Locating the "Sociopsychophysical" in One-on-one Kathakali Actor Training: Reconciling the "Old Social" with the "New Social" in an Australian Context

by

Arjun Raina

Thesis Submitted

to Flinders University for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.
18th July 2018

Table of Contents

APPENDIX B,C,D,E(Video documentation)

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text"

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. William Peterson for his supervisory powers, erudition, knowledge, generosity and kindness throughout the entire length of this project. Dr.Maggie Ivavnova for her support especially through the induction process, Dr. Stuart Grant for being the kind of referee that brings in a scholarship, Dr. Anne Thompson for her steady encouraging presence, Prof. Julian Meyrick for his support and encouragement, and Rosalba Clemente for facilitating an engagement with the student actors. Helen Smith, Peter Fraser, Lillian Warrum, Ezekiel Day, Cherian Jacob and Dr.Alison Richards for their work in the workshops. The Flinders University Library and staff and especially the amazing document delivery service. My fellow travellers Tiffany Knight, Houman Zandi-Zadeh, Peter Beaglehole, Sheila Duncan for being there on the road together. Evoor Rajendran Pillai, Jagdeeshan Thiruvatta, Anil Kumar and all the students of the International Center of Kathakali for the generous sharing of wisdom. Very deeply, for my teacher Sadanam Balakrishnan, for sharing his love and passion of Kathakali. For my father who was there to read every draft, except the final one. For my mother, and her lifelong love.

For Monica and Karan for their steady home love and support.

Abstract

As its original contribution to knowledge, this practice-led research PhD claims as "sociopsychophysical" the actor training processes of the seventeenth-century Indian dance drama Kathakali. This dissertation locates within the intercultural site of Kathakali actor training in Australia its research into Kathakali's sociopsychophysicality. The practitioner researcher is an experienced performer of Kathakali and is present at the research site as a master practitioner and teacher. Referencing the latest research in neuroscience on "mirror neurons," the thesis argues for a reconceptualisation of Kathakali's imitative methodology, advancing it from a previously recognised and reductive "mimicry," to a more contemporary and complex "mirroring." The research renegotiates traditional ideas of Indian aesthetics, claiming the performer's aesthetic pleasure as an added vector to the well-established theory of *rasa*. Working within a theoretical framework of "embodiment," this thesis uses the practitioner researcher's body, self, culture, and existential being-in-the-Kathakali world as provocations for theoretical investigation.

This research progresses through three cycles of investigation. The first cycle of investigation is located in India, at the International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi. Here the practitioner researcher worked as a disciple in a one-on-one relationship with a master practitioner or *guru,* while also observing the *guru* teach students. The second cycle is located in Melbourne, Australia where the researcher taught Kathakali to a group of sixteen contemporary performers. The third cycle has the researcher teaching two learners, one-on-one, in Melbourne, Australia. The first cycle functions as a site for autoethnographic research and data collection. The next two cycles function as practice-led sites for data collection and evaluation, offering up original

insights for theoretical investigation. Practice-led and autoethnographic research are, then, the two primary research methods supporting this investigation. The examinable element of the doctoral project comprises a 100% written thesis. A video documentation accompanies, as appendices, the written thesis, working as evidence of selected elements of the process

Chapter One

Introduction

This doctoral project works to validate the inclusion of Kathakali into contemporary actor training programs in Australia. In pursuit of this objective this thesis frames as "sociopsychophysical" the actor training processes of the seventeenth-century Indian dance drama Kathakali. This sociopsychophysical it locates both within the one-on-one site of Kathakali actor training, and in the social weave that informs Kathakali text and performativity. The "practitioner researcher" (Nelson, 2013) is a Kathakali performer and teacher. The research site is the teaching of Kathakali in Australia.

In a traditional Kathakali performance, after finishing his makeup and costuming, when a Kathakali actor looks into a mirror, he sees looking back at him the precise image of a god, a demon, an epic hero or heroine.

Kathakali demon: photo credit: Sreenath Narayana

This specific image or social presence has taken the performer four hours to create, and six to eight years of actor training to embody. The performer has learnt this art

from a *guru* or a master practitioner. He has worked for years as a *shishya* or disciple observing his *guru* while imitating his actions. This observation and imitation of a *guru* is central to Kathakali actor training.

In an introductory Kathakali actor training workshop conducted in Melbourne as part of this practice-led thesis, a student actor asked if the practice of a Kathakali actor was similar to that of a Filipino impersonator of a famous performer like Elvis Presley. To him, both seemed similar forms of mimicry. A consequent reading of academic literature on Kathakali offered the repeated use of the word mimicry to describe its teaching methodology.

In India, a traditional Kathakali teacher has no need to explain Kathakali's imitative pedagogy to a learner. Imitating a master practitioner is an accepted part of traditional Indian dance and acting culture. On the other hand, in Australia, explaining what Kathakali is, and how it is taught, is a performative act, in the English language. While communicating in English with learners, I, a Kathakali teacher found asking learners to mimic me, not a very accurate word for the act of imitating me. In the same introductory workshop in Melbourne, when an actor did actually mimic me, imitate and repeat what looked to me like a generalised and artificial version of my action, I found it inappropriate to ask for an improved, or a more precise mimicry of my action. Even a request for a more specific imitation felt inadequate. Further, while outlining and talking about my PhD research project to the participants, it was also not very appealing to use words like mimic and imitate to describe my offer, i.e., mimic me for a year or more, one-on-one! In contemporary western culture, to mimic or to imitate someone is not considered high art. Drama schools in Australia, for example, follow the western pedagogy of encouraging actors to interpret and improvise both text and character, while individualising their creative interpretations.

In contrast, Kathakali actor training (Zarrilli 1984, 1992, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2009, 2011, Zarrilli *et al.* 2013) works itself through a teacher-led program of imitative learning, preparing the learner to embody archetypical characters.

This thesis focuses on this imitative teaching methodology of Kathakali, located within the intercultural context of teaching Kathakali to contemporary performers in Australia. An understanding of the intercultural (Pavis1996; Schechner 1990; Watson 2002) aspects of the thesis are framed by the work of the first European practitioner to travel to India and engage with Kathakali, Eugenio Barba (1972, 1979,1989, 1994, 1995; Barba and Sanzenbach 1967). This particular enquiry within the intercultural exercise, of finding a more persuasive and appropriate representation of Kathakali's teaching methodology in Australia, emerged from what began as a wider investigation, first located within the more generalised field of researching the teaching of Kathakali in an Australian drama school. This research trajectory was in response to a contemporary call in mainstream Australian actor training culture, for a deeper engagement with Asian forms of performance.

As a Kathakali performer and teacher, my own experience of Kathakali actor training suggests a more complex and nuanced "mirroring" than a reductive mimicking by the learner of the teacher's actions. By "mirroring" I refer not to the inversion of an image in the mirror, but to the functional value of "mirror neurons" within the mirror neuron system in the human brain. The latest research in neuroscience on mirror neurons[1] (Gallese 2003, 2009, Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011, Gallese et.al.1996) suggests a deeper evolutionary link between the act of observing

---

[1] This "mirroring," as defined by the linkage of the act of observation with that of doing, is different to

and doing.[2] This thesis works to understand and appreciate Kathakali's mirroring methodology while offering up the hypothesis that this particular pedagogy is best enquired into by locating the practice-led research work within the one-on-one site of Kathakali actor training.

Over the past four centuries, Kathakali has been taught both in the group classroom teaching mode, with the teacher present with other singers and musicians, and in the more private one-on-one space, often in the teacher's home. Contemporary western actor training in drama schools in Australia, on the other hand, is primarily held in the group classroom mode. One-on-one work is rarely done and is often restricted to psychological counselling or emotional mentoring.

In the Kathakali one-on-one teaching space, the teacher repeatedly demonstrates the actions to be learnt while singing the text and keeping rhythm or *tala* with a wooden stick, beating time on a wooden stool. The student dancer-actor learns the dramatic actions by imitating the teacher's demonstrations of these actions. This includes embodying and illustrating with hand gestures the sung text, as well as imitating the embodied dance choreography. The learner embodies the song, allowing the *bhava* or the emotional state that exists in the song to inspire and possess him. The teacher expresses the *bhava* through singing the text or *padam,* keeping rhythm throughout the performance with the rhythm stick or *taalam*. The dancer-actor expresses the *bhava* through an enactment of the *padams* interspersed with pure dance pieces or *kalaashams*. This stage action is then received, realised and appreciated by

---

[2] Recent excitement in the field of neuroscience suggests there exists a "mirror mechanism" in the human brain supporting the intersubjectivity involved, for example, in the intimate social interaction as in the mirroring process, i.e., the mirroring by a learner of a teacher's actions. This intersubjectivity the mirroring mechanism mediates by integrating the act of observing with the act of doing, "[m]irror Neurons are premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else" (Gallese 2009:520).

the audience as an embodied emotional experience of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*[3]

(Pollock 2016; Krishnamoorthy 1979; Kumar 2010; Vatsyayan 2008; Shwartz 2006).

The Sociopsychophysical and 'The Old Social' in Kathakali Training

Over the last century, a large number of western practitioners have been

influenced by non-western[4] processes of actor training inspired by the work of

Russian acting teacher Konstantin Stanislavsky, one of the first western practitioners

to engage with yoga, creating psychophysical exercises for actors (Hulton and Kapsali

2017). Psychophysical is a term Stanislavsky used early in his work[5] to highlight a

significant problem of the western actor – the split Cartesian duality of a separate

mind (psycho) and body (physical) i.e., the psycho physical. The psychophysical

represents, then, an integrated body and mind.

This dissertation frames as sociopsychophysical Kathakali's actor training

processes. In Kathakali, the *guru* and *shishya* both work with their integrated

body/minds, their psychophysicality. The social element in my original construct

sociopsychophysical is defined by the social relationship between the teacher and

learner best realised in this thesis within the one-on-one actor training space. The

significant trilogy of terms for this thesis then add up to the psycho physical, the

psychophysical and the sociopsychophysical.

---

[3] According to the Indian aesthetician Pravas Jivan Chaudhury, Rasa is "originally a physiological term and figures in the medical literature (Ayurveda) of India. It means the physical quality of taste, and also any one of the six tastes, vis. sweet, acid, salt, bitter, astringent and insipid" (1956: 219). Rasa in the present context is then a "taste" of aesthetic pleasure.

[4] As Zarrilli documents, "Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov, Meyerhold, Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, Barba, Copeau, Tadeusz Kantor, Herbert Blau, Suzuki Tadashi, Ypshi Oida, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Anne Bogart have been influenced in some way by non-Western traditions ranging from Japanese noh, Indian yoga or kathakali dance-drama, to Beijing opera, among others." (2009:8).

[5] This thesis references Stanislavski's early work with text based realism as here is where he had the strongest impact on twentieth century actor training in the west. His later writings on his work with actors, much of it translated and disseminated long after his death, and particularly his method of physical actions, brings western actor preparation into greater alignment with Kathakali actor training.

To further elucidate the title of this dissertation, the old social frames Kathakali's social world in India/Kerala (Gough and Schneider 1961), as specific to Kathakali texts created in the seventeenth century. This includes both the time tested culture and practices of the traditional Kathakali acting pedagogy that have survived to this day, including the *guru shishya parampara* or the master/disciple tradition. The old social frames the social weave that informs Kathakali's text and stories created in the seventeenth century, a social weave this thesis argues is informed by the Indian caste system (Dumont 1970; Das 1977; Guha 2013). While acknowledging the tumultuous change in its social world specially since Indian Independence from colonial rule in 1947, the framing of the old social works to stay disciplined within the context of seventeenth century texts and its social world, and not reflect more generally on Kathakali over the centuries or on the state of Kerala. Further, the old social references culture and practices embedded within the body of the practitioner researcher. Within this practice-led research this Indian social weave is in part embedded into the body of the practitioner researcher and, as the body is carried from the old social in India where the practitioner lived most of his life to his new life in the new social, this distinction between the old and new social has specific meaning for the practice and its relocation. The thesis also assumes no hierarchical bias between the 'old' and the 'new.'

In contrast to the old social, the new social references the teaching of Kathakali to contemporary Australian performers in Melbourne, Australia where I now live. This includes my new social existence as a new migrant to Australia having migrated in the year 2010, an awareness of the new social equations on offer in the multicultural Australia of 2014-18 (Hage 2002), and with a rise of the Asian powers like China and India, the emergence of a new international order within the wider

shifting realities of a globalised world. For this dissertation, the new social is the site, then, for new negotiations within the intercultural actor training space.

Research Questions

A social contextualisation of Kathakali actor training processes extends the enquiry beyond the individual actor's psychophysical towards the sociopsychophysical. This sociopsychophysical includes both the *guru shishya parampara*, or the master disciple tradition, as well as the social weave and the caste system that inform Kathakali text and performativity. The following overarching research questions emerge from this extension:

- Is there enough evidence to frame Kathakali's actor training processes as sociopsychophysical?

- How does the social inform its pedagogy, its text and performativity?

- Does the social include the caste system and untouchability?

This thesis asserts a need to search for a more appropriate word than mimicing to describe Kathakali's imitative pedagogy. This suggests both a linguistic search, as well as a conceptual shift from earlier representations of its actor training processes. The word mirroring is informed by the latest research in neuroscience around the discovery of mirror neurons. An understanding of the Kathakali mirroring process is best realised through researching the site of one-on-one actor training. The key research question informing this investigation may then be framed as:

- While revisiting and renegotiating the reductive idea of mimicking, can the research successfully demonstrate, both practically and theoretically, mirroring as a more appropriate and nuanced representation of Kathakali's imitative teaching methodology?

From this specific concern extends a list of subsidiary questions:

- Is the one-on-one actor training space a fertile site for researching Kathakali actor training and its imitative mirroring methodology?

- Could a one-on-one working relationship be forged with Kathakali learners in Australia?

- If yes, could this one-on-one work then be sustained over a length of time, for example, three times a week, three to four hours each session, for at least a year or more?

A traditional understanding of Indian aesthetics identifies as the prime objective of Indian drama and actor training the performer's ability to create aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* for a *rasik,* or knowledgeable member of the audience. A *guru or* master performer who has mastered the art of creating *rasa* for his audience, passes on this ability to his *shishya* or disciple. Having spent a lifetime working at his craft, the *guru* and master performer has an intimate knowledge of the creative object/artefact on stage, and a consequent understanding of the pleasure experienced in its creation. A traditional interpretation of the theory of *rasa* however does not include the *guru* and master performer's experience, compelling an enquiry into the master performer's taste of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*. Thus, the research question that follows this key aspect of the enquiry is:

- Does the Kathakali *guru* and master performer taste aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*?

If the answer to the above is yes, as this thesis proposes, a subset of secondary questions follow from this concern:

- Within the theory of *rasa*, is there another way to frame the aesthetic pleasure of the performer?

- Does this practice-led research offer new insights and knowledge for intercultural actor training more broadly?

- Could the challenges emerging from this research exercise be understood, recognised and translated into opportunities for deepening international practice and engagement with Asian arts?

Kathakali in context

Kathakali is a late sixteenth-century/early seventeenth-century dance theatre, created and practised primarily in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Kathakali, or story-dance, has the dancer-actor perform archetypical characters from stories such as those of the Indian epic *The Mahabharata.* Episodes from those stories were first turned into Kathakali *attakathas* or texts written for performance. These *attakathas* would be handed over by the writer to the *guru* or teacher. The *guru* then created a performance score, practising and performing each role, often for an illiterate learner. The learner would receive the instructions orally and learn his part by imitating the teacher's demonstration. Once the roles had been learnt, the performers would come together to work more formally in rehearsal with the musicians.

In rehearsal, two singers, accompanied by two percussionists, a *chenda* and a *maddalam* player, narrate the story *shlokas/dandakas* and then sing the dialogues or *padams.* Appropriate *ragas* or specific melody scores are selected to support the *bhava* or the embodied emotional state appropriate to each dialogue or *padam.* The dancer-actors enact these *padams* using hand gestures or *hasta mudras.* The stage action crafted includes the *padams* as well as *attams* or danced enactments without song and *kalashams* or pure dance pieces.

Kathakali is an eastern theatre about gods and demons, and epic human heroes and villains. *The Mahabharata*, the literary epic that inspires a large number of Kathakali stories, while existing as a literary text, has a sacred status in Indian culture. Kathakali is a religious theatre in so far as it performs stories of the epic, and is performed by, and within, a culture of a people that have religion wrapped up in large parts of their life. Kathakali evolved out of earlier forms of what were more directly religion-linked forms of performance, including *krishnaattam*, the stories of the god Krishna and *ramanattam,* and the stories of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, considered a sacred text by the Hindus in India. Kathakali's creator, Kottayyam Thamburan, a local royal or *thamburan* of the principality of Kottayyam in Kerala, sometime in the late seventeenth century, used the less sacred and more literary *Mahabharata* to source stories for his first set of four Kathakali plays. To perform these plays, he trained his soldiers as performers, turning them into dancing warriors. These soldiers belonged to the *nair* or *nayar* caste, reflecting the deeper entrenchment of the art form within the Indian caste system.

In Kerala, each caste, tribe, or community has its own form of performance. These forms cross-influence others to create new forms. Performance sources of Kathakali include the ritualistic, classical, tribal and folk forms of Kerala, namely *theyyam, kutiyattam*, *kalaripayattu*, *krishnattam* and *ramanattam. Theyyam* is a ritualistic performance in which the lower caste or untouchable performer during the course of an annually held performance becomes the temple deity, bringing alive the deity, representing the deity for the worshippers. *Kutiyattam* is a form of stylised Sanskrit drama that is performed by upper caste temple servants called *chakyaars.* *Kalaripayattu* is a martial art performed by the warrior *nair* caste. Kathakali's pre-expressive body training routine is directly inspired by *Kalaripayattu. Krishnattam*

and *Ramanattam* are dance dramas created around the life stories of the two Hindu gods Krishna and Rama.

This hybridity of influence suggests a spirit of inclusiveness that exists within the Kathakali tradition. As compared to certain traditions that are closed to outsiders, within the context of actor training, this inclusiveness is reflected in contemporary Kathakali's openness to students of all castes as well as what are referred to within the Kathakali community as "foreign students" who are welcomed in and taught with enthusiasm. At the same time, Kathakali has an international presence with Kathakali troupes travelling the world to perform in dance and theatre festivals, university drama departments, and international cultural events. Kathakali has also been engaged by practitioners like Grotowski, Barba and Mnouchkine to influence the style and craft of their actors.

Over the centuries, especially in its latest period of reinvigoration in the 1930's and 40's, in its performance mode Kathakali has evolved by including an ever widening body of stories and literature. In addition to a host of traditional choreographies and stories, these include dance dramas on Mary Magdalen, the Persian story of Sohrab and Rustum, as well as works of William Shakespeare, notably *King Lear* and *Othello*. On the other hand, any perceived conservatism as reflected through its *guru shishya* tradition and imitative pedagogy, as observed at the International Center for Kathakali, New Delhi, is a reflection of its self assurance, of knowing through time tested methods what works to create Kathakali actors. Its relatively steady through line within actor training is evidenced through very similar codifications available in both Zarrilli (1984) and Balakrishnan (2005).This core stability is to be seen as a strength, and not as a consequence of any rigidity or resistance to change. Here too as the student actor matures he is encouraged to

explore an ever growing repertoire of Kathakali dramas. Recognising limitations within western actor training, in terms of time available and knowledge of Kathakali's language, culture and texts, this thesis limits it explorations to the initial years of Kathakali training practice when the imitative pedagogy is primarily at play. It does not seek to engage western actor training at advanced levels of Kathakali actor training. Advanced Kathakali student actors in their sixth to eighth year are challenged through their imaginative faculties and textual interpretive abilities. As the thesis is examining the imitative quality of mirroring it works within the above stated self acknowledged limits.

Kathakali actor training: key aesthetic features

Kathakali actor training is based on foundational principles of Indian aesthetics that guide the four key elements of an actor's representation: *angika* or body; *vacika* or speech; *aharya* or costumes; and *satvik* or the inner emotional. Kathakali's performance culture includes all four kinds of *abhinayas* or expressions of the act of performance, features found in all so-called 'traditional' Indian dance-drama forms. These include *angika abhinaya,* the art of enactment relating to the movement of the *anga* or limbs including hand gestures and facial expressions; *vachika abhinaya* or the art of the spoken word or, as is the case with Kathakali, the sung text; *aharya abhinaya* or the expressing of character and mood and feeling though elaborate costuming and makeup; and finally *satvik abhinaya* or the art of expressing the inner emotional world of the characters. All these four forms of *abhinaya* commune with each other, offering for the viewer or audience an aesthetic experience defined traditionally as *rasa* or a taste of aesthetic pleasure.

Rasa theory in Indian aesthetic explores the place of emotion in art. For more than a thousand years, Indian intellectuals have debated the location of emotion in art. Does emotion exist primarily in the poet or writer, in the character or text, in the artistic object on stage, or does it exist in the audience? *Rasa,* or a taste of aesthetic pleasure, suggests both that which is tasted and that which tastes. In drama, is the dramatic poet or writer the first taster of the emotion or is a taste of *rasa* reserved for the audience? This dissertation engages with these traditional ideas of *rasa* while attending to a significant gap in *rasa* scholarship, offering the neglected experience of the performer's body and its pleasure as another vector in the *rasa* debate. Through the bodies of the master practitioner and disciple, and through an appreciation of their pleasures, the one-on-one site of the practice-led research offers an opportunity to engage with and nuance the traditional understanding of *rasa.*

A key concept extending *rasa* into the realm of actor training is *rasaabhinaya.* In Kathakali, the training of embodied emotional states or *bhavas* is called *rasaabhinaya.* There are nine *bhavas,* namely *shringar* (desire), *hasya* (laughter), *karuna* (sadness), *raudra* (rage), *veera* (heroic), *bhayanaka* (fear), *vibhats* (disgust), *adbhuta* (wonder) and *shanta* (peace). The actor is trained to embody these formal emotional states not only through facial expressions, but even through a preparation of the entire body. Traditional scholarship on Indian aesthetics has *bhava* as the actor's embodiment of emotion and *rasa* as the audience's taste of aesthetic pleasure. The term *rasaabhinaya* sets up a contradiction, suggesting as it does the actor's tasting of aesthetic pleasure. This thesis works to negotiate and resolve this contradiction, offering evidence to suggest that the performer too tastes aesthetic pleasure or *rasa.*

A "practitioner researcher"

I am a Kashmiri Brahmin. I was born in New Delhi, India. I am not a traditional Kathakali dancer from the southern Indian state of Kerala. Before this PhD research exercise, I had taught Kathakali in the group mode, but never one-on-one. In addition to my work as a Kathakali performer/teacher, I am also a writer and performer of my own contemporary work. I began my Kathakali training at the age of 24. Today, at 53, I am also a creator of contemporary performances that have succeeded locally, as well as toured the international theatre festival world. My Kathakali training practice has influenced my contemporary work, in which I do not perform Kathakali on stage.

I began learning Kathakali at a difficult time of my life, in 1988-89, after my return from training as a contemporary actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (UK). This was after a series of nervous breakdowns, parts of which I have detailed in my novella, *The Painted Devil* (2014). Soon after these breakdowns, I began learning Kathakali from Sadanam Balakrishnan, who had no idea of my condition. I learnt Kathakali from him for ten years at the International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi where he was both principal dancer and teacher. Sadanam Balakrishnan is today a leading practitioner of Kathakali. His publication, *Kathakali: A Practitioner's Perspective* (2005) is one of the relevant Kathakali texts for this dissertation. I have also learnt Kathakali over the past years with a number of other teachers, including Kudamanoor Karunakaran Nair, Kalamandalam Krishna Kumar and Kalamandalam Bhagyanathan. A large part of these lessons were conducted one-on-one.

My training has included numerous *uzhichill* or body massage sessions, and learning the entire *kalaripayattu*-inspired body exercise routine *meyyarappu.* My decades-long engagement includes learning and practising the entire performance

score of what are considered amongst the Kathakali performer community, and acknowledged by academics as the golden classics of Kathakali. These four plays were written and choreographed by the creator of Kathakali, Kottayyam Thamburan, in the seventeenth century. They are *Kalyana Saugandhikam* translated as the "Flower of Good Fortune", *Baka Vadhaam* or the "Death of the monster Baka", *Kirmira Vadham* or the "Death of the monster Kirmira", and *Kalekeya Vadham* or the "Death of the monster Kalakeya". At the International Center for Kathakali, New Delhi, acting and dance choreographies used for actor training are primarily from these four dance dramas which continue to influence the core practices of the Kathakali actor training tradition. At this central location of my ethnographic research each new season begins with the professional troupe revisiting, one by one, each of these four plays. To make clear, training is not restricted to these dramas, only that these dramas occupy a central space in the training and performance repertoire. As there is no overarching authority censoring and controlling, each institution/*guru* is also free to evolve its/his own curriculum, especially at advanced stages of learning.

The Kathakali Mirror Box and Training

Since my breakdown/s as a young learner and the initial hard work put in to get my body functional again. It is this embodied learning experience of a journey from brokenness to wellbeing that makes me term this intimate one-on-one master disciple space as a "Kathakali mirror box," referencing Dr. V.S. Ramachandran's work at the Center for Brain and Cognition, University of California, San Diego with the "mirror box" (Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran 1996). Ramachandran used a box, with a mirror placed in the middle, to relieve his amputee patients of pain in their phantom limb, a limb that seemed to exist even after it had been amputated. Within

this proposed idea of a Kathakali mirror box, the learner is framed, subjectively perceiving his own dysfunctional learner's body, as a "phantom body" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998:46), observing and experiencing the Kathakali form as realised through the teacher's body. The more the learner observes the mirror, i.e., the teacher's body, which reflects within itself, as in a mirror, the Kathakali form, the more he is able to move his own body, with an ease that frees the previously dysfunctional phantom body. The learner's dysfunctional body works to imitate the teacher's functional body. It is this one-on-one embodied imitation that is my central concern locating the Kathakali mirror box or KMB as the primary site for research for this practice-led project.

A framing of the traditional one-on-one teaching space within the language of twenty-first-century neuroscience reflects a need to reconcile the pedagogy and practices of the old social to my own existence in the new social. In recent years there has been much enthusiasm neuroscience and the mirror neuron theory, and its relevance for actor training (1988, 2008; Mee 2014; Nair 2015). A critique of the mirror neuron theory (Hickok 2015) would suggest its still to be proven status as a cognitive science. As a qualification, I work in this thesis primarily with its linguistic, and their conceptual consequences. The focus here is with body and culture and not body and science. No strictly 'scientific' experiments were conducted as I am seeking the appropriate language and arguments to communicate a way of teaching created in the old social, to its new audience in the new social.

In the old social, this one-on-one space was referred to as the *guru shishya parampara* or the master disciple tradition. An investigation in the new social moves away from the usual descriptions that concentrate on the hierarchical, godly, devotional and spiritual dynamics of the relationship, to the more experiential,

embodied, existential evocation of two living human bodies coming to work together at the common craft of actor training.

The Research Field: Methodologies, Tools and Paradigms

I am using practice-led research to reveal foundational actor training insights and to help teach my practice in a new culture. The practice of teaching Kathakali to performers in Australia through the one-on-one actor training space is the site for both the addressing of research questions, as well as a provocation for theoretical investigations. Through the teaching of contemporary performers in Australia, this thesis seeks to uncover original insights and knowledge that help theorise and engage with academics and practitioners, both within, as well as outside of the practice. A video documentation of certain elements of the process, and its outcome, support as additional evidence the theoretical formulations and dissertation.

While Kathakali is a theatre of gods and demons, and kings and queens, it is to the very human craft of actor training that this dissertation attends. Towards this end, this practice-led research project is situated within the academic discipline of "embodiment," making the living human body, with its subjective experiences and its objective social/cultural expression, the primary tool for enquiry. As Thomas Csordas (1990, 94) theorises, the living body exists pre-objectively, before it is objectified by the mind as a thing, or can be discussed in terms of categories of the scientific body, for example, of body parts and fluids. It is this pre-objective, lived, subjective and felt experience within the KMB that grounds, provokes and leads my enquiry. By my embodied presence in, and experience of, the KMB, my body, self and culture are all provocations for knowledge gathering. The existential relationship formed with other bodies, with each individual learner become fertile ground for enquiry. Out of the

forging of these relationships the research forages and "knowledge gathers" foundational insights for intercultural actor training.

While the primary site of the practice-led research is firmly located in the field of teaching Kathakali in Australia, some elements of the research work, i.e., the researcher traveling to India to gather data at the International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi, may be seen as autoethnographic. This Kathakali training centre is where for ten years I had learnt Kathakali from 1990 to 2000. The centre continues to teach the exact form and *sampradayam*[6] or tradition of Kathakali that I had learnt there. The actions I observed at the centre were the actions I had performed myself. It is through the researcher's subjectivity, through my knowing the exact actions and acting processes being taught, that I come to share the same frame of reference as the subject. By this observation, I suggest that some elements of my fieldwork in India may be perceived as autoethnographic.

Literature Review

Kathakali literature relevant to this dissertation may be divided into Indian, European and American sources. While few studies concentrate on Kathakali's one-on-one actor training pedagogy, there exist abundant generic writings on the *guru shishya parampara*. M.K. Raina (2002) sets up a traditional understanding of the *guru shishya* relationship, its spiritual and metaphysical references. Ashish Khokar's (2016) comprehensive guide to contemporary Indian dance covers a whole range of

---

6 The three traditional styles of Kathakali are *Vettathu Sampradayam, Kalladikkodan Sampradyam* and *Kaplingadu Sampradayam.* These styles may further be narrowed down to the "northern" and "southern" styles. Differences in technique and choreographic choices, for example, mark a separation. The International Centre for Kathakali follows the northern style.

ideas on the traditional *guru* and *shishya* and the contemporary teacher and student. Annaya Chatterjee (1996) offers another scholarly appreciation of this pedagogic practice in the general field of Indian dance. Stacey Prickett (2007) gives a western perspective, examining and highlighting the difference between the traditional *guru* and the more contemporary teacher. Each title of *guru* and teacher carries with it its own set of cultural expectations and burdens. Throughout the thesis, I consciously use "teacher" to describe my work in the new social. I use "*guru*" to describe the teacher in the old social.

Indian literature on Kathakali

While there is a large body of literature by Indians both generically on Indian dance and more specifically on those forms of performance that are acknowledged as sources of Kathakali, I have concentrated framing my enquiry primarily within Kathakali literature. While in pre-independent India, before 1947, there was not much literature by Indians on Kathakali, post-independence writers primarily focus on the art form either as a celebration of nationalistic or of regional/Kerala state culture. One of the first full length books on Kathakali, written by Bharatha K. Iyer (1955), provides historical detail as well as a general overview of the *nair* community that performed Kathakali. Avinash. C. Pandaya's (1961) generalised description of Kathakali and its social world avoids any detailing of the *nair* performing community while highlighting the upper-caste *namboodri* or Brahmin patronage. It is only later that Kathakali practitioners and local scholars begin to find their own voice. Nair, D. Appukuttan, and Paniker, K. Ayyappa (eds, 1993) bring to Kathakali scholarship the embodied knowledge of practitioners and local scholars. Their work provides a significant discussion of the differences between Kathakali's realisation of its

aesthetics and what is found in the Sanskrit dramatic treatise, *Natyashastra*. Sadanam

Balakrishan (2005) too sets out to distance Kathakali from a presumed influence by

the *Natyashastra*. Natalia Lidova (1994) researches the *Natyashastra* and offers

insights into the shift from ritual to drama, from prayer to performance in ancient

India. The treatise on drama is also available in English in a translation by Kumar

(2010).

European and American literature on Kathakali

Through a body of literature by European practitioners, I examine the European

representation of the other, oriental, Asian, and eastern theatres, including Kathakali.

This includes the work of Antonin Artaud (1968), influential in coining the

controversial term "oriental theatre" (Bharucha, 1993:15-16); then, Jerzy Grotowski

(1968) who, in the search for a new theatrical language, found ancient Indian theatre

and performance to contain within its aesthetic an "ironic transposition of all possible

stereotypes, all possible clichés" (Osinki 1980:19); followed by the main protagonist

of this theme, Eugenio Barba (1995), whose work offers an understanding of the

shared principles underlying eastern and western practices. I examine the literature

around Barba's extensive work in theatre anthropology at the Odin Teatre (1972,

1979, 1994, 1995, Varley 1998; Ledger 2012). Eugenio Barba's work is central to the

intercultural elements of this research.

Following the European exploration of other, oriental, Asian and eastern

theatres, it was the Americans who engaged with Kathakali practice and scholarship.

This included Richard Schechner (1988), whose work has challenged conventional

definitions of theatre, ritual and performance while opening up a new field of inquiry

– performance studies; Diane Daugherty and Marlene Pitkow, who documented the

work of the only all-women's troupe in Kerala (1988); Marlene Pitkow who, through her PhD dissertation (1998), brought a much needed feminist perspective on the representation of the feminine within Kathakali; and finally/significantly, Phillip Zarrilli (1984, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2009, 2011;Zarrilli,et.al. 2013), the most prolific academic writer on Kathakali, who later developed his own psychophysical approach to actor training. In this dissertation, my original construct of sociopsychophysical builds on, critiques and advances Zarrilli's work on the psychophysical. Also relevant as a more general background to this dissertation is Richmond Farley's scholarship on Indian theatre (1965, 1971a,1971b, 1973, 1985, 1989). As Zarrilli is to Kathakali, Farley is to one of the sources of Kathakali, i.e., *kutiyattam,* the temple-based Sanskrit drama.

Located between worlds, and offering a very eastern perspective to what he considers is a very western-dominated field of interculturalism, is Rustom Bharucha (1993, 2000), whose work is central to my need to renegotiate western representation and experience of Kathakali actor training.

Finally, and seminal to this dissertation, is Sheldon Pollock's work on the Indian aesthetic of *rasa*. In *A Rasa Reader* (2016), he covers and critiques 1500 years of Indian critical writing around the theory of *rasa*. His insights and conclusions are central to validating some of the original insights on offer through this dissertation.

Practice-led research literature

For an understanding of the role of "practitioner researcher," I reference Robin Nelson (2013). Literature on practice-based, practice-as-research and practice-led

research sets up debates about the artistic process as different from the scientific; about the difficulty, location and value of documentation; and about the dynamism of alternate approaches. Piccini & Kershaw (2004) attend to questions about the methods, means and outcomes, the difficulties of examining and evaluating practice-based, practice as research and practice-led research. Barbara Bolt (2007) comments on the value of documenting the processes of creation. Essays by Ledger et al. (2011), and Boyce-Tillman et al. (2012) are concerned with the nature and value of liquid knowledge, knowledge not fully formed into product. This body of literature explores both the fears as well as the opportunities of practice-led research.

I believe that practice-led research serves well the present intercultural exercise of researching the teaching of Kathakali in Australia. By being present at the site of research, as a performing practitioner, I create the conditions for new knowledge to emerge, as well actively participate in its genesis. I chose the specific field of practice-led research for this work, preferring it over, for example, practice-based research, as my practice of Kathakali is, in itself, not the object of research, but only a site for it. By this, I imply that my practice of Kathakali and its traditional actor training routines remain almost unchanged through the research exercise, and thus the reinvention of my practice is not the objective of this research. Practice-based research, on the other hand, asks of the researcher to generate new knowledge through the practice itself. The creative artefact produced needs to reflect this new knowledge. This thesis uses traditional Kathakali actor training processes to engage in an intercultural exercise, in a new social. It is the ideas and insights emerging through this process that are of interest to the researcher.

Embodiment

In placing my body at the site of research and as a tool for gathering knowledge, I reference very centrally Thomas Csordas, whose works "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthology"(1990) and *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (1994) are seminal in influencing the way I approach my research and formulate my ideas. Csordas (1994) theorises in his introduction that we need to "reformulate theories of culture, self, and experience, with the body at the center of analysis" (4). This dissertation works to do precisely that, working to explore one-on-one Kathakali actor training through the live embodied presence of the Kathakali teacher as principal researcher. Nick Crossley (2006) engages with the self-reflexive and subjective awareness involved in the crafting of one's own objective body. Andrew J. Strathern (1996) helps frame a historical perspective of the Cartesian mind/body duality. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 64) reorients the mind/body relationship, setting up the living body itself as a fertile ground for experience, while Drew Leder (1990) offers the body's absence and its disappearance as an alternative state of consciousness to its presence. In Kathakali, the performer's body is hidden away, disappearing in service of the costumed god or epic character. In performance, this disappearing, labouring body is then both present and absent. Ideas of absence help theorise this disappearing body, indicating the significance of Leder's work to my research.

The living body may also be perceived as a "being" and I find an exploration into the essence or being of the Kathakali performer necessary for, as Martin Heidegger alerts us, "We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed. The Being of any such entity is in each case mine" (Macquarrie and Robinson (trans) 1973: 67). To theorise the existential relationship of two living beings working together every day with the common objective of creating the Kathakali form, I reference Edmund

Husserl (1969). Finally, two living bodies working together in a social situation meet and greet each other, sit, stand facing each other, making their bodies interact through a series of culturally circumscribed practices. Bourdieu (1990) helps negotiate and understand the hierarchical location and function of social practices within a social group or habitat. Bourdieu's *habitus,* for example*,* offers insights into the way social practices, and social power and hierarchies, inform each other. In this thesis, I reference an understanding of *habitus* to theorise two bodies engaged in a set of practices like those of a disciple touching the guru's feet as a gesture of respect and social inclusion. Bourdieu's work helps me contextualise the culture and practices of the old social and their reconciliation into the new social.

Neuroscience

To locate the central, imitative pedagogic concern of this dissertation within the latest research in neuroscience, I reference the work of Vittorio Gallese (Gallese 2003, 2009, Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011, Gallese et.al.1996). Gallese's work on the mirror neuron system (MNS) in the human brain is seminal to this thesis. His research into the MNS helps link the act of observation to the act of doing, two central functions of Kathakali learning. A mirror neuron is a premotor neuron, one that both provokes/fires the observation of, and the performance of, motor actions. Gallese's ideas, for example, of "embodied simulation" are a way to understand the embodied way imitation plays itself out in the KMB. To observe an action, we use the same neural map in the brain that we use to perform that same action. This validates a central imperative of Kathakali mirroring, the precise observation and imitation of the *guru's* action. By a precise imitation, the learner enters, as it were, into a direct relationship with the *guru's* MNS.

By engaging with the latest ideas about the body and the brain, I locate the one-on-one Kathakali actor training space conceptually within the KMB inspired by neuroscientist Ramachandran's work with phantom limbs (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 1998). The image of an arm in pain, mirroring an arm in pleasure, may be seen as a central metaphor of this practice-led thesis. In the KMB, if pain is the subjective condition of the dysfunctional body of the learner, pleasure may then be the experience of the well-functioning body of the *guru.* This well-functioning body is a consequence of years of observation and doing. This thesis focuses on the value of the act of observation in Kathakali actor training. The observation of another's action facilitates motor activity, while self-observation works to self-preserve, and inhabit an embodied engagement with the world. The force of the act of observation is well argued by Tsarkis et al. (2006, 2007). Particularly useful to this thesis are Sebanz, Bekkering and Knoblich (2006) and their framing of two bodies working together as "joint action". As suggested by them, neuroscience research has only recently begun looking at the joint action of bodies working together, having concentrated previously on the individual body and its individual brain function. This insight is relevant when seen in the context of the psychophysical actor training tradition, working primarily to serve the individual actor, who is often working alone, and on her own, and different to what I suggest is the sociopsychophysical wherein the bodies of the learner and teacher work together.

Caste

Research into Kathakali actor training involves an appreciation of both its embodied practices as well as its written texts. For a contextualisation of Kathakali texts within their seventeenth-century social weave, Louis Dumont (1970); Veena Das (1977);and Sumit Guha (2013) offer seminal perspectives on the Indian caste system. Dumont

(1970) orients and orders the caste system and social body along two binary values of purity and impurity, suggesting the higher you travel up the caste and social hierarchy, the purer the social function – and its opposite holds true in the other direction. Veena Das (1977) counters Dumont's holistic ordering with the complications of interchangeable conceptual and empirical relationships. For her, for example, a *brahmin* priest is both an empirically verifiable social entity, as well as a conceptual construct within Hindu thought. For Das, the social roles and values of functional behaviour are, by their interchangeability, interrelated and more complex. The thesis works primarily with conceptual constructs not examining caste empirically but conceptually. In contrast to these debates centred primarily around Dumont's seminal work on the Indian caste system titled *Homo Hierarchus*, Sumit Guha's recent scholarship offers another paradigm to locate the central driving principle of caste. Responding to the traditional academic estimation that the base unit of caste maybe be taken as the single village, Guha suggests an expansion to a cluster of villages, sharing skills and trades and socioeconomic reality within, and being protected from enemy threat from without. These village clusters are then controlled by a system of corporate dominance that structures itself all the way to the king, and/or the state. By this construct, Guha suggests social economic dominance, within and without the village cluster, as the prime value binding the caste system. These debates in social science find relevance in an understanding of seventeenth-century Kathakali texts first created by a local *thamburan* or king. Gough, Kathleen and Schneider M. David (eds, 1961) offer insights into the relationship between Kathakali's patronising caste of *namboodri brahmins* and the performing *nair* community. For a lower caste or untouchable perspective, I read a series of finely

argued articles by Ram (2012), and the work of Sadasivan (2000). Menon (1993)

provides an insightful analysis of *theyyam*, the lower caste mode of performance.

Methodology

My practice and its needs led the methodology worked through for this thesis.

Even while settling into academic culture, I began organising the practice element of

my research. I hired a rehearsal space in the city and through social media connected

with the Melbourne performing arts community. I offered an introductory Kathakali

workshop teaching Kathakali body training practices, dance choreography and

rasaabhinaya or the art of enacting embodied emotions. A total of sixteen participants

attended these workshops. These performing artists were from a range of practices,

including Butoh, Bodyweather, ballet, contemporary dance, performance art, Odissi

dance, stage and TV/cinema acting. There were also a few casual amateur walk-ins.

My offer was to enhance their own practice by working on traditional Kathakali

techniques and training practices. We worked one hour a week for three months in a

small, hired working space in Melbourne. At the start of the workshops, I handed the

participants a questionnaire, which they completed and mailed back to me. Five out of

the sixteen participants continued to work with me after these workshops, engaging

with Kathakali actor training for their individual needs, though only three of them

carried on with one-on-one work. Of these three, one of them, Lillian Warrum, was an

Odissi dancer, trained in Indian classical dance. Though a great support through the

work, Lillian offered limited contribution to the research exercise, as she had already

journeyed to the places to which I was working to take the others. An example is the

learning of two-handed hand gestures or *mudras,* which she achieved very easily,

while the rest struggled to perform them, making their struggle of interest to me. This

left two participants who went on to the research work of working one-on-one with me.

The two performing artists who went on to work with me from August 2014 through to June 2016, a period of twenty-two months, were both senior Melbourne-based performers. They both had previous experience of working with Asian forms. They had recently finished a Masters in practice-led research. Helen Smith is an Englishwoman, who migrated to Australia in 2008. She had done extensive work in Butoh, working with masters in Japan. She had also created original body-based performance work on the Melbourne stage. She is a tall, well-built, strong woman. In the initial workshops, she displayed a strong sense of body control and rhythm. She was able to work very hard.

The other participant was Peter Fraser, an Australian performer in his sixties who, despite his age, showed enormous physical strength and agility. Peter was both a Body Weather practitioner and a creator of contemporary performance art. While Peter was shy and less aggressive with his body, he showed exceptional ability in all exercises that demanded body transformation. For example, in the workshops, he visibly transformed into a Kathakali vulture, elephant, deer and fish. Peter's recent work was a performance art piece undertaken for his Masters thesis. He had played a lizard living inside a glass cage. With Peter and Helen, I felt I had ideal candidates for one-on-one Kathakali training.

Peter and Helen had never seen Kathakali, so I organised a performance of Kathakali in my home in Gisborne. Over the next three months, the three of us worked together in Helen's home in Melbourne. We then performed together in another home concert. They were part of my Kathakali lecture demonstration,

working to show their newly learnt skills of Kathakali hand gestures, basic footwork, nine emotions and some elementary Kathakali dancing.

Soon after this performance, I had my ethical clearance in place and I could formally work on my research. Both Helen and Peter agreed to continue working on the research project with me. In letter and spirit, they both consented to my using the knowledge and data gathered from our working relationship, including the proposed extended socialisation and deeper personal engagement. I offered to teach them one-on-one. While Peter was keen, Helen was initially hesitant. She preferred working in a threesome. I thought that Peter was suffering in the group sessions, as he was slower in learning, Helen dominated the space; she was also competitive, albeit in a joyous way. She was overshadowing Peter. She also needed to slow down, observe more and interpret less. I needed to have greater control over the work with her. By presenting these arguments and explaining the framework of my research, I was able to persuade them to work one-on-one.

They started coming to my home in country Victoria, an hour away from Melbourne. We had begun to form an important element of the traditional relationship, where the student travels to the teacher to gain knowledge. I cooked lunch for them. They met my wife Monica. We socialised together. Drank cups of tea. Chatted. We rested together in the afternoon, sometimes falling off to sleep. After working for six months, I decided they needed a greater challenge. I facilitated their travel to India to work with Evoor Rajendran Pillai, the Principal of the International Centre of Kathakali, New Delhi. They worked in India for ten days. They videotaped the Kathakali guru's teaching. They lived in my home. They met and bonded with my eighty-seven-year-old father and eighty-year-old mother. They shared in the social life of the house, meeting visitors, friends.

On their return to Australia, they continued to work one-on-one with me. After another six months, we created a performance at a formal theatre in Melbourne. I video documented parts of their performance I thought relevant for my dissertation. After working with them for eighteen months, I set up a series of interviews with Helen and Peter. I asked a Melbourne-based academic, Dr. Priya Srinivasan (2011), to facilitate these conversations, as I feared I had been their Kathakali teacher for far too long, and that this identity could continue to dominate the interview.

In addition to my work with Helen and Peter in Australia, I travelled to India and observed classes, conducted interviews and held detailed discussions with Kathakali masters at the International Centre for Kathakali, including my prime source, Evoor Rajendran Pillai. These interviews were conducted in English, Hindi and Malayalam.

Through the entire period of the practice-led work in Melbourne and fieldwork in India, I kept a diary into which were noted all observations and reflections. This process of keeping a written record facilitated what formed into a convention, one used throughout the thesis, of inserting reconstructions, elaborations on, actual writings from my diary, and field notes from the workshops. They are a key element of the research and are set out in what I frame as a "diary documentary" form of writing. I work with this convention whenever I need to step away from the theoretical, analytical and the literary, and give the reader a more direct reportage on the visceral embodied elements of the practice-led exercise. As the living body, the primary tool of research enquiry, exists in the present, this convention works to bring the reader into the present moment of the practice-led work.

Throughout my work with Helen and Peter, I worked with the traditional Kathakali teaching/learning methodology where the teacher demonstrates an action

and the learner observes and performs the teacher's demonstrated action, and this with minimum interruption. I kept to the traditional method of not entering into a lengthy discussion, not taking notes myself in the workshop, and not turning the Kathakali learner into an object of my research, while continuing to encourage the concentrated, careful and sustained observation of the actions demonstrated by me. Within this teaching methodology, the only thing I was willing to do was to demonstrate the action to be performed as often as the learner asked for it. Later, I would put on the researcher's hat and reflect on the process. These reflections I recorded in my diary. This methodology maintained the authenticity of a pedagogy that has existed for centuries within a non-literate and oral tradition; the traditional learner was not literate.

Thesis structure

I use the human body and its separate body parts both to spring, and structure, my dissertation. In Kathakali actor training, the feet, the hands and the face are all worked separately, then integrated into a functioning whole, understood as the Kathakali form. In this dissertation, these separate parts – feet, hands and the face – and the integrated body are provocations and tools used for knowledge gathering. Each chapter has central to it either the body of the teacher or learner, or both. In the chapter negotiating group work, I look at one body working with multiple bodies. Within each chapter, the body and body parts initiate enquiry. For example, during field work, while observing Kathakali training sessions, I focussed my attention on the separate functioning of hands, feet and face of the teacher and learner. In one instance, the integration of the hand and the eye movements in Kathakali actor training led me to think about the oversized hands and face of the "sensory

homunculus" in the human brain. This insight I then connected to Kathakali performativity. In Kathakali, while the hands narrate the story through the language of mudras, the face reveals the emotional state. By this example, a concentration on body parts led me deeper into an understanding of neuroscience as well as my practice.

In similar trajectory, the working together of the hands and feet or the upper and lower body, or the way the feet grip the earth are all a spring to activate a new chain of thought and enquiry. It is in thinking about the body and its separate parts, and their integration, that ideas of communion and the performer's embodied pleasure of communion find their way forward in the thesis. The living body, with its pain and pleasures, is then the central tool of enquiry for this thesis.

Overview of Chapter Content

I begin the second chapter of the thesis with the story of my own broken dysfunctional body at the start of my Kathakali learning, and theorise the process of its integration and a return to functionality and pleasure. By observing the Principal of the International Centre for Kathakali, Evoor Rajendran Pillai, teach Gokul, one of his star pupils, an objective analysis of the *guru shishya* working relationship is presented. These two bodies are in a long-term social relationship, which gets initiated each learning session through the ritualistic social practice of the learner touching the *guru's* feet. Theorising around this old social practice, a case is made for its reconciliation within the new social.

In Chapter Three, issues of representation emerging out of the teaching of Kathakali in Melbourne, Australia are examined. Preconceived notions and prejudices about Kathakali are recorded, theorised, analysed, and located within the wider arc of exotic western representations of oriental, Asian and eastern Arts. A case is made for

a more rigorous understanding of its training methodology by drawing the reader's attention to the complexity of its body crafting processes, and to the central location of the body of the *guru* or teacher in its pedagogy. To locate and understand the functioning of this body of the Kathakali *guru* working with other bodies of other cultures, the intercultural work of theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba is read into by examining the literature around Barba's extensive work at the Odin Teatre, specifically highlighting certain moments of intercultural conflict between him and one of the founding members of the Odin Teatre, the Indian Odissi dance *guru* Sanjukta Panigrahi. These incidents centre on the ritual of feet touching. These sites of conflict between Panigrahi and Barba centred on these incidents of feet touching are used to search for a theoretical framework, and an understanding of the specific social weave of the old social, a social weave that, it is argued, is informed by the Indian caste system.

In Chapter Four, Kathakali texts and embodied practices are framed within the caste system and untouchability. Kathakali performativity, located within the dominating middle castes, has a recurring gestural motif that is framed as the *nair* warrior dancer's "gestures of embodied aggression." These gestures are directed both at the characters on stage and also have meaning for the social body of the audience. These gestures emerge from the social weave, from inter-caste realities and equations that play themselves out on the Kathakali stage. Towards this end, four dance dramas of Kathakali are examined. The attempt made in this chapter is to contextualise and examine these Kathakali texts, and their choreography/performativity, within the Indian caste system and the culture of untouchability.

In Chapter Five, the researcher reflects on his own one-on-one Kathakali actor training session with Kathakali master practitioner Evoor Rajendran Pillai. As a

mature performer, he was revisiting traditional Kathakali actor training routines previously worked with his *guru* Sadanam Balakrishnan. This chapter negotiates the complexity of the subjective and objective points of view of a practice-led research exercise in which the researcher's body is an object of research, and the researcher's experience, a subjective field of knowledge and information. Through the subjective and objective process, a case is made towards validating the imitative act as an act of mirroring of one body by another.

Chapter Six sets out the practice-led research exercise of teaching Kathakali to contemporary performers in Australia in the group workshop mode. In negotiating the problems and difficulties faced in teaching in a group, creative solutions on offer are recorded, while recognising that this process of creative problem solving takes the teaching work away from the traditional methodology, as well as the research exercise. Work in the group mode set up inadequacies both for the traditional methodology, as well as the research exercise. Referencing the experiences of the group exercise, the next chapter explores more rigorously the traditional imitative methodology through the one-on-one site.

In Chapter Seven, the training of two Australian performers, Helen Smith and Peter Fraser, is examined, and the work done towards validating the one-on-one site for both Kathakali actor training as well as for this practice-led research project is documented. The one-on-one site is used to respond to and address some of the basic research questions that frame and drive this dissertation. In teaching Helen and Peter one-on-one, the researcher was looking to find ways and means to persuade them to follow his primary concern, an appreciation of the mirroring methodology. While recording the difficulties faced in this process, the chapter addresses a key question of the existence of the performer's aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*. Do performers experience

rasa? In this chapter, work is done to share the practice-led work as well as theories around the question of the performer's pleasure or *rasa.*

In Chapter Eight, adaptations made to the traditional teaching curriculum are documented and the individualised performances of Helen and Peter performing Kathakali in Australia framed as works of inner-interculturalism. The individualised performances were worked through using the vehicle of the researcher's production of *The Magic Hour*, in which scenes of Shakespeare's *Othello* have been adapted to the Kathakali form. I analyse Helen and Peter's inner-intercultural performances as well as document what this thesis presents as Kathakali's prime offering to the western performer, i.e., its gestures of embodied aggression. This documentation of the adaptations to the traditional curriculum as well as an analysis and understanding of the inner-intercultural performances, work towards the framing of a curriculum for Kathakali actor training in Australia.

In Chapter Nine, the final and concluding chapter, I evaluate the central claims of the thesis and document the prime research outcomes of this dissertation. These include a validation of the sociopsychophysical representation of Kathakali actor training, understanding and appreciation of the mirroring methodology, evidence of the performer's pleasure or *bhavarasa*, an elaboration of the performative offerings of creating an actor's scenic presence, and of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression that work to bring the performer out of an introverted pyschophysicality towards a more outward, bold and socially engaging sociopsychophysicality. This concluding chapter theorises and validates these outcomes as well as suggesting new areas of research.

Chapter Two

An objective and subjective view of the body in Kathakali actor training

In this chapter, I share my embodied knowledge, experience and understanding of one-on-one Kathakali actor training. By placing my own body at the site of research, I begin this dissertation from a point of view of my own learning of Kathakali. While my body and subjective experience are deployed in this practice-led research thesis, and are central to the process of enquiry in this chapter, another locus for knowledge gathering, specific to this chapter, is my objective observations of *guru* Evoor Rajendran Pillai teaching his student Gokul, one-on-one, at the International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi, India. This objective observation of Pillai and Gokul working together is further layered by my experience of having learnt Kathakali at the same institution. Pillai was teaching Gokul the same actions I had learnt earlier from my teacher Sadanam Balakrishnan. As a consequence of my own experience, I cannot see Gokul's actions objectively, without simultaneously thinking, feeling, reflecting on the times when I performed those actions.

These intertwining subjective and objective perceptions of Kathakali actor training validate what for Csordas forms as a "dual locus of culture" (2008:111). Through the subjective and objective perception of the Kathakali body, I work to discover new insights into both Kathakali actor training, as well as the particular weave and culture of its social world. For Csordas:

> If embodiment is an existential condition in which the body is the subjective
> source or intersubjective ground of experience, then studies under the rubric of
> embodiment are not "about" the body per se. Instead they are about culture and

experience in so far as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world (1999:143).

This introductory chapter works with these simultaneous subjective and objective points of view of the Kathakali body, and its being-in-the Kathakali world.

While traditional Kathakali learning begins with children at the age of eight or ten entering into the care of a *guru* or teacher, I began learning Kathakali, at the International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi, at the age of twenty-four, after my return to India, from training as a contemporary actor at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (UK). As a Kashmiri by statehood and a privileged *brahmin* by caste, I was a welcomed outsider to the Kathakali community of performers and students. I did not speak *malayalam,* the language of the people of Kerala, nor share the culture, habits and ceremonies of the other Kathakali students, most of whom were *malayalis,* the indigenous name of the people of Kerala. As a North Indian, Kashmiri and a man named after one of the major characters of the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna, Kathakali was, and continues to be for me, an intimate "intracultural" (Bharucha 2000) exercise. Rustom Bharucha defines intracultural as cultures co-existing within a region as different from intercultural, which suggests two cultures as separated from each other through space and time.

At the time of my Kathakali initiation and unknown to my teacher, I had experienced a series of psychological breakdowns. Learning under the influence of major tranquilisers added to my distress. The medicines slowed down my motor abilities. In class or group work with other students at the Kathakali Centre in New Delhi, my difficulty was increased by the pace at which other students learnt. The pain of my psychological and motor distress was mapped on the pain of learning the challenging foot, hand and face co-ordination of Kathakali actor training.

Balakrishnan saw my struggle, appreciated my commitment, and started teaching me one-on-one at his home. We worked every day for two hours in the intimacy of a small room in his house. We would then go to the more formal rehearsal space at the Kathakali Centre to work with the professional dancers and students. At the Kathakali Center Balakrishnan taught all levels of performers and students. This teaching would be in a group, with six to eight students or performers learning at the same time. My learning from Balakrishnan was then both one-on-one, and through group work as has been the case in traditional *guru shishya* pedagogy.

I begin this introductory chapter by reflecting on a place of subjective distress, allowing the memory of that subjective experience, and the slow process of a return to functionality, to inform the language, shape and form of this dissertation. The pain of psychological breakdown is different to the pain, for example, of a broken bone. As Ramachandran suggests with reference to a patient's pain in the phantom limb, "Moreover, these ideas imply that pain is an opinion on the organism's state of health rather than a mere reflexive response to an injury" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998:54). In my state of health, as a special needs learner, the care and attention available in the one-on-one space allowed me to move from the initial dysfunctionality and pain, to a progressive functionality and pleasure. This binary, of a dysfunctional body in pain journeying to a functioning body in pleasure is a central image framing this thesis.

It is this embodied learning experience of a journey from brokenness to wellbeing, that is progressively argued in this dissertation as a form of aesthetic pleasure experienced by the performer, terming this intimate one-on-one student–teacher space as a "mirror box" (Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran 1996: 377–388), or more appropriately for this dissertation, as a "Kathakali mirror box" or

KMB. In comparison to the Kathakali teacher's exquisitely functioning body, my dysfunctional body felt like an unusable stump or a phantom limb. Dr V.S. Ramachandran used the mirror box to relieve his amputee patients of pain in their phantom limb, a limb that seemed to exist even after it had been amputated. In the KMB, I frame myself, the learner, subjectively perceiving my own dysfunctional learner's body as a "phantom body" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998: 46) observing and experiencing the Kathakali form as realised through the teacher's body. The more I observe the mirror, i.e., the teacher's body, which reflects within itself, as in a mirror, the Kathakali form, the more I am able to move my own body, with an ease that frees the previously dysfunctional phantom body. This choice of defining my body as a phantom body suggests both the dysfunctionality following its breakdown, as well as the pain involved in its revival.

The Mirror Box

      Dr V.S. Ramachandran created the mirror box to relieve patients of their phantom limb pain. For Dr. Ramachandran, the first clue to understanding phantom limb pain came from the way different points on the body surface are mapped onto the surface of the brain. This map or representation, as shown in the image below, is in the form of a grossly misshapen little man, the so-called "Penfield Homunculus" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998:25).

This "sensory homunculus," as it is also now called, is a representation of the body surface on the outer layers of the brain. Its formation in the shape of a short and oddly shaped man, has the lips and tongue grossly over-represented on the one hand and, significantly for our story, the hand and face placed right next to each other on the brain surface. This offers the potential of one space being neurologically available to the other neighbouring space.

At the heart of Kathakali learning and performance is an integration of hand gestures and facial expressions. This unity is at the core of the Kathakali performer's ability. Eugenio Barba describes the value to the craft of Kathakali storytelling, of this hand and face relationship.

> From this rule we can see that the face is the emotional counterpart of the story not by somebody else, but by the actor's own hands. In short, there is a double structure: the actor must resort simultaneously to two different sets of technique to express the two complementary aspects of a story, the narrative and the emotional. His hands "tell" the former, while his face expresses the latter.
> (1967:40)

The proximity between the face map and the hand map on the human brain is what first fired up my interest in the story of Ramachandran's mirror box. Working at the Center for Brain and Cognition, University of California, San Diego, Ramachandran discovered, for example, that the sensory representation of the patient's amputated hand was remapped on the patient's face, that scratching a point on the face marked as the index finger felt like a scratch to the index finger of the patient's phantom hand. As a consequence of this remapping, a movement on the patient's face, a smile, a whistle or a twitch could bring alive the sensations and the feelings of the phantom limb. When this movement was inadvertently linked to a pain receptor, the connection

was experienced as phantom limb pain. To remove phantom limb pain, Dr Ramachandran created a simple cardboard mirror box.

The mirror box is made by placing a vertical mirror inside a cardboard box with its lid removed. The front of the box has two holes in it, through which the patient inserts her good hand (say, the right one) and her phantom hand (say, the left one). Since the mirror is in the middle of the box, the right hand is on the right side of the mirror and the phantom is on the left side. The patient is then asked to view the reflection of her normal hand in the mirror, and to move it around slightly, until the reflection appears to be superimposed on the felt position of her phantom hand. She has thus created the illusion of observing two hands, when in fact she is only seeing the mirror reflection of her intact hand (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998:46).

The brain's visual feedback system, now seeing the illusion of the moving hand, sends its normal messages of control, of checks and balances. However, as there is in fact no hand, the message of its loss, not conveyed earlier as there was no hand, finally comes home. At this moment the brain understands that there is no longer a hand and frees the patient temporarily of his phantom limb. The patient's body image is returned to its reality. The patient now senses his real stump and not the phantom limb. The internal body image returns to what the body is now, without the arm.

Significant to actor training/body transformation is Ramachandran's conclusion that the sense of our body, its body image, is not permanent, not etched in stone, but is in fact fragile and changeable.

Your body image, despite all its appearance of durability, is an entirely transitional internal construct that can be profoundly modified with just a few simple tricks. It is merely a shell that you have temporarily created for successfully passing on your genes to your offspring. (1998:62)

This essential fragility of the internal body image, sets the ground for a deeper inquiry into how we construct and understand the body's sense of itself, and of its unity. *For the body must first be one, an integrated whole, before it can transform to another.* This ability to function as an integrated whole, with a developed sense of a body communing with itself, is a pleasure.

A first stage of communion: integration of the Kathakali learner's body

In the Kathakali actor training in the initial phase of learning, the teacher, who continues to be a performer until a late age, must demonstrate each action to be learnt. To do this, he will often get up and perform an action for the learner to observe. He may do this facing the learner or dancing alongside. He will also work using separate effectors (hands, feet and the face) for each action to be taught. For example, he will teach footwork by demonstrating the steps and making the student observe his feet. He may then demonstrate the facial expressions and teach the hand gestures separately.

Kathakali actor training and body transformation works primarily through an imitation, by the student, of the teacher's corresponding body parts, hands of hands, face of face and feet of feet. As research in neuroscience elucidates, imitation is typically effector specific. That which moves our hands in the brain, is the same neural mechanism or map that observes the movement of hands, to facilitate an imitation. We imitate hand movements with our hands rather than our feet, and foot movements with our feet rather than our hands (Brass and Heyes 2005: 489–495). As each body part (hand/s, face, foot/feet) is worked on, and once the initial strange sensations (pain, discomfort) settle, each body part starts offering its specific contribution to the whole. The hands begin to form into specific hand gestures or

hasta mudras, the facial muscles into appropriate emotional states or *bhavas*, and the feet into the precise danced rhythms, *kalaashams.* An integration of these various elements creates the Kathakali form. Over time, the learner experiences his body as an integrated whole.

How does this sense of integration develop in the human body? Borghi and Cimatti suggest "the ability to distinguish between our own body and the body of others is of great importance for developing the sense of body" (2010: 765). At the outset, this insight may seem obvious and insignificant. However, a loss of this ability to distinguish between your own body and that of those around you, as may happen in states of distress and breakdown, suggests its primary importance in developing a sense of the body.

The following quote from my novel highlights my own experience of this loss. I wrote *The Painted Devil* in 2014, while waiting for my PhD admission process to complete itself. The following description evokes that loss of clarity, of body ownership, while in the midst of a psychotic breakdown.

> Sitting in a room with four people and not knowing, desperately trying to work out which one of the five in the room is you. Or seeing a mirror and your reflection in the mirror but not being sure which one of you is really you and which the reflection. Not knowing. Seeing your own hand and fingers change shape, slowly, into something other than itself, changing into something that looks, feels like a bird's foot, a claw perhaps! Breaking down! (16,17)

This personal experience of a loss of self-identification frames my interest in Kathakali's methods of developing body ownership. A Kathakali actor training process works through its integration of body parts, hands, feet and face, helping build an integral sense of the body while offering a sense of wholeness and wellbeing.

Embodied cognition literature on a developed sense of the body indicates that bodily self-perception is not one singular ability but is a development of forms of bodily awareness (Morin 2006: 358–371). For Borghi and Cimatti (2010:763–773), these forms of bodily awareness include "body-part sensation", "goal-directed action", and an "internalized social language." For Tsakiris, Prabhu and Haggard (2006), "action provides a coherent sense of bodily self i.e. unity of bodily self-consciousness comes from action, and not from sensation" (431). Finally, for Borghi and Cimatti, this sense of a unified body may also exist when the body is passive, through the agency of an internal language (772).

In Kathakali actor training, the idea of a body-part sensation may be understood as the separate working of the hand gestures or *hasta mudras*, the working of the face into emotions or *bhavas* and the feet into danced steps or *kalaashams.* In a similar context, goal-directed action may be centrally located in the constant back and forth of the learner towards and away from the seated and stable teacher. The entire performance score received by the Kathakali learner from the teacher exists within the body of the performer as an internalised social language. This internalised social language acts on the body, offering its expression as culture and performance for the audience. By this development of forms of body awareness, the Kathakali body may be perceived to exist as a unified and integrated social entity. This is a necessary condition for an experience of pleasure.

I now move away from the subjective point of view of the body to an objective description of the Kathakali body. Armed with knowledge, tools and insights gained from my readings, learning and experiences in the new social, I spent time over a period of a month at the Kathakali Centre in New Delhi, watching Evoor Rajendran Pillai teaching Kathakali. Pillai was the principal dancer and teacher at the

International Centre of Kathakali. An experienced master practitioner or *guru,* he was responsible both for the professional repertory company, as well as for the training of two-hundred-and-forty students at the Kathakali Centre. Two hundred of these students were girls, younger and older women, from the age of eight to forty-five. This fact nuances the critique of Kathakali as a male-dominated dance form.

Observing bodies in communion

At my request, Pillai invites me to the Kathakali Centre to watch a one-on-one session with one of his star pupils, Gokul. This is on a hot summer morning in Delhi. There are just the three of us in the session that begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 8.30 a.m., following which I have been invited to eat breakfast with Pillai in their communal kitchen. Pillai lives on the first floor. As Principal of the Kathakali Centre, as the International Centre for Kathakali is referred to by the community, he has his own small room. The other teachers stay in a large dormitory. Pillai lives on his own. His wife and two children live in Kerala as he cannot afford to have them living with him in Delhi, a far more expensive city. He sees them for a couple of months a year.

I arrive on time, having caught the newly introduced Delhi Metro rail, and having walked the short distance to the Kathakali Centre. Pillai and Gokul are both ready for me. Pillai begins the one-on-one session with Gokul, his fourteen-year-old male student. Gokul seems to be very happy for me to be there and observe. He smiles, beams at me. For the first fifteen minutes of their hour-and-a-half-long session, Pillai takes Gokul through a series of preliminary body exercises. As Gokul knows these exercises, having worked with Pillai for a number of years, Pillai does not have to demonstrate the exercises. He stands alongside Gokul, and not facing him.

This is an opportunity for the fifty-five-year-old master practitioner to stay fit. I notice that he has a bit of a belly.

He performs each exercise energetically and Gokul immediately repeats it with equal vigour. As an example, Pillai jumps a kind of frog leap, known as *chattam*, twenty-five times. Gokul follows with another fifty. He is many years younger and needs to do more than the master. In the July heat of the north Indian city of Delhi, their bodies have begun to sweat. Both are wearing white cotton *pyjamas* and are bare-bodied above the waist.

After the initial preliminary body training exercises, Pillai sits down on a stool. Gokul places a wooden block in front of him. The learning session now begins with Gokul performing the formal greeting ritual and then bending his head and reaching out to touch Pillai's feet. The teacher acknowledges the learner's body by touching his head with his right hand. He then takes the right hand and touches it to his own heart and forehead. Then he waves away the gestures, upwards, heaven words.

Having marked one end of the learning space by touching his teacher's feet, Gokul then moves to stand a short distance, three metres or so, away from the teacher. This action of touching the teacher's feet helps mark the presence of two separate bodies. The learning process may now begin within the clarity of this embodied relationship. I know the text they are working on. It is from one of the four classics of Kathakali titled *Kalayana Saugandhikam,* from hereon translated as "The Flower of Good Fortune." Bhīma, one of the five *pandava* brothers, is entering a forest and frightening all the animals. Perhaps Pillai has chosen this set choreography for today's one-on-one session as he knows I am particularly interested in this play. We had discussed it extensively in an interview I had conducted with him earlier in the week.

Pillai begins the training session by beating time with a wooden stick or *taalam* on a wooden block placed in front of him. He uses his right hand to do this. He sings the text/story and gestures with his left hand leading Gokul, who stands in front, facing him. I observe that the action of the learner is a constant to-and-fro motion, moving either towards the seated teacher or away from him. He also moves sideways, making a large square box on the ground.

As Gokul seems to know the dance well, Pillai conducts most of the session sitting. He only gets up twice to demonstrate a difficult step. While sitting on the stool he transforms for me into what I term, a little fancifully, as "guru homunculus," suggestive of the earlier-mentioned short, grossly shaped figure of a man – if the inactive trunk and legs of the seated *guru* are ignored, he could be seen as this short figure of a man working with his hugely important hands and face.

Gokul observes him intently as if from deep within. It is as if in Gokul's brain the "sensory homunculus" with its oversized hands and face is now set up to imitate the grossly exaggerated hands and face of the "guru homunculus." The sitting down of the teacher is an important element of stabilising the KMB. It leaves the learner standing vertical, empowered and looking down at the sitting "guru homunculus."

Now, while sitting on his stool, Pillai leads the session with his hands and with his face. With one hand he beats the rhythm to the song he sings, and with the other makes the relevant hand gestures or *mudras*. These gestures illustrate the words of the sung text. The Kathakali teacher learns to master the hand gestures and performs them in reverse, so that the learner does not see a mirror image, does not have to reverse the teacher's orientation, but imitates directly, i.e., the teacher's left-handed gesture is to be performed as a right-hand gesture by the learner. This helps the learner's body follow, as it is led by each gesture.

Pillai does not have to stand up to enact all the separate body parts. When, for example, with one hand, he shows the gesture of an elephant's trunk, Gokul responds not just with his one hand imitating the gesture of the trunk, but with his entire body following, helping create the form of an elephant; the right hand becomes the elephant's ear, the feet step rhythmically, slowly and heavily like an elephant's, the entire body sways majestically. For every gesture, the choreographed body, with the appropriate facial expressions and danced footsteps, follows. Besides hand gestural clues, facial expressions by the teacher also lead the learner, encouraging facial imitation. From my own experience, this helps the learner enter into the inner, subjective and emotional world of the characters he/she is learning.

The rhythm, beaten with a wooden stick on the wooden block placed in front of Pillai, are cues for the feet and the danced steps. Each hand gesture, facial expression and the rhythm kept by the teacher are cues for a complex and complete simulated action by the leaner.

The teacher continues to sit through this entire process, only standing up to correct when an error is made. If the teacher is angry or upset with the learner, this standing up may suddenly become threatening. When not threatening, the sitting down-standing up relationship of the teacher and learner offers a stable and calm environment, even as the learner is empowered by being in a taller position than the teacher and looking down at the teacher.

Gokul is an excellent student and a star performer. In today's session, Pillai does not get angry or stand up even once. Gokul has been learning from Pillai for the past six years. You can feel their stable relationship while watching them. They work intensely, with great concentration, focus and pleasure. These are two bodies in communion with each other.

The Painted Devil: a personal memoir

Before taking further this objective observation of Kathakali actor training, I return to the subjective, reiterating the conditions of my compelling need to understand these processes of body sensing, integration and unity. I place here my lived experience of a psychotic episode, of becoming the other, while having lost perspective/ownership of my own embodiment. To reference my understanding of body transformation techniques in Kathakali actor training, I first quote in detail from my own embodied experience of body transformation recorded in my novella *The Painted Devil* . Here, the protagonist, Monty, after having been beaten with a stick by a watchman, is now transformed into a bird, a crow. This is the story of how he is transformed:

How had Monty been transformed into Monty the Crow? What had made him walk that dangerous edge?

He had been walking the streets crazed and lost. However, till then he was still his familiar crazed self. Not yet a crow! It was seeing a real crow with a broken wing that had finally tipped him over the edge, into hysteria, into another realm of madness, transforming him, into a crow with a broken wing, into feeling like a crow with a broken wing, into being like a crow with a broken wing. Just a while earlier he had seen a woman lying just a little off the road in a grove of palm trees. She was frothing at the mouth. She looked to be dying. Near her a priest was talking to a husband and wife. They were ignoring her. Monty wanted to help her. Wanted to reach out and hold her. Save her. Protect her. But he didn't. He couldn't. His own head had just been bashed in. His brain, his mind was swirling. He moved away from the woman. A terrible

feeling of guilt settled with its heavy wings on his heart. He felt depressed, sad,

broken.

Then he saw a crow with a broken wing trying to lift itself off the ground.

This time he was determined to help the crow and not walk away. His heart

moved him toward the crow. He lifted it gently off the ground.

Monty looked into the crow's eyes and saw its fear, its panic, and its

terror. It was the exact feeling that he himself had felt only a little while ago

when the watchman's stick had rammed into his head. Fear, panic, terror. It was

like looking into a mirror. Monty had found a look and face that was familiar. In

that moment of recognition Monty became that fear, panic, terror. And in

becoming those feelings he became that bird, became that crow with a broken

wing. (2014:117)

Reflecting back on my subjective and objective, physical/motor condition at the start

of my Kathakali learning, I can now see how, post my breakdown, the KMB offered

me, over time, both a stable sense of an internal body image, and a stable

methodology for body image/actor transformation.

Kathakali's stable methodology of embodied transformation

To understand Kathakali's method of embodied transformation, I return to my

observation of the one-on-one actor training session. Pillai is teaching Gokul to play

Bhīma, one of the five *pandava* brothers from the *Mahabharata* who, while travelling

through the forest, is describing the animals he is seeing. Even as he describes these

animals, he has to transform into them. This is how it plays out. Gokul as Bhīma sees

an elephant and a python fighting. Gokul first becomes the elephant, wandering in the

forest, breaking and eating branches with his trunk. Then Gokul becomes a watchful

python seeing an elephant come his way. He then has to play both the elephant and the python as they fight. He then returns to playing the warrior, Bhīma. While there are codified gestures and conventions to help play and identify each animal/creature, these shifts in persona/character also demand body transformation. As an elephant, Gokul's body seems to fill out, expanding and growing larger than itself. As a python he seems to be constricting himself into a narrow space. His entire body seems engaged and transformed. Yet he moves out of one form into another with ease, with stability.

This stability of actor transformation in Kathakali training, I suggest, comes from knowing the body of the character or creature you are transforming into, at the first instance, as the body of the teacher. The teacher demonstrates and embodies each character. This embodiment the learner has observed, imitated, learnt and remembered. For Gokul, who has learnt this role from observing Pillai's body, Bhīma 's body as it were, is Pillai's body. The elephant's body is also Pillai's body. The python's body too is Pillai's body.

To appreciate Kathakali body transformation techniques as different from other kinds of drama, I reference the example of scripted, realistic drama, as in the Stanislavskian magic 'if' (Hapgood 1937:55) wherein the actor transforms by stepping into the shoes of a character who may not exist in the real space and with a real body. Rhonda Blair, in her exploration of empathy and its neurological underpinnings, offers up the following example as an extreme end of such an empathetic transformation:

> Daniel Day Lewis … is said to stay 'in character' from the beginning to the end of filming; but even so, this actor's choice is based on his sure knowledge that

he is not the character, and therefore must work consciously to maintain a connection to an alternative, temporary self. (1988: 92–103)

The return back from a temporary self to the real embodied self is always a delicate matter fraught with concern. Alternatively, other forms of performance offer the physical act of performing as a discovery of self, a process in which the actor, in personal terms, is behaving differently, as Richard Schechner elucidates: "in personal terms, is 'me behaving as if I am someone else' or 'as if I am "beside myself," or "not myself,"' as when in trance. But this 'someone else' may also be 'me in another state of feeling/being,' as if there were multiple 'me's' in each person." (1985:37).

Here, the actor is not in the shoes of another specific person/character, but is exploring and extending his sense of self to include other possible selves or other potential ways of being. For someone like me emerging out of a mental breakdown, these forms of exploration may be liberating but may also prove confronting, destabilising.

In Kathakali, a character's body exists through the teacher who embodies each character. The learner learns each character through the body-transformation of/by the teacher. The clarity of this separation of the body of the learner from the body of the character helps create a stable objective engagement. The learner has his body, the character's body is clearly the Kathakali teacher's body. By this, the learner has a clear sense of both his own body, and the character's body. This clarity and stability is an aesthetic pleasure when the learner learns to transform from one to the other. Embodied actor transformation in Kathakali is, then, a pleasurable thing.

For the Kathakali learner and teacher, this stable shared objective world facilitates an experience of the more complex, shared subjective world of the Kathakali stories and characters. In the KMB, three subjectivities are now at play: the

learner's, the character's and the teacher's. This complex set of subjectivities flowers within the intimacy of the teacher-learner relationship. In the KMB, learning is facilitated by an empathetic and sustained observation by the learner of the teacher's embodied demonstration and then a performance by the learner of the actions and emotions observed. For phenomenologist Husserl, this common world, this shared objectivity is arrived at or is made possible first of all by "empathy (Einfühlung), understood as the primordial experience of participating in the actions and feeling of another being without becoming the other" (1969:233). In Kathakali, actor training is a human craft though the characters played are gods and demons and epic heroes and heroines. By referencing Husserl here, I suggest that my interest lies in a search for the phenomenological essence of the existential relationship between two human bodies working empathetically together every day in the KMB, towards a common goal – actor transformation.

The *guru shishya* being-in-the-world, feet touching ritual

Watching Pillai and Gokul work together for an hour-and-a-half is a display of sustained observation by both learner and teacher. Gokul is very familiar with the gestures and the dance steps. He could easily remember them from memory and perform them independently. However, he watches Pillai intently throughout the session. Pillai too, through the hour-and-a-half is watching Gokul intently even as he is performing the role himself, often in reverse, and often possessed by the emotional state of the character, as Gokul the learner is. With little shifts of the body, Pillai indicates changes in form, suggesting he is playing an elephant, and now a python. His face is animated and expressive. His feet are stamping the rhythm. Even as he is seated, he transforms into the elephant and the python. His seated body seems to

expand and shrink, changing form. Throughout the enactment he continues to play the rhythm, beating the *talam* on the wooden block. His attention is both on his own body and the Kathakali form it is enacting, as well as on the learner. His concentration of attention seems to have no distraction, facilitating an intense learning session for Gokul.

Gokul ends the session by repeating the greeting ritual (now intended as a farewell) moving forward to touch Pillai's feet with his right hand. Pillai touches Gokul's head with his right hand and then gets up from the stool. This marks the end of the training session. Twice in the session, Gokul has touched Pillai's feet and twice has Pillai blessed him by touching his head. Gokul's respect for Pillai is actualised in each session with him touching Pillai's feet. A respect for the Kathakali teacher's body is an important element of the traditional *guru shishya* or master disciple relationship. The image below shows a student paying respect to Pillai through this traditional practice. (Photo taken by researcher)

In working to theorise the actions of two bodies touching each other through gesture, as in the practice of feet touching, I return to Csordas and his attempt to understand the nature of the intersubjective and its location and relationship with the intercorporeal. In his article entitled "Intersubjectivity and Intercorporeality"

(2008:110-121), Csordas builds on Edward Sapir's famous formulation from his article, "Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry", in which he argues that the "true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions" (Sapir 1961: 151). For Csordas, the following problem emerges from this formulation: if meaning is on the subjective side as Sapir seems to indicate, then interaction must be on the objective side, with the subjective side further understood as "entirely mentalistic" and the objective side as "mere behaviour." Sapir's formulation, for Csordas, oversimplifies the intersubjective and intercorporeal. In the practice of feet touching, a similar problem relating to the subjective and the objective, and their interrelationship gets highlighted when, for example, two participants have differing mentalistic subjective abstractions of the shared act. Are these differences to be treated as merely mentalistic with no link with the objective act, or do these differences compel a renegotiation of what could otherwise be left as mere behaviour?

In questioning Pillai and Gokul around the practice of feet touching, I received similar answers. Both understood it as an expression of deep respect for the teacher. In their shared culture, Gokul and Pillai seemed to be at ease with both the objective behaviour of feet touching as with their subjective mental abstractions and meaning. However, for me, this practice is more problematic. This foot touching ritual is the kind of practice of the old social that I need to reconcile with for my work in the new social.

This process of searching for a gestural transformation began for me after my student and prime research participant, Helen Smith, displayed her willingness to touch my feet as an expression of respect. Previous to this reflection, both Helen

Smith and Peter Fraser had been to India to learn from Pillai at the same International Centre for Kathakali, New Delhi. It was there that they too had witnessed the feet touching ritual. I asked Helen what this gesture signified for her:

Arjun: You seemed ok, willing to touch my feet?

Helen: Yes, this was after witnessing students doing it in India with Rajendranji and other members of the ensemble, including musicians and singers. Even though it is not a custom in this country, I felt willing to do it as a mark of respect for your experience and teaching that you were so willing to share with us. I guess I was ready to do it because after years of living in other countries and trying on and trying out different customs, I am comfortable with difference. As there wasn't an equivalent gesture from my own culture that was a good match for the feeling of respect and gratitude, this one seemed like a good one to adopt.

Arjun: What did that gesture signify for you?

Helen: A mark of respect from a student to the master, the teacher. An acknowledgement that I have learnt a lot from you and still have a long way to go. A recognition of the fact that the source of creativity stems from the feet and that the energy arises out of the ground. A reminder of one's connection with the earth through the soles of the feet. By touching the feet perhaps it is an expression of a wish or desire to tap into the same creative force and source as that of the master's, as if 'the magic' will somehow be transmitted from one to the other?

Later, in an email exchange, Helen added the following observations:

Actually, thinking about it, it is not so peculiar in my culture…Mary washed the feet of Jesus so, maybe across cultures the touching of the feet is a humbling act and a mark of true respect …and devotion.

It symbolizes a hierarchy, which cannot be reversed. In this instance, it is not bound by age …I think I'm actually older than you! But more connected with a recognition of expertise and experience and possibly wisdom!! It is a gesture of trust: there's an unspoken acknowledgment of the power bestowed by the act. (Email to author dated 11/7/2016)

In the present context of understanding the ritual of feet touching, if I think of Helen's action as mere behaviour, then it follows for me to let her behave as she pleases, allowing her to touch my feet, allowing her further, her subjective world of meanings. However, if the world of meanings I abstract from this act are at the first instance at odds with her articulation, and these meanings lie not just in my mind, or her mind, but in a common space of culture, then I am compelled to confront her action. Here, Helen is presuming my acceptance of this cultural practice while, contrary to her abstractions, I am at odds with it. For example, I disagree with the almost mystical suggestion that "the source of creativity stems from the feet and that the energy arises out of the ground" (Helen's email, as cited above).[7] What does that actually mean?

---

[7] This mystification of the feet is often linked to a greater mystification, as it is done here by Schwartz. "Shiva Nataraja, literally Shiva as Lord of the Dance, actually dances the universe into being and then destroys it in the same way. The physical contact of the foot against the ground is sacred, for it precipitates existence. What is lifeless and dormant is animated by the touch of the foot; hence the soles of the dancers' feet are painted red, the auspicious color associated with growth and fertility. Hindu iconography pays considerable attention to the feet, for although they are the lowest part of the body, and thus in several ways the least elevated, they also connect the body to the sacred earth. When a shishya or student touches her guru's feet in humility and thanks, therefore, the act is meaningful on several levels" (2002:32).

Instead, contradictorily, the feet, within the body hierarchy as circumscribed by Indian culture and the caste system, as the lowest part, and untouchable, and impure.

A discomfort with the inequality and hierarchy inherent in the practice is reflected in understandings that circulate in other religous communities. One such example can be drawn from the Sikh community in Britain. Among the Nirankaris, a sect within Sikhism pushing back against Hindu caste hierarchy and ritual, the following position has been adopted as they work toward values of equality: "Touching someone's feet in this manner is a sign of respect by an inferior person to a superior in Hindusim" (Thomas 1993: 223). Thomas cites Kalsi's earlier research (1992) with a local Nirankari informant who asserts, "'In our movement … the touching of each other's feet helps break the hold of the caste system'"(Thomas 1993: 223).

In India, the way this practice follows an established hierarchical order is revealed when the hierarchy is reversed, as it is here in a newspaper report about how upper caste Brahmin Ministers refused to touch the feet of a Dalit (lower caste) Chief Minister:

> Old habits, as the aphorism goes, die hard. At least this much was evident on Sunday as Mayawati was being sworn in as the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister. While all the MLAs[8] who took oaths as ministers lined up to touch the BSP[9] chief's feet, some of them refrained from doing so. (Singh 2007)

Similarly, in the recent film *Kaala* with South Indian superstar Rajnikanth, foot touching is set up as a site for the denigration of a Muslim woman by a Hindu man. In this film the protagonist, represented by Hari dada ('Hari' being another name for

---

[8] Designation for a member of the Legislative Assembly at the level of the State government.
[9] The Bahujan Samaj Party [BSP], which incorporates people from lower castes and religious minorities, is the third largest political party in India.

Vishnu), is not romantically interested in Zarina, a Muslim woman. The first time he hears her Muslim-sounding name, he asks her to repeat it, with a slight distaste registering on his face. He displays his abject disrespect for women with the remark that a '*pombala*'(woman) is not being able to survive on her own. Then, he humiliates her by expecting her to touch his feet. It is well known that in Islam feet touching is equated with prostrating or *sajdah*, which is an act to be solely for Allah, and not for other human beings.

Within the context of my teaching Kathakali in Australia Helen's touching of my feet then, for me, would be a display of touching of what is my most "impure" socially available body part. By these opposing and conflicting mentalist abstractions, I am compelled to renegotiate these actions, and work to find new common ground of behaviour, of being-in-the-same-Kathakali-world. In the new social, the one-on-one actor training space is perhaps not as resolved as it is in the old social.

Conclusion

This chapter begins by reflecting on the primary tool of this practice-led research, the researcher's body, initiating the chronicling of its journey from brokenness and pain, to a functionality and pleasure. Moving away from the subjective experience, I examine a one-on-one training session between a master practitioner and a mature student. I document their integrated, well-functioning, and pleasure-filled work while theorising around the complexity of the imitative process by using knowledge gathered through the latest research in neuroscience. I also document the social practice of touching the *guru's* feet, that initiates the *guru shishya* relationship. In the next chapter, I look at the wider perspective of western representations of Kathakali and respond to issues of representation emerging out of my initial group teaching in

Australia. Literature around the work of Eugenio Barba is examined and issues and concerns emerging out of the intercultural exercise analysed. By these explorations, an intellectual and practical framework is set out for the practice-led and intercultural exercise of researching the teaching of Kathakali in Australia.

Chapter Three

Representations of the exotic Kathakali body: from mythology to reality

In the first of two inter-related sections within this chapter, issues of representation emerging out of my teaching of Kathakali in Melbourne, Australia are examined and preconceived notions and prejudices about Kathakali recorded and located within the wider arc of exotic western representations of oriental, Asian and eastern arts. The history of mythologised perceptions of Kathakali are traced and located within existing academic literature, and a case made for a more rigorous understanding of its training practices, drawing the reader's attention to the complexity of its body crafting processes, and to the central location of the body of the *guru* or teacher in its pedagogy.

In the second part of this chapter, the intercultural work of theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba, and the literature around his extensive work at the Odin Teatre (Barba 1972, 1979, 1994, 1995; Varley 1998) is examined. Certain moments of intercultural conflict between him and one of the founding members of the Odin Teatre, the Indian Odissi dance *guru* Sanjukta Panigrahi, are highlighted. These incidents centre on acts of feet touching. This practice is shown coming from the Indian caste system, i.e., from within the old social. These sites of conflict between Panigrahi and Barba, centred on these incidents of feet touching, are used to search for a theoretical framework towards understanding the embodied self and culture of the Indian dance *guru* and its existential being-in-the-world of intercultural performance.

Mythologising of the oriental, Asian and eastern arts

Research into the history of Kathakali reveals a wide spectrum of representation by western academics and practitioners that constitutes a mythologising of the oriental, Asian and eastern arts. This includes the work of Antonin Artaud (1968) who, as Indian theatre critic, director and intercultural theorist Rustom Bharucha (see *Theater and the World: Performance and Politics of Culture*, 1993 and *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theater in an age of Globalisation*, 2000) suggests, was perhaps most influential in coining the controversial term "oriental theatre" (Bharucha 1993:15–16). Bharucha holds Antonin Artaud primarily responsible for the mythologising of eastern and Asian theatre. As Bharucha suggests, Artaud's search for visions and inspirations led him to a wide array of cultural stimuli from non-western cultures, that included "Yoga, oriental religions, drugs, magic, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, mysticism, acupuncture, astrology" (1993:14). While rejecting his own traumatised postwar European culture, Artaud had, in Bharucha's view, an almost pathological need to escape the strictures of logical Europe. In defence of the reality of his own, eastern and Indian theatre, Bharucha details Artaud's mythologising of Balinese theatre.

> Artaud viewed 'mechanically rolling eyes', 'pouts' and 'recurrent muscular contractions' as elements in 'a kind of spiritual architecture'. Similarly, he envisioned in the taut movements of the dancer a 'rigidity of body in trance stiffened by the surge of the cosmic forces invading it'. In his mind's eye, the director became 'a kind of magical conductor, a master of sacred ceremonies'. The very headdress of the dancers radiated 'divinity', a 'miraculous revelation.' (1993:15-16)

These exotic phrases frame an enquiry into the mythologised representation of eastern arts like Kathakali.

In group workshops held in Melbourne, and which were open to both experienced performers, actors, and dancers, as well as amateurs and casual walk ins, I found I needed to renegotiate similar false expectations, needed to shift the exotic expectation of the learner, away from a perception of the exotic otherness of the dance form, and towards what is real and shared. Participants/learners who come in looking for, for example, a spiritual connection, would, at the first instance, be attracted to, isolate, and want to work with those elements that they may have previously heard of, or seen as spiritual, and representative of their vision of eastern arts. Like, for example, the ordinary Indian social greeting of folded hands or *namaste* that was taken very seriously as if it was an act of devotion. At the start of a session, my greeting the group with a *namaste* was a social greeting, not a spiritual act. In itself, the gesture held no deeper meaning than a formal social "Hello". But when it came from an Indian Kathakali performer, it was greatly attractive for some learners, sending them into what looked like a zone of spirituality, and not the craft of actor training. They would close their eyes and bow low, when not asked to. In similar vein was the horizontal sliding head movement that Artaud identifies (1988:216). A number of participants, right in the first session itself, expressed a keenness to perform this action. They were fascinated by it and wanted to know how it was performed, as if it was a mystery waiting to be solved.

This fascination was also for the language of *mudras* or hand gestures, as if it was a language of mystery and magic. I found, with such participants, that even as I was enacting out a sentence with hand gestures, that I was demonstrating for them to observe and then perform, they would pick up on the exotic elements of my

demonstration and try and imitate them. For example, while I was trying to show them the enactment of the words "your desire," with two separate hand gestures, *kartareemukham* for "your," and *mudrakhyam* for "desire," (see Appendix A for all twenty-four mudras), even before they were able to observe clearly and perform with ease the two gestures in a logical sequence, they would begin layering the action with exotic add-on effects like the head slide or a widening and opening and closing of eyelids or the flickering of the eyebrows. This shifted their concentration from what I was really asking them to do, which was to observe and mirror my hand gestures, to an image in their mind of the Kathakali dancer, an image that came from their memory of an exotic representation, perhaps absorbed even from watching Bollywood films, like the exaggerated eyebrow flicker, the eye movements or the head slide.

To me, watching them, it felt as if they were mimicing me, imitating my action with a poor and artificial version of it. While I was showing them two hand gestures and trying to demonstrate the logic of the language, they were imitating five other actions, and very poorly. This generalised imitation of the exotic and fascinating other is at odds with Kathakali actor training, one that demands a steady, step-by-step observation of, and then a performance of a series of integrated actions. While each action is worked at individually, the series of actions exists as part of an integrated skill set. To isolate individual actions is to set them up as exotic. I direct this next section towards a single Kathakali exercise that has gained popularity over all others.

The exotic Kathakali eye exercise

Tiasha Selvan, a year twelve student, had joined the workshop as she had selected Kathakali for her International Baccalaureate Creative Arts project. The

project expected her to identify one world theatre tradition and a specific element within it. She had chosen Kathakali as her tradition, and more specifically the movement of the eyes to convey meaning. To complete this task, she was required to undertake a workshop to learn and demonstrate this one specific element. Unsurprisingly, she chose what is singularly the most famous of Kathakali exercises, *kannusadhakam* or the eye exercise. A look at the history of this eye exercise and its representation in western actor training literature is revealing of a kind of focused exotic prejudice.

Eugenio Barba, after his brief sojourn to India in 1963, documents these Kathakali eye exercises. Barba had not practised Kathakali, and had only observed/studied it, during his three-week stay at the premier institution of teaching Kathakali in Kerala, the Kerala Kalamandalam. He returned to Europe to experiment with techniques observed in Asia. Here, he is describing his working process with the Odin Teatre actors in his article "Words or Presence" :

> In the beginning of our activity we too believed in the "myth of technique," something which it was possible to acquire, to possess, and which would have allowed the actor to master his own body, to become conscious of it. So, at this stage, we practised exercises to develop the dilation of the eyes in order to increase their expressiveness. They were exercises, which I had taken from India while studying the training of Kathakali actors. The expressiveness of the eyes is essential in Kathakali and the control of their musculature demands several hours of hard training daily for many years. *The different nuances each have a precise significance; the way of frowning, the direction of a glance, the degree of opening or closing the lids are codified by tradition and are in fact concepts and images which are immediately comprehensible to the spectator.*

Such control in a European actor would only restrain the organic reactions of

the face and transform it into a lifeless mask. (1972:47–54, my italics)

My disagreement with Barba's representation and specifically the above italicised

section is the following: while in the scholarly documentation of these acting methods

these individual gestures may be codified, in actual practice they are received by the

learner as acting solutions. When the *guru* demonstrates the gesture in the acting

class, he does so meaningfully, making complete dramatic sense. Each gesture is not

taught as a code but as a moment of drama passed on from teacher to learner who in

turn works to become a teacher. It is the scholar that looks at it and translates it into a

code. This highlights a difference between a literate and a living embodied culture.

While on the page these codes exist as individual actions or exercises, in actor

training, each individual action, is layered meaningfully by the *guru*, integrated with

other actions, into moments of drama. To be interested in the Kathakali eye exercise

in isolation is equivalent to being fascinated by the way ballet dancers balance on

their toes. This fascination may be a starting point, but cannot be an end in itself. By

this argument, Kathakali has its own specific aesthetic as separate even from one of

its immediate sources *kutiyattam*, which does concentrate more specifically on the

eyes to tell the story. Arya Madhavan (2012) points out the importance of what she

refers to in her article as the "aesthetics of seeing" in the more ancient form of stylised

Sanskrit theatre *kutiyattam* and clarifies its uniqueness and difference with Kathakali:

When I say this, I am not negating the significance of other Indian dance or theatre

forms in emphasising expressive eyes. I am also aware that Indian dance forms

such as bharatanatyam and theatre forms like kathakali give importance for eye

training and ocular expression in their performance. Performers of Balinese dance

or kabuki also possess interestingly expressive eyes. However, none of these

performances possess a codified system of eye training and ocular function as maintained by kudiyattam. Moreover, kudiyattam performance focuses more exclusively on eyes and face, whereas bodily movement is the chief mode of expression in most of the other forms, including kathakali. (2012:550–570)

As Madhavan points out, in Kathakali, it is the body movement – the eyes, hands, and the entire body – that needs to integrate.

In the description of actor training at the Odin Teatre, whose work I will cover in greater detail later in this chapter, Barba is taking one exercise, *kannusadhakam* or eye exercise, out of a series of organically systemised exercises, and practising it in isolation. Of course, this exercise is done and practised separate from others, but its dramatic meaning lies in its connection with other exercises. For example, another exercise, *cuzhippu,* links the performer's eyes with the hands. By connecting the movement of the eyes to the hands and the physical body, the mind or inner or subjective self of the performer too is integrated. There are six types of *cuzhippu* and these are performed very slowly to facilitate the performer's concentration. The objective is to unify the hand gestures with the eyes. This helps the eye be present where the hand/story/narration is, and through the eye's presence, the performer's mind, emotion and being are present. This integration and communion between the hand, eye, mind and emotion is an aesthetic pleasure for the performer. As the oft-quoted saying goes:

> *Yato hasta tato drishtir*
>
> Where the gesture there the gaze
>
> *Yato dhrishtir tato manah*
>
> Where the gaze there the mind
>
> *Yato mana tato bhavo*

Where the mind there the *bhava*

Yato bhavastato rasa

Where the *bhava* there the taste of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*

The last phrase clearly indicates a final state of aesthetic pleasure. The first line "where the hand goes" suggests that the hand belongs to the performer, this entire sequence ending with *rasa* may be interpreted as directed towards the performer. This sloka from Nandikesvara's *abhinayadarpanam* (usually dated between the tenth and thirteenth centuries) is available to us in English through translations by Coomaraswamy (1957: 17) and Ghosh (1975: 42).

I re-emphasise here the need to connect individual exercises to each other, and into an integrated process. The eye exercises, done in isolation, set up a strangeness, an otherness, that seemingly leads to expectations of the actor training work being mystical, magical and trance-like. However, as stated in the previous chapter, while evoking the large hands and face of the "guru homunculus," the integration of the eyes and the hands serve a specific function. By being trained to follow the hand gesture, and be present where the motor action is, the eyes serve to highlight the *bhava* or emotional state that the face and the body express, working as an essential link between the narrative and the emotional. This integration exists in the body of the teacher and is a symptom of his mastery of the form. The teacher works at the craft a step at a time, working slowly over time to integrate into the learner's body, a series of actions. The real basis of Kathakali actor training is for the teacher to demonstrate an action and for the learner to observe and then perform that action. Any shift in concentration, any inclusion of exotic otherness breaks that flow and concentration. The learner's concentration needs to remain on what is really, specifically being

demonstrated in front of them, and what action, at each moment, is specifically being asked of them.

It is also important for the teacher to be conscious of what precisely is being demonstrated by him/her, and for the teacher to be precise about the imitative or mirroring process. The teacher has to spell out clearly what is being demonstrated, and what is expected of the learner, i.e., what the learner needs to observe and perform. At each moment of the training process, the gaze of the learner has to be directed at the precise action being demonstrated.

Another significant insight, gathered while undertaking the practice-led research supporting this thesis, is the need for an appropriate application of the two facets of the language spoken in the learning process: the first being the language of demonstration, and the second, the language of observation. Both of these languages need to be clear, specific and focussed on the tasks of demonstrating and observing. A contemporary actor-learner must have the space to ask specifically about what is being demonstrated for her to mirror or imitate. She may also be empowered to question the teacher by speaking a specific language of observation, for example using sentences like "Could you show that again? Can I see what your left hand is doing? Can I see where the right hands end up being placed? Can I watch this from behind you? From which angle should I see this demonstration?" This process puts a stop to any generalised mimicing or imitation, de-mystifies the exotic presenter/representation and, instead, offers a work that comes from a real engagement of a learner with the other's performativity.

Through my initial research workshops, I realised that it is also very important for the teacher himself/herself to not project an image of otherness. Under pressure to win over the learner, to convince them of the attractiveness of the form, a teacher

may, especially in the initial sessions, demonstrate those very elements that stand out for their otherness. This highlights the formal dance as coming from another culture, another world – as exotic.

The exotic foot slap

In the workshops, the participants/performers were very impressed by the way I was able to slap the ground with my foot. It was clear that this was not something they had seen before nor could they do it themselves. Encouraged by their attraction, I too over-performed the foot slap. Consequently, independent of my guidance, they decided to take on the challenge of being able to slap the ground with their own foot/feet. I found that they were trying to do this, even when not required, even when they had some simple steps to perform. Instead of moving smoothly from one step to the other by placing the foot gently, the foot slap would be there. Without their realising it and even before I could interfere, it had become a habit. It took a lot of undoing, and a long time before they could let go of that need to slap the ground, and to make some of the foot movement work ordinarily, not exotic and other.

This ability to slap the ground hard, with the sole of the foot, is an ability that the Kathakali dancer has. But this ability emerges after a lot of work has been done in grounding the body. It was interesting for me to see how little power I had in controlling their urge to master it. Despite my repeated suggestions that they should allow for time, for a grounding to happen before the foot slap became easier, they continued to try and find their own mind /body or a psychophysical way into the gesture. What follows are Helen Smith's and Peter Fraser's answers to my question about the foot slap after approximately eighteen months of working together:

Arjun: Why was the foot slap so important?

Helen: When we observed you do it in the first few lessons it just seemed to me that, one, you were able to do it so well, so amazingly—it also seemed to me as if it was part of the form, an integral part of the form, that is what I understood, and then it just became a curiosity. How do you do that? And also because of prior experience with working with the Suzuki Method, where we do the stomp and have a relationship with the ground, but it was clear to me that this was a completely different relationship and the result, the sound of it was so different to what I had done in the past, it just became a fascination, a curiosity, and then a desire to able to do it, to work it out, to find out how to do it.

Peter: I think it was because it was something we couldn't do. I was equally nervous about stomping the foot on concrete in your home studio, I thought I was going to break my feet forever, it doesn't, but I did not know that. So I was equally interested in finding out what happened when you stomp on a hard surface using the sides of the feet, and trying to get this leg coming in a bit rather than just (hesitates) …and other things I could sort of do but the foot slap I couldn't.

Arjun: There was a sense in this, that you decided what you can't do and you set out to conquer it, you set out to crack it, set out to solve it and that was not necessarily what I was asking you to do, (Peter agrees) or the method I was setting out… and later in the one-on-one sessions we started aligning together, so for me the sequence was as follows: I set off that foot slap, that become the thing that attracted you and that started dominating the work, so for example even in a simple step of going back to the basic posture, it became important (for you) to get the foot slap right (when all

that was needed was the three steps taken back in rhythm). My vision at that time, which I communicated to you was that this was not the time to crack it, that when you get more grounded a different relationship will emerge which will make the foot slap easier. However, both of you were trying to find out the body-mind or your individual psychophysical way, or the science behind it, thinking for example of particular muscles and how they were affected, you were thinking of how to get grounded, how to crack it, solve it, in my presence, you kept trying to work it out, and I shared and allowed it, went along with you and I waited, for me this process was a distraction.

Peter: Yes, but as dancers there are also things that are physically a pleasure. You are attracted to them because you feel I wish I could do that. So it's not that it is just an exotic thing, it's that it is, part of the form that is very attractive to master, looks good, sounds good. (Interview with Smith and Fraser, 30 June 2016))

A year later, when Helen was ready and wore the *kiridam*, the large Kathakali headdress, it brought about a whole new way of balancing the body, one that allowed the lower half to be freer to both sense its relationship to the ground as well as connect to it with the foot slap. It was as if the head needed to be in place for the performer to be in greater control of their feet and in a way, for the ground to rise, to become more solid and available. It was as if a series of steps and abilities had to be acquired before the foot slap could happen, easily and naturally. There was no point working hard at it in isolation. This carefully crafted step-by-step integration of the performer's body with the form is the essence of Kathakali training and performativity. This process requires skill, knowledge and trust, by the learner, of the

teacher. This trust is the real heart of the teacher learner relationship. This gets understandably complicated in the western actor-training context when performers want to own their actions, through an ownership of their bodies and its functioning, and effect/control their mind/body psycho/physicality in separation from the embodied social presence and vision of the teacher.

This presence of the *guru* or master practitioner, who is both a teacher and a performer, is the difference between the sociopsychophysical, and the psychophysical tradition. In the sociopsychophysical, the *guru* is a master practitioner whose presence is central to the learning exercise. In the psychophysical, the master practitioner is replaced by a western teacher/director, who absorbs techniques and practices of the eastern arts while creating a pedagogy and process aligned with the needs of western performer training. While there are many western practitioners who have invited eastern *gurus* to work with their actors, this has been primarily in the group workshop mode. Even in instances where eastern *gurus* have taught in the west, it is not with actors learning their forms over any significant length of time, and especially not in the one-on-one mode. Further, the *guru* is seen as teacher but not often as both teacher and performer. An occasional performance or lecture demonstration cannot replace the sustained observation of a *guru* over years of performance. The teacher-performer equation also frames a difference between a performance tradition like Kathakali, wherein you can actually see a practitioner function both as teacher and performer, and a martial art form like *kalaripayattu*, in which it is not possible to see the actual practice, to see the martial artist as warrior. With a martial art, I suggest, the circle does not complete itself.

I concentrate this next section on the work of the leading western academic writing on Kathakali, Phillip Zarrilli, acknowledging his unique positioning for both

engaging deeply with the eastern arts, as well as evolving his own pedagogy to serve his psychophysical vision. I chronicle here his engagement with, and then his departure from the sociopsychophysical, and towards the psychophysical. I work on this next section to highlight the presence of the *guru's* body as central to the sociopsychophysical processes.

Phillip Zarrilli and the psychophysical tradition

Phillip Zarrilli's has been the most sustained and comprehensive scholarship on Kathakali actor training. In 1984, he published *The Kathakali Complex: Actor, Performance & Structure,* a comprehensive guide to the source traditions of Kathakali, to its codes and methods of actor training, to its performance scores and practices, to its patronage and survival as an art form. Zarrilli learnt Kathakali for six months while researching this work and would later spend seven years practising one of the source traditions of Kathakali, *kalaripayattu*. Sixteen years later, he followed up with *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Play* (2000a) offering readers access to Kathakali's written texts or *attakathas* through translations in English. This work also covered a descriptive history of the land of Kathakali, the southern Indian state of Kerala, including the history of the *nair* warrior community that Kathakali was first performed by, and continues to be performed by to the present day. Working through his seven years of practice with *kalaripayattu,* and using the body as a tool of enquiry, including his own, in the same year he also produced an insightful article titled "Embodying the Lion's 'fury'" (2000b) that builds on his work and relationship with his *kalaripayattu* guru.

In the years following this article, he framed his research within the trajectory of Merleau-Ponty and Drew Leder's ideas of embodied presence and absence, while placing the body and its multiple modes of experience at the centre of his enquiry into actor training, a mode of enquiry reflected in the title of his 2004 article, "Towards a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of Experience." In the body of work that followed, Zarrilli concentrates on the individual performer's psychophysicality. These works include *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (2009), "Psychophysical Approaches and Practices in India: Embodying Processes and States of 'Being-Doing'" (2011) and Zarrilli, P., Daboo, J. and Loukes, R., *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process: Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2013). These works negotiated the individual performer's psychophysical, a departure away from the "joint action" of the sociopsychophysical. An understanding of joint action helps clarify its difference from the individual psychophysical. At its simplest, joint action may be described as two bodies working together in a social situation. In the specific instance of Kathakali, this joint action may further be clarified as two bodies working to commune as one. As a reading of the latest research in neuroscience points out, the study of joint action has been slow, as cognitive neuroscientists have focused on the functioning of the psychophysical, individual, mind and brain, instead of the social.

Progress in understanding the cognitive and neural processes involved in joint action has been slow and sparse because cognitive neuroscientists have predominantly studied individual minds and brains in isolation. However, in recent years, major advances have been made by investigating perception and action in social contexts (Sebanz, Bekkering and Knoblich 2006:70). This joint action between the teacher and

learner, sustained over a length of time, defines the social element of my framing of

Kathakali's actor training processes as sociopsychophysical.

The psychophysical tradition

       The psychophysical tradition reflects an interest in the individual

body/mind/psyche/brain of the actor. As Zarrilli(2009) observes, the psychophysical

tradition emerged as a postwar western phenomenon in actor training, one that relied

increasingly on the Stanislavsky-inspired psychophysical mind-body integration of

the actor, through an interplay of practices both psychological and physical:

> [I]n his attempt to bridge the Western gap between "mind" and "body," the
>
> cognitive and sensory realms of our experience, and analysis and embodiment,
>
> Stanislavsky himself identified the need for a "psychophysical" theory and
>
> practice of acting. He therefore drew upon two 'new' paradigms and practices to
>
> help him solve these intractable problems – Ribot's psychology and Indian
>
> yoga. (8)

Zarrilli then proceeds to document the dissemination of this practice, listing a number

of the theatrical greats of the twentieth century:

> Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov, Meyerhold, Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, Barba,
>
> Copeau, Tadeusz Kantor, Herbert Blau, Suzuki Tadashi, Yoshi Oida, Ariane
>
> Mnouchkine, and Anne Bogart have been influenced in some way by non-
>
> Western traditions ranging from Japanese noh, Indian yoga or kathakali dance-
>
> drama, to Beijing opera, among others. (8)

Thus, Zarrilli's work, like many others in the western tradition before him, drew

directly on non-western traditions and principles that inform them, for, as he explains,

they offer "an alternative understanding of all key elements of acting-body, mind, their relationship, emotion, acting – and even of the acting process." (8).

In an intercultural training program such as the one Zarrilli established at the University of Exeter (see photo, 2009:92), when technical exercises from non-western performance traditions like *kalaripayattu* or Kathakali are incorporated within a western actor-training program, individual joint action led sociopsychophysical exercises run the risk of being reduced to psychophysical ones. Zarrilli, the teacher of *kalaripayattu* in his own studio, would acknowledge that his seven years' practice of *kalaripayattu* does not qualify him as a master or *guru* of *kalaripayattu*. Nor does he articulate the need for a sustained social relationship with his students outside of the workshop space. There is a gap in the learning exercise when instead of *guru* you have a western performer adapting learnt eastern practices for a western theatre's needs. In the context of Kathakali training, the missing link in such an exercise would be that of the *guru*, as both teacher and performer, and the offerings that come through a sustained and holistic relationship between teacher and learner.
For example, in the singular case of Kathakali facial exercises or *rasaabhinaya*, the *guru's* technical demonstration of the nine emotions is only a prelude to the *guru's* enactment of those nine emotions, both while teaching characters from the dramatic texts and in performance. The learner learns the technique from a source that will also demonstrate its application. Twice. In class and in performance. The Kathakali facial exercises without a link to the face of the *guru*, as both teacher and performer, may merely be perceived as a formal artificial objectification of inner states with no personal involvement of the learner, as if the *guru* was wearing an external mask for the learner to mimic or, as Zarrilli interprets, "Rather the neophyte begins with the form – the external facial gestures in the expression of emotional states" (1984:209).

This view further encourages him to term the facial gestures as "Exercises of the facial mask" (133).

The Guru's face is not a mask

In all my learning with many master practitioners, I have never thought of their face or mine as a mask. Even when you transform your face through elaborate makeup into the face of a character, it remains a face and not a mask or even a facial mask. The traditional Indian term for acting through the face is *mukh abhinaya* or face acting and not *mukhauta abhinaya* or masked acting. The Kathakali learner works at his face and its emotional expressiveness by observing his teacher's face. This process, by its intimacy between the teacher's and learner's face, is more personal than learning how to wear a mask or enacting emotions through a formal mask. By this argument, I critique Zarrilli's choice of phrase, "Exercises of the facial mask" (1984:133). Further, in contrast to Zarrilli's suggestion that the "neophyte begins with the form" (209), I offer the counter that the form itself begins with the formal establishment of the relationship of learner and teacher and this form informs every aspect of the learner's emotional and physical development. By this form (of the *guru shishya* relationship) the facial expressions received through the face of the *guru* as performer/teacher are a window to the emotional life of the characters he is teaching. It is by this relationship that a technical exercise like *kannusadhakam* or the eye exercise becomes a relevant means of dramatic training and not just a virtuoso display of technical flamboyance. For the eyes of the teacher are the eyes of the performer and further, in performance, the eyes of the character. In mirroring the eyes of the teacher, the learner is preparing the ground to mirror the eyes of the character and. through the eyes, the deeper life and subjectivity of the character. This entire circle of communion, when realised, I argue, is an aesthetic pleasure.

Rasa in the Kathakali mirror box

Traditional scholarship on Indian aesthetics interprets *rasa* as the definer of an appreciative and knowledgable audience's aesthetic pleasure and *bhava* as the performer's embodied emotion. Even while progressing to counter and nuance this traditional view, I use at this stage of the enfolding argument, the one-on-one site as a place of spectatorship of the *guru* by the *shishya* and then in reverse, once the learner has mastered the form, by the *guru* of the *shishya*. By his mastery over the aesthetics of his art form, the master practitioner experiences an exquisite ease of performance that facilitates the creation of joy or *rasa* for the audience. In the learning session, the learner too observes as an audience. A good teacher demonstrates and performs with joy for the learner observing as an audience, as often as is needed. This joy is passed on to the learner, even as the teacher demonstrates and the learner, or at least the maturing learner, as audience, as a *rasik* or taster of pleasure, observes. This ease and joy of performance, he/she passes on to the willing learner, through a wide range of actions, roles, characters and choreographed dances. Symbiotically, once the *shishya* has become an adept performer then roles reverse and the *guru* becomes the audience, communing with the learner, observing and taking pleasure in the learner's art even while teaching it. Both *guru* and *shishya* are now aesthetically knowledgeable, well-informed audiences of each other's demonstrations, both are *sahridaya* or co-sharers of the heartfelt experience. The performer's pleasure adds another vector to the greater debate about the location and experience of *rasa*. While not establishing conclusively at this stage, this description of the *guru* and *shishya's* pleasure of observing and spectating each other's work, as *rasa*, I am laying the ground for a

more nuanced appreciation of their aesthetic and joyful experience in the context of the theory of *rasa.*

Mimicry: a lower form of imitation

In all western academic and practitioner-led research of imitative, eastern teaching methodologies, the words used for what I call mirroring are words that have a slightly negative connotation – to imitate, copy, mimic. Zarrilli, himself the most significant and influential western academic writing on Kathakali, states: "When learning hand-gestures the student moves from *mimicry* of externals to a state where he is psychophysiologically 'connected' to each mudra from the region of the navel (nabhi)" (2000a:92, my italics); and then again, many years later: "Whether learning the preparatory exercises or more advanced techniques, the student *mimics* the master and/or senior students, repeating over and over each day the basic techniques until they become part of one's body knowledge." (2011:249, my italics).

Eugenio Barba too repeatedly uses the word mimicry to represent the act of imitation, "Through his gestures and his *mimicry*, the Kathakali actor recreates the atmosphere and the action of the drama while describing to the audience the action's locale" (Barba and Sanzenbach 1967:38, my italics) and again in the same text, "When he has completed his studies, a Kathakali actor knows perfectly the totality of signs, *mimicries*, jumps, and mudras of all the traditional characters in approximately sixty plays" (47, my italics). In all examples cited, there is never any clarification made of the precise meaning of, or any special interpretation of, the word mimicry. It is used as interpreted in plain English.

It is perhaps because of this nuance and prejudice towards mimicry that great individualistic European theatre practitioners like Grotowski and Barba do not focus, highlight, examine or play with the *guru/shishya* relationship and the mirroring methodology, as it is contrary to their need to create new, individual, rebellious, original work. Even Eugenio Barba has Indian/Odissi dance *guru* Sanjukta Panigrahi, a founding member of Barba's Odin Teatre, only as part of the intercultural project and not teaching her own form extensively for any length of time. Panigrahi is involved with other performers in intercultural exchanges and improvisation exercises, she performs for them to share the beauty and logic of her dance. Barba works with her to consciously break down her craft, but no one learns Odissi from her for any length of time (Read Varley 1998:249–273). No one becomes Panigrahi's *shishya* to explore what emerges from there.

In the post-World War Two era in Europe,[10] these practitioners were in search of new ways of being and new worlds to be in. They were in search of new theatres to revitalise their own, while in a traditional world in Kerala, India, Kathakali *gurus* were carrying a different burden. They were inheriting a tradition and working to preserve and enhance it. It is not hard then to understand a European practitioner's dismissal of the imitative process as a limited mimicing. Yet a working methodology that asks the learner/participant actor to imitate, mimic, copy or, as I prefer, mirror the action demonstrated, is always present and is evident even in some of the actor training processes recorded in one of the iconic books of European theatre, *Towards a*

---

[10] "Barba has reflected that the Odin theater was built out of the ruins of Europe, that their innovative approach to training and performing developed, in part, because of the social and cultural disruption in Europe following the second world war" (Turner 2004: 39).

Poor Theater (Grotowski, 1968). I cite here a series of examples of Grotowksi's most celebrated actor Cieslak demonstrating and setting up exercises[11].

"Cat improvisations. Cieslak gives an example: a cat that stretches and relaxes after having slept" (154). "Cieslak demonstrates a whole gamut of movements. Each movement is accompanied by an indescribable concentration and complete control of both body and respiration" (155). "It is wrong to think that the exercises which Cieslak shows us – physical exercises – are only for athletes, for people with strong, lithe bodies" (162). "After one of the lessons Grotowski gave instructions to prepare an improvisation exercise, based on the various details and exercises that were demonstrated and taught by Cieslak during the same lesson" (162).

By citing these examples, I am making a conceptual point that suggests the inevitability of the copying, imitating or mirroring process existing in any embodied learning space even when later the learner is not expected to imitate and instead create his own version of the exercise. For no embodied imitation, copying or mirroring to exist, the exercise needs to be verbally described not demonstrated. But even a verbal description may be perceived of as an embodied gestural act (Csordas 1990:25). This implicates the methodology of mirroring into every embodied learning process. The act of observing the demonstrated action, in all cases, influences the learner's choices. Within this methodology, I argue, Kathakali (as with other Indian embodied performance practices) mirroring is an extremely evolved form as the teacher has

---

[11] A one-on-one close intimate bond of learning between *guru* and *shishya,* or in the western context between producer and actor, existed successfully in Grotowski's Theater too, as suggested here by Alison Hodge's research: "Some performers, involved in highly intensive collaborative relationships with Directors have been central to the realization of a new aesthetic –Ryszard Cieslak in Growtowski's Poor Theater for example. During intimate preparatory work with Cieslak in Growtowski's "Teatr Laboratorium" (Laboratory Theatre), while developing his role in the Constant Prince, Grotowski acknowledges that for months and months Cieslak worked alone with me" (Hodge 2000: 2).

mastered the action demonstrated through years of training and performance, and the action to be mirrored is a complex integration of feet, hand and face movements. There is, however, a difference between Cieslak's demonstration of acting exercises and a Kathakali *guru's* teaching methodology. While Cieslak is working with the workshop participants on what Eugenio Barba describes as the performer's "pre-expressive state" (1995:2), the Kathakali *guru* works on both the performer's pre-expressive as well as his/her expressive form – the form that is seen on the stage.[12]

It was to understand both the pre-expressive and the expressive in eastern forms of performance that Barba engaged foundationally in his work at the Odin Teatre with Sanjukta Panigrahi, one of the founding members of the theatre. In the next section, I examine Barba and Panigrahi's work, locating my interest in the presence of the body of the Indian dance guru, with the body present and existing, as Csordas suggests, as the "existential ground for culture and self" (1994). It is this body and its presence through its culture and self, and its performative gestures, that conflicts with and complicates the intercultural exercise. In this section, I examine and theorise around the difficulties created as a result of the embodied presence of the Asian dance *guru* in a European intercultural exercise.

Eugenio Barba

For a practice-led dissertation working to reconcile the practices of one culture within another, Eugenio Barba's ambitious, wide ranging and sustained anthropological research on eastern and western modes of performance, including Kathakali, demands special focus and attention. Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatre was

---

[12] The Russian practitioner Meyerhold's etudes are taught in a very similar way to the studio practices described in this thesis (Pitches 2003).

created in Oslo, Norway in 1964, and moved to Holstebro (Denmark) in 1966. Its performance history records a significant and successful body of work with 76 productions, performed in 63 countries and in different social contexts. Barba's expertise of intercultural exchange, techniques of performance, cross-disciplinary endeavours and international collaboration is well established and institutionalised with ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology). From its initially precarious origins, as Bharucha's research suggests (1993:54–67), Barba moved, after a twenty-year-long struggle, to head a state-supported Teaterlaboratorium with a grant of $250,000 (Bharucha1993:65), a significant sum of money in the early 1990s. In 2017, Barba is still very active and influential in the intercultural actor training space.

Barba's anthropological research had its origins in the practical needs of actor training for the theatre. Over the years of working with his actors at the Odin Teatre, Eugenio Barba observed that some actors were good performers but not good in training, while others were good in training but were not good in performance. After extensive work and research, he concluded that it was not relevant whether the actors were good in performance or good in training or good in both. What was relevant was that all actors must enhance and train their "scenic presence, i.e. their ability to attract an audience's attention by their sheer presence" (Barba 1995:9). This presence then allowed their minutest of actions to be of interest to an audience. This, Barba concluded, the actors do by making extra daily actions. These extra daily physical and vocal exertions are based on principles different from those that govern daily behaviour. Through transcultural analysis, by mapping training and performance techniques of a wide range of traditions, Barba was able to single out "recurring principles" (9) or "shared themes of performativity." These recurring principles were

to be used by Odin Teatre actors as points of departure, away from the source traditions and towards a new, individualised way of working.

Here is Barba sharing the genesis of this process, of his discovery of the recurring principles:

In 1978, the actors all left Holstebro in search of stimuli which might help them shatter the crystallization of behavior, which tends to form in every individual or group. For three months, they dispersed in all directions: to Bali, India, Brazil, Haiti and Struer, a small town about fifteen kilometers from Holstebro. The pair who had gone to Struer to a school of ballroom dancing learned the tango, Viennese waltz, foxtrot and quickstep. Those who had gone to Bali studied baris and legong; the one who had been in India, kathakali; the two who had visited Brazil, capoera and candomble dances. They had all stubbornly insisted on doing what, in my view, ought absolutely to be avoided: they had learned styles – that is, the results of other people's techniques. (6)

While watching his actors perform these newly and hurriedly learnt exotic acting skills and techniques, Barba had a moment of truth, an epiphany. He noticed his actors putting on another skin/skeleton in order to perform, for example, their version of a Balinese dance or Kathakali. However, when the performance ended they would seem to step out of it and step back into their Odin Teatre actor skin/skeleton. And yet, in the passage from one skeleton/skin to another, in spite of the difference in expressivity, they applied similar principles.

These recurring principles were to become the basis of the work ahead. As he observes:

This 'putting on' and 'taking off', this change from a daily body technique to an extra-daily body technique and from a personal technique to a formalized Asian,

Latin American or European technique, forced me to ask myself a series of

questions which led me into new territory. (6)

This new territory was the work of the unique individualised way of the Odin Teatre.

This way used the recurring principles as points of departure, away from the source

tradition; not a surface, artificial wearing of a few learnt techniques from another

culture, as at least the actor who had gone to India to learn Kathakali seemed to

demonstrate.

A video recording exists of the Kathakali-inspired performance created by this

Odin Teatre actor who learnt Kathakali for three months in India. The excerpt can be

found in the Odin Teatre's 1979 performance of *The Million* (1979), created in 16 mm

film and video copy available online.[13] Produced by Odin Teatret Film, relevant

footage runs from 4:15 to 11:50. I viewed this video very carefully, stopping and

starting many times, to note down all the Kathakali elements in the dance. I observed

formal Kathakali conventions and steps, mixed up with interpretive and creative

additions by the performer. I noted these down in my diary and then framed a

response to this viewing, set out below:

> *The Million* is about Marco Polo's journey to the east. A performer sits on stage
>
> as Marco Polo. A kind of strange sensational orientalist fantasy world of song
>
> and dance plays around him. The audience sits on the ground, in a round. After
>
> about six to seven minutes a performer emerges dancing and dressed up as a
>
> character that I recognise as a Kathakali character *pootna*, the demoness,
>
> transformed into a beautiful woman and sent to murder the baby god Krishna.
>
> As she starts dancing I recognise Kathakali steps, gestures, feminine movements

---

[13] A copy of the video can be bought and downloaded from https://www.artfilms.com.au/item/odin-teatret-the-million

as well as eye movements and facial expressions. The performer displays a rough elementary skill and control over the Kathakali form. To that he adds his own Chaplinesque kind of artificial stylised energy with jerky, mechanical movements. Is this a parody, a conscious mocking of the Kathakali form? I am open to that thought, to that conscious playful affront. However, my fears rise to the surface. I know the story. It is *pootna moksham,*[14] the liberation of the demoness named *pootna*. It is the story around the birth of the Hindu god Krishna. A story similar to baby Jesus and Herod, for it has been predicted that Krishna will grow up to kill *kamsa,* the King. To prevent this, *kamsa* sends the demoness to kill baby Krishna. Dressed as a beautiful woman, Pootna arrives at Krishna's home and manages to feed him milk from her poison smeared breasts. However, instead of being killed, Krishna sucks both the poisoned milk as well as the life out of Pootna. In the Odin Teatre performance, as in the Kathakali performance, a baby doll is brought in and placed on the ground. After dancing a mock, strange and frenzied version of Kathakali, the performer suddenly stamps on this doll with his right foot, stamps on baby Krishna! (Recorded in my diary on the 1.12.2014)

To clarify, the Odin Teatre audience has no way of knowing the baby doll represents a god named Krishna as there is no dialogue and no storyline to this show. One scene flows into another, like an oriental fantasy. The actor, however, would of course have

---

[14] For anyone familiar with Kathakali and especially with actor training, this story of *Pootna Moksham* is often the first story, after the initial dance steps that are taught to a western performer coming to India to learn Kathakali. Being a *stree vesham* or a female role, it does not have the heavy *Kiridam* (worn only by male characters) nor the heavy costume with the layers of cloth making up the billowing "skirt." In Kathakali actor training, this story of *Pootna* is not really taught in the formal rehearsal spaces. It is learnt by sheer observation of other senior performers performing it. The learner is challenged by primary techniques and skills. This is why it is taught to 'westerners' who are there briefly, to learn Kathakali for a few weeks to a few months.

known what he was doing. What was he trying to achieve by stamping on another culture's god? Or, was the performer creating a new interpretation, with Pootna killing off Krishna quickly, even before he had a chance to kill her! That could indeed be a new, humorous twist to the story.

The performance itself, as Barba had predicted, was a superficial adoption of certain techniques of another culture, a comic caricature, a Frankenstein-like horror show for me. It seemed to have come from a Kathakali form, learnt in a terrible hurry. However, my interest in this foot stamping of a god is not to critique Barba's theatre nor with researching the inner logic of a European theatre and its transcultural experiments. My concern rather is with another matter: what an analysis of this action helps me enquire into and reveal about the embodiment of Indian culture and its representation outside of India. I am using these representations of Indian culture in Europe not to get to the root of their authenticity, but to assist me in conceiving my arguments as they evolve through my practice-led research.

It is my lived experience with Indian culture that informs my reaction to his stamping of the doll Krishna. The foot is the least sacred, the most profane part of the body. If accidently your foot touches another's body, you touch your hand to their body and then to your head as if compensating for the foot touch with a head touch. As children we were made to do this gesture of repentance and not just to a body but even to a book. If one accidently touched a book with the foot, the book would immediately need to be touched by the hand and then that hand touched to the head. Taboos about the foot are an intrinsic part of Indian culture. In my home here in Australia, guests take their shoes off before entering the house. This is of course as much about the house being kept clean as it is about it being kept sacred.

A foot-centric conflict

The Odin Teatre performer's foot stamping leads this foot-centric story to another stamping or, more precisely, the kicking of a book, that became an issue between Barba and founder member Indian Odissi dance guru Sanjukta Panigrahi. Here is one of the leading actresses of the Odin Teatre, Julia Varley, recounting a specific incident while speaking of Panigrahi's work with the Odin Teatre. I examine this incident and her role in it both for her presence as a master practitioner and for her embodiment of Indian culture as reflected in the conflicting situation Varley describes:

> On another occasion Sanjukta refused to follow Eugenio's instructions. It was during the ISTA in Salento, Italy, in 1987. Goethe's Faust was being worked on. Faust was represented by Katsuko Azuma, Margarita by the Onnagata Kanichi Hanayagi and Sanjukta was Mephistopheles, dressed in European style for the first time and, also for the first time, with her long hair let down loose. At a certain point a book fell from Faust's hands and Sanjukta, as Mephistopheles, had to kick it away. To mistreat a book was taboo in her culture and so she refused. Despite all of her solidarity towards Eugenio and towards the work in which she was discovering the richness of silence as accompaniment, she categorically refused to kick the book. (1998:249–273)

Present now in the cauldron of European intercultural experimentation are not just a few Kathakali exercises or yogic techniques, but both the mind of the practitioner and, through her body, "the existential ground of culture and self" (Csordas 1990, 1994). Taking a lead from Csordas' scholarship on embodiment, we come to a richer understanding of the conflict when, instead of reading into the taboo of mistreating a book, we reference Sanjukta's existential experience of her own living body, and

through her body, her experience of her culture and self. My insight from my lived experience of the Indian caste system suggests this incident is as much about her not wanting to kick and mistreat a book as it is about her relationship with her own body and the culture unconsciously encrypted on it, by which a foot stands condemned as impure, lesser/least in status as compared with the rest of her body and the body itself, lesser in status than the book.

My insight holds the pre-knowledge of the encrypted hierarchised body, an essential part of the Indian caste system, where the head and mouth is considered pure and sacred, belonging symbolically to the highest *brahmin* caste, the body with the chest and arms to the *raja/kshatriya's* or warriors, the legs to the *vaisyas* or merchants and the foot the lowest to the *shudra*[15] or the servants, and with the untouchables or pariahs considered as dirt below the feet. Writing of the primordial super male *purusharth's* body, noted historian and Indologist Arthur L. Basham quotes the Rig Veda: "The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced" (Basham 1989:24). Each individual body absorbs and is imprinted by this encryption. My own head is my highest part, my feet my lowest, untouchable. Significantly this caste-encrypted body exists as an absence. This is to state the obvious. Viscerally, no one feels any body part different from another. No one experiences/senses their feet intrinsically of lesser import than their own hand. It is as culture that the encryption plays itself out, setting up the feet as the lowest part of the body hierarchy.

Within the Panigrahi-Barba incident, there are two social practices that this insight highlights. First, the taboo on kicking with one's foot a book, and second, the

---

[15] I use the term sudra/shudra while acknowledging that the political correct term is Dalit. I use it, not empirically, but conceptually and with reference to the caste encrypted body in the context of seventeenth century texts.

placing/perceiving of the untouchable as separate from the caste hierarchised social body and placed even lower than the foot, as dirt beneath the foot. The common underlying principle between these two practices is the principle of untouchablilty (see Sadasivan 2000) framed by the rules and culture of the caste system that work on values of purity and impurity (Dumont 1970). This linking principle connects these two social practices to other practices that make up the Indian social habitat known as the caste system. Thus, the caste system and its practices of untouchability inform the act of Panigrahi's refusal to kick the book. Her own caste-encrypted body and its rules and principles, however, exist as an absence both to herself and to the other, to Barba. This encrypted embodied self and its principles and practices work not through Panigrahi's conscious will and control but as if automatically, unconsciously. Seen and understood through the tool of her body and its encryption, her embodied gestural display, her refusal to kick the book, is now located within the old social habitat of the Indian caste system. This culture exists as an embodied absence – the caste-encrypted body is absent from consciousness.

For example, the laws of body pollution which frame the hierarchy, with the *brahmin* on top being the most pure and the *shudra* at the bottom being the most impure (Dumont 1970), has another manifestation. The pure-impure binary is reflected by the left hand being the polluted hand and the right hand, the non-polluted. So, you eat your food with your right hand and use your left hand in the toilet. However, there is no visceral experiential difference in the feeling between one hand and another. Both hands feel the same to oneself. One hand does not intrinsically feel dirtier than the other. The encryption of the left- and right-hand differentiation exists as an absence. This caste-encrypted body is driven by structures and principles of which it is not consciously aware. These principles and practices work to place the

body into the power structures of the social order and the caste system. These practices and principles then exist in the body as a 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1990:52–65).

My interpretation of Bourdieu's "habitus" helps me engage with the logic of individual practices like feet touching and see how they make sense in the greater construct of the social world and power structures they inhabit. Within the Kathakali learning space, as observed and documented at the International Centre for Kathakali in New Delhi, this practice facilitates the inclusion of the learner into an empowered learning space. I harness ideas of both embodiment and habitus into the practical task of revealing my existence in both Kathakali practice, and the social world of the caste system.

In the present context, from a wider construction of the historical process of the representation of eastern, Asian, Indian arts, and from Artaud's mythologised representation, through to a particular conflict between Barba and Panigrahi, we have moved to potentially a real moment of intercultural reality. Embodiment and habitus now become my tools to help gain an understanding of the real problem existing between Barba and Sanjukta. One aspect of the real problem is the dancer's body encrypted with the embodied culture of the Indian caste system that prevents her from obeying the director. Barba too, by not offering a solution (he could have found another way to do the scene which Varley does not suggest he did), returns a conflicting gesture, insisting she obey the needs of the situation while not offering an alternative. The potential for an ugly conflict emerges.

I highlight this conflict not to denigrate and devalue the intercultural exercise but to show the consequence of the real presence of the other. I would also like to clarify here my disinterest in Barba's motivations or his side of the story. I am interested in Panigrahi here and I am using her story as revealed through the available

literature to come to a conceptual understanding of a conflict within an intercultural exercise and through it reflect on her embodiment, her embodied experience of her culture and self. Going further, in this conflict the practitioner's body is not just the existential ground for culture and self, but through its potential for embodied gestures, through its performativity, a real, live and potentially conflicting presence for the other. It is this embodied gesture that I am interested in examining. In the present intercultural exercise between Barba and Panigrahi, a gestural display of embodied aggression, a refusal by one to obey the instructions of the other to kick the book, reveals two separate cultures at play. This conflict becomes even more interesting when you frame the existence of the cultural encryption on Panigrahi's body as an absence. Panigrahi is not consciously aware of her foot's lower status. She does not perceive or experience her foot as untouchable or lesser in status than the rest of her body. Her refusal to kick the book is not because she actively feels her foot lesser in status than any other part of her body (for example, her hand), she would have been willing of course to touch the book with her hand. Her body feels to her as one, and the same. What she is conscious of is the social practice of not mistreating the higher status book. It is about the book, not the foot. The experience of the lower status foot is absent. The caste-encrypted socially hierarchised body exists as an absence.

In addition to this particular conflict between Sanjukta and Barba, there is another foot-centred moment in their relationship that is of interest here. As a mirror image to the previous conflict, this time Sanjukta's gesture is submissive and conciliatory and Barba's passive, conflicted but not conflicting. Here is Varley once again, reporting as if from the scene of a crime:

> In 1986, Sanjukta came to Holstebro with Kelucharan Mahapatra. During this
> ISTA session, I saw how Odissi dance could become like a Neapolitan popular

play when Sanjukta did not interpret it. The pupil seemed more mysterious and fascinating to me than the master. It was also the first time I saw Sankjukta bend down to kiss Eugenio's feet, as a form of respect to greet a master. Eugenio, embarrassed, tried not to submit to this ceremony. In the same way that she followed all the formalities towards her Guruji, Sanjukta was adamant.(1998: 249–273)

The socially informed bodies of both Panigrahi and Barba, with their separate tastes and distastes, compulsions and embarrassments, with all their senses are at work now. In the presence of her own Indian *guru*, Sanjukta is displaying her social sense of devotion, a sense of respect for her European *guru*. By kissing his foot, the body of the European *guru* too is now hierarchised and encrypted with Indian culture. He is now conceptually (and not empirically) a *brahmin,* and a respected teacher. Sanjukta is, through this gesture of devotion, marking and branding their embodied relationship as teacher and student. Through the practice of foot kissing, between Barba and Panigrahi there is now a shared habitat. For the moment, it is India in Europe. Despite Barba's embarrassment, there is complete sense here driven by a shared habitus.[16]

Unlike Barba, who could not escape despite what Varley describes as his embarrassment, I was able to refuse and stop Helen from touching my feet. I was conscious of not wanting to be turned into an exotic other for her (I term her gesture exotic as she wanted to accord me a status by a practice whose logic she was not aware of or not really concerned by). Even at the start of the relationship when Helen, habituated by her Butoh-led Japanese experience of calling her teacher *sensei*, asked what a traditional Indian teacher was called and if I would be happy with her calling me that, I had refused. I had insisted she call me Arjun. I wanted to stay real, as

myself. While she was not aware of the principles that drove the practice of feet touching, I certainly was. My refusal was as much about a social practice that reflected for me the inequity of the caste and social hierarchy in India as it was a need to be in control of, and to distance myself from, an exotic identity on offer in this social habitat into which Helen was, by playing her part, offering to locate me as a *guru*, a teacher worthy of his feet being touched! My refusal to be deemed exotic even as a well-respected other, compelled me to search for an alternative that was driven by principles, consciously crafted and acceptable to me.

Conclusion

In this chapter I began with an examination of European perceptions of eastern arts, including Kathakali. These perceptions have dominated and framed academic and social discourse on Kathakali and needed to be understood and negotiated by me. Examining the literature on the work of Artaud and Barba, I attempted to locate their representation of eastern arts and Kathakali within my needs of engaging with and creating a real actor training program here in Australia. Using the practice-based experience and data gained from conducting workshops in Australia, I worked to take forward in this chapter my central argument of the need for the centrality of the Kathakali *guru* or teacher's presence in any real training program of value. This presence of the body of the Kathakali teacher moves the exotic engagement towards the real and I used real conflicts between Eugenio Barba and Sanjukta Panigrahi to theorise and understand the embodied, real presence in a particularly influential European practice of the eastern other. This presence of the Indian dance *guru* then includes as an absence her caste-encrypted body. By this embodied presence and

absence, I moved this chapter from a mythologising of the other, to the potentiality of a real engagement with the other.

In the next chapter, I look at the culture of the old social, including the caste system and untouchability, that informs the learning space, both through the embodied presence of the *guru,* as well as through Kathakali texts and performativity. The specific offerings to western actor training are then Kathakali's "gestures of embodied aggression" that emerge from its particular location within the social weave and the caste system.

Chapter Four

Caste, Kathakali and its "gestures of embodied aggression"

In this chapter, four seventeenth century Kathakali texts and their performativity are contextualised within its social world and the principles and culture that drive it, the Indian caste system and untouchability. Theoretical frameworks are set up using debates in the social sciences around the values and structure of the caste system. While focussing on the role and function of the *nair* caste that first performed Kathakali in the seventeenth century, four Kathakali classics written by Kottayam Thamburan, the ruler of the princely state of Kottayam in Kerala, are referred to, with greater attention to one of them, *Kalayana Saugandhikam* or *"*The Flower of Good Fortune.*"* An understanding and interpretation of these texts was received by me from six Kathakali teachers and noted down by me in my learning diaries. Kottayyam Thampuran (c. 1645-1716) wrote and created the first four classics of Kathakali using his *kalaripayattu* trained *nair* soldiers.

The real caste equation between the ruler Kottayam Thampuran, the warrior *nair* community, and the dominating *nambudiri brahmin* caste*,* help frame an understanding of the inter-caste relations setting up an appreciation of the performing power of the *nair* performer and his performative gestures of embodied aggression towards his lower caste audience. These gestures of embodied aggression emerge from the values of domination and aggression embedded into the warrior *nair* caste that Kathakali was traditionally performed by. These gestures of embodied aggression are directed not only at other characters on stage but further onto the social space of the audience. These gestures come from the social role of the *nair* caste whose place

and purpose in the caste hierarchy, in the seventeenth century, was to dominate the lower "impure" castes, even while protecting the "pure" upper castes.

By this elaboration of the social weave are implicated into this chapter three important binding principles and values that frame the debates in the social sciences around the Indian caste system: values of purity and impurity (Dumont 1970); empirical and conceptual interrelationships (Veena Das 1977); and socioeconomic dominance (Guha 2013). Purity, and impurity are, for Dumont, the defining values of occupations that work their way up and down the social hierarchy; the higher up you go, the more pure a function you perform – for example, you conduct the prayer service in the temple. While, on the other hand, the lower you go, the more impure the function, for example, the skinning of the carcasses of dead animals to create leather.

For Das, the simplicity and clarity of Dumont's binary structure is complicated by each caste; for instance, a *brahmin* priest or *kshatriya* king are both empirical entities as well as structural categories of Hindu thought. For Das, simple binary equations of purity and impurity, when used to define inter-caste equations, prove inadequate. For her, the tripartite division between the "priest," the "king" and the "householder" and its other, the "ascetic," for example, serve as a more stable tool of enquiring into caste roles and realities. In certain existential circumstances, the purer *brahmin* priest may be lower in status than the less pure *kshatriya* king, while in others, the *brahmin* may be higher. Thus, caste equations are interchangeable for Das and emerge through the particular circumstances and existential conditions that these interrelationships occupy. No single holistic plan, as is Dumont's, frames the caste order. It is imperative then for a negotiation of caste to be both empirical as well as conceptual. As empirical conditions are very complex in the field, as this chapter will elaborate, my primary working methodology is conceptual.

For Guha, whose recent work has been appreciated by social scientists for its offer of a new paradigm, the structure of the caste system depends less on the religious cultural values of purity and impurity and more on the socioeconomic necessity of protecting clusters of villages and their economic and social activity, and this dictates the particular nature and function of a caste. A caste group shares the culture and value of dominance or protection, as the case may be. This theoretical construct works well in the context of the seventeenth century *nair* caste whose main function was to defend land and territory, i.e the King or *thampuran*.

A theoretical understanding of caste and a negotiation around these debates enriches our appreciation of seventeenth century Kathakali text and performativity framing an understanding of the *nair* caste's dominating role in the social weave, a role that generates its gestures of embodied aggression. These gestures of embodied aggression have as their socially embodied other gestures of embodied submission. These gestures of embodied aggression, emerging from a caste contextualization of Kathakali text and performativity, are a valuable tool in working with performers in Australia as evidenced through the accompanying video documentation (see Appendix B–E). This evidence is examined in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

In the context of Kathakali actor training, an understanding of these gestures of embodied aggression/submission may begin right from the ritual of feet touching that initiates each learning session. The learner submits to the embodied presence of the teacher by bending low and touching his/her feet. While in most circles of a shared culture, as between a similar caste, family or community, this ritual is conducted obediently, its abstract meaning and inherent embodied aggression/submission, is revealed in conflict and resistance. The moment of touch may then be seen as potentially the bridging moment between a gesture of embodied aggression, the

teacher's embodied presence demanding respect, and an expected acquiescence by the learner facilitating an inclusion. That the *guru* allows the learner to touch his body, and that too the lowest part, is significant. Gabriele (2008) connects the act of touch within the wider culture of untouchability:

> The abolition of 'untouchability' as a political and social practice has not yet changed completely the individual perception of touch, which is strongly linked to the concept of pollution. Avoidance of contact and touch with persons or objects classified as impure is a prominent feature of Indian society and is intrinsically linked with core values, such as status, purity and power. Public demonstrations of "intimate" touch, such as kissing, are unacceptable and, if displayed, lead to a storm of indignation, as the emotions excited by the Richard Gere/Shilpa Shetty (*an actress Gere kissed publicly*) case illustrates. Given the importance attributed to rules of the avoidance of touch, the question arises, what about touch? When is touch practised? What is considered touch and what constitutes it? And what does it mean, as both a personal experience and a public symbol? Is touch just the absence of "untouchability"? And if so, does it then signify status equality? Or is touch coded and structured like the rules of "untouchability"? (524–525, my italics)

Aware of the complexity of touch as described in the quote above this thesis seeks to provoke a renegotiation of this traditional practice of feet touching in the context of teaching Kathakali to contemporary performers in Australia.

While touching of the *guru's* feet may be seen as an embodied gesture of respect, contextualised within the Indian caste system, this practice is complicated. As Veena Das observes:

In the famous Purusa Sukta, which describes the origin of the four varnas, the body is divided horizontally and hierarchically, with the Brahmans emerging from the head, the Kshatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from the thighs and the Shudras from the feet of the primeval man. This hierarchical division of the body serves as a suitable metaphor for the hierarchical division of society into four *varnas* (1977:126).

Within this specific conceptual construct, when a learner bends to touch the teacher's feet, she is paying obeisance to this social order, accepting her place alongside what is conceptually the space of the *shudra*, within a shared culture of untouchability. The teacher is now the head of the embodied encryption or conceptually a *brahmin.* If the teacher were to disallow his feet being touched through a message of no touch, the learner would be excluded from the learning space. The excluded learner would then exist outside the social space as an outcaste/ conceptually an untouchable. A model of such a social space could be framed in phenomenological terms as touch-no touch-untouchable.

This construct touch-no touch-untouchable may be used to examine the social inclusion or exclusion of characters in Kathakali dance dramas. In her essay entitled "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Kathakali's Females and the Men who play them," Marlene B. Pitkow structures the female character in Kathakali according to varying degrees of inclusion within the social order. The Good is the honorable married woman at the centre of the social order. The Bad is the outcaste woman who is still allowed in, or finds her way into the social circle. The Ugly is the outcaste and untouchable woman, who may only appear as an uncontrolled monstress/demoness (2011:223–243). The good woman then is the very touchable woman. The bad is the

one not to be touched but allowed into the social space. The ugly is the untouchable one to be violated for any attempts at entering the social space.

This construct of touch-no touch-untouchable may also be used to structure characters from the plays by Kottayam Thamburan. In the seventeenth-century Kathakali drama *Kirmira Vadham,* available in English through a translation by Zarrilli(2000a:118–130), the story adapted from the *Mahabharata*, has the *pandavas* exiled into the forest with a thousand *brahmins* following them as an entourage. These *brahmins* need to be fed by Draupadi, a problem she resolves by praying to the god Krishna. In a subplot, Draupadi is enticed to travel deeper into the forest by a demoness *simhika* dressed up as a beautiful woman *lalitha.* Her plan is to abduct Draupadi and eat her up. In this story, the "Good," is the touchable *minnuku* character type like Draupadi, the Pandava wife. Her central dilemma is to feed a thousand hungry *brahmins*. A very touchable task, as the pure *brahmins* are happy to eat food touched by her hands. The "Bad," *lalita* character is the (no touch) not to be touched female demon *simhika* in disguise as a beautiful maiden. Draupadi makes the almost fatal error of befriending her, touching her. She is abducted by the demoness who wants to kill/eat her. The demoness now reveals her true form as the untouchable, "Ugly," *kari* character type, a grotesque and vile creature who is punished by Draupadi's husband Bhīma, for transgressing, for touching and abducting Draupadi. Her nose and breasts are cut off. She leaves the stage screaming in pain.

In another of the four golden classics titled "The Flower of Good Fortune" while seeking permission from his brother Yudhishthira to fight the enemy, a raging Bhīma begins by first touching his brother's feet, recognising and paying obeisance to his place in the hierarchical order. Through the scene, even as Bhīma rages, seeking revenge and threatening his enemy with gestures of embodied aggression,

Yudhishthira, a *kshatriya* like Bhīma, plays the role of calm wise *brahmin*. In the next scene, when a violated and molested Draupadi, with her hair left untouched, untied and open asks her husband to go bring her *saugandhika* flowers, she is in the no touch space, she does not touch him nor let herself be touched, the husband and wife do not hold hands or display any affection. Only when Bhīma is leaving for the forest do they formally embrace, barely touching each other, with the elaborate costume and makeup facilitating the delicacy of the liminal touch-no touch space. Later in the play when Hanuman, the monkey god, lies down and blocks Bhīma's path, Bhīma, by refusing to touch him, to hold his tail and remove him from the path, by expressing contempt for his lowly status, treats him in a way that conceptually may be understood as treating an untouchable.

. By these examples of touch-no touch-untouchable I initiate an inquiry into discovering caste-related codes of behaviour within Kathakali text and performativity.(

Background

As argued in the previous chapter, the key scholarship in English on Kathakali does not engage with the complexity of caste, either in the form itself or in the lived experience of it. Iyer (1955);Pandaya (1961);Jones and True (1970); Zarrilli (1984, 1992, 2000a,2000b, 2004, 2009, 2013); Schechner (1988); Barba (1995); and Pitkow (1998) neglect the complexity of caste in Kathakali, i.e., the lived experience of it. While Zarrilli in fair detail describes the role of the *nair* or *kshatriya* caste as well as more generally the social order, and while Pitkow attends to the feminine representation, including lower caste female and demonic characters, the lived experience and interrelation of one caste vis-à-vis another is little remarked upon,

probably because this study of inter-caste relationship may be perceived as contentious, and is difficult to negotiate for someone who has not experienced caste as part of their lived experience.

In his article titled "Contested Narratives on and off the *Kathakali* Dance-Drama stage", Zarrilli recognises, in the context of Kerala's leftist government policy makers and their attempts at critiquing and transforming the traditional temple-based arts with the aim of facilitating an ideologically sound contemporary reinvention, "the potential enmity of those whose personal caste-specific identity is invested in the powerful, highly public symbols of caste-specific performance traditions like *teyyam* or *kathakali*"(1992:111). Zarrilli is correct in his observation. In Kerala, each individual ritual, folk, classical art form belonged to a particular group, community or caste whose identity was and continues to be deeply connected to it. Any critique of the art form or reinvention needs to traverse the difficult edge of negotiating that sense of deep-rooted caste or community-based ownership. The difficulty is heightened when that community is the researcher's host.

Additionally, caste-related fieldwork in India for an Indian researcher is a problematic business too, due to conflicting caste identities. I, for example, am an upper-caste Kashmiri *brahmin* and any overt display of this fact may have consequences. Travelling in a metro in Gurgaon, India recently (Jan 2016), I realised a complete obliteration of caste identity. No one cared or knew who sat down next to whom. Overtly asking after someone's caste identity, in principle, is not acceptable in today's urban India. Yet, its politics and social life, especially in rural India, is driven in large measure by caste, making it a significant context for the understanding of a practice like Kathakali.

Sumit Guha, in his recent work *Beyond Caste Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (2013), argues convincingly that an understanding of caste is best served by engaging with ideas of power and domination. For Guha, a status-ranked ethnic community or caste became in South Asia "a highly involuted, politicized form of ethnic ranking shaped by the constant exercise of socio-economic power" (Guha 2013:2). A caste then is defined by its place in the order of dominance and the culture and values shared within the group.

For French social anthropologist Louis Dumont, in his seminal if much critiqued work entitled[17] *Homo Hierarchus* (1970), caste is best understood through a religio-cultural model based on a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and impure. In *Homo Hierarchus*, Dumont works to integrate into a single idea three founding principles of the caste order: 1) hierarchy, 2) separation, and 3) a division of labour.

> These three "principles," rest on one fundamental conception and are reducible to a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and impure. This opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and the impure must be kept separate, and underlies the division of labor because pure and impure occupations must likewise be kept separate. *The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical co-existence of the two opposites.* (1970:43)

Both Guha's socioeconomic power domination on the one hand and Dumont's

hierarchically[18] ordered religio-cultural values of pure/impure on the other, serve well

as frames of reference in my present endeavour.

The difficulty of any holistic attempt at a caste contextualisation of Kathakali

text and performativity, however, lies in the absence of two out of the four castes

from the four dramas mentioned. The stories of demons and kings and queens include

brahmins or priests and *kshatriyas* or warriors, but they neglect the *vaisyas* or

merchants and the *shudras* or labourers/untouchables. Yet, these unrepresented castes

were there at the periphery of the audience space, the inclusivity of Kathakali,

towards all castes, is argued for by Sadanam Balakrishan (2005:95).[19] By working

conceptually rather than empirically, I negotiate the *vaisyas* and *shudra*s

absence/presence once again in phenomenological terms. The onstage presence of the

nairs I call "being there". The audiences I place as "being there/not being there"

(actually present centrally and peripherally, but fictively and performatively absent as

with *vaisyas*). The "highly polluting" untouchable castes I frame as "not there." The

complications of the under-researched caste composition of the traditional

seventeenth-century audience may then be framed in phenomenological terms as

"there-being there, not being there-not there". This convoluted phenomenological

construct acknowledges the ambiguity and complexity of the onstage/audience

[18] In the context of the performing arts in Kerala, the top of Dumont's hierarchy has *kutiyattam* performed by a caste of *brahmin* temple servants or *chakyars*, the lowest rung of "untouchables" have their form of deity possession *theyyam*, and the interstitial space is occupied by the *nair* community performing Kathakali.
[19] "During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, landlords considered it a matter of pride to organize and conduct performances in their courtyards. For a Kathakali performance during such occasions, invitations were not necessary. Keli, the percussion announcement on the evening of the performance, would draw the community to the site of the drama to be enacted later that night. There was, and still is, no restriction or bar on who could attend a Kathakali play. The inclusiveness is one of the principal strengths of this art form, and it has contributed to its survival and popularity. Kathakali is a theatre for everyone – for the young and old, for lower and higher castes, and for communities of all persuasions"(Balakrishnan 2005:95).

composition, though there is a sense, acknowledged by Zarrilli, that for a Kathakali performance "more if not all were present." (2000a:6).

Working through Macquarrie and Edward's (1973) translation of *Being and Time* , Heidegger's concept of "Being" is particularly useful here. As a performer and a Kashmiri *brahmin* writing of my lived experience of both Kathakali practice and the Indian caste system, an exploration into the essence or being of the Kathakali performer is needed for, as Heidegger's philosophy has alerted us, "We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed. The Being of any such entity is in each case mine" (Macquarrie and Robinson 1973(trans): 67). I seek the meaning of my own embodied practice within the performativity of Kathakali on the stage. I interpret Heidegger's Being as the individual essence of the Kathakali practitioner (myself).[20]

The value of engaging my caste-embodied being with this scholarly exercise may best be understood by an example of a personal experience, my own reaction/anger towards one of my Kathakali teachers when he physically hit me. My rage at being hit with the rhythm stick at the age of 30, on reflection 22 years later as I write this, was a *brahmin's* rage. Even after being hit, I continued dancing. I stamped my feet violently, danced and gestured angrily in what I can only define to western readers as a crazed Rumpelstiltskin-like fashion. On reflection, now years later, I recognise my gestural display as similar to the performative expression of a *brahmin's* curse. In Kathakali's source literature, the epic *The Mahabharata*, while *kshatriyas* rage to kill, *brahmin's* curse. While the biophysical texture of rage is unequivocally similar across human bodies/castes, its performed expression across culture differs. *Brahmin* characters on stage rage differently to *kshatriyas* because the end product of rage is different. *Brahmins* curse, *kshatriyas* kill. Even formally, text-based

kudiyiattam is performed by upper-caste temple servants, with the actor

reciting/chanting text*,* and represents a theatrical space of the *brahmin's* curse. A

curse is a set of words/text spoken harshly. Kathakali's embodied dance, physicality

and aggression, further enhanced by a silent non-speaking warrior performer, reflect

the *kshatriya* function to kill. This sequence further begs the question of the absent

dalit or untouchable's rage. Though outside the scope of the present enquiry, it is

relevant to note here that states of deity possession in *theyyam* reflect the repressed

emotional anger/pain of the untouchable. By these outsights, I suggest the value of

using my caste-encrypted social being and identity as a tool of enquiry and knowledge

gathering.

To make specific the embodied culture of caste, Heidegger's ideas on touch are

particularly useful and relevant. He observes: "When entities are 'worldless' in

themselves, they can never 'touch' each other, nor can either of them be alongside

each other" (Macquarrie and Robinson(trans) 1973:81). Touching establishes the

existence of a shared destiny, being in a common world. To be alongside each other,

Heidegger frames the individual's existence as 'being-in-the world' with the 'being-

in' having 'the-world' alongside it. The two entities then may touch each other as they

are alongside each other and are "encounterable" (Macquarrie and Robinson 1973

(trans):81). This encounter happens in a shared world. The act of touching establishes

the existence of a shared destiny, with the entities touching and touched encountering

themselves within that world and by that act of touch. Within this framework, in such

a shared world, the culture of untouchability includes an interrelationship defined by a

culture of touch-no touch-untouchable. This interrelationship is between the one, with

the power to touch, and the other, with no power to touch. The culture of

untouchability then is, by the act of dictating the rights over the encounter, the establishing of an ownership of a shared world.

At this stage of the enfolding argument I revisit ideas presented in the previous chapter that would explain the difficulty of negotiating issues and practices of untouchability. I refer again to Leder's ideas of 'absence' and Bourdieu's 'habitus', theorized in the previous chapter. As the caste encrypted body exists as an absence, with the head conceptually deemed as *brahmin,* and the foot *shudra*, the abstracted meanings of cultural practices like those of feet touching, that emerge from this encryption, remain absent from consciousness. As these practices leading you to an inclusion into the power structures of the social space, as 'habitus', they work unconsciously complicating an investigation into their social meaning.

As discussed earlier, the culture of untouchability includes an interrelationship of touch-no touch-untouchable. In the upper-lower caste-untouchable power/domination equation, this interrelationship is between the one with the power to touch, and the other, with no power to touch. The former, as the teacher does in the learning space, establishes an ownership of the shared world. Also helpful here is Veena Das' insightful analysis of Sanskrit texts, which contributes to a deeper understanding of caste-related interrelationships in the context of Kathakali texts and performativity. In it, she includes the tripartite interrelationship of the priest (*brahmin)*-king (*kshatriya*) and the social householder/asocial ascetic (*sanayasi)* (Das 1977:7). The demons in Kathakali dramas may be seen as the forest other of the ascetic or *sanyasi.* Conceptually, as structures of Hindu thought, these categories represent all significant characters and relationships in the four classics of Kathakali.

Finally, it should be noted that a localised form of the caste system known as *jati* exists in Kerala(Sadasivan 2000; Ghurye 1969). It is to a local variant of the *jati*

system that the King of Kottayam, Kottayyam Thamburan, the writer and choreographer of the first four classics of Kathakali, belonged. As a monarch, was Kottayam Thamburan higher in status than all other *jatis*? In her extensive coverage of the caste composition of Kerala society, Kathleen Gough details the caste status and compositions of the higher *jatis*, the *nambudiris* and the *nair* (also spelt *nayars*). The former were equivalent to the *brahmins* of the *varna* system, ranked "ritually above the Kings and were to some extent above and outside the political systems of the Kingdoms" (Gough and Schneider 1961: 306). Dumont notes hegemonic *brahmin* empowerment in south India as well: "Thus in the south there are scarcely any castes intermediate between Brahman and Shudras; the warrior castes themselves are considered as part of the Shudras" (1970:73). *Shudra*, as the feet of the caste body, represents the labouring body as always lower in power and status.

By this conception in South India, even royalty, below the *nambudiri* in power and status, was deemed *shudra*. The *nairs* too, as the *kshatriya* component in this lower class, have further hierarchical divisions of sub-groups. Gough records five discrete *jati*s within the higher *nairs* (spelt by her as *nayars*) each with their discrete purpose. These included in decreasing order of status and power "Kiriattil Nayars, Vellayma Nayars, Purattu Nayar, Agattu Nayars, Pallichan Nayars and Sudra Nayars" (Gough and Schneider 1961: 308-309). Below these, as Gough and Schneider document, were the *nair* temple servants with "degrading" occupations: "*Chidigans* – funeral priests, *Veluttedans* – washermen of the castes above them and *Vilakkataravans* – barbers of all the castes above them" (311). Therefore, even if Kathakali was performed and seen by only one community of *nairs*, the reality of lower groups both within and without the *nairs* was present in the Kathakali audience. The conceptual idea and existential identity of being lower in caste ran all the way

through the caste hierarchy, starting from the lowest untouchable and moving right up to the highest *nambudiri Brahmin,* i.e., except for the highest *brahmin* everyone one else was lower in caste to someone else.

Within this hierarchised social structure, caste identity and social belonging restricted social mobility. Roles assigned to each individual being within the caste system worked not only to define their social existence but also to effectively restrict the existential potential for their self-realisation – not in a spiritual sense of the ascetic but in social role. The carpenter's son had no option but to be a carpenter and the night soil carrier's child would be a night soil carrier. In the seventeenth century, such social conditions (see Gough and Schneider 1961: 298–415) were unequivocally the site of Kathakali performativity.

In such a caste-inscribed social world, Kottayyam Thampuran used his soldiers and controllers of the area belonging to the *nair* caste to be the first Kathakali dancers, and the movement vocabulary of the dance was based on martial training. Lower sub castes were present even in the limited audience of only one community. In a Kathakali performance in the seventeenth century, when a lower caste first saw an actor on stage he would have recognised both the Kathakali performer as the character he was presenting but also as the *nair* warrior he was by caste. These warriors were trained in gymnasiums or *kalaris* through the martial art form *kalaripayattu*. As Zarrilli observes:

> Kathakali's vigorous choreography, its tremendously powerful and masculine leaps and jumps, and perhaps even its stylized battle choreography were all drawn from the actor's physical abilities developed in the rigorous martial training programme, as well as directly from movement patterns and models taken from the martial system (1984:54).

The form and structure of the embodied dance on the Kathakali stage is a ritualisation of an attack or retreat response. When I studied with him in the 1990s, Sadanam Balakrishnan would insist on this rigorous back and forth movement of the choreography, which often gets diluted in performance due to the heavy weight of the costume. On stage, performers take two steps back, and two forward, instead of four steps each way. This reduction dilutes the attack and retreat martial element of the form.

As Evoor Rajendran Pillai, Principal of the International Centre for Kathakali in New Delhi observed in an interview:

> The Kathakali dancer is never still. He is always moving. This movement is essentially either downstage, towards the audience or it is returning upstage. All the aggressive gestures are directed downstage while all the gentler gestures are performed upstage (Pillai 2016).

His principal dancers, Kalanilayam Jagadeeshan Thiruvatta and Kalamadalam Anil Kumar, concurred that the back-and-forth movement may be perceived as *yuddham-shantam* (war and peace), and this was the overarching theme under which all Kathakali scenes/choreography might also be placed. Kathakali gestures are spatially located and performed along a vertical upstage/downstage axis. Gestures/*mudras* that are about relief, rest, and wellbeing (i.e., house, king, gods, flowers, joy) are all performed with a leap back, moving upstage away from the audience. Gestures that evoke aggression (i.e., enemy, destroy, cruel) are performed moving forward with an embodied aggression directed downstage towards the audience (Zarrilli 1984:131-132; Balakrishnan 2005:138).

This choreography helps the performer embody the constant tension and release, or what I term attack and retreat, serving the alternating thematic impulses of war and peace. These playful ritualised actions of the Kathakali performer are gestures of embodied aggression directed towards both other characters on stage as well as the audience. It is to be remembered that each gesture of embodied aggression was played out to a specific rhythm or *taalam,* setting up within this project a challenging level of skill and ability for the western performer.

A Case Study: *The Flower of Good Fortune*

To offer a specific example of these social gestures of embodied aggression, I analyse choreography from "The Flower of Good Fortune".

Peter as Bhīma displaying a gesture of embodied aggression. (Photo courtesy Karan Bajaj). The choreography of this particular set piece, almost unchanged, and from the seventeenth century classic Kalyana Saugandhikam is traditionally used for actor training, and is the most challenging piece for a student actor and the

culmination of his training. In Scene 1, Bhīma the great warrior is asking permission

from his brother, King Yudhishthira, to take revenge on his enemy Dussassana, whose

chest he has sworn to tear open, and whose blood he has sworn to drink. Here, Bhīma

is in the attack mode (standing) while Yudhishthira is in the retreat mode (sitting).

Emotionally too Bhīma is in a rage while Yudhishthira is calm. Bhīma is the

Kshatriya warrior, while Yudhishtira is taking on the virtues of a wise man,

conceptually a *brahmin*. At the start of this scene, a *shloka* or narrative song

introduces the episode and then, as the hand-held curtain is lowered, it reveals Bhīma

doing a short aggressive pose, while twice standing menacingly on one leg, first at the

upstage end away from the audience and, second, at the downstage end near the

audience. Having established these points of reference, the dialogue begins and the

back-and-forth attack or retreat action continues till the end, when Bhīma sits at the

downstage point and demonstrates how he will, with his bare hands, tear open his

enemy Dussassana's chest and drink his blood.

Significantly, in this version of the story Bhīma does not actually kill his caste

cousin Dussassana, he only threatens to do so with a gestural display of aggression.[21]

The actual killing is performed in another popular Kathakali drama *Duryodhana*

Vadham (Death of Duryodhana) by Vayaskara Aryan Narayanan Moosad (1841-

1902), where Duryodhana is killed by Bhīma on the great battlefield of Kurukshetra.

As Jeffery (1976) observes, the mid-nineteenth century was a time that coincided with

the fading of both the *nair* caste and Kathakali. During this period, the colonial state

and its policies beleaguered and depleted the power of the landed and dominant *nair*

---

[21] This is an important distinction between a gestural display of aggression and an actual killing which is reserved for demonic characters. In all the four plays, the *nair/kshatriya* warriors kill no one from within the caste system – no Brahmin and no lower caste. The only ones to be killed are the caste other – the demons. The rest are to be subdued, threatened, protected or punished through gestures of embodied aggression.

caste through a series of land reforms that dwindled their traditional hold over land,

encouraging and empowering the lower castes through missionary-led education. A

growing capitalist economy where money and industry prevailed over older forms of

feudal linkages and hegemony further alienated the *nair* hold over the populace.

Perhaps in that era a more literal display of *nair* dominance (i.e. actual killing) was

felt necessary, even if the evil doer at the receiving end of *nair* justice was also a

kshatriya/nair.

Setting up the *nair* warrior's dominant role in the social weave, Kottayam

Thampuran's four plays, written in the seventeenth century, avoided the actual battles

of the Great War or *Mahabharata*, and suggest the king's intention to celebrate the

nair warrior's craft while avoiding showing the killing of caste brothers. For the *nair*

community, that period of dominance was a secure one, with lesser confusions and

contradictions. Through the logic of his choices and through the celebration of the

nair caste, the royal can be perceived as subverting a traditional hierarchy that had the

nambudiri or *brahmin* lording over both the *nair* and the king. However, despite his

not showing the actual killing, even Bhīma's gestural demonstration is a ferocious

display of his righteous strength as a provider of justice, showing how he will tear

open Dussassana's chest with his bare hands and take cannibalistic delight in drinking

his blood. This ferocious act of touchability threatens to punish Dussassana for

molesting Bhima's wife Draupadi.

It is not hard then to imagine how Kathakali's aggressive enactments work to

dominate the individual viewer, especially those whose caste is below the *nair*

warrior/performer. By this, Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression validate

Guha's hypothesis suggesting social domination as the core shared value binding a

caste group together. For the *brahmin* caste, for example, these gestures of

domination take on the form of a *brahmin's* curse that damns the all-important *atma* or soul, while for the warrior *kshatriya* or *nair* caste, they translate into gestures of physical threat and violence. Kathakali then embodies and celebrates these social gestures of embodied dominance by the *nair* community and creates out of them a flamboyant dance theatre. This particular role in the social weave gives to the Kathakali performer his open, bold and celebratory gestures that are of value in training actors grown in a more inward, introverted and experimental aesthetic, a point taken up further in Chapter Eight and evidenced through the video documentation. To appreciate this particular texture, it is necessary to delve a little deeper both into its *nair* caste character as well as into its alternative vision of dominance, alternate to the *nambudiri* or *brahmin*. This alternate vision is explored through an interpretation of the four classics of Kathakali and the textual choices made by their inventor Kottayam Thampuran.

Namboodiri dominance of the social weave

In the seventeenth century, *nairs* existed within the hegemonic control of the *nambudiri* landlords who held power over the social order including the religio-temple structures where performances were held. "The greater landlords were managers of large temples, promulgators of religious law, legal advisers of Kings, priests of public sacrifices, or philosophers and Vedic scholars" (Gough and Schneider 1961:306). All the genres that fed into Kathakali were controlled by the temple system. This includes *kutiyattam* performed in temples by *chakyars* or higher-caste temple servants, *krishnaattam*, a religious art about the god Krishna performed only in the Guruvayur Temple, *theyyam*, a form of deity possession, performed in the temples of, and by the lower untouchable castes, and the immediate precursor to

Kathakali, *ramanattam*, telling the stories of the Hindu god Rama (Zarrilli 1984: 39-45). Kathakali stepped away from the temple system by being performed in courtyards of rich landlords and village squares (Balakrishnan 2005:95;Zarrilli 2000a:6). Its stories were taken primarily from the *Mahabharata*, which is a more temporal, literary and less god-centric story of a battle between two sets of *kshatriya* cousins. Kottayam Thampuran's four stories, inspired by the *Mahabharata*, have the Pandava brothers as their heroes and the gods playing only a minor role. This elevation of the human helped move the discrete caste identity of the *nairs* away from the religio-temple structures and *brahmin* hegemony.[22]

The first four Kathakali stories present the *nair* warrior in all his power and glory and resist the religio-*brahmin* overlordship which was imprinted on *nair* identity through hypergamous relationships and liaisons. While the eldest son of a *nambudiri* patrilineal extended family had to marry within his caste, preserving land and lineage, the younger *nambudiri* sons were allowed liaisons with *nair* women.

> These hypergamous unions were regarded by Brahmins as socially acceptable concubinage, for the union was not initiated with Vedic rites, the children were not recognised as Brahmins, and neither the woman nor the child was accorded the right of kin (Gough and Schneider 1961:320).

However, for the matrilineal *nairs*, these relationships were regarded as marriage: "They fulfilled the conditions of ordinary Nayar marriage and served to legitimize the children as an acceptable member of his matrilineal lineage and caste" (320).

---

[22] Quoting a Nayar leader Mannutha Padmanabhan, social historian S.N. Sadasivan observes "Even the all powerful-supreme lord, the sovereign is made to agree that he is untouchable to the Brahmin…and had to keep a distance of two to three feet from the latter. The prime responsibility of a monarch installed by the Brahmin is the maintenance of the caste system and untouchability" (2000:380).

Kottayam Thampuran's choice of stories from the *Mahabharata* reflects a certain shifting ground of this *nair nambudiri* relationship. Kottayam Thampuran as a king was not considered a *nair* and, thus, existed in a liminal place, in between the *nambudiri* and the *nair*. His four stories here are interpreted from notes made during my decades long engagement while learning from Kathakali masters like Sadanam Balakrishnan, Kudamanoor Kalamandalam Nair, and Kalamandalam Krishna Kumar and through my recent engagement with Evoor Rajendran Pillai. These teachers were all *nairs*, including both higher and lower sub caste *nairs*.

As a Kashmiri *brahmin*, I was equivalent in status in the *varna* system to the *nambudiris* but, as a student, way down the pecking order. In the 1990s, these caste equations did not play out explicitly. However, implicitly, I, from time to time, I was accorded privileges that came not only from my urban, westernised otherness, but also from my caste status. These were teachers of a traditional form living traditional lives. One teacher, for example, walked in public spaces with his wife keeping seven paces behind him. For me, a historic moment of my personal journey in unpacking my caste consciousness came during *urizhcil* as my oiled body lay on the ground and was massaged by a teacher's foot. To allow one's adult body to lie vulnerable on the ground and be massaged by another man's (my teacher's) foot is, in itself, a difficult and fearful business. Add to this, the hidden emotions of caste identity and conflict. These prejudices and fears run deep and need a separate essay, but, for the moment, my lived experience is shared, to reflect on the *nambudiri nair* interrelationship in Kottayyam Thampuran's plays.

The four plays are all set in the liminal, asocial space of the forest rather than when the Pandavas were peacefully living in the palace or during the great war when the two sets of cousins were bent on killing each other. Instead, the Pandavas heroes

are either escaping from the Kauravas or banished to live like ascetics or s*anyasis*. This liminal space helps Kottayam Thampuran renegotiate the interrelationships between *nairs* and *nambudiris* with the *nambudiri brahmins* playing a subordinate role to the *kshatriya nairs* and the dramas all culminate in the liminal act, the death of the social antagonist the demon(s), almost as a sacrificial dead body to the holy flame of performance. Zarrilli's Kathakali Dance Drama (2000a) is subtitled *Where Gods and Demons Come to Play* but might be more apt as "Where Demons come to Die"!

David Bolland's *A Guide to Kathakali* (1980) gives the details on these deaths, which are summarised here: (1) In Kalyana Saugandhikam (Flower of Good Fortune), perhaps the least bloody of all plays, Bhīma kills Krodhavasa, who guards the lake of the Saugandhika flowers (33–34); (2) In Baka Vadha (Death of Baka), Bhīma kills two demons – his wife's brother, Hidamba, and then Baka (22–24); (3) In Kirmira Vadha (Death of Kirmira) Arjuna kills the demon Sardula and Bhīma kills the demon King Kirmira after a fierce fight (27–28); (4) In Kalakeya Vadha (Death of Kalekeya), Arjuna fights and kills the *asuras* (demons) Vajraketu and Vajrabahu and later kills two more *asuras,* Nivatakavacha (who lives under the sea) and Kalakeya (who has been attacking *devaloka* [heaven]) (31–32).

Within the liminal existence of the *pandavas* in the forest, these demons may be understood as enemy tribal chiefs, the dangerous other of peaceful meditating ascetics, like Hanuman in "The Flower of Good Fortune." In establishing the threat to the socioeconomic interests of the settled caste world from the outside, the relationship between the caste world and the tribal world is very precisely delineated by Guha in describing what he terms as the "the persistent tribes" (2013:56–64). As Guha points out, while the settled agrarian caste order evolved out of tribal existence, tribes not only pre-dated the settled agrarian world, but also continued to respond to it,

negotiating, and existing for the caste Hindu social order as an external enemy. The social space of the caste order needed constant protection from tribal identification and territorial threat.

In Kathakali dramas, this theme of the killing of the demonic anti-social/tribal enemy celebrates the power of the *nair* warrior and is a common motif right across the repertoire of thirty-six plays whose stories and list of characters are available in a collection by David Bolland (1980). Nine of these plays include killing/death (*vadha*) in the title and in a number of others the words for war (*yudha)* or victory (*vijaya)*. Of such playful killings, Schechner's observation is relevant:

> This kind of playing at killing emphasizes individual or small group action and teamwork. It is scripted behavior. In time, playing/hunting may generate the symbolic activities of ritual and drama. This transformation may be a function of what Lorenz calls "displacement activity": when two conflicting impulses prevent each other from being activated a third action results. In animals, displacement activity is often ritualised behavior. In humans, the conflicting impulses may be the wish to hunt people versus love bonds for members of one's own species, culture or kin group. The displacement activity is a ritual or drama in which humans kill humans – but only "in play" (1988:108–109).

What then are the two conflicting impulses that are displaced creating the playful Kathakali dancing warrior? Kathakali developed in the seventeenth century during a time of relative peace, which allowed the king to redirect the warring energies of his *nair* soldiers internally, towards policing his own people. With Kathakali came the contradictory tasks of both controlling and entertaining them. The *nair* warrior performers subdue and yet enchant via the image of the dancing warrior who playfully threatens and entertains. The warrior's training in acts of embodied

aggression are translated into theatrical gestures on the Kathakali stage. His real ability to threaten, punish, and kill are woven into the thematic, choreographic, and performance structures of Kottayam Thampuran's four plays. This indeed is now a flamboyant celebration of *nair* caste domination.

In these four plays by Kottayam Thamburan, the central characters are the epic heroes of the *Mahabharata*: Bhīma in *Baka Vadha* and *Kalyana Saugandhika*, Yudhishthira/Dharmaputra in *Kirmira Vadha* and Arjuna in *Kalakeya Vadha*. These four stories minimise religious structures and the role of the gods and enhance the role of the *nair* warrior.

The first drama, *Baka Vadha*, has the five Pandava brothers, *kshatriya* warriors like the *nairs*, protecting a *brahmin* family from a monster Baka whom Bhīma kills. Even in the liminal space of the forest, interrelationships are important: Bhīma kills another asocial demon, Hidimba, but marries his sister, the demoness Hidimbi. Bhīma here is a warrior and a king, killing off the enemy while expanding territory through marrying the enemy's sister.

The second play, *Kirmira Vadha,* has a thousand *brahmins* waiting to be fed, with Draupadi, the Pandava consort, left with no food in her cooking vessel. She prays directly to Krishna, needing no *brahmin* intermediary or any Vedic ritual. Krishna appears before Draupadi and solves her problem. Separate from this episode is the killing of demon Kirimira, a cousin of Baka in the previous story.

In the third story, *Kalakeya Vadha*, Arjuna goes to heaven to meet his father Indra, and by this demonstrates a direct link between the *kshatriyas* and the gods. No intermediary *brahmins* are needed to get to heaven. He then serves his father by killing four demons – Vajraketu, Vajrabahu, Nivatakavach, and Kalakeya.

The fourth story, *Kalyana Saugandhikam*, is the only one of the four plays not titled after the killing of a demon. In this story, the hero is Hanuman, a monkey who is also a half-brother of Bhīma, as both are born of Vayu, the god of wind. When Bhīma confronts Hanuman, a devotee of Rama, Hanuman does not initially have a divine form/status. Bhīma calls upon Hanuman to reveal this divine form and then, as Hanuman obliges, the *kshatriya*/*nair* Bhīma is linked directly to Hanuman's divine form. By these thematic choices, the *nairs* in at least three of the four plays have a direct access to god (Krishna in *Kirmira Vadha*, Indra in *Kalkeya Vadha,* and Hanuman, son of Vayu, in *Kalyana Saugandhikam*). The *brahmins* are there to be protected and fed, but have no agency and exercise no ritual power in the plays. Thematically, these stories are moving away from the religio-temple hegemony of the *brahmin nambudiris*. In Kottayyam Thampuran's dramas, it is the *nair* dancing warrior who is at the centre of his universe. This includes that inherent ability to threaten and frighten. To maintain social order, this power also needs to be reined in, as it is done in "The Flower of Good Fortune," with the ascetic Hanuman teaching Bhīma a lesson of humility.

The episode of Bhima's humiliation by Hanuman may be conceptually perceived as highlighting the untouchable view of the caste order as critiqued through the ascetic or *sanyasi.* Once again I reiterate that this section is being explored conceptually, working with structural categories of Hindu thought, and not empirically. Hanuman here is conceptually an ascetic, living in the forest. His meditation is violated by Bhīma in search of flowers for Draupadi. To teach Bhīma a lesson, Hanuman the ascetic transforms himself into an old and dying monkey and lies down in the path of the aggressive Bhīma. He lies down on the left side of the stage denoting his lower status. By this, Hanuman, it may be argued, takes on the

untouchable's place, and point-of-view, in the caste order. The ascetic is transformed into an old monkey that may be perceived materially as a dying carcass, and Bhīma must consequently become a remover of the near dead. The impurity associated with removal of dead animals pollutes a caste permanently, making them untouchable. By touching the dead animal, they are deemed permanently polluted. Bhīma therefore refuses to touch the impure monkey and instead tries to lift Hanuman's tail by using his club. In failing to lift Hanuman's tail, Bhīma is humbled and controlled. On Bhīma's request, the ascetic Hanuman, having critiqued Bhīma's caste arrogance, reveals his divine self. After this lesson in humility from Hanuman, Bhīma kills Krodhavas, the monster guarding the grove of flowers. In the context of the real world, the *nair* warrior Bhīma, having been controlled by the divine Hanuman, returns to exercising his rights and responsibilities as accorded to him by his king to whom the *nair* owed loyalty unto death. The *nair* warrior works to keep the social weave in order**.**

Untouchability and the caste-based social weave

In documenting Kerala's caste hierarchies, Zarrilli notes a tripartite division of non-polluting high castes, higher polluting castes and lower polluting castes (Zarrilli 2000a:21). Within the "touchable life" of the higher castes, the higher polluting lower castes are allowed into the no touch space of the village while the lower polluting castes are kept out. Gough and Schneider (1961) offer a specific detailing of the caste structure as well as the laws of untouchability and pollution. From their research (312–313), one can conclude the absence from Kathakali audiences of at least those highly polluting castes like the *pulyas* and *parayas* that lived outside of the village

and had strict taboos: "As highly polluting castes, Pulyas and Parayas were theoretically forbidden to approach the high castes within a distance of sixty-four feet. They might not enter the 'good' area of the village or walk on the main paths" (313). Similarly, Robin Jeffrey's research uncovers the following order:

> …a Nair can approach but not touch a Namboodiri Brahmin: a Chovan [Ezhava] must remain thirty-six paces off, and a Pulayan slave ninety-six steps distant. A Chovan must remain twelve steps away from a Nair, and a Pulayan sixty-six steps off, and a Parayan some distance farther still. Pulayans and Parayars, who are the lowest of all, can approach but not touch, much less may they eat with each other. (1976:9–10)

Thus, set out above, and increasingly over the centuries, this was the texture of the social body watching a Kathakali performance as it was performed in a temple, at a landlord's home, or in the village square.

In such a social world, the onstage ritualisation of the attack or retreat impulse choreographed with the alternating theme of war and peace, resonated with the soldier's warring impulse in the kingdom. With socioeconomic existence in medieval Kerala divided into a series of little kingdoms, war was the central business of survival; authority was hierarchised with divisions existing right down into and within the "polluting" lower castes. In such an intensely intimate and divided world, order had to be maintained. From the highest of the high to the lowest of the low, each individual being had to keep, and to be kept in their place. The system had to warn and instil a fear of transgression, forging the base of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression.

Seen in the context of the seventeenth-century sword-carrying *nair* soldiers-turned-performers, with real rights to dominate and subjugate, the following playful

dialogue between Bhīma and Hanuman takes on a threatening tone. By way of

illustration, the following passage, recited from memory, is from the Kathakali text

"The Flower of Good Fortune", followed by my own translation into English.

Vazhiyil ninnu poka vaikathey vanaradhama Pokaykil nine

Muzhutta kopamodaduthu njan ninte Kazhuttil unpotu pitichudan

 Thazhacha ninney erinju njan ee vazhikku povathinanakulam

 (Get out the way you lowest amongst monkeys, get out. My rage increases, I will

grab you by your neck and beat you, you fat monkey. I will throw you far, get out

of the way you lowest among monkeys)

The phrase *"lowest among monkeys"* is Bhīma the warrior's interpretation of the

situation. There is nothing on stage, or in the appearance or costuming of the monkey

that would suggest that he is the lowest. Bhīma's scorn and derision are his

interpretation. Bhīma the warrior's contempt for lower life belongs not just to the

story but also to the values embedded at the heart of the caste system, an upper-caste

nair's contempt for the lower castes. On stage, this contempt is expressed through a

violent expression of disgust. The hands form into a fist through the hand gesture

mushti and are raised to meet at the centre of the forehead. The face transforms into a

specific expression of *vibhats* or disgust. Then the hands are smashed down to waist

level palms facing downward. It feels as if something is being thrown, beaten down,

kept away violently. The face is contorted, with the expression suggesting the

smelling of something disgusting, terrible, revolting.

How would the lower-caste world of *nair* funeral priests, barbers, washermen

and a host of undefined others receive this message? The *nair* warrior's threat is

flamboyant, violent and real, establishing his social dominance. Bhīma's dancing

throughout this entire dialogue is aggressive and violent. He stands over the monkey threatening ironically to touch, beat him. He exaggerates his own superior position within the hierarchy while lowering the monkey to the lowest of the low. For the duration of this dialogue, the consequences of this encounter would appear very clearly to the lower-caste audience. If they were to block the path of the warrior, it could result in their death, as this early the sixteenth-century account records.

> These [nayrs] live outside the towns, separate from other people, on their estates, which are fenced in. They have there all that they require; they do not drink wine. When they go anywhere they shout to the peasants that they may get out of the way where they have to pass; and the peasants do so, and if they did not do it the [nayrs] might kill them without penalty (Barbosa 2010, p.129).

In this story, Bhīma ends up blocking his own journey, preventing him from easily hopping over the monkey's tail. This existential choice and freedom, of finding the easiest way forward, is not available to him. His free action is held back by a complex web of caste roles, interrelationships and obligations. In the caste system, even the powerful warrior dancers have their limits and may not transgress. Their gestures of embodied aggression must remain as gestures and not turn real and destructive.

Conclusion

This chapter sets up a theoretical framework using the debates in the social sciences around the values and structure of the caste system. While focusing on the role and function of the *nair* caste that first performed Kathakali in the seventeenth century, reference is made to texts of four Kathakali classics written by Kottayam

Thamburan with greater attention to "The Flower of Good Fortune." The real caste equation between the ruler Kottayam Thampuran, the warrior *nair* community, and the dominating *nambudiri brahmin* caste*,* helps frame an understanding of the inter-caste relations setting up the performing power of the *nair* performer and his impact on his lower-caste audience. Using phenomenological, ethnographic, and auto-ethnographic tools, the researcher has attempted to pry open the issue of caste and untouchability that has previously been neglected. This inquiry sets up a questioning of the traditional practice of Kathakali students touching the teacher's/*guru*'s feet, reflective of issues concerning the hierarchical inequalities and inequities of the Hindu caste order. This social context is necessary to explore the social weave that Kathakali drama and text is woven from and into. Out of this weave emerges its gestures of embodied aggression that are of value to the western contemporary performer as they work to draw out the psychophysical processes into the social.

In the next chapter I turn to the one-on-one site of Kathakali actor training by placing the researcher's body in an actor training relationship with a traditional Kathakali *guru.* I work to validate the "observe, imitate and repeat" pedagogy of traditional Indian dance training. The body of the learner mirrors the master practitioner's body, suggestive of a more complex and nuanced pedagogic methodology than a reductive mimicing. From an appreciation of the complexity of the mirroring process emerges an understanding of the performer's taste of aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa.*

Chapter Five

The researcher's body at the site of one-on-one actor training

In this chapter, I reflect on my own one-on-one Kathakali actor training sessions with Kathakali master practitioner Evoor Rajendran Pillai. These sessions were worked on in preparation for training performers in Melbourne. As in Chapter Two, this time around too, the Kathakali actions observed had previously been worked on with Sadanam Balakrishnan. The actor training routines were repeated not only to work on my skills as a Kathakali performer and teacher, but also to reflect on them as a researcher. These sessions were recorded with a stationary video camera and the recordings as well as notes in the diary were available when writing this chapter. By this process of documentation and reflection, the complexity of the subjective and objective points of view of a research exercise, in which the researcher's body is an object of research, and the researcher's experience a subjective field of knowledge and information, were negotiated. Besides honing my own teaching skills, the objective in these one-on-one actor training sessions was also to reflect on the nature of Kathakali's imitative methodology. Over the two decades of learning and working in Kathakali, I have never felt I was mimicing my teachers. By working through insights gained through the latest research in neuroscience, the act of mimicry is reframed as a mirroring. My body mirrors my teacher's body. This embodied act has two processes: one that creates the performer's embodied presence, and the other its absence. Working through a one-on-one session, this chapter examines both the body's presence and absence in Kathakali actor training.

The imitative methodology of the *guru shishya* tradition

The concept of *guru shishya*, the traditional Indian/Kathakali teacher/learner training methodology, was primarily a one-on-one mirroring process wherein, for a

number of years, the learner was learning the craft, receiving knowledge, skill and ability through intense individual attention from a teacher and practitioner of Kathakali. This mirroring process involved the observation of a teacher's action by the learner and then a performance of that observed action. Though previously judged, especially in the initial learning phase, as a "non-personal" (Zarrilli 1984:209) and "mechanical" (Schechner 1988:264) imitation of the teacher's actions by the learner, this mirroring is a far more sophisticated methodology than has previously been explored by the few western and Indian scholars of Kathakali actor training practices (Zarrilli 1984, 2000a&b, 02, 04, 09, Zarrilli, et.al.13; Schechner 1988; Pitkow 1998; Jones 1970; Iyer 1953; Barba 1995; Pandaya 1966). It is my contention that this mirroring is not a "non-personal," "mechanical" process of "mimicry and imitation" but a significant site for a skilful transfer of both the objective embodied physical ability required for Kathakali acting, as well as its subjective condition. This methodology of teaching works for the traditional Kathakali actor training program which is realised over a length of time, six to eight years, working towards transforming a neophyte into a mature performer.

In 1987, as a twenty-four-year-old actor training at The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (UK), I had the opportunity to participate in a workshop conducted by Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil, Paris. During the audition/interview conducted by Mnouchkine, she suggested I stop wasting my time in Europe, and return to India, and learn Kathakali with Mr. Balakrishnan who had worked with her actors. As it happened, I followed her advice and I was Sadanam Balakrishnan's student for ten years from 1990 to 2000. Since then, I have continued to learn, teach and perform Kathakali. It is this embodied experience of learning

Kathakali from a master practitioner over a length of time that informs my research of its teaching methodology.

It is also this personal experience of learning that is reacting to a narrative exampled at the extreme edge of its narration by this very problematic western description of another eastern dance teaching culture in Bali, Indonesia. The following example is from a foundational piece of anthropological writing by Zoete and Spies[23] that, in part, established the terms of engagement, how the exotic East would be viewed by western practitioners. It frames the imitative pedagogy and the master disciple relationship in ways prejudiced and unacceptable to contemporary perceptions. By the inclusion of this example about dance traditions in Bali, which could easily have been suggested about Kathakali, my argument holds significance for the learning methodology across a diverse range of performance traditions in Asia.

> Dancing of whatever kind is done entirely by imitation, the pupil dancing
> behind an older dancer, who has become a teacher, as well as behind or in front
> of her guru. It seems almost impossible that such intricacy of dance movements
> and accents should ever be memorized, but it is astonishing to see with what
> rapidity they feel their way into the long series of complicated movements.
> Nothing is explained, the dance is gradually absorbed, rather as we might
> imagine a performing dog to receive his training, by receiving the impress of his
> teacher. (Zoete and Spies 1938:38)

---

[23] Beryl Drusilla de Zoete was an English ballet dancer, critic, and researcher. In the field of dance, she researched South Asian dance and acting traditions. With Walter Spies, she collaborated on *Dance and Drama in Bali* (1937), which is still considered a significant work used to reference traditional Balinese dance and theatrical forms.

If the above were true, it would be hard indeed to persuade a contemporary western performer to enter into a dog and trainer relationship with an eastern master practitioner or *guru*.

Though not as problematic as Zoete and Spies' "performing dog" representation, many years later, Schechner and Zarrilli too have their own, for me, problematic judgments. While Schechner, commenting on emotion theorist Paul Eckman's experiments with actors and their facial muscles, suggests "their work was a flagrant demonstration of 'mechanical acting'—the kind despised by most American performers, but exactly what is learned by Indian young boys beginning their studies as performers in kathakali dance-theater" (1988: 264). Zarrilli too adds to this narrative with the observation that, "For the ten year old boy going through the exercises on a daily basis, there is nothing 'personal' about the training. The neophyte makes no personal 'feeling' investment in an exercise (as often is the case with young Western actors today)" (1984: 207).

Zarrilli takes this argument further and concludes that the Kathakali learning process involves a non-personalised internal and external objectification:

Just as the external in body process of Kathakali acting is a process of objectification which is *non personal*, the internal side of the actor training and performance shares in the development of this process of objectification. Even though emotional states are extremely important in Kathakali, these emotional states are *objectified and not personalized expressions*. We have seen how the internal side of training begins when a teacher may ask to draw on an experience. Notice that the student is not being asked to begin inside his personal feelings. His personal feelings are not the point of origin for the

external action. Rather the neophyte begins with the form – *the external facial gestures in the expression of emotional states.* (1984:209, my italics)

By this non-personal exercise, Zarrilli implies disengagement with the personal, individual and psychological, values precious to American western contemporary actors, especially from a tradition of Stanislavskian text-based realism and naturalism.

The personal, individual and psychological state of child actors inheriting a performative culture (as is the case with Kathakali, where training begins from a young age) is a more complex process, involving a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes personal feelings. The internal and external binary, even as a descriptive of the initial learning period, is a simplistic account of a phase of learning that is setting the ground for a lengthy and intimate process. In preference to the internal-external duality is an offer of the reflexive binary of subject/object, wherein it is the subject/object binary of the learner that mirrors the subject/object binary of the teacher. The objective element of the Kathakali form, learnt through the act of mirroring, is never without the realised subjective condition of the teacher. This subjective condition is rich with the performed and personal experience of the master performer. The young learner is learning within this mirrored world of the *guru's* subjective and objective experience and ability. This for the *shishya* is a very personal location.

Guru Shishya in Kathak dance pedagogy

This researcher's concern for a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to the imitative in the *guru shishya* training pedagogy is shared by Monica Dalidowicz (2015), albeit in the field of *kathak*, a North Indian form of dance, and its teaching in North America. Kathak training, with its *guru shishya* pedagogy, is similar to Kathakali. In her article examining the creativity involved in Kathak dance training in the diaspora, she suggests:

> …the guru-shishya parampara (master-disciple relationship), has historically been based on imitative and repetitive pedagogies. Yet close examination reveals less conspicuous forms of creativity at work in the process of reproducing the tradition with fidelity; this improvisational work is further heightened in the demands of teaching in the diaspora. (838)

Her need to examine and argue for a creativity involved in traditional pedagogy comes from an awareness similar to mine regarding a reductive and simplified representation of the imitative process which she suggests is made more complex by the innovation and creativity of each *guru* adapting to the needs of a fresh generation of learners. Fidelity to tradition, far from being inevitable, was an achievement that was actively worked on, slowly and meticulously crafted through years of study, in the North Indian dance of Kathak. Disciplined training was central to the recipe, but most descriptions of transmission of bodily knowledge in South Asian performance describe learning simply as a process of 'observe, imitate, and repeat.'(839).

Dalidowicz shares my concern regarding a more nuanced representation of the "observe, imitate, repeat" methodology. However, our answers offered to similar questions, diverge. While she is concerned with innovation, adaptation and creativity, I am engaged more directly with the imitative process itself, a process that is central to the teaching methodology. It is to the conservative act of observing, imitating and

repeating that the analysis in this chapter attends, arguing for a more complex and nuanced approach to this pedagogic methodology, especially as realised in the one-on-one actor training space.

In the traditional system of training, a large part of the learning happened as a one- on-one teacher-to-learner transfer of skill and knowledge. This intimate encounter, often in a small room within the teacher's house over months and years, sets up both the subjective and objective growth of the learner and the art. Throughout the learning process, the learner has the image of the action to be imitated both internally, as in his mind/memory from having observed performances, and externally by the teacher demonstrating the action. The learner observes and then performs this action. They mirror what they remember of the form, and then mirror the form as shown by the teacher. Over time and through a sustained intersubjectivity, the learner trades places gaining the skills and being of the teacher and eventually becoming a teacher, while carrying on the tradition.

Richard Schechner alludes to this depth when he suggests "what was rote movement, even painful body realignment, becomes second nature – a full language capable of conveying detailed and subtle meanings and feelings. The maturing performer now begins to internally experience his role with a force every bit as powerful as what an American Stanislavsky trained actor might experience" (1988:273). However, both for Zoete and Spies (1938) and for Schechner (1988), this astonishing journey remains essentially unexamined and almost mysterious, as suggested here by Schechner: "aesthetic acting, learned from the outside, 'composed' and culturally determined, penetrates deep into the brain. What was at the start of the training an external effect becomes during the course of training an internal cause" (273).

It is this astonishing and mysterious penetration deep into the brain that this chapter works to explain. A rationalisation of this transformation first exists in the length of time taken, and second, in the very social nature of this learning process. For years, the training takes place in a social setting, between the learner and the teacher and later with the singers and musicians. The first set of personal feelings that come into play are the feelings of a *shishya* for a *guru* and of a *guru* for a *shishya*. Right at the start, both know that this is a relationship for a considerable length of time. Consequently, it has its rules and codes of obedience and responsibility. This is the subjective condition that exists even as the objective process unravels. As much as the student is in the care of the teacher, he also needs to be careful of the teacher. His personal feelings range from love and affection for his teacher, to a fear and terror of the teacher. The personal feelings of the learner are always engaged and are the subjective condition of the learning process. Often, in just a small room, the teacher demonstrates through his imposing presence and the learner mirrors what he observes. To understand what happens in this intimate setting, I reference my own experience of training one-on-one.

The practitioner researcher in a one-on-one training session

As noted earlier, Evoor Rajendran Pillai lives in a small room on the first floor of the building that houses the International Centre for Kathakali in New Delhi. If he was living in a house, he would have invited me home to train one-on-one. Here at the centre, we will train in the main hall on the ground floor. This is the same space in which I observed Gokul training, as described in Chapter One. This is also the same space that I have worked in earlier with Balakrishnan. It has years of memories

associated with it. In this space, the professional company with the musicians practice. Once a month, a Kathakali performance is held here. On weekends, students practice here in large groups formed according to the level of training achieved. On social occasions such as the festival of *Onam*, the larger community gathers in this hall to sit down and eat a meal together. These observations are drawn from my diary at the time I commenced my work with Pillai on 16th July, 2016. This forms the "diary documentary" convention used throughout this thesis.

It is for the first time that I am entering Kathakali training space with a video camera in hand. I feel very uncomfortable about this and it makes me feel like a tourist coming to take photographs of exotic Kathakali dancing. I have to persuade myself that this documentation is an important element of the research, especially as I will be at the centre of it, as a performer/learner. The room has changed. They have put in air conditioners to beat the Delhi heat, but this means all the windows are shut. As I am unsure of the protocol to switch on air conditioners, I suspect they are there for performances held over the weekend, I locate the fan switches and switch on the fans. The air is hot and muggy with an expectancy of the monsoon rain. I set up Pillai's stool to sit on and wait for his arrival. I can hear him outside talking on his cell phone. Perhaps to his wife in Kerala? His son is also named Arjun. His daughter is Rajashri. I stand waiting in the middle of the room wearing my north Indian attire of a *kurta* and *pyjama*, feeling a little apprehensive about the session. I wonder how intense he will make the session for me? How hard he will make me work? At 52, I have my niggling aches and pains and worries. But I am also excited. I have stood here waiting for the teacher to arrive, many times over, over the many years.

Pillai, who I will now refer to as I call him, Rajendra ji, steps into the hall and immediately indicates for me to do the formal greeting salutation. I understand that he will not be doing the initial body exercises as he had done with Gokul. This may be in respect of my age, and because this session is being held around eleven o'clock in the morning and past the time for the body exercises. Also, while I do the formal salutation, I see he does not sit down on the stool but stands and waits for me to finish. As Rajendra ji and I are almost the same age (he is a few years older than me), at the moment I reach out to touch his feet he holds my arms and prevents me from bending. A gentle bowing of the head with folded hands is enough of an expression of respect. He too responds with a nod and a folded hand greeting. We are then both ready to begin the session.

I had earlier shared with him my objective of doing one-on-one training, which includes my going back to Australia and teaching Kathakali one-on-one, and he, I think, has come in with a plan that I suspect involves him demonstrating to me all the exercises of the day, as well as correcting my Kathakali form. Not surprisingly, immediately after the salutation he steps up beside me, takes three quick steps backwards and then moves into what I know as the basic Kathakali posture. The salutation has now become a little danced step and choreography. He tells me to observe, and then performs the salutation, followed by the three danced steps, and then moves his body into the basic posture. He suggests this sequence is the first thing I do with a learner. He expects me to do it perfectly and even though I have done both the salutation and the basic posture many times over the years, the sequence proves a challenge. *Tala* or rhythm is my weakest ability and even this minimal

choreography sets up a challenge. I seem to be imitating him with less grace and rhythm. He decides to lead the way by chanting the rhythm even as he does the actions. The rhythm is *chembata* and the *vaitari* or the spoken sound pattern *ti ti tai*. With great ease, he demonstrates and locates every action of the choreography within this rhythm. The salutation, the three steps backwards and the arrival into the basic step are all performed to the rhythm of *ti ti tai* and *ti ti tai*. Even in this little bit of body movement, while I imitate some aspects of his body form, I have to find a deeper place within myself, to sense his ease with the rhythm, with the body moving to *tala*. I have to watch him more carefully sensing how his body relaxes into the rhythm, allowing the rhythm to lead. I also sense the continuity of movement, the flow through the entire action. He encourages me to speak the rhythm and when I do I find I have to first get the same flow in the spoken sounds and then allow them to lead the movement. My body begins to work with itself, with its own spoken rhythm as I seem to commune with myself. He demonstrates the action a few times, then stands aside beating the rhythm with his hands and chanting the rhythm. I hold my own spoken rhythm in my head and then listen to his chant and follow with my body. After a few attempts we both laugh, delighting at getting this elementary action right. He then indicates that I stay in the basic posture, expecting me to hold it for a while. I know, after a minute or two of holding the basic posture, the pain in the thigh muscles starts kicking in and this exercise gets harder to hold. However, today, Rajendra ji has decided I need to go lower, deeper into the posture, and he keeps indicating with his right hand, asking me to go lower and stay down. While I hold the posture, he walks up to me, makes me stretch my knees wider, places his hands on my lower back suggesting I curve the back in a

little more, and then he moves to my hands, asking me to relax my wrists, and release my hands. I have done this basic posture an endless number of times over the years, and yet each time, there is a new alignment, a new adjustment, a new way the body seems to form itself into the basic pose.

Now seeing the work through the eyes of a researcher, I realise the potential for embodied knowledge of this one embodied action. I will describe it here in greater detail. In this next section, I theorise an understanding and an experience of the basic posture, referencing ideas received from Drew Leder in his seminal work, *The Absent Body* (1990).

The basic posture

An appreciation of crafting a performer's body into the Kathakali form is facilitated through an understanding of the phenomenology of Drew Leder's "disappearing body" (1990:1). The phenomenology of the body and its disappearance has been the subject of his detailed inquiry in *The Absent Body*:

> While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience. When reading a book or lost in thought, my own bodily state may be the farthest thing from my awareness. I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or postures. (1)

The idea of the disappearing body came from what Leder described as the phenomenology of the body's disappearance "even in the midst of its inescapable presence." (1)

By the body's disappearance Leder implied that, as the senses experience the world, the sense organs themselves recede, disappear into the background. As an

example, he suggests that you are least aware of your eye at the point that your eye observes the horizon. Or an apple, once eaten, leaves no trace of its previous taste, touch, smell or sight. With it being physically consumed into the body, its sensory experience too is consumed by each organ. These sense organs, including the human skin that covers the entire body, Leder calls the "surface body" (1). This surface body he suggests is in a constant "ecstatic" or outward engagement with the world.

As Zarrilli suggests, "Physiologically, the surface body is characterized primarily by exteroception" (2004:658), implying that the outer directed five senses open us out to the external world. For Leder this "exteroception" of the surface body can be "without immediate emotional response" (40). The exteroception of the surface body does not by itself generate an emotional response. For there to be an emotional response in the body, the surface body must actively reach out, or engage with the world. Seeing a flower in itself does not create an emotion of joy within. To experience an emotion of joy the surface body needs to actively engage with, needs to move towards the flower: to smell it deeper, to see it clearer, to touch it. In so doing, by its active exteroception, the body recedes into the background or disappears.

Simultaneous to the phenomenology of the disappearing body is the phenomenology of its continued centrality. Wherever our body moves to, it continues to be at the centre of its experience. Whether sitting, standing or running. Whether on top of a mountain, by a river or by the ocean. The body is always present, defining the here, to the world out there. By this, as the surface body opens itself out to the world, the body is continuously in a state of disappearance. Thus, continually, the surface body, by its very ecstatic or outward stance, leads to the body's recession or disappearance from experience. Citing Leder, Zarrilli (2004:660) suggests that the body's disappearance and absence thereby mark our "ceaseless relation to the world"

(Leder 1990:160). The problem that our ceaseless relation to the world and phenomenology of the surface body and the consequent disappearing body creates for the Kathakali learner is a sense of disembodiment, and an instability between the *angik* (outer objective physical body) and the *stavik* (inner subjective emotional state). Not sure of his/her own body and its stable embodied presence, the learner struggles to create and sustain an embodied presence. Kathakali solves this problem with its intensive embodied stabilisation and integration of the subjective and objective or the emotional and physical. The Kathakali form is crafted to hold within itself, as it were, at every moment, both the physical *angika* or embodied, as well as the *bhava* or emotional state. The first step, then, in the long and arduous process of Kathakali performer training is the crafting of the performer's body into a basic posture.

Presence and Kathakali training: the basic posture

In the basic Kathakali posture, the feet are placed in parallel, slightly wider than shoulder width apart, with the head and trunk aligned right in the middle, with the trunk lowered, the knees bent outward and with the weight resting on the outer edges of both feet. The toes curl inward in an arc with the big toe pressing down hardest while clamping the foot to the ground. The lower back is then pressed inwards towards the belly and both arms rest stretched wide to each side. The breathing through this process is relaxed, slow and deep. The body is continuously lowered and kept down. In the image below, I am working with Peter Fraser on his basic posture. (Photo credit: Karan Bajaj).

This posture, with its low centre of gravity, allows the heavy costume to be carried with ease. The costume includes a set of heavy jewellery carved out of wood and layers of starched cloth supporting the billowing skirt, whose weight and sway demands the technique of holding the feet outward with the weight on the outer edge; if the feet were placed flat on the ground, the knees would collapse inward. The wearing of the large Kathakali headdress, the *kiridam*, creates a further imbalance, shaped as it is with its back portion flat and its front curving out in a concave shape, making it front heavy. The control of the lower back then allows the upper body to be tilted backwards at a right angle so as to balance the headdress, perfectly countering the forward bias. The *kiridam* plays an important role, with the head staying balanced and stable with its shape and weight. This prevents the performer from figuratively losing his head when the emotional intensity of the scene increases and the drumming starts going wild. The image here is of *raudra bhima, or* a raging Bhīma. (Photo credit: Sreenath Narayana). The headdress must remain stable through all the rage expressed.

These coordinated adjustments of various muscles of the body allow for an "extra daily" ability to both balance a heavy costume and headdress and dance, emote and enact powerfully. Illustrating one of Eugenio Barba's "recurring principles"[24] is the continuous ritualised game of "balance in action" that Kathakali choreography embodies. This extra daily ability to balance and unbalance while wearing the heavy costume and headdress, whether it be moving forward or backward, tilting to the right or left, or dancing around in a circle, emerges from and is an elaboration of the daily, unconscious game of balance and unbalance, the daily business of keeping our feet on the ground and our lives steady. This extra daily ability to balance in action helps stabilise the earlier mentioned problem of the performer's disembodied sense of instability, of the imbalanced inner and outer, of an embodied ecstasy and recession, and gives the performer a sense of a stable embodied self, an embodied self in control.

Central to this business of balance in action is the lowering of the performer's body. The entire training of the Kathakali performer involves the steady lowering of the centre of gravity and the shifting of weight from one foot to the other. The lower the centre of gravity and the deeper the weight rests on each clamping foot, the easier it is to balance the headdress. The low centre of gravity further helps in the extra daily transfer of weight from one foot to the other. Through shifts in tempo-rhythm, these

---

[24] Barba's "recurring principles" or "shared themes of performativity" between a number of eastern and western performance traditions, which include oppositional binaries such as "altered balance, dynamic opposition, consistent in-consistency, reduction, and equivalence" (1995: 9).

weighed-down danced steps help in the generation, stability and control of the *bhava*. For example, as the character gets angrier, the tempo-rhythm builds up; when speeding up, the performer must stay down, keeping his centre of gravity low. Even as the force, energy and weight are sent downward into the earth, the *bhava* or the emotional state is generated through the body to be expressed formally through the appropriate facial gesture.

A common misrepresentation of Kathakali aesthetics has *bhava* existing only on/in the face, through facial gestures. In Kathakali (as in other dance traditions like *odissi* and *bharatanatyam*), the entire body is trained to embody the emotional state. The dancer's body is perceived to have *bhava*. The balanced head and the *kiridam* keep in control the enormously powerful extra daily energy generated in the dancer's body. The skilled performer learns to use the power in his feet to generate, as if from the earth, the required energy to embody and sustain the *bhava*. This then is Kathakali's craft of a balance in action that creates an extra daily ability to balance and create powerful embodied emotional states of being which are best described as a Kathakali performer's "presence".

Absence and Kathakali training

This extra daily presence brings us to examine its reflexive other, a subjective state of "absence". This state of absence by its primary condition of disappearance is thematically difficult to describe and detail. This condition of absence, however, exists, is crafted and realised through a commitment to and a perfection of the Kathakali form. Even as the objective outer Kathakali form is crafted as a presence, the inner subjective state is experienced as an absence. An own-embodied experience of the subjective condition of the Kathakali form leads one away from describing the

inner experience as empty or neutral. Subjectively, the performer exists as an absence, as a performed reflexive other of the embodied presence.

To understand and clarify this phenomenon, I would like to give the example of a hand with the outer surface of the hand placed against a cold wind. While the texture of the outer surface feels colder, harder and with a presence, the inner surface of the palm is calmer, softer and with a reflexive sense of the other, of an absence. The Kathakali basic posture offers the opportunity to try and detail this state of subjective absence. The basic posture demands the spreading out of the body, the stretching of the skin and a filling out of the form by the entire surface body of the performer. It is as if the skin of the performer is stretched to its limit. Even as the performer embodies the form, his own body seems to disappear. The more the performer's body embodies and becomes at ease with the form of the Kathakali basic posture, the more this sense of disappearance of his own body formalises within the performer as an inner state of absence. This absence is cultivated into a subjective habit. A good teacher repeats the basic posture often, while making the student hold the posture for increasing lengths of time. This is done not only to perfect the outer shape of the Kathakali form but also to cultivate the inner subjective space.

This ability to create absence seems a contradictory outcome of intense Kathakali training. From the extra daily body techniques utilised, it would make sense if, instead of an embodied absence, a stylised and extra daily presence resulted. This is true of course; this ability is developed. However, the counter-ability is also created, exists and is present on stage when the performer is not performing. The Kathakali performer, elaborately made up, costumed and transformed into an epic character or god is often asked, while the other performer is performing, to wait and do nothing. At these times he cannot collapse back into his daily self. Nor can he

disturb the performance of the other performer with his active presence. Instead, he must wait with a formalised, calm outer presence and a calmer, inner subjective state of absence.

The basic body posture then is not just an embodied objective presence but also is an embodied subjectivity experienced within as an absence. The extra daily body techniques of Kathakali training help the performer arrive at this perfect balance. Often while working with Sadanam Balakrishnan and standing in the basic posture, he would refer to the fact that he could see, like a passing shadow, Arjun, that is me. He would then say that he did not want to see Arjun but only Kathakali. Initially bewildered, over time, I understood what he meant. I learnt to stand in the basic posture, without, even for a brief moment, my own inner presence and struggle visible. This inner presence may be understood as a set of resistances, that inner struggle with the effort and commitment towards the creation of the outer form. In time, this struggle settled. In time, all that I was, was an embodied Kathakali basic posture with a calm inner state of absence.

Mirroring the Kathakali *guru's* basic posture.

Returning to the one-on-one session, Rajendra ji decides to stand facing me in the basic posture and work me through the logic of the body structure, even as he insists I do this exercise every day with new students and learners. "This is a must" he says in English, which he speaks reasonably fluently. He lowers himself into the stance, adjusts his feet a little for width, and then seems to visibly expand in front of me as he both seems to lower himself deeper towards the ground, as well as works to pull back and hold the body at the centre with his lower back, while widening his chest and expanding both his

arms sideways like the branches of a tree. His arms are not straight out but slightly curved at the inner elbow. Then, once he seems to have completely settled into the form, he releases his hands from the wrist and lets them drop freely. He gently bounces his hands as if to display the ease and freedom of his hands. I notice while his feet, and especially his big toe, are gripping the ground hard, his hands are doing the opposite, they are in Rajendra ji's words "loose and free" with "no tension".

I mirror his embodiment of the basic posture, realising for the first time the tension in my wrists and my hands, not as free and easy as his. I reflect and recall my other teachers' bodies even as I watch Rajendra ji's. Each one had their own individual way of gripping the ground with their foot, of lowering the body, of widening the chest and arms and especially of releasing the hands. I notice Rajendra ji does a little adjustment to the back of his neck that allows him to find the right placing of the head on the neck. This slight adjust not only works for the head but also opens up the face so that it is neither looking downwards or upwards, but is comfortably looking ahead. Once his entire body is in place, he gently brings a smile to his lips, suggesting he is completely in control. I mirror his body and sense/commune with my own even as I work to theorise and understand the offerings of this seminal moment in the KMB.

In the following section, I develop this line of inquiry further, linking my own experience set out above to Tim Ingold's insights relating to body parts—specifically the hand and the feet—to the evolution of culture; his research attempts to do through the study of human movement what I am attempting to do with Kathakali, namely find a new way to understand it by placing the body as the tool of enquiry. While

Ingold's research opens up a window to western ideas of human evolution and its connect with human culture, this research does not pick up that thread in his work as the focus here is on the body and not on engaging with the western evolutionist model. The following section works with his concepts with respect to the hand and foot relationship, providing a balance to the earlier exploration of the hand and face integration in Chapter Two.

Reimagining the world through the feet

In his article titled "Culture On The Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet," Ingold works towards undoing a "boot-clad" European bias in the western "head over heels" evolutionist model, in which, as he suggests, "the plane of science and culture" is posited as separate from and placed over the "ground of nature" (2004:315–340). For example, he observes that when people walk in a city, they are barely aware of the ground they walk on, and are far more connected to the people and the spaces around them, the city scape. In his opinion, a more grounded approach to human movement, sensitive to embodied skills of footwork, opens up new terrain in the study of human anatomical evolution. Ingold repositions the un-booted human foot at the centre of his enquiry.

In framing his concepts linking the body part (the feet) to the body and its movement, he begins by underlining three significant developments in the evolution of the human anatomy, all relevant to this dissertation:

The first was the enormous enlargement of the brain, especially the frontal regions…. The second was the remodelling of the hand, and above all the development of that special ability we have of being able to bring the tip of the thumb into contact with the tips of any of our other fingers – an ability that

allows us to carry out manual operations with a versatility and dexterity

unequalled in the animal kingdom.... The third consisted of a suite of

anatomical changes – the rebalancing of the head upon the neck, the

characteristic S-shaped curvature of the back, the broadening of the pelvis and

the straightening of the legs that underlie our ability to stand upright and to walk

on two feet. (316)

In the present context of understanding the workings of the Kathakali body, Ingold's

first concept, that of the development and enlargement of the human brain, connects

with the skill of not losing your head in performance, with the balanced head of the

Kathakali performer wearing the heavy *kiridam* on his head offering up a potential

research enquiry into the performer's balanced stable brain/mind. The second concept,

which focusses on the importance of the hand, and especially the tip of the thumb

touching the tip of the forefinger, connects to the language of hand gestures or *mudras*

with many gestures doing precisely that, linking the thumb tip to the tip of one of the

fingers. The third concept, that of an evolution of human posture, connects here to a

study of the basic Kathakali pose that engages with the shape and form of the entire

body, a body bent at the knees.

 In Chapter Two, I pointed toward the importance of the hand and face

connection while locating their neural maps placed intimately on the brain's surface.

In this section, and through a description of the basic posture, I look at the hand and

foot relationship. For Ingold, the Darwinian view of the evolution of the human

anatomy offered up a "Physiological Division of Labour," (316) by which the feet and

hands came to be perfected for different but complementary functions "of support and

locomotion on the one hand, and of grasping and manipulation on the other" (316).

This division in turn allowed the human being, through the free hand, to function

more intelligently than all other creatures, an idea, as Ingold suggests, not new and belonging solely to Darwin, but shared by writers of classical antiquity:

> The idea that bipedal locomotion liberates the hands, and furthermore that the free hand endows human beings with an intellectual superiority over all other creatures, can be traced back to classical Antiquity to be found in the writings of Xenophon, Aristotle, Vitruvius and Gregory of Nyssa.(316)

However, somewhat controversially, as Ingold points out, "For Darwin, then, the descent of man in nature was also an ascent out of it, in so far as it progressively released the powers of intellect from their bodily bearings in the material world. Human evolution was portrayed as the rise, and eventual triumph, of head over heels" (318). Ingold questions this model by asking:

> Is the conventional division of labour between hands and feet, then, as 'natural' as Darwin and his contemporaries made it out to be? Could it not be, at least in some measure, a result of the mapping onto the human body of a peculiarly modern discourse about the triumph of intelligence over instinct, and about the human domination of nature? (321)

While on the one hand recognising that this modern discourse of separation and hierarchy may be framed within the philosophic embrace of Cartesian mind body duality, and on the other wishing to avoid the evolutionary concepts which underpin this construct, I instead direct these implications of these ideas toward the field of actor training. Even as I stand in the basic pose, I ask myself if I experience my own hands as separate from and superior in function to my lower body and my feet? Or are they instead as I experience them, integrated and connected, and in communion with each other?

I reflect on mirroring Rajendra ji's action of the basic pose. My feet grip the earth and my hands release themselves from my wrist. I work to balance these two contradictory impulses, between the strength and tension of the legs and feet, and the freedom of the arms and hands. My body is bent and lowered at the knees. I seek to understand this separation of the hands and feet within the Kathakali basic posture.

In my mature performer's body, I sense no separation. I feel instead a communion between the separate parts. After the initial struggles, I arrive at a stillness, feeling my body as one. Once I have achieved the basic pose, through repeated practice, through a steady lowering of the body and a relaxing of the arms and hands, over time I feel an integration of various body parts, a communion within. I experience this communion as a pleasure. Through the basic pose, the various body parts relate to each other meaningfully, making sense, making pleasure.

Even as I take pleasure in my embodied presence, I turn again to ideas of absence. In Chapter Three, ideas of absence with reference to the caste body were discussed, arguing that there was no experiential difference between the "pure" right hand and "impure" left hand. In the present instance, I sense no difference between my "intelligent" hand and my "instinctive" foot. Both the intelligence of the hand and instinct of the foot exist as an embodied absence.

As stated earlier, the objective of Kathakali actor training is an integration, and a communion, between various body elements – hands, feet, face. This integration and communion varies from individual to individual. The balance between the lowered body, the clamped foot, the relaxed arm and the free hand is different in each individual. This individuality emerges with greater clarity the deeper the work is entered into. The depth of this work by the learner is not only outwards towards the object imitated, i.e., the Kathakali teacher's body, but simultaneously inwards, deeper

within the learner's own body, even as the body is both lowered and freed, both made tense and relaxed. By the depth of this inward process, the imitative act is made more nuanced, moving away from a reductive surface mimicing of the teacher to a deeper and more complex mirroring.

While mirroring the basic pose objectively, from the outside, over time the learner begins to own it from the inside, with the basic pose informed by the individual's inner commitment. This basic pose is the scaffolding readied to receive the full weight of the archetype, both in terms of the heavy weight of the costume and headdress, and in terms of the subjective passions of the epic character or god. This shift in focus in the business of representing Kathakali, from the well-known Kathakali eye exercises to the full-bodied basic pose, is a moving away from the exotic representation towards a more fundamental appreciation of the form. The exercise of the basic pose sits centrally at the heart of Kathakali training.

Kaal sadhakam or footwork

Having worked me hard with the basic pose, Rajendra ji moves me onto Kathakali *kaal sadhakam*[25] or footwork. He works at this for thirty minutes, making me repeat each step a number of times. However, he also insists I chant the *vaitari* or spoken chant that accompanies each step. This complicates the repetitive act for now, as I have to integrate my foot movement to my chant. Once again, while the process is initiated by him demonstrating the step and me observing, imitating and repeating it, the process moves very quickly to my communing with my own chant, making my feet listen to my own chant. I find

---

[25] For a descriptive of this particular exercise in one of Kathakali's source forms, Kutiyattam, see Madhavan, A. and Nair, S. 2013.

sometimes my feet are leading the chant and sometimes the chant leads my step. At the rare moments when they come together, I feel the force of the body moving powerfully to rhythm. Throughout this exercise, Rajendra ji keeps reminding me to keep the body lowered. He gets up and demonstrates the difference between doing this exercise erect or lowering the body really deep and then working the steps. The difference is enormous. With the body lowered, the entire body is committed to the act and the concentration is deeply within. If the body is held up, then the steps are much lighter, the feet seem separate from the body and the concentration moves from inside the body to the outside.

I can feel the grounding, lowering and deepening of the work strengthened by this footwork. There are four footwork routines and in the thirty minutes we cover all four. By the end of this session, I am dripping with sweat. This is hard work.

Step One: has the footwork directed to a central point, as if drilling a hole into the earth. I call this exercise a body rooting exercise. This step is done in slow, medium and fast tempos. The *vaitari* (or vocal chant) that accompanies this step is:

Dhi ta ta ta X 4

Step Two: has the foot being slapped firmly and hard onto the earth's surface. The heel is then clicked followed by a stamping of the left and right foot. I call this exercise a body grounding exercise. This step is done in slow, medium and fast tempos. The *vaitari* (or vocal chant) that accompanies this step is:

Tai hita ti ti Tai hita tom tom X 4

In this way, each step can be seen to be serving a specific body function. The third and fourth steps, however, move away from the body stabilising imperative and are more decorative in nature. There, the energy is not directed downward and into the earth, but more along the surface and outward towards the audience. Each step has its individuality, its individual function.

For each step, Rajendra ji gets up and demonstrates. Once again, I observe carefully and then mirror his actions. I work to synchronise the chant with the step. I notice the way his right foot comes in bang on time. It's the quick lifting of the right foot that allows for a perfect timing. He demonstrates this for me at the fastest tempo and then we both do the step together. I can sense both our bodies in communion with each other as well as with our chanting selves. We are working as much within ourselves as we are without. We are working to ground ourselves as much as we are perfecting the physicality of the step. It is this "grounding" ability, of learning to hold one's ground, that will help later when the musicians come in, and the drums start leading the performance. The performer then has literally to hold his ground, and not get swept away by the drumming.

With this work, my one-on-one session ends. It has been hard work for me as I have had to stay low and grounded for most parts of an hour-and-a-half. Rajendra ji has also worked hard as he got up from his stool repeatedly to demonstrate a step for me, to observe and mirror. I end the session and begin to offer to bend to touch his feet but Rajendra ji prevents me. I fold my hands in a salutation and he too folds his hands and thanks me.

These counter gestures of my offering to touch, and his not letting me touch his feet reflect a nuanced interaction within the intracultural space. Rajendra ji, by not

letting me bend to touch his feet, was acknowledging my age and status as a mature teacher and performer. My offer to touch was an acknowledgement of the space and culture I was in, where respect for the embodied presence of the teacher is expressed by this particular ritual. While I have personal reservations around this social practice, there were times when I was younger, like at formal ceremonies, where everyone is touching the feet of the guru, that I have had to fall in line with everyone else, and touch the feet of the guru. But I had always felt uncomfortable about it and was happy for Rajendra ji's gesture of letting me off.

However, when I did return to teach Kathakali in Australia, in the intercultural space within the new social, I felt a need not to continue the foot touching practice but for an embodied contact with the learner, for the learner to know that the knowledge was coming from my embodied self, for an expression of respect for the teacher's body. In the new social, I felt a need to reconcile the foot touching practice with a new practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined one-on-one Kathakali actor training by placing myself at the site of a Kathakali training session. I worked alone with Evoor Rajendran Pillai, repeating exercise routines and choreographies I had previously worked with Sadanam Balakrishnan. Pillai lead me through each exercise and I followed, mirroring his actions. I worked to validate the "observe, imitate and repeat" pedagogy of traditional Indian dance training, referencing the work of Monica Dalidowicz. While both Dalidowicz and I work to nuance an understanding of the traditional *guru shishya* methodology, our interests diverge; while she looks at the creativity accompanying this pedagogy, I work to validate and understand its core

method of a precise imitation and repetition. In this chapter, I reflect on one of the most important Kathakali exercises, the work on a learner's basic posture. The basic posture's presence and absence is analysed by referencing the work of Drew Leder. A theoretical framework offered by Tim Ingold's article works towards understanding the relationship of the hands and feet, and a process of these body parts functioning together in communion. The next chapter looks at the details of teaching Kathakali in Australia in the group mode. A case is made for the efficacy of one-on-one training by examining the difficulty of sustaining the traditional teaching methodology, of observing, imitating and repeating the teacher's actions, especially when faced with multiple bodies with a multiplicity of needs.

Chapter Six

Teaching Multiple Bodies in Australia

This chapter negotiates the practice-led research exercise of teaching Kathakali to contemporary performers in Australia in the group workshop mode. The objective through this research exercise was to teach Kathakali in the group mode, and to then persuade willing learners to work one-on-one. At the start of the process, I was not sure of the learners' interest in one-on-one actor training. If they were indeed interested, I was not sure how long that interest would be sustained. Would an Australian learner work with me one-on-one for a day, a week, a month, a year or more? I had never taught one-on-one before. What were the means and methods I needed to adopt to make this an artistically worthwhile exercise for both? I also needed to stop reading, thinking, worrying and step out and engage with my practice. From August 2014 to October 2014, for three months, I taught Kathakali in Melbourne where I now live. I worked with a group of Australian performing artists from a range of practices, including Butoh, Body Weather,[26] ballet, Odissi dance, stage and television/cinema acting. We worked for one hour a week. The learning process throughout this entire engagement followed the methodology established, which was to demonstrate for the participants the action to be performed, and then ask them to mirror and perform it. I was not going to engage in any detailed discussion

---

[26] "The term and philosophical basis for BODY WEATHER was founded by Butoh dancer Min Tanaka and his MAI-JUKU performance group, Japan. Drawing from both eastern and western dance, sports training, martial arts and theatre practice, it a[sic] ground training that develops a conscious relation devoid of any specific aesthetic. As a former dancer with Mai-Juku 1985-91, Tess de Quincey introduced the BODYWEATHER philosophy and methodology into Australia in 1989" (http://dequinceyco.net/bodyweather/about). Peter Fraser, one of the two prime participants in this research, has worked extensively with Tess de Quincey.

through this process. The only method on offer was my repeating the action demonstrated as often as they asked for it.

The Mirror Neuron System

To teach Kathakali in Australia, an appropriate language and representation needed to be found. Readings in neuroscience literature offered a contemporary language to present the Kathakali work. In my workshops, I had to speak in English, and ask learners to observe me, to watch me carefully, to imitate me. To observe is to do in Kathakali. Kathakali learning involves a sustained observation, over many years, by a learner of a *guru*. The value of this sustained observation may be validated by developments in our understanding of the way the brain works. Recent excitement in the field of neuroscience suggests that there exists a mirror mechanism in the human brain supporting the "intersubjectivity" involved, as happens in the intimacy of social interactions wherein a mirroring takes place, one parallel to that of the mirroring of a teacher's actions by a student. This "intersubjectivity" generated by the mirroring mechanism mediates by integrating the act of observing with the act of doing; as Gallese observes, "[m]irror Neurons are premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else" (2009: 520).

This integration, through an act of precise imitation of the act of observing and doing, is the core methodology of the "Kathakali mirroring" process. Gallese and Sinigaglia set out the working of the mirroring mechanism in greater detail:

> … this mechanism in the human brain, given the present state of knowledge,
> maps the sensory representation of the action, emotion or sensation of another
> onto the perceiver's own motor, viscera-motor or somatosensory representation

of that action, emotion or sensation. This mapping enables one to perceive the

action, emotion or sensation of another as if she were performing that action or

experiencing that emotion or sensation herself. (2011:512)

What is significant here about the activation of the mirror neuron system is not that a

motor neuron (one that moves the body) fires when an action is performed, and

another visual neuron (one that helps observation), fires when that same action is

observed. It is that the same motor neuron fires, for instance, when the monkey grasps

a peanut as when the monkey observes another monkey grasping a peanut. These

neurons were called mirror neurons because it was as if the monkey was watching her

own actions reflected by a mirror when watching someone else performing the action.

It is as though this neuron is adopting the other person's point of view performing a

virtual reality simulation of the other person's action.

In the context of Kathakali learning and performance, what may be inferred here

is that the same motor neuron that fires when a teacher's action is observed by the

learner is the motor neuron that fires when the same observed action is performed.

The power for the Kathakali learner/performer comes from the integrated process by

which a motor neuron fires twice, as it were, firing once while observing the dramatic

action being taught and firing again when enacting that action. This process is

facilitated by an act of empathy. This empathy works itself out connecting two bodies

separated at the surface of, and by their human skin. This empathy is heightened when

the action observed is precisely imitated. Through that precise enactment the teacher

and the learner experience a communion, a oneness, losing their sense of separation.

This communion is an aesthetic pleasure. This idea of aesthetic pleasure references an

earlier articulated binary of pain and pleasure in Chapter Two (pages 38, 39)

suggestive of a journey from a broken dysfunctional learner's body, to a body well

integrated and communing with itself, functioning to connect its hands, feet and facial gestures while serving to function as an integrated social entity. This well-functioning body then communes with the teacher in the learning space, and with the audience in the performance space, creating the conditions for an experience of aesthetic pleasure.

The human skin and the act of empathy

In a TED talk (2009), neuroscientist Dr. V.S. Ramachandran, reflecting on what makes for two individuals experiencing themselves as separate from each other, suggests that it is the sensitivity of their skin that effects a feeling of separation. A sense of touch received through the human skin, as perceived by the human brain, furthers the ownership of a separate experience. Ramachandran's ideas about the way the brain functions are central to this dissertation. A TED talk by him is used as a reference, both for the knowledge it contains as well as the performative act, the stepping out by the scientist into the performance space, arguing for and stating a new understanding of the way brain activity informs culture, an understanding that makes more complex the act of imitation.

As a teacher of Kathakali in Australia, my articulation in English of an appropriate representation to validate its imitative teaching methodology is a similar act of performance. I needed to communicate and convince the learner by using an appropriate language. To have the learner's attention and empathy I needed to find the right words and language. Within the Kathakali mirror box, I need to activate what Ramachandran, mooting human connectivity, playfully calls "Gandhi Neurons":

> So, I call them Gandhi Neurons, or empathy neurons. And this is not in some
> abstract metaphorical sense. All that's separating you from him, from the other
> person, is your skin. Remove the skin, you experience that person's touch in

your mind. You've dissolved the barrier between you and other human beings. And this, of course, is the basis of much of Eastern philosophy, and that there is no real independent self, aloof from other human beings, inspecting the world, inspecting other people. You are, in fact, connected not just via Facebook and Internet; you're actually quite literally connected by your neurons (TED talk, 2009).

To make sense of Ramachandran's hypothesis in the present context, I turn to Kathakali's body massaging practices. In Kathakali's body preparation practices, one element of what Drew Leder defines as the "surface body", the skin, and its ecstatic opening out to the world, is enhanced through the process of daily oil massage called *uzhicil.* The body is massaged for long stretches of time, not just for days but for months, day after day after day.

Why does the actor training process require such intensive massage? One explanation references the earlier elaborated idea of Leder's "disappearing body." The massage opens the young learner's skin and senses to the world, and by that very ecstasy makes the body comfortable with the state of absence, with the body's disappearance. After a month or more of the oil massage, the sense of being relaxed, free, of being bodiless, airy etc., are all part of that greater sense of embodied disappearance. The oil massage serves not just the body's flexibility and relaxation but also helps develop that inner subjective state of calm, of absence, of a comfort with the body's disappearance. This subjective relaxation and comfort facilitates the embodiment of the *bhava* or the embodied emotional state. When the performer generates and fills his body with the specific embodied emotional state, the subjective body is ready to receive the *bhava* and the performer, too, gets to be comfortable with this inner possessed state. By this process, Kathakali training habituates the performer

to the phenomenology of the body's disappearance and makes it facilitate the body's possession by the emotional state or *bhava.*

The body's absence and disappearance also facilitates its communion with the other, the body of the teacher. The learner's internal body image, freed of its sense of its limitation by an intense massage of its outer surface, its skin, is easily morphed into, and absorbed as it were into the body image of the teacher. Through a sustained social interaction, the two bodies feel as one. Yet they maintain their separateness. As Ramachandran suggests, it is the skin that separates, facilitating identification. The well-oiled and well-trained body of the Kathakali learner, observing the teacher's demonstration, experiences the teacher's action, the Kathakali form, its objective and subjective condition, as if it were his own. This state of deep empathy is heightened by the precise observation and imitation of the action observed. This process of precise observation and imitation facilitates a communion between the learner and the teacher.

The imitative methodology in group work

I stand before a group of Kathakali learners in a small studio called "The Yellow Room" in Melbourne. I have hired the studio for an hour-and-a-half every Friday of the month. I had advertised these classes as an introduction to Kathakali actor training. I've had a great response and find eight enthusiastic learners waiting for me on the first day. The room has a window looking out westward, and the evening sun is flooding into the room. There is a large mirror on one wall which I had hoped to keep to one side of us, but have to adjust myself because of the sunlight, and stand in front of it, with the learners facing

me and facing the mirror. There are different ages, ethnicities, body shapes and genders facing me.

Dr. Alison Richards is a short, stocky, powerfully built middle-aged woman. Allana Hogart is an edgy, nervous, slim-bodied young woman. Cherian Jacobs is a young man, shy of his physical presence. Helen Smith, as previously described, is a tall, large well-built middle-aged woman with large hands and big feet. Lillian Warrum is a neatly framed, slim-boned, contained and reserved young woman Ezikiel Day is a strong-bodied, powerfully built young man. Peter Fraser, is a thin, tall, wiry and unsure-on-his-feet middle-aged man. Tim Wilkinson is a tall, well-controlled, precise young man with a very wide arm-spread, making him look like an albatross in midflight!

I begin the actor training session with the folded hand salutation, then the three steps backward and into the basic pose. This takes a lot of time. It is surprising to see how slow they are in co-ordinating their left and right hands as well as their hands with their feet. This lack of co-ordination becomes even more apparent when we attempt two-handed gestures, with each hand illustrating a different gesture.

Lillian Warrum, who is an Odissi performer, another form of Indian dance with its own hand gestural language, is quick to adopt Kathakali's language of gestures. Helen too over time finds a good rhythm but the rest of the group find it very difficult. Peter, who is the oldest in the group, interestingly finds gestures that bring the tip of the forefinger and the tip of the thumb together, almost impossible to remember and master.

After attempting the folded hand greeting, I move to working steps backward to rhythm. The steps in rhythm take more than one session to master.

Stepping backwards seems more difficult than stepping forward. It is clear in doing this simple step to rhythm that these bodies in front of me have not previously moved to a formal rhythm such as Kathakali's *taalam*. Taking steps backward in rhythm proves difficult and is time consuming. I find that while I am showing one learner the steps, the others are trying to find their own way into it. For example, Tim has changed the *ti ti tai* chant to a one, and a two, and a three. The sound of *tai* pronounced with an elongated *taieeeee* can be stretched and allows for a little more space before the next beat. The count of three is more precise and limiting. I do not want them to count in numbers. I want them to observe and imitate me; this means I need to demonstrate it eight different times, once for each of them, and then work with each of them to get the chant and the step in sync. It proves quite exhausting and we barely have time to work at the basic pose.

I am keen and committed to working the basic pose every day. On the first day, I realise each individual requires a lot of attention. For the basic pose, each body has a different way of lowering itself and at the same time holding itself up. For example, Peter goes into a deep low square squat with his knees open wider than necessary. This results in his upper body and chest jutting forward almost aggressively and his arms stretching out, very square to the body. I need him to make his arms more rounded and release and relax into each element of the basic posture. I sense his body in two parts with him holding together the upper part far too tightly. This makes it feel as if he is disconnected to the lower part. Even though his posture is low and square, he doesn't feel grounded. Lillian has great form and stands low and grounded on the one hand, and relaxed and free in the upper body on the other. However, her foot, used to the

Odissi dance form, opens out at an angle. For Kathakali, I need to have it straight. This is a difficult choice. Lillian has come to Kathakali to work at *abhinaya,* or the expressive enactment, including her facial and emotional expression. How could I teach her Kathakali *abhinaya* without affecting and changing her Odissi form? I am unsure of the answer. Tim has an excellent basic pose with wonderfully rounded arms. However, I sense he is holding his breath, and this makes for a lot of tension in the body. Alison is very committed to going low but with her weight and age I have to watch very carefully so that she does not suffer pain in the knee joints. With everyone I sense a difference for the length of time each can and needs to stay down. This is a critical skill for the Kathakali teacher. To lower the learner into the basic posture, to watch them carefully as they stay down and at the right moment, to release and return them back to the upright. Each day, this needs to be done very carefully and the time increased slowly. Each individual has a different sense of being grounded and each has to be worked at separately. I find this critical element of grounding the learner very difficult to achieve with eight bodies present in front of me. Each archetypical gesture needs individual attention best served not by the group mode but by the one-on-one site of actor training.

Over the next three months, on every Friday, I work with the group. The numbers ebb and flow as the participants make their choices. At its fullest, the group is ten strong. I have a questionnaire for each of them which they reply to and email me once they have finished with the work.

In the group phase, often left on their own while I work on an individual, I notice participants working out their individual solutions to some of the difficulties

they are facing. Difficulties range from performing fluently the two-handed *mudras* or hand gestures, to getting the danced choreography right. I notice they are doing two things, taking personal ownership of their problems as well as creating their version of the solution. This further results in the creation of their own artificial version of the Kathakali form. Taking personal ownership of problems and finding their own individual solutions makes the learner work within their own psycho physicality/psychophysicality, changing the sociopsychophysical nature of Kathakali learning wherein the social informs the learner through the embodied presence of the teacher. I notice that whenever Helen is not able to do an action, she tries to identify it, and see and own it as a problem, to be analysed and solved. She seems to be asking herself "why am I not getting it?," while simultaneously applying her mind in trying to solve it. I hear Peter too say something to the effect of, "my mind is not getting it, so let me just see, if I go with the rhythm, I might get it". My belief is that till the performer is not able to see clearly what the body is being asked to do, the problem remains. For the performer to be able to see the Kathakali form, she must observe without interruption and in as pure, uninterrupted and unselfconscious a way as possible. The moment the physical form is seen as a problem, the learner's attention moves to finding the solution and not to the observation of the action. This creates other versions of the solution, interpretations other than the one which emerges through sustained observation.

In group work, this methodology of asking for a sustained observation of demonstrated actions was not easy. Time and again, I found the learner/s introspecting in my presence. Often, I could see them not watching me, and even while seemingly observing, trying to work something out in their own minds and bodies. Repeatedly, I would have to remind them of my presence, to watch me, observe me. I would say

"Don't look up trying to remember the gesture, I am here, showing it to you, observe my gesture." I could see Helen working out the moves in her own head, in her own coded language that she had created on her own. Her own inner dialogue was so loud that I could almost hear it. On my insistence, she shared it. She had given a name for every move with the logic of a waiter serving a meal. "Hand up flat, holding a serving dish, three steps towards the table, bend to place plate, leap back as if seeing an insect in the soup!" She had created her own internalised social language. In the group sessions, I was unable to bring her attention to my needs, to the needs of the Kathakali teacher.

It was only later, when working one-on-one, in the intimacy of the KMB that I could negotiate and find a way for her to give me her full attention. In the one-on-one space, while the learner was constantly confronted by my presence, neither of us could escape each other. In the group space, the opposite was true. While I was attending to one, the others would turn inward, beginning to introspect, finding their own ways. I had to devise different strategies to draw their attention to my presence. I had to physically exaggerate some gestures or make a louder noise with the rhythm stick. For a long time, Helen had the habit of making a particular popping sound when getting a rhythm right. It was her way of announcing to herself that she had done the step right. I had to intervene to break that habit. I would stop teaching the moment I would hear the sound. It took a while for the message to sink in. The Kathakali learner has to be silent, watchful. Like a hunter warrior out on a hunt! Cherian kept looking abstractedly into space, to remember gestures and insisted he was a visual person and needed to refer to his visual memory, which was way up there somewhere. I was showing him the gestures and needed him to do them precisely till he was sure of

them, not attempting an interpretation of the action, recalled from a memory space, but presenting a real version of what I was offering.

I found I had to ask the learners to stay within the grounded environment of our relationship. In common parlance, I needed the learner to stay in constant touch with me. At the same time, I had to attend to each of them individually, separately. This proved extremely difficult. It was easier to start talking and explaining things than to repeatedly demonstrate for them. I had to find persuasive and contemporary arguments to highlight the importance of a need to sustain observation. This brought up the question of the language I used to argue my case. How do you ask a contemporary western performer to observe an action and then to copy, imitate or mimic the observed action? How do I ask an Australian learner/actor/performer to observe my action and then copy, mimic, imitate me repeatedly, till it is perfected? Mimic your way to become perfect impersonators! I noticed the learners observe and receive an action and then move very quickly to owning and interpreting it. Living in Melbourne for the past five years, I have shared a culture where one individually owns and executes actions all day – from washing clothes and dishes, to shopping for and cooking food, to removing garbage. Here in Australia, all these are not social joint actions (as they are for me in India) but singular, individualistic acts. I had to find a new language and culture to adapt to the needs of both, the traditional Kathakali training methodology, as well as the Australian learner. From this, for example, emerged the need to define the imitative learning process as an act of Kathakali "mirroring," referencing not the inversion of an image in the mirror but the functional value of mirror neurons within the mirror neuron system in the human brain. This reframing of the act of imitation and placing it within the contemporary language and

culture helped justify the repeated requests to observe and then perform and mirror my actions.

Through teaching groups of performers and attending to their individual needs I realised all performers, each in their own ways, have special needs. For example, Peter had a habit of pursing his lips each time he committed to an action. This was a personal nervous habit no one else had ever noticed. In Kathakali, the face, including the lips, is made up into a precise facial form. A pursing of lips would destroy the form. The precision of the form needed him to break his habit of pursing his lips. This required me to intervene into his personal space and constantly remind him of his habit each time he pursed his lips. In a group session, this was embarrassing. Later in the KMB, the trust, intimacy and privacy allowed this significant intervention. Over time, Peter let go of his habit, experiencing a deeper relaxation as a consequence.

While dancing, Lillian was getting breathless very easily. She seemed to be struggling with body movements, which she was sure of and had mastered, to the traditional music. She had always listened to the traditional music while attempting the formal dance. Perhaps she needed to find a new way to listen to the traditional music – by free dancing to it. She responded to the free dance session in the following way:

> So, when I was dancing freely to traditional music it felt like I was actually listening to the music and not worrying about what my body was doing as much as I would usually. I heard and experienced flows of rhythm that I normally wouldn't whilst dancing the traditional form. There was a freedom in breaking out of the form and it felt a little rebellious too! (Personal email to author dated 4/4/2016)

This was a great response and I felt emboldened to include it for other learners, free dancing to traditional music, as a means not for performance but to help them deepen their connection to the music. However, these solutions within the group work began to take the teaching away from its core principle of demonstrating, observing and imitating. While being more creative, I found myself compromising with the core research exercise which was to renegotiate the basic exercise of observe, imitate, and repeat. As a teacher, I was beginning to invent exercises to help solve individual learners' problems. This was moving me away from the objective of the research exercise. I needed to draw the participants back to the research objectives, not solve actor training problems as if we had a show to perform. I needed to work at the act of imitation and move the learners to trusting the creativity within the imitative process.

As Hallam and Ingold point out, "copying or imitation . . . is not the simple, mechanical process of replication that it is often taken to be, of running duplicates from a template, but entails a complex and ongoing alignment of observation of the model with action in the world" (2007: 5). The learner needed to trust in this process of observation, imitation and mirroring. They needed to be convinced of the many innovations within the imitative methodology itself, elaborated upon here by Dalidowicz (2015):

> Although less obvious, and harder to translate to pen and paper, instruction and interventions in dance come in other ways, from the subtle movements, emotive gestures, and expressions of the teacher, to more obvious methods like slowing segments down, emphasizing critical features, parsing choreography into manageable sections, or repeating isolated movements. The basic task of mimicry is, in fact, a product of interventions, based on the teacher's pre-

understanding of basic problems and difficulties, made in response to the

student's shifting abilities. (2015,841)

Dalidowicz's observations validate the value of the imitative process supporting a

master practitioner's effort to make the learner imitate more precisely. This trust in

the imitative process is central to traditional pedagogy.

A sign that I was not taking on the role of the traditional teacher in the group

sessions was my not taking up the central seated position of the teacher. Instead, of

the seated, dominant position, I would stand and teach, often at the side or even

behind the group. Theoretically, in my head, I had framed the group phase as an

"intracultural" exercise between fellow Melburnians of differing ethnicities, and

consequently was attempting to create a more democratic exercise of my power as a

teacher. An "intercultural" exercise perhaps would have required a more definitive

stamp of the leading culture. My avoidance of the role of a central authority was a

conscious choice and needs some explanation in the context of ideas emerging from

the "intracultural" exercise.

The intracultural exercise

In negotiating the creative problems emerging from a "collision of cultures,"

Rustom Bharucha (2000) suggests working with the alternative concept of the

intracultural as different from the intercultural. In an intercultural exercise, Bharucha

suggests that the two cultures, separated in space and time, move towards common

ground, a universal middle, a neutral space. This neutral space however is white,

patriarchal and male in its primary dominant narrative. We saw this earlier in the

conflict between Barba and Panigrahi wherein it was Barba's values that were driving

the intercultural exercise, creating situations of conflict for Panigrahi. In the

intracultural exercise, Bharucha frames a more equal negotiation of cultures, existing within a region, with an acknowledgement of each participating culture, and without a search for a universal common ground. For a director leading the intracultural exercise, he suggests that "to work with the acknowledgement of 'imperfect knowledge' could be the surest way of securing the trust of one's collaborators" (70). By standing to one side of the group or standing behind the group and not right at the centre, I was attempting to live out this idea of the leader with "imperfect knowledge." The knowledge that was being sought was not with me alone, but somewhere in between us, between the learners and me. By not sitting at the centre and making the group work at repeating my actions perfectly and instead innovating and inventing exercises, I was losing both the research exercise, as well as the core traditional methodology of observing perfected actions and then imitating them.

This choice was reflected in a lack of clear directive of how to start and end a session. No formality had been established and participants were free to come in and leave. While staying away from using the foot touching ritual, the participants still needed a formal entry, in and out of the workshop. The work itself was formal and embodied. A mere "hi", "hello" or a "good bye" and a handshake felt inadequate for the work. The practice itself was demanding a formal greeting. I felt compelled to reinvent one. The inadequacies of the "intracultural" exercise for research into Kathakali actor training then set the ground for a more rigorous examination of the traditional methodology.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the teaching of Kathakali in Australia in the group mode. I set up my argument for the efficacy of one-on-one training by examining the difficulty of sustaining the traditional teaching methodology, of observing, imitating

and repeating the teacher's actions, especially when faced with multiple bodies with a multiplicity of needs. In negotiating the problems and difficulties faced in teaching in a group, I record the creative solutions on offer while at the same time recognising the divergence of this process of creative problem solving, one that resulted in taking the teaching work away from both the traditional methodology as well as the research exercise itself. By locating the difficulties and the inadequacies of the "intracultural exercise," I return to the traditional idea of the teacher driving processes based on a central figure working with what may be framed, in reference to the "imperfect knowledge" of the intracultural, as "perfect knowledge." The traditional Kathakali teacher was sure of what needed to be taught and how to teach it. The methodology imparting this "perfect knowledge" becomes complicated in the group teaching mode. Building on the lessons learnt and experiences of the group exercise, the next chapter explores the traditional imitative methodology through the site of one-on-one actor training. This imitative methodology, argued for as a mirroring, is central to the sociopsychophysical pedagogy of Kathakali. This chapter makes an evidence-based claim for *bhavarasa*, or the performer's aesthetic pleasure, as the prime offering of this mirroring pedagogy.

Chapter Seven

Working One-on-One with Helen Smith and Peter Fraser

This chapter documents the teaching of two Australian performers, Helen Smith and Peter Fraser, and works toward validating the one-on-one site as the appropriate field for researching the sociopsychophysicality of Kathakali actor training. At this sociopsychophysical site of one-on-one actor training, the psychophysicality of the learner mirrors the psychophysicality of the master practitioner. This mirroring is experienced as an embodied communion between teacher and learner. This communion lays the ground for an experience of aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa*. While critiquing the theory of *rasa,* the performer's body and its aesthetic pleasure is added to the traditional idea of *rasa* as limited to an audience's pleasure. Using the convention of a "diary documentary" technique of on-site reportage, I share the practice-led work, as well as theorise around the question of the performer's pleasure or *bhavarasa.*

Helen, Peter and I: working as a threesome

My work with Helen and Peter went through two stages over the twenty-two months it lasted (a period which includes the first three months of group work). Initially, we worked as a threesome before moving into the one-on-one space. This working together took place in Helen's home in the city. A small front room was enough to host three performers. Helen's home is an hour-and-a-half journey from my home in Gisborne, the first country town out of Melbourne. Afraid of city traffic and parking issues, I chose to drive down twenty minutes to a nearby town to catch the city metro. In the city I had to change metro lines to get to where Helen lived, a

journey that required ninety minutes of travel in each direction. Peter lived near Helen's home. Helen and Peter had worked together before and were happy to form a pair of learners. While Peter seemed willing to undertake one-on-one work, Helen initially seemed a little reluctant, and was happier working in a group.

This initial plan had me spending a total of three hours travelling and often arriving to teach, a little tired and rattled by the journey. This limited my energy and I found our sessions restricted to an hour-and-a-half due to my getting tired by both the journey and the session being physically demanding with my need to demonstrate the actions repeatedly. Three months later, when we started to work one-on-one in my home, I found two significant differences. First, I could be still, calm and relaxed before starting the session. Second, Helen and Peter, working separately and one-on-one by now, both had cars and found they could drive to my home in forty minutes and were less tired than I was by my travel. By this shift in work location, we were able to work for four/five hours at a time. The work itself, through an availability of time, felt deeper and richer. It also felt meaningful that the learner was moving towards a still/stable teacher. This formality felt right for an embodied practice like Kathakali wherein the teacher must often work as hard as the learner. However, initially I respected Helen's need to work in her own space. I later interviewed and recorded her feelings about her resistance to moving out of this space and into the one-on-one space:

> Arjun: So, we began as a group with the workshop if you remember and then
> we went solo one-on-one. How would you have felt if we had carried on
> the entire process as a group. What was your reaction on the move?
>
> Helen: Personally, I would have liked it, I like group work and it suits my mode
> of learning and that comes from prior experience. I learnt dance as a child

in a group class and I worked in an ensemble theatre company where we trained and worked together. I really love that because I don't feel singled out like I do on my own and it's like what you said about hearing other people's responses. I enjoy working with other people and seeing how they react to the work and it helps me, inspires me to watch other students struggling, and helps me to understand my own struggle more, because the teacher being the role model is already exemplary but other students in the class are like me, struggling, and we can work it out together. So, I definitely prefer being in a group but I understand, I accepted your reasons for going in that direction, it was also rewarding.

The interview with Helen from which this excerpt was taken was recorded at the end of the twenty-two months of working together and reflects the complications of working one-on-one. As Helen suggests, not all learners are keen to work one-on-one. While respecting and understanding Helen's reluctance for one-on-one work, I was happy and appreciative of her trust in the process, and her willingness to engage with the one-on-one work. As she indicates at the end of the excerpt, she was a willing participant. This willingness was important for the research, as indeed was the voluntary nature of the exercise. Peter too was willing and the one-on-one work began for me in earnest when Helen and Peter starting coming to my home in Gisborne.

Working one-on-one: an informal "daily" start to the work

The Kathakali training work begins with their coming, one at a time, to my home in the country town of Gisborne, where at my doorstep they have to take off their shoes. I have a chair waiting for them at the door, for them to sit. It takes a while

for Peter, who wears very complicated laced up shoes, to change to easier slip ons. His left foot is fragile, painful at times, and he is protective of it. I have a cup of tea ready for them or at times, make them a cup of tea even while they are settling and relaxing after their drive. I enjoy having them standing around watching me make tea. We spend ten minutes, or so, sitting around the table relaxing and talking, conversing about our lives. My wife Monica joins in and sets off a discussion about dance. She is an Odissi dancer, an older form of classical Indian dance from the Northern Indian state of Odissa. These ten or fifteen minutes spent are precious for their ordinariness. Our "daily" bodies, sitting, standing, lounging ordinarily. Our embodied voices touching each other. Washing up the tea utensils, we move to the studio.

In the one-on-one session, I attempt to work with the clarity and authority of a traditional teacher. In the Kathakali mirror box I am the well arm, the learner the phantom limb. However, while I am attempting to play a traditional teacher, these are not traditional students. With Helen and Peter, and in respect of western traditions and habits of learning, the training sessions keep getting interrupted by their need to take down notes, and to ask questions. I am unsure and under-confident of enforcing my own rules of engagement. I feel obliged to let them participate in and direct the form of the work.

On being asked about his motivation for participating in the research exercise, Peter had expressed his desire to create a work with Kathakali and Shakespeare in the future. In an email, he had spelt out his attraction for what he believed was the kind of theatre Kathakali represented:

I am not so interested in personal (self) expression and psychological narratives. I am most attracted to and moved by performance that does something like 'resonating on the spot' – with a sense of being or presence or becoming. And of

something human but larger or more universal than the individual human. Or

something that is reached by means of gesture and state of the body.

Peter also had thoughts, though in the very early stages, of what he might do with the

Kathakali work in the future:

> As to how I might 'use' this. I am not sure. I do have a plan to work on a two-
> person version of Macbeth – perhaps focussing on grotesque elements
> (influenced by Ubu Roi) and using extravagant costume etc (email to researcher
> dated 05/09/2014)

> Helen too had previously participated in a physical theatre performance of

Macbeth[27] and was open to making creative explorations with Kathakali and

Shakespeare. Both of them had just finished a Masters by Research and were keen

note takers by habit of this previous research experience. They were both open to

working at a doctorate in the future. While not asking them to refrain from note taking

or interrupting the work to ask questions, for my own part, I kept to the traditional

method of not entering into a lengthy discussion. I tried to answer questions briefly

while not getting into any detailed analysis, debate or discussion. I chose not to ever

stop a session to take notes myself. Within the one-on-one site, I worked hard to not

turn Helen and Peter into objects of my research and continued trying to see them as

Kathakali learners, and to encourage the concentrated, careful and sustained

observation of the actions demonstrated by me. However, later, I would reflect on the

process. This methodology of keeping the writing away from the training space

---

[27] *Macbeth: As told by the Weird Sisters* by Zen Zen Zo Performer. Venue: City Hall Brisbane, VIII World Shakespeare Congress. Director: Steven Mitchell Wright. (Helen Smith c.v)

maintained the authenticity of a pedagogy that has existed for centuries within a non-literate and oral tradition.

Susan L. Schwartz, in her study of the aesthetic pleasure of *rasa* (2002), offers a persuasive argument in support of treating these oral-based learning traditions differently from those that are literate:[28]

The atmosphere in which teaching and learning took place was oral/aural/kinesthetic. It is difficult to appreciate the power of this form of transmission fully, particularly from the standpoint of a primarily literate culture. If we are to understand the performing arts in India, however, this is one aspect that must be grasped. A distance occurs between the student and the knowledge to be gained when the mode of transmission is the written word. The physical distance between the eye and the page is symbolic of a greater distance between the learner and the learned. However, when the transmission is experienced physically, as sound enters into the body through the ears and movement is physically internalized, it is more active, more engaged, and it is immediate, that is, unmediated. Those who learn physically learn differently and experience their knowledge differently as well. It becomes ingested, becomes, like food, part of one's cell structure. When the guru *shows*, rather than *tells*, absorption by the student is of a different quality altogether. (5)

Schwartz's highlighting of the difference between the written and the "oral/aural/kinesthetic" frames my research methodology. The practice-led work followed this methodology of the teacher showing rather than telling. The time to

---

[28] Diana Taylor too, in her forceful work *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas,* argues for a recognition of this difference between the embodied and the literate. "For all of us the political implications of the project were clear. If performance did not transmit knowledge only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity" (2003:xvii).

reflect on the work came later when writing about the sessions in the diary. On re-reading and analysing these reflections recorded in the diary, I found my writing suggested those sessions that I perceived as going well contained data less relevant for the present research as compared with writings about points of breakdown and conflict in the relationship. It was in negotiating problems and conflicts that my research interest seemed to lie.

The first problem awaiting resolution was finding an appropriate ritual to start the session, replacing the traditional touching of the teacher's feet. While rejecting the practice of the old social, in the new social I needed Helen and Peter to continue to make some form of respectful contact with my body. In our sessions together, we unsuccessfully tried various options. A handshake was too western. A folded hand greeting by both was eastern but a still a little like an exotic spiritual greeting. A hug was too intimate. A kiss on the cheek too alien to the culture of Kathakali. Starting only with the Kathakali *kumbatil* or formal greeting was another option, but that meant entering the training space without acknowledging the social space. For a while, we struggled with the replacement of the traditional hand to foot gesture.

It was in researching the way the body and the brain inform each other that I gained confidence in transforming the traditional practice into a new practice. The "sensory homunculus" as analysed in Chapter Two, translated into the "guru homunculus" with his large hands and face becoming the transforming image. The narrative and emotional significance of the hand and face connection to Kathakali performativity furthered the move away from a hand and foot gesture to a hand and face gesture. In the new ritual devised by the three of us, the teacher puts out his folded hands, the learner bends slightly, not as much as he would have to touch the teacher's feet, and holds the teacher's hands in/with his hands, then leans forward and

touches the right, then the left cheek with the teacher's cheeks. The process of writing this dissertation helped me intellectually validate this new practice, as well as helped me argue the case with Helen and Peter for this new practice to replace the old one. This freedom to touch our faces was one available in the new social and I was happy to be able to use it, for my purpose of both acknowledging an intimacy and touchability within the one-on-one space in the new social, as well as expressing respect for each other's bodies.

Communing with Helen one-on-one: an episode from a researcher's "diary documentary"

To my home in Gisborne, Helen arrives sharp at 9 a.m. At the door while she takes off her shoes we have a little playful ritual greeting in German, "Wie Gehts…Zer Gut, und sie." Just fun. We sit down for a hot cup of tea. In talking with her, I find out she has just dropped a dear friend to the airport. I sense she is a little fragile by this farewell. We go into the studio and we both delight in the new hand and face greeting. She too is happy with it. She claps her hands in approval. I am now seated centrally in the room like a traditional teacher. She moves back, stands a few feet away from me, and does the formal Kathakali *kumbatil.* Even though Helen, through all her previous training, has a very strong sense of body grounding, when working to move her body to rhythm, she works with her mind, listening and trying to work out the rhythm in her mind, trying to connect the rhythm to her body, and when she does that, she tends to hop lightly with her steps. As her mind is working the rhythm out in her head, her body feels ungrounded. I decide to begin by working harder at helping her staying grounded, even as she works to move her body to Kathakali *taalam* or

rhythm. To start the process, I make her stay in the basic pose for far longer than before. As she struggles to release herself out of the pose I keep indicating for her to stay lower. Helen is a fighter and struggles hard against her need to free herself. She stays low for a long time. I finally ask her to relax, reminding her that I need her to stay low through the entire session. For the next four hours, I keep indicating to her, not to bounce up, but stay low.

While staying low we begin to work at a little dance phrase that both Helen and Peter have had difficulty in mastering. It is a "full stop," that marks the end of more elaborate *kalashams* or choreographed danced steps. The *vaitari or* vocal chant accompanying the step goes

Dhit ta tat ta tim da ta di tai ta dhi ta dhiki ta tai.

The steps are "right foot in, right foot out, left foot in, left foot out, right foot forward, left foot forward, a left foot heel click and a simultaneous right foot kick forward, then a right foot heel click and a simultaneous left foot kick forward, then a quick right kick, right step, left step, closing with a final right step." This last phrase is to the rhythm of *dhi ki tat tai*.

I demonstrate this step repeatedly, endlessly it seems to me. This full stop takes Helen an inordinate length of time to master. The rhythm, which is cyclic, has a marker just before the final beat, to indicate the next cycle is coming up. The chant slows down after *dhi… ki…* and quickens with *tat tai*. This blurs its steady mathematical progression, complicating its imitation. The clicking of the heel and the simultaneous kicking of the other foot further makes this a complicated step for Helen.

While Helen wants to notate this step in her diary in ways similar to those I have just described, I want her to stay away from writing, to observe me

instead, and try and mirror my action. I am happy to demonstrate it as many times as she requires me to. However, I observe her introspecting the moment she begins to mirror my action. Her head bends down and tilts sideways, and I can hear her mumbling, trying out the chant in her head. Her gaze is turned inward. I ask her to chant the *vaitari* aloud but find the chant has in itself become a challenge with the problem of mouthing alien sounds, and a difficult exercise on its own. When I suggest we leave this step for another day, Helen argues strongly for her need to perfect the step before she moves onto anything else. She wants to be left alone to work it out for herself. I need her to keep observing me and to keep trying to repeat the step. Her getting the step perfect is not important for me today. Her trying to get it perfect, and in the way I am asking her to do so, is more important. I realise I need to find a way of sharing my desperation. I tell her I feel like she is treating me like an artist's model, and while I stand there in front of her, she is working to make what looks to me like an impressionist painting of me. An impressionist painting acceptable to her but not to me. We are both upset by this image. I am aware she is emotionally fragile that morning. I could/should stop there and walk away but I sense it would be difficult for me to carry on. I have been trying to get through to her, to allow me to lead the action, for a while now. Helen continues to insist trying to work it out on her own, arguing she is a perfectionist and needs to work out for herself why she is not able to do a simple step. To find her own answer. As a final argument, I add to the image of the artist and the model, another image. One of a monkey and a scientist. I have felt like that each time Helen has taken an action and tried to analyse it while I waited, watching. Like a demonstrating monkey while the free and creative scientist/artist works things out. I suggest to

her we both needed to be monkeys playing with, observing each other. I suggested a time for interpretation would come later, once she has communed enough with the form. This freedom to interpret at a mature stage of learning is available even in the traditional training method. However, at this stage, she needed to commune with me, and trust the process.

We were both moved by this image of difference. This was as hard for me to express as I could see it was for her to hear. I didn't doubt Helen's work ethic. I could have given in earlier, but I knew I had reached a limit. I had shared with her the research exercise of following the imitative methodology. I had presented my arguments. However, she was compelled by her own creative compulsions, training and culture.

We both ended the session there and chose instead to get the water boiling for another cup of tea. We both calmed down after talking of small inconsequential things. I was glad for this social space. By the time she left, we had a plan for the work ahead.

For the next session, she arrived, once again on time, to continue the work. Even in this, the very next session after the morning of our conflict, I found her far more observant and trusting of me, and the process. Our working relationship improved. I had been able to persuade her to follow my method not by the sheer weight of the traditional authority of the role I was executing but instead, through communicating my need, expressed to her verbally, to be seen as an equal. This critical negotiation was possible because right from the start of our relationship I had established a need for an equal relationship—Arjun to Helen—and not one of hierarchy that becomes established quickly through the foot touching practice. This

equality helped sustain our social relationship, a critical element of the sociopsychophysical construct.

I felt very happy when, some months later at a performance that we did together, she revealed that this learning and performing of Kathakali had been one of the most pleasurable processes she had been involved with. We had moved from a potential brokenness that day, towards an experience of pleasure, towards *rasa*. Perhaps ideas and discussions of *rasa* between us had influenced her into thinking specifically about her own pleasure. Or perhaps this process was indeed pleasurable as she insisted. By making her follow my methodology, I was able to offer her what I had received from my own teacher, an ease of performing the hands, feet and facial gestures realised through the Kathakali form. This communion with one's own body parts and the ease of performing what at times are a complicated set of embodied gestures is, I suggest, a first stage of creating aesthetic pleasure.

This integrated body in communion with itself is driven by the rhythm or *talam* kept by the teacher. The teacher demonstrates the actions and emotions while keeping rhythm and singing the dramatic text. The communion with the teacher's actions, rhythm and "being" is then the second stage of aesthetic pleasure.

This is what the struggle with Helen was about, this communion with the teacher's body and rhythm, even for a little full stop. This communion begins even with a little phrase and then develops to negotiate complex choreography. The body of the Kathakali teacher holds within itself many stages of joy and aesthetic pleasure. A communion with that body starts from letting the teacher lead even for a little full stop. From this second stage, the bodies of the learner and teacher move to communing with the text, the singers and musicians in rehearsal. This is the third stage of aesthetic pleasure. The body of the performer, expressing on stage through all

four forms of *abhinaya angika, satvik, aharya* and *vacika* and communing with the audience's body, especially of one who is knowledgeable of the aesthetic object on stage, is the fourth and final stage of aesthetic pleasure.

In traditional scholarship on the theory of *rasa*, the predominant interpretation of *rasa* engages with only the fourth stage. Here too it is the audience's experience that defines the meaning of *rasa*. The performer's body and its aesthetic pleasure is absent. In the following section, by examining the theory of *rasa*, the performer's body and its pleasure is added to the traditional idea of *rasa* as limited to an audience's appreciation and pleasure. In acknowledgement of traditional scholarship, the performer's pleasure is defined separately as *bhavarasa. Bhavarasa* is the aesthetic pleasure of performing *bhavas* or embodied emotional states.

Theory of rasa

A theory of *rasa* or *a* taste of aesthetic pleasure, was first articulated in the *Natyashastra*, the second century (A.D.) Sanskrit *Treatise* on drama. Over the centuries, one dominant interpretation of the theory separates *bhava*, the actor's embodiment of emotion, from *rasa,* the audience's taste or pleasure of the actor's embodiment. Zarrilli (2000a) validates this view:

I am defining bhava as the state of being/doing embodied by the performer/actor, as demanded by the dramatic context and interpreted within a particular lineage of acting.

I am defining rasa as 'flavor,' or 'taste,' arising out of the act or practice of spectating which involves as complete as possible an engagement of the spectator in experiencing what the actor 'brings forward' and embodies.(217)

However, *rasaabhinaya,* the common, traditional term used by actors in Kathakali for

the training of *bhava,* sets up a contradiction suggesting that actors too are being

prepared for *rasa.* Zarrilli (1984) documents this contradiction only to see it as

erroneous, and reiterates the traditional scholarly separation of the performer's

embodied emotion as *bhava,* and audience's experience as *rasa.*

> It is interesting that for the Kathakali performer in common discussion and
>
> teaching, the exact differentiation between *bhava* (the performer's experienced and
>
> then projected emotion) and *rasa* (the audience's experience of the corresponding
>
> mode) noted above is not followed. Indeed, actors commonly refer to facial
>
> training and learning of the *bhavas* or emotional states as *rasaabhinaya. Rasa,*
>
> *which technically should only refer to the audience's experience of aesthetic*
>
> *delight*, and its savouring and experience of various emotions of the play, is
>
> commonly used to refer to the actor's projection of a character's emotions. (103,
>
> my italics)

Zarrilli references here and validates the traditional scholarly division between *rasa*

and *bhava*.

Traditional scholarship (territorially *brahmin* and upper caste in ownership and

consequently valuing divisions, separation and hierarchy) suggests *rasa* is the

audience's aesthetic pleasure and *bhava* the performer's embodied emotional state.

Kathakali performers and embodied practitioners very commonly talk of their

experience of training the embodied emotional states or *bhava,* not

as *bhavaabhinaya* but as *rasaabhinaya. Rasaabhinaya* is a common, well-accepted

term used in the wider field of Indian dance and drama training, as is another

commonly used term, *navarasa*, to describe the nine embodied emotional states or

bhavas. These terms suggest that performers too, by being trained for *rasaabhinaya*

and *navarasa*, have a stake in the creation of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*. If the

audience experiences pleasure or *rasa*, does the performer too not feel an aesthetic pleasure? An evidence-based argument is presented in support of the performer's experience of *rasa*. A perspective of joint action offers an alternate vision of this shared experience of *rasa*. By this, implicated into the concept of *rasa* is the performer's body (conceptually, if not empirically, lower in caste to the *brahmin* patron sitting in the audience and therefore neglected in scholarship) and through the body, the performer's embodied pleasure of the joint action termed separately as *bhavarasa,* or the *rasa* tasted in performing *bhavas*.

Evoor Rajendran Pillai, in an interview (2016), sets out the following point of view with respect to the performer's *rasa:*

> A performer must feel the aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* in his mind, of the performed *bhava*. For example if I show a character's *kopam* or anger without any experience of *rasa* or the pleasure of performing it, the audience will suspect that my head is full of anger. But it is not my personal feeling, the *rasa* I feel separates (clarifies) for the audience that it is not the performer's emotion but the character's emotion that both the performer and the audience are taking pleasure in. (Pillai 2016)

By this argument, *rasa* exists for both the audience *and* the performer.

In further support of this view is Sheldon Pollock's *A Rasa Reader* (2016), a comprehensive compilation of 1500 years of critical writing on the theory of *rasa*. This period spans the time of the writing of the *Natayashastra*, from approximately the third century through to the eighteenth century. This expansive body of critical literature around the *rasa* theory attends to a few central questions. Where does emotion in dramatic literature first exist? In the poet, who first sees a deer dying shot by a hunter's arrow, empathises, and then creates a poem enriched by that empathy?

Or does it reside with the reader who absorbs and experiences the aesthetic emotion in the poem? Or is it in the dramatic expression of that poem, in the characters of the hunter and the deer, and the creative artefact on the stage, or within the spectator who sees and experiences the artefact? These questions have plagued critics in India for a millennia-and-a-half. To frame the task before him, Pollock too uses the metaphor of a mirror, "a hall of mirrors."

> To watch ourselves watching something unreal, and willingly embracing that real unreality, no matter how sad or terrifying, is to enter into a fascinating hall of mirrors. Making sense of the reflection in this hall is what "aesthetics" in part is concerned to do. Although story telling in drama or poetry is a universal human practice, few people have meditated as deeply and systematically on the questions it raises as thinkers in India, who over a period of 1500 years between the third and the eighteenth centuries, carried on an intense conversation about the emotional world of the story and its complex relationship to the world of the audience.(1)

As suggested above, Pollock examines an extensive body of original, critical and literary texts in Sanskrit interpreting the theory of *rasa* and covering a period from the third century A.D. right up to the eighteenth century. His conclusions are significant for an interpretation of *rasa.* In the following section, a body of evidence is marshalled in support of the practitioner's experience of *rasa* with the argument presented that both *bhava* and *rasa* enrich the embodied creative artefact on stage. Pollock finds one interpretation (Krishnamoorthy 1968: 45), with which, importantly, he is in agreement, that suggests that the theory of *rasa* in the *Natyashastra* was primarily concerned with the actor and the creative artefact on stage. The following conclusion arrived at through Pollock's research is significant for this thesis.

A half-century ago a leading scholar of Indian aesthetics was correct to note– and

has been alone in noting–that in the *Treatise* "the words *rasa* and *bhava* [emotion]

are used in connection with the actor and the artist and not in connection with the

spectator, and that any "historical approach" to these concepts must admit that they

"describe the aesthetic situation, the art object outside, more than the subjective

state of the critic." Although the scholar never worked out this historical approach,

his intuition was correct, and the judgement about *rasa* fits with the overall

objective of the *Treatise*: to provide guidance above all to actors. This objective is

manifest in the work's repeated reference to how the components of drama, and the

rasas in particular, are "to be acted out," and it was clear to the work's

contemporary readers. "The theory of drama" as Kalidasa puts it, "is focused on

performance." (48–49)

This interpretation of the *Natyashastra* by the lone scholar Pollock identifies is

different from the traditional view of *rasa* as belonging to the domain of the critic.

The ancient drama treatise is, at the first instance, as argued for by the Indian scholar,

and supported by Pollock, a guide for actors. *Rasa* and *bhava* are then terms first used

for actor training. Pollock's estimation "his intuition was correct" leads the way for a

reading of the Indian scholar Krishnamoorthy. This reading underlines *rasa* and

bhavas' role in actor training and performance and not limited to the audience's

experience. As Krishnamoorthy clarifies:

What deserves our special attention here is the fact that the words *rasa* and *bhava*

are used in connection with the actor and the artist, not in connection with the

spectator. Bharata's *Natya-sastra*, if studied in this background, will show how

nowhere are the words *rasa* and *bhava* confined to describe the spectator's

exclusive experience. They are invariably used to refer to the activity of the artists.

In other words, a historical approach to the concept of *rasa* and *bhava* must admit

that these two words describe the aesthetic situation, the art object outside, more

than the subjective state of the critic (1979:5)

By this scholarly evidence, *rasaabhinaya*, the Kathakali practitioner's craft of training

and taking pleasure in creating emotional states or *bhavas,* is aligned with the theory

of *rasa* as first articulated in the *Natyashastra*.

This thesis attends to this much neglected scholarly appreciation of the actor's

rasa or the essence of the actor's subjective experience of the objective artefact on

stage. Thus, drawing from my discussions with Pillai in August, 2016, is set out the

following framework that underpins the operation of *rasa.* At the centre of the

experience of *rasa* is the actor's embodiment of emotion. This embodiment

transformed into a creative object in performance, may then be perceived pleasurably

by the "living body" of the performer both subjectively, from within, and objectively,

as the art object. This subjective and objective perception holds true for the audience

too. This aesthetic condition of the subjective and objective experience of aesthetic

pleasure is then fertile ground for the tasting of *rasa.* This entire process may be seen

in stages, set out below:

- The actor first creates, experiences, contains within the body and sustains for

  some duration a specific emotion. The actor's body is now transformed to a

  specific artistic object, a specific embodied emotion or *bhava.*

- The actor as subject experiences this object, this embodied emotion, this

  bhava even as through his craft, this *bhava* is sent forth, communicated and

  expressed as *abhinaya* and received by the audience (including the co-actors,

  singers and drummers on stage). Both the actor and the audience as subjects

experience and take pleasure in the object, the aesthetic, artistic, embodied emotion or *bhav*a. This is *rasa.*

- This communion of subjectivity between the audience/community and the actor, initiated by the same object, the specific *bhava* within the embodied artistic artefact on stage, and its self-aware conscious contemplation is *rasa.* The contemplation and experience of this single subjectivity by both the actor and audience is *rasa*.

This understanding of *bhava* and *rasa* in the context of joint action in a social situation is important because it brings the performer's living body into the scholarly discourse on *rasa*. An original construct of the sociopsychophysical representation of Kathakali aesthetics helps further frame an appreciation of the social along with the psychophysical.

Why has the subjective pleasure of the performer's body been absent from an aesthetic interpretation of *rasa*? The answer lies in an appreciation of the social weave, in the absence of the performer's body from this social weave, from scholarly representation. In a brahminical culture that has evolved over time and dominated this period of fifteen hundred years, text is the territory of the *brahmin* or upper caste. To read, to use the mind, is to perform a purer, higher function than to labour with the body. The body exists within the social weave of the Hindu caste system as progressively *shudra* or lower in status and caste, both empirically and conceptually. Conceptually, anyone labouring with the body may be deemed a *shudra.* The *shudra* body or the actor's labouring body occupies the stage while progressively the *brahmin's* appreciating mind spectates. It is this texture of the social weave that is seminal to an understanding of the sociopsychophysical aesthetics of Kathakali. In scholarly discourse, which is *brahmin* in territory and practice, a separation is made

between the pleasures of the *brahmin* patron and the *shudra* performer. A shift takes

place in which the *brahmin's* pleasure is present and that of the *shudra* is absent. A

communion between performer and audience, which is the objective of the

performance, is not polluted with the performer's pleasure and is purely the

spectator's. Performer and audience cannot taste of the same food, of the same

pleasure. The untouchable in the greater social weave, it is to be remembered, was not

allowed to even draw water from the same well. Untouchability here is playing its

part in isolating the audience's experience.

While a communion between actor and audience would suggest a shared

experience and should include a shared name, the performer's pleasure is named

bhavarasa to continue to differentiate it from the traditional idea of the audience's

rasa. This thesis is presenting an argument to further an understanding of the pleasure

experienced by the performer's living body. This understanding is affected by a

framing of the social, i.e., it is the social space within the caste system that neglects

the performing body's pleasure. By this argument, the neglect may be attended to, not

by seeing the performer's embodied pleasure as an individual psychophysical state,

but as a sociopsychophysical experience. In the following section, an understanding

of this differentiation is arrived at by appreciating the very social nature of Kathakali

actor training and aesthetics.

Kathakali *rasaabhinaya* and the social nature of *bhava*

Kathakali *rasaabhinaya* is codified into the *navarasa* or nine codified

"emotional states"/*bhavas* – i.e., *shringar* (desire), *raudra* (anger), *veer* (valour),

bhaya (fear), *karuna* (grief), *hasya* (laughter), *vibhast* (disgust), *adhbhuta* (wonder)

and *shantam* (peace). The preparation of a performer capable of embodying these

bhavas is at the core of Kathakali training methodology.

> In Kathakali the emphasis is on the emotion or bhava, evoked at every moment
>
> in a performance. It is the finely nuanced aesthetic expression of the inner
>
> emotions that is of most importance in a Kathakali performance rather than the
>
> presentation of well-honed, even superb, technique. (Balakrishnan 2005:159)

The enactment of *bhavas* then, as this quote reconfirms, is right at the centre of

Kathakali actor training. The following section sets out the social nature of *bhava.*

Zarrilli has *bhava* as an embodied "emotional state" (1984:103). In all available

literature on Kathakali (Iyer 1955; Pandeya 1961; Jones and True 1970; Pitkow 1988;

Balakrishnan 2005; Schechner 1988), *bhava* is described variously as emotion,

sentiment or mood. Zarrilli, too, in his early work, writes: "The Kathakali actor's

formal training includes nine basic *bhavas* or emotional states" (1984:103). Later,

working through his psychophysical vison of actor training, Zarrilli works in the idea

of *bhava* being a form of "being, doing" (Zarrilli 2000a:92; Zarrilli et al. 2013:57).

This psychophysical, embodied state of being, doing is a departure from the

conventional idea of *bhava* representing emotional states. Being, doing seems to lack

emotion. In defending *bhava* as an emotional state, attention is being drawn to the

social nature of an emotional state.

One reason for *bhava* being interpreted as a reductive psychophysical state of

being, doing is Zarrilli's separation of an individual performer's personal feeling/state

from *bhava. Bhavas* are not activated by personal feelings but are

sociopsychophysical embodied emotional states. Zarrilli's being, doing does not

address the social elements governing emotions, what emotion theorist James R.

Averill identifies as the three principles by which emotions become organised into

coherent systems of behaviour, i.e., "biological principle" (information encoded in the

genes), "social principle" (rules and other cultural artefacts), and "psychological principle" (schemas or knowledge structures) (Averill 1990:391). By this understanding, *bhavas* serve as a potential communion within the social, between the singers, musicians, the teacher and the learner in rehearsal (*bhava*) and then between the singers, musicians, performers and the audience in performance (*rasa*). This shared social understanding of *bhava* is critical to the creation of the aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*. By this, *bhava* is not just about an individual performer's psychophysical state of being, doing but is more specifically about how that state of being, doing is shared. Zarrilli's descriptive of being, doing seems to uncouple the idea of the social, i.e., the family of singers, musicians, performers and audience, entirely from a representation of *bhava*. This social element of *bhava*, as a shared cultural artefact, brings an understanding, an emotional comfort, to everyone. By this, everyone can know and feel what that performer is being, doing.

First performed, as stated earlier, in the sixteenth/seventeenth centuries by the *nair* warrior caste and existing over the centuries within the Indian caste system, any representation of Kathakali is best served by an inclusion of the social. As Kathakali moved from the wooden masks used in earlier forms like Krishnattam, to the painted and masked face of the performer, it also moved from the divine archetype to the human archetype, from the stories of gods like Rama and Krishna to the epic heroes of the *Mahabharata*. These gods and epic characters have their place and roles within the social weave and religious culture of the Kathakali world. The Kathakali performer is trained to play out the sociopsychophysical gestures of epic human heroes and gods. I choose "gestures" over "actions" here, as I frame "actions" as that element of human behaviour that effect change in the environment while "gestures" do not.

In a Kathakali performance, the audience knows the story. They know what the performer will do next. The "feeling" state generated in the body of the performer (and the character) is not a "motivation" to effect a surprising change in "behaviour" or in the action of the play. There are no surprises. The action is predictable. The characters too play out their pre-determined destinies, their fates. In the context of its predictable action, it becomes useful here to distinguish emotional from "motivational" antecedents. Motivational antecedents imply that the organism is preparing to or actually acting on the environment, whereas emotional antecedents imply only that internal processing, internal control mechanisms are in force (Scherer and Ekman (Eds) 1984: 26–27). "Motivations" are "feelings" that translate into a change in the organism's behaviour or environment. Emotions, on the other hand, are "feelings" held within, contained within the skin of the emoting organism, effecting no outward change. In the context of Kathakali performativity, emotions are feelings generated in the body of the performer, through its sociopsychophysical gestures, held back as it were, within the skin of the performer and existing as an emotional state or *bhava*.

Now, if in Pribram's theory emotion is held within the skin of the organism then the question that begs asking is of its practical relevance to the emoting organism's behaviour. Pribram's theory answers this question with the suggestion that an organism's emotionally expressive behaviour plays its part in a socially communicative setting with its value dependent not on the emoting organism's behaviour but on the ability of other socially sensitive organisms to sense the meaning of its expressions.

Thus, emotional expression does have a practical influence beyond the emoting organism, but only in a social communicative setting. In such a setting the

practical influence is completely dependent on the ability of other socially

receptive organisms to sense the meaning of the expression. (Scherer and

Ekman (Eds) 1984:27)

In Kathakali, at the level of the performance, these socially sensitive organisms are

the co-actors, singers, drummers and the audience, and their cultural sensitivity exists

in their being able to read into the *bhava* or the contained "emotion" of the organism,

i.e., the performer. *Bhava* is best described then as a self-contained embodied

emotional state as it exists in a social situation.

To serve this social situation with a nuanced and coherent system of behaviour

there exists the family of *bhavas*, including *sthayi, sanchari* and *satvik bhavas*. The

sthayi bhava is the single, stable, permanent, enduring, base emotional state that

underlies each scene or dialogue or sustained action. Overlaid on the *sthayi bhava* are

more transient feelings and emotional states called the *sanchari bhava*. The *satvik*

bhava is an involuntary expression of feeling or a spontaneous reflection or

expression of the mind. In Kathakali, then, these families of emotional states get

together, as it were, to create *rasa.* To delineate the logical steps of this process,

Balakrishnan cites the *Natyashastra*.

In chapter Six Bharata Muni writes:

Vibhavaanubhaava sanchaari samyogaad rasa nishpathi

The emotion [bhava], with the combination of the cause [vibhava], reflection

[anubhava] and the transitory mood [sanchari], creates an aesthetic experience

or rasa (147).

These themes and variations of emotional states, as detailed above, are suggestive of

emotion theorist Paul Ekman's concept of emotion families.

Each emotion is not a single affective state but a family of related states. Each

member of an emotion family shares the eight characteristics I have described. These shared characteristics within a family differ between emotion families, distinguish one family from another (Ekman and Davidson 1994:19). This family of emotional states then serves the sociopsychophysical expression of *bhavas*. By contrast, Zarrilli's psychophysical representation of "being, doing" seems too singular, individual and reductive a term to represent the entire family, themes and variations, and social world of *bhava*.

Bhava is experienced subjectively by a performer, not just as a state of being, doing but more accurately as a state of "knowing, feeling, being, doing". The first descriptive element of "knowing" is critical to an understanding of *bhava*. This knowing is shared by singer, teacher, performer and audience. This is how the emotionally expressive state of "knowing, feeling, being, doing" becomes a social, shared cultural artefact. The knowing is, further, a knowing of a feeling: there is a feeling behind the embodied emotional state that is recognisable and known to the performer. The audience too knows and feels this. This sharing with the audience of the knowing of the feeling behind the being, doing of the *bhava* is a pleasurable thing for the performer.

In addition to the audience's *rasa*, there is also the performer's pleasure of *bhava*, the pleasure in embodying an aesthetic emotional state or *bhavarasa*. The existence of *bhavarasa* is implicit in Balakrishnan's offering of his practitioner's embodied knowledge:

This aesthetic emotion, which is developed by the creator, author *or performer* and is sustained for some duration, permits the receiver to forget his own individual identity and instead, experience oneness with the feelings and emotions of the works of art or the character of the literary text or the drama

enacted in the stage. This aesthetic experience is Rasa. (128, my italics)

As Balakrishnan suggests, the performer, along with the author and creator, develops and takes pleasure or *rasa* in, and through his own creation. This thesis lays claim to a performer's right to experience pleasure in the crafting of a sustained aesthetic embodied emotional state or *bhavarasa*.

The performer sublimates his individual self to become one with the character's emotional state while individuals in the audience step away from their personal selves to commune with the performer/character. The word for character (as in the list of characters of a play) in Sanskrit dramaturgy is *paatra* (vessel). The actor fills the vessel, the body of the character, his own body, with a specific aesthetic emotion. To begin this process, the actor's imagination is engaged and is sensitised to the story. The following is Balakrishnan's description of the process of evoking the performer's "inner emotional life":

> The initial seed for the evocation of emotion lies in the given circumstances of the story as detailed in the performance text or *attakatha*. These given circumstances offer a clue to the cause or *vibhava* for the provocation of emotion. *Vibhava* is the cause which provokes the evocation of the *bhava*. It is of two types – *alambana*, that is, people, living creatures or objects that cause or evoke the *bhava*, and *uddheepna*, the circumstances, which help to enhance or inflame the *bhava*. *Anubhava* is the reaction or reflection of the *bhava* created by the onset of *vibhava*. 'There are three avastas or stages in the process of the development of bhavas. They are beeja avasta (seed stage), ankruts avasta (sprout stage) and pallavita avasta (flourishing stage).' (148).

This entire imaginative/creative process as detailed above leads to a significant event of subjective embodiment, the growth from an initial seed to a flowering of an

embodied emotional state of "knowing, feeling, being, doing" and then the holding within the body of the *bhava* for a certain length of time. This is then crafted and directed towards, sent forth or offered to the audience, which then receives, absorbs, contemplates and experiences it as *rasa*.

Zarrilli describes this embodiment of the emotional state best when he adds to his idea of "being, doing" with the "being/feeling" and "emotion/bhava" binary. Here is his explanation of the difference between western naturalistic acting and Kathakali:

> Part of the difference between the subtle 'naturalistic' acting of the West and kathakali is that in kathakali, as in Japanese kabuki, this 'filling' of the body is openly displayed and indulged, while in naturalism it is usually hidden and not obvious. The act of physicalization of the state of being/feeling of the character is intentionally 'excessive' in the sense that the stage is the place to display openly the full or 'pure' emotion/bhava, i.e., nothing need be held back to inflect or nuance its expression. These are, after all, gods, epic heroes, heroines and personalities at play on this cosmic stage, whose predicaments and responses to them are bound to be 'larger' than everyday life. (2000a:90)

This flamboyant display of emotion as recognised by Zarrilli here is a pleasure to perform. By defining the performer's pleasure of *bhava* as *bhavarasa*, this thesis separates the audience's experience from the performer's. This naming and separating is a scholarly act and not the practitioner's lived embodied experience of *rasa*. In practice, the performer and the audience commune, i.e., the greater the recognition by the audience of a specific *bhava or* emotional state created by the performer, the greater is the performer's pleasure in expressing it. The sensitive and informed spectator or *rasik* communes with the performer, sharing the embodied experience.

Rasa for the performer does not exist without an audience. It is social in nature. It emerges from "joint action" and a communion between the two, knowledgeable actor and audience.

The conflict with Helen, as described in the earlier section, in getting the little full stop correct through mirroring my actions, was a struggle towards an initiation into this sociopsychophysical aesthetic of communing with the master practitioner, and tasting *bhavarasa.* This process moves through learning a brief choreographed full stop, all the way to performing scenes with archetypical gods and demons, epic heroes and demons, learning to perform their embodied gestures of aggression by communing with the master practitioner, and through the entire process tasting of *bhavarasa.* In comparison with this very social, celebratory and outward aesthetic of Kathakali performance, the individual psychophysically absorbed western actor risks being introverted and playing without *bhavarasa.* Coming from the sociopsychophysical tradition, my initial viewing of Helen and Peter's own creative expressions, as described in the next section, suggested to me a different aesthetic at work, one in which it felt as if the performers did not feel sure of where their pleasures lay – an aesthetic that was not necessarily seeking embodied pleasure, but that could perhaps benefit from Kathakali's sociopsychophysical offering of *bhavarasa*.

Creative performances by Helen and Peter

Keeping their interest in Shakespeare in mind, and to see them working their own craft, right at the start of the one-on-one training, Helen and Peter were asked by me to use their own practices and create improvisations around archetypical moments from certain Shakespeare scenes with which they were familiar. On observing Helen and Peter performing, a lack of a certain outward socially directed openness was

sensed. From a Kathakali practitioner's perspective, they seemed self-absorbed and not tasting pleasure or *rasa* in their own gestures. While Helen worked on the moment of Desdemona's death, Peter worked on what he framed as Iago's emotional state of jealousy, and the disgust at having to serve Othello. Their creations, using their own practices, were about four to five minutes long. They had chosen their own music and appropriate costuming. These were "work in progress" creations using costuming materials that were easily available. Throughout the process, we had no budget for any production work. They showed their creations to me in my working studio. There was no one else present. The work was video recorded and documented. This initial work was then used to reference and compare work done later, at the end of the training process

Helen's creation was her version of "Desdemona's journey to heaven." (see Appendix D for video documentation of Helen's contemporary expression). Though the rules of the exercise included not being pressured by any need to incorporate traditional Kathakali training in their creations, Helen had begun using certain Kathakali hand gestures, like the gesture of fear to reflect Desdemona's inner emotional state. Watching the work, an introverted, self-absorbed psychophysicality that seemed to fall short of displaying itself to the audience, shy of its social presence was noted. This was a different aesthetic that seemed to be working with the fourth wall, unlike Kathakali, where there is no fourth wall. This same self-absorbed psychophysicality was reflected in Peter's contemporary creations exploring the theme of what would eventually be framed as "Iago the jealous dog." Both their works looked to me like experiments wherein the performers, even at the moment of performance, were more concentrated on solving a problem rather than sharing it with me, the audience. While this is no judgement on the artistic quality of their creations,

which were indeed both very fine in their aesthetic textures, what struck me was the difference between Kathakali's bold outward sociopsychophysicality and their more inward, introverted, experimental psychophysicality. The imitative or mirroring work for the next eighteen months was then directed towards drawing them out of their psychophysicality into Kathakali's sociopsychophysical. Through this process, fertile ground was being prepared for their bodies to experience pleasure or *bhavarasa* in performance.

Working with Peter Fraser

My second experience of one-on-one actor training with Peter Fraser furthered the challenge of taking a psychophysically trained performer into the sociopsychophysical space. While, on the one hand, Peter was mentally and physically extremely disciplined and capable, his will to mirror needed greater convincing. For someone who had previously played, and brilliantly, a lizard locked up in a glass cage, as he had done in connection with his practice-led Masters thesis, the integration of hands, feet and facial expressions into an outwardly directed, socially meaningful dramatic gesture proved a more difficult task. To move him to take seriously the mirroring process, and through that enter into a communion with my ability to experience *bhavarasa*, was a challenge. While consciously Peter worked to mirror my actions, perhaps unconsciously he was resisting. The consequence of this unconscious resistance, at times, was, what seemed to me, a shallow mimicry. This generalised mimicry from a physically disciplined performer was disconcerting for me, to say the least. Documented and detailed in the following section is one session of conflict, a moment of difficult negotiation, that I had to confront, that broke the flow and ease of the Kathakali mirror box.

Right from the start of the group sessions, it was clear that Peter had a unique ability to run with an image and make something special of it. On an impulse, in a session, I had asked him to observe my demonstration of *rasaabhinaya* with each *bhava* being expressed through a bird or animal form i.e., "desire like a peacock", "anger like a lion", "fear like a deer" and "disgust like a vulture," he was free to make of the form whatever came through to his imagination while keeping my demonstrated image in his mind. Peter responded by creating an amazing array of birds and animals with each embodiment expanding and contracting, breathing, shifting shape and size right before my eyes. We stayed with this kind of work for a couple of sessions and perhaps that was the cause of a certain derailment of the Kathakali work. While this interpretation worked well for what was primarily a visual image, i.e., of a vulture with my hands extended and my face contorted to show disgust, the moment rhythm and *taal* came in, his difficulties became apparent. For example, in a dance piece, in which there are series of complicated steps, Peter let go of the Kathakali form completely, and adopted a kind of Salsa, hip-leading rhythm and style. This was his way of embodying and owning the complicated Kathakali rhythm. However, it was at a terrible cost to the form. The work stopped looking and feeling like Kathakali, though he seemed to be enjoying himself a lot more. As he continued down this path, it felt as if he was beginning to mimic the form through his quick, shallow, ungrounded imitation and adaptation of my movements. By this reduction of the form, one could understand clearly what mimicry looked and felt like, and how different it was from the mirroring being asked for. I realised each time I demonstrated an action that Peter was absorbing a general view of my body image and mimicing it. He was not looking at any action specifically, precisely, in depth, nor was he working to integrate and co-ordinate the actions. This mimicry upset me.

When he had tried to imitate specifically, for example, tried to get the precise embodiment of a step, he had asked specific questions, like which particular muscle was involved, or was the right hand leading over the left, or how many inches was the heel lifted off the ground, or was the weight resting on the balls of the feet. I had resisted his method, refusing to engage mentally and provide him with answers, instead insisting he observe a lot more carefully, and work to concentrate on observing and imitating better. He would respond with a shallow imitation. At a point in time, I thought he was consciously mimicing me, a mimicry that was exaggerated by his upright body and stance offering up a very artificial version of the Kathakali form. On reflection, the reasons for him conveying, what to my Kathakali-trained aesthetic sensibility felt as a kind of mimicry, were twofold.

First, Peter was in my view a very ungrounded performer; his stance always seemed upright, like a courtier at the court of a medieval English king. Contradictorily, when he was embodying other creatures, he would liberate himself and transform quite amazingly, for example, into a lizard lying comfortably on a branch. However, when he was standing up, working with his full human frame, he had this very upright stance. Initially very resistant to any suggestion of mine towards his inability to connect with the ground he stood on, it took Peter almost two years of work to reflect back on his stance, through watching the video documentation, and realise he had a problem with grounding his body. "Very true! Somewhat problematic for me! I feel, in seeing the video, *very ungrounded*" (email 4/07/2017) (my italics). This acknowledgement of being ungrounded took a long time coming.

The second reason why Peter's imitation of my actions felt like mimicry to me was his work and exposure to Body Weather[29] training. Drawing from both eastern and western dance, sports training, martial arts and theatre practice, Body Weather is an actor training process that consciously seeks to be devoid of any specific recognisable aesthetic. In the summer of 2007, Peter had attended a workshop in Japan by one of the founding creators of Body Weather, Min Tanaka's Body Weather farm in the town of Hukushu. He was also a member of one of Australia's leading Body Weather inspired companies appropriately named Bodyweather. Fuller's (2014) writing about Min Tanaka's summer training workshops in the town of Hukushu is, for the present enquiry into the hierarchical *guru shishya* relationship, aptly titled, "Seeds of an anti-hierarchic ideal: summer training at Body Weather Farm." In part, a reading of this article explains my struggles with working to make Peter mirror my actions, and not mimic them. As Fuller highlights, in Tanaka's workshops, as different to Kathakali, the participants are encouraged to imitate "even [the movements] of the least experienced member." For Tanaka, it seemed, what was being imitated did not matter as much as the mere impulse to imitate, as this descriptive passage by Fuller details:

> From 1986 until 2010, dancer/choreographer Min Tanaka led a series of
> experimental body workshops in the town of Hakushu, a small village
> approximately four hours west of Tokyo. The methodology employed in these
> training sessions was grounded in the ideology of Shintai Kisho (Body
> Weather), which conceives of the body as a force of nature: omni-centred, anti-

---

[29] While Body Weather is the form of training and Bodyweather the name of the company in Australia working with the Body Weather form, as Peter explained, these terms are sometimes interchangeable, as Body Weather is not a form of training but in fact a breaking of forms, is not in effect a style of performance but the breaking of style/s. Hence, the interchangeability of terms with Body Weather also being represented as BODY WEATHER.

hierarchic, and acutely sensitive to external stimuli. Emphatically resistant to

the codification and commodification of dance technique, Tanaka (whose dance

was admired by Michel Foucault and Felix Guattari), sees the establishment of

any repeatable, reproducible form as a collusion with the various power

structures that limit human agency by controlling the body. Ideologically

opposed to formalised dance pedagogy where students imitate the movements

of a master teacher, *the training challenged workshop members to closely*

imitate any physical movement, even those of the least experienced member. In

these summer training sessions, struggle was valued over technical virtuosity,

and physical stimulation over the type of visual imagery emphasised in

many *butô* workshops. (197–203, my italics)

Kathakali actor training, with its codifications and hierarchies, was in direct contrast

to Tanaka's method as detailed above. While consciously Peter was respecting my

need for imitation to be undertaken with rigour and precision, unconsciously perhaps,

his previous training was compelling what came across to me as an artificial, surface

mimicry of the Kathakali form. At that time, I had not read up on Body Weather and

while being aware of Peter's disciplined physicality and quite extraordinary bodily

flexibility, I was not conscious of this subversive/playful anti-hierarchic aspect of

Body Weather training. I was very troubled and upset by what seemed to me at that

time as a conscious trivialisation of the Kathakali form. While he took his own

psychophysical work seriously and worked at it very precisely, he seemed to be

throwing away very casually the sociopsychophysical gestures on offer.

Perhaps my defensiveness was also personal, in that I felt his casual gestures were a

wider comment on an art form that I had worked at so seriously, and loved, that his

was a judgement on the imitative aspects of my culture, implying a hierarchical

difference between our two cultures, one of a new migrant and the other of a resident Australian. This had the potential of going the wrong way and ending the relationship. I realised I had to work harder to make it work. For our relationship to survive, I had to do two things: argue more forcefully the value of the mirroring process as well as make my demonstration a very precise step-by-step evocation of the Kathakali form, to repeatedly draw him out of his introverted psychophysicality and into my sociopsychophysical presence, to convince him about the need for a new way to be precise, through sustained observation. Towards this end, I isolated each element of every integrated gestural action and worked with Peter to observe, imitate and repeat it precisely. Peter was extremely generous through this process, took on this challenge, allowing me to lead and later offered an appreciation of this process.

Peter's response to one-on-one training

> So, it was very helpful for me and I felt very grateful that you introduced the one-on-one which helped me work without feeling like throwing in the towel. It's a bit like I've experienced it with computer lessons too, you go to a computer class and the first five minutes you are lost, the rest of the session you feel like weeping, because you are so far back that you will never catch up. So, I appreciated that, and I appreciated your emphasis on letting you judge what was needed. I thought that was wise, and I happened to at the same time be doing one-on-one yoga where the teacher was trying to work out what would suit me and she decided that yielding (laughs) is what would suit me, as my tendency is to work hard, push hard at getting something right which is often the way to get it wrong, so I thought that was invaluable, and that perhaps relates to the idea of

mirroring. I read something just the other day about Alexander[30] where he was

saying (maybe it was someone else quoting him) something to the effect that

one does not always have the embodied knowledge of how to do what you want

to do, and so, sometimes you need to find another path to do it. So, I think the

idea of letting you be the judge of what was needed, not getting too neurotic or

egocentric, or hardworking about getting everything accurate, something like

that, I found that very helpful. (Interview with Peter, June 2016)

Working with Peter gave me a deeper reflection on Kathakali pedagogy. The

Kathakali master practitioner leads and leads precisely, offering specific actions to be

imitated by the learner. These specific actions need to be imitated with precision and

not be interpreted. This precise mirroring of actions leads the learner, over a period of

time, through a communion with the master practitioner, into a state of deeper

"psychic" engagement. Use of the phrase psychic engagement references an

interpretation of *rasa* as existing in the *Natyashastra*. The following passage from the

Natyashastra, as translated by Pollock, describes the phenomenology of performing a

range of emotions, suggesting that there exists a shared essence behind the playing of

a range of emotions, what it terms as "psychic sensitivity".

> Psychic sensitivity as defined here is something that arises from the mind; it is
>
> said to be the mind in a state of heightened awareness, since the psychic
>
> sensitivity arises when the mind is thus aware. The particular nature of each of
>
> its different emotions, such as horripilation, weeping, pallor, and the like,
>
> cannot be brought about when the actor's mind is elsewhere. Given that the

---

[30] Frederick Matthias Alexander was an Australian actor who in the first part of the twentieth century developed the Alexander technique, helping actors break through embodied habits by a realignment of the head, neck and body.

drama imitates the nature of the world, the role of the psychic sensitivity is essential. An example: the dramatic emotions that are effects of pleasure or pain should be purified by psychic sensitivity that they are identical. In the case of pain, for example, which consists of weeping and the like, how can it be acted out by someone not feeling pain; or pleasure, which consists of joy and the like, by someone not feeling pleasure? It is precisely thanks to the actor's psychic sensitivity that he is able, even when not feeling pleasure or pain, to display horripilation or weeping, and it is for this reason that these emotions have been explained as being psychophysical. (55)

This psychic sensitivity behind the playing of emotional states is the essence of *rasa*. It is that pleasurable taste of an essence or common state of being that lies behind the playing of a range of emotions, each different from the other.

The master practitioner then, through a precise and deep understanding of his embodied practice, passes onto the learner this ability to experience psychic sensitivity. This psychic sensitivity, or more precisely psychophysical sensitivity, exists in the mind, and, I argue, in the body, as a taste of aesthetic pleasure. The Kathakali performer develops a mental psychic sensitivity as well as an embodied psychophysical pleasure or *bhavarasa.* It is for this reason that the Kathakali *guru* needs to lead, his body needs to be imitated precisely because, through mirroring all the choreographed routines and enactments, a specific psychophysical ability is being passed on from master practitioner to learner. This imitative process extends to even a mirroring of the breath of the *guru,* and the breathing patterns of the characters he is enacting.

In the following excerpt from Helen's interview at the end of the twenty-two-month process, she speaks of her experience in India and of observing Pillai teach:

…I noticed I was observing much more detail and I got to the point where I could almost imagine what it is like to be him doing it, I could see how he was breathing and see the angle of the body and where the head was and it was much more of an embodied experience

She goes on to make the following observation after having watched and trained with videos she recorded of Pillai. Reflecting on how a demonstration by a *guru* can become a shared experience, she adds:

When we were in India watching students training I couldn't understand still why they were so intently watching him, even as they were doing the dance, because they clearly knew it, and he was demonstrating it from his chair, and I thought they are watching him in case they forgot something, though they did not look like forgetting, they were so on top of the dance, but it is only when I came back and I was practising by myself and I made this observation that I was noticing so much more, his angle and his breathing and I could understand why this movement is like this now, noticing so much more, and then I remembered them watching and I thought "aha" this is what they were observing, they are not just observing the outer form, they are really watching just all the minute details that you can only observe while doing, like he has got an amazing sense of rhythm, even as he is sitting you can almost understand the point at which he turns by observing. All these amazing details, they're good. They are observing all of this. So that for me is mirroring. When you are mirroring far more than the surface. (Interview, Helen Smith 2016)

Helen's observations suggest that the act of observation is a force on its own in Kathakali learning. It requires an uninterrupted sustained phase of watching the teacher carefully, observing and imitating precise actions, and not mentally

interpreting and mimicing the action, for a successful mirroring of dramatic actions to happen. Within the context of actor training, "mentalist" processes on the other hand work through a conscious separation of the mind from the body, setting up the western actor's mind/body split. This method is in contrast to the embodied processes that offer the eastern actor an integrated psychophysicality. In refusing to answer Helen and Peter's questions, in refusing to give them answers to their rational enquires, in insisting on the demonstration, observation and enactment methodology, I was attending to the need to integrate the western mind body/psycho physical split, wherein a mental engagement precedes a physical enactment. By demanding a sustained observation of my demonstrations, conditions for an embodied communion and an integrated psychophysicality were being created. This integration empowers the actor to act meaningfully, intentionally, dramatically and with embodied pleasure.

As Helen describes so vividly, when a Kathakali learner is observing a guru teach, she is empathetically watching actions not only for their physical and motor reality, but even further for their intentions and objectives or "end goals." This "deep brained" process of "action observation," "action intention" and "end goal" realisation is a process of embodied integration between the observer and the observed. This unselfconscious sustained observation of the teacher (and other master performers), especially in a one-on-one situation, is the essence of the sociopsychophysical offering of Kathakali. It comes from the sustained social relationship between learner and teacher. In Kathakali actor training, the social informs both the pedagogy, as well as the text and performativity. The social binds the performer's psychophysical into an integrated whole.

It is for this wholeness, at the first instance, that Zarrilli and the psychophysical tradition engage with Asian forms, working to solve the Cartesian duality of a mind/body split. Responding to Wallace in an interview, Zarrilli here clarifies:

> At a philosophical level, I think Asian thought is very, very useful because there is no bodymind duality in certain Asian philosophical traditions. In the West we do have the unfortunate legacy of Cartesian dualism and that is something that is so ingrained in Anglo-American culture in the way that we think, act, are inculturated, that makes it very difficult to get over. Having encountered things in non-Western cultures provides models and conceptual frameworks for a way to problem-solve and to do it clearly for people, not by romanticising, but by challenging certain ways of thinking in the West that are problematic for actors. If somebody wants to be a dualist, [fine], but if you want to be an actor it is not going to help you. It is a pragmatic issue (Zarrilli Interview 24 Feb.). (Wallace 2012:112)

Within the Kathakali world, this non-duality is realised through the *guru shishya* pedagogy, and the very intimate social nature of this relationship. In the traditional world of the old social, as described in Chapter Four, caste belonging framed *guru shishya* relationships. In the martial art *kalaripayattu* training, for example, you would have a *nair guru* training a *nair shishya*. This commonality feeds a social intimacy, a oneness, a social non-duality. This non-duality facilitates embodied intersubjective communion.

In his TED talk (2009), it is to the intersubjective non-duality of embodied communion that Ramachandran brings attention when mooting human connectivity, playfully referring to what he terms as "Gandhi Neurons" or "empathy neurons," while articulating the neuroscience of human intersubjective communion. The

neuroscientific interpretation of this communion was referenced earlier in Chapter Six (pages 162–63) with Ramachandran recognising it as "the basis of much of Eastern philosophy" (TED talk, 2009). In the human brain, mirror neurons facilitate this embodied communion. An understanding of mirror neurons and the mirror neuron system helps further nuance an understanding of the "deep brained" processes of actor training and psychic sensitivity articulated in the *Natyashastra*. In the next section, I work to understand the mirror neuron system and its relevance with respect to Kathakali mirroring.

Kathakali Mirroring and the Mirror Neuron System

Mirror neurons are not "magic cells". Their significance lies in their ability to integrate while operating on information received from other brain areas: aural, visual, affective, motor. This integration or communion happens within the motor system, that system in the brain that brings us, through our motor acts, out of ourselves as it were and into the world of others. In the present context, these motor acts are the actions of a Kathakali drama. These externalising and socialising properties inherent within the mirror neuron system create a potential for the body to perform motor actions. By actions is implied not just general body movements or even specific motor acts but, in effect, the integration of motor acts with their social intentionality or an "end goal" as directed towards their outer social world. This integrated process may then be termed "action intentionality." An ability to read and respond to "action intentionality" is inherent in the MNS as demonstrated when mirror neurons fired even as the action observed was only partially visible (Umlita et al. 2001), or when an associated sound or visual image was observed. (Kohler et al. 2002)

In Kathakali mirroring, the learner observes the motor actions of the teacher but in so doing also absorbs the dramatic intention and intensity of that action. While observing an action, the brain is also recognising the intention of that action, and seeing it for its entirety, seeing the action even as it is being enacted to its logical conclusion. "Action observation" as facilitated by the MNS is not merely a visual recorder and facilitator of an imitation of another's motor act, but also a predictor of the inherent intentionality of the motor act. It is as if a single motor neuron not only observes acts but also acts intentionally executing the end goal of the motor act, operating as an integrated neural process that reveals a meaningful outward social engagement via the social gestural intentionality of the motor act. In this manner, the mirror neuron system facilitates both the coding of an observed action's intentionality as well as its outer motor expression.

Kathakali learning works by the learner observing the teacher's motor acts. However, as described above and earlier documented by Helen observing subtle details of breathing patterns, the learner observes not just the motor act, but even its intentionality and its end goal. The Kathakali *guru* teaches both the motor actions, and the emotions and intentions and objectives of the character he is demonstrating. The learner at each moment of learning is observing a complete and meaningful dramatic action. When the learner imitates precisely a motor action, an integrated set of dramatic values, actions, emotions, intentions including an ease and pleasure of performing those actions or *bhavarasa,* are being learnt. When, instead of observing and imitating, the learner separates the mental from the physical, by asking questions and engaging mentally, this process of embodied communion is broken. As observed and sensed with Helen and Peter, this mentalist approach creates a mind-body split where the mind first needs to absorb and interpret and then, through introspection, act.

Prior to an understanding of the mirror neuron system, the conventional mentalist view of inter subjectivity had the observer mind reading into the other's intentionality. Gallese (2009) challenges this purely mentalist view of intersubjectivity. He suggests that there exists a more basic neural mechanism that not only recognises the goal of a specific motor act but also allows the prediction of the next motor act and consequently the overall intention. By this, he suggests the existence of a neural mechanism that mediates the externally directed observation of sensorimotor actions to their internal neural coding. He calls this "embodied simulation."

> It has been proposed that mirror neurons by mapping observed, implied, or goal directed motor-acts on their motor neural substrate in the observer's motor system allow a direct form of action understanding, through a mechanism of embodied simulation. (521)

Gallese sets up an examination of this mechanism of embodied simulation within the interpersonal one-on-one intersubjectivity of a psychoanalytic setting between patient and analyst:

> My main point is that embodied simulation provides a model of potential interest not only for our understanding of how interpersonal relations work or might be pathologically disturbed, but also for our understanding of interpersonal relations within the psychoanalytic setting. (520)

This setting may be seen as similar to the one-on-one site and the learner master practitioner relationship within the Kathakali mirror box. Gallese argues his case for the existence of a functional mechanism, an embodied simulation that helps mediate our capacity to share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings and emotions with others.

In Kathakali learning, the shared social space beyond the training space facilitates conditions of this shared embodiment. With Helen and Peter, the social space, where we shared daily rituals, of sitting, standing, eating, talking, washing dishes, sleeping, lounging all set up a condition of shared embodiment. Bodies in "daily" rituals share a similar embodiment even in their outer social and cultural expression. We all sleep essentially the same. This sharing of bodily culture in the daily social space, sets up the more formal but deeper sharing in the training space. Through the concept of embodied simulation, Gallese sets up and explains this shared embodiment. Embodied simulation, as Gallese suggests, does not require the intermediary pretend state as it is an embodied, mandatory, pre-rational, non-introspectionist process. By mandatory, he implies that when two people meet or share a space, they automatically experience each other as embodied beings. This embodied mirroring of each other is facilitated by the functional neurology as existing in the mirror neuron system of each subject. Both subjects are similarly wired in the brain to achieve shared and similar social goals. Essentially, we are up and about doing similar recognisable things to achieve similar recognisable ends *within the represented limits of a shared embodiment*. That represented similarity extends to similar wiring in the brain. Embodied simulation mediates that shared space, that sharing of actions, intentions, feelings and emotions with others. The connectedness to others exists in the brain and in the body, and is turned on automatically and consequently is mandatory. Further, it is pre-rational as it is a neural structure embedded into the brain wiring and existing independent of the conscious thought process. Thus, it bypasses the mentalist phase of a pretend state. Within this embodied shared space, an "intentional attunement" or a direct form of understanding each other happens from within. This happens through the activation of neural systems

underpinning what both are doing and feeling. This intentional attunement is mediated by the mechanism of embodied simulation.

In the context of Kathakali mirroring, the Kathakali learner observes the Kathakali teacher doing actions with accompanying emotions. This observation of the teacher is not a mere mental process, but an embodied observation. The sensorimotor experience, i.e., what the eyes see and the ears hear and the senses sense, is then mapped onto the learner's motor "representations" in the brain. Motor representations are like maps directing the path to a particular motor act, emotion or sensation. This mapping, Gallese suggests, is done through a process of "reuse". My brain and body in turn uses this process to recognise, feel and express disgust, and that embodied representation is then reused when observing the action of disgust by another. This is why we can recognise an emotion or gesture of disgust by another, as disgust. The "daily" social space with its embodied rituals facilities this reuse, this shared embodiment. The extra daily training space then works further to layer a deeper sharing and embodiment.

In contrast to this embodied process, in the mind reading mentalist view, this process would have begun from perceiving the other's actions and through that generating a pretend state within and then by introspection projecting that pretend state back to the observed body, and then inferring the mental state of the other and linking it to the motor acts of disgust while making meaning of this. Reuse as the methodology of embodied simulation Gallese suggests is a more direct, immediate and mandatory embodied process facilitated by the act of observation. The act of observation prepares the ground, but does not immediately translate into action. The observed action is simulated in the brain and not acted out.

When the action is executed or imitated, the cortico-spinal pathway is activated, leading to the excitation of muscles and the ensuing movements. When the action is observed or imagined, its actual execution is inhibited. The cortical motor network is activated, though not in all of its components, and, likely, not with the same intensity, but action is not produced, it is only simulated. (522–523)

Thus, embodied simulation is that integrated neural structure that holds within the mirror neuron system that potential for action even as that potential is inhibited and withheld during the act of observation.

When the Kathakali *guru* demonstrates an action, he initiates an entire cycle of observation, imitation and repetition. Each element of this cycle has its own logic and needs to be performed to its fullest. The demonstration needs to be dramatic with the motor action integrated with the intention, emotion and end goal of the action. The observation must be concentrated and sustained. The imitation precise and the repetition rigorous for the action to be absorbed into the performer's deep brain space. With Helen and Peter, through the course of our conflicts and struggles, it was possible to follow this traditional Kathakali pedagogy. The end goal of this cycle of integration is then the performer's experience of aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa.*

Conclusion

By entering into a sustained social relationship with Helen and Peter, the researcher created and then researched the appropriate conditions to teach the craft of Kathakali actor training. Evidence gathered from scholars and practitioners, and through theorising insights gathered from the practice-led research site, this chapter validates the performer's pleasure as *bhavarasa*, and offers a nuanced and

contemporary understanding of Kathakali's imitative mirroring methodology. Both an appreciation of the mirroring pedagogy and the performer's *bhavarasa* emerge from the framing of Kathakali as a sociopsychophysical theatre.

The next chapter details the traditional actor training routines covered in the one-on-one work with Helen and Peter. In addition, it documents and analyses the creative "inner-intercultural" work of Helen and Peter performing Kathakali through the vehicle of my production *The Magic Hour* in which scenes from Shakespeare are adapted to, and performed within the traditional Kathakali form. Through these performances, Helen and Peter accessed and experienced Kathakali performativity, including its gestures of embodied aggression. This chapter documents the adapted traditional curriculum and mirroring methodology, as well as the aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa* of Helen and Peter performing Kathakali in Australia.

Chapter Eight

The inner-intercultural practice of performing Kathakali in Australia

The twenty-two-month research exercise of working one-on-one with Helen Smith and Peter Fraser offered the researcher insights into both training, and performing Kathakali in Australia. This chapter documents both the adaptations made to traditional Kathakali actor training routines, as well as the "inner-intercultural" experience of Helen and Peter performing Kathakali. This work is placed into context by theorising how the inner-intercultural functions differently from the inter or intracultural. Besides working on traditional Kathakali texts and stories, and knowing both Helen and Peter's interest in Shakespeare, I worked with them using elements of my creation of *The Magic Hour* (Loomba 2005; Calbi 2011) wherein I broke form with traditional Kathakali storytelling, and used scenes from William Shakespeare's *Othello*. *The Magic Hour* includes Shakespearean texts translated into traditional Kathakali *padams* or songs, and scenes of high drama, like the famous murder sequence in *Othello*, Act V Scene II , which is enacted using the Kathakali form. In comparison with traditional Kathakali texts in *malayalam* and Sanskrit, Shakespearean texts in the English language and selected scenes from Shakespeare's *Othello* adapted into, and enacted through the Kathakali form, offer the western performer a more direct access to Kathakali performativity, including its gestures of embodied aggression. These gestures of embodied aggression offer a specific aesthetic value for intercultural performer training in Australia. These gestures draw the psychophysically absorbed and introverted performer out of themselves, and into the sociopsychophysical and celebratory mode of Kathakali performance. This sociopsychophysical performance brings the western performer into Kathakali's very

particular offering of aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa.* At relevant points through this chapter, I offer further evidence of the work through video recordings of individual scenes, available as indices to the written body of the thesis.

Adapting the traditional training curriculum

Kathakali actor training entails working on both embodied dance practices, as well as dramatic texts and stories. This first section examines Kathakali's embodied training practices, and the adaptions made to them. While a traditional training program runs for six to eight years, an adapted program for the new social needs to make choices in terms of the lesser time available for western actor training. Adaptions needed to be made to the traditional dramatic texts, in response to certain difficulties faced by western learners as evidenced from working with Helen and Peter. This section details those difficulties faced and records the alternatives offered.

In a traditional Kathakali learning program, each learning session begins with the *kumbital*, the formal Kathakali salutation. Traditionally, there are five salutations to be done, one to each corner (wherein resides the appropriate deity) and one to the lamp or to the centre where the *guru* is seated. Throughout the one-on-one training with Helen and Peter, while this formal salutation was done a few times, on most occasions each session began with just the one directed towards the centre, where I sat.

Following the salutation, we would begin the work with *meyyarappu* or body control exercises (Zarrilli 1984:104–138). These exercises are a modified form of *kalaripayattu*. Performed in sequence, these exercises create a choreography of their own. While there are a number of shorter connecting exercises, a few of the more challenging ones as described by Balakrishnan are detailed here.

*Kaalatavu – s*tepping forward and kicking the right leg to the palm of the right hand which is stretched above the head, and then repeated with the left leg. The exercise is repeated eleven times in various ways. *Vechchiruttal –* sitting on one leg with the other extended, the body twists from one side to the other. *Thirichukuthal –* from a sitting position, rotating the arms backwards, forming a bridge, then continue the rotation to the original position, repeated three times each (101).

Helen and Peter performed *meyyarappu* with me in Australia, and then again in India with Pillai. These exercises are not done to formal *taalam* or rhythm and therefore posed no challenge to either Helen or Peter. They were both able to master them and take pleasure working them. These are also the set of exercises that Zarrilli mastered in the six months he worked on Kathakali actor training. This exercise routine inspired him to work on their source form *kalaripayattu* for the next seven years.

After these body exercises, Helen and Peter would work on their basic posture for increasing lengths of time. This involves learning to relax and be still, while sensing and working on their body both from within and from without.

The work on the basic posture would be followed by *Kaalsadhakam*, the practice of the basic four steps. These steps require the performer to chant along the spoken rhythm or *vaitari.* The teacher controls the tempo rhythm, moving the learner from slow, to medium, to fast, and then finally, very fast. Both Helen and Peter enjoyed working on these basic steps. Over time, they were able to master these steps and own them.

The basic step work was followed by *kannu sadhakam,* or eye exercises, and *cuzhippu,* or eye and hand co-ordination (see Appendix A). The eyes were exercised moving horizontally, from left to right and then from right to left, vertically from top

to bottom and then the other way, diagonally from a top corner to an opposite bottom corner and then in figures of eight. These eye exercises were followed by synchronised movements of the eyes, hands and body. The co-ordination creates grace in the movements and links the body to the subjective self. The body begins to work as an integrated whole and a sense of communing with oneself gives this exercise a spiritual feeling. Both Helen and Peter were able to master these exercises and get pleasure out of performing them.

In the traditional training program, two choreographed dance routines follow these initial exercises. The first is the *todayyam,* and the second is the *purupaddu*. The *todayyam* is a dance sequence danced to all seven *talas* or rhythms in Kathakali (see Appendix A**)**. While this is a foundational dance training routine, the difficulties of intercultural actor training began here, with the complication of the *tala* added to the steps. With the difficulties faced working with Kathakali rhythm, each set of steps or phrase was taking far too long to master, especially the interconnecting *kalaashams,* which are like commas and full stops. While I had planned to finish the *todayyam* by the first three months of the one-on-one work, by the end of the first month I realised the need to adapt. I chose not to finish the *todayyam* and instead worked on more formal *kalaashams* primarily set to two *taalams, chemba* and *chembata.* By this choice, I was letting go of learning an intricately choreographed dance piece that runs for twenty-five minutes and instead worked on short, two- to three-minute dance choreographies, while keeping the *taal/rhythm* challenge to a minimum.

While in India, Pillai concentrated on teaching Helen and Peter the *purupaddu*. Helen did extremely well and in ten days finished learning the *purupaddu.* Peter, on the other hand, had a very difficult time. *Purupaddu* has dance choreography that moves from a slow tempo initially to a very fast tempo by the end. While the

todayyam is never performed on stage, the *purupaddu* is an invocatory dance performed on stage in the *veisham* or costume of Krishna, with a headdress or *krishnamudi*. The dance has a lot of circular and ornamented moves, making the body bend as well as leap, to teach the student how to balance and manage the costume. Compared to the *todayyam*, it sets up a greater challenge and Peter was always struggling with it. This was in part due to Pillai's inability to offer one-on-one sessions as he had too many students to teach. At the end of ten days, they had both performed it with live musicians, a *chenda* and a *maddalam* player. Both Helen and Peter, despite the struggles, returned to Australia with a far greater ease of moving the body to rhythm.

In the initial learning period, a significant amount of time was spent in learning *mudras* or hand gestures (see Appendix A). It was surprising to note how difficult the two-handed gestures were to learn, i.e., those which had different *mudras* for each hand. For this part of the training, self-created home videos, recording hand gestures to a sentence, were emailed to the performers. It was easier to perform *mudras* to a sentence in English; the complications of the Kathakali text being in a mix of *malayalam* and Sanskrit, in a language they did not understand, made learning *mudras* to Kathakali *padams* or songs an extremely difficult exercise. It was here that a shift from traditional texts to Shakespeare was effected. Instead of struggling with the difficult Kathakali texts, audio recordings in the researcher's voice, of Iago, Othello and Desdemona's texts were made available (see Appendix B for Helen's Text and Mudra video documentation). Appropriate *mudras* were identified for the words of the text, and Helen and Peter performed them to the audio tracks. These interventions proved very effective, as not only was the word more accessible, but the emotion and context too were played out through the language of gestures. With the Shakespearean

text, the language of gestures stepped away from its exotic otherness, turning into what it is, a dramatic language carrying words, thoughts, feelings and emotions to an audience. The success with the hand gestures further encouraged me to work with Helen and Peter on the Kathakali scenes of Othello from *The Magic Hour*. This was developed later for a public performance at La Mama Theatre in Melbourne in June 2016.

This entire process of learning led to their being ready to integrate the foot, hand and face movements into a complex choreography and danced enactment, bringing them to learn a set piece known as *shauryaguna*. In traditional Kathakali training, this danced dialogue *shauryaguna* is a set piece that integrates all elements of the Kathakali performer's skill. This particular set piece is from the Kathakali play "The Flower of Good Fortune" and features Bhīma asking for the permission of King Yudhishthira, his elder brother, to go and fight his enemy Dussassana Dushasana. It opens with the lowering of the curtain, revealing Bhīma the warrior. Bhīma openly displays his *bhava* of anger and acts aggressively with his gestures, postures, and embodiment. Helen and Peter responded to these gestures of anger and aggression far more pleasurably than a scene of Bhīma in love in which he offers to get flowers for his beloved wife Draupadi. The male-centric Kathakali depiction of love and desire sat uneasily on both Helen and Peter's vision of love as a more equal thing, between lovers. Peter acknowledged that with love and desire he felt he was only mimicing the externals, while in the scene of anger and disgust, he felt he was more involved emotionally, from the inside.

In the first public performance that we danced *shauryaguna* together I led Helen and Peter through the set piece. As a leader, I was a little extra careful in making sure I was taking them along, helping them to arrive correctly at each end point of a

rhythm cycle. This was done by my controlling my own embodied emotional state and by not allowing the *bhava* to rise within myself. By being emotionally stable, I was able to concentrate on keeping the precise *taalam* which, in a performance of more intense emotional embodiment, gets more complex. When possessed by the *bhava,* the performer tends to ride through individual markers of rhythm, and not acknowledge them as formally and precisely as in rehearsal. Later, in a solo Kathakali piece by me, Helen and Peter were able to see the same piece done more flamboyantly.

We also worked regularly on *rasaabhinaya,* or the training of the nine *bhavas* or basic emotions . This took place in two stages. In the first, I would just work the face, with each emotion being located at a specific area or muscle; for example, *shringar* or desire in the eyebrows, *raudra* or anger in the cheeks, *vibhats* or disgust in the nose, and *bhaya* or fear in the eyes. To take the concentration away from the face and to embody the emotional state, I would then have them work through the *bhavas* using my own playful creation, which relies on archetypes of birds and animals. For example, they would express "desire like a peacock, anger like a lion, fear like a deer, pride like an elephant, wonder like an owl, sadness like a fish, and disgust like a vulture." While the *Natyashastra* details only eight emotions, in Kathakali practice there are nine, as the last emotion, *shantam* or peace, is the cessation of the act of emoting.

At the end of this traditional training work, Helen and Peter were ready for performing and sharing the work with a Melbourne audience. Kathakali's sociopsychophysical actor training completes and realises itself when it is brought into the social space of a performance. The performers did need to perform to make sense of their training. A choice of performance pieces, choreographies and texts had

now to be made. Explaining to Helen and Peter traditional Kathakali stories and texts

set up issues of intercultural translation. A mentalist engagement was needed, in

translating theory to practice, in interpreting traditional Kathakali texts for

performance, in contextualising for Helen and Peter the archetypical characters in

terms of their social and historic location. This took away from the embodied

discipline of the research exercise requiring a mental and textual engagement,

explaining and answering all their questions about the caste system, social

relationships and existential conditions within the old social.

While acknowledging, as a problem, this area of translating texts of the old

social for performers in the new social, and recognising it as a separate area of

research, I chose instead to work with scenes from Shakespeare adapted to the

Kathakali form, in what was felt by the research participants as a more direct route to

researching Kathakali's pedagogy and embodied performativity. While staying with a

traditional Kathakali opening piece *thiranoku* for the performance, scenes from *The

Magic Hour* were selected by the three of us, for the more dramatic sections of the

work. These scenes were Kathakali adaptions of Shakespeare's scenes. A familiarity

with Shakespeare's characters Othello and Iago, as well as accompanying audio

recordings of Shakespeare texts helped facilitate, for the performers, a more direct

access to Kathakali performativity.

The first piece of a traditional performance is the *thiranoku*, the traditional

curtain entry of a character. In a traditional performance, before the enactment of a

scene the character is revealed briefly with the lowering and raising of the curtain.

This action draws the audience's attention into the performance space and onto the

character's presence. I worked to craft both Peter and Helen's *thiranoku*. Each

character in their own *thiranoku* displayed a specific *bhava* or embodied emotional

state. In Peter's *thiranoku* in which he played Iago, the stable emotion or *sthayi bhava* he was embodying was *vibhats* or disgust at having to serve Othello (see Appendix C for video documentation). As can be seen in the image below, in Helen's *thiranoku,* where she played Othello, the *sthayi bhava* was *raudra* or rage. (Photo credit: Darren Gill)

Helen and Peter in the *thiranoku* developed a stillness, a boldness, an openness, and a presence that had come from their Kathakali training. This shift from the introverted psychophysicality of their individual creations described in Chapter Six, to an extroverted sociopsychophysicality helped create what Barba frames as an eastern actor's "scenic presence" (Barba 1995: 9). In Kathakali acting, this "scenic presence" emerges from the performer's comfort at observing, and at the same time being observed by an audience. This is what the Kathakali learner does every day of his learning life. The learner observes the teacher's demonstration, then acts and allows the teacher to observe his or her own actions. This is what the performer needs to do in a *thiranoku*; feel comfortable, boldly observing an audience, as well as be at ease at

being observed by them. This two-way process of observation is the core methodology of the mirroring process of Kathakali learning, as argued throughout this thesis. The two *thiranokus* were performed by Helen and Peter after twenty-two months of Kathakali training. The *thiranoku,* while seeming simple to perform, requires refined skills, especially moving the eyes to the Kathakali rhythm or *talaam* as the audience sees most spectacularly at the end of the sequence. Moving the eyes to Kathakali rhythm requires a level of skill and ability that takes time to acquire. The next section documents and analyses the creative interventions made through the vehicle of *The Magic Hour,* working to perform Kathakali and Shakespeare in the new social. This exercise may be framed as a work of inner-intercultural theatre.

ic Hour and the inner-intercultural practice of performing Kathakali in Australia

My working with the concept of an inner-intercultural practice emerged in response to the difficulties faced at later stages of Helen and Peter's development. At this stage it was necessary to engage their imaginations by creating a space for interpreting text. Adavanced Kathakali students,work with their knowledge of their craft and difficult texts in a familiar language, to fly as it were on the "wing of poesy". This space for the imagination exists in traditional performances. However, language issues made it difficult for Helen and Peter to engage with more advanced texts. This made me search for a text, not from without, but from within the three of us. Shakespeare was a familiar text, and a part of our inner self.

This particular original construct of the inner-intercultural is also a response to the inadequacy I feel towards the intercultural as a descriptive for my work in *The Magic Hour*. This creation has been my very personal, individual project for the past seventeen years (read Loomba 2005:134-36). It works with both texts of Shakespeare and scenes of Kathakali. The intercultural descriptive suggests the presence of separate cultures outside of the performer, and separated from each other (Pavis 1996; Schechner 1990; Watson 2002). In contrast to the intercultural is the "intracultural" (Bharucha 2000; Landon-Smith 2016) which reacts to the intercultural with an offer of cultures existing within a shared time and space – a shared geographic and cultural region. As a colonised Indian who read Shakespeare in school,[31] my performance of Shakespeare has no geographic or regional boundaries. My need and interest in Shakespeare's work exist as much within me as without. Both the intercultural and intracultural felt inadequate as definers of my experience with *The Magic Hour*. The inner-intercultural is constructed as a response to both the intercultural and the intracultural. The inner-intercultural are all cultures separated outside of me, but now existing within me, as part of me. As a colonised Indian with a historical relationship to the English language, and a conscious journey to Kathakali acting, my work with both forms of theatre emerges from my individual performative being. Both my work with Shakespeare and Kathakali come from within me as much as from without.

In a similar process, I respect Helen and Peter's work with other cultures and performative practices, which have been through their hard work and dedication, absorbed into their being, and exist in their bodies as one. For me, they had worked

---

[31] Shakespeare in Asia is a significant area of scholarship. Asian practitioners have responded to Shakespeare's works for reasons as varied as talking back to empire, celebrating intercultural theatre, and negotiating identity in a multicultural world. For a glimpse into what is now an extensive field of scholarship, read Lan Li and Kennedy (2010) and William Peterson's interview with Ong Ken Sen (2014).

hard enough and long enough at Kathakali actor training for twenty-two months, for the culture of Kathakali too to be considered a part of their creative being.

With Helen, embedded into her performative being, along with her recent work with Kathakali, was her earlier work with *butoh*. Both these forms embedded a contrary set of techniques into her body. Butoh gave her, for example, techniques and habits of breaking the body while with Kathakali she was able to create and hold the body in form, through formal gestures. In performing Othello's breakdown and rage to traditional Kathakali music, her body responded with a well-integrated set of gestures, both of the broken, as well as of the formal body. This cohabitation of Shakespeare, Butoh and Kathakali within her performative being expressed itself in the form of a very individual inner-intercultural performance. In the image below, Helen as Othello, sword in hand, is preparing to murder Desdemona. (Photo courtesy Darren Gill).

In similar mode, Peter's body inhabited a diversity of performative cultures, techniques and habits. When performing Iago, after months of Kathakali training to lower and ground his body, Peter returned to the very upward stance of a Venetian

courtier, he was playing out both his Anglo-Saxon body habits as well as his acquired Kathakali training. These two cultures within one body created an attractive tension and presence. While working hard at form, rhythm and *taalam* through the entire length of the Kathakali training, when Peter finally came to embody Iago and express his evil, he used his Body Weather training to imbue Iago's body, and the atmosphere around it, with a dark feeling of evil. Eventually, when he danced Kathakali displaying Iago's disgust at Othello, he returned to a form of mimicry, and eccentric exaggeration of the formal, which did, in the context of Iago's particular circumstance of having to serve a black man, express a precise feeling of *vibhats* or disgust. The image below catches Iago's *bhava* of *vibhats*. (Photo courtesy Darren Gill).

By these examples, Helen and Peter were both, individually and through an appreciation of the inner-intercultural, able to both absorb their Kathakali training and use it meaningfully in performance. The inner-intercultural then lies within one individual body, and its creative expression. It lies as much within, as without. While

it makes sense for the traditional Kathakali actor training program to exclude the non-traditional learner's own journey/culture/experience, and to stay within the rigours of the form, an inner-intercultural exercise offers the opportunity to integrate the learner's previous experience, ability, culture and background into the process of working with the newly acquired culture. It is with this framework that Helen and Peter were encouraged to bring their own practices into the Kathakali performance space.

Performing Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression

In this final section, I will describe and consider Helen and Peter's performance work in the context of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression. For each performer, I will analyse in greater detail a scene discussed in the previous section. The scenes were specifically selected for each performer to encourage the extroverted outward social display of gestures, and for them to experience the pleasure of performing Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggressions. These gestures in both the scenes chosen for Helen and Peter are performed to rhythm and when the performer embodies both the form and the rhythm, a performative power and pleasure or *bhavarasa* is experienced. These gestures were first demonstrated by me and observed by both of them. Once absorbed, they were then free to make of them, through their inner-intercultural practices, very individualised expressions and performances.

We selected the Othello murder scene for Helen, so she would be encouraged to take pleasure in these gestures of embodied aggression, to be bold, open and social, both with the formal embodied emotions or *bhava,* and her actions. During the course

of this performance, while sitting in the green room and making up, she reflected on how pleasurable this process had been. The pleasure was of playing within the discipline of the *taalam* or rhythm structure, an emotion or *bhava*, openly, boldly, even flamboyantly. This pleasure may then be formally realised as *bhavarasa.*

In performing the role of Othello, in the well-known Othello and Desdemona murder sequence in Act 5 Scene 2, Helen worked with her Butoh techniques and used Kathakali's embodied basic position, *bhavas* of rage and sadness, as well as a number of formal hand gestures. The Kathakali form helped add and layer an embodied form onto the formless/brokenness of her Butoh training. This tension between the formless and broken on the one hand (Butoh), and the formal and social on the other (Kathakali), helped create a delicate and refined tension.

Helen's playing of the murder sequence in Kathakali was worked through using Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression. These gestures of embodied aggression come from the *nair* warrior's social role in the seventeenth century, the social location of which are set out in Chapter Four. While these gestures of embodied aggression are directed toward the character on stage, they are simultaneously opened out and directed towards the social space of the performance. They demand boldness, an outwardly directed aggression, and an extroverted embodied presence bordering on flamboyance. These gestures draw a psychophysically absorbed performer out of the introverted experimental mode, into a more outward, extroverted and celebratory form of performance. What makes them not crude but sophisticated gestures of embodied aggression are the precise and complicated rhythms or *taalam* that accompany the scene. The performer is encouraged to explore a full-bodied flamboyance while performing within the sophisticated discipline of the rhythm structure or *taalam*.

The second scene that offers insights into Kathakali's embodied gestures was Peter's enactment of Iago, the scene where he gives his reasons for hating Othello. In the first part of the scene, Peter used hand gestures to enact Iago's monologue, corresponding with a recording of the speech in my voice. He then danced a Kathakali *padam* or song based on the same monologue. In the dance, he expresses his affections for Desdemona and his disgust and hate of Othello, whom he suspects of have slept with his wife Emilia. Peter displayed all the *bhavas* or emotions, openly and boldly, even squealing at one point with the delight of having planned the destruction of Othello's marriage.

In both Helen and Peter's scenes, the performers allowed themselves to be led by the rhythm, taking their embodied presence to its gestural limit while staying in touch with the rhythm, neither losing it, nor leading it, nor lagging too far behind it. When the rhythm is ridden with precision, a certain embodied power is available to the performer. In both these cases, the full-bodied possession of the rhythm or *taalam* brought these two performers to be possessed by what Barba frames as an "extra daily" energy. The performance, especially in Peter's case, seemed to step away at the end from a careful formal classical precision towards a wilder trance-like possessed

state. Yet, the possession remained within the formal confines of the *taalam*, within the rhythm.

These gestures of embodied aggression and offerings of rhythm-driven states of possession are some of Kathakali's significant offerings for the contemporary performer. In allowing and making the space for the performers to own these formal and codified actions, performed to specific rhythms, I was also influenced by the power of the *theyyam* performer, who briefly, for the duration of the performance, is allowed this individual possession and expression of a formal deity's actions (Menon 1993). The significant difference between a western performer attempting to embody an eastern tradition on the one hand, and an "untouchable" *theyyam* performer embodying and owning a god/deity, on the other, is of course not to be minimised. This making of one's own, of a formal dance theatre like Kathakali, within an inner-intercultural exercise, is a very delicate task and requires the sustained intimacy of the one-on-one relationship to offer any hope of success. I reference *theyyam* here to suggest the cross-pollination of forms in the Kerala arts, though through the entire thesis I have tried to stay disciplined and have focused on Kathakali (See Appendix E for a video documentation of Helen's "gestures of embodied aggression).

In Helen and Peter's case, their work was well appreciated by both audiences and critics, while Nithya Iyer's review in *Peril,* an online arts magazine, reflects an understanding of the context for the work which provides detailed, relevant descriptions of what the actors did:

Among the most utterly arresting moments of the entire work is the scene where Helen Smith, embodying the mind of Othello, enters into a dance of death, demonstrating the fruits of her rich expertise in the controlled contortive nature of the Butoh form. Similarly, Peter Fraser, an exponent of the Bodyweather

technique, is hauntingly present in his scenes as the jealous and crazed Iago. Both Smith and Fraser, currently learning Kathakali from Raina, are, in their own way, symbols of the changing tides of the Asian-Australian relationship, embodying the notion that these art forms are not religiously or culturally bound (Iyer 2016).

The success of this inner-intercultural work was not just critical, but more importantly through the pleasure experienced by all three, Helen, Peter and me. At the heart of this inner-intercultural exercise was the joy or pleasure of performing the formal routines of Kathakali with its clarity of *bhavas* or emotional states, and its openly displayed gestures of embodied aggression that work to draw the psychophysically absorbed performer out of the introverted inward state to an outward, bold, celebratory sociopsychophysicality.

Conclusion

This chapter documents both the traditional Kathakali actor training routines worked on with Helen and Peter, as well as the inner-intercultural experience of performing Kathakali in Australia. The training and the performance work is analysed and the offerings of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression and their value to the contemporary western performer documented.

In the final and concluding chapter, claims made in this thesis are examined and evidence presented of their successful conclusion. The theory, literature and methodology used is reflected upon and critiqued. Limitations of this practice-led research thesis are arrived at, and acknowledged, leading to a suggestion for new areas of research. Finally, this thesis offers one-on-one actor training as the appropriate methodology for contemporary western performers to engage with

Kathakali, and other South Asian and Asian, sociopsychophysical actor training processes.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

The objective of this doctoral project has been to validate the inclusion of Kathakali dance drama into contemporary actor training programs in Australia. The form of actor training researched for inclusion has been the traditional one-on-one *guru shishya* or master disciple relationship. By enquiring into Kathakali's traditional imitative pedagogy, and reframing it as a contemporary mirroring, the thesis has been attending to the reconciliation of its actor training practices, created within the old social world of seventeenth-century India, to its contemporary location within the new social in Australia. By claiming Kathakali actor training processes as sociopsychophysical, the thesis has been working to articulate its unique offerings to the psycho physically challenged western contemporary actor and performer. By its choice of a practice-led research project, the thesis has been using the body, self and culture of the practitioner researcher, as well as his embodied presence at the site of Kathakali actor training, as the primary provocations for research.

The practice-led component of this research, the focus of the last half of this thesis, has been largely located within the one-on-one site of actor training while working with two individual contemporary Australian actor performers over a twenty-two-month period. Data gathering for the thesis has been both at the site of the practice-led work in Australia, as well as at the more traditional Kathakali actor training site, at the International Kathakali Centre, in New Delhi, India. The thesis has been using the human body and its body parts, to be both a spring for new ideas, as well as to form its structure. The human body, with its living existential conditions of pain and pleasure, has been the central tool of enquiry. Responding to the traditional

understanding of *rasa* in Indian aesthetic theory, this thesis has claimed as *bhavarasa* the performer's aesthetic pleasure. As evidenced, *bhava* and *rasa* form a social communion in the space of performance. This claim of the performer's aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa* feeds into the overarching claim of Kathakali as a sociopsychophysical theatre. In this concluding chapter, both these claims are evaluated as well as the theory, methodology and research fields engaged with and critiqued. New areas of research emerging from this thesis are recorded and suggestions made by which this practice may further be engaged more formally into western actor training programs.

Claims realised and conclusions drawn

I first attend to the claims this thesis sets out to validate, while providing relevant evidence of their validity. The first is of Kathakali's sociopsychophysical processes of actor training. An appreciation of the sociopsychophysical builds on the psychophysical tradition of western actor training. As evidenced through available literature on western actor training practices, the psychophysical tradition works to attend to the psycho physical/body mind split in western actors. During the course of this practice-led research, I saw at first hand, as it were, this mind/body split in the western learner, wherein the learner needed to engage mentally with an action before embodying it – a mental interpretation before an embodied communion. To integrate the body mind of their actors, western practitioners have engaged with Asian practices to absorb as it were their integrated mind/body or psychophysical techniques and practices.

Central to the Asian forms is the integrated pedagogy of the *guru shishya* tradition. While at times, and as evidenced by literature examined in this thesis, the psychophysical tradition neglects the presence of the *guru* and the social relationship with the *shishya*, this thesis successfully demonstrates the validity of its use through the central exercise of the practitioner teaching two Australian performers. The establishment of a long-term one-on-one working relationship between teacher and learner, in an intercultural context, is then a primary success of the research exercise. This success opens up the possibility of one-on-one actor training being explored more rigorously in western actor training programs. The quality of the work produced as in the acting work created is secondary to the objective of appreciating the sociopsychophysical processes as a necessary framework for locating Kathakali actor training within Australia. More research needs to be done for a more specific plan for an inclusion of Kathakali into, for example, a drama school actor training program in Australia. This thesis is limited by the ethical constraints of research. For a formal program within a drama school, the program needs to be a validated one, i.e., drama students cannot be made the subjects of a trial, however worthy the research objective. The process of trial and validation is a separate research exercise. This research does not take on that burden.

A second element of the sociopsychophysicality of Kathakali is the influence of the social weave and the caste system on Kathakali texts and performativity. The researcher has been using a variety of tools to open out the lived experience of the caste system and its relevance to Kathakali text and performativity. The thesis used ethnographic, autoethnographic and phenomenological concepts to throw light on the social experience of the caste system and untouchability, and demonstrates how this exercise highlights certain existential elements of Kathakali performativity. By

delving into the ethnographic literature available, the thesis also has been able to highlight the role of the *nair* community, and its interrelationships with other castes. Out of an understanding of the civic role of the *nair* warriors within the caste order has emerged an understanding of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression. These gestures are an important offering to western actor training, drawing out as they do the psycho physically challenged and introverted western performer into the social space of performance. This thesis offers to the western performer the socially directed performative gestures of aggression that emerge out of an understanding of Kathakali's sociopsychophysicality.

The second claim, that of the master performer or *guru's* aesthetic pleasure, has been supported with sufficient evidence in this thesis to warrant a new perspective on Indian aesthetics. The premise of this hypothesis was built on the practitioner researcher's experience of pain, of a broken dysfunctional body, and its journey to the pleasures of a functional body. This functioning body, while performing for an audience, experiences aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa*. Significant evidence in this thesis has been offered in support of this claim, which counters well-entrenched scholarly views. This thesis presents a strong argument for the existence of the performer's *bhavarasa*. While more ethnographic and phenomenological enquiries need to be made – for example, into the specific nature of an audience and a performer's pleasures – what is concluded is that the theory of *rasa* must necessarily include an understanding of the performer tasting aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* as a necessary part of the process of creating an artistic object for an audience. This understanding aligns this claim to the theory of *rasa* first articulated in the second century A.D. in the *Natyashastra*. This claim of the existence of the performer's *bhavarasa* rests on following evidence presented in this thesis: Pollock's very

exhaustive research and conclusions; on the work of the Indian scholar Pollock identifies, K. Krishnamoorthy, and whose interpretation and understanding of the *Natyashastra* validates this claim; its common reference by Kathakali practitioners in their training into the nine emotional states as *rasaabhinaya*; my own embodied subjective experience of *bhavarasa* through my practice-led work with Helen and Peter; from the work and representation of Sadanam Balakrishnan (2005); and from interviews and discussions with Evoor Rajendran Pillai (2016). This collective body of evidence suggests that *rasa or* the theory of aesthetic pleasure includes both the performer's, as well as the audience's experience.

Both these claims, of the appropriate representation of Kathakali as a sociopsychophysical theatre, and of the master practitioner tasting aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa*, coalesce to validate each other, and find a point of commonality in the act of mirroring. The act of mirroring is a nuanced and complex sociopsychophysical practice and a site for a tasting of aesthetic pleasure or *bhavarasa*. This thesis concludes with an appreciation of Kathakali mirroring.

The Kathakali curriculum and the "use value" of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression

In Chapter Eight research into a potential curriculum for contemporary actor training was documented. This included both the adaptions made to the traditional Kathakali program as well as inclusion of scenes from Shakespeare adapted to Kathakali. The inner-intercultural experience of performing Kathakali and Shakespeare offered the research participants a more direct access to what this thesis frames as Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression. An understanding of these gestures is not only a valuable scholarly offering for the interpretation of Kathakali

text and performativity, but also one that has value in practice in western actor training. While working with Helen and Peter, I noticed a habit of taking an action to be performed and transforming it into a problem to be solved. This problem solving required introspection, as they worked out their solutions. This introversion played itself out further into their creative expressions, i.e., each time they were asked to improvise or create an action based on a certain theme, they would undertake a similar journey, first going inward, to work things out, then later moving outward. This act of making actions into problems to be solved, this introspection, caused them to stay introverted and withdrawn from a more direct and bolder engagement with the audience. As an audience, I felt I was looking into an experiment happening in a laboratory, with the performers experimenting on their bodies. While not passing judgment on the value of this aesthetic or on the process of creation, the opposite happens through the mirroring of Kathakali's gestures of embodied aggression. The gestures demonstrated by the master practitioner demand attention, are bold statements of dramatic action and, when offered as actions to be mirrored with their subjective conditions of *bhava* or embodied emotion and *tala* or rhythm*,* draw the introspecting and introverted performer out of themselves into a more open, bold and direct engagement with the social space of the performance, and with the audience. The performance stops looking like an experiment and more like a celebration.

More research needs to be done before a conclusive curriculum may emerge offering the precise location of these gestures of embodied aggression within, for example, a drama school actor training program. This thesis, however, conclusively validates their presence informing Kathakali texts and performativity, and their use value in an actor training program. The thesis also validates for an inclusion into an

actor training program, the mirroring methodology, as well as the one-on-one site and master disciple relationship.

Critiquing the field, theory, literature and methodology

As practice-led research this thesis has explored Kathakali practice and its creative conditions, set up and responded to appropriate research questions, rigorously analysed and theoretically framed insights gathered through the research field, as well as offered scholarly evidence where needed.The strength of practice-led research lies in the opening up of the practitioner's subjectivity to the process of research and knowledge gathering. The practitioner's diaries, memories, experiences, gut feelings, epiphanies and insights are all valid provocations for enquiry. This makes this particular field of enquiry an exciting one for a practitioner. It is deeply meaningful for a practitioner to enquire into a few closely held insights and nuggets of knowledge that have been treasured over, say, a lifetime of performance. I use this expansive emotional language to suggest the subjective joy available that goes alongside a deeper enquiry into the mature practitioner's lived self.

While acknowledging the role of the subjective, the objective abilities of the practitioner also play an important role in the process of research. It was my ability as a Kathakali practitioner that excited two senior Australian performers to engage with and stay engaged for twenty-two months on a project that they were both doing voluntarily. There is no shying away from stating the importance of the practitioner's ability and talent. These two conditions of the objective and subjective lie within the body of the practitioner, and it is the practitioner who works to connect them, while keeping a balance, letting the research be neither too subjectively driven, nor too

dependent on the objective performing abilities of the practitioner. A practitioner researcher's balanced sense of his subjective and objective self is then a strength for practice-led research. The nature of a practice, however, may create an imbalance.

Kathakali pedagogy seeks a communion, and not a separation between teacher and learner. On the other hand, traditional research methodology demands a scientific objectification between researcher and subject, facilitating data gathering. Caught between my roles as a Kathakali teacher and a researcher, I found I had a deeper need, and habit, to work at communion. The culture of Kathakali pedagogy works to make the learner's body absent while crafting the presence of the Kathakali form. The teacher does not actively seek to problem solve, does not objectify the learner's body to identify a problem. The teacher continually seeks to bring the learner into a communion with his performing self, not a separation. I found the periods of interest for me as researcher were those that related to a breakdown of the relationship, to the breaking of the bond, to a threatened separation. Situations of conflict within the intercultural space became significant sites for data gathering. They legitimised for me an objectification of the learner's body. They legitimised the objectification of a problem between learner and teacher. This objectification facilitated data gathering and analysis. The weakness of this model is that a conflict cannot be generated, or created, it must happen organically, out of the teaching process. The researcher must be alert to recognise conflict within the one-on-one relationship, seeing it as a fertile site for intercultural practice-led research data gathering.

While sites of conflict facilitated data gathering and analysis, the thesis has also been well served by the critical theories relating to "embodiment." Thomas Csordas (1990, 94) locates the genesis of embodiment, as a theoretical paradigm, in the transforming conditions of globalisation. Within the crisscrossing of cultures and the

overlapping of peoples and geographies, the earlier tools of ethnographic academic enquiry framed by Csordas as "text and textuality" proved unstable, and the human body emerged as a more stable tool for academic enquiry. The experience of withdrawing money from Automated Teller Machines or ATMs explains this for me. While across the world ATMs offer up money, the language of usage, for example, French, German, Vietnamese and Spanish, varies but the performative act is similar. The body with the hand moving to insert the card is the stable link. The "embodiment" framework, using the human body as a tool of enquiry, has been both a stable and a productive framework for this project, serving well a thesis that has engaged in a research exercise spanning a length of time and space i.e., across geographies, cultures and centuries of time. It was by following the theoretical discipline of embodiment that the body of the performer, its embodied self, culture and existential pain and pleasures, became the primary tool for knowledge gathering. A critical foundational source for understanding embodiment in this way is the work of Merleau-Ponty, who highlighted the centrality of the body as a site for human experience. While this understanding moved the critical framework away from the Cartesian mind/body split, the more engaging theory for this thesis was the counter offer by Drew Leder, of absence. This thesis has engaged very productively with theories of absence. While enough ethnographic work has been done detailing the Kathakali performer's presence, for example, Phillip Zarrilli's exhaustive research on Kathakali actor training, more work needs to be done on the body's absence. This includes both absence as a condition of the costumed body in performance, as well as absence as a condition of the caste-encultured social body of the performer.

The thesis has attempted to focus its enquiry singularly on Kathakali, to suggest its uniqueness even within the cross-pollinated space of the Kerala arts, where one

form informs another. This thesis reviews literature on performance forms such as *kutiyattam* and *theyyam* but does not critique or include them in the articulation of the thesis. The work of Phillip Zarrilli has been placed centrally in this thesis. This is both in acknowledgement of the significance of his academic contribution as well as the practitioner researcher's need to negotiate and converse with it, as it were. Literature around the intercultural work of Eugenio Barba has influenced and served well the core intercultural practice-led exercise of teaching the performance practice of one culture in another culture. Neuroscience literature enquired into through the works of Vittorio Gallese and V.S. Ramachandran have led the thesis towards a new way to look at the traditional pedagogy as well as find a new language for its representation. This thesis has not shied away from negotiating existential phenomenologist literature in its attempt to articulate an enquiry located outside of the godly and religious space, i.e., one that is working to locate it within the human, everyday and existential workings of actors. Finally, literature on the caste system in India is used in the thesis to serve the conceptual exercise of connecting an understanding of the caste system to Kathakali texts and performativity, i.e., this thesis works with the central, seminal writers on caste and locates the conceptual enquiry within their debates.

The methodology used in the practice-led research work has been focused on the teaching of Kathakali to contemporary performers in Melbourne, Australia. This site has served well the process of gathering data. As the researcher is a new migrant to Australia, and not part of an existing performing arts community, this methodology risked failure through the fact of the researcher not being well known locally. Further, the methodology risked failure as it moved forward from day to day, i.e., the participants were free to leave at any given point in time, the one-on-one work could have stopped at any time. If it had stopped, the researcher would have needed to

search again for new participants, as the methodology was to work with participants over a long period of time. This need to persuade participants to continue participating demanded many careful negotiations on both sides between the performers and the practitioner researcher. This was a vulnerable part of the methodology. The methodology also disciplined the research around the practice-led project in Australia. Wider ethnographic research, for example, was avoided as part of this practice-led discipline. Autoethnographic enquiry in India, for data gathering and data validation, was limited to one Kathakali institution where the researcher had learnt Kathakali. If the practice-led one-on-one site in Australia had not been central to the research exercise, then an ethnographic enquiry into a wider field of one-on-one actor training would perhaps have required the researcher to travel to Kerala, as has been done previously by traditional ethnographers like Zarrilli and Pitkow. The methodology of having the practitioner researcher present at the site of research, as teacher and as participant in Australia, enforced its own limitations, and discipline.

Limitations faced and new possibilities

The thesis has been limited by the few research publications that deal directly with the *guru shishya* tradition. While there are a number of studies done in the field of music, research on *guru shishya* in the space of embodied practices and dance is limited. As documented in the thesis, those studies that do deal with the *guru shishya*, as in Dalidowizc's study of Kathak dance, concentrate more on the creativity of the *guru* and the innovations within the learning process. Straight down the middle studies of the embodied imitative process in master disciple learning is, surprisingly, an unexplored area. The studies that do engage with *guru shishya* more often than not use journalistic methods of interviewing *gurus* or writing their life stories. Research for this thesis suggests the reason for this is perhaps the lack of interest in the

imitative methodology. In music, this imitative methodology is perceived differently. While a *tabla* learner may be seen to imitate her *guru*, she will not be said to be mimicing her *guru*. On the other hand, it is easier to have a Kathakali *guru* teaching facial expressions being perceived as teaching the art of mimicry.

While engaging with and critiquing a wide body of western representers of Kathakali, one significant shift in perception for the researcher has been the move away from the exotic eye exercises that have been placed centrally in western narratives of Kathakali actor training, towards the more significant exercise of the basic posture. This basic posture engages the entire body, serves the archetype from within, like a scaffold does a building. A limitation of this thesis has been the inability to research deeper into the craft of creating and performing archetypes. At the International Centre for Kathakali, there are now two hundred young women out of a body of two-hundred-and-forty students, learning Kathakali. They play both male and female characters. This sets up exciting possibilities of researching feminine bodies scaffolding male, female, godly and animal archetypes.

While the thesis offers as a hypothesis and validates the performer's experience of *bhavarasa*, new research needs to be done to appreciate with greater depth the *rasa* experienced by performers. This research would need to bring the performer's body and its lived experience and culture, right centre stage as it were. Performers on stage in India shy away from nudity, and the human body and its intimate functioning too is absent from scholarly discourse. While work has begun around the embodiment paradigm, more specific research work is needed that focuses on the performer's pleasure or, even simpler, the performing body's happiness. This is an exciting new area of research.

Connected to the performer's ability to experience *rasa* first theorised in the *Natyashastra* are all the related concepts that drive the performer's imagination into a state of emotional embodiment. These individual concepts, which may be translated into English as "given circumstances," "action" and "emotion memory," all resonate with Konstantin Stanislavsky's work to create an actor's "inner emotional life." His later journey to a method of physical actions brings it closer to the Kathakali method, wherein the learner works at and learns a physical score, and through the physical arrives at the emotional and psychological. By this comparison, a new area of research lies in working to discover how what Stanislavsky did for the actor playing individual realistic naturalistic characters may converse with Kathakali's methods to create epic archetypical characters. *Rasa* theory may then talk, converse with the "Method."

While connecting the lived experience of the caste system with Kathakali text and performativity, this thesis opens up another area of research linking the performer's body to its culture and performativity. An example of performativity's connection to the social practice of untouchability is the Kathakali performer's gaze, which often works on stage as an expression of domination, suggesting that when bodies cannot touch, power is exercised by staring, and not by touching. The celebrated Kathakali eye exercise has now a local context within the social practice of untouchability. By this example, the caste contextualisation of the performing arts informs the very texture of the body's performativity. Perhaps, if the hands touched more, the eyes would stare less. Caste, untouchability and performativity in the Indian arts is an exciting new area of research.

Finally, this thesis opens up for practitioners engaging with sociopsychophysical performance forms like Kathakali the one-on-one space as a

significant site for intra-, inner or intercultural actor training. In a globalised world, most cities have Asian practitioners of one form or another available. For formal drama schools, this thesis works to open out an engagement of student actors with the Asian master performers available in the community. This engagement through a sustained one-on-one relationship, in addition to group workshops and classroom training in the drama school, is a new model of incorporating traditional eastern arts into drama training programs. Without the one-on-one work, and the relationship sustained over a length of time, this thesis argues that this intercultural work lacks depth. While this thesis validates the Kathakali one-on-one actor training space, more research needs to be done on the wider field of traditional Asian arts, and the embedding of one-on-one actor training into formal programs of learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antonin, A. *Collected Works Volume 1*. Translated by Victor Corti, Calder & Boyars Ltd, 1968.

---. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Susan Sontag, University of California Press, 1976.

Averill, J. R. "Emotions in Relation to Systems of Behaviours." *Psychological and Biological Approaches to Emotion*, edited by Nancy L. Stern, et al., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990, pp. 385-402.

Balakrishnan,S. *Kathakali: A Practitioner's Perspective*. Calicut: Poorna Publications, 2005.

Barba, E. *The Paper Canoe*. Routledge, 1995.

---. "Words or Presence." *The Drama Review*, 1972, pp. 47-54.

---. *The Million*, Video Artfilms digital (Firm). Originally released by Odin Teatret Film. Drama-Experimental Theater, 1979.

---. "The Fiction of Duality." *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 20, 1989, pp. 311-314.

---. "The Steps on the River Bank." *The Drama Review*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1994, pp. 107-120.

Barba, Eugenio, and Simonne Sanzenbach. "The Kathakali Theater." *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1967, pp. 37-50.

Barbosa, Duarte. *The Book of Duarte Barbosa,* Translated by Mansel Longworth Dames, Asian Educational Services, 1989.

---. *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century.* Translated by Henry E. J. Stanley, Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010.

Basham, L. A. *The Origin and Development of Classical Hinduism*. Oxford

    University Press, 1989.

Bharucha, R. *Theater and the World, Politics and Performance of Culture.* Routledge,

    1993.

---. *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theater in the Age of*

    Globalization. Wesleyan University Press, 2000.

Blair, Rhonda. "Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting: Imagination, Conceptual

    Blending, and Empathy." *Theater Drama Review*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1988, pp. 92-

    103.

 ---. *The actor, image, and action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*,

    Routledge,2008.

Bolland, David. *A Guide to Kathakali*, National Book Trust, 1980.

Bolt, Barbara. "The Magic is in Handling." *Practice as Research: Approaches to*

    Creative Arts Enquiry, edited by Estelle Barrett, and Barbara Bolt, I.B Tauris,

    2007, pp. 27-34.

Borghi AM, "Cimatti F. Embodied cognition and beyond: acting and sensing the

    body." *Neuropsychologia,* 2010, 48(3):pp.763-73.

Bottini, G. "Feeling Touches in Someone Else's Hand." *Neuroreport*, vol. 13, 2002,

    pp. 249-252.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Policy Press, 1990.

Bowers, Faubion. *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Dance and Drama.* Grove

    Press, 1956.

Boyce-Tillman, June, et al. *PaR for the Course Issues Involved in the Development of*

    Practice-based Doctorates in the Performing Arts. *The Higher Education*

    Academy. University of Winchester, 2012.

Brandon, James R. *Theatre in Southeast Asia*. Harvard University Press, 1967.

Brass, M., and C. Heyes. "Imitation: Is Cognitive Neuroscience Solving the Correspondence Problem?" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 10, 2005, pp. 489-495.

Buchanan, Francis (Hamilton). *A Journey from Madras, Canara and Malabar,* vol.2. Black, Perry and Kingsbury, 1807.

Calbi, Maurizio."Postcolonial Entanglements: Performing Shakespeare and Kathakali in Ashish Avikunthak's *Dancing Othello.*" *Anglistica,* vol. 15, no. 2, 2011, pp. 27-32.

Chatterjee, Ananya. "Training in Indian Classical Dance: A Case Study." *Asian Theater Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1996, pp. 68-91.

Chaudhury, P. J. "Catharsis in the Light of Indian Aesthetics." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. XV, no. 2, 1956, pp. 218-226.

Coomaraswamy, A. K. *The Mirror of Gesture*. 3rd ed., Munshiram Manoharlal, 1957.

Craig, Edward Gordon. *The Mask*. Craus Reprint Corp, 1913.

Crossley, Nick. *Reflexive Embodiment in Contemporary Society*. Macgraw-Hill, Education, 2006.

Csordas, Thomas J. "Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology." *Perspectives on Embodiment*. Edited by Gail Weiss and Honi fern Haber, Routledge, 1999, pp. 143-162.

---. *Embodiment and Experience*: *The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

---. "Embodiment as a Paradigm." *Anthropology Ethos*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1990, pp. 5-47.

---. "Intersubjectivity and Intercorporeality." *Subjectivity*, vol. 22, 2008, pp. 110-121.

Cynkutis, Zbigniew. *Acting with Growtowski -Theater as a Field for Experiencing Life*. Translated by Khalid Tyabji, Routledge, 2015.

Dalidowicz, Monica. "Crafting Fidelity." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, vol. 21, 2015, pp. 838-854.

Das, Veena. *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*. Oxford University Press, 1977.

Daugherty, Diane, and Marlene Pitkow. "Who Wears the Skirts in Kathakali?" *The Drama Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1988, pp. 138-156.

de Zoete, Beryl, and Walter Spies. *Dance and Drama in Bali*. Faber and Faber, 1938.

Delgado, Maria M., and Paul Heritage, editors. *In Contact with the Gods: Directors Talk Theatre*. Manchester University Press, 1996.

Dumont, Louis. *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*. University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Ekman, P., and R. Davidson. *The Nature of Emotion, Fundamental Questions*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Fitzgerald, Tim. "Review of 'Drama and Ritual in Early Hinduism by Natalia Lidova and Farley P. Richmond'." *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 182-184.

Foley, Kathy. "Founders of the Field: South and South East Asia and Introduction." *Asian Theatre Journal,* vol 28, no. 2, 2011, pp. 437-442.

---. "John Emigh." *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2011, pp. 451-462.

---. "Melvyn Helstien." *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2011, pp. 443-450.

Fraser, Peter. Personal interview. 30 June 2016.

Fuller, Zack. "Seeds of an Anti-hierarchic Ideal: Summer Training at Body Weather Farm." *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, pp. 197-203, 2013.

Gabriele, Alex. "A Sense of Belonging and Exclusion: 'Touchability' and 'Untouchability' in Tamil Nadu." *Ethnos*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2008, pp. 523-543. doi: 10.1080/00141840802563956.

Gallagher, Shaun, and Jonathan Cole. "Body Image and Body Schema in a deafferented subject." *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, edited by Donn Welton, Blackwell, 1998, pp. 131-147.

Gallese, V. "The Roots of Empathy and the Shared Manifold Hypothesis and the Neural Basis of Intersubjectivity." *Psychopathology*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2003, pp. 171-180.

---."Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation, and the Neural Basis of Social Identification." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 19, 2009, pp. 519-536.

Gallese V, and C. Sinigaglia. "What is so Special about Embodied Simulation?" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 15, no. 11, 2011, pp. 512-519.

Gallese, V., et al. "Action Recognition in the Premotor Cortex." *Brain*, vol. 199, no. 2, 1996, pp. 593-609.

Ghosh, M., editor and translator. *Nandikesvara's Abhinayadarpanam.* Manisha Granthalaya, 1975.

Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press, 1991.

---. *Sociology*. Polity Press, 2009.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life.* Penguin, 1959.

Goldman, Alvin. *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience of Mindreading.* Oxford University Press, 2006.

Gough, Kathleen, and David M. Schneider, editors. *Matrinileal Kinship*. University of California Press, 1961.

Growtowski, J. *Towards a Poor Theater*. Simon & Shuster, 1968.

Guha, Sumit. *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*. Brill, 2013.

Ghurye,G.S., *Caste and Race in India*. Popular Prakashan, 1969.

Hage, Ghasan. *White Nation*. Taylor and Francis, 2002.

Hallam, E., and T. Ingold. "Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction." *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation,* edited by E. Hallam and T. Gold, Berg, 2007, pp. 1-24.

Hapgood, Elizabeth R. *An Actor Prepares*. Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1937.

Hickok, Gregory. *The Myth of Mirror Neurons: The Real Neuroscience of Communication and Cognition*,WW Norton &Co, 2015.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time,*(trans Macquarrie and Robinson). Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1973.

Hodge, A. *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. Routledge, 2000.

Hopkins, Washburn E. "Hindu Salutations." *Hopkins: Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1931, pp. 369-383.

Husserl, Edmund. *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.

---. *General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology.* Routledge, 2012.

Hulton, Dorinda and Kapsali, Maria. "Yoga and Stanislavski: reflections on the past and applications for the present and furture." *Theater, Dance and Performance Training*, Taylor and Francis online, Volume 5, 2017, pp.37-47.

Ingold, Tim. "Culture on The Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet." *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2004, pp. 315-340.

Iyer, Bharatha. *Kathakali; The Sacred Dance-Drama of Malabar.* Luzac and Company, 1955.

Iyer, Nithya. "Asian-Australian Theatre Baptizes Othello: The Magic Hour." *Peril*, 15 Jun. 2016, http://peril.com.au/topics/arts/asian-australian-theatre-baptizes-othello-the-magic-hour. Accessed 25.06.2016

Jeffrey, Robin. *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847 - 1908.* University of Sussex Press, 1976.

Jones, Clifford R., and Betty True. *Kathakali: An Introduction to the Dance-Drama of Kerela.* Theater Arts Books, 1970.

Jortner, David, and Kathy Foler. "James R. Brandon." *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2011, pp. 341-355.

Kalsi, Sewa Singh. *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain: Religious and Social Change among the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford.* Leeds: University of Leeds, Dept. of Theology and Relgious Studies, 1992.

Kapila, Vatsyayan. *Aesthetic Theories and Forms in Indian Tradition*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008.

---. *Indian Classical Dance*. Sangeet Natak Academy, 1974.Khare. R. S, editor. *Caste, Hierarchy and Individualism*. OUP, 2006.

Khokar, Ashish. *Teacher&Guru*, Printways,2016.

Kiernander, A. *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Theatre du Soleil*. Cambridge Universiy

    Press, 1993.

Kohler, E., et al. "Hearing Sounds, Understanding Actions: Action Representation in

    Mirror Neurons. *Science*, vol. 297, 2002, pp. 846–848.

Kothari, Sunil. *New Directions in Indian Dance*. Marg Publications, 2003.

Krishnamoorthy, K. *The Dhvanyaloka and its Critics*. Kavyalaya Publishers, 1968.

 ---. *Studies in Indian Aesthetics and Criticism*. Mysore Printing and Publishing

    House, 1979.

Kumar, Pushpendra. *Natyasastra of Bharatamuni*, vol. 1-4. New Bharatiya Book

    Corporation, 2010.

Kumeiga, J. *The Theatre of Grotowski*. Methun, 1985.Lan, Li Yong, and Kennedy

    Dennis. *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance*. Cambridge

    University Press, 2010.

Landon-Smith, Kristine. "Towards an Intracultural Actor Training: Utilising the

    Cultural Context of the Performer.*"* Dissertation, University of East London,

    2016.

Leder, D. *The Absent Body*. University Press Chicago, 1990.

Ledger, Adam J. *Odin Teatre: Theater in a New Century*. Palgrave Macmillian, 2012.

Ledger, Adam K., et al. "The Question of Documentation: Creative Strategies in

    Performance Research." *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*,

    edited by Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, Edinburgh University Press,

    2011, pp. 162-185.

Lidova, Natalia. *Drama and Ritual of Early Hinduism*. Motilal Banarasi Das

    Publishers, 1994.

Lipner, Julis. *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge, 2012.

Loomba, Ania. *A Campanion to Shakespeare and Performance*. Edited by Hodgson
    and Worthen, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

---. *'Local-manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows': Issues of race,
    hybridity and location in post-colonial Shakespeares*. Post-colonial
    Shakespeares. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin. Routledge,1998.

Madhavan, Arya. "Eyescape: Aesthetics of 'Seeing' in 'Kutiyattam.'" *Asian Theatre
    Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2012, pp. 550-570.

Madhavan, A. and Nair, S. "The Kinetic Body: Foot Memory and Dispositions of the
    Body in Performance." In Sandra Reeve (ed.) *Body and Performance: Ways of
    Being a Body*. Devon: Triarchy, 2013.

Mee, Erin. *"'Rasa Is/As/And Emotional Contagion' In Natyasastra: Aesthetics,
    Epistemology   & Performance Practice."* McFarland Press, 2014,pp.157-168

Menon, Dilip. "The Moral Community of the Teyyattam: Popular Culture in Late
    Colonial Malabar." *Studies in Social History*, vol. 9, 1993, pp. 187-216.

Menon, Narayana, et al. *Guru-shishya Parampara: The Master Disciple Tradition in
    Classical Indian Dance and Music*. Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982.

Merleau, Ponty M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.

---. *The Primacy of Perception*. Edited by James J. Edie, Northwestern University
    Press, 1964.

Merlin, B. *Beyond Stanislavski*. Nick Hern, 2001.

Meyrick, Julian. "Limits of Theory: Academic versus Professional Understanding of
    Theatre Problems." *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2003, pp. 230-242.

Mikkel, Bille, et al. *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence
    and Loss*. Springer, 2010.

Morin, A. "Levels of Consciousness and Self-awareness: A Comparison and Integration of Various Neurocognitive Views." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 15, 2006, pp. 358-371.

Munsi Sarkar Unmimala and Burridge Stephanie. *Traversing Tradition: Celebrating Dance in India*. Routledge, 2012.

Nair, S. *The Natyashastra and the Body in Performance*. Macfarland, 2015.

---. *Restoration of Breath Consciousness and Performance*. Brill, 2007.

Nair, D. Appukuttan, and Paniker Ayyappa K., editors. *Kathakali: The Art of the Non-Worldly*. Marg, 1993.

Nayar Prabodhchandran, V. R., et al. "Kalyanasaugandhikam (The Flower of Good Fortune), A Kathakali Drama." *Asian Theater Journal*, vol .13, no. 1, 1996, pp. 1-25.

Nelson, Robin. "Conceptual Frameworks for PaR and Related Pedagogy: From 'Hard Facts' to 'Liquid Knowing'." *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 49-70.

Osinski, Z. *Growtowski and his Laboratory*. Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1980.

Pandeya Avinash, C. *The Art of Kathakali*. Kitabistan, 1961.

Pavis, Patrice, editor. *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. Routledge, 1996.

Peterson, W. "Being Affected: An Interview with Ong Keng Sen of TheatreWorks Singapore in Conversation with William Peterson." *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, edited by Margherita Laera, Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014, pp. 165-180.

---. *Theater and the Politics of Culture in Singapore*. Wesleyen University Press, 2001.

Piccini, Angela, and Baz Kershaw "Practice as Research in Performance: From Epistemology to Evaluation." *Digital Creativity*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2004, pp. 86-92

Pillai Evoor Rajendran. Personal interviews. 11 July 2016 and 26 August 2016.

Pitkow, Marlene Beth. "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Kathakali's Females and the Men who Play Them." *Between Fame and Shame: Performing Women – Women Performers in India Part 3*, edited by Heidrun Brückner, et al., Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011, pp. 223-243.

---. *Representations of the Feminine in Kathakali: Dance-drama of Kerala State, South India*. ProQuest Dissertations, 1998.

Pollock, Sheldon. *A Rasa Reader*. Permanent Black, 2016.

Prickett, S. "Guru or Teacher? Shishya or Student? Pedagogic Shifts in South Asian Dance Training in India and Britain." *South Asia Research*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 25-41.

Pitches, Jonathan. *Vsevolod Meyerhold*.Routledge,2003.

Raina, Arjun. "The Art of Creating a Kathakali Performer's 'Presence'." *Theater, Dance and Performance Training*, Taylor and Francis, 2015,6:3,pp. 323-338.

---"Kathakali Mirror Box" *Theater, Dance and Performance training*, Taylor and Francis, 2017,8:1,pp.61-74.

---*The Painted Devil*. Partridge, 2014.

Raina,M.K. "Guru-Shishya Relationship in Indian Culture: The Possibility of a Creative Resilient Framework," 2002, *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 14(1):pp.167-198.

Ram, Ronki. "Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation: Articulating an Alternative

>Dalit Agenda in East Punjab." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 46, 2012, pp. 639-

>702. doi:10.1017/S0026749X11000254.

Ramachandran, V. S., and D. Rogers-Ramachandran. "Synesthesia in Phantom Limbs

>Induced with Mirrors." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 1996. doi:

>10.1098/rspb.1996.0058,pp.377-86.

Ramachandran, V.S., and S. Blakeslee. *Phantoms in the Brain*. Fourth Estate, 1998.

Ramachandran, Vilayanur. "The neurons that shaped civilization." TED talk,

>November2009,https://www.ted.com/talks/vs_ramachandran_the_neurons_

>that_shaped_civilization.

Richmond, Farley P. "Asian Theater Materials: A Selected Biography." *The Drama

>Review, TDR*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1971a, pp. 312-323.

---. "The Bhasa Festival Trivandrum, India." *Asia Theatre Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1,

>1989, pp. 68-76.

---. "The Multiple Dimensions of Time and Space in Kutiyattam, the Sanskrit Theatre

>of Kerala." *Asian Theater Journal,* vol. 2, 1985, pp. 50-60.

---. "The Political Role of Theatre in India." *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 25, no.

>3, 1973, pp. 318-334.

---. "Some Religious Aspects of Indian Traditional Theatre." *The Drama Review:

>TDR*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1971b, pp. 123-131.

Richmond, Farley P., et al. *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*. Motilal

>Banarsidass, 1993.

Roy, Arundhati, Roy. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997.

Sadasivan, N. S. *A Social History of India*. A. P. H. Publication, 2000.

Safwan, Amir. "History of Kathakali: Of Art, Agency, and Aesthetics." *Literophile*,

vol. 7, no. 3, 2014, pp.16-19

Sapir, E. *Culture, Langage, and Personality*, *Selected Essays*. Edited by D.

Mandelbaum, University of California Press, 1961.

Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Routledge, 1985.

---. *Performance Theory*. Routledge, 1988.

---. "A Reply to Rustom Bharucha." *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984, pp.

245-253.

Schechner, Richard, and Willa Appel, editors. *By Means of Performance:*

Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual. Press Syndicate of the University

of Cambridge, 1990.

Scherer, K.R., and P. Ekman P, editors. *Approaches to Emotion*. Lawrence Erlbaum

Associates, 1984.

Scott, A. C. *Theatre in Asia*. Macmillan, 1972.

Sebanz, N., et al. "Joint Action: Bodies and Minds Moving Together." *Trends in*

Cognitive Sciences, vol. 10, no. 2, 2006, pp. 70-76.

Shakespeare, S. W. *Othello*. Edited by J. A. E. Honigmann, Arden Shakespeare,

Thomas Learning, 2006.

Shawn, Ted. *Gods Who Dance*. E. P. Dutton, 1929.

Shulman, David. *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India.*

Harvard University Press, 2012.

Shwartz, Susan. L. *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India*. Columbia University Press,

2006.

Singh, Akhilesh Kumar. "When Brahmins did not touch Mayawati's feet." *Times of*

India online, 17 May 2007. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/When-

Brahmins-did-not-touch-Mayawatis-feet/articleshow/2055822.cms. Accessed
25 June 2018.

Smith, Helen. Personal interview. 30 June 2016.

Srinivas, M. N. "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization." *Caste in Modern
India and other Essays*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 42-62.

Srinivasan, Priya. *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*. Temple
University Press, 2011.

Strathern, Andrew J. *Body Thoughts*. University of Michigan Press, 1996.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the
Americas*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Thapar, Romila. *Interpreting Early India*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Thomas, Terence. "Old allies, new neighbors: Sikhs in Britain." *The Growth of
Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945,* Vol 1. Edited by Gerald Parsons.
Abingdon, UK: Open University/Routledge, 1993, pp.205-242

Trowsdale, Jo, and R. Hayhow. "Psycho-physical Theatre Practice as Embodied
Learning for Young People with Learning Disabilities." *International Journal
of Inclusive Education*, vol. 19, no. 10, 2015, doi:
10.1080/13603116.2015.1031832, pp.1022-1036.

Tsakiris, M., et al. "Having a Body versus Moving your Body: How Agency
Structures Body-ownership." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 15, 2006, pp.
423-432.

---. "On Agency and Body-ownership: Phenomenological and Neurocognitive
Reflections." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 16, 2007, pp. 645-660.

Turner, Jane. *Eugenio Barba.* Routledge, 2004.

Umlita, M. A., et al. "I Know What you are Doing: A Neurophysicological Study." *Neuron*, vol. 32, 2001, pp. 91-101.

Varley, J. "Sanjukta Panigrahi Dances for The Gods." *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. XIV, no. 55, 1998, pp. 249-273.

Wallace, Dace. "The Concept of Rasa in Sanskrit Dramatic Theory." *Educational Theatre Journal,* vol. 15, no. 3, 1963, pp. 249-254.

Wallace, Lori Lee. *The Intercultural and Psychophysical Acting Pedagogy of Phillip Zarrilli.* UMI Dissertation Publishing Michigan, 2012.

Watson, I. *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate.* Manchester University Press, 2002.

---. Odin Teatret: "The Million" La Mama Annex, New York, April 26. *The Drama Review* TDR, vol. 29, no. 3, 1985, pp. 131-137.

Zarrilli, P.,"Contested Narratives on and off the *Kathakaḷi* Dance-Drama Stage." *Modern Drama*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1992, pp. 101-116.

---. *The Kathakali Complex, Actor, Performance & Structure.* Abhinav Publications, 1984.

---. *Kathakali Dance-Drama Where Gods and Demons Play*. Routledge, 2000a.

---"Embodying the Lion's 'Fury'." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2000b, pp. 41-54.

---. *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski.* Routledge, 2009. DVD-ROM by Peter Hulton.

---. "Psychophysical Approaches and Practices in India: Embodying Processes and States of 'Being–Doing'." *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 27, 2011, doi:10.1017/S0266464X11000455,pp.244-271.

---. "Towards a Phenomenological Model of the Actor's Embodied Modes of

Experience." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2004, pp. 653-666.

Zarrilli, P., et al. *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process: Intercultural and

Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Zoete, Beryl de, and Walter Spies. *Dance and Drama in Bali*. Oxford University

Press, 1938.

APPENDIX A (Reference Balakrishnan 2005)

TWENTY FOUR BASIC HAND GESTURES

|				
PATHAKAM	MUDRAKHYAM	KATAKAM	MUSHTI	KARTAREEMUKHAM
SUKATHUNDAM	KAPITHAKAM	HAMSAPAKSHAM	SIKHARAM	HAMSASYAM
MUKURA	ARDHACHANDRAM	MUKURAM	BHRAMARAM	SUCHIKAMUKHAM
PALLAVAM	TRIPATAKA	MRIGASEERSHAM	SARPASIRASSU	VARDHAMANAKAM
KATAKAM	URNANABHAM	MUKULAM	KATAKAMUKHAM	
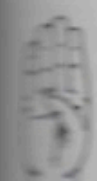
The *guru* controls the rhythm (*taalam*) and tempo (*kaalam*). He moves around among the students, correcting their postures, their movements and steps. For this correction, the *guru* strikes the offending part of the student's body with the same thick stick he uses for giving the *taalam*. This part of the training is the most strenuous and rigorous—and is very painful, but vital to the remoulding of the physical body and the building of self-discipline.

In the past, there were fourteen basic steps, but now there are only four in practice. These steps are practised on a rotating basis, one or two steps per day. To complete one basic step in this manner takes about one hour. By the end of this part of the training, the floor is awash with sweat.
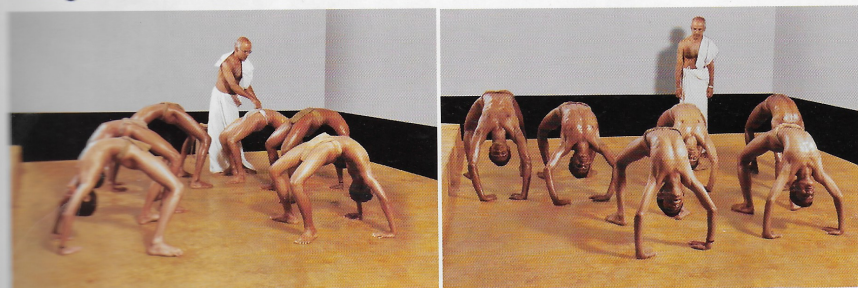
UZHICHIL — BODY MASSAGE
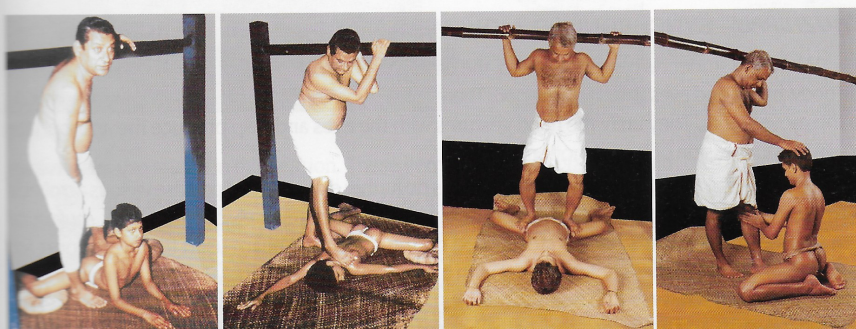
Uzhichil

After a round of leaps, the students lie in a prone position on a palm leaf mat for the body massage, called *uzhichil* or *tadaval*. The teacher gives the massage with his feet, holding onto a bamboo stand for support. The student's knees are supported by a special pillow, the *terika*, so that when the teacher presses on the small of the student's back, the front portion of the body is forced to touch the ground. Starting with only a single layer of pillows, after a certain period of time the pillows are doubled. The object of this massage is to open the joints between the groin and the legs. Depending on the physical nature of the individual student, up to three layers of pillows may be used. When I was fourteen years old and undergoing the early part of my training, three pillows were used, and it was extremely painful.
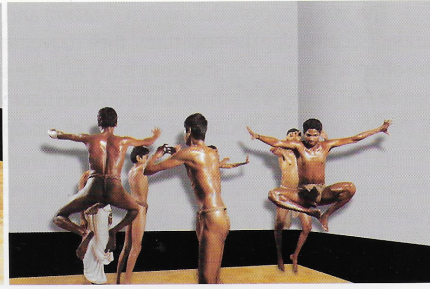
The student changes his position, and the massage continues for about forty minutes. The student's face will also be massaged with the *guru's* feet. However, now-a-days the face massage is done with the hands.

Acrobatic exercises

279
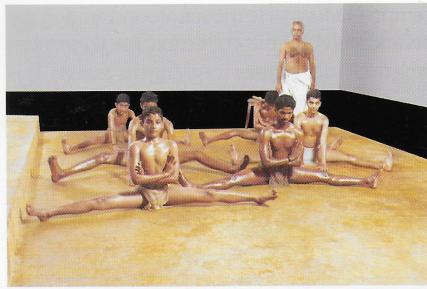
Acrobatic exercises

Leaps

CHUZHIPPU—SYNCHRONISED MOVEMENTS AND OTHER EXERCISES

While one student is being massaged, the other students practise synchronised movements of the body, hands and eyes, called *chuzhippu*. There are six types of *chuzhippu*. *Chuzhippu* gives grace to the movements. They unify the hand gestures with the eyes and help produce the appropriate *bhava* (the expression of inner emotion).

After finishing the body massage, the students do further exercises and practise various acrobatic items, such as *soochikkiruttal* (sitting in a position with the legs completely outstretched), *mulakkital* (the small of the student's back is suspended on the horizontal beam used for the support for massage, while the student holds his feet with his hands), *tozhukkutti kaalupitikkal* (in a standing position, bends backwards and holds the ankles), and *iratta karanam marichil* (while one student bends backwards and holds the small of the back of a second student standing behind him, who is bent forward and holding the small of the back of the first student, then the one in the back, lifts the one in the front, placing him behind himself—an action which is repeatedly performed).

The morning class finishes around 7:30 a.m. with the traditional salutation. A break for bath and breakfast lasts until 9:00 a.m. The morning session is the most rigorous and painful for the students. No outsiders are permitted to attend the morning sessions, even the students' parents. The morning training builds a strong and perfect foundation for the Kathakali physique and *gurus* must give their students their total attention during this period.

Chuzhippu

Chuzhippu

TRAINING OF PRELIMINARIES AND MINOR ROLES

From 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon, students practise the Kathakali preliminaries, such as *todayam* and *purappad*, which help them learn the *taalam* patterns and the intricate steps

leaves, areca nut and some coins for accepting him as a *sishya*. In return, the disciple receives *enna* (medicated oil) that is applied to the body for the daily exercises, and a *kaccha* (a 15 cm X 300 cm cloth) that is worn around the student's waist during training.

Facial exercises

KANNUSADHAKAM—THE EYE EXERCISES

Classes begin early in the morning, at 3:00 a.m., during the rainy season (June to end of August). The students sit in a semi-circle in front of the lighted lamp. They apply *ghee* (purified cow butter oil) to the eyes and hold the eyelids open with the thumb and index finger. They practise various eye movements, first, in a slow tempo, then at twice the speed, culminating in fast tempos. The movements include in circles, both clockwise and anti-clockwise, lateral, up and down, diagonal, and zig-zag.

Various muscles of the face are then exercised—the eyebrows, eyelids, cheeks and lips. The eye and face muscle exercises take about one hour to complete and are practised daily.

Eye exercises

Table 3 gives the *taalam*, the *matras* and the *vaitari*. X refers to the stronger, accented beat and x is the soft, unaccented beat, while o indicates the gap, or rest.

TABLE 3

	Taalam	Matra	Vaitari							
1	*Chempata*	8	Thei X	Yam o	Tha x	Tha x	Thi X	I x	Thi X	I x
2	*Chempa*	10	Thei X Dhim X	Yi o Thithi o	Ntha x	Thi x	Ntha x	Tha X	Kita o	Dhim X
3	*Atanta*	14 X	Thei o Tha x	Yi x Tha x	Ntha x Dhim X	Tha x Thatha o	Tha X Dhim X	Dhim o Thatha o	Im x	Ntha
4	*Panchari*	6	Thom X	Om o	Ntha x	Thim x	Ntha x	Ka x		
5	*Triputa*	7	Thei X	Yi o	Dhi X	Thei X	Yi o	Thei X	Yi X	
6	*Muriya-tanta*	3, 2 1/2 3 1/2	Thei X X o X o	Thei X X o X o	Thithi o o o o o					
7	*Eka*	4	Thei X	Yi o	Thei x	Yi o				

The *taalam* cycles are played and danced in various tempos, according to the character, situation and mood. For example, *Chempata* can be played in 8 *matras* for a ferocious mood, in 16 *matras* (8 x 2) for a heroic and 32 *matras* (8 x 4) for a romantic mood. In other words, the slower the *taalam*, the more serene or romantic is the mood and scene, while the faster the *taalam*, the more vigorous is the scene, character or mood.

Table 4 demonstrates how a basic *taalam*, *Chempata*, can be played in three different tempos, a multiplication of this *taalam*'s eight beats. As explained above, the first speed is fast (8 *matras*), the second is medium (16 *matras*), while the third is the slowest tempo (32 *matras*).