



## Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between

Erika Fischer-Lichte, August 11, 2010

As I have argued in my recent book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, performances epitomize the state of in-betweenness.<sup>1</sup>

These states give rise to performances, because they take place through the bodily co-presence of those who perform and those who look on. Whatever the performers do affects the participating spectators; and whatever the spectators do affects the performers and other spectators. Thus, a performance comes into being only during its course. It arises from the interaction of performers and spectators.

It follows here that its course cannot be entirely planned or predicted. Performances rely on autopoietic processes involving participants, performers, and spectators alike and are characterized by a high degree of contingency. The exact course of a performance cannot be foreseen at its beginning. Even if performers set the decisive preconditions for the progression of a performance – preconditions that are determined by a set of rules or the process of the *mise en scène*, they are not in a position to fully control the course of the performance. Many elements emerge during a performance as a consequence of certain interactions.

In other words, over its course a performance creates the possibility for all the participants to experience themselves as a subject that can co-determine the actions and behaviour of others and whose own actions and behaviour are similarly determined by others. The individual participants – be they performers or spectators

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: a New Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008). This paper was given as a keynote lecture at the 14th Performance Studies International conference, 'Interregnum: In Between States', in Copenhagen, 20–24 August 2008 and is published in: Erika Fischer-Lichte. "Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between." *New Theatre Quarterly* 25, pp. 391-401 (doi:10.1017/S0266464X09000670).

– experience themselves as subjects that are neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others; subjects that accept responsibility for a situation which they have not created but which they participate in.

Given that performances arise out of the encounter of different groups of people who negotiate and regulate their relationship in different ways, performances cannot transmit given meanings. Instead, they themselves bring forth the meanings that come into being over their course. Therefore, a seventeenth century court festival cannot be understood as the realization of a given allegorical programme; nor can the political mass spectacles of modern times be seen to represent an individual's power, like that of Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, or Hitler; nor can a theatre performance using a particular dramatic text be regarded as transmitting its fixed meanings or particular interpretations. While the organizers or directors may have intended for it to be so, the actual performance emerges out of the encounter between performers and spectators, with unforeseen reactions and responses constantly changing the planned course.

### **The Spectrum of Liminality**

Due to the inherent in-betweenness of performance, its participants, too, are automatically transferred into an in-between state – such as the state between co-determining the course of a performance and being determined by it. Referring to Victor Turner's theorization of such a state, I have characterized the experience participants undergo over the course of a performance as a liminal experience. This holds true for all kinds of performance – in the arts, in rituals, sports competitions, festivals, games, or political events. Within that spectrum, however, we may distinguish various types of liminal experience, which Turner labelled the state of being 'betwixt and between'.<sup>2</sup>

Some liminal experiences might lead up to a particular goal. Such goals might consist of socially recognized changes in status; the generation of winners and losers; the creation of communities; the legitimization of claims to power; the creation of social bonds; or simply entertainment. Other liminal experiences turn the very journey into the goal. Such liminal experiences in particular characterize artistic performances, which is why I have labelled these aesthetic experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London; New York: Routledge, 1969), p. 95.

That is to say, aesthetic experience concerns the experience of a threshold – a passage; here, the emphasis lies on the very process of transition. In contrast, non-aesthetic liminal experiences concern the transition and resulting transformation *into* something.

This brief sketch of the in-betweenness of performance will serve as starting point for my further deliberations. The emphasis on in-betweenness reveals that performances become particularly suitable sites for processes to take place between people within but also outside of the same milieu, religion, social status, gender, ethnic group, nation, or culture. Therefore, it seems particularly promising to examine processes of cultural exchange in performance.

As far as neighbouring cultures are concerned, such exchanges can be traced back to ancient times. During the Nara period (ad 646–794) in Japan, for example, the courtly dance *bugaku* and the didactic Buddhist dance *gigaku* evolved, based on Chinese and Korean forms of musical theatre. The history of European theatre is replete with similar examples. In their performances, groups of English comedians travelling across the continent in the late sixteenth century allowed for exchanges between English and German culture that led to the development of a professional theatre in German-speaking countries. In France, Molière established a new kind of comical theatre by fusing the French farcical tradition with elements from *commedia dell'arte* in his performances. In this way, different cultures were interwoven through performance.

The above-mentioned examples all refer to the interweaving of neighbouring cultures that share a number of features. Rare exceptions include the introduction of Jesuit school plays in Japan during the brief period of proselytization that left traces in the new theatre form Kabuki when it was established by Okuni between 1600 and 1610. Voltaire's tragedy *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, which premiered at the Comédie Française in 1755, based on Ji Junxiang's Chinese opera *Zhaoshi gu'er* (*The Orphan from the House of Zhao*), dating to the Yuan dynasty (1280–1367), serves as another example here. In both cases, theatrical elements from an otherwise largely unfamiliar culture were seamlessly incorporated into the native culture via performance and adapted to its specific needs.

From the beginning of the twentieth century such transfers from one culture into another obtained an entirely different status and dimension. Since the mid-nineteenth century, European travellers had increasingly brought home detailed accounts of diverse, predominantly Asian, performing arts. Half a century later, the

first Japanese and Chinese troupes arrived in Europe. During their often extensive sojourns, they presented their performances before audiences accustomed to very different performance conventions. European theatre artists such as Reinhardt, Craig, Meyerhold, Tairov, Brecht, Artaud, and many others drew inspiration from these guest performances, incorporated certain elements and practices into their productions, and created entirely new theatre forms for their European audiences.

Likewise, Japanese performing artists came to Europe to collaborate with Stanislavsky, Reinhardt, and Meyerhold. Based on their exposure to European realistic and psychological theatre, they founded a new theatre form upon their return to Japan – *shingeki*, a form of spoken theatre. It was received enthusiastically by Tokyo's Chinese students, who went on to establish the Chinese spoken theatre form *huaju* in Shanghai shortly thereafter.

### **Between East and West**

With the twentieth century thus began a much more discerning interaction than the eighteenth-century practice of appropriating performance elements from an otherwise exotic culture. New modes of transport enabled individual artists and entire troupes to present their performances in the bodily co-presence of audiences from other, hitherto largely unknown, cultures. The concept of interweaving cultures in performance captures this phenomenon. The turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century also saw the invention of new telecommunication technologies; and since this revolution in transport and communication marks the onset of globalization, it also determines the beginning of a new mode of interweaving cultures in performance.

Thus, the process of modernization, to which I will return later in more detail, went hand in hand with the coming into being of a modern theatre in Europe and other parts of the world. Processes of interweaving proved constitutive for modern theatre.

In Europe, newspaper articles and books on the Asian and particularly Japanese performing arts conveyed to readers tired of naturalism the impression that the Japanese performing arts might provide a counter model to their own theatre, which they felt had taken a wrong turn. The initial enthusiasm for Japanese theatre reached a peak with the European tour of Otojiro Kawakami's troupe, starring Kawakami's wife, Sada Yakko. The troupe was not a 'real' Kabuki troupe, but belonged to the *shimpa*, a school attempting to modernize Kabuki. Nevertheless,

even this school only admitted male actors, enforcing the decree of 1630 which banned women from the stage. Sada Yakko, who was trained as a geisha and thus as a dancer, first took over the leading roles during the troupe's tours abroad (1899 in San Francisco).

The troupe was the first to travel through Europe and America, offering a large Western audience the opportunity to see Japanese performing arts, even if it was not traditional Japanese theatre. However, for the guest tour, Kawakami chose traditional Kabuki plays, which he nonetheless rewrote in order to adapt them to what he thought was the taste of Western audiences.

In order not to bore the spectators by extended dialogues in a language they did not understand, the dialogues were heavily curtailed. Instead, additional dance scenes were incorporated. So, the *danmari*, the pantomimic scene, which traditionally works as the link between the most exciting episodes, here became the main part of the production, and in addition, Kawakami reduced the music, which usually accompanies the whole action.

Sada Yakko was a sensation at the World Exhibition in Paris (1900), in London (she performed twice in front of Queen Victoria, in 1900 and 1901), and Berlin (1902). She captivated audiences and, despite feelings of estrangement and even arrogance, the critics aptly pointed out the originality and remarkable aspects of a performance art that might rejuvenate the literary theatre of illusion prevalent in Europe: Thus Henri Fouquier:

To us, the plot seems naive. It is, I repeat, a pantomime libretto. But it is through mime that they principally convey and express passion, and not merely passion alone, but also the nuances of emotion. It is just as in Wagner's music where the voice sometimes only serves to narrate the dramatic situation in a simple melody while the orchestra expresses all the nuances of feeling borne by that situation. Mime is the essential art of the Japanese artists.<sup>3</sup>

Two aspects of Fouquier's critique are worth mentioning. By referring to Wagner, he explicitly points out that theatre does not imitate but creates its own reality – a reality of 'emotion'. He also acknowledges the fundamentally different positioning of theatrical elements; the role of language (the literary text) in European theatre is here subordinated to the art of acting.

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Fouquier, 'Sadda Yacco', *Le Théâtre*, October 2, 1900, p. 10.

## Creating an Emotional Community

The dominance of the performance art, particularly in Sada Yakko's death scenes, seems to have overwhelmed the European audiences. In this respect, Paris critics even went so far as to place her above their national treasure, Sarah Bernhardt:

An incomparable spectacle. Without contortions, without grimaces, she gives us the impression of a death that is physically progressive. We see life slowly abandoning the little body, almost second by second ... Our Sarah Bernhardt herself, who so excels at dying, has never given us a stronger feeling of artistic truth.<sup>4</sup>

And: 'After her temptress smiles, what eyes deep with anger! Her nose dilates, her cheeks become hollow, fright convulses her whole frame, as she dies with a sort of supernatural realism.'<sup>5</sup>

When the troupe performed the two plays *Kesa* and *Shogun* in Berlin in 1902, however, Franz Blei wrote somewhat mockingly:

The whole world in Paris went to be charmed by 'Sada's death'; the accommodating Japanese changed this scene, so that what only took a minute in New York when I saw it lasted the whole play in Paris and in Berlin seemed endless.<sup>6</sup>

What Blei attributes to Japanese 'politeness' is rather to be accorded to the physical co-presence of actors and spectators. Sada Yakko's art of acting had such a strong impact on the corporeality of the spectators that observable changes of their physiological, affective, energetic, and motor state were brought about. The artists responded to such transformations by changes in their performance.

Obviously the fact that Sada Yakko, an actress from a very different – a 'foreign' – culture, playing in an unusual style not known in Europe, was capable of exerting such a strong impact on the spectators made the critics who experienced the same effect in themselves wonder.

At such moments it was not the point to understand or explain the other culture. Rather, it was experienced that the Japanese and the French or German culture, respectively, were here interwoven with each other and that this let an emotional community emerge out of the Japanese performers and the French and German

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<sup>4</sup> *Lecture pour tous*, March 1908, quoted in Leonard Pronko, *Theatre East and West: Perspectives Towards a Total Theatre* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> *Je suis tout*, quoted in Pronko, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Blei, 'Otojiro Kawakami', *Die Insel*, III, No. 7–8 (1903), p. 66.

spectators. This became possible since, in the performance, theatre was realized not as a literary but as a physical art.

The emotional community coming thus into being in the course of the Japanese performances in Paris and Berlin most likely did not outlast the end of the performance. However, even if it was experienced only in its course, this has political implications. For members of European and a non-European cultures not only met here on equal footing, but Europeans were taking the others as their model. Moreover, the idea of a community, which is not only conceived of as a local or national community, but as comprising members of very different cultures, seemed feasible. It was the space of theatre in which such a utopia could temporarily materialize.

This happened at a time when, because of the growing industrialization and urbanization that was causing the process of migration from villages to big cities, the question was raised how, under such conditions, communities can come into being. While the kind of community, emerging in the course of the Japanese performances in Paris and Berlin, was not considered either by sociologists or by anthropologists at the time, it points forward to the last decades of the twentieth century, that marked a new stage in the process of globalization.

One can easily understand the European audience's addiction to Sada Yakko's death scenes. It was through such scenes in particular that Western spectators experienced performances which relied on the body's movements and could largely dispense with language to create a reality of 'emotions' performatively. One can thus assume that at least part of the audience and the critics received the theatre practised by the Japanese troupe as a counter-model to the predominantly literary theatre of Western culture, which had come only to imitate reality: 'What a spectacle for the imagination, what a feast for the eyes,' wrote the French critic Arsène Alexandre in *Le Théâtre*.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in Europe, Sada Yakko's performance was celebrated as the epitome of innovation, soon to be recreated by the European avant-garde movements. A review of her 1901 guest performances in Berlin described her art of acting in opposition to naturalism and proclaimed it to be a model for reforming European theatre:

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<sup>7</sup> September 1900. Cf. Pronko, op. cit., p. 123.

What we are able to see, conceive, and understand – the outer appearance, the physical – ... is anything but naive, undeveloped, juvenile, an art form of the past, which lies behind us and which we surpassed. *It is still before us, it is imminent, perhaps we are steering towards it.* ... We are looking at the future. ... No, there is really no reason for us to shrug off this art. *We may infinitely profit from it.*<sup>8</sup>

### **Reinhardt and the Hanamichi**

By having recourse to the constitutive elements of Japanese performing arts, European avant-garde movements created not only a new but also a modern theatre. The new aesthetics that were brought forth are by no means to be regarded as an intrinsically artistic phenomenon alone. Rather they were often accompanied by new concepts of space and the body as well as by modes of perception that affected the surrounding culture.

In his pantomime *Sumurun* (after Friedrich Freska, 1910), for example, Max Reinhardt's use of the *hanamichi*, originally a device from Japanese Kabuki theatre, led to significant changes with respect to all three aspects. While stage and auditorium had so far been strictly separated from each other, the *hanamichi* now connected the two. At times, actors entered both spaces simultaneously. The spectators experienced space in an entirely new manner, forcing them to break with perceptual conventions. The spectators were exposed to a mode of perception that demonstrated that they could no longer perceive the surrounding events in their entirety. A spectator could miss something that a neighbour witnessed who in the process missed something else. Ten years on, the spectators' experience in the theatre was to become the standard metropolitan condition of perception.

The *hanamichi* also redefined the relationship between actors and spectators. The proscenium stage with its darkened auditorium kept the spectators at a distance from the actors, which they were meant to overcome through empathy. The *hanamichi*, however, transferred the actors into the midst of the spectators, who could touch the actors simply by reaching out. This new relationship between actors and spectators – based on physical proximity rather than distance – not only affected the spectators' perception but also formulated a new body concept. The actors' bodies no longer formed a part of a picture or tableau to be beheld from a

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<sup>8</sup> Critic for the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*, cited in 'Die Kawakami-Truppe (Sada Yakko) in Berlin', in *Ost-Asien*, IV, No. 46 (January 1902), p. 449–50, p. 450.



distance; they moved in a three-dimensional space that changed with their movements.

Different audience members observed a single actor from the front, back, left, and right. The actor might come so close to some spectators that they could hear him breathe, smell his sweat, touch the seam of his costume, or discern his make-up. The actors' phenomenal body jostled up to the spectator and allowed the latter to become aware of and experience the co-presence of actor and spectator. Such changes in space and body concepts and modes of perception, brought about by processes of interweaving, have proven to be highly consequential for cultural history. At the same time, they mark an important step in the development of modern theatre.<sup>9</sup>

### **Ibsen in Japan**

In Japan, performances of Ibsen's plays in particular paved the way for the modernization of society, including the foundation of a new, modern theatre. The first Ibsen play to be performed in Japan was *John Gabriel Borkman*, directed by Osanai Kaoru in 1909. He recruited actors from a Kabuki company, the lead role being entrusted to Ichikawa Sadanji II (who was to tour Russia with his troupe in 1928; Sergei Eisenstein watched their acting and subsequently wrote his famous article on Japanese acting entitled 'Behind the Screen' in preparation for his work with sound film). The women's parts were played by *onnagatas*, that is, male actors specializing in female roles. Yet, this was not the first Western play to be performed in the Kabuki style. Several Shakespeare plays and Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* had been performed by Kabuki companies since the 1880s, interweaving Japanese and Western cultures.

In 1911 *A Doll's House* was produced by the *Bungei-kyokai*, the 'Literary Society'. Nora was played by Matsui Sumako, who received her training at the theatre school founded by Tsubouchi Shoyo in 1909. The study of Shakespeare and Ibsen formed an important part of the training. While Matsui Sumako was not the first actress to return to Japanese stages, the experience of watching an actress on stage was still unfamiliar to Japanese audiences of the time. Moreover, she was the first to

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'From Theatre to Theatricality. How to Construct Reality', in Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1997), p. 61–72.

practice a wholly new style of acting. The performance of *A Doll's House* triggered the emergence of a new theatre genre – *shingeki* ('new drama'), a form of Japanese spoken theatre – and at the same time established a new mode of interweaving Japanese and Western cultures.

The production introduced two major novelties beyond the mere appearance of an actress on the stage. The first referred to the possibility of discussing topical social problems, such as women's issues, on the stage; the second marked the invention of a completely new acting style. These went hand in hand – that is to say the new theatre form *shingeki* introduced spoken theatre and a realistic style of acting in order to grant theatre a new social and political function.

Just as it would be absurd to accuse Max Reinhardt of trying to ape Japanese theatre by introducing the *hanamichi* to German theatre, it would make no sense to view the production of *A Doll's House* as an imitation of European theatre. Rather, in both cases there was a mode of productive reception based on the interweaving of cultures in performance. It was meant to enable theatre to serve new functions within the respective cultural context that it seemed unable to fulfill in its present form.

In the case of Japan, Ibsen's plays acted as the principal catalyst in paving the way for such a new performance art. Matsui Sumako surprised and enchanted her spectators with an illusionistic acting style in *A Doll's House* that allowed the spectators to observe ordinary people as they discussed issues that were gradually becoming more pressing. Nevertheless, the new acting style was in contrast to the actors' costumes; they were not dressed in everyday Japanese style, but European clothes, giving them an estranged appearance and keeping the spectators at a certain distance. Thus, the Western clothes served a completely different purpose here than in European realistic and psychological theatre.

### **The Shift to Transculturalism**

Evidently, such processes of interweaving European and Japanese cultures in performance at the turn of the last century were linked – albeit in different ways – to the process of modernization and its resulting problems. In this light, it is not surprising that the next wave of modernization – the process of globalization going on since the 1970s – went hand in hand with new forms of interweaving cultures in performance all over the world. Since the 1960s, which marked the end of colonialism, and even more so since the 1970s, processes of interweaving cultures

in performances have been taking place in an unprecedented and so far unimagined way. No matter how 'similar' or 'different' cultures may be, how close or how distant, at any time different cultures may be interwoven in performances. Not only texts, acting styles, artistic devices, and artists travel and sometimes form multicultural theatre, opera, and dance ensembles; it has also become common practice for productions to travel from country to country, continent to continent, from one international festival to the next.

Significant differences remain between the processes of interweaving during the first decades of the twentieth century and those of the last forty years. Whereas the first mainly served to eliminate deficits in one's own culture by modernizing theatre, the latter involved processes occurring transculturally. Such differences today create and stimulate novel modes and states of in-betweenness in performances. A particularly interesting case in point in this context is the production of *King Lear* by the Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen. This premiered in 1997 in Japan and then went on tour to Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta, and Perth. Later it toured Europe. I attended two performances in Berlin.

### **Ong Keng Sen's Hybrid *King Lear***

Ong Keng Sen's production of *Lear* played with the state of in-betweenness that affected each participant, performer, and spectator by incorporating the local and the global. It drew heavily on different local acting and performance styles but addressed different audiences all over the world from the very beginning. *Lear* was played by a famous Noh actor from Japan who delivered his lines in ancient Japanese and performed in the Noh style. Goneril was played by an actor from a Peking opera company representing that particular operatic style, which in many respects differs from the *kunju*, *szechuan*, or other styles. In Ong Keng Sen's production, the actor followed this style and used the Chinese language. The part of Cordelia was played by a Thai dancer who performed in the style of the traditional mask dance Khon. He, too, spoke the lines in his own language.

The choreography underlying the movements of Goneril's three warriors followed the traditional Indonesian martial art Pencak Silat. The participating musicians also hailed from these different traditional backgrounds. However, they did not accompany the performer of their own tradition, but that of another. The Fool was played by a young Japanese actress who spoke in English and followed a mostly

realistic acting style. The Shakespearean text had been changed substantially to reconcile the conventions of the three performance traditions.

As stated above, the production drew heavily on very different local performance traditions, which it assembled in a way that celebrated difference. Although the performers all followed their own styles, they performed together – that is, they established particular relationships among each other. The effect was enhanced by the music, which did not match the performance style in which it originated. This created not just a hybrid performance based on a variety of performance traditions, but one that reflected on the very concept of hybridity, on so-called hybrid identities and passages.

The performance space was defined by two broad passages, crossing each other and leading nowhere beyond the stage. On these passages the performers displayed their particular stylistic identity which, however, was questioned, if not alienated or even transformed, by the accompanying music from another performance tradition. Ong Keng Sen used this method to shape dramatic figures undergoing the process of losing their identities. These dramatic figures were poised on the passage between a former identity and, it was hoped, a new one arising from the processes of interweaving achieved by the coupling of acting and music from two different performance traditions.

Although proceeding from well-defined local traditions, the performance focused on the passage from one tradition, culture, and identity to another, and so created something new which was neither one nor the other but both at the same time. The result was a state of liminality or ‘third space’ (to use Homi K. Bhabha’s term), brought about by the interweaving of cultures.<sup>10</sup> No performance allowed its spectators to feel entirely at home in it or to identify completely with a performance style or dramatic figure. In this way, the performance created an effect similar to that of globalization – on people as well as on performance. It not only transferred the spectators into a liminal state but also challenged them to reflect on this state. The aesthetic experience it enabled comprised a particular kind of liminal experience, embracing fascination as well as alienation, enchantment as well as reflection.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Homi Bhabha, ‘Culture’s In- Between’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, ed., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996).

Although Ong Keng Sen worked with different performance traditions in his production of *Lear*, it had little in common with what we conventionally described as intercultural performances in the 1970s, 1980s, and partly even the 1990s. These productions usually had the stage director, who was firmly rooted in his or her own tradition, select theatrical elements and sometimes performers from other cultures and include them in their productions. The work of Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Tadashi Suzuki, and Yukio Ninagawa may serve as examples here. The result could still clearly be identified as European or Japanese performances that for certain aesthetic or maybe even political reasons referred to elements from other performance traditions or cultures.

Ong Keng Sen's *Lear*, in contrast, must be seen as a product of interweaving different cultures. It was neither Japanese nor Chinese nor Thai, nor Indonesian, nor European (with regard to the Shakespearean text). Rather, it referred to all these theatrical traditions and presented them not in a distorted but a clearly recognizable manner. Yet, bringing these elements together did not simply neutralize them but created something absolutely new and breathtakingly beautiful. The theatrical traditions of different cultures were assembled here to bring forth something new in which these traditions still resonated without determining it. Wherever the performance was shown it appeared to transfer spectators into a state of in-betweenness or into a 'third space', that is, an effect similar to that of globalization.

However, there are important differences to be considered between performances of the production in Asian and in European countries. In Asia, this state of in-betweenness by the spectators might have enabled the anticipation of some kind of a new 'pan-Asian' cultural identity that does not destroy or annul different local traditions but is able to interweave them productively, although there will always remain domains not to be understood. Here the political dimension of such processes of interweaving in the production as in the course of the performance was therefore foregrounded. So the community that might have come into being in and through the performance in different Asian countries, at the same time reflected on the conditions of its very possibility.

### **Making Differences Productive**

In European countries, it was an aesthetic community that, in the course of the performance, came into existence between actors and spectators. However, this aesthetic community was markedly different from the one brought about by the Japanese performances in Paris and Berlin at the beginning of the century. Whereas there, despite the obvious differences, the community was based on a kind of emotional union as well as on supposedly related aesthetic principles, here the differences were emphasized – not only the differences between the Asian performers and European spectators but also among the Asian performers. The Japanese actress who played the Fool in a realistic style differed most from all the other performers; however, by European audiences she was received within the frame of their own tradition. So the community that came into being did not abolish or blur differences, nor did it need the feeling of oneness. Instead, it celebrated itself as a ‘third space’, a state of in-between, in which different identities are possible side by side.

Of course, this kind of a community also has its political implications. For if such a community can emerge in the space of theatre, why should it not be feasible in other places? And if, for the time being, it is in fact only possible in theatre, then theatre is to be regarded as a laboratory. Here, different ways are invented and tried out in interweaving cultures productively, and in exploring how to turn a crowd of individuals with very different cultural backgrounds into members of a – even if only temporary – community that does not demand that they hide or even give up their differences, and that does not include the one and excludes the other, but is able to render their differences productive for each and everybody participating.

### **Interweaving Multiple Modernities**

Up to this point, I have deliberately avoided the terms ‘intercultural performance’ or ‘intercultural theatre’ commonly used to describe performances that combine the texts, acting styles, stage spaces, or scenic devices from different cultures. Mostly, the fusion occurs between Western and non-Western cultural components. Two assumptions, which I do not share, underlie the use of these terms. Firstly, they presuppose the feasibility of clearly recognizing the cultural origins of each element and distinguishing between what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘theirs’. This implies the notion that a culture is essentially monadic and self-contained. However, processes of exchange between cultures have been going on at least since the onset of

modernity and, as a result, cultures permanently undergo change and transition. This situation renders any attempt to draw a clear line between 'ours' and 'theirs' futile. Yet, this is not to say that differences between cultures do not exist. The differences are simply not fixed and given once and for all; they are permanently generated anew.

Until recently, research on intercultural theatre largely neglected this situation. Even very recent approaches based on the hybridization of cultures seem to some extent to ignore this fundamental insight. For ultimately the notion of the hybrid which is transferred from biology assumes that we are dealing with elements that do not belong together 'originally' or by their very 'nature' but have been linked arbitrarily. So I am avoiding the terms 'intercultural' or even 'hybrid theatre' in order to circumvent such notions and connotations. Instead, I refer to the idea of the 'interweaving cultures in performance', as introduced here. In my view, the term's implication that the nature and generation of new differences is processual seems more appropriate in this context.

Secondly, it is interesting how the transfer of non-Western elements into Western theatre is dealt with in the main body of research on so-called intercultural theatre. It seems that here, implicitly and partly explicitly, non-Western elements imported into Western theatre are given a different emphasis than the use of Western elements in non-Western theatre. While in the first case they are celebrated as bold aesthetic experiments, in the second they are generally seen within the purview of modernization, which is largely equated to Westernization.

I agree with sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt's critique of modernization as a process of Westernization. Eisenstadt instead emphasizes the existence of multiple modernities.<sup>11</sup> As a normative, relational, and historical concept, modernity today is a contentious subject. Bearing in mind the decade-long critique of unilateral, simplifying, and glorifying theories of modernity, my focus in approaching modernity rests on the notion of diversity. With regard to contemporary performances – that is, performances of the last thirty years – the obvious choice would involve identifying issues of particular relevance to their times, such as processes of differentiation, diversification, and fragmentation; a heightened sensibility towards (self-) reflection; or globalization as facilitator of communicative exchange.

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<sup>11</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); and *The Great Revolutions and Civilizations of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

## **The Paradigmatic Role of Performance**

However, the self-attribution of the cultures concerned plays a pivotal role in moderating the inevitable Eurocentric perspective. The specific criteria by which the directors, performers, critics, and audiences of a particular society judge themselves and their performances as modern must first be determined. Therefore, the theorization of given concepts of modernity and the modern is necessary. While Eisenstadt's focus lies on the multiplicity of cultures and the differences between them, I am interested in the interweaving of cultures in performance. Admittedly, a tension exists between the idea of multiplicity and cultural difference, on the one hand, and the notion of historical and contemporary processes of interweaving, on the other, which occurs between both Western and non-Western cultures and between different non-Western or Western cultures.

Furthermore, I am proceeding from the assumption that processes of modernization can develop multi-dimensionally. They refer to specific constellations of certain aesthetic, political, social, technological, or economic dimensions. On a large scale, processes of transformation do not occur in isolation; nor do they result from simple causal relationships. I would like to argue that since the 1970s (and likewise between 1900 and 1935) the interweaving of cultures in performance has neither led to the westernization of non-Western performances nor to the homogenization of performances globally. Instead, it has generated new forms of diversity.

In this context it must be emphasized that all processes of interweaving different cultures in performance can be regarded as political processes. Performance takes place in public. Each and every performance creates both an aesthetic and a political situation. As stated in the introduction, two groups of people meet and negotiate their relationship in a performance – the 'doers' and the 'onlookers'. Their relationship might be defined as one between subject and object or as one between co-subjects. One group might attempt to impose a certain behaviour or conviction on the other. Both groups may form a community or be in conflict with each other. That is to say, as soon as a power struggle between groups or within one group erupts, the performance is to be regarded not only as an aesthetic, artistic process but also as a social, indeed political, one.

In this respect, performances take on a paradigmatic role for society. All that occurs publicly in them – both between the performers and between performers and spectators – may reflect, condemn, or negate the surrounding social conditions or anticipate future ones. In performance, new forms of social co-existence are tried



and tested. Performance's multiple paradigmatic functions are particularly visible in the processes of interweaving cultures. Such processes provide an experimental framework for experiencing the potential of culturally diverse and globalized societies. The interweaving of cultures in performances quite often creates an innovative performance aesthetic, which establishes and gives shape to new collaborative policies in society. It probes the emergence, stabilization, and destabilization of cultural identity. Here, the aesthetic and the political merge.

The globalization of cultures is mirrored and partly anticipated in the global performance landscape that increasingly functions within a framework of transcultural entanglements. Interweaving cultures in performance does not mean erasing their differences or homogenizing them. Rather, because of the multiple states of in-betweenness elaborated above, performances are particularly suitable as sites for different cultures to meet and negotiate their relationships through various processes of interweaving that result in something completely new and beyond the scope of any single participating culture.

The state of in-betweenness into which the performance transfers its participants allows them to anticipate and experience a future wherein the journey itself, the permanence of transition, and the state of liminality constitutes the goal. What is here perceived as aesthetic experience will be experienced as everyday life in the future.

Interweaving cultures in performance can thus be described as an aesthetic 'Vor-Schein', as the philosopher Ernst Bloch put it<sup>12</sup>: an anticipation in and by the arts of something that will become social reality much later, if at all. In this case, such an anticipation is not based on particular contents, ideologies, *Weltanschauungen*, and so on, but on the very processes of interweaving cultures that occur in performance. Here, moving between cultures is celebrated as a state of in-betweenness that will change spaces, disciplines, and the subject as well as her/his body in a way that exceeds the imaginable.

By interweaving cultures without erasing their differences, performances, as sites of in-betweenness, are able to constitute new realities – realities of the future, where the state of being in-between describes the 'normal' state of the citizens of this world.

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<sup>12</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Ästhetik des Vor-Scheins*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).