

TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*

Fusing Technology and Tradition

Helena Grehan

In this era of increasing globalization we need to seek a broader understanding of the term interculturalism and, in response, a concomitant broadening of the role of the spectator in response. As I have argued elsewhere, attention should be focused on the dynamics that result or may result from new kinds of cultural fusions (see Grehan 2000). Here I want to extend that discussion with reference to TheatreWorks' production *Desdemona*, which premiered at the Adelaide Festival in March 2000.

TheatreWorks is an international performance company based in Singapore. The company specializes in exploring notions of the "traditional" and the "contemporary" through performance works that juxtapose different cultural elements in a process of collaboration and exchange. The artistic director of the company, Ong Keng Sen, is concerned with creatively interrogating the concept of "New Asia" in an increasingly global environment.

Desdemona was, according to the Festival program: a "new wave Asian production" (Ong 2000a:4) that used William Shakespeare's *Othello* as its point of departure. In his notes, director Ong Keng Sen, stated that *Desdemona* was "a journey through difference in Asia, traditional performing arts, gender, ritual and contemporary art; a process of reinvention" (5). The fact that *Desdemona*—which could be read, according to Ong Keng Sen's notes, as a project that aimed to be an exemplary new kind of cultural fusion—was interpreted as a profound failure makes both my desire to write about *Desdemona* and my concern with new kinds of cultural fusions in need of urgent justification and interrogation.¹

At a festival forum on globalization entitled "Think Globally/Act Globally—International Collaborations," questions were raised about the problematics of globalization in the face of what is seen as the increasing disappearance of local issues in contemporary performance. In response to the forum I found myself asking the following questions: Are we, as theorists and cultural producers, too obsessed with local and global identities and with justifying fusions and exchanges? Is it time for the focus to shift? The forum reignited my desire to explore the possibilities for finding new ways of talking about what interculturalism might mean at the beginning of the 21st century. My concerns seem to be similar to those raised by Doug Hall in the forward to the catalog for *The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* in Queensland in 1999, in which he talks about the motivations behind the artists' work:

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Desdemona

TheatreWorks (Singapore)

Desdemona premiered at the Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000, 16–18 March, Optima Playhouse Theatre.

Conceived and directed by ONG Keng Sen (Singapore)

In collaboration with:

Playwright	Rio KISHIDA (Japan)
Video/Installation/Slide Animations	Matthew NGUI (Singapore, Australia)
Music Director/Composer	JANG Jae Hyo (Korea)
Set Designer	Justin HILL (Australia, Singapore)
Lighting Designer	Scott ZIELINSKI (USA)
Costume Designer	PARK Hwa Young (Korea)
Producer	TAY Tong
Production/Stage Manager	Lisa PORTER
Collaborators/Performers	
Madhu MARGI (India)	Othello
Maya Krishna RAO (India)	Othello
Claire WONG (Malaysia/Singapore)	Desdemona
JANG Jae Hyo (Korea)	Zero
LOW Kee Hong (Singapore)	Zero
Martinus MIROTO (Indonesia)	Zero
Matthew NGUI (Singapore/Australia)	Zero
PARK Hwa Young (Korea)	Zero
SHIN Chang Yool (Korea)	Zero
U ZAW MIN (Myanmar)	Zero

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These artists not only cross geographical borders in terms of where they choose to practice, but also use media and subjects in ways which fracture any sense we might have of a recent art historical continuity. This is less concerned with traditional views of expatriations and diasporas, and more to do with artists finding linkages which enable their culturally specific experience to be relevant beyond their country of origin. It is not about finding a new home, but providing a means of generating new creative impulses. (1999:19)

Hall's comments can be read in a number of ways. They can be seen as an extension of notions of identity/location politics moving the discussion into a millennial moment, a moment of increased mobility and communication. Yet they can also be read as a call to move beyond notions of place, belonging, and diaspora as they are currently theorized. Hall seems to be suggesting that the artists involved in *The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial* have already shifted the focus

of their work from reinforcing notions of home, place, and belonging, to creating “linkages” beyond origins as a catalyst for moving outward and perhaps even stimulating Deleuze and Guattarian “lines of flight” (1987:508).²

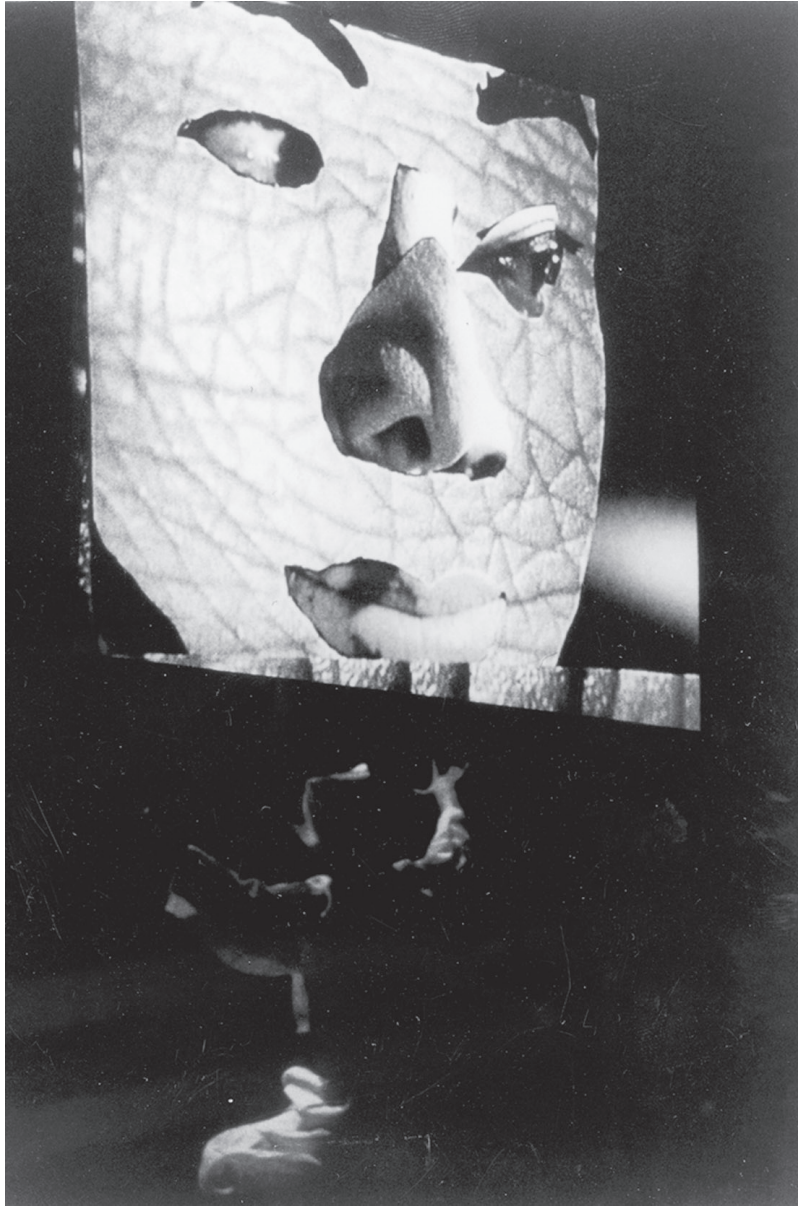
Given that mainstream galleries and festivals are increasingly holding exhibitions and events focusing on identity, diaspora, and home, does this not mean that the subversive potential surrounding issues of diaspora and identity politics is waning as they become increasingly evident within the mainstream?³

In the forum on globalization, Ong Keng Sen said, “interculturalism is expensive [but] it is as important as health and sewerage. [...] Interculturalism is about provoking questions and these are vital if we are to move forward” (2000b). He also suggested that we create a language of interpretation so that creative work can be deciphered or decoded by a range of audiences. For Ong Keng Sen, intercultural work provides a platform to showcase a myriad of traditions, some of which are dying. For example, Madhu Margi, who, along with another actor, performs Othello in *Desdemona*, is only one of a small number of people who still practices *kudiyattum* of Kerala, India. As a collaborator in this project he uses his extensive skills in *kudiyattum* to inform his portrayal of Othello. As Ong Keng Sen points out, “his experience in intercultural performance through *Desdemona* allows him a way out of the box that can be limiting” (2000c). In addition to offering exposure for *kudiyattum*, Madhu’s involvement in *Desdemona* allows him to experience other art forms and to collaborate with both traditional and contemporary practitioners, providing the “linkages” that Hall sees as valuable.

Like Hall, Ong Keng Sen is urging us to move in different directions, but not of course to abandon these complex issues; territory will never be easily ceded. Hall and Ong Keng Sen urge us to keep the issues surrounding diaspora and identity alive by reconsidering how we theorize and indeed utilize them within contemporary intercultural practice. Perhaps we should be looking at these concepts in ways that allow us to see the points of connection, exchange, and dialogue that they may open up instead of viewing them with “Mahabharatian”

1. Madhu Margi (right) as Othello and Claire Wong as Desdemona in TheaterWorks’ *Desdemona* (2000). (Photo courtesy of Ong Keng Sen)





2. *Desdemona* (Claire Wong) watches a layering of skins created by installation artist Matthew Ngui and projected onto the large central screen. (Photo courtesy of Ong Keng Sen)

anxiety, referring of course to the debate over Peter Brook's 1985 production of the *Mahabharata* (see Zarrilli 1986). Ong Keng Sen stated in an interview that although in the mid 1990s he had felt it necessary to position his work in response to Brook, he feels that now the work has "started to gain its own momentum" (2000c) and therefore he no longer needs to respond to Brook. I am not suggesting that a new approach to intercultural exchange that advocates a lack of reflexivity in terms of practice or theorization be adopted. What I am suggesting, however, is that both theorists and practitioners need to find new ways of mobilizing the very real concerns that revolve around terms such as diaspora, identity, and belonging so that we do not become jaded nor the terms sanitized and utilized as no more than a limp gesture to political correctness.

The move beyond current figurations is risky however, and will not work unless there is a concomitant desire on behalf of spectators to engage with new cultural forms. Yet how is this to be achieved? Creating avantgarde

works that are totally inaccessible to anyone will not encourage this kind of shift in identification. All it will achieve is alienation and boredom. The kind of response or lack thereof generated by *Desdemona* in Adelaide is evidence of this. Australia's premier performance broadsheet, *RealTime*, was in residence at the Adelaide Festival and produced four special editions during the festival. The articles and reviews in these editions discussed many of the works in depth and provided very interesting and often polemical responses to particular shows. In the editorial of the last of the special editions, Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter stated that they were eagerly awaiting *Desdemona* and would review it in the next edition of *RealTime*, yet they did not. After scouring the edition from cover to cover I emailed Gallasch to enquire whether or not I'd missed something. His reply was disheartening. He said, "Sorry, zilch on *Desdemona*—not from us and from no one else in the team—no one would take it on." Gallasch goes on to say, "We were underwhelmed by the performances, impressed by the design (and the videos along the sides of the theatre with the text and image) and expectant after its strong opening [...] but [...] from then on it all trickled away. We're usually alert to something special [...] but this wasn't it" (2000). I am not suggesting here that Ong Keng Sen created something so wildly exciting and beyond our framework that we couldn't understand it. I do not think that this was the case. But I do believe that he was attempting to shift the parameters of intercultural performance. While I agree with Gallasch that it did "trickle away," I think that the performance warrants a closer investigation. This is particularly important if we consider *Desdemona* as the second work in a trilogy of which the first work, *Lear*, received critical acclaim internationally from 1997 to 1999.

Yet if the work is underwhelming, how much time do we spend on it before giving up? How do we separate something with potential from something that fails to elicit a response in us? For me this question is complicated by the fact that I attended rehearsals of *Desdemona* in Singapore a couple of weeks before I attended the premiere in Adelaide. The rehearsals were breathtakingly beautiful as well as incredibly engaging.

I believe that Ong Keng Sen mobilizes his performance praxis to complicate the questions of positionality, location, and subjectivity, and that this complication is achieved in *Desdemona* through the use of a performance mode that (in rehearsal) was an inspiring integration of technology and tradition.

Desdemona in rehearsal comprised a team of practitioners working together to create from the Shakespearian text a seed, a provocation, and a desire to harness the traditional, the contemporary, and the technological into a narrative. This narrative aspired to ask all the questions raised by identity or subjectivity politics, but did so in a way that focused not on the questions but on the points of connectedness or engagement that could be engendered for the spectators by the work. At the first rehearsal that I attended, I was astounded to see that one not only needed a vocabulary of cultural forms to interpret the myriad of traditional and contemporary performance practices, but that one also needed a vocabulary of technology. The words translation, inscription, and layering feel inadequate in describing the rehearsal process for *Desdemona*. Video installations of bananas, feet, apples, human cells, lips, text, and performers engulfed, and were at times engulfed by fragments of Shakespeare. As Matthew Ngui, one of the installation artists involved in *Desdemona*, points out in the program notes:

Such an experiment cannot be viewed in any other way than by peeling through its thick skin, layer after layer. What happens when an ancient traditional form encounters another? What if this encounter is simultaneously framed by technology in the context of an isolated experiment? Why this desire to make such a piece? (2000:10)

On *Desdemona*

In Response

Ong Keng Sen

I am afraid *Desdemona* was never meant to be an easy read. However, I must say the company left Australia without the impression that it had been a failure there. I am also surprised that Helena Grehan's assessment of the performance was so affected by *RealTime*'s response. *RealTime* does not represent Australia even though it is an important voice reflecting cutting-edge work. It's almost like saying a performance failed in downtown NYC because the *Village Voice* refused to comment with a review.

I think the audience and possibly even the theorists/critics were not ready for the work. Isn't that because, as Grehan says, the parameters for criticism of intercultural performance have yet to be developed?

Ironically, if I had made *Desdemona* more accessible—that is, kept the narrative, encouraged the performers to perform the emotional thread of the story—it would have been well reviewed, even though there may have been voices objecting to the spectacle of an aesthetically gorgeous work.

Ultimately, I think we were too issue-based for the audience in an international festival that is built up on consumption, and too “confusing” for critics who do not dare venture into the unknown, even to make a comment, for fear of being politically incorrect!

We built the production upon Brechtian principles of teaching the audience some of the struggles of being an intercultural company. For me, interculturalism in performance is increasingly less about finding a better way of telling the story and more about asking, Why engage in interculturalism at all? Hence the work naturally shifts from character to actor and I must say that these are issues that we cannot answer directly at this point in time.

Questions with no answers.

The last scene/epilogue is instructive in that we have re-created it differently in different cities. In Adelaide, it was kind of a meditative moment where the characters walked through the space while light bars were lowered into the playing area, as the video artist Park Hwa Young suggested time by wearing different-sized socks (a play on the foot fetish that surrounds the mystique of the East Asian woman, *Desdemona*). In Singapore, this meditative moment was intersected by an email (visible on a monitor) written by Low Kee Hong about the ironies of intercultural work presented in a consumer market, bringing the action back to the actors rather than the characters.

Ultimately, the bigger issue posed by *Desdemona* is: “Who is the audience that we are playing to?” The audiences have been so radically different. There is no one universal audience, and this complication is compounded in intercultural work. Adelaide audiences were uncertain/ambivalent; Singapore audiences were unforgiving; and Hamburg audiences gave it seven ovations.



The latter question seems most obviously to be the one to tackle first. Why make *Desdemona*? In fact, why, if one's aim is to challenge cultural form and representation, resort to the canon in the first place? Ong Keng Sen suggests that *Desdemona* is a journey toward "reinvention" (2000a:5). He expanded on this by stating that he wanted to use Shakespeare as a point of departure to focus on the "archetypal killing of an intercultural couple. One kills the other and that was just our point from which we projected out" (2000c). This departure led me on a voyage that, while initially difficult to decipher, once (at least partially) decoded, was fecund with stories, ideas, and possibilities for new cultural fusions.

While *Lear*, Ong Keng Sen's last Shakesperean-informed project was seamless, smooth, and engaging, *Desdemona* was bumpy, leaky, and difficult. Ong Keng Sen was deliberately attempting to move beyond the seamless and sophisticated performance of *Lear* with *Desdemona*, as he felt that this shift would provide a space for "the contemporary to reveal itself. [...] It is really an encounter between the contemporary and the traditional" (Ong 2000c).

The range of scenes and moments were both exciting and challenging, falling within Kristeva's definition of Carnival (following Bakhtin): "The scene of the Carnival, where there is no stage, no 'theatre,' is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle" (1986:48–49). Yet even this definition doesn't seem broad enough to contain the leaky vessel that was *Desdemona* in rehearsal.

Several video monitors surrounded the performance platform. During the rehearsal period, everything was in full view: the traditional musicians were seated on the floor to one side of the platform; Matthew Ngui (the installation artist) moved around and among the performance; and Park Hwa Young (video artist, performer, and costume designer) remained seated at her projection seat—a glass-topped table with attached cameras that captured both the facial expressions of the artists and the writing on the tabletop. Performers sat quietly at the side of the platform and waited for their turn to perform. Much of the attention was focused on the trancelike performance of Maya Krishna

3. Matthew Ngui creates an installation at the front of the stage while *Desdemona* (Claire Wong) performs a puppet sequence center stage. (Photo courtesy of Ong Keng Sen)

Rao, a *kathakali* performer who shared the role of Othello with Madhu Margi. Once in the performance space she entered a completely focused zone and chanted and moved with such power that the room felt both electrified and traumatized. Rao has created her own “performance language” that “melds the traditional and the contemporary” (Rao 2000:20). As Rao performed during rehearsals, experiments were being carried out around her. One of the most memorable of these was, for me, when Rao was stamping her *kathakali* dance on the central platform with a video screen directly behind her. As she performed, Ngui operated, via remote from the side of the stage, a camera that was positioned on the ceiling above her. We were fully engaged with Rao’s trancelike movements and the guttural sounds emanating from deep within her body, as our attention was being seduced by the video behind her. Rao was inscribing her actual body, via her shadow and through her obstruction of the video image, onto her actual performance. This “layering of skin” as Ngui calls it, is a total imbrication of the technological and the traditional—two elements working together to create patterns that can only be described as “rhizomatic” (Deleuze and Guattari 1998), creating a third and fourth performance through their fusion. The eye/I felt schizoid yet focused at the same time and the patterns that emerged spoke volumes about performance, culture, tradition, technology, and fusion. The unique tension triggered “lines of flight” for me about the possibilities of technology and tradition, about fracturing the performative space, and about notions of presence.

Another moment in rehearsal that had the potential for liberating lines of flight was the metacommentary by Low Kee Hong, who played the role of Zero, during a pivotal scene in which Claire Wong as Desdemona says:

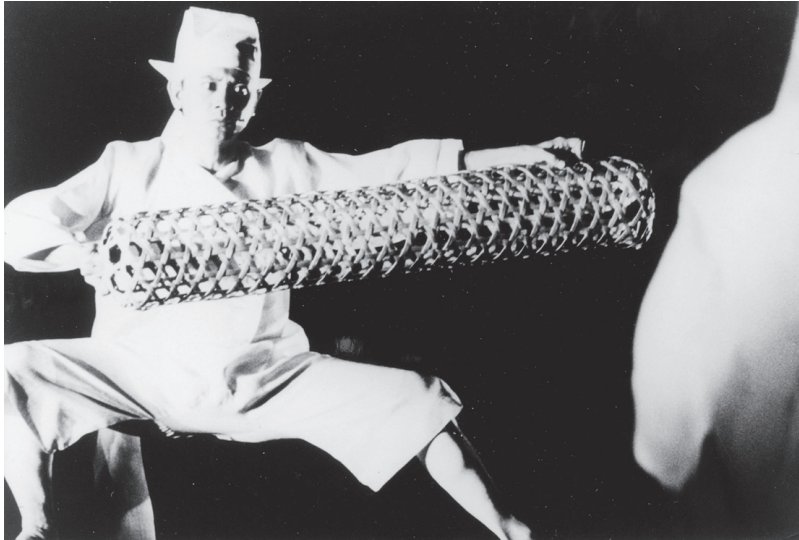
I desire a conversation with you
I desire a conversation with you
I desire a conversation.⁴

As Low sat typing at a computer, video artist Park Hwa Young created an installation, writing on a tabletop with lipstick and swallowing clear capsules. This installation was captured on video by both a minicam and another camera positioned underneath the glass-topped table on which she worked. These images were projected live onto several film projection screens surrounding the performance platform. Low’s commentary appeared on a monitor to the left of the performance space as she typed:

Is there a difference in this kind of collaboration between visual artist and performers? Sometimes I feel that contemporary performers must continually fight for space when placed together with “traditional” performers who generally seem to possess a wealth of training that contemporary performers are assumed to be lacking. At the same time traditional performers transplant themselves from their own local context to work in an environment that is perhaps unfamiliar to them. This process has been documented who owns the rights to these footages? (Low 2000)

Wong left the platform. Rao entered and began a trance/dance sequence. A video installation by Park Hwa Young entitled *Mona’s Dress* appeared on two screens, featuring various kinds of dresses, presumably for a modern Desdemona. Low continued typing:

Some of these thoughts are the result of our previous experience, *Lear*, a larger intercultural product which toured Japan, Asia-Pacific and Europe between 1997 and 1999. Some of our critics reacted to what they read as Singapore, through the money provided by the Japan Foundation Asia



4. *Zero* (Martinus Miroto) performs a confrontational movement sequence. (Photo courtesy of Ong Keng Sen)

Center, appropriating not only the various traditional Asian art forms but also a process of bastardizing Shakespeare. Some of these criticisms were perhaps misplaced in the sense that the actual intercultural process was not visible through the highly designed product. *Lear* in part was too airtight to really allow any extensive discourse on the intercultural process. What most saw onstage was a harmonious product that perhaps represents a false new Asia. (2000)⁵

Rao's performance on the platform continued, as did Park's installation, with beautiful dresses flashing on the monitors. Where do we look? I was intrigued by the meta-commentary. What purpose does this serve? While Ong Keng Sen has suggested that he has moved beyond any "Mahabaratian anxiety," is this desire to frame, position, and respond to criticism a signal that he has not, and that perhaps the very parameters (however flexible) of interculturalism require some form of accountability or justification? Who is this commentary for? The one or two spectators attending the rehearsal process? The performers? Such a wide range of issues were presented; this was both a response to *Lear* and a discussion of the intricacies of the intercultural process, the borders of exchange, and the insecurities involved in translation. While the material attempted to represent *Lear*, it fractured the performative frame. The space was shattered. The commentary was brought to bear directly on the performance. The usual parameters, however fluid, that frame performance and post-performance were redundant. We were participating in the post-performance discussion as we watched the performance unfold. Ong Keng Sen pointed out that he wanted to achieve "multiple layering, quick shifts into surrealism and abstraction, symbolism, fracturing of self into different component parts [and] non-linearity" (2000a:8) in terms of the development of the two central characters. Yet this also seemed to be demanded of the spectator in order for each (me/I/eye) to keep up with, or interpret, the performance in rehearsal.

The final scene I would like to discuss is the prologue, the only scene from the rehearsal process that translated smoothly into the actual performance. This was the opening sequence in Adelaide. It was a visually stunning sequence in which panels of plywood, partially painted with white stripes, were spread in what seemed to be a random pattern, both on and around the performance platform. Yet when we looked at this seemingly random pattern on any of the many video screens surrounding the platform, we saw that this pat-

tern, due to the positioning of the video camera, created a circle—a large white circle signifying O/thello or perhaps zero. Ong Keng Sen asks:

What is zero, who is zero? Zero is the beginning, zero is the end, zero is negative Space, zero is absence, zero is shadow, zero is the echo, zero is the reflection, zero is the trace, zero is the source, zero is the process.
(Ong 2000a:8)⁶

Desdemona crawled from the side of the platform toward the front, yet when one looked at the screen at the back of the performance space, she appeared to be crawling through the circle.⁷

At the front of the platform Low manipulated a puppet, which danced in front of the panels; on the screen, it appeared that the puppet was dancing at the opening of the O tunnel through which Desdemona was crawling. This was a stunning scene and the eye/I was again positioned in a schizoid state, glancing back and forth between the “real” and the manipulated images. As Desdemona moved toward the camera her image became bigger and bigger and the “set” became smaller and smaller. It was as if she was emerging from a dollhouse. As she reached the front of the platform and began to speak, Ngui began to deconstruct the O set by removing the panels from their positions on the set. This moment was extended in Adelaide so that when Desdemona emerged from the O it appeared on the video as if Low had devoured her. The Adelaide audience gasped audibly at this evocative opening sequence.

Despite the power of this opening sequence, *Desdemona* in Adelaide did not hold the same spark as *Desdemona* in rehearsal. This could be attributed, in part, to the fact that *Desdemona* in rehearsal was approximately five hours long, and *Desdemona* in Adelaide only one-and-a-half hours. It could also be attributed to the choices made by Ong Keng Sen in deciding which aspects of the work to retain in order to fit the performance into its time slot. In rehearsal, Rao was a prominent performer in many of the scenes, yet in Adelaide her role seemed fractured and marginalized; for the most part her trancelike sequences were performed on a separate platform from the main performance space, a gesture that seemed to alienate her, and, due to the size of the venue, the intimacy of the engagement with her nuanced performance was dissipated. Another element that may have contributed to this loss of spark could have been the positioning of the video screens in the playhouse. During the rehearsal the screens were positioned all around the space, almost encasing the performers at times. Yet in Adelaide, the screens were positioned high up on the walls of the performance area; there was none of the layering of video and performer that we saw, for example, with Rao’s performance in rehearsal.⁸

Despite these factors I think the main reason that the thrill of engagement was lost in translation from rehearsal to performance was that the performed *Desdemona* did not offer any openings, gaps, or linkages that would allow the spectator to become an active participant in the creation of the work’s meanings. *Desdemona* was scattered and evasive; we were left out in the cold.

Ong Keng Sen argues that what is missing in terms of interculturalism (generally speaking) is a language in which to communicate:

[W]e lack a language to communicate interculturally. [...T]he search for me is to find a language. [...H]ow do we begin to talk when we have so little in common? [...] *Lear* created an illusion of an impeccable whole; *Desdemona* is about fracturing this illusion. [...] I think that in the next 10 years we will achieve a language. (2000b)

I believe that it was this language that was missing in *Desdemona*.⁹

Yet, who will this language assist? Is it designed to “educate” spectators so that they can be guided to participate in cultural shifts? On a surface level it could be argued that spectators were not prepared to engage with *Desdemona*. Ong Keng Sen does point out that if interculturalism is to be relevant and useful, it must be considered seriously and theorized rigorously so that it becomes a decipherable process. Yet what does this mean about product? About producing theatre (or any cultural act, for that matter) for the general public? If this new cultural fusion is only accessible to either its practitioners or an elite group of spectators, what kind of fusion is it anyway? For Ong Keng Sen, interculturalism is as important as “health and sewerage.” What needs to be clarified is which aspects of interculturalism are vital. Is it the process and the acts of exchange that occur during rehearsals or is it the process plus the opportunity to showcase and share this product with those outside the immediate parameters of the performance? Is the answer project-specific?



5. *Othello* (Madhu Margi) performs the role of the puppeteer, as *Desdemona* (Claire Wong) becomes the puppet. (Photo courtesy of Ong Keng Sen)

Clearly, there is currently an impetus to create new kinds of cultural fusions. It is important that this process be carefully considered and constructed so that works don't alienate or bore spectators, and so that they retain some kind of "hook" that allows the spectator to participate in the process. What must be avoided at all costs is the devolution of performance into a pastiche of meaningless chatter. Yet I wonder if this is all too easy. Have understandings of cultural exchange and difference really progressed to such an extent that we need to move beyond questions of diaspora, etc.? Are artists from "marginalized" or fractured societies comfortable enough with their own positionality that they can engage in intercultural exchange without anxiety?

While *Desdemona* in Adelaide seemed to lack this hook, I do not think it can be dumped in the "meaningless chatter" basket. If it has provided a fertile ground for cultural exchange between the practitioners involved yet is considered unsuccessful by a Western theatre audience, is it a success or a failure? I think the answer is that *Desdemona* must be seen as a project that is evolving. As it morphs from presentation to presentation, it becomes more and more valuable as both a product and a process.

Notes

1. I suggest here that *Desdemona* was a failure because it did not generate any substantial response from the media or critics/theorists in Australia. There were very few reviews of the premiere at the Adelaide Festival and those that were published expressed exasperation or a sense of disappointment in response to the work. For example, the review in *The Australian* newspaper stated: "I think the best way to describe *Desdemona* is as lavishly unconfounding, a theatre of blissfully untroubled shimmering surfaces, a dramatic neuter; in fact, a nice night out for both censor and sponsor in any capital espousing 'Asian values'" (Ward 2000:18). From my own discussions with spectators and critics who attended the premiere, the responses to the production were—on the whole—expressions of frustration with a work that from the outset seemed to have so much potential but came up empty.
2. "Lines of flight" is a mechanism used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe ways in which one moves beyond specific territory in a pattern of "deterritorialization." According to Deleuze and Guattari there are various modes of deterritorialization, which may be obstructed by reterritorializing forces (1987).
3. *The Rose Crossing* was an exhibition held at the Singapore Art Museum in February 2000. *Home* was an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia as part of the *Perth International Arts Festival* in January 2000. Matthew Ngui, one of the installation artists who worked on *Desdemona*, also exhibited in *Home*.
4. The playwright Rio Kishida's text is sparse. She stated in the program notes that she wanted to "deconstruct and reconstruct Shakespeare's play [...to] extract the factors of Love and Death from the original work and focus on them" (2000:9). There is very little actual spoken text in *Desdemona*; what text there is seems philosophical and in places "new age" sounding. These lines spoken by *Desdemona* are some of the most poignant and thought-provoking in the performance.
5. For a more detailed engagement with the representation of "New Asia" in *Lear* see Grehan (2000) and de Reuck (2000).
6. Zero is an important concern in *Desdemona*: not only could the circle be interpreted as representing zero, but several of the performers were also named as performing "Zero" in the program notes. These included Park Hwa Young, Matthew Ngui, Low Kee Hong, and Martinus Miroto.
7. This installation could be read as an extension of one Matthew Ngui created for the *Home* exhibition (see note 3).
8. When asked about the shift, from rehearsal to performance, in emphasis away from Rao's role, Ong said that there was some anxiety among performers about being less visible, so he made some adjustments. This shift could be seen as reinforcing his interest in process and exchange.
9. In her article entitled "Denise Stoklos: The Politics of Decipherability," Diana Taylor

discusses the importance of changing the ways in which spectators respond to intercultural work: "The aim of our efforts, as one of my students put it, is 'to re-educate the epistemological privilege of the ordinary spectator'" (2000:27). This re-education is exactly what Ong Keng Sen is also striving for.

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