. At the same time Ruthe Zuntz and Michael Reitz from Walkscreen used these different approaches to Japanese lifestyle to mount a photographic puzzle of personal stories that became common ones.

Within the process, structured improvisation in choreography was chosen as a means to enhance the passing of time, the split moment that it takes for something to grasp ones own attention. Some dancers were inspired by their cultural and ethnic traditions to express themselves, others were inspired by their formal technical training, while others attempted to copy the Japanese everyday movement vocabulary. The use of media enhanced the pictorial representation of the city and was used as the “dancer’s eyes” while sound grasped urban sounds and copied human body pulses to accentuate the feeling of being not only in the city

but inside a “body” as well, locus in locus. Sometimes, media seemed to be taking over the role of the narrator in the performance, while dancers were merely players on the same screen as the projections. However, this aesthetic was in line with the way we experienced Tokyo, e.g. through high technology equipment, being guided in the city by media paraphernalia and surrounded by gigantic screens.

Nonetheless, Tokyo was not the protagonist of this show, but the “space” itself, as a three-dimensional place, which set the atmosphere for the reactions of the 3D forms of the dancers. Perhaps, this was the most confronting element for the European media artists, Walkscreen, the fact that although they were used to telling stories through pictures and presenting the body as a space of memories and experiences, this time they were put in a constructed “mood” in which they had to make their point abstractly.

Mr Naoto Ina described himself as “a mood creator” who connects points with other points in order to communicate. Using different kinds of patterns (dance, media, sound) he aimed at communicating, not by following a scenario, as in a typical theater play, but with the concept of localism & globalism. In this case the city of Tokyo became locality as the common meeting point of various other cultural localities.

The use of dancers was focused on the humanity of the body. The human body was a point in space, therefore round which takes up space and has a line going through it, which has time-length. These two shapes create a spiral that could expand in any direction and meet with other points, and therefore communicate. Through guidance, and not manipulation these points were connected within this made up performative “situation”.

If communication was deliberately aimed by Mr Ina, that was exactly the issues that troubled the collaborating artists, who seemed to be lost in the perception of archetypal matters of performance. But if troubled interpretation was met in artistic inspiration, the end result was clear in communicative power but contrasting in feelings. How could it not be when there were 22 different cultural bodies interpreting the city in their own way. As Cynthia Novak has pointed in her ethnographic history *Sharing the Dance*: “Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate. We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it, in conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it.” (1990:8)

As a tourist, when you visit a foreign country you enter a new “space” which you are willing to explore. Accordingly you have to learn to adjust/ or not to this new atmosphere that has a different flow of energy and time from your home country, a different mode of communication, and you might even experience some strong cultural contrasts due to your own personal interpretations.

When this contrasting “space” becomes the stage and the subject matter of a 1 week workshop with artists from 20 different countries that leads to a performance, the outcome is a collection of different interpretations of the same place.

As contrasting as that may sound the Pointe to Point workshop performance managed to perform a common point of reference for all these different artists, creating a common ground of shared experiences. This is what workshops like the Pointe to Point Young Artists Exchange do, to connect points that come from different cultures, which at first sight might have nothing in common, and bring them together to a common space that becomes their new locality.

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