

# Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory



Performance, Embodiment  
and Cultural Memory

Edited by

Colin Counsell and Roberta Mock

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

---

**P U B L I S H I N G**

Performance, Embodiment and Cultural Memory,  
Edited by Colin Counsell and Roberta Mock

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by Colin Counsell and Roberta Mock and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1120-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1120-0

# CONTENTS

COLIN COUNSELL	
Introduction .....	1
RIC KNOWLES	
Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present: The Case of Toronto .....	16
ROYONA MITRA	
Embodiment of Memory and the Diasporic Agent in Akram Khan Company's <i>Bahok</i> .....	41
ROBERTA MOCK	
<i>Tohu-bohu</i> : Rachel Rosenthal's Performances of Diasporic Cultural Memory .....	59
BRYONI TREZISE	
Belated Spaces: Embodying Embodiment in Holocaust Tourism .....	80
CARIAD ASTLES	
Barcelona: Earth, Puppets and Embodiment .....	97
RUTH HELLIER-TINOCO	
Dead Bodies/Live Bodies: Myths, Memory and Resurrection in Contemporary Mexican Performance.....	114
MICHELLE LIU CARRIGER	
Consuming Culture: The Japanese Way of Tea in Performance .....	140
PAUL RAE	
No Sweat: Performance and the Care of the Singapore Self .....	158
MINTY DONALD	
<i>Pianola Karaoke</i> and Other Attractions: Resisting the Homogenisation of Cultural Memory Attached to Material Sites .....	183

ROSS BROWN	
Noise, Memory, Gesture: The Theatre in a Minute's Silence .....	203
Key Texts .....	222
Contributors.....	224

# INTRODUCTION

COLIN COUNSELL

Even acknowledging the operation of will, affect and individual desire, it is evident that the bulk of our behaviours are socially constructed. Manners and etiquette, deportment, vestimentary codes, the constraints of propriety and conventions for expressing sexuality, gender and power – all predate the particular act, are the realisation of inherited schemes. In this sense, they constitute embodiments of memory, and a memory that is collective. This has long been recognised in the academy, for when anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered the rituals of “primitive” peoples, they implicitly viewed the bodies involved as the bearers of pre-existing significance – even as, conversely, they tacitly assumed Western, “civilised” bodies acted in ways that were largely ideationally neutral.<sup>1</sup>

This recognition was not always relegated to the implicit, however. Writing in 1934 of the “techniques of the body,”<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss attempted a general theorisation of the relationship between corporeal practices and a wider *habitus*,<sup>3</sup> while Norbert Elias’s compendious study of the “civilising process” demonstrated the impact of large-scale historical developments upon the *soma*.<sup>4</sup> In his 1941 account of carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin described the celebratory body’s symbolic participation in the subversion of social hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> By the mid twentieth century there was already a theorised understanding of the body as a vehicle for extant cultural meaning, its forms and actions a mnemonics of what had gone before.

It is this – the cultural coding of the *soma* and its behaviours, the way it reproduces, modifies or challenges inherited formulations – that is the subject of this volume of essays. In introducing the volume, I want first to consider some of the conceptual frames within which such acts of embodied remembering have been understood. Rather than try to be comprehensive, I will focus here on just three bodies of writing that have had particular impact on the modern study of the body in performance.

The first is that pool of writings that comprises modern Structuralism. For the “father” of Structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss, the significance granted acts and artefacts is the product of semiotic “sets” that are culturally specific.<sup>6</sup> Composed of elements that typically take a binary, oppositional form – male versus female, raw versus cooked – these paradigmatic structures provide the thetic scaffolding within which all particular meanings are generated. At the core of Lévi-Strauss’s Structural Anthropology, therefore, is a conception of human action as always already culturally charged, and charged alike for both actor and (culturally competent) observer. Although most subsequent structuralist writings would focus on language as the primary medium of culture, Lévi-Strauss thereby prepared the ground for a view of corporeal practice as partaking of, drawing significance *from*, inherited cognitive systems.

It was on this basis that the early work of ethnologist Pierre Bourdieu proceeded. Writing of the people of Kabylia (Algeria), Bourdieu explained how their gendered behaviours – the groundward-leaning posture of women, connoting a “proper” modesty, versus the upright stances of men; male visibility in public spaces and female restriction to the enclosed space of the home – were born of their culture’s founding sexual *habitus*, the very shapes their bodies adopted deriving their logic from systems of oppositions peculiar to Kabylia life. For Bourdieu, the subject who acts and the subject who perceives the act function within the same inherited frames, their behaviours constituting a form of corporeal remembering.<sup>7</sup>

In the work of the early Bourdieu, then, actor and observer exist in a perceptual relationship determined by specific species of cognition. For both, the act is rendered a sign, a concretisation of constructions peculiar to that culture. It is this broadly structuralist proposition that Michel Foucault developed so successfully. Writing of what he termed the “episteme” of “surveillance” in his vastly influential *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault attributed to behaviour a similarly mnemonic status.<sup>8</sup> For while much of the piece’s rhetorical force derives from his tracing of the episteme’s imprint on diverse cultural artefacts – architecture, discourses of penology and education, modes of social organisation – its final point of impact is bodily practices. Foucault’s account of those practices is distinct, however, in putting politics at its centre. The “micro-physics of power” he detailed ultimately rests on a three-part economy of perception of the kind resonant of Structuralism *per se*, but in which power was always already embedded: as subjects act,



their acts are perceived by onlookers through the lens of one or other hegemonic discourse, are “known” in the terms that discourse provides. Knowledge for Foucault is always “power/knowledge,” with somatic practices inescapably implicated in a politics of social control.

Although interest in Structuralism *per se* has waned in recent years, elements of its perspective continue to inform cultural theory. In relation to questions of performance and embodiment, it is arguably Judith Butler who, while in no sense a structuralist, has done most to develop the insights provided by such as Foucault. In her much quoted *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler argues that identity, and notably gendered and sexual identity, is itself the product of somatic shaping.<sup>9</sup> Prevailing Cartesian models of the self insist on a division between mind and body, valorising the former as the repository of the subject’s essence and relegating the latter to the role of “automaton,” merely the instrument for expressing what lies within. Butler in effect inverts this explanation: “essential” selfhood, she argues, is a chimera, for subjects in reality enact an identity via existing corporeal codes, “stylised acts” that possess given semic freight. If this embeds hegemonic models of the self in both everyday and staged behaviours, it also renders those models vulnerable to challenge. For in refusing the usual conflation of (gendered) behaviour and “essence,” performances such as drag acts subvert any automatic equation of identity with stylised act. Although embodiment is the medium of received constructions of selfhood, for Butler it is also the arena in which these can be contested, and it is possible to extend her conclusions regarding gender and sexuality to other species of social identity.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years models of culture rooted in structuralist assumptions have been subject to widespread critique. It has been noted, for example, that Structuralism does not easily admit diversity: that in viewing culture as a single semic “system,” it obscures the plurality of positions and identities all real cultures – indeed, all real *subjects* – manifest. It therefore offers no place for theories of ethnicity or sexual dissidence, say, founded as they are in notions of difference. For those concerned with embodiment and performance, however, there is perhaps a more pressing problem, albeit a related one. For the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*, embodiment always takes a negative form, consisting of the imposition of corporeal regimes that serve the interests of a diffuse, Nietzschean power. In this period of his writing, at least, he admits no possibility of effective somatic resistance – bodily practices able to oppose prevailing hegemonies

– for even dissident acts are perceptually constructed within the terms of the prevailing episteme.<sup>11</sup>

This is in large part the result of the synchronic perspective at the heart of structuralist thought. To view a culture synchronically is to render the relations between its parts static, and to freeze what may in reality be ongoing, temporally-based, dialectical *processes* into apparently fixed patterns of dichotomies. Structuralism's own analytical posture, and its consequent aestheticisation of thesis into systems of oppositions, thus produces a vision of culture as monolithic – and, for the middle-period Foucault, one in which all is inescapably part of the dominating order.<sup>12</sup> Butler's work is not entirely free from this limitation. The “stylised acts” detailed in *Gender Trouble* also exist in systematic relations, defining identity according to patterns of ideologically-weighted polarities. As a consequence, resistance can only take the form of a *subversion of* hegemonic regimes. There is little sense in which the body might be the site of independent, autonomous constructions such as would characterise a genuinely polyphonous cultural terrain.

Additionally, while Structuralism offers a way of conceptualising the body in culture, it has less to say about the inheritance thus embodied, that which is corporeally remembered. In so far as memory features at all, it resides in the semiotic *langue*, the network of arbitrary relations that link signifier to signified, act to concept. It was from sociological writing that an account of cultural memory was initially to emerge. Memory has been a tacit object of study since the inception of modern Sociology, of course, for when Durkheim wrote in 1912 of religious ceremonies and rituals, he addressed those concrete acts as the bearers of values rooted in actual and notional pasts – more precisely, mythological values derived from a real past.<sup>13</sup> But it was a follower of Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs, who first considered the question of memory directly, viewing it from the outset as a social property.

Moreover, while Durkheim and others considered societies their object of study, Halbwachs wrote specifically of “groups.” The distinction is not insignificant, for in doing so he acknowledged the pluralism characteristic of any modern social whole, its composition as an amalgam of different collectives, and its resulting potential to manifest multiple, possibly conflicting identities and positions. Thus in his *Social Frameworks of Memory* (1934) it is smaller-scale social aggregates, in the form of families, religious groups and social classes, that he proposes as the

breeding ground of distinct bodies of memory.<sup>14</sup> Halbwachs's choice of collectives may be subject to critique, seen as reflecting the cultural assumptions of his time, and the modern scholar might wish to propose different – indeed, less strictly bounded – collective forms; but he nevertheless saw the *group* as memory's proper environment.

The historical value of Halbwachs's work resides in large part in its recognition of memory as a social artefact. Generalising in its observations, and discursive in form, it is eminently quotable but perhaps does not provide an adequate framework within which other studies of cultural memory might be securely couched: it offers no explicit and transposable theory, and few in-depth, original case studies from which observations of a theoretical, generally applicable kind might be extrapolated. Equally importantly, Halbwachs devotes very little space to considering how memories are maintained and disseminated. This is a significant omission, for if collective memory is by definition drawn from the past, then the social and material means of its transmission through time, between individuals, must be of central concern to sociologists and, of course, scholars of that emphatically material enterprise, performance.

There is no such omission in the work of sociologist Paul Connerton. In his concise *How Societies Remember* (1989) he certainly considers the nature of memory *per se*, juxtaposing a range of broad traditions within which it has been conceptualised.<sup>15</sup> A main focus of the book, however, is the collective and material mechanisms by which memory is passed on. Under the rubric of what he calls “commemorative ceremonies,” he explores “official” enactments, the kind of national or society-wide means of transmission that have been the subject of numerous studies in the past. More intriguingly, he also considers less formal bodily practices, the way apparently casual, even doxic behaviours may in fact embody inherited dispositions of a conceptually dense kind. Discussing fashion in France after the Revolution, for example, he notes:

Styles of clothing in Paris passed through two phases during the revolutionary period. During the first, which dominated the years 1791-4, clothes became uniforms. The culotte of simple cut and the absence of adornments were emblematic of the desire to eliminate social barriers in the striving for equality: by making the body neutral, citizens were free to deal with one another without the intrusion of differences of social status. During the second phase, which dominated the years of Thermidor beginning in 1795, liberty of dress came to mean free bodily movement. People now began to dress in such a way as to expose their bodies to one another on the street and to display the motions of the body... This was a

moment in the history of Paris when inhibitory rules were suspended: when, as in all carnival, the people acted out their awareness that established authority was, in reality, a matter of local prescription.<sup>16</sup>

For Connerton, then, even ephemeral codes of fashion can function as vehicles for cultural remembering. Apparently unregulated, born of informal social interaction, they are nevertheless capable of conveying highly nuanced conceptions of a common history. Yet the above example also makes evident another quality of embodied memory. For the fashions described do not simply reflect the past, they recreate it, and effectively re-narrativise events individuals might actually have experienced. Cultural memory is not simply passed on in Connerton's account, it is made afresh, bodies enacting new visions of a collective past.

This points the way towards a significant issue. It is perhaps easy to imagine the embodiment of memory as an essentially static process, for, drawing from and deferring to the past, imprinted on the bodies of the present, it can appear exclusively reiterative. This impression has been countered in a number of studies, but nowhere more cogently than in the work of anthropologist Margaret Thompson Drewal. In her *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (1992), Drewal makes the point that even "traditional," apparently fixed somatic practices in fact respond to historical circumstance, and so are always in the process of change, are formed of "repetition with revision."<sup>17</sup> This can be extended to include our understanding of embodied memory. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger demonstrated that traditions may be invented – that cultural enactments of the past are always conceived in a present, and necessarily serve present interests.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, culture of necessity constructs its memories, if only because their reproduction in concrete practices is always shaped by the aesthetic and ideational dispositions of the society that remembers. As Raymond Williams pointed out, "no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors,"<sup>19</sup> with the consequence that each models its memories in a different way.

This conception of cultural acts as essentially constructive, *making* meaning, is central to the third and newest body of writing I want to consider, that deriving from the discipline of Performance Studies. As a distinct discipline, Performance Studies emerged in the late 1960s and early '70s, building upon discussions between sociologist Erving Goffman, anthropologists Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood, and director and performance theorist Richard Schechner.<sup>20</sup> Having written on the presentation of self in everyday life, Goffman had already demonstrated

an interest in the theatricality of the quotidian,<sup>21</sup> while Conquergood addressed performativity as a tool for real-world activism. In his numerous studies of rituals, Turner construed them as mechanisms for socio-cultural renewal and transformation, and Schechner's experimental theatre productions worked to question given distinctions between social and performance space.

It was not insignificant, then, that the new discipline proved fundamentally interdisciplinary, admitting no absolute distinction between activities traditionally ring-fenced as "performance" and other kinds of enacted event. Football games, political protests and productions of *Hamlet*, the hawkers' calling of his wares and the TV personality's careful manufacture of his public persona – all are arguably species of what Schechner famously termed "restored" or "twice-behaved behaviour," activities that are neither purely functional nor entirely spontaneous but defer to prior actions or models for action, and so are in some sense reiterations.<sup>22</sup> At a time when structuralist writing most often focused on language, Performance Studies turned its attention to the body as the principal medium of memory's transmission.

Of the many works to emerge from the discipline, two stand out as especially apposite to the essays in this volume. Considering what he calls the "geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world," in *Cities of the Dead* (1996) Joseph Roach examines the modes of performance that emerged from economic and cultural exchange between Europe, Africa and the Americas (emblematised in the examples of London and New Orleans) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> No performance or model for performance is beyond the scope of Roach's consideration, as he ranges across events and texts as diverse as Thomas Betterton's funeral, Dryden's *The Indian Emperour*, and the work of Mardi Gras "krewes." Crucially, the study is underpinned by Roach's assertion that performance, in the global sense implied by the discipline, entails processes of remembering, forgetting and reinventing – of restating past values, dispositions and relationships via "surrogates," enacting new dispositions, and so on. For Structuralism, performance was always in some sense secondary, the *parole* to the abstract *langue* that is culture: for Halbwachs memory was separable from the material means of its transmission. But for Roach, memory and meaning are imminent in the act itself, generated and negotiated by particular bodies, specific acts. Performance thus forms the very substance of cultural life, is the *process*

in which the terms of collective existence are made, remade and transformed.

Diana Taylor shares this broad assumption. At the centre of her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) is a non-dogmatic proposal: while archives typically comprise an official record, and hence lend themselves to dominant viewpoints, the repertoire, with its circulation of unofficial, apparently ephemeral materials, is the more likely repository of the histories and experiences of the marginalised.<sup>24</sup> It is the latter – memory not collected and written down but embodied in practice – that she explores in the form of a variety of cultural performances both modern and historical, from the “self-fashioning” of celebrity fortune tellers to the performances of indigenous peoples in fifteenth-century Mexico, and memorials to Diana Spencer. Such performances may or may not be overtly political in content, but, for Taylor, all negotiate a basic political dynamic. As an accumulation of official viewpoints, the archive comprises an ossification of hegemonic structures. It is only in the comparatively unregulated realm of the repertoire that non-hegemonic views may be postulated. The place where alternatives may be proposed, new meanings *made*, the repertoire is the domain of cultural process, and therefore the arena in which acts of resistance can take place.

\*\*\*

What emerges from the interaction of these perspectives is a vision of performance as an essentially *constructive* medium, and one for which orthodox distinctions between the real and the theatrical, and the functional and conceptual, cannot be maintained. However and wherever they appear, bodies and their actions are shaped by, give form *to*, figures drawn from cultural memories. If they thus comprise a means of reproducing those memories, through time and between individuals, as articulators of an unofficial repertoire bodies also provide an arena in which they can be adapted and contested.

In their different ways, all the essays in this volume deal with this reiterative or adaptive process. As Ric Knowles notes, Canada was the first country to officially adopt a policy of multiculturalism, but the outcomes, he argues, have not been entirely positive. Implicitly taking an essentialist, exoticised view of cultural difference, the policy has resulted in a theatre dedicated to preserving immigrants’ cultural heritage, one that

fails to acknowledge the fluidity of the nation's diasporic identities, and their interaction in a modern *intercultural* milieu. It is this fluidity and interaction he explores via the examples of four recent works of a different stripe, all performed in the multicultural city of Toronto. Rather than offer some nostalgic depiction of a "home" culture, each piece traces the interpenetration of past memory and present reality, dealing with the modern subject's negotiation of an identity that encompasses both. If they explore this in their themes and narratives, Knowles asserts, they also do so via bodily practices, developing somatic forms that function as mnemonics of cultural memory.

The body as an instrument for enacting cultural identity, and the possibility of that identity's reinvention, are also at the centre of Royona Mitra's chapter. With numerous individuals having transplanted from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe to a new life in the West, migration, she observes, is a central feature of contemporary cultural experience. Having two "homes" – or, in a state of ongoing cultural "transit," effectively having none – migrants and their descendents have no obvious and given body of cultural memories in which their own identities might be anchored, and no somatic repertoire to give those identities form. It is the condition of these "diasporic agents," Mitra argues, that is addressed in Akram Kahn's dance *Bahok*. Caught in the in-betweenness of transit, its culturally diverse characters trace a postmodern state of hybridity in their very actions, are forced to negotiate a relationship to multiple cultural locations and to each other. But this is not an entirely negative situation, Mitra asserts, for in the process essentialist ideas of "home" are challenged, the dance ultimately offering the possibility of an empowering *transnationality* in which new identities are created self-reflectively.

Approaching the question of diasporic agency from a somewhat different direction, in her chapter Roberta Mock uses the term "autotopographical" to describe the relationship between autobiography, place and the body in the work of Rachel Rosenthal. Overlapping interiority and exteriority, personal biography and global history, in a series of performances Rosenthal has offered her own body as mythic metaphor for the geographical world. Since topology is a powerfully constructive discourse, defining not just place but the subject's relationship to it, Mock argues, Rosenthal's work comprises a "writing of self," a process implicated in the creation of cultural identity. But underpinning this, often unspoken, is the structuring presence of a more literal social identity, that of the diasporic Jewish woman. For while Jewishness has often been suppressed

over the last century, the terms on which Jewish identity was founded nevertheless re-emerge as a “spectral visibility” haunting modern culture. It is a similar haunting that Mock traces through Rosenthal’s work, exploring how Jewishness appears not only in her choice of materials but in the themes and geo-somatic symbolologies it provides.

Trauma, Bryoni Trezise notes, is no less subject to cultural embodiment. It is not simply memories of traumatic events that are transmitted across time, for such memories are themselves typically couched within given perspectives, construing those events in specific ways. Thus testaments to trauma also provide for later generations particular subject positions, embedding cultural identities in their conceptualisations of the past. It is this principle she brings to her exploration of three memorials to the Holocaust. Christian Boltanski’s *Missing House*, Peter Eisenman’s *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum certainly offer quite different kinds of testimony, but they more importantly provide different perceptual experiences, effectively requiring that participants adopt a definable position in relation to the horrors scarring mid twentieth-century Europe. In this sense they comprise embodiments of embodiment, demanding that visitors interpretively perform a specific cognitive relationship to what has gone before.

Specificity of site is also central to Ciriad Astles’ chapter, for its setting is Barcelona, a city whose history is marked by cycles of occupation and independence. Deliberately stripped of its Catalan identity in the post-Civil War period, it was re-presented as a Castillian Spanish city until the end of Franco’s dictatorship. It is in this context of repression followed by liberation, Astles notes, that puppeteers such as Joan Bixas worked to assert Catalan cultural identity. A traditional Catalan medium, puppetry is inherently redolent of Catalan culture, and in Bixas’s hands the bodies of its marionettes became instruments of carnivalesque assault against the prevailing political order. Equally important was the role of *matter* in Bixas’s work, however, for in incorporating materials that were visibly worked and used, he presented audiences with tangible traces of past human activity. The resulting performances thus comprised materialisations of memory, mythically asserting Barcelona’s status as the place of multiple linkages, connected to the greater human world.

The embodiment of cultural identity is similarly at the heart of Ruth Hellier-Tinoco’s chapter. The construction of national identity in Mexico,



she notes, has since independence involved mobilisation of the objects, sites and iconographies of a prehispanic, sometimes mythical Mexican past. Performance has played a role in this, with the bodies of actors and dancers “transmuted” into symbols of myth and history. If cultural identity always involves an appeal to a remembered past, in Mexico this appeal has particular urgency, for, founded in invasion and conquest, built upon shifting borders, the question “Who am I?” has singular resonance for that country’s people. It is the continuation of this process of identity formation today that Hellier-Tinoco explores via four modern performances. The pieces are very different, comprising two contemporary theatre works, one traditional, apparently authentic cultural event, and a filmed record of another such event. But in each the bodies of “performers” are deployed as icons of a Mexicanness built of the past, made to bear the weight of memory.

Michelle Liu Carriger’s chapter is less concerned with the historical meaning of *Chanoyu*, the so-called “Japanese Tea ceremony,” than with its character as a transposable act of embodiment, one that can be remobilised in the present. Tea certainly reflects principles basic to Zen Buddhism, implicitly favouring the negation of self in favour of the here and now of its performance. But this very refusal of an abstract meaning lying beyond the material act, she argues, renders it available to changing narrativisations. This is in part a result of Tea’s position at the intersection of two temporalities, for, borne of long tradition and disciplined practice, yet contingent and ultimately unrepeatable, it both “disappears” in Peggy Phelan’s sense and involves an act of reiterative “surrogacy” as described by Joseph Roach. Reaching into the past and genuinely reproducing material bodily practices, but leaving those practices semically unfixed, it comprises a canvas on which shifting significances can be projected.

Taking quite a different tack, Paul Rae begins his exploration of embodiment and memory in Singapore with an emphatically modern Asian luxury commodity, the “iDesire” massage chair. The state of Singapore, he argues, was in large part founded on the erasure of existing cultural memories, for it was only by effacing the diversity of specific histories and experiences that the modern, unified state was brought conceptually into being. While this effacement most obviously involved mechanisms for overt social control, ranging from modes of surveillance to the creation of an “official” national history, it emerged more obliquely as various “techniques of the self,” practices of bodily self-monitoring for which the iDesire is a modern exemplar. If bodies thus comprise targets

for socio-cultural discipline in Singapore, however, it is because they offer themselves as vehicles for collective memory, which also makes them repositories for memories of an unofficial kind. This is most of all the case with performing bodies, Rae maintains, for it is in theatre and films about theatre that he finds acknowledgement of the role played by the body in Singapore, and traces of that nation's cultural loss.

The cultural "writing" of place is equally crucial to Minty Donald's chapter, albeit that she deals with a place of a different scale. Today's "heritage industry," she notes, inherently tends towards cultural stasis, for in ascribing to objects and sites a limited number of established and orthodox meanings, it renders them expressive of a homogenised history. Hermetically sealing the past, it thereby removes them from the processes of present remembering. But performative, embodied practices have the capacity to challenge memory's ossification, Donald argues, and such was the aim of her project *Glimmers in Limbo*. Comprising a number of performances in and around the disused Britannia Panopticon Music Hall in Glasgow, it sought to destabilise the hegemonic meanings attached to the site, prompt "imaginative rememberings" that linked past to present in new and diverse ways. The ultimate goal was a multiple layering of history, making the now decrepit venue the locus of present cognitive activities, and hence of diverse and competing narratives.

The narrativisation of the material is approached from a different direction by Ross Brown. Today's preoccupation with the visual is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, he argues, and the audial played a far greater role in premodern cultures. It could do so in part because of sound's immersive quality, for, resonating within the body, refusing to not be heard, it denies any easy Cartesian distinction between self and external world. It was therefore able to function as expression of greater, holistic paradigms, make of the body "a microcosmic extension of a universe." It is this perspective that Brown brings to his account of the two-minute silence. In reality such events are experienced as anything but silent, for they serve to frame the sounds emanating from the environment and from one's own body. They thereby effect a heightened recognition of an existential situation, the individual's relationship to their surroundings, and particularly to the crowd. Communal yet solitary, free of intentional sounds but experienced as supremely noisy, they recontextualise the solipsism of the modern subject, comprise "a powerfully unifying agreement that at this moment, nothing need be said."

## Works Cited

- Bakhtin, M. (1993) *Rabelais and His World* [1941], trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1967) *The Algerians* [1961], trans. Peter Neal, New York: Beacon Books.
- . (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* [1972], trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Connerton, P. (1989) *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Counsell, C. and P. Stanley (2005) "Performing Impairment: Modernity and the Cultural Enactment of Disability," *Atenea*, 2:1 (December), pp.24-38.
- Drewal, M. T. (1992) *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1933) *The Division of Labour in Society* [1893], trans. George Simpson, New York: Macmillan.
- . (1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [1912], trans. Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press.
- Elias, N. (1994) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* [1939], trans. Edmund Jephcott, London: Blackwell.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory*, trans. & ed. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger (Eds.) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966) *The Savage Mind* [1962], London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Mauss, M. (1974) "The Techniques of the Body" [1935], *Economy and Society*, 2:1 (February), pp.70-88.
- Roach, J. (1996) *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schechner, R. (2006) *Performance Studies: An Introduction* [2002], New York and London: Routledge.
- Taylor, D. (2003) *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is particularly interesting to view Durkheim's work in this light, for in attributing a "mechanical solidarity" to premodern societies and an "organic solidarity" to the modern, he implicitly proffered a conception of the latter as fundamentally rational, geared to function, and the former as based in the mere repetition of tradition. See Émile Durkheim (1933) *The Division of Labour in Society*, New York: Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss (1974) "The Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society*, 2/1 (February), pp.70-88.

<sup>3</sup> Although the term is probably most associated with Pierre Bourdieu today, its modern use in fact derives from the work of Mauss and Elias.

<sup>4</sup> Norbert Elias (1994) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, London: Blackwell.

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin (1993) *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>6</sup> The relatively late work, *The Savage Mind* (1966), London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, represents Lévi-Strauss's developed thought in this respect.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu (1961) *The Algerians*, New York: Beacon Books. Bourdieu would soon abandon what he called the "blissful structuralism" of his early work, even critiquing Lévi-Strauss for what he saw as the other's underlying essentialism. Indeed, Bourdieu's later theory was in large part built around attempts to avoid, or perhaps reconcile, the twin evils of structuralist "objectivism" and Sartrean "subjectivism." See Pierre Bourdieu (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Colin Counsell and Peri Stanley (2005) "Performing Impairment: Modernity and the Cultural Enactment of Disability," *Atenea*, 2/1 (December), pp.24-38.

<sup>11</sup> This is evident in the "pessimism" of New Historicist writing, for example, its foundation in such Foucaultian assumptions leading to a propensity to find modes of oppression in materials that might otherwise appear politically ambiguous, or even neutral.

<sup>12</sup> In the later, "post-structuralist" phase of his work Foucault acknowledged the possibility of somatic resistance. While in *Discipline and Punish* he gives a fully theorised account of how dissident acts are enveloped within the greater episteme, in his later work he does not offer quite so thoroughgoing an explanation of why

---

he now viewed such resistance as potentially effective. See, for example, the three volumes (1979, 1987 and 1988) of his *The History of Sexuality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>13</sup> Émile Durkheim (1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: The Free Press.

<sup>14</sup> Reproduced in Maurice Halbwachs (1992) *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Connerton (1989) *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Thompson Drewal (1992) *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>18</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Eds.) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.131.

<sup>20</sup> See the special edition of *The Drama Review*, "Theatre and the Social Sciences," Fall 1973, which explored the interaction of these disciplinary perspectives.

<sup>21</sup> Erving Goffman (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Richard Schechner (2006) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Roach (1996) *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Diana Taylor (2003) *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

# PERFORMING INTERCULTURAL MEMORY IN THE DIASPORIC PRESENT: THE CASE OF TORONTO

RIC KNOWLES

All memory bridges difference. It takes place in the present, but recalls, incorporates, or appropriates the past. All *cultural* memory is performative. It involves the transmission of culture through bodily practices such as ritual, repetition and habit. I consider here some of the ways in which communities in diaspora interact and constitute themselves as communities through the performative enactment of *intercultural* memory. I am using the city of Toronto as my test case because it hosts one of the world's most complex intercultural performance ecologies. The city claims in its promotional literature to be at once the third most active theatre centre in the English-speaking world and the world's most multicultural city. Not only is Toronto's immigrant population approaching the 50% mark, but the minorities who will soon comprise its majority come from a genuinely global range of cultures, mingling across many generations of immigration, and co-existing in the city's core, where there are no significant "ethnic enclaves,"<sup>1</sup> with a diverse population from various Aboriginal communities as well as from the so-called "founding" settler-invader British and French cultures. Toronto is, too, the largest city in the first country in the world to have adopted multiculturalism, in the 1980s, as official state policy.

Official multiculturalism, often celebrated as Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "idealist dream,"<sup>2</sup> has nevertheless had its detractors.<sup>3</sup> Seen as a way of managing (containing and controlling) diversity, deflecting attention from social inequities by privileging untouchable cultural difference, and commodifying or exoticizing difference in the programming of diversity slots at the city's mainstream theatres, official multiculturalism has been something of a false friend to those grass-roots theatre practitioners who want to challenge the hegemony of whiteness on the city's stages. Chief among the policy's problems are its focus on "preserving" immigrants'

“cultural heritage,”<sup>4</sup> its focus on “tolerance” as a marker of Canadian national identity – which posits a Canadian “us” who generously tolerate an othered, ethnic “them”<sup>5</sup> – and its explicit exclusion of First Nations. In terms of cultural memory, the policy problematically constructs memory in essentialist, static, and nostalgic terms in relation to dehistoricized ethnic “homelands,” atomizing communities of memory into separate “ethnic” enclaves. It makes sense, then, that much of the city’s grass-roots *intracultural* performance practice works against this, performatively, to forge intersecting and fluid diasporic identities in the city.

In focusing on *intercultural* memory, I am attempting to take into account scholarship on cultural memory as both social<sup>6</sup> and, as a function of social ritual and habit, embodied, performed, and, through performance, transmitted across generations.<sup>7</sup> Taking into account the performative nature of social identities – gendered, classed, and raced – as constituted through ritual repetition,<sup>8</sup> I accept Joseph Roach’s concept of “performance genealogies,” which he sees as drawing upon “the idea of expressive movements as *mnemonic reserves*, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words... and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it.”<sup>9</sup> I also find useful Roach’s concept of “surrogation” as a mode of cultural transmission-by-replacement (“the king is dead, long live the king”), together with Diana Taylor’s elaboration that sometimes, particularly in postcolonial cultures, the doubling repressed by surrogation *preserves*, rather than erases, its antecedents.<sup>10</sup> In introducing the concept of *intercultural* memory I am attempting to understand the transmission and transformation of cultural memory in diaspora across various kinds of difference.

If it is true that all memory bridges difference, it is equally true that all cultural memory involves transference, in which the individual subject remembers events that s/he did not, in fact, experience, practices that s/he did not perform. Ross Chambers has examined the phenomenon of “orphaned memory” to explain the ways in which the memories of a dead generation of Holocaust children survive in a body to whom they do not, in any experiential sense, “belong.”<sup>11</sup> They are “fostered” – technically “false” as individual memory, but as cultural memory embodying profound and otherwise inaccessible truth: the memories of the dead. Similarly, Marita Sturken suggests that so-called “false memory syndrome,” in which individual subjects recall the experience of sexual abuse that did not happen to them, can be considered to *be* cultural

memory. She argues that events that may not have happened to the person who “remembers” them are nevertheless culturally “true” insofar as they rightly characterize a lived, embodied culture of systemic sexual violence.<sup>12</sup>

How are these transferences affected? Marianne Hirsch puts considerable faith in the power of art to produce empathy among audiences who do not simply witness representations, but undergo “emotional and bodily experience” that is incorporated and felt as embodied memory.<sup>13</sup> Alison Landsberg, considering the transcultural power of mass culture to “suture” to spectators memories of events through which they have not lived, labels this process “prosthetic memory.”<sup>14</sup> Empathy can be a double-edged sword, its effects ranging from the easy catharsis of the “good cry” to the appropriation, without cost or context, of others’ experiences. But in specific performance contexts certain forms of non-appropriative empathy can also provoke the genuine transference of embodied, practiced memory across difference. When, in Roach’s terms, “patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words... and imaginary [or imagined] movements” come to inhabit the muscles and socialization of the body, the possibility exists of the transference, across difference, of embodied “mnemonic reserves.”

Addressing the question of transference, Paul Connerton claims that “if there is such a thing as social memory” it is performative, operating through commemorative ceremonies, bodily practices, and habit.<sup>15</sup> It is, consciously or not, *taught*, as when young girls learn with their mother’s milk, as it were, to cross their legs when sitting, young boys to take up space in ways denied their sisters. If this is so, then cultural memories can be transferred, not only generationally within a family or community, as in Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,”<sup>16</sup> but also across other kinds of difference.

In diaspora this transference crosses both generations and geographies, and it involves the intercultural transformation of the very performance practices it employs. There are various kinds of theatrical practice in Toronto that use the performance forms of “home” communities, invoking embodied cultural memories to (re-)constitute different kinds of diasporic community. Some companies, such as Carlos Bulosan (Filipino) Theatre Company, are dedicated to supporting and reflecting specific communities of memory. Others, such as the AfriCan Theatre Ensemble, Theatre Archipelago, and Rasik Arts, primarily perform work from



cultural “homelands” – Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia – evoking, sometimes nostalgically, cultural memory in diaspora. Others, such as Obsidian Theatre, b-current, fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre, Red Sky Performance, and Native Earth Performing Arts, constitute internally diverse or even historically conflicted communities as “African Canadian,” “Asian Canadian” and “Aboriginal,” developing new work that speaks across such differences, and producing intercultural memory among potentially affiliated communities of interest. Finally, companies such as Cahoots Theatre Projects, Modern Times Stage Company, and the feminist Nightwood Theatre, are more broadly intercultural, creating performance forms that bridge explicit and acknowledged differences. These companies and others actively intersect, establishing coalitions of difference among what Yvette Nolan, Managing Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, calls the city’s “brown caucus,” working together in what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call “*mutual and reciprocal relativization*.”<sup>17</sup>

I look elsewhere at what this activity means for the constitution of Toronto as a multicultural city and the (re-)constitution of its broadly diasporic subjectivities.<sup>18</sup> Here I want to consider four recent performances that employ the performance forms of minoritized cultures to “build memory.”<sup>19</sup> At the level of representation, the memories these shows address and suture are increasingly traumatic in terms of the levels of displacement they portray, moving from voluntary immigration (and voluntary memory), through harrowing refugee experience, to involuntary trauma memories of enforced immigration, colonization and genocide. My case studies also move from the individual effort to suture a divided cultural identity to the communal building of shared cultural memory, to the actual *constitution* of new forms of community through “prosthetic” memory-making that works to reconstitute diasporic subjectivities through the embodied practices of intercultural memory.

### *Fish Eyes*

*Fish Eyes*, a solo show written and performed by South Asian Canadian Anita Majumdar, began when Majumdar was a theatre student at University of British Columbia (UBC). Having grown up an only child in the Vancouver suburb of Port Moody, where she was “one of maybe three South Asians in my school, from elementary school to graduating in grade twelve,” Majumdar says that when she went to UBC, “it was important to me to own my culture and investigate what this other side of

me was.”<sup>20</sup> Although she had taken and quit classes in ballet, piano and figure skating as a child, her father wouldn’t allow her to take Indian dance, so she set out at UBC to construct a set of embodied memories – “patterned movements [as] mnemonic reserves” – of her South Asian self. These were not specific to her own Bengali heritage, but were both diasporic and pan-Indian. As a theatre student at UBC she enrolled, outside the program, in classes in Kathak, a narrative dance form from Northern India that fuses Hindu and Muslim cultures. She also took language classes in Hindi – ironically, from a white American, Ken Bryant – where she was exposed for the first time to “a sea of brown faces.” Majumdar performed with a dance troupe in Vancouver but kept her dancing separate from her theatre training, which at UBC was overwhelmingly western. Only later, in her final years at the National Theatre School, was she encouraged by faculty and fellow students to integrate her dance life into her acting – which meant merging her cultural identities.

*Fish Eyes* developed over several years from a 15-minute in-school exercise to a full-length professional production. But it retained its interdisciplinarity as dance and theatre, as well as its interculturalism as both Canadian and “pan-Indian.” Majumdar describes being in India when *Fish Eyes* was first conceived:

We were on a ... 12-hour trip back from the Taj Mahal to where I was staying in Lucknow [in Northern India]. We were stuck on the national highway ... and I was looking through these fields, this vast land, and I suddenly felt this great need to be able to fuse the two countries that I come from.... And when I got back to Calcutta [in West Bengal] I had a blue costume stitched for what my idea of what the play was going to be.<sup>21</sup>

At first, *Fish Eyes* seems to be a simple sketch about Meena – short for Meenakshi, meaning “Fish Eyes” – a teenage Canadian born to South Asian immigrant parents, caught between the pressures and pleasures of her last year in a very white high school and her parents’ requirement that she take classes in Indian classical dance. Meanwhile, her friends “are going to parties...and making out in closets with hot, popular boys like Buddy Cain, and drinking lots of beer and making best friends with popular girls like Candace Paskas because she holds your head back while you throw up.”<sup>22</sup>

The play is autobiographical in form, not content. Where Majumdar chose at the age of 18 to take dance and language classes as performative

entrées into the South Asian side of her culture, Meena grows up under the wing of Kalyani Aunty (“happy cow”<sup>23</sup>), an exuberant if lovelorn woman who “lactate[s] butter chicken,”<sup>24</sup> readies Meena for the Lord Ganesh festival and the All India Dance Competition (where she will perform “Extreme Nimbooda”) – and accompanies her in her pink Volvo to Toronto’s “Little India”<sup>25</sup> where they purchase Indian foods, Thumbs Up, henna, and other trappings of the homeland.

Kalyani Aunty provides the play’s most trenchant, if comic, postcolonial critiques – “you know how many places British colonize? 77! 77 in whole of the world, Meena! They have so much land, SO MUCH LAND, then be giving us generous gift: two blocks of East Gerrard Street?! Oh thank you, *thank you* British Raj!”<sup>26</sup> And she speaks in the play for the immigrant community’s compensatory nostalgia for all things Indian, while at the same time aspiring to take her students’ work back to the old country to demonstrate its quality. But her most significant role is as one dance teacher in an intergenerational chain, making regular calls to her own teacher in India to report her students’ progress. As such, she serves as the agent for the transmission of embodied, if transformed, cultural memory through dance.

For of course the play is not reverent about India, nor is it purist in its treatment of the traditions of Indian dance. “I don’t like purist work,” Majumdar says. “I get bored with it.... What I really like is seeing the invention of new forms.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, the play includes elements of the South Indian Bharata Natyam, the northern Kathak, and the North-eastern Odissi dances, sometimes combined within a single movement sequence. It also includes one parodic, cross-dressed Punjabi dance and a comic toothbrush dance, conceived early on as a way of imagining how a Canadian might find her symbolic Indian mudras – hand gestures – informing her work as a dental hygienist. These various positions and mudras function in the play in clear and uncomplicated ways as Roach’s “mnemonic reserves ... made and remembered by bodies” in which they can be combined, complicated, and clustered. But, as Majumdar says, “we never said ‘Meena studies Kathak, or Meena studies Odissi.’ It’s a mix of all those.” And of course the play is not Indian classical dance, but South Asian Canadian dance theatre – itself a newly minted form.



*Figure 1:* Anita Majumdar in *Fish Eyes* using the “Katakamukha” mudra indicating the lotus of purity, from the Bharata Natyam dance tradition. Photo: Rob Daly.

Nevertheless, the play *is* structured around Indian classical dance. Meena’s narrative and Majumdar’s character transitions are signalled by specific mudras – “Kartarimukha” (scissors), from the Bharata Natyam dance tradition; “Katakamukha,” the gesture usually used across the chest and indicating the lotus of purity; and so on (See *Figure 1*). And the play incorporates a mixture of forms that bring together within Toronto a “South Asian” community, a kind of “pan-Indian” experience that can only happen in diaspora. As such it helps to constitute a performative reinvention of embodied, intercultural memory, and along with it community identities and individual subjectivities that have not previously existed.

*Fish Eyes* was first intended for a broad, non-South Asian theatre audience. It was directed by Gregory Prest, a white male classmate of Majumdar’s from NTS and, together with other work by Majumdar and others, it is contributing to the performative reconstitution of the intercultural performance ecology of Toronto. But the play has also reached a more specific South Asian Canadian community, partly because it has *not* been folkloric, targeted to the ghettoized community centres of

official multiculturalism. It has reached its South Asian Canadian audience partly because Majumdar developed and performed it at established theatres, refusing to play multicultural venues in suburban Mississauga, Scarborough, or Brampton.

In spite of some early criticism in the South Asian press of the show's perceived critique of India,<sup>28</sup> *Fish Eyes* proved itself downtown, where its success validated the show within its home community and began to play its role in reconstituting that community as pan-Indian. Majumdar talks about how the show serves South Asian audiences as a site of memory-making, where they come together to compare traditions, cross classes, castes, and South Asian cultures, and negotiate new, crossover identities in diaspora. The show's success also led to a well received production in late 2006 at the prestigious diasporic "Other Festival" in India itself, where (who knows?) it may have contributed to the reconfiguration of inter- and intranational subjectivities *within* the subcontinent through the transformative injection of embodied, performative and diasporic, intercultural memories.

### *Singkil*

*Singkil*, written by Catherine Hernandez and produced in 2007 by fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company, directed by Nina Lee Aquino, also centres on dance: in this case Filipino folk dance, the "Singkil" of the play's title. And like *Fish Eyes*, the play is concerned crucially with the intergenerational teaching, learning and transformation of cultures in diaspora through embodied performance. But both as process and product, *Singkil* moves from the individual reinvention of self through performative memory-making more directly into the knitting together of a larger community, and the displacement the play represents at its heart – a mother-daughter rift – is more traumatic.

*Singkil* began with an event that is represented in the finished play: Filipina playwright Catherine Hernandez, rifling through family photos on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in an effort of conscious memory-making, discovered an image of her mother, Cecille Hernandez, dancing the Singkil. Looking at the date on the back, Hernandez discovered herself in the picture: her mother had been pregnant with her when the photo was taken. An accomplished dancer herself, Hernandez had not realized she had been "dancing this dance [my] entire life."<sup>29</sup>

As both process and product, deliberately and inadvertently, *Singkil* was very much about mothers, daughters, and the transmission of cultural memory through performance. The play deals with the struggles of the partly autobiographical Mimi, played by Nadine Villasin, to come to terms with the memory, and loss, of her mother Maria. She does so in part by learning the Singkil, the dance that her mother had abandoned – and along with it her sense of self – when she came to Canada. Two weeks into rehearsal for the show, the company learned that Nadine's own mother, Fely Villasin, who founded Carlos Bulosan, the Filipino Theatre Company Nadine had inherited as Artistic Director, had died suddenly from cancer. Nadine, playing a woman coming to terms with her mother's death by learning her performance traditions, missed only one rehearsal, and the company, for whom her mother was an icon, rallied around her. Less than two weeks later, a week before opening night, director Nina Lee Aquino's water broke while she was setting cues. She finished the cue she was working on, made notes for the next day's scheduling, and went into labour with her own daughter, Eponine, whom she speaks of only partly in jest as the inheritor of fu-GEN. Hernandez, a prenatal educator, was present at the birth.

But it had been all about mothers and daughters from the beginning. In the workshop production at Factory Theatre in 2005, the mother-daughter team of Cecille and Catherine Hernandez attended rehearsals to teach the cast the Singkil, the latter carrying her own 1½-year-old daughter Arden on her hip. “[It was] three generations of us doing this dance,” says Hernandez, “and it was wonderful.... I don't know if Arden will ever get into it, but she loves watching it.”

In a very real sense, teaching and learning the dance across generational and cultural differences internal to the Filipino community, teaching one another Tagalog (one of the major languages of the Philippines, used in the play), teaching the use of the traditional kulintang gongs (see *Figure 2*), and exploring informally, in breaks, the respective foods, traditions, and behaviours – the embodied memories – of the largely Filipino company, constituted not simply the rehearsal of a play, but the rehearsal of a community in diaspora. Not everyone spoke Tagalog, and the best versed in the language was the youngest cast member and most recent immigrant, Rose Cortez. Not everyone knew the Singkil, in spite of the dance's being a major archetype of Filipino identity, a traditional Muslim dance that nevertheless cuts across the different religious and geographical communities in the country's dispersed northern and southern