Conclusion

Interest in a practice-theory interface is no longer seen as a pastime and self-indulgence either by practitioners or by academicians. The historical divide is diminishing with scholarship in theatre and performance studies establishing itself as a discipline in its own right while professing its genealogical emergence. The emergence of theatre and performance studies in India as an University discipline has happened within a holistic study of the arts, visual and performance. Therefore research in the arts with theatre and performance envisaged the advantages as well as the paradoxes of interdisciplinary exchange. For my work these encounters happened self consciously and interdisciplinarity was an index of the ‘new’ opposing itself to a disciplinarity of the old institutional set ups. This in turn allowed me to look at a methodological flexibility which happens in context where knowledge formations are still being constituted and allowing one to function both as an outsider and insider.

For me it was also venturing into the hitherto unchartered fields of practice as Research (PAR). The expansion of theatre and performance studies in University contexts allow hands on performance experience and experiments as an upfront micro history of contingent practices. This in turn allows a lively creative performance culture to interact with research and larger epistemological questions of performance culture. Practice as research in the performing and media arts-generally understood as the use of creative processes as research methods-is an international and spreading phenomenon with strong established or emergent movements of post doctoral and post graduate practitioners and researchers in universities in UK, Australia, Canada,

61 I cite the example of the School of Arts and Aesthetics at JNU where research and study of the performing arts has originated within a School of Arts, with no connections to drama or literary studies. The Department started in 2001.
Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere. Aesthetic innovations, social-cultural relevance had become the characteristics of this successful growth in the last decade. Yet even when described thus radical creativity upsets traditional caution of scholarship particularly in Institutional spaces of University as well as the NSD.

PAR is described by one of the pioneers in the field as 'potential for parodies of iconoclastic regimes of knowledge and power'. They tend to follow a performance studies methodology which claims 'subject is boundless'. For me venturing into a potential future may be a follow up journey but not the course the research maps out. For me it was definitely a theatrical space and a theatrical space of history. Very closely bound with history of post independent Indian theatre and performance the methodological applications of PAR were not relevant or applicable to most of my work. Even chapter 4, which analyses my own work is from past experience and not connected directly to the dissertation writing process. In PAR there is always the parameters of conducting research along with the reading and analysis where practice and theory interact with each other even during the time of research.

For me past and present examples from theatre performances were both a theatrical object and a mode of analysis – responding to issues of national, regional and local identities in post independent India. I have tried to reconstruct historical performances through its spatial expressions and excavate the director's and performer's relation to what has often been labeled 'identity politics'. For me it was significant to trace how the theatre, far from assuming reductive conceptions of the

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self sufficient subject actually foregrounds its contingency. A study of modern to contemporary Indian theatre through space brought into consideration new approaches of re-looking at it which would allow new interpretations and re-interpretations.

The historical narrative I have constructed and deliberately fragmented going from a pedagogic method of introducing certain spatial concepts particularly the ones from a traditional vocabulary (chapter 1) to a new modern vision of a nation emerging out of colonialism to a phase where the grand narratives of modernism are deliberately broken required a counter narrative of comprehension or critique. It is not enough to raise a critique of spectacles and leave it as self explanatory.

For me the spectacle culture created by Alkazi and the NSD is an entry point in a narrative which creates a feeling of distance and alienation. Without spelling it out emphatically I have tried to understand reception and the effect Alkazi’s work had on its urban homogenous audience of the 60s and 70s. While political and social crises elsewhere and in other theatres were trying to create that moment of break, where the audience and performers come together to move towards action which gets translated into public spaces, Alkazi’s career tells a parallel story of unconditional march of valorized spectacles and its growing alienating effect. The process though not very apparent at that stage particularly in connection to use of technology, converting all images to representations was already evident. 63 Technology in terms of theatrical experience where the proximity of life bodies are a key factor can even be interpreted, as removing them physically to a distance where the oral transmission

63 Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, Black and Red Detroit 1983
was through a public audio system (Tughlaq in purana Quila, chapter 2). This pushes Debord’s argument relevant for cinema where the use of the camera creates certain basic expectancies of distance and representations into the realms of theatre. The aesthetic framing of Alkazi’s work and illumination created almost a similar effect where all images were seen as distant and alienating. The subsequent emphasis on visual aesthetic and converting all work in the institutional space of NSD into creating such visual impact was taking this trend to its logical conclusion. Hence the trend towards alienation and commodity fetishism which Debord traces so aptly through general sociological and film trends is applicable to Indian theatre history. This itself bears out the economic trend towards a systematic adoption of capitalist economy and industrialization. Partha Chatterjee in Nation and its Fragments points out that even within Gandhi and Nehru’s experiments with mixed economy the preferential choice for capitalism was very aptly elaborated and carried out in practice. There were never really any choices and by the 1980s the acceptance of entering a global capitalist market was declared and implemented as a fait accompli.64

The NSD example is unique and today no real difference within historical narration is evident between those post independent stalwarts who worked outside the state’s institutional set ups and those who worked inside. As if one collaborative theatre project came together as an integrated picture. Neither Habib Tanvir or K. N. Pannikar is seen as operating an alternate genre of theatre/performance practice. Somehow the official history through various institutional processes, awards, honorary positions and teaching stints at government run institutions like the NSD

have created one single historical narrative. Here Tanvir or Pannikar’s work is also seen as a NSD legacy and one project of creating a grand spectacle towards another more spectacular than the past.

Today NSD is touted as a model and the biggest annual theatre festival is held under its aegis where works by all directors need to pass through a selection committee selected by the NSD before it gets showcased in Delhi. The merger story is even better retold through this new cultural exhibitory space. It is important to see how the NSD festival tells a story of an integrated Indian theatre scene through its fantastic scenic effect created out of huge technological machinery working extensively at the five or six venues simultaneous. I say this not as a critique against any institution or individual but as unraveling the story of Debord’s process of alienation through visual stimulation and spectacles. Today the works acclaimed for its merits usually look like multi media presentations.

Once mediated through this spectacle stimulations which constantly strives to out surpass each other Debord argues that social life has been replaced with its representations. ‘All that was once directly lived has become mere representations’ (Debord; thesis 1). Debord further argues that the history of social life can be understood as ‘the decline of being into having and having into merely appearing’ (Debord, thesis 17). Within a larger Marxist framework of alienation Debord talks of the ‘historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life’ (Debord: thesis 42).
Whether it is the inevitability of capitalism which is promoting this trend or theatrical or artistic pursuits which are creating a supplemental culture which eulogize capitalism to create its strong foundational base, my concern here is not how to reverse the process. Maybe there is no way to reverse the process itself in a world where capitalism despite its imminent collapse continues to be valorized and gain support but how should the critique express itself. This brings me to a classical Marxist debate which acknowledges capitalism as an important stage towards socialism and communism, do we then accept the facile value of such spectacles to turn it around on itself.

If my work is anyway related to practice as research and carrying it forward to new potentialities (chapter 4), what I have tried to explore is how can technology and spectacle be reversed not by eliminating it from the scene altogether. I think the problems are too deep to attempt such a naïve reversal. It requires which in moments of this realization I have actually used spectacles to what I call dismember spectacles itself. More and more I am coming to believe that spectacles to reframe visual aesthetic delight can be broken and intervened by using it to break all notions of the established aesthetic mode of communication.

This is not to position my work as a new path breaking work. Many a times I too have with my mastery and fascination for spectacles fallen into a trap of creating delightful experiences for my audience. What exactly are the paradigms of dismembering spectacles as a mode of communication are moments which come across through a theory-practice interface. In that respect my detailed analysis of my ongoing work on circus and clowning is I think a step in that direction.
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Note

1. Prof. (Dr.) Anuradha Kapur Project Advisor from Japan Foundation Asia Centre expressed the following in the Performing Women brochure.

In these, our exceptional times we are beginning to come across situations where there is an inversion of social norms; at such a point, what defines the law and what defies it, what distinguishes civil war from a foreign one, indeed what defines the state of peace from that of conflict, is obscured. In fact, there has been much thinking on such states of exception recently.

In this context, it seems pertinent to perform characters such as Medea, Jocasta, Helen who invert, challenge, and disrupt settled values. Among other things, the stories of these three women are about death, marriage, and inheritance; about incarceration, suspicion, betrayal and even execution; about the repercussions of female speech; about the speech of injury, and the injury of speech. Foreigner, suspect, criminal, slave; mother, wife, lover, executioner; extreme, extremeness, excessive, unequal; the accounts of these damaged lives help us map our own against theirs.

One way or another, appropriation of ancient material highlights those who choose to scrutinize it because while the characters is profoundly altered. It is because the performative lens focused on them is from Greek tragedy comes from regions that may (or indeed may not) have had complex materials and linguistic links with each other in the past. These civilizational connections form the crux of the project. It is the circulation of ideas that reflect the contemporary within a rapidly reconfiguring Asia which is the foundation of this endeavor: an ‘Asia’ one might say, that almost by an act of will, by a voluntarist reallocation as it were, is redrawn to extend from Japan to India to central Asia, to the Middle East. By attempting to reposition these ancient “texts” in geography modifies, in some ways, the career of the text as well as its civilizational cargo.

The performance is anthological in that it does not add up into one single narrative but permits the individual concerns of the directors to be manifested in their particular fragments; the space designed for the performance has been constructed in order to allow for three habitations, three routes. These routes to the classics and back, as it were, allow us a response to what appear to be, almost irreversibly, extreme times’. Abhilash Pillai’s Helen from India works an image teetering on the faultlines of the past and the present, where the present means the contemporary the current and the absolute here and now. Apprehending the here and now means recognizing for one thing the arbitrary violence of today’s world. Excavation to death, quarrying the body, bleeding dry its remains, this is the topography on which the politics of oil and the clash of civilizations is staged; here Helen lies ravaged and sick to death. Bloated some times and wasted another, her life is reckoned retrospectively through symptoms; she has been supplicant, submissive, incensed, seductive, tempting, and repulsive; she has loved, wrought vengeance, and has been forgiving simultaneously as she has veered through life. And about her, as if on a loud speaker, empire has continued to portray itself as safe guarding civilization.

Suturing these three sections or instead, marking and itinerary through these parts, are the interludes in the performance. Like classical interludes they separate performance from scene change through song but like a modern chorus they commentate on the performance as well. Their text is part lyrical lullaby and part inventory (of household chores) that quotidian routines necessarily notch up; by putting these two different modes of speech and song together they attempt to connect the ‘then and there’ of the ancient world with the here and now of our disordered times’.
Richard Schechner defines two kinds of inter-culturalism. One is the traditional-seeking, and the other is the intercultural avant-garde: To a large degree, the tradition seeking and the intercultural avant-garde overlap, perhaps even converge. The difference is that the tradition-seeking avant-garde uses whatever it finds to make new, unified artworks. The intercultural avant-garde emphasizes the disjunctions, the breaks, the irritants of cultural “mixing.” (“Five Avant-garde or ... None”)

We can think of, as the example of the former, those inter-cultural works which had its heyday during the 1980s, that is, before the Communist regimes came down and the speed of liquidation of national borders began to be accelerated. The most typical of the former would be, as Schechner takes it up in his article, Peter Brook’s Mahabharata. On the other hand, the inter-cultural avant-garde emerged in the 1990s, during the process of establishment of America induced — that stumbling rough road of “New World Order,” with world-wide neo-liberal reconfigurations of power structure stealthily attached. The latter can be seen, in short, a kind of corresponding performative practice of a well-known phenomenon of globalization.

We came to sense the impossibility of the former. “new, unified artworks” the former envisions seems not only obsolete but simply escapist, though the escapism has been and still is a dominant mode in a globalized theatre market, including the avant-garde. On the other hand, it had become customary for conscientious theatre artists to emphasize “the local” rather the “global,” in the hope “the local” would become visible within the blinding standardizing forces of globalization. But the transformed new-liberal power structure knows various efficient and deadly ways in managing to isolate “the local” from the rest of the world, as is clearly seen in the rise of religious fundamentalism and nationalism.

Rustom Bharucha’s famous call for “intra-nationalism” against (any) “inter-culturalism,” posited as possible ways of thinking about making theatre now, is surely one option if we think of critiquing and subverting the dominant cultural production mode. It is even a natural way of thinking when we can assume such locality of India, where the nation itself is cultural chaos. Does this mean the end of any kind of “inter-culturalism”? I am tempted to say yes, but at the same time, there is a critical need to open up the closed boundaries by national borders and/or cultural borders, and set up a renewed site where what the audience can clearly see are “the disjunctions, the breaks, the irritants of cultural ‘mixing’.” Needless to say, theatre is where people expect “new, unified artworks.” Without completely betraying their expectation, how can we stage, both literally and figuratively, “the disjunctions, the breaks, the irritants of cultural ‘mixing’?”

I have been asking this question myself being in this project. I am sure that to ask participating three directors create their own part, sharing the unified theme of women in Greek tragedy is a temporary solution to the above question. But it is a productive one in an age of globalization, where capital flows back and forth, ignoring national and/or cultural border. While they themselves are closing down in the celebration of “locality,” that only brings pathologically xenophobic and claustrophobic fear, resulting in terrorism in many regions. This results in growing number of suicide in Japan, where more than 30,000 people kill themselves each year.

There is no easy way out. But I hope our collaborative work will set an example of the way theatre can tell you only about “us” but more about “you.”