

Speaker 1:

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Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this lunchtime conversation which is presented by Dancehouse in partnership with Asia TOPA Public Programme. My name is Angela Conquet. I'm the artistic director of Dancehouse and before I introduce these wonderful speakers, I'd like to acknowledge that we meet on indigenous land, the land of the Boon wurrung of the Kulin nation, and to pay our respects to their land and elders past, present and future. The conversation that you're here for is part of a series of two, today and tomorrow, and I have asked two of our closest collaborators and friends to prepare this very interesting topics today and tomorrow.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

And I would like to introduce Dr. Phillipa Rothfield, who's Dancehouse's creative advisor, co-editor of the Dancehouse Diary and dear colleague and friend, and Dr. Priya Srinivasan, another friend of Dancehouse and very treasured artist whom we had the pleasure of having in Dancehouse not so long ago. And speakers today, Takao Kawaguchi visiting from Japan as jury the Keir Choreographic Award, Linda Sastradipradja, who is a local practitioner, choreographer, pedagogue, and Amaara Raheem, a multidisciplinary artist, whom again we've had the joy of having in resonance with dances for a while. And I would like to hand it over to Phillipa to tell you all about the dynamics of test.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

[inaudible 00:01:50] So the way that this panel came about is because Phillipa and I started having a conversation around the terms of engagement in Melbourne and elsewhere seem to be around the concept of the contemporary, which we have had lots of dialogues about, as we all seem to have very different definitions around what that is, and yet, there seems to be a sort of like a monolithic presentation of it in the most sort of mainstream spaces around what that work is.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

So we just wanted to trouble that term at the moment, at this moment in time, to actually look at how colonial structures may have contributed to how we even think of what the contemporary is, something we don't tend to talk about very much, particularly because we don't look at time in the same way. So those are the basic main ideas for why we started this panel and also the Dancehouse Diary, which, if you don't have a copy, please do. This is Angela's vision for what Dancehouse can do is not just as practise but also really asking questions and having dialogues here in Melbourne around Australia and around the world to challenge some of these concepts.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So, greetings, everybody. Thank you for coming. It's lovely to see you all, and it's going to be quite an intimate conversation. So feel free to move forward one, or what? Or to the middle, or you could just stay where you are, if you prefer. And so we're hoping that this will be quite a fluid conversation but each of our people has really, really important and interesting things to say. So we're going to try and manage it to give everybody space to say things, but also to try and open up some movement of thought, so it's not thought belongs to any one thought, something that moves.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

I'd just like to introduce our three speakers in a little bit more detail without my glasses. But I know that you are Amaara. Raheem's practise is performance. You make your own work and also work for and with others. Amaara has made home in three cities across three continents, Asia, Europe, and Australia. Her work crosses borders. Geographic, spatial, disciplinary, and dancing has always been for Amaara entwined with words. She's fascinated at how language moves.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Welcome, everybody. Come in. Grab a seat. Amaara Raheem is especially interested in collaborating with practitioners from different fields to make interdisciplinary political dance artwork, works that prioritise a great slowing down or a quiet revolution. Amaara's completing a practise-based PhD at the School of Architecture and Urban Design at Melbourne's RMIT University.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Now, next to me, we have Linda Sastradipradja, whose dance career is really quite enormous, encompassing dancing, teaching, directing, producing, mentoring, researching, and creatively engaging with dance and dancers over many years in many countries. Linda was a student and graduated from VCA with distinction. The Victorian College of the Arts, which is over the road, and she moved to New York and performed internationally with American artists and companies, including Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, working directly with choreographers including Twyla Tharp, Merce Cunningham, Mark Morris, and Tere O'Connor, Sara Rudner, Dennis O'Connor Dance, Dana Reitz, Molissa Fenley, in Hong Kong with the City Contemporary Dance Company, and with Australian artists and companies including Dance Exchange and Opera Australia and Ballet Lab and Dance Works.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So, Linda's... Is it tiring just to hear all of that? So, she's also... you can see photos of Linda by the renowned dance photographer Louis Greenfield, so welcome. And Linda also works with Russell Dumas in Dance Exchange as a performer and artistic associate.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

And thirdly, but not leastly, is Takao Kawaguchi, welcome, from Tokyo. He's a Tokyo-based artist. Takao performed with Dumb Type between 1996 and 2009 and has also created a number of solo works from 2000 onwards. Also collaborating with artists from other disciplines, so also kind of multidisciplinary as well. In the style perhaps of performance theatre, and I suppose the question of style and category is something that'll probably come up for all of us in our conversation.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

In 2012, Takao made a work called The Sick Dancer based on Tatsumi Hijikata's book. And then, in 2013, made a work that some of you may have seen called About Kazuo Ohno, which was reliving the Butoh diva's masterpieces, and that was also shown at Dancehouse at the last stage of TOPA two years ago. That work about Kazuo Ohno, which we hope you'll probably talk about, had 73 shows in over 35 cities around the world, so it's certainly moved around.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Despite these last two works being Butoh-related, Kawaguchi isn't a Butoh artist as such. But perhaps a contemporary dancer, performer, choreographer. Maybe some of these categories are open and, in a way, our conversation will probably open the question of category as well. So, welcome to you three. Thank you very much for joining us today.

Angela Conquet:

And since some of you came a little bit late, we just wanted to tell you that the topic for today is the term contemporary. What does that mean, and how do we think about time. Amaara, would you like to begin?

Amaara Raheem:

Sure.

Angela Conquet:

Some thoughts on how your practise has explored what is contemporary.

Amaara Raheem:

Hi, everyone. There was an invitation to join this panel and alongside the invitation a subsequent invitation to prepare something. That in itself was... Yeah, that in itself took me somewhere because I wanted to make a puncture into this topic of contemporary, and I felt that the best way to do it is to maybe speak about a project that is resonating in my life. I talked about it yesterday and many of you were actually... I see some very familiar faces yesterday, so you might hear about it again, which is that I lived for two years at Cecil Street Studios in Fitzroy in Melbourne, which was a dance studio for 21 years.

Amaara Raheem:

And I lived my life there. As in I had a room there. And living there was very much in relationship to some of the questions that I've been exploring as a choreographer and performer that has situated my practise in the school of architecture and urban design. So some questions that came up for me that are recurring for me in terms of time, like rhythmic questions in my life in terms of contemporary is how or what is a home or how do I think about a structure of home.

Amaara Raheem:

I'm really interested in archive, and archive is a historic, somehow. An archive is a series of events that has already happened, but I'm also interested in archives of things that haven't happened yet, or speculative fictions and how we might think about disappearance and loss as something of the future, not only of the past. So some questions that came up for me, living at Cecil Street Studio, how did the building sound?

Amaara Raheem:

These are questions of contemporary debts. How did the building sound? What was it's function? What can be said about the life of the architects? How can I bottle the smell of that building? How can I creatively make a document of a building that has a past that is only oral or gestural but not written down and refuses writing? How can I make a reflection on the staircase and the lifespan of the structure's secrets? What of the voices of the building?

Amaara Raheem:

Ongoing questions in contemporary, my practise of contemporary, are questions of belonging and identity. How to reside. It was a communal space. It wasn't just mine. It was ours, but it was mine within an our. As in O-U-R, rather than H-O-U-R. Yeah. How to reside in a communal space? In particular a dance studio with the specificity of being a dance studio? Does residing there... whatever your occupation or trajectory in life then make you a dancer? What's the relationship between art and residence, more broadly, and what's the relationship between my practise and domesticity?

Angela Conquet:

That's great. That's a fantastic start for all these questions. Thank you so much. Perhaps Takao, would you mind talking a little bit about how you came into your practise and how you worked with the term contemporary in your work, or not?

Takao Kawaguchi:

So you said the word identity, so identity is what you are, I guess, and so I have never felt comfortable saying that I'm a dancer, I'm a performer, I'm a choreographer. I really haven't... it has been changing, I don't know. Sometimes I say I'm this, some other times I'm that. I was very athletic, playing volleyball for a long time until university, and then, all of a sudden, I started going to theatre and, a little later, dance. So when I started dance, I was only able to run, jump, roll, and get up and run and jump and...

Takao Kawaguchi:

And I wanted to make some stage performances, so that's what I did. I have never learned dance at school or any institution, so I don't have any particular style or technique that I've been using and, in a way, I don't have that foundation so it's very hard to make dance. But, at the same time, I could go into any direction and do this, do that, dah-dah-dah. So that has been my way of working and I haven't had any particular theme or topic that I wanted to pursue in this performing arts. What can I say?

Takao Kawaguchi:

So lately I've been working on this piece about Kazuo Ohno, as you introduced, about Butoh. I have never studied Butoh, I have never met Kazuo Ohno, but I thought I wanted to learn something about the movements or expression that come from the inside of the body. That's how I thought and, boom, this name, Kazuo Ohno, came up in my mind. So, okay, I want to do something about Kazuo Ohno. Kazuo Ohno is the legendary Butoh dancer in Japan who lived, danced until 103 when he passed away. And all major works have been done, created, and presented after he was 70 years old.

Takao Kawaguchi:

And I took some of his representative works and watched the video tape and copied his dance. Dance of Kazuo Ohno has been... people say that it's a dance of soul, but I watched the two-dimensional video images and tried to copy his dance, and people asked... My idea was if you can copy exactly the body, the shape, and movements, you can also copy the soul.

Takao Kawaguchi:

So I studied that and I have done whatever I can, and depending on people who approve that or not, but I tried to copy the shape and I approached his dance of soul from the exteriority. I wanted to do something with the interiority but what I did was the exteriority, so there's just a paradox. But going

back to the identity, well, if you read this Dancehouse Diary, my interviews there and it is called Butoh Deselfization.

Angela Conquet:

Selfization. That's a [crosstalk 00:17:41].

Takao Kawaguchi:

Yeah, I know. I think I have said that word. So we talked about identity but then I say deselfization. So erase the identity and copy and become the... I'm not really saying this discourse in a logical way but I think I'm saying [crosstalk 00:18:16].

Angela Conquet:

You're saying [inaudible 00:18:17] and you wanted to say something, Priya.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Well, I thought I would wait also till Linda spoke and then I'll say something after that. I have lots to say. It's really great to hear both of you speak about your practise without clearly categorising yourselves. Although we've said can you speak, or is it can you speak, not as a practitioner, but both of you were talking about the practise. Like what it is that you're doing, rather than offering yourself as a fixed identity, so I think that's already raising some questions. First, before we... I'll let you jump in. Linda, would you have a few words to say?

Linda Sastradipradja:

Just a few. I'm really bad at speaking into these things. I also picked up on the identity that Amaara spoke about, but for me what resonated was who creates that identity. And in terms of this talk being about contemporaneity, I believe that's an Angela word, too.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

No, she didn't make it up.

Linda Sastradipradja:

No, no, no. It's not made up. It's who defines the identity. Like are we defining our identity, or is that being defined by the gaze of somebody else? And that comes back also for me into my practise of dancing. When I'm dancing, when I'm making dancing, I'm actually trying to, in my practise, get to the crux of the dancer. So who is that person? Where are they coming from? What have their experience has been? It's really about drawing out what is most important and most contributory from that individual dancer.

Linda Sastradipradja:

And it's very difficult because we have this constant reflective process where I'm in the moment. This is what I think about, this is what I think about me, these are all of these contributing influences but, at the same time, how is this being perceived? So there's just this constant back and forth, back and forth. That happens in my practise, but it also happens in terms of how I approach this topic, which is what is contemporary.

Linda Sastradipradja:

And, again, I sort of asked myself, "Well, who is saying what is contemporary?" And in relation to Asia TOPA, it comes back to what Priya said at the start. We wanted to trouble this topic because I'm quite troubled about who it is and where their perspective is coming from. What it's informed by when they designate a work as being contemporary or traditional or cultural and what frame of reference is that?

Linda Sastradipradja:

I think I'm reasonably safe in saying that, on the whole, we, as in Australian society, is very Anglo-centric in the way that we just perceive time and that relates to what is contemporary and what's not contemporary. So what am I saying here? It's going into allowing the perspective of the choreographer or the dancer or the artist to define for themselves where they fit on that time spectrum. How they're perceiving it, how they're embodying it, as opposed to us judging it externally.

Linda Sastradipradja:

So that's something that sort of comes back into my practise and its questions that I ask as I go through it, don't know.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Great. Thank you. Hearing all of you, I just wanted to say something one thing, but it actually has a lot of things inside it, so stop me if I say too much. But I'm so excited to hear these thoughts by all of you. I wanted to actually go very much into the particular and to where we are right now in the land of the Kulin nation people and to just point that arts centre out to you. That spire, the white spire rising above and really just towering over everything like a panopticon.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

You know, that is an all-seeing eye that determines what the aesthetic is of this city and what gets to be inside that building and what doesn't has been particularly a very interesting process, partly because I grew up in that building doing a practise which we call traditional Indian dance and also contemporary, experimental forms that the Bharatam Dance Company was doing for 15 years when they were funded by the Australia Council and the Victorian Council for the Arts.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

And also, I grew up feeling like I was in the centre. That I was the panopticon, too. I got to decide what was art, but I left and I left for 20 years and, when I returned, I realised I don't have a space in that building anymore, and it's a metaphor for where the arts have actually travelled in the last 30, 40, 50 years in Australia, symptomatic of Melbourne as well as to who gets to determine what is funded, what is qualified as new work and this newness and this whole way in which what is defined as the new is determined by a very few number of people who then get to decide who is allowed in these space and who is not. Whose practises belong and who is not.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

And one of the research questions that I asked when I wrote my book called *Sweating Saris, Indian Dance as Transnational Labour*, was to actually trouble this concept of the contemporary by looking at the great modern, such as Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, to actually ask and find out that they were inspired by Indian dance. Not only inspired but actually learned Indian practises, which then got deleted

from their forms and people suddenly forgot because in the process of modernity, we do not recognise anything that has gone before. We are always new. We are always emergent, and is always the solo female generally choreographer genius who has gotten their ideas from almost nothing, in a way.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

And so I started to ask this question, "Well, what if citational practises were possible in modern dance, which has led us to where we are now? How would we actually re-think time itself and who we owe for where we are today?" And the other side of the equation, the Indian classical dance that I was trained in, when I left Melbourne is when I actually found out it was not a classical 3,000-year-old tradition but rather a post-1940s nationalist independent form that had been created in response to a different kind of impetus of modernity but that we were masking our modernity and saying that we were traditional to prevent the effects of colonialism.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

So these two supposed oppositional practises are in fact quite hybrid and quite related to each other, and that is where for me the question of the contemporary and how do we each think of time and how do we think of presence, coming back to what you said, the emptying of the self to find this other subject. That is a question the practises that I do have always been asking, but I find it very interesting in relation to your question, Linda, around how do you actually ask questions in the place of the practitioner. Where is that toggling? And I think to me is what's interesting about how one sees oneself in understanding the contemporary.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

As a philosopher, I actually do really like concepts and a lot of you have been bringing up the notion of time or the concept of time, and you very challengingly, and nicely talked about an archive that hasn't happened yet. And for you to care, like on the one hand, this is the most accurate rendition of Kazuo Ohno that I can manage, and yet, it's from these external points of view of a Butoh practitioner who works from the inside out.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So there's this kind of flipping or turning inside out. Like a Mobius Strip. It starts one way and it ends up going the other way and then goes one way. And someone who I started reading called Bruno Latour and he has a book called *We Have Never Been Modern*, and he talk about modernity but I would flip it and talk about contemporaneity, or the contemporary as we're working with this idea that what's happened happened in the past and then that's left behind and the stuff's happening now, here we are, blah, blah, blah, goes into the past, and then the future's something ahead, as if it's like a ticker tape.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

But there seem to be so many ways in which there are crossovers, and he talks about the way in which we try to arrange things so that they are seen as contemporary. So, for him, the contemporary is the result of putting all the square pegs in a row and then getting rid of the round ones. So there's a sort of fabrication of the contemporary. And, like Linda, I think you... did you say or did I dream that you said that the contemporary is a westernised or that we tend to impose it? Did you say that?

Linda Sastradipradja:

My perception is that it is a westernised or an Anglo-centric concept that is imported as an explanation or a designator of this is a contemporary, this is a traditional, this is a [crosstalk 00:28:51].

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So the exclusive categories, and you can't have mixing of the categories.

Linda Sastradipradja:

Well, I think there's been attempts to have them mixed, but the fact that there's categories at all is my-

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Yes, that we have them or that they're thought to designate distinct things that the body, if we think of the body as an archive, the body is an historical... the body has a legacy, is time clearly defined in the body? And then, if we have like the way in which you were talking, Takao, in a way in which creating the work... Go away. Creating the work actually produces a sense of history in the present through the making, through the creation of technique, rather than I have the technique first and then I do what I do.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So there just seems to be some real mixing of categories around what I would call a notion of the linearity of time, as if it's kind of coherent and one follows the other follows the other. And yet, I think some of the categories that you're talking about, Linda, contemporary, traditional, modern, do they have a notion of time embedded in them? And how does that work with western practises or non-western or mixtures thereof? You drew-

Linda Sastradipradja:

Can I just say one thing there? Which is that the colonial practise, or colonisation, was justified by putting the people that they colonised as backward in time. And therefore, the coloniser gets to be the new, gets to be in the present, and everyone else is kind of put backward in time, and I think this is that legacy of western modernity, in a way. That way of we've actually got people that are going to be separate, different to us, to justify our domination over them.

Linda Sastradipradja:

And, to me, it's interesting to look at our artistic practises now in a similar way. That if we actually put people at different time frames in this linear model, it's then easy to say, "Well, this is why we dominate. This is why we are allowed to dominate."

Amaara Raheem:

Can I-

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Go ahead. Sorry.

Angela Conquet:

I just wanted to speak to that, and in terms of the categorizations, just to make clear that I don't necessarily subscribe to these.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Not at all.

Angela Conquet:

Yeah. The parameters that are put around them and are that... and I'm included, that we accept as the norm are part of that colonisation process. I did want to share a little... I suppose it's an anecdote. It was part of the MPavilion to appear, and it was with the cast of seen and unseen. I'm not sure if people saw that. It was an Indonesian theatre performance that was drawn from a rural Balinese community. Had young people as well.

Angela Conquet:

Anyway, the choreographer was asked... what was the question? It was, "Clearly, particularly the young people had some sort of a cultural practise that we can see it in their bodies and you have tapped in to this traditional, cultural practise in order to choreograph the piece, the score for this theatre piece. And her answer to that was that that was not the case. She said, "I don't understand what you mean by traditional and cultural." She said, "Where we are from, there is a ritual that we have every morning that is part based on yoga that's part based on wellness, it's part-based on community. Everybody gets together, we do these morning exercises. We all join in." And she said, "So that's a shared, embodied repertoire or vocabulary that we have."

Angela Conquet:

And she said, "When I came to actually making the choreography, I could draw on those things but I also went to YouTube and I also went to see because these are young people, what would be interesting to them?" But she said, "The issue of it being traditional or contemporary was..." She said, "We had that moment years and years ago in Indonesia, in Bali." She said, "We had that moment in the '70s, though I'm not really sure what it is that you're asking." So when they asked her about what was that moment, it was the moment when Balinese culture was widely discovered by the American university systems.

Angela Conquet:

And there was this wonderful, "Look at this." Let's take this. What is this? This is traditional, this is cultural, this is whatever. And she said, "Well, we have to actually have a think about what is traditional. This is dancing that everybody has done and has done since we've always done it. But if we track that back that dancing is movement that we've always done, so how far are we going to go? We're going to go to virtually pre-history of when did we start moving because we never at any point said, 'This is our art form,' and never at any point did we decide, 'This is our tradition.'"

Angela Conquet:

Our culture is as we live it day-to-day, and it's as much our culture today in the contemporary as it was when people started making these sorts of moves and expressing themselves through this dance. So I thought it was really interesting that she basically came right to the crux of that what is contemporary, what is cultural, what is traditional, and said, "Well, from our perspective, it's a moot point."

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

But that's the thing. When you actually ask people how they define themselves, it's very different to defining them.

Angela Conquet:

Them. Exactly, yeah.

Amaara Raheem:

Can I tell you a story? So we came to Australia, my family and I came to Australia in 1984, one year after the riots broke out in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where I was born, and the civil war sort of officially began. And when I came to Australia at that time, I was 10 years old and I remember a few things. One, I remember standing at Melbourne airport and realising for the first time in my life that I was brown. I didn't know that before I came to Australia because I was surrounded by brown people so I didn't know that I was that colour until I was surrounded by other than brown, and then I realised in that moment.

Amaara Raheem:

And as I realised that, I made a decision, age 10, which is that I was never going to speak Sinhalese again. I was going to only speak in English. That my mother tongue was like... I was going to erase that from myself, because I couldn't erase the colour of my skin but I could change what I sounded like, so that if you were to speak to me on the phone, you would think that I'm Australian, and that became like a practise. And so I went through a few years where I tried to change my accent and did successfully.

Amaara Raheem:

But, although my accent is actually built on quite rocky ground, so it's the kind of accent that still adapts and shifts, and my parents accepted this decision of me not speaking Sinhalese. I mean, there was a lot of things that they didn't accept in modern Australia and made me do out of a cultural affiliation or something that I wasn't affiliated to, but one thing that they didn't force was that I continue to speak Sinhalese.

Amaara Raheem:

And then it's a big regret in my life that I don't speak this language. I understand bits and pieces but it's like I submerged something so deeply that I can't actually access it. Of course, if I go and live in Sri Lanka and study it, I'm sure it will return. But I asked my mother about 10 years ago whether she regretted not letting me... like not forcing me to speak Sinhalese. I said, "Is that a regret for you as much as it is for me?" And she said, "Of course not. English is your future."

Amaara Raheem:

And I think we all understood. Like I understood that English is my future, and speaking English, like to a superb level, was going to give me power. I understood that at 10 years old and my parents understood that, but one thing that I also realised that I didn't know was that, in my father's family, when Sri Lanka got independence, which is the same time in India in 1948. There was a push from the government then to... because English was spoken quite widely in the middle and upper classes, and there was a push in the country for it to become Sinhalese again.

Amaara Raheem:

And the history of my family is that I come from a lineage where we pushed back for English. Like we fought to keep English as the... so, in some ways, I always thought, "Oh, I knew that English was my future and then I learned that, actually, in my bloodline is a claim on this language." And so I think my relationship to... you know, I said dancing for me includes words, and this is a very deep relationship. And when I say words I mean the English language, but I think what's really underneath all of my practise is a submerged mother tongue that I'm not in the process of relearning like some indigenous languages that are being reclaimed and relearned.

Amaara Raheem:

Because actually there's something about reaching for an iceberg that is part of my practise of actually a lost language in me. It's not lost in the world. Many people speak it, but lost in me, but then also that it has become a structure of loss is how I...

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Amidst movement as well. Like you're talking about your own mobility and movement in your life.

Amaara Raheem:

Yeah. And for me movement is dance. It's an aesthetic practise, but it's also being a migrant. The identity of... and multiple belonging, because I'm at home in Sri Lanka and Australia and also London where I lived for 15 years.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

So that's space and time now. It's not just temporality, is it? Like it's also and like, Priya, the way you sort of spoke about this place, or the specificity of place.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Phillipa, I think space is time.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Right. Space-time.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

I just don't feel it's space and time.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Oh, okay.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

I don't feel that there's space and there's time. I feel like space is time.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Is time space?

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Yeah. I mean, there's place and time, and I think place is different to space.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Ah, okay. Just making space. Making space and time for something to emerge. Anyone want to say anything? We will open up to invite you into our conversation also but want to give everyone here every opportunity.

Linda Sastradipradja:

I think, because I had thought of it in relation to space and time and the identity of self. The identity of a culture, of a group, of a community, of different things that... this has made me rethink but the place and the time, the space that that creates for the individual to contextualise what it is that's happening and to actually take some understanding from what those elements combined create on an individual level.

Linda Sastradipradja:

I think what you've described with your story of how you have come to your practise, which is a very deeply personal investigation, is in bigger and smaller versions, what we do when we're investigating works. On a larger scale, what is it that we think about this sort of more macro idea and what do we think about when I'm working on that particular dancer is drawing on which particular of those experiential sorts of occurrence.

Angela Conquet:

So this is the question, right? You look at it like that but then we find that when people's practises are different, do people ask those same questions? And I'll give you an example, right? This is something Phillipa and I have talked about for a while. Costume, just as an example. Just to say costume, right? What we're wearing when we're performing what we're performing. How does that place you in time and how does that place you in space in a very distinct way? And how do then people ask what is your experiment, or are they not even going to ask what is the experiment or questions you're asking but take you at face value?

Angela Conquet:

By this, I mean, if I were a sari and I wear a bindi and I wear other things that signify an Indian woman's clothing, when I perform, the questions that are asked are very different, even if I'm performing the exact same thing as when I'm dressed like this and I perform that same material. Immediately there's a shift in how people are perceiving what it is about this person's body in space and time, and I'm really curious. How can we re-think this?

Linda Sastradipradja:

Can I open up our conversation from... I'm just thinking of your work, Devika. Not meaning to put you on the spot but it was such a rich piece that kind of looked at your own biography of time and had filmic representation, something from the past, and then you had your costume. I wonder if you could just tell people a little bit about it and if you have any thoughts about that. Sorry. [inaudible 00:44:41] was in advance.

Devika:

Hi, I'm Devika. Last year, I did a performance called ALAKKALA: The Promise of A-Dance. It was a part of Sanggam South Asian Performing Arts. First of all, that was at Dancehouse. I feel bit caught off-guard because I was deeply trying to question something in that space and kind of work through it but I'm trained in [inaudible 00:45:07], which is from the same school that Priya is also trained in, and for a long time, I'm going to get this really quick, I've been looking for this thing of what is my contemporary body? What is the notion of contemporary for a long time. And in this way, how will I dress when I perform this piece.

Devika:

The way that I got into finding a work that felt satisfactory in approaching a contemporary concept was that I used time to break through the practise and traditional forms. So I learned the form in reverse. I learned a whole three-minute dance from back to front, and so that allowed me to consider so many things and bring in things of clearing and my body, my live body with a video of when I was 15 performing it with all of the regalia and the saris and everything.

Devika:

So there was this tension there and, yeah. What was I going to wear? Like I just ended up wearing a black Kurta with like a black full-body leotard underneath. So the question then was do I show my arms? How long is my Kurta going to be? Should it be short? What points to India? What points to another place? What points to an origin but is satisfying a contemporary desire for simplicity and minimalism, and why do I have that?

Devika:

So it's definitely wound up in these things of signifying and how you want to be signified and all these different channels of, yeah, perceptions and gazes and, yeah. Concurrently, the thing is that it's all concurrent. I don't think I answered the question but...

Linda Sastradipradja:

No, it was a rich picture of the some of the different elements that you were weaving into your performance, and I just think it sits interestingly with your work about Kazuo Ohno. Like you on the one hand had studied the dance and there's this film of Devika, and what were you, 16 or something?

Devika:

15, yeah.

Linda Sastradipradja:

16-year-old Devika there, so that really was you, right? And whereas like you're not and never will be Kazuo Ohno but doing an incredibly faithful something, copying, a something, a mimetic relationship with the work. So, on the one hand, would seem to be authentic identity. On the one hand, emptied out identity.

Devika:

Yeah. But then also I had to use video as well to learn how to perform in reverse. So I have this mimicry happening as well of myself of the form of what is presented, so yeah. There are various flips there that are really interesting in the space of... I don't know. I'm asking this question of when we question what is

contemporary, I think maybe I'd like to push it into a space of how do we repeat things, how are things repeated, and what that means for the space of contemporary, and repetition with these techniques or with costume or without, yeah, and modes of fracture and, yeah, I don't know.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Would anyone like to pick up on-

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

I just wanted to say that I... I mean, I'm very interested in copy. In the copy of the copy of the copy, and what I loved about what you just said, Takao, and I didn't realise that in the work that you're speaking about, is that you tried to copy his soul. Did you say that?

Takao Kawaguchi:

If you ask a question, "Can you copy somebody's soul through the shapes?" And so that was the idea that I wanted to... so casting my body into that shape of Kazuo Ohno. And I don't think that I have been able to copy his soul, but trying to do it from that action of casting myself into that shape, something else happens and that could be called the soul is being searched.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

Because I've been really thinking about time. It was in the blurb and there's this question about repeating and time and contemporary, which I think is inherent. Time is inherent in contemporary, and I was trying to really think about what, how do I use time. And beyond duration and the 50-minute show, beyond the surface of time of how a work is constructed, I think I realised that I'm deeply influenced by the notion of karma in my practise. I grew up in a Buddhist country. We weren't born Buddhists but I was very influenced by living in a Buddhist country, but Hindus also have the concept of karma.

Dr. Priya Srinivasan:

And in the concept of karma I think... and when I say karma, I mean that your actions have consequences. That would be my definition of it, or how I work with it. And in Buddhism, there's this other idea. That our consciousness is not private. It's public. As in, my intention for generosity, for example, or my intention for kindness actually has consequences in the world. And so...

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

[inaudible 00:51:16] promptly talks about consciousness as that which is already [inaudible 00:51:26] think of it as something really inside. About what if it's already pointing out. We've got a few minutes left. Now I'd just like to invite people, anyone who wants to say anything to join the conversation [inaudible 00:51:41] coming a bit.

Angela Conquet:

[crosstalk 00:51:42] say your name also, please?

Barony:

[Barony 00:51:48]. My name is Barony. It's about ownership as well. That revisiting. So it's about revisiting keeps the continuum alive. It makes it relevant. It makes it give a furthering of that reinterpretation but with your revisiting is that you are doing it with perhaps the notions of the people

around. Not that you're conscious of audience, no, but it's through life. So it is in that notion of also through the soul, the lock of the ownership. It's a generosity that you have because in a net... in a western sense, you could have interpreted it as copyright or something like that.

Barony:

But, instead, this has got such a generosity but also it goes back to how this conversation started about history. How, through the works, you can embed something too much in the... and who writes that in the theoretical but also an avenue for artists to explore and revisit and an evolution of things telling individual stories but also the collective. They sit separately and together, and for both avenues to kind of co-exist together, rather than categorise, yeah.

Angela Conquet:

Can I invite other people to speak? Who would like to comment or throw something in or put forward a question?

Speaker 10:

Can I comment on... I think from a dancer perspective, what's really interesting in your response to Takao is Russell Dumas, who is an Australian artist, he uses the... and Philippa, you would recognise this, he speaks of the body being colonised by particular genres. Takao, you had mentioned that I didn't have a ballet or a contemporary or a jazz or this, that, or the other. Russell talks about us and our bodies being inscribed by those sorts of things and that, over time, we are inculcated with the habits that are associated with that.

Speaker 10:

And then also the way that we practise those genres, so his way of actually approaching dances to broaden the scope of their movement potential is to have people copy that which he says is... okay, so this is the gold standard of whatever it is. This is an excellent answer, doing an excellent rendition of a piece of repertoire. Try and get as close as you can, which is I think what you were trying to do in order to sort of come externally in order to embrace the internal.

Speaker 10:

And his very sort of logistical way of doing it is that if you copy, if you bring yourself as close as you can to that vision, to that idea of something that's outside the self, you'll actually increase your repertoire of your own movement, and it's one of the few things that will actually diminish the habits that are so deeply held in the body.

Speaker 10:

So I find it really interesting that you're using that technique to actually get to the soul of something, whereas in a studio process, he uses that technique to try and get rid of what's already there and replace it with another type of learning, yeah.

Takao Kawaguchi:

To copy something, you have to rid of yourself and become an empty vessel so that something can come in and inhabit your body, and you said ownership so I try not to own the movement but really be reduced to the minimum of self and do... you know what I mean?

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Speaker 10:

Yeah. And I think in doing that, there's something new that's created. So then if we're talking about this continuum, what is contemporary, we've sort of gone around again, yeah.

Angela Conquet:

I think that's a really great place to finish. We've been told we have to stop now, but we urge all of you to come and speak to everyone here and hope that we can continue this conversation on a slightly different note tomorrow. Please do come and join us same time 12:30 to 1:30 as we continue these explorations. Thank you so much for being here and thank you to all of you.

Dr. Phillipa Rothfield:

Thank you [crosstalk 00:57:27].

Angela Conquet:

... for joining us.

Speaker 1:

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