

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Emerging Contemporary Bharatanatyam Choreoscape in Britain: the City, Hybridity and Technoculture

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**Emerging Contemporary Bharatanatyam Choreoscape in Britain: the  
City, Hybridity and Technoculture**

By

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BA (Hons), MA (English), BT, MA (Performing Arts) (Dist)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in  
Dance Studies

Department of Dance  
University of Roehampton

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## **Dedication**

To

My *hemonter pakhi* (autumnal bird)

and

for all those women who never leave their dreams behind.

## ABSTRACT

### **Emerging contemporary Bharatanatyam choreoscape in Britain: the city, hybridity and technoculture**

The thesis investigates how Bharatanatyam dance practice is reconfigured through the specific cultural histories and novel practices of emerging dance artists in Britain. At the outset, I engage with how various dance labels are contested socially and culturally by diverse groups of people. In doing so, I intertwine the discussion with the politics of identity to illuminate how these dance artists negotiate their multiple identities, encompassing the issues related to race, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. Through a situated reading of postmodern and postcolonial praxes, I argue that these dance artists construct a permeating border by continually bringing new elements into their contemporary works, dismantling the purity/hybridity dyad. Additionally, I demonstrate how the theme of the ‘city’ is adopted as a performative device to portray kaleidoscopic patterns of cultural, historical and psychological climates of urban cities. While analysing non-proscenium choreographies, I demonstrate how an assembly of the senses overlap with various architectural places to create a complex web of history, cultural identity and memory to construct a ‘site’, which in turn, opens up rooms for discussing the previously ignored senses, including tactility, gustation and olfaction. Furthermore, I reveal how digital performance as a genre is increasingly celebrated by these dance artists, which decisively has challenged the bodily boundary and influenced the psycho-visual aesthetics of contemporariness. Drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical lenses, my readings of a range of danceworks and a mixed-method approach, I argue that contemporary Bharatanatyam practice is always in a state of flux due to the incessant mobility of people, ideas, cultures, histories and differential artistic subjectivities, and therefore it restricts any closure of meanings. In a nutshell, this thesis offers a new

perspective on the disjuncture and reconfiguration of contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century British context, provoking new ways of seeing, interpreting and appreciating contemporary performance.

## **Declaration**

I certify that the work contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is written by me. Any support that I received during this research work and the preparation of the thesis has been duly acknowledged. In addition, I declare that this thesis is no more than 100,000 words in length, including footnotes and exclusive of appendices and references. Images used in this thesis are assumed copyrighted by their respective owners and used with permission.

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## Chapter 1

### Setting the scene

#### 1.1. Introduction

This thesis investigates how the adoptions of new themes, techniques, tools and genres by various dance artists<sup>1</sup> engender innovations in contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam dance<sup>2</sup> in Britain and demonstrates that the borderline of contemporary ‘choreoscape’ is in perpetual transformation, keeping the future growths open. Bharatanatyam, with other Indian Classical dance forms (such as Kathak and Odissi), entered Britain through international migration<sup>3</sup> and has unfolded itself under the brand name ‘South Asian dance’. Shobana Jeyasingh, a renowned contemporary choreographer and the artistic director of Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, has significantly contributed to expanding the boundaries of contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam since the 1980s. Her choreographic experimentations have attracted a great deal of scholarly interests (Briginshaw, 2001; Katrak, 2011; Jordan, 1999; Meduri, 2011; O’Shea, 2007, 2008; Roy, 1997, 2003). Jeyasingh (1990, 1998) has also published a few

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that the usages of the terms including choreographers, artists and dancers can be loaded and problematic due to ever-changing performance scene in Britain. For having a consistency of meaning, I have used the term ‘dance artists’ for those whose works I am examining in the thesis. ‘Dancers’ or ‘cast members’ are often used interchangeably for those who performed in the artists’ choreographies. Also, the term ‘dancers’ in Chapter two is used to refer to practitioners who are either performing regularly in dance companies or who are working as visiting artists in Britain. I have exclusively used the term ‘performer’ to label the dance photos. Learning community members, whom I interviewed at different performance venues, are identified as second and third generation learners.

<sup>2</sup> Bharatanatyam as a ‘classical’ dance was renamed and reconstructed in the 1930s from a local dance form, *Sadir*, which was practised by the dancers from the temples of South India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gaston, 1996; Meduri, 1996; O’Shea, 2003, 2007; Srinivasan, 1985; Soneji, 2010). Its repertoire chiefly draws inspiration in temple rituals and recounts mythological tales on Hindu gods and goddesses (Gaston, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Some of the countries other than the UK where Bharatanatyam was transported are: Australia (Ram, 1995, 2000, 2011; Srinivasan, 2012), Canada (O’Shea, 2003, 2007), Malaysia (Nor and Burridge, 2011; Nor, 2012), Sri Lanka (Satkunaratnam, 2009) and USA (Devarajan, 2012; Katrak, 2004, 2008, 2013; O’Shea, 2007; Narayanan, 2007; Srinivasan, 2012). Attending to the concerns related to transnational Bharatanatyam practice is also gaining currency as an important methodology in recent doctoral theses (Kedhar, 2011; Satkunaratnam, 2009; Thiagarajan, 2012).

autobiographical critiques on her works which encompass the issues of identity, hybridity, multiculturalism and aesthetics.

While most of the writing had celebrated Jeyasingh's choreographies in the past, there is also a rising interest amongst scholars to examine works created by post-Jeyasingh dance artists. For example, dance academic Janet O'Shea discusses *Triple Hymn* (2000), choreographed by dance artists Mayuri Boonham and Subathra Subramaniam, which juxtaposed two streams of classicism - Bharatanatyam and European Classical music (2007: 162). Dance practitioner-scholar Anusha Laxmi Kedhar states that Jeyasingh is one of the pioneers who paved the way for other dance artists such as Nina Rajarani, Subathra Subramaniam and Mayuri Boonham (Kedhar, 2011: 10).<sup>4</sup> In her doctoral thesis, Kedhar discusses at length Boonham's and Subramanyam's collaborative works, produced by their Angika Dance Company and a few others created by Subramanyam's Sadhana Dance after the Angika Dance Company had dissembled in 2008. While attending contemporary performances in London and other cities in Britain, I was drawn to the fact that these emerging dance artists are continuously pushing the boundaries of practice(s) through their choreographies that have remained largely unexplored in literature, and thus need scholarly attention. For the purpose of the thesis, I discuss choreographies created by Mayuri Boonham, Kamala Devam, Divya Kasturi, Seeta Patel, Ash Mukherjee, Nina Rajarani (MBE), Shamita Ray, Anusha Subramanyam and Subathra Subramaniam. By situating it within the broader discourse of 'choreoscape' and drawing on a wide repertoire of theories across disciplines, interview narratives, archival sources and dance analysis, this study leads us to new ways of understanding the politics of identity, global

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<sup>4</sup> A few of my artists-participants have reflected on various occasions how their practices are shaped by Jeyasingh, but a comparative study between Jeyasingh and post-Jeyasingh dance artists is beyond the scope of this thesis.

mobility, urbanism and the 'technoculture' in contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam in the British context.

My fieldwork documentations led me to ponder upon how new choreographies are constantly defining and re-defining the borderlines of contemporary practice in relation to culture and urban life. A complex tapestry is woven with a broad range of techniques that are laced with histories, global travels and cultural inflows, dismantling the binary 'purity'/'mixture'. With the intervention of technology, the performance space becomes malleable where identities of these dance artists are reconfigured and imagined, using fragmentary narratives. Variegated city places are juxtaposed with rapid kaleidoscopic successions to mimic the non-linear deconstructionist tendencies of media, rendering inaccessible spaces of desire, dream and urban spectacle. Moving with the dancers in space in an outdoor dance has allowed its audiences to have an ever fluid definition of place with differential sensory collages. A dance artist's body is no longer regarded as a fixed symbol of identity, but is subject to various technological reproductions, blurring the binary of the 'live' and digital.

Such indeterminacy, slippage and open-endedness of contemporary practice have led me to raise the following main research questions: how do the global flows of ideas, people, technology and culture reconfigure contemporary Bharatanatyam choreoscape in Britain? With greater mobility across (trans)national/global borders, how are identities and identifications of these dance artists and dancers affected? Which new genres are created and experienced, underlining the facts of cut-n-mix and cross-over of cultural practices? A secondary research question is also examined here: how are these new works perceived by audience members?

To examine these questions, I situate my analysis within the two broad frameworks: philosopher Jacques Derrida's (1976 [1967]) approach of deconstruction and anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's '-scape' theory'. I particularly base it on



deconstruction because it does not pre-suppose specific sets of rules or fixed criteria. Derrida argued that: ‘Deconstruction is inventive...It does not settle for methodological procedures, it opens up a passageway. It marches ahead and leaves a trail’ (1989 [1978]: 42). As the overall purpose of deconstruction is to challenge fixity, it is thus adopted for analysing identities in order to illuminate the resemblance and interdependence that exist between a binary opposite. I also prefer deconstruction as a method to develop critical understanding of various dance genres, the boundaries of which are always under construction and to examine how encounters of people reconfigure multiple identities in a postcolonial context.

Drawing upon multi-sited fieldwork, danceworks and historical framework, O’Shea investigates Bharatanatyam dance practice from the global, local and translocal perspectives in her book *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, and argues Bharatanatyam ‘incorporates diversity and divergence’ (2007: x), which challenges our notion of a classical dance as a ‘museum piece’ (2007: xi) and as an idealised past. From my fieldwork, I also noted that contemporary practice<sup>5</sup> is not static, but is open to its future becoming, as artistic devices are. And, this becoming is always unforeseen and unpredictable. As Derrida asserted: ‘It’s better to let the future open - this is the axiom of deconstruction, the thing from which it always starts out and which binds it, like the future itself...’ (Derrida in Derrida & Steigler, 2002: 21). Thus the methods that I have chosen to frame my research are not fixed by the application of a single method based on a pre-determined knowledge. Rather, I have adopted a mixed-method approach that opens passageways for understanding the multiplicity of

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<sup>5</sup> Many scholars have engaged with the discourse and practice of Indian Contemporary dance. See *Classical and contemporary Indian dance: overview, criteria and a choreographic analysis* (Coorlawala, 1994); *New directions in Indian dance* (Kothari, 2003); *Classicism, post-classicism and Ranjabati Sircar’s work: re-defining the terms of Indian contemporary dance discourses* (Lopez y Royo, 2003); *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Jo Zollar and Chandralekha* (Chatterjea, 2004); *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (Katrak, 2011) and *Indian Modern Dance, Feminism and Transnationalism* (Purkayastha, 2014).

meanings involved in the field by putting it into play with the notion of eternal stability and fixation. I explicate the research method later in detail.

In addition, I draw insights from Appadurai's (1996) notion of '-scape' as a method.<sup>6</sup> Appadurai's theorisation on the globalisation landscape through the -scape model<sup>7</sup> has focused on the disjunctive and the hybrid nature of the culture, economy and media, and has underpinned the idea that the world is fragmented and always under construction. Appadurai explains: 'The suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of the landscapes' (1996: 33). Thus -scapes are not 'objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors' (Appadurai, 1996: 33). These multi-directional flows (whether of people, ideas, culture or finance) along with the subjective interpretations have generated new permutations and combinations, as well as a new set of contrasts and transformations of ideas and practices. Thus this thesis presents choreoscape as a fluid framework, where the dynamics 'are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent' (Appadurai, 1996: 5), thereby resisting any kind of closure or fixity. This model has provided me room to read multiple sites and deal with uneven sets of data, which will be unfolded more in the following chapters.

So, 'deconstruction' and '-scape' are not set against each other; rather, they complement to frame our understanding about practice in terms of incessant mobility of people, ideas, places, cultures, histories and differential artistic subjectivities. Using choreographies as case studies, I demonstrate later how these two broad frameworks overlap to reveal that contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam is an ever-growing field

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<sup>6</sup> I am thankful to Avanthi Meduri for sharing her expertise on Appadurai's conceptualisation of various '-scapes' with me.

<sup>7</sup> Appadurai enumerates five scapes: 'ethnoscape', 'financescape', 'technoscape', 'mediascape' and 'ideoscape' (1996: 35).

that is constantly shifting and in which the East/West divide is getting blurred, just as cultures and identities are.

Although my primary interest is to examine contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam, I acknowledge that it is impossible to have undertaken this study without examining the politics of South Asian dance in Britain. For this reason, in order to investigate contemporary Bharatanatyam in its entirety, I shall be alternating the topic of discussion between contemporary Bharatanatyam practice and South Asian dance. For example, I engage with the contestations of the label of South Asian dance by various groups of people in Chapter two, whereas Chapter three has a sub-section that intersects South Asian dance scholarship with the notion of hybridity for contextualisation.

The remainder part of this chapter briefly contextualises the debate on the South Asian dance label from the existing literature, reports and conferences; then, it introduces my background as a practitioner and goes on to express my interests in this field as a researcher. Following that, it discusses how the analytical frameworks are selected to explore the new trends in contemporary practice. This chapter concludes with providing the scope and the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2. South Asian dance as an enquiry**

The term 'South Asia' was coined in the late 1940s by the United States of America's (USA) Department of State following the emergence of an independent India. 'South Asia' is the geographical area encompassing India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Maldives (Singh, 2002).<sup>8</sup> The international migration of South Asians, British Asians or Asians has brought several cultural values and social symbols

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<sup>8</sup> In the USA, the term 'East Indian' is the vernacular used to refer to this group whose ancestry originates in India (Mansfield-Richardson, 2014: 18). Currently, the term 'Asian Indian' or 'Asian American' is used as an umbrella term for the same population.

within the mainstream British culture.<sup>9</sup> In a multicultural city such as London, the coming together of different groups of people (who are assigned as ‘South Asians’) through varied trajectories has exposed its contested nature. For example, the issues related to South Asian identity have received academic attention in arts scholar Alessandra Iyer’s (presently Alessandra Lopez y Royo) edited book *South Asian Dance: The British Experience* (1997) and anthropologist Andrée Grau’s report, *South Asian Dance in Britain: Negotiating Cultural Identity through Dance* (SADiB) (2001a), funded by the Leverhulme Trust. For scholars and critics the transformation of South Asian dance has been visible during the past three decades through scholarly writings and dance critiques on practice in Britain (David, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2012; Grau, 1997, 2001a, 2007; Grau & Prickett, 2002; Iyer, 1997, Lopez y Royo, 2004; Prickett, 2004, 2007, 2013; Meduri, 2008a, 2008b, 2011). I examine the works of these scholars later in Chapter two, especially their theoretical arguments that are relevant to discuss the label of South Asian dance and ‘South Asianness’ and other issues of identity.

Apart from the research articles, there were several reports written on South Asian dance in Britain that focused attention to the contribution of British Asian artists and the role of funding bodies. For instance, art consultant Naseem Khan’s commissioned report *The Arts Britain Ignores* in 1976 on the arts of the ethnic minority groups has brought to the forefront many unrevealed facts about South Asian people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The 1948 British Nationality Act conferred full citizenship to all Commonwealth subjects which resulted in a large amount of South Asians immigrants settling permanently in the UK. A large-scale movement of voluntary and forced immigration of South Asian population had taken place due to various reasons ranging from economic opportunity, ethnic violence, to social and political persecution. Immigrants were largely from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Caribbean, Hong Kong, East Africa, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Somalia and Cyprus (Peach, 1996). The largest influx of Indian Asian people occurred between 1956 and 1968. Following that, there was the migration of East African Asians either from Kenya or who were expelled from Uganda in 1971. For detailed accounts of the migration histories of the South Asian migrant communities, see *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (van der Veer, 1995). To have information on the experiences of British Asian diasporic life, see *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (Ballard, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Various dance organisations were established in Britain following the publication of the report by Graham Devlin on dance in 1989. Various reports were also commissioned including the *East Midlands Arts* (Gahir, 1984) and by the Arts Council report (Jarrett-Macauley, 1997) on South Asian dance specifically in the Midlands, UK. ADiTi (The National Organisation of South Asian Dance in Bradford,

The South Asian label was also an emergent funding term by the Arts Council of Great Britain<sup>11</sup> in the 1980s and has influenced dominant institutions (for example, Akademi,<sup>12</sup> Kadam<sup>13</sup>, Sampad<sup>14</sup>) in promoting Indian Classical dances, namely Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi (Meduri, 2008b; Prickett, 2004, 2007, 2013).

Several undergraduate and postgraduate modules in the British academic institutions have been designed for introducing South Asian dance studies. Scholars have also discussed at length on issues related to South Asian dance and its institutionalisation in the British higher education system (Grau, 1997; Prickett, 2003, 2004, 2007). Dance academic Avanthi Meduri broadens the scope of this term by introducing it as an analytical tool in her pedagogy at the University of Roehampton.<sup>15</sup> All these implicate that South Asian dance has gained currency in various fields including dance scholarship, higher education and practice as well as an institutional funding category.

Although some of the artists situated their practice under the label of South Asian dance, they articulated their ethnicity as either 'Asian', 'British Asian' 'Indian'

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England), which promotes practice and propagation of Indian dances in schools, published a teacher's handbook on *South Asian Dance in Schools* in 1996. In the same year, Leicester City Council's 'Living History Unit' published a booklet *Parampara - Continuing the Tradition: Thirty Years of Indian Dance and Music in Leicester* (Hyde et al., 1996) (David, 2005a: 50).

<sup>11</sup> *The Arts Council of Great Britain* is a public body, which was founded in 1946 to promote and maintain British culture. It was divided into the Arts Council of England, the Scottish Arts Council, and the Arts Council of Wales in 1994. In this thesis, I will refer to the institution in its abbreviated form - 'Arts Council'. For more details, see <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>.

<sup>12</sup> Akademi, a London-based cultural institution, is also known for its innovative dance productions and organising stirring debates surrounding issues related to South Asian dance in Britain. See <http://www.akademi.co.uk/>.

<sup>13</sup> Kadam, another cultural organisation, contributes in the development of South Asian dance and music arts to various people across cultures. It publishes *Pulse magazine*, the leading journal on South Asian dance and music in the UK. More information about it is found at: <http://www.kadam.org.uk/>.

<sup>14</sup> Sampad is a cultural developmental agency located in Birmingham, UK that promotes the appreciation and practice of diverse art forms originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. See <http://www.sampad.org>.

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/postgraduate-courses/south-asian-dance-studies/index.html>, (accessed: 09/11/2014)

‘Tamil’, ‘Gujarati’ or ‘Bengali’. Thus there exists a gulf in the way South Asian dance is practised and viewed and the way practitioners and audiences position themselves. I was equally struck by the irreverence, rejection and angst expressed by many dancers and some mothers of the learners about this label. I return to this later to debate how the boundary of South Asian dance in practice is defined.

But notwithstanding the obvious questions attached to this label, the valorisation of ‘South Asianness’ by various funding bodies in this country has gradually garnered increased attention in various seminars, symposia, conferences and performances. Akademi organised the following symposia: *No Man’s Land - Exploring South Asianness* in 2004 that examined the very category of South Asianness (Pinto, 2004); *South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped* (Grau & Prickett, 2002) which explored South Asian aesthetics in the arts by bringing in several renowned contributors and *Negotiating Natyam* (David, 2005b) which debated the classical form of Bharatanatyam.

While conducting fieldwork and archival research, a few terminologies that attracted my attention are: ‘British Natyam’ (David, 2005b), ‘British *arangetram*’<sup>16</sup> and ‘UK *Gharana*’ (Fieldnote, October 30, 2010). Meduri notes: ‘how deeply British Natyam was imbricated with its Other, that is, Indian Natyam, and how difficult it is to speak about the ‘One’ without also invoking its other’ (2008a: 237). As Cultural theorist Iain Chambers argues:

Our previous sense of knowledge, language and identity, our peculiar inheritance, cannot be simply rubbed out of the story or cancelled. What we have inherited - as culture, as history, as language, as tradition, as a sense of identity - is not destroyed but taken apart, opened up to questioning, rewriting and re-routing (1994: 24).

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<sup>16</sup> *Arangetram* is the ritualistic debut performance of a Bharatanatyam dancer on the stage. I came across the term ‘British arangetram’ through the following links: [http://www.fipa.org.uk/docs/arangetram\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.fipa.org.uk/docs/arangetram_booklet.pdf); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BF48iwUKaPg>, (accessed: 23/09/2011).

In a way, a person's past and present interact to frame his or her future identity. Thus morphologically and from the viewpoint of practice, the term 'British Natyam' created a cross-border tie to celebrate the new identity of Bharatanatyam on the transnational stage. From dance academic Ann R David's (2005b) commissioned report on *Negotiating Natyam*, I understand that the choreographies performed at the Royal Opera House in London did not present a homogenised whole but a heterogeneous tapestry. Thus British Natyam is not a restrictive label; rather, this label disrupts the notion that Bharatanatyam in Britain is not only performed by people who have their origin in India, but by people who have complex histories of migration.

Parallel to practitioners' concerns, several arts institutions have been selecting new themes for organising symposia over the past two years. During my fieldwork I noted that the 'cultural flows' that are connecting together not only the two countries, but multiple countries. For example, in 2011, I attended *Moving on: National Symposium for the South Asian Dance* which featured talks and performances to discuss the role of South Asian dance agencies, media and institutions in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Leicester.<sup>17</sup> Organised by the *Centre for Indian Classical Dance*, the day-long symposium culminated with a recital, "Indian Classical vs Contemporary", performed by four male dancers, Ash Mukherjee, Aakash Odedra, Sooraj Subramaniam and Revanta Sarabhai at the Curve Theatre. On this occasion, each of them performed two solo choreographies, presenting the classical and contemporary forms as the confluence of a river. Conventions of movements and musical structures constantly were deconstructing the classical principles, although they did not fully sever their ties with the traditional forms. The dance artists provided the possibility of new themes, spatio-temporal dynamics and brought in influences from other musical styles so on and so forth in order to draw out the complex sets of performance aesthetics. Although the

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<sup>17</sup> Available at: <http://www.southasiandance.org.uk/section-detail.php?pid=2383>, (accessed: 19/04/2013)

populations of male dancers in Bharatanatyam performance scenario and classrooms have always remained limited, it did not go unnoticed that male dancers were prioritised over the female ones in this show.

It became evident to me that the discourse of 'abstract' is emerging as a choreographic device in South Asian dance after attending *Looking for the Invisible - The Abstract in South Asian Arts*, organised by Akademi and chaired by the dance practitioner-academic Christopher Bannerman in London in 2012. This symposium drew panellists from distinct backgrounds, both geographically and in terms of their professions, for providing an interdisciplinary outlook. In this symposium, Bannerman discussed the abstract nature of *nritta*<sup>18</sup> and suggested that abstractness could be a base to explore newness in South Asian dance (Fieldnote, February 15, 2012). At the event while discussing choreographic creation of Chandralekha's *Sharira* through film, Sadanand Menon, an art critic and journalist from India, discussed how Chandralekha abandoned narrative technique to create this piece. Abstractness in Chandralekha's piece was interpreted as 'an intervention where movement, space and sounds come together' (Prickett, 2012a: 3). The movement-metrical interrelationship which is embedded at the core of the *nritta* technique was demonstrated by a contemporary Kathak dance artist Sonia Sabri. I noted how abstractness intersected with the hybridisation of cultural forms in her choreography. Varied artistic choices make abstractness as a fluid concept. So abstractness is promoted as a consumption of an imagined 'past' juxtaposed with the ideals of artistic autonomy and self-discovery.

In various presentations during the day, many argued that it is difficult to present choreography as an abstract form because theatrical representations are its inseparable

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<sup>18</sup> *Nritta* in classical dance practices is defined as an item that is devoid of any mimetic element and abounds in rhythmic sequences. The root word is derived from Sanskrit '*nrit*' which means 'to dance'. (see *Abhinayadarpanam* verse number 15) (Ghosh, 1975). In Bharatanatyam, *nritta* is the delineation of measured, coordinated human movements that is rendered while holding a specific pose in a given unit of time (Vatsyayan, 1992: 14). Some *nritta* based items are: *pushpanjali*, *alarippu*, *jathiswaram* and *tillana* (Balasaraswati, 1978). A musical composition for the *nritta* is set either to *swara* (musical notes) or *pata* (syllables played on rhythmic instruments or recited verbally with or without music).



performative ingredient even today in India. For instance, Anita Ratnam, a dance artist and the director of the *Arangham Dance Company* from Chennai, India, threw a set of provocative questions at the audience: ‘can you abstract *abhinaya* [mimetic technique]?...I live and perform in India, so why do you ask this question?’ (Fieldnote, February 25, 2012). In spite of differing voices, this symposium marked the celebration of abstractness as a performative tool by using various mediums in different conceptual and stylistic approaches, which included performance, video art, installation, sculpture, and photography.

From the symposiums, it is also inferred that the relationship between culture and geographical location is not a one-way process; rather it is mutually constituted. Some terminologies and aesthetic strategies gain currency; some become oblivious - which make the choreoscape intrinsically stratified and differentiated. The emergence of new terminologies indicates the problems we equally grapple with either as scholars, dance artists, funding bodies or producers. Thus it is argued that this mobility of artistic genres and dance terminologies is constructing a fluid boundary of practice.

Before proceeding further, I explicate a few autobiographical details to indicate my interest in this research.

### **1.3. My root/route**

Coming from a classical training background in Bharatanatyam dance, my early choreographies have largely drawn on movements from the Bharatanatyam tradition and are composed from Sanskrit ancient dance or music treatises and Bengali literature.<sup>19</sup>

While my choreography, *Ragarupakalpana* in 2002 (Banerjee, 2005) drew on my knowledge of music, classical texts and the vocabulary of classical Indian dance,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I was trained in Bharatanatyam from Debabrata Chakraborty and (Dr) Sucheta Chapekar in Kolkata and Pune, India respectively as well as in Hindustani classical music and Carnatic vocal from multiple teachers.

<sup>20</sup> *Ragarupakalpana* (in Sanskrit, *raga* means melodious mode of Indian classical music system; *rupa* means visual form; *kalpana* means imagination) is a visual representation of musical flow of the South

*Madhura Bhakti Gatha* (2003) was adapted from the poet Rabindranath Tagore's<sup>21</sup> musical dance-drama *Bhanusingher Padaboli* (2003), which was later showcased in several venues in Europe.<sup>22</sup> While living in Dortmund, Germany for a year (2003-4), I visited several venues, such as universities, religious centres and governmental institutions in many European nations for performances, residencies, workshops and lecture-demonstrations. Through these travels, I happened to get introduced to multiple migrated Bharatanatyam practitioners, and amongst them, many had shared their experiences on how they negotiate the constant juggling between moral commitments to maintain 'purity' and expand their practices to secure sponsorship.

My primary research interests are centred on ancient dance treatises, Indian dance aesthetic theories and critical pedagogy.<sup>23</sup> However my experience of visiting multiple universities in the United States of America (USA) as a guest-artist-in-residence since 2006 has deepened my passion to observe and learn from people of different ethnicities and cultures, which has inspired me to analyse dances from socio-cultural perspectives. Also, I have observed how my identity assumed new names, such

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Indian '*raga-s*' using traditional vocabulary where bodies and various colours are contrasted to portray emotional expressions and *raga* characterisation.

<sup>21</sup> Rabindranath Tagore was a famous bard, novelist, playwright, philosopher, educationist and music composer from Bengal, who received Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 for his anthology *Gitanjali* (1913). He also composed several *nritya-natyas* (dance dramas) including *Chitrangada* (1936), *Chandalika* (1938), *Shyama* (1939) and *Shapmochan* (1931).

<sup>22</sup> I was invited to perform Tagore's *Bhanusingher Padaboli* in a week-long Tagore Festival organised by the Cultural Wing of the Indian Embassy at the Tagore Zentrum in Berlin, Germany in 2004. I also performed this dance drama widely in various venues in Germany during 2004-5, such as University of Dortmund, University of Münster and *Deutsch-Indischen Gesellschaft*, Karlsruhe. This dance drama, renamed as *Madhura Bhakti Gaatha*, was performed at the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France in 2004 and a selected part of it was demonstrated for a religious studies classroom in collaboration with Jaya Krishnakumar at the University of Geneva, Switzerland in 2005. This dance drama was restaged as a part of my lecture, "Vaishnavism: Aesthetics and the Arts" for the Krishna-Gemeinschaft Schweiz, Zurich, Switzerland in 2004.

<sup>23</sup> See *Creating Living Forms: Choreography in Bharatanatyam* (Banerjee, 2005); *Designing a Dance Curriculum for Liberal Education Students: Problems and Resolutions Towards Holistic Learning* (Banerjee, 2010); *A Merry Dance? Being an International Student at a London University* (Middlemas & Banerjee, 2012); *Never Mind the Text, Where do the Ideas Come From? Creative Approaches to Writing using Movement, Colour and Sound* (Middlemas, Tondeur & Banerjee, 2013); *Adaptation of Bharatanatyam Dance Pedagogy for Multicultural Classrooms: Questions and Relevance in a North American University Setting* (Banerjee, 2013a)

as practitioner of a temple dance, ‘Indian dancer’, ‘East Indian dancer’ and ‘Bengali Bharatanatyam dancer’ while crossing various borders (Banerjee, 2009: 80). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall therefore emphasised that diasporic identity is often ‘unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory’ (2003: 233) and thus the self is no longer articulated as an essentialised past but as multiple, conflicting and differentiated identities. In this way, I realised that the question of identity is a potentially valuable source of insight for practitioners who are settled elsewhere and travel frequently.<sup>24</sup>

Through my travels, choreographies<sup>25</sup> and interactions with scholars from various disciplines, I was also motivated to investigate how new experimentations can be studied in the light of existing theories. My interest to look at hybrid practice was previously roused when I received an invitation from the Department of Health and Human Performance, later named as Department of Kinesiology at the Iowa State University, USA in early 2006 to teach Bharatanatyam. This residency acquainted me with several world dance forms such as ballet, tap, jazz, contact improvisation, modern dance, hip hop, salsa, which have inspired me to blend ideas, style, cultural idioms and aesthetic sensibility to create new choreographies.<sup>26</sup> Later as a visiting guest artist at various universities in the USA,<sup>27</sup> I collaborated with dance professors to create works

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<sup>24</sup> I appreciate my dialogues with Payal Banerjee who enlightened me on several issues related to the politics of identity from the sociological perspective during our appointments as faculties (2008-9) at the Foundation for Liberal And Management Education in Pune, India and my later visit to Smith College, Massachusetts, USA in 2009. I am also thankful to Stacey Prickett for giving me an opportunity to present some of my findings from this research on identity in her course BA/BSc “Dance, Power and Politics” in 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Some of my choreographies are: *Osmosis* (2009), *Mahaganapathim - Ganesha Enlivened* (2007), *Fall of Icarus* (2006), *Navigating space* (2006) and *Bloom* (2004) and *Fractals* (2012), *Take 5* (2009) and *Movement Metrics* (2006) jointly with Michele Dunleavy from the Pennsylvania State University, USA.

<sup>26</sup> I am particularly grateful to Janice Baker and Michele Dunleavy for exposing me to a wide range of world dance forms during my residencies in the USA.

<sup>27</sup> I was a recipient of the Alvin Edgar Guest Artist-in Residence Grant, Department of Kinesiology, Iowa State University, USA for teaching in the 2006 (Spring & Fall); 2007 (Spring & Fall) and 2009 (Fall). I also received a grant for creating new works through artistic collaboration from the School of Arts and Architecture & School of Theatre, Pennsylvania State University, USA in 2007, 2009 and 2012. In addition, I have visited various universities including University of North-Carolina at Greensboro, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Northern Iowa, Harvard University and University of Florida to deliver lecture-demonstrations, conduct workshop, teach, perform and introduce my works.

that juxtapose tap dance with Bharatanatyam. My lecture “*Tap Natyam: a cultural pollination*” presented at several venues in India has problematised the binary notions of ‘tradition’ and ‘change’ and thus eventually the question of authenticity (Banerjee, 2009). The obvious questions raised were: what are the ethical concerns behind such a choreographic process; and how far is this acceptable to me or others? I believe, in this way, all migratory and immigrant artists are being measured or measuring themselves against the existing codified practice(s) and I am no exception. Since my earlier dance experience and education stem from a *guru-shishya*<sup>28</sup> model, which strongly believes in an unquestioning propagation of this dance repertoire, I am interested in studying how these new danceworks can be read and situated through the lens of various theories.

In conjunction with all these factors, my interest to examine the new danceworks of post-Jeyasingh practitioners has been extended by my attendance in two modules on “MA South Asian Dance Studies” at Roehampton Dance in 2010-2011, convened by Meduri, that integrate South Asian dance with global modernities, globalisation, global diasporas and ethnicity in addition to postcolonial identity formations with aesthetics and politics. These modules have helped me not only in connecting with the British contemporary South Asian scenario, but also in encouraging me to take my arguments a step further. Incidentally, I happened to get introduced to dance artist Divya Kasturi as my peer in the same course and time frame. Through personal interactions with her as well as eventually with many others, I came to know how Bharatanatyam dancers in Britain are blending various dance styles to create new pieces to meet the funding requirements, modifying their pedagogic strategies and negotiating their identities (between ‘here’ and ‘there’). Such orientation of research was essential to pursue this proposed topic as these activities were pivotal to explore the issues of hybridity by

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<sup>28</sup> The *guru-shishya* (teacher-pupil) teaching method is regarded as the ancient method of transmission of knowledge for many generations in India (Ananya, 1996; Kothari, 2002; Gaston, 1996). This method is undergoing several transformations in terms of pedagogic choices, learning contents and hierarchical shifts (Banerjee, 2010; Prickett, 2007).

interrogating how the traditional movements and gestures are absorbed in contemporary Bharatanatyam dance practices as an emblem of displaced new reality.

Even after travelling in various countries for more than a decade as a migratory artist and now living as a researcher in Britain, the connection to my 'home' is quite strong, both in terms of visiting and maintaining contact with my family and friends living over there through the Internet and social networking sites. My different international visa statuses have offered me the flexibility to travel and work outside home, but there were moments I started missing the presence of my husband, his readings from Nabaneeta Dev Sen,<sup>29</sup> my wardrobe, favourite sculptures in our living room and fish curry among many other things.

In the past four years, my back and forth travels across the two borders (India-Britain) and varied personal experiences have generated a sense of in-betweenness - the crux for geographical instability, arousing the feeling that I do not distinctly belong to any one of the cultures. Often I have occasionally received phone calls from some of my relatives or friends who were curious to know if I have become a British citizen, leaving my husband back home. I have undergone through several unsettling thoughts when my passport was submitted to the United Kingdom Border Agency office for visa extensions for a couple of times. All these incidents led me to think how culture is reflected through citizenship, and different kinds of emotions are linked to citizenship. I demonstrate later in Chapter two how the notion of citizenship intersects with the question of national identity and emotional instability.

While conducting fieldwork, I noted how a hybridised personality was created by melding my multiple selves of being a researcher, writer, interviewer, archivist, city walker, observer and subject of my study, amongst other roles. These multiple positions

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<sup>29</sup> Nabaneeta Dev Sen is a renowned litterateur who has widely published her writings in Bengali as various genres: poetry, novels, short stories, plays, literary criticism, personal essays, travellogues, humour writing and translations. She was a professor of comparative literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.

have led me to understand the collated data from different perspectives. At various social gatherings, people have questioned on my engagement with dance research in Britain as they thought that being ‘a married Hindu woman’ I should have stayed at ‘home’ with my husband.<sup>30</sup> All of these feelings and experiences began to offer a context within which I earnestly started pondering over questions built around belonging, home, citizenship, gender roles and identity.

The questions I am grappling with in my professional and personal life are the ones that might be shared by many other artists and dancers. Thus I am interested in examining the following questions: how does life across two (or more) countries, languages and cultures shape one’s identity? How are such negotiations reflected in practice? The utilisation of my experience as a Bharatanatyam dancer, a researcher, and a person who is torn between India and Britain, is not meant to be an exercise in self-indulgence, but is related to the practice of self-reflexivity, to situate my voices in relation to those of others with and of whom I shall speak.

In the following section I outline research methods which are used for examining new trends in contemporary Bharatanatyam practice and their receptions.

#### **1.4. Research methods**

To answer my research questions posed in the beginning of this chapter, I have adopted a mixed-method approach that comprises: (1) reading and analysing dances; (2) fieldwork in the form of conducting interviews with the dance artists, dancers and audience members as well as attending performances and post-performance discussions; (3) recording the performances, collecting photos and videos, and documenting performances in my reflective journal and 4) examination of contemporary dances against the chosen analytical lenses (which I introduce shortly in this chapter).

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<sup>30</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) discusses how the multiplicity of the self emerges contextually for a woman ethnographer.

As my research methods have varied across the chapters, I annotate each of them with a brief description, wherever necessary. Chapter two is inspired from the qualitative method of ethnography that deals with a ‘systematic description of human behaviour and organizational culture based on first-hand observation’ (Howard, 2002: 553). For analysing qualitative data, I adopt a narrative analysis method for interpreting layered meanings embedded in data. The rationale for using this method is because of its ‘concern with the meaning of experience, voice, human qualities on personal or professional dimensions, and research as a story’ (Cortazzi, 2001: 385). During data analysis process, I also observed many shared themes, patterns and connections across the work of the dance artists and thus I chose a thematic analysis method, which ‘is used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79) in order to compare and contrast the broader and shared concerns of the dance artists, dancers and audience members in Chapter two.

My research is broadly situated within the context of present-day culturally diverse London and a few other cities. As mentioned earlier, my primary participants - Mayuri Boonham, Kamala Devam, Divya Kasturi, Seeta Patel, Ash Mukherjee, Nina Rajarani, Shamita Ray, Anusha Subramanyam and Subathra Subramaniam - are primarily British-based and some of them have eventually migrated to this country through multiple trajectories. Based on personal interviews and the publicity materials (such as published interviews, online blurbs and invitation cards), I prepared notes on the dance artists which comprise information on their dance trainings, dance companies and choreographies (Appendix I). I interviewed all of them either in person or via Skype. Among them, only Subramaniam was not available for personal interview, although I managed to speak with her a couple of times at The Place Theatre and Purcell Hall in London.

Most of the face-to-face interviews with my research participants took place in London (Alpertown, Camden Town, Ealing, Enfield Town, Hammersmith, Roehampton, Southbank Centre, Sutton, Surrey, King's Cross, Wembley and Victoria) in addition to a town (Stevenage) and a few other cities (Leicester, Plymouth, Reading and Sheffield). Although I visited several venues to conduct my fieldwork in person, in some instances, I have used virtual ethnography<sup>31</sup> (Hine, 2000) for collection of a wide array of information. Web based conferencing (for example, Skype, Facebook videochat) as well as electronic communications were used to record the respondents' stories. I would like to mention that in this thesis, research participants and respondents are used interchangeably.

Conversations with dance artists lasted from one to two hours, during which we discussed the open-ended questions from a structured questionnaire (see Appendix III). In each of the interviews the dance artists provided me with oral histories regarding their respective family, culture, dance training and career trajectories including details about their future works. My interview questions were designed to elicit information related to two major themes. The first revolved around issues of identity and the second centred around the larger conceptions about contemporary practice as well as the emergence of new practices including non-proscenium dance and digital performance. I also introduced some further questions in order to facilitate the flow of their stories. I further interviewed cast members Sooraj Subramaniam, Archana Ballal, Shreya Kumar, Pauline Reibell, Hiten Mistry and Veena Basavarajaiah using a semi-structured questionnaire to know about their background, previous training and present activities. I sent semi-structured questions through email and Facebook messaging system to them when they expressed interests to further share their viewpoints.

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<sup>31</sup> Virtual ethnography is a form of ethnographic enquiry suited to the Internet and which 'involves embracing ethnography as a textual practice and as a lived craft, and destabilizes the ethnographic reliance on sustained presence in a found field site' (Hine, 2000: 43).



Ethical considerations were given priority in every aspect of the research process from its conception, design till the dissemination of the results. My first step in addressing these concerns was to outline the main purpose of my research project to the participants, making sure that they fully understood their involvement in this research study and voluntarily choose whether to participate in it or not. Anonymity of research participants was maintained, when requested. I was working with second and third generation minor learners, and so I have taken verbal consents from their parents on such occasions. Their respective parents were present during these discussions. All the narratives used in this thesis have been produced with prior permission of the artists and dancers and a consent form was duly signed before the each of the interviews (see Appendix III). I also distributed a structured questionnaire (Appendix IV) at several performance venues with due permission, and interviewed members of the audience who were voluntarily available for speaking after the performance.

Empirical data in Chapters three to six are primarily danceworks. The analyses of the choreographies are largely my readings that I either encountered first-hand as a spectator or collated from the digital archives and online resources. In my chapters, I have often inserted fragments from my reflective journal that appear in italics. Not only has this allowed me to annex ideas onto the main thread of dance analysis and discussions, but also incorporate my fieldwork experience and set my voice on par with other members of the audience or dance critics, and thereby forming new domains for divergent comments. Occasionally, I have also presented phrases or sentences from my field notebook to isolate my ethnographic self from the scholarly discussion.

My analysis draws on voices collected from the viewers from several performance venues in London including The Place, Patidar House, Westminster Hall, The Bhavan, Southbank Centre, (Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Royal Festival Hall), Michaelis Theatre (University of Roehampton), Watermans Theatre, Rich Mix

Theatre and Curve Theatre (in Leicester). Additionally, I have borrowed from other sources such as field notes, interviews, videos from the post-performance discussions and press reviews, and then examined them in the light of multiple theories which establish a link between performance practice, theory and reception.

Given the emerging themes and choreographic intentions of the dance artists, the analyses of the choreographies are expected to offer an important route to an understanding of the politics of contemporary practice. I adopt a range of analytical frameworks for examining the issues related to identity and reading the dances. In fact, personal experiences and danceworks act as entry points to broader theoretical discussions. The interdisciplinary theoretical components are identity, ‘organic/intentional hybridity’, ‘the city’, ‘heterotopia’, the ‘senses’ and ‘the digital double’. I situate my readings of contemporary choreographies at the intersection of postmodern and postcolonial praxes.<sup>32</sup>

The purpose of the following section is not to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this study at length, but to reveal how these analytical lenses were selected for addressing the research questions posed. The writing in this section switches from anecdotal modes to fieldwork experiences, and from existing literature to dance practice.

## **1.5. Pathways to analytical lenses**

### ***1.5.1. The question of identity***

As all of the informants for my research have their roots in another nation, my aim was to gain a deeper insight in their transnational/global ties and examine how these ties have an effect on their identity. Hence during my first few visits in the field, I was interested in noting their diversified travel route; the way they explicate themselves in

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<sup>32</sup> See *Postcolonial drama: Theory, practice, politics* (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996) for discussions on postcolonialism and postmodernism in theatre. See also *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Postmodern Dance* (Banes, 2011) and *Postmodern dance postmodern architecture postmodernism* (Copeland, 1983) for a comprehensive understanding of postmodern dance.

Britain; ties they have with their home nation and how these transnational ties influence the articulation of their identity. I found that many second generation dancers have identified themselves using multiple ties, race, ethnicity and locations. However when it came to talking about their dance practice, most of them preferred to call them by the names of the dance styles, such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi or sometimes using the collective umbrella of ‘Indian Classical dance’ or ‘South Asian dance’.

As mentioned earlier, the scope of debate about dance practices and identity in Britain was broadened by Grau in her SADiB report (2001a). Contrastingly, Meduri, for instance, investigates the identity of Bharatanatyam in the doubled Indian/South Asian label in the UK (2004, 2008a, 2008b). David conducted ethnographic field studies (2005a, 2010a, 2012) in Leicester and London to examine Hindu cultural practices and how Bharatanatyam is performed as a means of expressing religious identities of various groups in the British diaspora. I return to this again in Chapter two. Knowing that the realm of identity studies is vast, I locate my study at the intersection of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, and draws on a selected range of theories. Although I have not delved deep in the theorisations on transnationalism, I find anthropologist Stephen Vertovec’s argument very useful and relevant because some of my participants are always back and forth between the two nations.<sup>33</sup> According to him: ‘transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition’ because their identities ‘are negotiated with the social worlds that span more than one place’ (2001: 573). Thus transnational people or ‘transmigrants’ are those whose families may have been elsewhere for generations and who continue to affiliate themselves with an ancestral ethnic, racial, or national identity. In this way the

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<sup>33</sup> Anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc stated that:

We define ‘transnationalism’ as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders [...] An essential element is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies (1994: 6).

immigrants assume a new identity to overcome the emigrants-immigrants binary since it limits the understanding of their daily practices within two closed geographical spaces (origin and destination). This state is largely stimulated on account of pull and push experienced from past and present.

In contrast, some of my primary and secondary participants are constantly travelling across multiple borders and negotiating their identities entwining the issues related to citizenship and nation-states. Moreover, my field experiences have made me think how my identity is constructed differently each time, which may be understood in the words of cultural and feminist theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa:

Identity is not just a singular activity or entity. It's in relation to somebody else because you can't have a stand alone; there must be something you're bouncing off of [...] Identity is not just what happens to me in my present lifetime but also involves my family history, my racial history, my collective history (2000: 240).<sup>34</sup>

Anzaldúa argues that: 'For me, identity is a relational process. It doesn't depend only on me but it also depends on the people around...' (2000: 240). Later, I cite narratives from my participants and demonstrate how they validate such claim. I am interested in how social identification within a particular context works with or against the construction of personal identity. This has led me to further examine how the questions of personal identity fit within the uncertainty and multiplicity of postmodernism. I demonstrate with examples in Chapter two how a dance artist's identification and identity has been dialogical and interactive. Here I would like to inform that my intention is not to elaborate a 'model' or theory, nor is this intended to come remotely near to a 'survey' of significant literature in this area of study. Instead, I hope to reflect how identity is practised, articulated and mobilised in this contextualised setting. Through this I hope to open up a series of questions and issues that might inform both further debate and empirical research.

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<sup>34</sup> See also *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Anzaldúa, 1999).

### ***1.5.2. Performing/Reading Hybridity***

From my earlier travels I have observed that hybridity in practice can be articulated in many different ways, depending on the context and on who defines the situation. As a concept, hybridity can be seen as upholding much valued norms, a creative mixture of disparate cultural elements or a stress on subjective inclusion. Although the following examples are not from my respondents in Britain, they have contributed immensely to frame my research questions for Chapter three.

I come from a Bharatanatyam dance teaching-learning background where fixity and boundaries are often the cultural values sought to protect the perimeter of classicism. Any boundary crossing act is deemed as detractor and any violation of any principles invites unfavourable criticism. Parallel to this was my training in Tagore dance, which encompasses various genres of dances mixed together. Earlier, when I was travelling to various countries in Europe and the UK in 2003-2004, I myself found seeing everything in terms of binary: us/them, western/non-western, self/other, tradition/change, pure/fusion. Gradually, after having several encounters and discussions with the teachers, practitioners and academicians in the USA, my notion of boundary became more fluid.

In one of my visits to the USA in the fall semester, 2006, the host professor introduced me to another visiting dancer from India and informed her of my collaborations with the professors who teach tap dance in the US universities. Her immediate response was: 'Listen, we believe in purity. We don't do fusion. My practice is real and truly classical' (My translation from Hindi, personal conversation, September 19, 2006). Throughout the conversation, she used the term 'fusion' to mean 'otherness' that contaminates and displaces the idea of purity. One point of this artist's critique called for attention to the fact that speaking of 'mixture' or fusion attracts negative

criticism. I also perceived how she was presenting classicism as a collective identity, cross-woven with the notion of ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’.<sup>35</sup>

On another occasion, a classical dance artist from India commented after watching the videos from my experimentations with tap dance artists: ‘In my experimental work you will only see adherence to classical principles. It’s just that I use jazz music...I don’t like my choreographies to be called fusion. These are contemporary works’ (My translation from Marathi, personal conversation, September 19, 2008). I was intrigued to see when the line between the hybrid and pure is drawn and in what context and for what purpose. In the above quote, the term ‘fusion’ is set in contrast to ‘contemporary’ which follows classical norms. Her statement was clearly a means for showing up subjectivity and the power as a controlling authority to accept or deny any foreign influence as ‘other’ or impure. Even prior to this, I observed how the distinctions between the pure and impure intersect with local and historical discourses. For instance, when I experimented with Tagore’s Brajabuli verse or Hindustani music with Bharatanatyam, I noticed that these kinds of cultural hybridity were never questioned within India, France, Germany and Switzerland. This was because the language, songs and dances are originating from the same country and those outside India probably were not aware of the issues.

The notion of purity is considered to be a virtue in all forms of Indian Classical dances. By ‘purity’ often people understand the untainted propagation of cultural practice. Coming back to the British scene, Grau’s SADiB report presents similar beliefs on the act of fusing arts as expressed by the founder-director of the London Bhavan, Mathoor Krishnamurti: ‘Classical means classical...Mixture means mixture.

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<sup>35</sup> While learning my two choreographies, *Bloom* and *Fall of Icarus*, a few students who enrolled for Ann Dils’s course on Dance History (at the Department of Health and Human Performance, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA) raised the questions on authenticity and cultural appropriation of such practice during my visit in 2007. Later, I addressed those questions in one of my articles (Banerjee, 2009). I have had an opportunity to revisit those questions and construct a few while teaching a class for Andrée Grau’s MA course module, “Dance in Culturally Diverse Societies” at the University of Roehampton in 2011 and 2012.

Classical dance and music - they are divine. A sacred thing has to have dignity to it...’ (Nagarajah, 2000: 8; cited in Grau, 2001a: 61). From this above comment, I note two things: first, there lies a distinct opposition between ‘classical’ and ‘mixed’ practice, and second, classical is perceived as ‘divine’ and thus has more respectability attached to it than mixed arts. It is important to note here that is that the notion of purity/mixture is always contextual, encompassed by race, history, nation and culture.

As a phenomenon resulting from cross-cultural encounters, a variety of discourses on hybridity have surfaced across different traditions in order to define its meanings. Multiple and anti-thetical usages of the term hybridity have created a debate over its meanings and usefulness. Postcolonial theorists (for example, Homi Bhabha (1994; 1996), Robert Young (1995) and many others) have theorised hybridity as a way of conceptualising cultural exchanges. Despite the fact that the concept of hybridity is regarded as ‘one of the most widely employed and disputed terms in postcolonial theory’ (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 118), hybridity is celebrated in literature (Rushdie, 1991) and music (Sharma et al., 1996) and many other disciplines.

The importance of the term hybridity has also been recognised in South Asian dance studies (Briginshaw, 2001; Chakravorty, 2008; Lopez y Royo, 2004; Meduri, 2008a, 2008b). Feminist dance theorist Valerie A. Briginshaw (2001) uses hybridity as a useful methodological tool to analyse Jeyasingh’s identity, multiplicity, and in-betweenness of nomadic experience in Britain. In Meduri’s account the way how a new performative identity is created is not disputed:

Jeyasingh articulated a new, aesthetic vision for “contemporary” South Asian dance in Britain by deconstructing *Bharatanatyam* dance vocabulary and urbanized the classical form of combining it with Western postmodern movement genres (Meduri, 2008b: 305).

Dance scholar Ketu H Katrak (2011) privileges linguist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981 [1935]) theorisations of hybridity in examining Indian Contemporary dance across nations, specifically Bakhtin’s definitions of ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘dialogic’ which she

finds extremely relevant; the former privileges multiple over single interpretations, and the latter argues for open-endedness. As seen above, scholars such as Briginshaw, Meduri and Katrak have celebrated hybridity as a methodological apparatus to analyse practice, but their approaches and interpretations have greatly differed. I come back to this later in Chapter three.

During my visits to several dance venues in Britain and while watching videos either from the Akademi's archive or online resources, I found most of the contemporary pieces were an outcome of cultural hybridisation. For instance, Shamita Ray's solo piece *Dark Matter* mixed Bharatanatyam and western contemporary movement vocabulary with traditional metrical sequences and a tune from Tagore song. Whilst Anusha Subramanyam's piece *na asat* (2010) brought out 'Butoesque quality' (personal interview, March 1, 2013), Divya Kasturi distinctively weaved together nuances from release technique along with Kathak and Bharatanatyam movements in her choreography *NowHere* (2011). On one hand, Boonham placed 'sculpturesque' quality of Bharatanatyam against contemporary moves in *Sivaloka* (2010), on the other hand, (Subathra) Subramaniam's *The Shiver* (2010) blended the aesthetics of Bharatanatyam with an abstractness of human emotion, shiver. I noted how the interactions between the two or multiple cultures led either to mute or dominant exchanges.

All these collisions and overlapping of different languages and cultural signs, led me to believe that there is a need to discuss the choices that these dance artists make while creating dances, and the differing viewpoints of the audience members while looking at them. For this, I draw on Bakhtinian binary of organic/intentional hybridity to analyse practice.<sup>36</sup> While organic hybridity is defined as a natural ability to fuse languages and idioms shared by all linguistic expressions, intentional hybridisation is

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<sup>36</sup> The use of the slash (/) between 'organic' and 'intentional' is intended to indicate the juxtaposition of two concepts creating a porous border. I have used slash at many other places in the thesis (for instance, hard/soft city, live/digital etc.) to analyse concepts which are interconnected, but appeared separated.



not so much a place of fusion, but an arena of contestation - a ‘collision between different points of view on the world’ (Bakhtin 1981 [1935]: 360). Building on Bakhtinian (1981 [1935]) ‘polyglossia’, ‘dialogism’ and ‘organic/intentional hybridity’, my analysis in Chapter three privileges hybridity as the basis of a methodological approach for studying contemporary choreographies as a metaphor of asymmetrical mixing from various genres.

Besides, I engage with postcolonial and cultural interpretations of the Bakhtinian notion to demonstrate how these conceptualisations enable the dance artists to situate various consciousnesses on a single plane to either mute exchanges or open up new spaces for artistic collaborations. I discuss more issues on hybridity later in my Chapter three that makes sense how the discourse of hybridity functions as a choreographic device in bringing in transformations in the contemporary Bharatanatyam practice.

### ***1.5.3. The City, heterotopia and performance***

Choreographic experimentations by contemporary dance artists in visualising city buildings, city walls, gardens, busy traffic roads and automobiles virtually have brought cities into focus. The complexities and difficulties of thinking dance tradition through the conjuncture of dance and city life are worth discussing for the ways they raise issues involved in locating the history and practices of Bharatanatyam dance within an urban city. Sociologist Helen Thomas’ edited book *Dance in the City* (1997) postulates dance as a reflection and expression of urban realities and opens up new conceptual possibilities to interrogate issues around dancing bodies and the urban space. Building on the work of philosopher Michel de Certeau and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, several academic attentions are drawn to examine urban rhythms and narratives (for example, Edensor, 2000; Simonsen, 2004). Lefebvre writes: ‘The city is not only a language, but

also a practice' (1996 [1968]: 143).<sup>37</sup> These thoughts have significantly contributed to the development of urban studies.

While conducting fieldwork, I observed how these contemporary dance artists are increasingly preoccupied with the subject of the city. The city with its architectural grandeur carved in stones, emerged as fluid with the intersections of human movements, travel trajectories, nostalgia and ideological collisions. Bharatanatyam has a deep-rooted connection to temple architecture (Balasaraswati, 1978); and thus setting this dance tradition against the postmodern cities is not as uninformed as it might appear.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, Briginshaw (2001) read Jeyasingh's *Duets* as a multi-layered text of a postmodern city that juxtaposed varied city spaces such as streets, office rooms, elevators, automobiles and corridors. For instance, while sitting in the theatre hall, I read Rajarani's *Quick!* (2006) as 'a pictograph - a text of events and a living city map that appeared to flow, and there is a continuous collision between real and virtual bodies (Fieldnote, October 30, 2010). Some important questions that came to my mind were: how are personal interpretations of cities transformed into narratives or texts? How do we communicate our experiences of the city through visuals? For addressing such questions, I have borrowed my arguments largely from sociologist Jonathan Raban's classification (1974) of the city as 'soft' and 'hard', to reveal how the images of London, Chennai and Kolkata emerge in these choreographies and how these dance artists imagine and perform the meaning of cities, creating a collage of urban architecture.

I also observed how the digital timer of a microwave oven, a toaster, a lift and street signals in *Quick!* (2006) by Rajarani; automobiles, dirt and noises of Chennai and London in Kasturi's *NowHere*; and lifts, trains and huge moving cranes in the

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<sup>37</sup> However it is important to note that this attempt to place bodies either inside city buildings or virtually on screen against the city streets is not new in the realm of Indian dance. An Indian contemporary dancer and choreographer Uday Shankar had experimented with urban life in his choreography *Kalpana* (1948) which portrays the mechanisation of Indian urban society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. See *Dancing Otherness: Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the Work of Uday Shankar* (Purkayastha, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> See also *Dance-Space-Architecture* (Lopez y Royo, 2006).

promotional video of *Song of the City* (2011) by Mukherjee contributed in the making of performative elements. I perceived the theatre space that brought several ‘incompatible’ spaces (such as personal, secular, sacred, corporate, public and private) together. Philosopher Michael Foucault introduced the term heterotopia to describe broadly an assemblage of places that blur the boundaries of public and private places, unsettle things and have the effect of making them appear out of place:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another [...] (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 25).

The cityscape has offered architecture scholar Michiel Dehaene and art historian Lieven De Cauter in their edited book *Heterotopia and the City: Public Places in a Postcivil Society* (2008) to re-visit the Foucauldian notion of the heterotopia as an urban concept.

Largely inspired by a wide range of theories and drawing on contemporary practice, the city is another key theoretical concept in this thesis. In order to elucidate the urban role of heterotopia, I contextualise this discourse in Chapter four while analysing the city dances to unpack the interrelationship within the city, space and choreography. Here narrative analysis comes as a powerful mode of inquiry in consulting dance artists’ voices and exploring plural perspectives and uphold dissonance to fathom urban cities (for example, Chennai, Kolkata and London).

#### ***1.5.4. Site dance and the senses***

As a child and youth growing up in the suburb of the city of Kolkata in India, I had always felt that my interest in non-proscenium dances used to be dichotomous. On one hand, I had immense adoration for outdoor works, such as *basanto utsab* (festival of spring season), *brikkhyoropon* (festival of planting trees) or *probhat feri* (a street performance that particularly welcomes the dawn while singing and dancing). On the other hand, I was reluctant to express myself as a dancer through any of these outdoor

performances as I used to feel very uncomfortable at the thought of performing this dance on account of my physical proximity to the audience. During 1985-1993, I was enrolled in a local school, *Surochanda*, where every year during the annual program I had to perform an opening dance based on Tagore's song '*tumi je surer agun lagiye diley mor praney/shey agun choriye gelo*' ('You light my heart with melody/Like a blazing flame of fire it spreads'). The choreography involved travel from the end of the auditorium towards the stage through the narrow walkway that divides the rows on either side. As a child, while dancing either on that uneven floor or through that narrow, dark passage, I would get more captivated by the audience's reaction than in doing movements.

During the first year of my on campus stay at the University of Roehampton, I organised a programme, "Confluence" for the Roehampton Dance Festival to commemorate Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary in which I was particularly interested in using the terrace and patio of Grove House, an 18<sup>th</sup> century classical building.<sup>39</sup> Being attracted to this building and its stimulating sculptures; I requested dancer Katja Vaghi, who is also a fellow doctoral student, to choreograph a piece (Fig 1.5.4.1). *On the way home* (2011) was performed using the various aspects of Grove House terrace. Following this dance, the audience members had to take a walk from Grove House to Michaelis Theatre and I heard the audience members talking about their experiences about how soothing it was to walk on green grass under the bright sun whilst relishing the blissful view of Froebel Lake (Fig 1.5.4.2). An audience member recounted how she had visited this place once to attend a marriage party on a rainy day when it was dampening cold. I was particularly intrigued to observe how this performance had aroused site-activating memories, enabling the place to tell varied stories, thus contributing to the layers of meanings in the whole process of making this dance. It is

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<sup>39</sup> I appreciate the encouragement received from Andrée Grau for organising this event.

the subjective and sensorial aspects that I examine to understand how a site is performed not only through dance movements, but by sharing myriad stories about a site through the senses in Chapter five.



**Fig 1.5.4.1.** *On the way home* (2011) by Katja Vaghi. Performer: Katja Vaghi. Photo: Chrystalla Pafiti.

Indian dances have a rich history of performances taking place outside the traditional theatre building - in the *sabha* (courtyards of Kings) and on street corners,<sup>40</sup> within temple space and in the lap of nature. Akademi has created several spectacular site-specific dance performances in Britain for over more than a decade (Meduri, 2008a; Prickett, 2013). Emerging from the visual arts in the 1960s, the term ‘site-specific’ has been appropriated in theatre to suggest performance occurring outside the theatre premises. There has been an increase in the use of public places, such as parks (*Paradiso* in 2011), historical buildings (*Maaya*, in 2012), streets, underground tunnel (*Song of the City* in 2011), riverside (*First Light*, in 2012) and this list is gradually

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Kathak dance is believed to have originated from the tradition of *kathakars*, who were ballad singers and narrators in the street and squares of villages (Kothari, 1989; Massey, 1999).

expanding. However throughout this thesis, I use site dance<sup>41</sup> or non-proscenium dance interchangeably to analyse the dances that are showcased outside the boundary of an auditorium.



**Fig 1.5.4.2.** Walking on the grass. Photo: Chrystalla Pafiti.

Cities and architecture have always been dominated by ocularcentricism. In fact, the titles of the dances which I intend to study, for instance, *First Light* (2012), *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009) and *Paradiso* (2011) - contain dominant optical sensations. However while interviewing the dance artists, cast members and viewers, I noticed their sensory perceptions of the sites (for example, Southbank Centre, Stonehenge and The Isle of Sheppy) not only greatly varied, but contained collages of the senses, weaving together histories, mythology, religious beliefs and culture. While transcribing their interview narratives, I found an abundance of sensory imageries (for example, ‘colours’, ‘rumbling’, ‘culinary smell’, ‘uneven’, ‘rough surface’, ‘smooth’, ‘delicious’, ‘damp

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<sup>41</sup> The term ‘site dance’ appears in the title of the book *Choreographers and the Lure of Alternative Spaces* (Kloetzel & Pavlik, 2009).

smell’, ‘smell of an Indian kitchen’ and so on). How is a city tasted, heard or felt? This initial query from the field led the framing of Chapter five in which I am interested in teasing out the multi-sensory qualities that are embedded in the built environment and to know how such a performance encourages the dance artists and audiences to narrate a site. This also involves theorising how the senses act as a method of knowing architectural and city places in the site dances. Located at the intersection of postmodern praxis and the theoretical exploration of the senses, the Chapter five examines the means by which a performative engagement with a site is sensed and simultaneously articulated by the dance artists, dancers and audiences.

#### ***1.5.5. Technoculture and the digital body***

The urban city landscape and architecture in Britain have been projected in dance films using Bharatanatyam idioms since the 1990s. For example, the actual spaces of dancing bodies and architectural sites are explored to suggest new emerging realities in Jeyasingh’s *Duets* (1993) which is a ‘dance for the camera’.<sup>42</sup> Undeniably, *Duets* was a site of technological experimentation, but it did not juxtapose live and mediated bodies.

At the turn of the new millennium, there have been numerous studies on performance practices that actively utilise digital technology (Bannerman, 2003a, 2004; Broadhurst, 2007; Birringer, 1999, 2001, 2002; Causey, 2006; Dixon, 2007; Giannachi, 2004). Media academic Steve Dixon and performance arts academic, Barry Smith used the term ‘digital performance’ in 2001 when they launched their project Digital Performance Archive.<sup>43</sup> Dixon (2007) defines digital performance as ‘all performance works where computer technologies play a key role rather than a subsidiary one in

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<sup>42</sup> Researchers have used various terms such as ‘dance for the camera’, ‘videodance’, ‘dance-film’, ‘choreography for the camera’, ‘cinedance’, and ‘screen dance’ to suggest choreographies that deal with camera for their makings. I use the term ‘dance for the camera’ to denote a dance which is videotaped and shown on screen. See *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media from Hollywood to Experimental Art* by Sheril Dodds (2001).

<sup>43</sup> The *Digital Performance Archive*, an online archive of performance works funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, was designed to record and analyse performance works that incorporated digital media to cyberspace, interactive drama and web casts between 1999 to 2001.

content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms' (2007: 3) and subsequently categorises the digital performance based on a comprehensive taxonomy. Given the importance of rigorous body training deep-seated in the core of Bharatanatyam, such performances that combine this ancient theatrical tradition with cutting-edge technology invariably complicate understandings of the bodily boundary. The digital experimentations lead us towards a creation of new dance genre, marked by the dominance of technological consumerism which perpetuates the ephemerality of culture, identity and even our existence in a geographical space. I discuss this later in Chapter six.

My interest in digital performance research lies in explorations of various digital tools for my choreographies in the past decade.<sup>44</sup> During my fieldwork in London, I noted how contemporary dance artists celebrate digital performance in which their movements were continuously overlapping between real and projected spaces, blurring the boundaries of digital and real bodies.<sup>45</sup> I was deeply interested to see how technology affects body imaginings. The poses in Bharatanatyam dance, which are conceived in terms of geometric shapes, interacted with virtual screen to create and redefine new geometries.<sup>46</sup> While viewing a live performance of Kasturi's *NowHere*, the constant juxtapositions of the real body and the digital images complicated the notion of the body and temporality:

*My experiences were multi-layered: the interaction of Divya's live and recorded bodies; the juxtaposition of her recorded and live voices and her miniature image on the LCD screen of the video camera contrasted with her magnified*

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<sup>44</sup> Some of my choreographies that utilised digital technology are: *Raga Expressions* (2006) in collaboration with Hiromi Okumura, *Osmosis* (2009) and *Ankitasmi - Digital I/Eye?* (2013) (Banerjee, 2013b).

<sup>45</sup> In this thesis the terminologies 'digital body', 'digital double', 'virtual body', 'technologised self', 'mediated body' and 'techno-human body' are used interchangeably.

<sup>46</sup> All Indian dance positions can be classified and analysed in terms of position of head, hand, fingers and the incline of the body, the torso and the deflection of the hip (Vatsyayan, 1977). The basic posture of a Bharatanatyam dance is the integration of many triangles (Vatsyayan, 1992: 25) and while performing, the dancers are constantly trying to achieve the 'perfect pose' - 'a moment of arrested time in limited space' (Vatsyayan, 1967: 233).



*image on screen [...] Besides, depending on my position in the auditorium, I shifted my eyes between downstage and upstage to watch the dancers [...] Through the use of the digital space, I was able to gain access to Divya's historical space that she had left behind in her past 'home' (Reflective Journal, February 11, 2012).*

I was also drawn towards a few more choreographies through online search. For instance, whilst Rajarani's *Bend it...* (2008) incorporates digital bodies mainly as a tool for externalising ego, zeal, jealousy and other subtle emotions of players in a football match, her *Quiet, Please!* (2007) evokes traces of memories, love relationships and nostalgia of the protagonists through digital projections. Contrastingly, Shamita Ray utilises her digital double in *Many More Me* (2011) to represent juggling among multiple tasks in a busy life. Although the digital doubles have the same human qualities as the actual live performers in the choreographies mentioned above, they are used to demonstrate a great range of artistic subjectivities<sup>47</sup>, which demand qualitative enquiry.

The questions with which I deal are: how does technology function as an aesthetic device and a way of representing oneself? What social meanings are created when the real body intersects with the techno-human body? As limited research literature is available on digital performance in the field of Bharatanatyam or South Asian dance studies, I am interested in examining how such interference reconfigures new aesthetics and enables a dance scholar to read the digital body. Chapter six thus illustrates how digital tools have not only promoted improvisational opportunities through the technological interactivity, but also allowed the dance artists to spontaneously express their multiple identities and to entwine complex spatio-temporal environments.

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<sup>47</sup> My use of the term subjectivity is inspired from academic Nick Mansfield's overview on it:

'Subjectivity' refers [...] to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience [...] (2000: 3).

To investigate the digital body, I contend that Dixon's conceptualisation (2007) of the 'digital double' could be an apt analytical lens as it addresses a wide variety of themes and techniques pertaining to techno-bodies. By using a psychoanalytic optic, danceworks examined in this chapter simultaneously reveal lure and dismay of the impact of technological splitting of the selves. The broad aim of this framework is to investigate how technoculture, which explores the interactions among technology, human beings and culture (Shaw, 2008), reformulates contemporary practice. Technoculture, a neologised word used by media studies academic Constance Penley and cultural studies scholar Andrew Ross in their edited book *Technoculture* (1991), is gaining currency recently in academia.<sup>48</sup> The way technology intrudes and reconstructs social and cultural meanings of the self by transcending the border of the flesh brings a critical lens to this study. Drawing on the theorisation of 'the digital double', selected choreographies and ethnographic narratives, I reveal how these dance artists set multiple identities at play and embroider a complex text of social reality, urban culture and postmodernism.

Having discussed various autobiographical narratives, my fieldwork experiences and practical observations that paved the ways for selecting these analytical frameworks to read practice, I now outline the scope of this study.

## **1.6. Scope of the research**

As mentioned before, this thesis engages with contemporary Bharatanatyam practice in Britain with a specific focus on post-Jeyasingh dance artists. The main aim is to examine what emerging genres are created by the dance artists and how those practices

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<sup>48</sup> Recently a few universities in the USA have used the word 'technoculture' in their course names (for example, University of California at Davis and Riverside to name some). For instance, Cinema and Technocultural Studies department at the University of California Davis focuses on interdisciplinary approaches to artistic, cultural and scholarly production in contemporary media and digital arts. See also *Technoculture and critical theory: in the service of the machine?* (Cooper, 2003) and *Technoculture: The Key Concepts* (Shaw, 2008).

can be investigated in the light of existing theoretical models. This thesis draws inspiration from main as well as sub-fields of dance studies.<sup>49</sup> Although Chapter two is a continuation of the studies by selected scholars, the scope of this study is broadened by citing the narratives of the dance artists under examination to demonstrate how their multiple identities are negotiated. Another new addition in this chapter is the demonstration of the rising ‘new ethnic’ audience class who identify them as ‘BrAsian’ (Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006). To interrogate how Bharatanatyam dance is flourishing through these contemporary choreographies, this study attends to the concerns related to the understanding of place, temporality and hybridity in contemporary practice through a selected repertoire of theories.

The analyses of ‘city dances’ look at how the built environment produces urban images, challenging predetermined ideas about performance spaces and geometry ingrained in the form of Bharatanatyam. This research is informed by the study of a heterotopic model which is useful in linking together an identity of various city places those are evidenced in day-to-day material practices, social relationships and artistic subjectivities. Furthermore, this thesis looks at the ways in which the varying characteristics of sites, ranging from ancient Gothic architectural building to the riverside, city streets to public gardens and modern bridges to an ancient ‘sacred’ archaeological site, have aroused differentiated sensorial experiences. Technological advancements have decisively challenged bodily boundaries and the relations between live and digital bodies profoundly contest its spatial realities and dance aesthetics.

Drawing on media studies and psychoanalytic theories, this thesis also undertakes a

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<sup>49</sup> Dance Studies is relatively a new branch of knowledge, and therefore it provides ample opportunity for a scholar to engage and shape its scope as compared to other established disciplines. The emergence of dance studies as a discipline in higher education in the UK and the USA took place in the 1980s (Giersdorf, 2009: 24). Dance scholar, Janet Adshead (now Lansdale) situated epistemological concerns of dance studies within a historical, spatial, and social context, which allowed her to propose various models for establishing dance studies as an academic discipline in the British academy (Adshead, 1981, 1988). It has four broad streams of disciplines in dance studies: ‘anthropology, folklore and ethnography; the writings of expert viewers and dance analysis; philosophy, especially aesthetics and phenomenology; and historical studies including biography and dance reconstruction’ (O’Shea, 2010: 2).

critical investigation through the nexus of theory and practice to examine how these experimentations have encoded new meanings through the digital body.

I now go on to outline the structure of my thesis. The organisation of my chapters intersperses the more theoretical frameworks that elucidate various elements of dance practice through a mixed methodological approaches.

### **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

Chapter two, titled “(Mis-)Taken labels and multiplicity of identity” examines how the dance artists, cast members, dancers and second and third generation learners identify themselves and how they are identified by others. It highlights the ways in which the ‘South Asian dance’ has been deployed by institutions and debated by tiers of people. It also deconstructs the theoretical tropes in understanding ‘South Asian’, ‘Asian’, ‘British’ and ‘BrAsian’ identities founded on academic contestations and explores how the dance artists practice or challenge or broaden these identities. It argues that cultural identity is a practice; it is defined by oneself as well as others. It is a continuous process ‘of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past’ (Hall, 1990: 225). Drawing on the postmodern conceptualisation of identity (Hall, 1990, 1992), Chapter two provides an insight into how the identities of my research participants are not always clear-cut and stationary, but always in a state of transition along both axes of ‘similarity’ (a collective consciousness, as in South Asian, Indian, Asian, BrAsian) and ‘difference’ (those disjuncture and fragmentation that determine their ‘uniqueness’).

Chapter three, “Porous borders: performing hybridity” critically engages with the discourse of hybridity and seeks to establish correlations between theory and practice. Postcolonial notions of hybridity assume that cross-cultural encounters cause individuals to live in a state of uncertainty and constant in-betweenness. Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1981 [1935]) conceptualisations of ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’ hybridity and

four contemporary danceworks created by Boonham, Subramaniam, Ray and Subramanyam, this chapter examines how the discourse of hybridity functions as a choreographic device for deconstructing the rigid labels and reveal the new borders created in practice through inclusion/exclusion of cultural forms, race, the body, language and the nation. It demonstrates that hybridity in practice is not just a homogeneous mixture, but is a dialogic term in which certain elements of dominant cultures are appropriated and re-articulated.

Chapter four, “City dances/dancing city” presents issues related to theoretical discourses around the city, urban space and heterotopia and examines their applications in contemporary Bharatanatyam dance practice. In the first part of this chapter, various theoretical frameworks, especially, Raban’s (1974) classification of soft/hard city and Foucault’s conceptualisation of heterotopia (1986 [1967]) are explored. It discusses how these notions can be applied to four selected choreographies and how these ‘city dances’ can be viewed as textual representations of the ‘hard/soft’ city. The real and imagined cities co-exist; and there is a continuous overlapping between them. The promise that heterotopic spaces hold is that by analysing variegated places (for example, a city tunnel or an unknown city street) we reveal many hidden meanings which otherwise we tend to overlook. It argues that the choreographies bring together disparate objects from different locations in a single space to present the totality of time, weaving a new spatio-temporal aesthetics.

Chapter five, “Performing the site: the senses and sensibilities” examines the representation of the senses in relation to the urban environment and traces the interrelation between a site and the senses in non-proscenium dances. It contextualises the history of site dances in Britain and then goes on to discuss a range of theories on the senses (anthropology, architecture and film) in order to demonstrate the ways multi-sensorial experiences can contribute to our understanding of how the senses are

performed, constructed and articulated. It examines a set of selected choreographies which are read against theories (Blessner & Salter, 2007; Marks, 2000; Pallasmaa, 2005; Schafer, 1977) and informs how the interlacing of the senses with the architectural places create a complex web of histories, cultural identity and memory. It demonstrates how the site dances encourage the dancers and viewers to participate through a more direct experience of a sense of the place. Informed by the multi-sensorial model (Classen, 1997), I argue that the senses are not reconciled, rather they contrast and collide to accentuate the differential experiences of the dancers and viewers in defining a site.

Current practices of contemporary dance artists in placing bodies in digital media contest the conventional use of dancing bodies. Chapter six, “I and digi-I: reading the digital double” examines the concept of the ‘digital double’ (Dixon, 2007) in contemporary Bharatanatyam choreographies. It contextualises the background by discussing briefly how various theorists have defined digital performance and other related terminologies. Following that, it analyses three dances and explores specific technologies designed and employed by the dance artists in their works. Drawing on the dance analysis and ethnographic narratives, it discusses how the dance artists have featured their simulated doubles to exhibit split selves and postmodern realities. It concludes by arguing that these works exhibit a mystical interplay between corporeality and the simulated image, the self and the other, the real and the unreal, scattered through the dance artists’ multiple identities as they traverse from the physical world to the digital world.

Chapter seven, which is the conclusion of this thesis discusses salient findings and evaluates how the main objectives (of assessing the questions of identity and contemporary Bharatanatyam dance practice) are achieved through qualitative research

and dance analyses. It culminates with an emergent trajectory of practice and a discussion on the imminent scope of this research.

Now that I have contextualised my research and linked it with the broad frameworks, I go on to the next chapter to interrogate the implications of dance labels and questions on the politics of identity.

## Chapter 2

### (Mis-)Taken labels and multiplicity of identity

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter has two main aims: first, it examines how various labels (for example, South Asian dance, Bharatanatyam, Classical and Contemporary) are challenged or accepted by my research participants including dance artists, cast members, other dancers and second and third generation learners<sup>1</sup>. Second, it illuminates how these participants articulate their identities in Britain. I mentioned earlier how the identity of Bharatanatyam dance became problematic when arts officers coined the term ‘South Asian dance’ in the late 1980s to replace the term ‘Indian dance’ in Britain (Iyer, 1997; Grau 2001a; Pinto, 2004). The inherent complexities and current developments in the politics of identity and difference in the context of South Asian identity in dance have been explored by several dance scholars (Bannerman, 2003b; David, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2012; Grau, 1997, 2001a; Grau and Prickett, 2002; Iyer, 1997; Lopez y Royo, 2004; Meduri, 2008a, 2008b; Prickett, 2004, 2007), and I discuss some of their works later in this chapter. During my fieldwork, I noted that most of the dance artists whom I interviewed accepted this umbrella label of South Asian dance, though they preferred to define their practice either as ‘contemporary’, ‘modern’ or ‘temple dance of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’. Interestingly, I also noted how a certain group of audience members identified themselves as ‘BrAsians’, which is not noted in dance scholarship. The differences and various formulations of identification processes have made them undeniably contested. For the purpose of the chapter, the principal research questions addressed are: how do the dance artists and my other research participants identify themselves and how are

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<sup>1</sup> The label ‘second-generation’ has raised debate about its definition (Fouon and Glick-Schiller, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). While I recognise the complexity and diversity of their travel routes, nevertheless for the sake of simplicity, I use second generation to refer to the progeny of the first generation of South Asian population who first settled in Britain and third generation as the descendant of second generation.



their identities defined by the Other<sup>2</sup> or the other-within? How do audience members, chiefly from contemporary performances, identify themselves? Drawing on interviews held with dance artists, dancers and others, my findings recognise that identities are never singular, but always multiple, complex, unresolved and open-ended (Hall, 1996, Cohen, 2000). It is with such understanding that this chapter probes the complexity of identity and contributes to the available literature on South Asian dance studies.

South Asians being the most populous ethnic minority in the UK have been subjected to rigorous anthropological and political enquiries (Ballard, 1994; Brah, 1996; Dwyer, 1999; Werbner, 2004). Although my main focus in this chapter is not to substantiate the migration model through historical studies, I realise that the questions of identity of the immigrants cannot be isolated from the history and diffusion of the South Asian population in Britain. Identity is distinguished from identification on the grounds that the former is a label, whereas the latter refers to the classifying act of oneself (Rummens, 1993; Bamberg, 2011). In various interviews which I conducted on the topic of self-identification in Britain, my participants' responses were: 'Tamil Indian', 'British-born but my parents are Gujarati', 'Indian Malaysian but Australian citizen', 'British citizen but originally from India', 'American and [White] Hindu' and so on. It is evident from the above expressions that their hybrid identities have resulted from international migration, which has led them to entangle between two or more distinct cultural worlds (Hall, 1992) or integrate multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000), encompassing race, ethnicity, national identity and citizenship. The multiple processes of identification call for an attention to some of the ways these artists define themselves and are defined by others in relation and response to hegemonic discourses, labels and through inclusion/exclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis I have used lower case for the word 'other', unless it is used to denote the postcolonial discourse.

In order to address the research questions posed in this chapter, I analyse a wide variety of qualitative narratives that include the artists' varied places of origin, travel trajectories, patterns of settlement, religion, ethnicity, language and dance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my primary research informants are dance artists Mayuri Boonham, Kamala Devam, Divya Kasturi, Seeta Patel, Ash Mukherjee, Nina Rajarani, Shamita Ray, Anusha Subramanyam and Subathra Subramaniam. Although I do not claim to speak for all dance artists who are currently working in Britain in this field, each individual experience that I use in this thesis, can contribute towards understanding the politics of identity as a whole. Apart from the artists, I interviewed cast members Sooraj Subramaniam, Archana Ballal, Shreya Kumar, Pauline Reibell, Hiten Mistry and Veena Basavarajaiah all of who have performed in the choreographies which I examined in this thesis. I also collected voices of other dancers who were present at the performance venues (n=33); second and third generation learners (n=80) and some of their mothers (n=59) who were readily available for interviews after the performances or who invited me to their houses for conversations on performances. Additionally, other audience members (n=214) were interviewed either in person at performance venues or later through Facebook or Skype. They were mostly interviewed from contemporary performances in London to be precise, but also in Leicester, Plymouth and Sheffield. The primary data in this chapter are the words spoken by my respondents. Transcription was verbatim, with the use of normal punctuation and a few edits to make it flow better for the readers. In cases, when my respondents used Indian vernacular languages, I have translated them into English.

My aim here is to explore the extent to which the dance artists investigated have attempted to locate and stabilise their identities in new territories. The voices collected from a range of people lead us to understand how the South Asian dance label functions at different levels to generate debate in Britain. I shift the focus from groups to social

situations and practices in order to help understand the circumstances under which people identify or distance themselves from collective identities. My understanding of identity politics is informed by the works of multiple scholars with which I deal separately later in this chapter. Borrowing from relevant theoretical frameworks and ethnographic components, I argue that the complexity of hyphenated or multiple identification process is fluid and contextual, and is entwined with the questions of race, ethnicity, dance practice and citizenship.

In the remaining part of this chapter, I turn to the studies that were conducted on South Asian identity in dance settings. While a comprehensive historiography of ‘South Asian dance in Britain’ is beyond the scope of this study, I demonstrate how various interview narratives from different tiers of people have further made this term contested. It is made evident that the identity of South Asianness is imbued with differential connotations. This discussion contributes to a larger discussion about how cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, national and gendered identities are negotiated by my primary research participants. It is argued that the identities of these dance artists are contextual and thus in motion. In addition to this, particular attention has been paid to the ways in which ‘BrAsianness’ is constructed in the identification process by a group of audience members.

The following section critically examines the label of South Asian dance and analyse thereafter how various dance labels have been accepted or rejected by my research participants.

## **2.2. Label matters**

In Chapter one I touched upon some of the important reports and events that played a central role in shaping the South Asian Dance in Britain. Often the identity of South Asian dance is rooted and debated around geographical boundaries as noted by Bannerman (2003b):

“South Asian dance” as a designation evolved largely in the West in the 1980s, as an alternative to the term “Indian dance”, in order to embrace practitioners who may have had Pakistani or Bangladeshi roots. The term “Indian dance” is still used almost interchangeably, in part due to the origins of many of the forms in what is now present day India, and in part due to the India dominance of dance activity in the subcontinent today (2003b: 1).

Previously, Iyer stated why the label of South Asian dance was brought into use to supplant the term ‘Indian dance’:

‘South Asia’ refers to the whole of the subcontinent, regardless of its political subdivisions. South Asian dance is thus a shorthand term to indicate the dance traditions of the subcontinent (1997: 1).

Within a span of a decade, the term South Asian gained currency ‘in academia as a hegemonic category and is used to refer to the dances, literatures, theatres, folk forms, cultures, cuisines, film, and music coming from India’ (Meduri, 2008a: 223). On another occasion, Jeyasingh argued that ‘the term ‘South Asia’ sounds like a country but it draws together disparate countries, linked by geography but defined by difference’ (cited in Grau & Prickett, 2002: 2).

Grau’s SADiB report (2001a) hints at how South Asian identity acts as contextual and ever-changing. Building on a wide range of the narratives of informants, Grau notes how different people, for example, artists, funders and art managers have reacted to this label. In this report, Grau provides a clear example of how the vision of ‘South Asianisation’ of Indian art was uncomfortable and threatening for some. For example, Farooq Choudhry, manager of Akram Khan Dance Company, sees the label as a ‘blanket term’ because it engulfs the original identities of the artists and their forms (Choudhry cited in Grau, 2001a: 28). As opposed to Choudhry, theatre practitioner Vayu Naidu thought it was important to have labels for less known artists and dance companies (Grau, 2001a: 28). I come back to the question of labels and subjectivity later in this chapter.

Grau provides qualitative evidence in her report to indicate that the practice of South Asian dance is often prejudicial in nature and various people associate the question of authenticity of a White dancing body with skin colour:

The issue of identity was especially poignant when Gorringe [a White Bharatanatyam dancer] had her authenticity as a performer questioned by some of our informants. Although from her perspective the authenticity of a dance form resides in the body of the performer, and the extent to which this body transmits the aesthetic ideal embodied in the dance technique, some people, whites and browns, linked authenticity with skin colour (Grau, 2001a: 31).

The term ‘Whiteness’ as a racial category is equally debated in literature. Sociologically, ‘the term “white” can be interpreted as encompassing non-material and fluid dominant norms and boundaries’ (Garner, 2007: 67). However to be ‘White’ in Britain may not mean one will always occupy a privileged position (Puwar, 2004) as there exists various ‘shades of white’ (Long and Hylton, 2002). It is reported that White Irish, Jewish and ‘new migrant’ communities, such as Eastern Europeans, continue to occupy marginal positions (Long and Hylton, 2002).

Interestingly, almost a decade later Grau’s report, Kedhar notes how Rose, a White dancer trained in Bharatanatyam, was also treated as an inauthentic dancer and underwent difficulties in getting a job in South Asian dance companies (2011: 100). Amongst my participants, Devam, who is White and describes herself as an American Hindu from California, USA told me: ‘I faced it and I overlooked it. Also, I proved myself [later hinting at her dance performances in Jeyasingh’s dance company and own works] [...]’ (personal interview, March 11, 2014).<sup>3</sup> On another occasion, a Bharatanatyam dance teacher from London told me: ‘You know these White dancers are everywhere. They are learning tits and bits from everywhere and spoiling the tradition’ (personal interview, February 21, 2014). Yet, notwithstanding this racial prejudice at the core of people’s mind, I observe the increasing presence of White bodies in the

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<sup>3</sup> The question of authenticity through skin colour, dress code and conduct is raised in *The Art of Defining Me* (2013), a screendance by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam.

choreographies of Boonham, Subramaniam, Patel and Devam, which I analyse later in this thesis.

The task of contesting the dominant framing of ‘South Asian dance’ in Britain was taken a step forward in *Akademi’s* symposium *South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped!* (Grau & Prickett, 2002) and *No Man’s Land* (Pinto, 2004), as mentioned in Chapter one. Moving beyond the aesthetics of dance was the theme of *Akademi’s No Man’s Land* symposium that engaged its panellists to debate on the following queries on South Asianness. Some of the questions reviewed were: ‘Is it a new nationality?’, ‘Is it a convenient catch-all that simultaneously cloaks the political and cultural hegemonies implicit within it?’, ‘Is it just ‘Indianness’ in disguise?’ ‘How relevant is the term to artistic production?’ and ‘Do we recognise ourselves in this term?’ (Pinto, 2004: 3). From these queries one thing is clear that South Asian dance was undefined at that time and the primary aim was to demarcate the line between ‘South Asian’ and ‘non South Asian’ which led various people across disciplines to look into the matter of what constitutes South Asianness.

In *No Man’s Land*, the panellists, for instance, academic Daud Ali and journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, rejected the term ‘South Asianness’ and thought it to be ‘ambiguous, dishonest and ineffectual’ (Pinto, 2004: 15). Whilst Grau argued that the label of South Asian in dance was more ‘neutral’ than ‘Indian’ as the former ‘removes the dance from any notion of a clear-cut lineage and a nostalgic notion of lost heritage’ (cited in Pinto, 2004: 9),<sup>4</sup> some advocated for more particular regional identities, such as Gujarati, Punjabi, Nepali (Pinto, 2004: 15). A few favoured the term ‘Britishness’ by raising the question - ‘if we’re going to adopt a generalist term, why not Britishness as we’re living in Britain?’ (Pinto, 2004: 15) Jeevan Deol, a history academic, was critical

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<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere geographer Bertram Hughes Farmer asserted that this label is ‘neutral and inoffensive’ (1983: 1) because it does not privilege any particular country as central.

about the term South Asian as he thought that this term was deployed for obtaining more funding (cited in Pinto, 2004: 16).

Other panellists, such as Jeyasingh and Roy, accepted the term and recognised it as an ever-changing, ‘multi-headed beast’ (Pinto, 2004: 15). Roy argued that ‘the most apt characterisation of South Asianness could be borrowed from an interpretation of mixed-race identity as a complex and contradictory chameleon’ (cited in Pinto, 2004: 14). Cultural chameleonism is defined as a sociometre that reflects ‘the chameleon-like property of changing one’s identity to fit someone’s cultural surroundings’ (Downie, Mageau, Koestner & Liodden, 2006: 533). Embracing the chameleon imagery refers to a ready acceptance of the value of one’s own changing and responsive ‘colours’ in a transient and challenging environment. The metaphor of chameleon clearly indicates the construction of South Asianness which is ever-changing and cross-cut by various factors related to people’s subjectivities. Thus the South Asian label has multiple lineages within the dance practice and in scholarship, and the differences among these various formulations have made this term undeniably complex and contested.

African American Studies academic Kobena Mercer argues that ‘identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty’ (1990: 43). The label of South Asian has definitely disrupted the stability of the term ‘Indian dance’ in Britain. Lopez y Royo argues that whether it is ‘South Asian dance in Britain’ or ‘British South dance’, both phrases eclipse the cultural and historic facts in search for uniformity and ‘mask another attempt at naming a complex phenomenon arbitrarily positing it, through western liberal-democratic discourses [...]’ (2004: n.p.). Elsewhere, Bharatanatyam dancer Vena Gheerawo (now Vena Ramphal) while addressing the question of the British experience of South Asian dance argued:

I am not convinced that there is a British experience of South Asian dance, if that one means the way British people perceive South Asian dance. I am a dancer of Indian descent and British by birth and education [...] They are both part of my identity (1997: 45).

In the above statement, Gheerawo travels between collective to personal hyphenated identity of two cultures. Many of my respondents also reacted in the same manner as Gheerawo. I argue that the process of (re)naming labels within South Asian dance communities is related to the rapidly evolving nature of the dance itself and also demonstrates the discomfort and unease that these labels induce. Whether it is South Asian dance or British South Asian dance, both these nomenclatures are meant to prioritise certain ways of practice and aesthetics.

Meduri explores the questions of politics of identity of Bharatanatyam in the British context in two articles (2008a, 2008b), in addition to the complexities that are linked to colonialism, Indian nationalism, and the status of Indian women in configuration of Bharatanatyam. She situates the term South Asian dance in the postcolonial context and discusses how Akademi promoted the doubled Indian/South Asian label by forging new local/global identities for Indian and British-based dancers and choreographers in Britain (Meduri, 2008a). The acts of naming/renaming and creating a binary (for example, Indian/South Asian) thus indicate the feeling of unease or discomfort that various practitioners, scholars and institutions have while labelling dance.

The recent shift of name from ‘South Asian Dance’ to ‘Classical Indian dance’ in the Imperial Society of Teachers in Dancing (ISTD)<sup>5</sup> classification in 2013 has once again set the debate in motion. The South Asian Dance Faculty at the ISTD was established in 1998 to teach Bharatanatyam and Kathak along with other Western dance styles. In a press release, Bannerman, who is also the Chair of the ISTD, commented

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<sup>5</sup> The *Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing* (ISTD) is one of the world’s leading dance examination boards founded in 1904 as a registered educational charity. More details may be viewed at: <http://www.istd.org/home/>



that: ‘It is a great pleasure to learn of the new name of the Classical Indian Dance Faculty of the ISTD. This work has enhanced and broadened the ISTD portfolio’.<sup>6</sup> Kathak dance teacher and the current Faculty Chair of ISTD Sujata Banerjee in the same news stressed on the appropriateness of the name Indian Classical dance and commented: ‘Anyone can call themselves a Classical Indian Dancer no matter where he or she comes from. It is the proper and actual name’. I argue that the adjectives ‘proper’ and ‘actual’ represent an idyllic expression of Indianness while imposing a sense of authenticity and legitimacy through reference to the historical lineage and traditional representation of the dance styles. Thus dancers who do not necessarily carry the ‘proper’ cultural capital or represent the same aesthetic values will definitely fall out of place. From Banerjee’s phrase - ‘no matter where he or she comes from’- one more thing is anticipated that in spite of the dissimilarities of ethnic expressions of various dancers across nations, the label will represent not just forms but an idealised cultural continuity. I demonstrate later how my second and third generation learners and their mothers have also argued for sticking to the appropriate name of the genre.

Political science academic Benedict Anderson stated that a nation is ‘an imagined political community’ that is ‘imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’ (2006 [1983]: 6). Drawing on Anderson, I argue that the ‘Indian dance’ label has enabled the expansion of the imagined boundaries of Indianness, united by a common thread of ethnic and cultural histories. I argue the term ‘imagined community’ of Indian identity is variously defined in two competing discursive ways: the modernist imaginery of the nation-state that stresses essentialism, territoriality and fixity is set in contrast to the postmodernist imaging that celebrates hybridity, deterritoriality and fluidity.

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<sup>6</sup> Available at: <http://www.southasiandance.org.uk/section-detail.php?pid=2857&vid=>, (accessed: 30/10/2013).

In a commissioned commentary for the ISTD, David states that the above change of the name ‘reveals a complex mix of histories, political positions and strong individual opinions’ (2013: n.p.). She mentions how moving away from the generic ‘South Asian’ terminology has been a relief to some practitioners as this umbrella term encompasses not only the two classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam and Kathak, but also performances of contemporary Indian dance, as well as film dance (Bollywood) and Indian folk dances. The whole process of naming and renaming is a political act and the return to the original name is clearly a revalorisation of ancestral ties for further recognition and autonomy. The label Indian Classical Dance under the Imperial institution of ISTD is forging a new hybrid identity, underlined by the concerns of race, history, ethnicity and religion. In fact, the binary of imperial/colonised identity reflects the discursive elements of social reality, cultures, histories of conquest and subjugation. Prickett interrogated previously the issues that circumvent the postcolonial identity of the ISTD:

Among all the debates, a fundamental dichotomy exists in the name, the title of the organisation - the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing - and the integration of postcolonial dance forms in its portfolio. The very title of the ISTD labels the ideological structures upon which a colonial relationship was based - imperial (2004: 16-17).

From the above discussion, it is evident that in the process of claiming authenticity and authority, labels and individuals compete to assert different definitions that enable them to set the terms of their relations with the other labels in the country, and, at the same time, producing different meanings and outcomes. Forces, both from within and outside of institutions, define and reconfigure identities, and in doing so, a constant debate ensues how realness is performed. From my qualitative data, I became aware of how the individual fields of practice (artistic production, institutional promotion and consumption)<sup>7</sup> are situated within specific locales. The next section extends this debate

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<sup>7</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu (1993) who discussed why a field of practice is important and how it relates cultural consumption, stratification and communicative processes within a frame.

further by demonstrating how my research participants have articulated their viewpoints on this South Asian dance label.

When I asked respondents about their thoughts on the South Asian dance label, they provided the grounds for debate, exchange, agreement and differences. The label South Asian dance sounded new and thus was exciting to a few respondents. For instance, Kasturi accepts that her Masters training from the University of Roehampton in South Asian dance studies has informed her understanding:

It's never problematic to me. I just took it for granted. I liked the exoticness of it. This term, 'South Asian' is more neutral and embracing. And I went back and tried using this term [in India], but not all have understood it [...] As I don't live within the city of London, the term has a limited usage in my locality [Stevenage]. Not many people would know about this term either here [...] I think Roehampton Dance and *Complicité* –these two institutions have informed my understanding about South Asian dance. Plus *Akademi* gave me a platform (personal interview, December 8, 2012).

Kasturi's above statement illustrates the role that academic institutions, funding bodies, companies and people play to challenge beliefs and priorities. From her narration, I derive that the use of the term is confined to urban, academic, professional and institutional circles and has earned very little popularity in terms of its usages in suburban localities. I support this viewpoint also on the basis of qualitative data collected from various sub-urban localities in the UK. Despite contestations of this label in different communities, the academic institutions, funding bodies (for example, *Akademi*) and dance companies continue to play an important role in shaping how one understands the label.

Patel acknowledged that her works draw from South Asian aesthetics, but then she urges that she should not be 'seen only as a South Asian choreographer or an artist' because it limits her scope of work. In a personal interview, Patel told me that: '[...] Even if I don't do Bharatanatyam, people see me as a South Asian dancer [...]' (November 12, 2012). From this I arrive at two conclusions: firstly, Patel's dance form is determined by her physical appearance and secondly, Bharatanatyam dance is viewed

as synonymous to South Asian dance. It is important to note that she is trying to maintain a balance between the two: the label and no-label and in her following statement it is evident that she wants to transcend the boundary of labels: 'I feel quite strongly that your work has to stand independently and at a point it would be lovely if your work is appreciated as a piece of work without needing a prior knowledge of South Asian dance' (November 12, 2012).

Although Mukherjee accepts the label of South Asian, he prefers to present his works under the name of 'temple dance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' which is 'an adaptation of original temple dances that used to be performed in India for British audiences' (Skype interview, March 5, 2013). When I asked Mukherjee what temple dance means to him, his response was: 'I perceive temple dance where I could see the human body as a temple'. In the same interview, he mentioned that his practice is 'classical but for contemporary audiences' and he is 'not updating the temple dance tradition'. Rather, he is 'adapting it for the British audience'. He utilises his choreography as a means to balance Indian identification with integration into British society. In contrast, on another occasion, Anusha Subramanyam commented:

I am a Bharatanatyam practitioner, but none of the works that I'll do will be Bharatanatyam in this context. They will be called contemporary work - contemporary in a very loose sense, because my technique is not contemporary as I am not trained in contemporary dance (Skype interview, March 1, 2013).

Subramanyam's above statement that her work can be labelled as 'contemporary work', although her 'technique is not contemporary' is antithetical. It represents the fluidities of meanings and disparities associated with various labels and especially her dilemma of getting caught in the midst of labelling her practice. All these comments reveal how labels are variedly deconstructed by the artists.

Several other dancers, whom I interviewed in London, Leicester and Sheffield, have however raised criticisms in a response to South Asian dance and favoured the essentialist one as a prerequisite for a politics of recognition. The South Asian label was

often seen as an unwanted result of colonisation, intoxicated by the material trappings of ‘British society’, ‘contemporary artist’ or ‘British people’. For instance, Hiten Mistry, who was born in the UK and trained in Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Jazz and Bollywood, expresses his disagreement over the usage of this term:

I think this is absolutely rubbish. South Asian is a very broad and a big term [...] I think, they should call it Indian arts as it makes it so specific [...] so many arts are coming from India: Kathak, Bharatanatyam, North Indian music, Carnatic music and all these are so prominent in the UK [...] I think British artists are trying to pack them together and keep them in a box. I think, it is wrong and I don't think it's a good term (Skype interview, September 21, 2012).

Like many other dancers, Mistry's argument is raised on the ground of nationalism versus regionalism, specific versus non-specific and singular versus plural and ‘us’ versus ‘them’. These imaginings of the label entail processes of inclusion and exclusion, creating not only similarity but ‘otherness’.

As opposed to Mistry, Shreya Kumar, who is trained in Bharatanatyam in New Delhi, India and contemporary dance at Trinity Laban in London, has a sympathetic approach towards this label:

Our country is rich in several classical dances and I don't blame if everybody doesn't understand them [...] For instance, we won't be able to say which dance is practised in South America or in a remote village in Peru [...] In the same way, it is not wise to expect that everyone should be aware of or understand all forms of Indian dance. So, I don't mind Bharatanatyam coming under South Asian tag, as long as we understand it comes from which part of the world (Skype interview, June 18, 2013).

On one hand, Kumar accepts that it is not possible for everyone to know the root of practice, while on the other hand, she organises the national and aesthetic identities around the label (‘tag’). She attempts an imaginary reconciliation of two contradictory concepts by transcending the limits of ethnic culture that defines the nation by shared ancestry. Contrastingly, her expectation (‘as long as we understand it comes from which part of the world’) competes to fixate the boundary among nation-state, practice and label.

While talking to the parents, learners and audiences of South Asian origins who were attending a dance programme in Stevenage, I observed that most of them did not seem to connect to this term. This label is threatening to most of the mothers who held it a ‘foreign’ category and who also thought that this ‘marker’ is threatening their sense of collective identity and solidarity of Indianness. On another occasion, a mother, whom I interviewed at Wembley, told me that this label is ‘imposed to separate us from the British culture’ (personal interview, May 9, 2011). Contemporary practice was often criticised for the inappropriateness of dress code and lack of beauty by many mothers whom I interviewed, and who also raised criticisms against a devaluation of moral values and dance aesthetics through such practice. A mother, whom I interviewed in Sutton and whose daughter has been learning dance in Bhavan for the past 15 years, told me that:

I have never heard this term before. We are called sometimes Asians by British people. But, what is this South Asian dance? And do you think those dances can be called Bharatanatyam either? We can never think to wear such costumes while dancing. See, there is no beauty in that dance (personal interview, May 9, 2011).

Although this mother expresses that she does not know anything about the label, she clearly draws a line between such practice and Bharatanatyam dance. She puts particular emphasis on practice through labels and the heterogeneity is seen as the ‘other’. When I asked what she meant by ‘those dances’, she raised her voice and said: ‘Those dances mean all modern fusion dances where dancers are dressed scantily. No respectability’. Her dancer daughter who was listening to us interrupted and said - ‘You know all those dancers throw their legs at 90 degrees straight up like a ballet dancer. We used to laugh at them in class’ (personal interview, May 9, 2011).<sup>8</sup> Thus the scorns and angst are not limited to the dance label, but also the way it is practised. I argue that

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks are due to Christopher Bannerman for drawing my attention towards the fact that aesthetics of ballet (e.g., extension of leg) is also in flux, like any other classical dance forms.

concerns for national identity, aesthetics, respectability and authenticity intersect to determine the acceptability of this label.

To understand second and third generation learners' opinion, when I asked - 'What is Bharatanatyam to you and how does the name matter to you?', I found most of them situated Bharatanatyam by blurring the boundaries of 'here' and 'there' - 'a classical form of Indian dance which I am learning here'. The socio-spatial transformation forces the learners to reconstitute their translocal identities. They defined it variously as 'a form of Indian dance', 'which has originated in India, but can be danced in other places' or 'a form of South Asian dance originated in Tamil Nadu'. Amongst all of them, just one learner presented it proudly as cultural heritage: 'It is an art tradition which you would like to show people' (personal interview, September 21, 2011). One learner, whose parents are from Sri Lanka but who was born in Britain, objected to the label of 'South Asian': 'I would like to call Bharatanatyam as Bharatanatyam but not as South Asian dance. I think this name [Bharatanatyam] is real and proper' (personal interview, October 9, 2011).

Amongst the group of learners whom I interviewed at Bhavan on the occasion of Nina Rajanani's performance *Jham!*, a girl whose parents' roots lie in Punjab resisted the name Bharatanatyam and said: 'I am a Punjabi girl born here. In my dance class there are many friends who come from different parts of India, so it should be known as multicultural dance and not Bharatanatyam' (personal interview, March 12, 2014). A mother, born in the UK, but whose parents are originally from Bangladesh and married to someone who has an Indian root, interrupted our conversation and said: 'I don't mind the name as long as they are learning our culture' (personal interview, March 12, 2014). This stance of the above mother establishes that she is 'eternally fixed in some essentialised past' (Hall, 1990: 225) and trying to set an idyllic characteristic of 'our' underpinned by her Indian/Bangladeshi nationalist ideology.

From these above qualitative data, it is evident that on one hand, South Asian dance seems to refer to something specific, while on the other hand, it is seen as a broad term engulfing specific identity. I am equally drawn to various imageries used by people to describe the label from the existing literature as well as by my respondents, such as ‘blanket’, ‘the sheltering sky’, ‘box’, ‘umbrella’, ‘cloak’, ‘multi-headed beast’, ‘chameleon’, ‘rainbow’ and ‘collage’. All these imageries have revealed how subjective the term is. While some have proudly embraced the label South Asian dance due to the Akademi’s promotion of it in opening up various work opportunities, others have preferred to avoid this label on the ground of foreignness and cultural inappropriateness. Drawing on narratives, I realise that the border is not something ‘found’ on the map, but it is itself a social and imagined construct. Such presumptions do not represent a monolithic practice, but one which is being constantly displaced by a mapping of the multifarious historical formulations and ideas, making it undeniably slippery and complex.

Having discussed the labels, now I proceed to examine how my primary respondents express their identities and how they are defined by others.

### **2.3. Identity: where and in whose eyes?**

Over the past few decades, scholars from diverse disciplines such as anthropology (Calhoun, 1994; Cohen, 2000), cultural studies (Grossberg, 1996) and sociology (Stets & Burke, 2003; Callero, 2003) have investigated the politics of identity. They have provided a comprehensive body of knowledge for theorising the problem of identity,<sup>9</sup> but I restrict myself to those which are relevant for analysing my respondents’ narratives. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall illustrates what identity exactly means and how it is defined: ‘Identity [...] is historically, not biologically defined. The subject assumes

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<sup>9</sup> For example, they have studied themes such as the binary of the insider and outsider (Nagata, 1979); the problem and the role of the boundaries in defining identity (Barth, 1969); the linguistic roots of the term ‘ethnicity’ and its relationship to the concepts of ‘nation’ (Sollors, 1986).



different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self' [...] (1992: 277). Hall states that: 'Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we become' (Hall, 1996: 4). Hall's reading of identity challenges the notion of essentialism arguing that identities undergo constant transformations and 'multiply constructed across different, often antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions' (1996: 4). Jeyasingh mentioned earlier how she constructs her mixed identity: 'For me my heritage is a mix of David Bowie, Purcell, Shelly and Anna Pavlova, and it has been mixed so subtly as a samosa [an Indian snack item] has mixed itself into the English cuisine in the last ten years or so: impossible to separate'(1998: 48). In postmodern theorisations, there is a continuous emphasis on fragmentation, rupture and dislocation. This unhinges the stable identities of the past, and also opens up the possibility of new articulations - the forging of new identities and the production of new subjects.

While examining the second and third generation learners, I was drawn to their hybrid identities, throwing into question the British-Indian binary. I realised many of them described themselves by mentioning their race and ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> In their discussions about national belongings, most of the respondents used the label British Asian/British/Asian to define themselves. I noted that the terms Asian and British Asian are used interchangeably. They affirmed their identities as either 'born in the UK' or 'British' *but* (stressing) our parents are 'originally' from India or Sri Lanka'. Coming back to my dance artists respondents, I also noted that the question about 'where they are really from' has revealed more than their national, regional or ethnic identity. For

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<sup>10</sup> The two terms race and ethnicity are debated by various sociologists and anthropologists, without arriving at a consensus to their meanings. But, often 'if race describes differences created by imputed biological distinctions, ethnicity refers to differences with regard to cultural distinctions' (Malik, 1996:174).

example, Kasturi specified her caste<sup>11</sup> along with her regional identity within the national boundary: ‘I come from the Brahmin community, traditional Brahmin family, a Chennaite [people from the city of Chennai] (personal interview, November 23, 2011). Similarly, Rajarani identified herself as a ‘North Indian’ (personal interview, May 24, 2014), Boonham as a ‘Gujarati’, ‘Hindu’ and was born in East Africa (personal interview, November 25, 2011), Anusha Subramanyam as ‘Dilli ki hu’ (my translation from Hindi: ‘I’m from Delhi’) and a ‘Tamil Brahmin’ (Skype interview, March 1, 2013), Ray as a ‘Bengali and British Asian from Scotland’ whose parents had migrated from West Bengal, India (personal interview, December 11, 2011), Mukherjee as a ‘Bengali born in Kolkata’ (personal interview, March 5, 2013) and Patel as ‘Gujarati’ who was born in London and whose parents had settled in the UK via Africa (personal interview, November 12, 2013).

Devam and Reibell identified themselves as ‘American’ and ‘French’ respectively. For example, Devam, who has appeared in various Jeyasingh choreographies, told me that her family converted to Hinduism in San Francisco, USA, and she was raised as a Hindu girl. She elaborated on her various arts training and the process of assimilation of other aspects of Hindu cultural living:

We took veena [a string musical instrument] and learned a few *gitam* [a form of Carnatic musical composition]. We were trying to embody all cultural things [...] We wore *salwar kameez* [a traditional Indian dress for women] almost every day. We didn’t have any American dress. We didn’t wear jeans (Skype interview, March 11, 2013).

When Devam was fourteen, she decided to leave the temple society and follow ‘American culture’. Since then she has been wearing western clothes, such as jeans and started learning other Western dance forms. Throughout Devam’s narratives, identity is multi-layered, encompassing the religious beliefs of her family, enculturation into

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<sup>11</sup> The caste system in India is a system of social stratification in which communities are classified in various endogamous hereditary groups. There were four dominant caste categories in the Brahminical texts, viz. *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras* (Anant, 1972; Fuller, 1996).

Hinduism through her dance and music training, migrations and her working networks in Britain and the USA. Her identity can be analysed in the light of Anzaldúa's comment (2000) because it is layered, constructed across different, intersecting and antagonistic practices.

Reibell, who danced in many of Boonham's choreographies, is from Paris, France and identified herself as 'French' and a Bharatanatyam, ballet, jazz and contemporary dancer. She recognised ballet and contemporary as her primary dance forms and recounted how she got interested in learning Bharatanatyam:

My mother took me to a Bharatanatyam recital in Paris. I was learning sign languages then, and so I got attracted to see the use of hand gestures [...] Then I applied for a scholarship and went to India in 2003 [...] After two years when I was back, I was looking at different companies' websites [...] I was interested in their exploration of contemporary language of this form. I saw the website of *Angika Dance* and applied for an audition (Skype interview, June 2, 2013).

So, although Devam and Reibell are Whites, their differences in life stories and social realities have constituted how they would narrate their identities.

While analysing the transcripts, I observed that the identity of the respondents was not only a description or construction of the self but also referred to the ways in which they are characterised by others. Anzaldúa argues that the notion through which our identity is constructed not only by us, but also by others through 'an identity-as-clusters-of-stories metaphor' (Anzaldúa cited in McCarthey & Ber Moje, 2002: 231). Thus another common emergent theme was: the division of people into opposing groups of 'we' and 'they' and 'us' and 'them', more often resting on unexamined prejudices, values, discrimination and historical factors. Dichotomisation involves the construction of social and cultural understandings that make to see opposites as others (Brewer, 2001; Sen, 2006; Stanton, 2004). Sociologist Rogers Brubaker and historian Frederick Cooper similarly argue: 'How one identifies oneself - and how one is identified by others - may vary greatly from context to context: self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual' (2000: 14). Historically,

identity has been often shaped in opposition to others (AlSayyad & Castells, 2002). Drawing on participant narratives, I am interested in examining how the binary I/they functions in the identification/identity process.

For example, a dance artist's following statement illustrates the ways in which a British/Asian identity challenges existing constructions of national belonging: 'I definitely call myself British, but obviously I don't look like British and people consider me as an Asian person (personal interview, December 11, 2011). As a categorisation, the term Asian is highly debated in academia as its use is inconsistent throughout history (Brah, 1996; Kaur & Kalra, 1996). Gilroy (1991 [1987]) argues that the notion of Britishness is negatively associated with imperial sovereignty and thus enforces negative racial stereotypes and inequalities. And, Ray's remark highlights how identity is stereotyped and Britishness is attributed to Whites. Englishness is often associated with 'whiteness' (Commission of Racial Equality, 2005). It is debated that the race, culture, nation and patriotism intersect to define Britishness/Englishness (Parekh, 2000). Often 'Britishness' was conflated with 'Englishness' in the narratives of my respondents. A variety of other identifications voiced by the audience members included 'being English'; 'half British' and 'British but mixed'. Respondents characterised - what is by 'being British' mean to them - in the following way: 'born and raised here (in England)', 'born of British parents', 'I look British, don't I (jokingly)?' But, it is noted that the boundaries of what constitute 'British' are not always determined by skin colour, but are also predicated on notions of cultural belonging and birth rights. The points of identification articulated by Ray earlier in this paragraph were principally framed by the discourses of two hegemonic domains: England and Asia. Thus it is not Asian or South Asian identity that is rendered with differences, the term 'British' is equally loaded and expressed in terms of race, ethnicity and national belonging. Nevertheless, to be 'White' in the field of South Asian dance in

Britain is equally problematic and does not automatically mean the dancer is put in a privileged position (Grau, 2001a; Kedhar, 2011). I return to this shortly in this section.

Several narratives raise questions on essentialism, resistance and discrimination. Central to identity construction is the concept of categorisation - a process that involves 'identifying oneself (or someone else) as someone who fits a certain description or belongs to a certain category' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 17). For instance, in the field of practice, Kasturi's identity as a Tamil/Bharatanatyam dancer is often challenged:

I learned Kathak for 2-3 years and did my *manchapravesh*<sup>12</sup> in 2005 [...] I still remember that during the photo shoot someone said: "Ah! Thank god! You do look like typical North Indian"! [...] When I went to India on a travelling fellowship [from the UK], I remember the way the Director of a dance institute reacted after hearing that I have learned both these forms: 'Bharatanatyam lady doing Kathak!' And constantly in every Kathak workshop that I'd have attended so far, I'd heard this like a buzz: 'Bharatanatyam lady doing Kathak!' (personal interview, November 23, 2011).

Her identity is contested and questioned not only in the light of where she comes from and her ethnicity, but it is also linked with her dance practice. Elsewhere Grau raised these crucial questions: 'who creates the boundaries of identity, and how are these boundaries established from within and without?' (2001b: 201). Drawing on Grau's above questions, I argue that Kasturi's identity is contested both from within and outside the group because she has transcended the regional boundary as a Tamil woman to dance a North Indian form of Classical dance.

Concern over prejudice and racism were also prevalent among the samples.

Racism is defined as

[...] any set of claims or arguments which signify some aspect of the physical features of an individual or group as a sign of permanent distinctiveness and which attribute additional negative characteristics and or consequences to the individual's or group's presence (Miles, 1989: 149).

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<sup>12</sup> *Manchapravesh* is a ritualistic debut public performance in Kathak dance tradition. It is very similar to *arangetram* of Bharatanatyam, where the disciple pays tribute to the teacher and performs the dance pieces learned during his/her prolonged training.

Some of the expressions transcribed were: ‘I am a White dancer and thus not held as an authentic dancer by them’ and ‘Sri Lankan and under-privileged in Bharatanatyam dance scene (by them)’. In the first example the respondent relates the subject ‘I’ with race (skin colour) and ‘them’ with people who are in power to grant funds or who are Indians (defined by national identity/insider perspective). The last respondent’s comment puts ‘us’ with national identity (Sri Lankan) and ‘them’, as Indian Tamil or funders who have power to deny on the ground of national identity. The respondents informed that the authenticity of a Bharatanatyam dancer is often measured by how close her/his hometown is from Chennai. For example, a dancer complained: ‘I’m learning dance now for 20 years, but the South Indians will always get priorities. The teacher will always appreciate them and their movements as ‘pure, typical South Indian and flawless’ (personal interview, September 24, 2012).

On several occasions, I noticed that cultural ‘authenticity’ was defined by geographic distinctions which also emerged when my participants constantly essentialised the differences among race, religion, language, caste, skin colour and dance forms. The dancers whom I interviewed are often discredited as marginalised members<sup>13</sup> or deviants (Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001) whose narratives abounded in negations: ‘not Tamil’, ‘not an Indian’, ‘not Hindu’, ‘not South Indian’. Protection of cultural ‘authenticity’ is often defined by geographic distinctions as expressed by many of my respondents. For example, a dancer whose origin is Sri Lanka told me in a complaining voice: ‘You see I’m a dancer from Sri Lanka [...] I’ve not been selected yet to perform in London [...] They always question about my training as I didn’t learn dance from India’ (personal interview, April 23, 2011). A Bharatanatyam dancer, while informing me about her friend, said: Who will believe her as a Bharatanatyam dancer? She even does not know how to converse in Tamil! She is learning Tamil from me these

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<sup>13</sup> I am aware that the terms such as ‘marginal’, ‘ethnic minority’, ‘third world’ are not neutral and loaded with multiple implications as Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1996) and many other scholars have indicated.

days' (personal interview, September 30, 2011). On other occasions, a few audience members, who have their roots either in Bangladesh or Pakistan and who are trained primarily in Kathak dance, told me that they are disregarded on account of their previous nationality, dance training and religion. From the above cases, it is noted that marginal identity as a cultural emblem of 'otherness' is also slippery and slides between race, cultures, languages and histories.

In the next section I analyse three selected themes using thematic analysis method briefly to interpret the layered identities of my participants.<sup>14</sup> In some places identifiers have been removed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

## **2.4. Multiple identities navigated**

### **2.4.1. Name versus re-naming**

While conducting fieldwork, I was intrigued to note that the naming/renaming is not just restricted within dance labels, but it is also applicable to personal names. By and large, most of the Hindu personal names have their origin in Sanskrit language. They have specific meanings and are often gender-specific. The surnames are chiefly the markers of castes. Several respondents complained that many times their names are mispronounced and at times, this mispronouncing has become an object of ridicule which has made them feel 'out of place'. Thus any change associated with personal name can either generate an unsettling feeling or a new kind of identity. Also, I noted how some of my respondents have changed their names in Britain.<sup>15</sup> In most of the cases, Indian personal names are the signifiers as they describe certain personal, social, religious or geographical identity of a person. Various theoretical frameworks on

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<sup>14</sup> The transcription of my data has produced many other themes, such as 'mother language and problems of bilingualism', 'sexual orientation and issues related to gender' and 'exploitation of the dancers', which I like to address in my future research.

<sup>15</sup> Bhabha (1994) draws upon Freudian term '*unheimlich*' to characterise the postcolonial condition of unhomeliness, and this will be explicated later in Chapter six how this feeling is reflected in their works.

naming have been shaped over time by anthropological and sociological studies. Many anthropologists argue that personal names express facts about social relationships in some way or the other (Alford, 1987; Zheng & Macdonald, 2009). In this section I examine a few selected instances to see how identity is negotiated through the act of renaming in the postcolonial context.

In my first face-to-face interaction with Mukherjee at Westminster Hall, I was intrigued to know that his original name is Abhishek [which means ‘coronation’ in Bengali] and people in Kolkata know him by this name. He also informed me that he has shortened his original name after coming to Britain. Being called ‘Abhishek’ is one of the primary sites that constitute his belonging of language, culture, birthplace and the nation. Later in an interview he elaborated on that:

I intended to keep it as it is [...] I was in a dance school studying classical ballet here and went through different auditions in 1998. There weren’t that many people going to auditions for western dances. They wanted a shorter version of my name. I literally had 3 letters for my name [...] (Skype interview, March 1, 2013).<sup>16</sup>

In the above statement, Mukherjee is caught in the midst of ‘I intended to’ and ‘they wanted’ which definitely indicates a cushioned hierarchical power relationship. I argue that in this process of anglicising his name and attaching it to his paternal surname, Mukherjee assumes a hyphenated identity of ‘in-betweenness’. But Mukherjee’s argument was that this renaming did not lead him to assume any foreign identity, rather it articulated his religious identity metaphorically: ‘As a child, I worshipped Shiva [a Hindu god] ... and you know Shiva has three eyes and ... when Shiva opens his third eye, only *bhasma* [ash] is left’ (Skype interview, March 1, 2013). In broad strokes, Mukherjee integrates his childhood memories, Hindu mythological tale and religion along with several social incidents. The ‘new’ name Ash still has an inner core or

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<sup>16</sup> This reminded me of Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* (2003) in which the protagonist Gogol Ganguly, a South Asian descendant in Massachusetts, unnamed himself to get rid of his discomfort associated with his given Indian name.



essence that is ‘the real me’, nevertheless the act of renaming is in a continuous dialogue with the ‘outside’ cultural world and the identity it offers. This act puts Mukherjee to determine his religious identity, whilst producing a divergent identity politics. I argue that Mukherjee’s renaming produces in-betweenness where his identities mediate between two cultures, while at the same time ‘being’ neither.

On another occasion, an audience member who was born in Sri Lanka but now is a British citizen told me why her personal name has been changed: ‘My name is Lokhamathankhi, and it was shortened for ease of pronunciation in English to Loga and the ‘kh’ being a double consonant was replaced by the single ‘g’. It is now written as Logamathangi to match the pronunciation’ (personal interview, March 23, 2014). Lokhamathankhi’s renaming is an example of gaining linguistic comfort, unintentionally trapping her into the conundrum of ‘here’ and ‘there’. My argument is that the anglicising a personal name is not a neutral activity; rather it underpins the dominant (linguistic) culture of the place as well as reshapes one’s ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Another audience member told me that she has changed her name from ‘Ashmita’ to ‘Ash’. When I asked the reason, her response was:

Because people here in the country always want us to shorten everything [...] but it sounds nice and modern, isn’t it? You know, it’s a Gujarati name and it means ‘one who is proud’. That’s my real nature [...] (personal interview, May 25, 2014).

From the above comment, she indicates that the meaning of her original name captures her true ‘self’ (‘proud’) and new name uphold her ‘modern’ self. I argue that Ashmita’s identity is inextricably linked to the nation and a particular provincial region, aligning her outer ‘self’ with inner psyche. This renaming suffices that the new name is so much about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become in a new socio-cultural environment (Hall, 1992).

It is striking to note here that both Mukherjee and Ashmita have chosen the same name, yet their explanations are different. Mukherjee's act of renaming was justified on the religious ground, where Ashmita's focus was solely on the social aspect. Logamathangi urged that her new name is linguistically convenient to pronounce. In all the above cases, I argue that the act of renaming is a construction of a new 'self' that is a derivative of 'English' practice and involves a complex identity politics to capture migration, colonialism, nationalism, linguistics and religion.

#### ***2.4.2. Mapping citizenship***

Many of the artists, cast members and other dancers whom I interviewed either have migrated to Britain or constantly moved back and forth, their narratives contained phrases, such as 'Australian but also Belgian citizen', 'Indian but British citizen', 'both American and British citizen' and 'I have an indefinite leave to remain status'. Such dimensions of citizenship brought to the fore distinguished identities of the artists and dancers, which call for a study of social identity in relation to the notion of citizenship. Meduri previously noted that contemporary Bharatanatyam dancers 'travel on the historical pathways created by dance migration, hold dual passports and work permits, and shuttle back and forth between India, Asia, America and Britain' (Meduri, 2008a: 227). Citizenship is a legal and cultural framework which serves as a mode of inclusion and incorporation in society (Lister, 1997; Walby, 1992; Young, 1990). Western models of citizenship link a sense of belonging to a territorialised political community often represented by the nation-state (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Jacobson, 1996). Drawing on interview narratives, I demonstrate how the discourse of citizenship of my informants has been often underlined with the feelings of loyalty, ambiguity, freedom and patriotism.

Building on his research on the transnational Chinese public in the West, anthropologist Aihwa Ong formulates that flexible citizenship as 'flexible practices,

strategies, and disciplines associated with transnational capitalism’ that create ‘the new modes of subject making and the new kinds of valorized subjectivity’ (1999: 19). Drawing on Ong’s theory of ‘flexible citizenship’, Kedhar argues that late capitalism has created not just ‘flexible citizens’ (2011: 12) but flexible dancers who ‘no longer fit in with hegemonic definitions of race and citizenship’ (2011: 16).<sup>17</sup> While conducting interviews, I noted how the dance artists and dancers claim citizenship not simply as a legal status but a socio-cultural recognition and economic distribution. A few dancers, who have settled in Britain and have opted for a British passport, informed me that they earned social prestige back ‘home’ because of their new national identity. In many cases, citizenship is entangled with the feeling of ‘belonging’ to the country of origin, and simultaneously breaking the assumed congruity between citizenship, state and the nation. For instance, a female dancer told me: ‘I just got my British passport. I have been holding my Indian passport and thought to keep it forever. But, it was hard to travel within European nations for performances and to apply for a visa each time is time-consuming and expensive’ (personal interview, March 23, 2013). I argue that although the notions of citizenship and nationhood still hold a great deal of importance for this respondent, nevertheless her choice of becoming British was utilitarian.

I was curious to note how holding a British passport has remained to be a cause of worry or embarrassment for some. For instance, a female dancer told me: ‘I just got my passport recently, but I just don’t want my friends and family to know about this’ (personal interview, March 2, 2014). Another female dancer told me: ‘I just got my British passport. My relatives in India were very unhappy when they came to know about it. I told them that [India] is my *janmabhumi* [birth land] and this [Britain] is my *karmabhumi* [work land]’ (personal interview, January 19, 2011). Implicit in the

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<sup>17</sup> To know more on how the notion of citizenship is constructed and practised through dancing bodies in transnational countries, see Priya Srinivasan’s *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (2012).

arguments of the respondent is a pronounced divide between being Indian and British. Most commonly, citizenship work with territorial definitions of community and opting for a British passport has stirred the boundaries of nation and belonging. By separating her '*janmabhumi*' and '*karmabhumi*', I argue that this dancer is torn among birth rights, patriotism and freedom of movement and financial gain that a British passport offers.

As opposed to this, possessing a British citizenship is a matter of privilege for some first-generation mothers who want to seek a suitable groom for their daughters. An arranged marriage is an important choice for young women to conform to their community norms (Charsley & Shaw, 2006). A dancer's mother told:

My daughter is currently working in a corporate firm and we are looking for a groom to get her married [...] He has to be a Bengali holding a British passport or at least one who is living in Britain for long and doesn't wish to go back. We don't want a groom from India as he might just want to marry my daughter for acquiring British citizenship [...] (my translation from Bengali, personal interview, February 15, 2011).<sup>18</sup>

I argue that citizenship here functions as a double-edged discourse: first, it serves as a source of legal belonging (British), and second, it claims equality (through Bengali culture), nevertheless denying the exclusionary and differentiating nature (British Bengali versus non-British Bengali).

In many instances, the dancers, whom I interviewed, separate out a feeling of belonging in a cultural and social sense because they hold a different legal status. A male dancer told me: 'I am not a citizen because I have an Indian passport. As I am hired by a dance company, I can stay and work here, but I do not belong to this country' (Fieldnote, March 15, 2014). Inspired from cultural anthropologist Victor Turner's (1969) conceptualisation of 'liminality',<sup>19</sup> performance studies academic Fadi. F. Skeiker (2010) defines 'liminal citizen' as 'any person who lives in a host community

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<sup>18</sup> Scholars have noted that British Asian women are more reluctant to marry in the subcontinent than their male counterparts (Anwar, 1998) and cited such examples where second generation Bengalis often resist marrying Indian men from the homeland (Biswas, 2011: 161-62).

<sup>19</sup> Turner describes: 'Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (1969: 95).

for a significant period of time without becoming a legal citizen of that community' (2010: 13). Drawing on this definition, I argue that the above dancer is a 'liminal citizen' (Skeiker, 2010) who is 'neither here nor there'.

I also observed how 'flexible citizenship' is becoming a popular concept amongst the dancers whom I interviewed, and many of my respondents have favoured this notion because holding several passports is connected to travelling, creative ventures and capitalism. For example, when I interviewed (Sooraj) Subramaniam for the first time, he told me that: 'I was born in Malaysia, went to Australia and now am an Australian citizen [...] and working here' (personal interview, September 24, 2011). But, in a recent interview, he informed me that:

I am an Australian citizen, which means I travel on an Australian passport. I have a residence permit in Belgium, I can now live and work freely over there for 5 years. My visa will be renewed after every 5 years. Soon I'll be eligible for applying for a Belgian citizenship [...] I come on a special permit for working in Britain (personal interview, March 24, 2014).

Drawing on Ong (1999), I argue that Subramaniam is a 'flexible citizen' who expands the border of nation-states by travelling back and forth and his choices have been driven by utility and cultural capitalism.

It is evident that the articulation of citizenship involves the categorisation and identification of self and others, the building of self-understanding and the construction of patriotic sentiment or belonging with others. The contestation over citizenship emerged when the respondents divulged their newly acquired legal identity through acquisition of a British passport. I argue that 'flexible citizenship' (Ong, 1999) offers the dancers an elastic identity that depends not only on a legal status, but also on access to professional networks and economic resources. Through 'flexible citizenship' the dancers have managed to transcend the narrow bounds of a singular identity implied by the classical concept of citizenship and accommodated plural identities.

### 2.4.3. *When men dance: gendering identity*

During my fieldwork I was curious to hear stories about how gender of the male dancers was defined by others, and how they negotiated their gender identities when they were challenged. So in this section, I borrow from a few selected narratives to examine how identity intersects with the question of gender and sexuality. Here my primary respondents are Mukherjee, Mistry and Subramaniam and my secondary sample consisted of thirteen male dancers.

Throughout my experiences of learning, practising and studying Bharatanatyam dance, I noticed that Bharatanatyam is largely dominated by women dancers and dance classes tend to contain a disproportionately higher number of females compared to male dancers. In Britain, the representation of male dancers is marginal in South Asian dance, but there is a gradual rise in their numbers (Grau, 2001a: 6). In Chapter one, I mentioned about an evening performance event in Leicester in 2011 where all the choreographies were performed by male dancers.<sup>20</sup> Thus male dancing bodies are gaining currency in the UK. Kedhar notes: ‘Rajarani runs ‘an all-male dance company, the only one in the UK’ (2011: 166). However from my fieldwork and other online resources (such as YouTube, Flickr), it is evident that Rajarani has begun to feature female dancers in her choreographies, including *Quick!*, *Bend it...* and *Jham!* (2014). It clearly indicates that the policies and priorities of the dance companies are also shifting with time.

Most of the respondents informed that Bharatanatyam practice is considered as an ‘inappropriate profession for men’, although many female dance artists and dancers also reflected that they experienced similar kind of resistance from their parents when they had decided to pursue career as professional dancers. Male dancers often became

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<sup>20</sup> Back in Chennai, a five-day dance festival titled as “Purush: The Global Dancing Male” was arranged to examine the male dancing body in Indian dance in 2013. Also, the male dancing bodies are gaining attention as a research subject (David, 2010b; Krishnan, 2009).

the object of ridicule in their childhood and adolescence periods. A tension lies in stereotyping the male dancers as homosexual. The stereotype of the male dancer as gay seems partially a result of the historical and traditional parameters of Western dance (Burt, 2009; Hanna, 1988). In my samples gender non-conformity and sexual identity also play a role in constructing the experiences of male dancers, whether in India or in Britain. A few male dancers reported to me that they were teased and insulted for being effeminate or homosexual, whether or not that is how they identify themselves (Gard, 2006). For example, a dancer recounted incidents from his middle school in Britain about how his peers thought him to be a gay: ‘When they had seen me perform on the stage with my make-up on, foundation on my face or in an Indian dress...I won’t say that is racism but their attitude was: ‘He looks like a gay’ (Skype interview, November 27, 2012). Performing dance in concerts wearing an Indian costume and facial make-up puts his sexuality into question. On several occasions, his relatives have passed scornful remarks about his engagement with dance:

Earlier, my family looked down upon my dancing [...] They probably thought: ‘He’s a *chakka* [means a eunuch in Kannada and Gujarati] or a gay’. I had so many people from my family who have passed negative comments on dance, but I never cared about what they had said. I was quite stubborn and my steadfastness proved good [...] (Skype interview, November 27, 2012).

Anthropologist Serena Nanda (1990) provides anthropological and linguistic perspectives on the lives of *hijras* (eunuch) in India and argues that they are ‘neither man nor woman’. According to Nanda (1990), the *hijras* form a third gender and their identities are defined primarily through the inability to reproduce. The above dancer’s statement contests his gender identity in a dichotomous way. His identity is constructed as a homosexual (indicated by the word ‘gay’), and again, as a ‘third gender’ figure who is ‘neither man nor woman’ (indicated by the word ‘*chakka*’). This liminality (‘neither a man nor woman’) expands the construction of masculinity by challenging the stability

of his gender identity. Both sexuality and gender are components of subjectivities and these indicate that gender identities are not fixed, but always in flux.

As mentioned earlier, male dancers are often ostracised because dance is largely perceived as a 'non man-ish activity'. A male dancer, who came to the UK in 2011, had received similar mockery from his friends in India in his middle and high schools: 'I had curly hair and large eyes, so my classmates always used to call me 'ladies'... A friend of mine asked me once: 'Can't you walk like a real man'? [...] (My translation from Hindi, personal interview, July 6, 2012). Here the dancer's masculinity is constructed as a separate entity from sexuality in holding a stereotypical belief that men should not behave like women, no matter what their sexual orientation is. This is in agreement with gender theorist Judith Butler's (2002) argument that the male and female bodies are not biological, but that they are constructed through repeated performative acts, following a behaviour that is socially and culturally accepted.

Most of the male dancers whom I interviewed commented that their fathers did not see dance as a respectable profession. Dance is often looked down upon as an inferior profession due to the fact that they receive comparatively less pay than other professionals, such as medical practitioners, business managers or engineers as reported by many of my respondents. Initially a biology school teacher, Subramaniam happened to choose dance as his full-time career. In an interview, he talked about his family's love for the arts which is set in contrast to his familial expectation about his career choice:

My grandmother [...] pushed me and my sister to learn dance. My parents didn't have any opportunity to learn or not anyone from my parents' generation was either artists or dancers but they appreciated art forms. But I don't think they had ever expected me to take up dance as a profession (personal interview, September 24, 2011).



This contradiction runs in the vein of many families, including mine. Mistry, on the contrary, expressed his satisfaction, especially the support and encouragement which he had received from his parents:

In fact, my father acted as my taxi driver (jokingly) who took me to dance classes [...] They sponsored my trip to India for dance training [...] My mom had a doubt about how I'm going to make my living [...] because when it comes to watch Indian dance, [Indian] people don't spend money so easily for concerts (Skype interview, November 27, 2012).

But, I note that the primary concern about making a living through dance profession is always there amongst parents as expressed above. Similarly Mukherjee, like Mistry, also received a great deal of enthusiasm from his parents (who are also artists) towards learning dance which is an unusual response against the strict gender codes (in Kolkata).

Amongst them, a few dancers informed me that although at certain point of time their fathers who have remained highly apathetic towards dancing were gradually seen to change their attitudes: 'My father was very unhappy with my decision of becoming a professional dancer [...] However after coming here [to London], I find that my parents' outlook on dance is somewhat changing (my translation from Hindi, Fieldnote, July 6, 2012). When I asked him the reason for this change, the reply was: 'Because of the money which I send them every month from here. When you convert pound into Indian rupee, it multiplies almost 90 times. And, because of my work, their economic condition has substantially improved' (my translation from Hindi, Fieldnote, July 6, 2012).

Mistry also narrated how after winning a Boogie Woogie, a dance competition on television, his relatives back home and friends in Britain have considerably altered their attitudes too:

When I won a competition *Boogie Woogie* in television,<sup>21</sup> I was doing lots of interviews, workshops, performances and when they [relatives] saw that, they

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<sup>21</sup> *Boogie Woogie* was a popular dance show on Indian Television hosted by Sony Entertainment Television. Hiten Mistry won the Sony Entertainment Television Asia's Boogie Woogie Senior UK and International Champion in 2007. A glimpse of the show may be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfJIL8fX9V8>.

changed their mind. They began to say: '*yeh mera mama ka ladka hay!*' ('This is my uncle's son') [My translation from Hindi]. People, who used to hate me earlier, said: 'We know him. He's in our class!' (Skype interview, November 27, 2012).

It is another example of contradiction that people engage in. Mistry's recognition as a performer began to weigh more than his gender identity and this sense of honour is undeniably graced by his appearance on television.

The articulation of identities of the male dancers arguably opens up the debate for the ways in which their gender is constructed by others. I have discussed how the male dancers become an object of vulnerable target of misunderstandings, gestural or verbal abuse and hatred. There are also evidences of bullying and sex confusion of male dancers in high schools. Despite their marginalisation, it is interesting to note that these male dancers have remained unperturbed by the gender biases in their contextual social setting and continued to practice dance for asserting their 'real' and 'artistic' selves.

In the following section I go on to unpack the term 'BrAsian' in the light of existing literature and discuss the construction and negotiation of BrAsian identity, drawing upon the narratives of the audiences.

## **2.5. Who is a BrAsian?**

The audience members whom I interviewed at various venues have identified them as 'British Asian', 'BrAsian', 'British', 'Asian', 'Indian' and so on, but in this section, I restrict the discussion to analyse how BrAsianness is constructed by them. While interviewing audiences at performances in venues, such as The Place, Southbank Centre and Bhavan in London and the Curve Theatre in Leicester, I was curious to know how the term 'BrAsian'<sup>22</sup> is used not only to depict the South Asian contemporary music chiefly by the second and third generation British Asians, but also in their self-identification process. Generally, BrAsian refers to people who have their ancestry in

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<sup>22</sup> Both the spellings, 'BrAsian' and 'Brasian', exist in literature. Whilst quoting from literature, I retain the original spelling used by the respective authors and when discussing, I use 'BrAsian' for homogeneity.

South Asia or are the descendants of South Asian settlers in Britain (Ali et al., 2006). Most of the second and third generation audiences, who identified them as BrAsians, traced their roots to India (Punjab, New Delhi, Gujarat), Pakistan and Bangladesh, including a very few people of a mixed-lineage.<sup>23</sup> Some believed that these dances should still be labelled as ‘Indian’, regardless of the involvement and participation of various dancers across cultures in them. Notably, there lies a gulf between labelling practice and identifying themselves.

A few researchers, including anthropologist Raminder Kaur and sociologist Virinder S. Kalra (1996), argue that the phrase ‘British Asian’ is problematic as it essentialises identity by prioritising the British signifier. Thus term BrAsian is neologised as a response, as sociologist Salman Sayyid (2006) explains, to destabilise this existing East/West dyad. Sociologist Roxy Harris (2006), in a similar vein, moves away from binary expressions like ‘British Asian’ in his study of language and identity in young British Asians in East London. Drawing on Hall’s (1992) notion of ‘cultural hybridity’, Harris uses ‘Brasian’ to indicate the emergence of new ethnicities/identities in conjunction with language use. As a hybridised terminology, BrAsian has dismantled a racist and a nationalist discourse.<sup>24</sup> All these indicate that the BrAsian label has intrigued many scholars so far.

Sayyid argues that ‘the use of British as prefix or suffix establishes a superficial relationship between British and Asian’ (2006: 7), and thus recognises ‘the need for a category that points one in a direction away from established accounts of national identities and ethnicised minorities’ (2006: 5). Morphologically, BrAsian is a hybrid term, but to Sayyid it is ‘not as an easy decomposition of the British and Asian’ but ‘an

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<sup>23</sup> In India the mixed breed of Indian and British came to be known as ‘Eurasian’ or ‘half-castes’ in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the term ‘Anglo-Indian’ was used in the national census for describing such inter-racial mixes (Carton, 2000; Mijares, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> See Sharma (2006) for music, Ranasinha (2007) for literature, Kaur & Terracciano (2006) for plays and Sawhney (2001) for films.

intermediate terrain on the cusp between West and Non-West' (2006: 7). As an in-between space, BrAsian is dichotomous because it aims to withdraw the colonial hierarchical supremacy, although cannot expunge it fully. He further states that 'BrAsian needs to be conceptualised in the Derridean sense of being 'under erasure' (Derrida, 1976)' (Sayyid, 2006: 7). Borrowing from philosopher Martin Heidegger's conceptualisation, Derrida (1997 [1967]) situated 'under erasure' within the context of deconstructive literary theory to signify it as a word which is inaccurate and yet indispensable to utter. Literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated *sous rature* as 'under erasure' in her "Translator's Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*" (1997). Spivak argues that Derrida's erasure is a gesture which 'implies 'both this and that' as well as "neither this nor that" undoing the oppositions and the hierarchy between the legible and the erased' (1997: 320). Placing BrAsianness 'under erasure' is to acknowledge that it is not devoid of problems; rather, it points to the fact that the previous identity is not yet effaced, while offering multiple possibilities to examine the relation among the Self, Other and nation-states. In situating my respondents with this deconstructive critique, I reveal shortly in this section how BrAsianness embed the problems of the postcolonial subject identities as fragmented, multiple, ambiguous and shifting in various contexts and how such constructions can even be problematic.

Contrary to Sayyid who posits BrAsian as a postcolonial concept, Harris views it as a new ethnicity from the global perspective. Both Harris (2006) and Sayyid (2006), celebrate the term because it overcomes the essentialising dichotomies of the increasingly popular term, such as 'British Asian'. As a 'fused' term 'it captures the rich and elaborate interwoven enactment of ethnicities in the interstitial textures of everyday life' (Harris, 2006: 13). This, in turn, provokes unresolved queries: to what extent hybrid identities merge 'disparate elements' and what are the alternatives when

identities are not hybridised. Sayyid himself admits that ‘BrAsian is not the correct answer to the question of British Asian subjectivities, but nor is there a better answer we can turn to [...]’ (2006: 7).

According to Harris, BrAsian ‘suggests a continuous flow of everyday life and cultural practices in which, at any given moment, both British and particular South Asian derived elements are always co-present’ (2006: 1-2). The phrase ‘at any given moment’ frees this label from the bounds of time and makes it more flexible. This is reinstated when Harris states that this term ‘is a formulation embracing openness, variability and unpredictability’ (Harris, 2006: 13). In this respect, Harris echoes Sayyid who holds that ‘by placing BrAsian under erasure we accept that BrAsian is not a fully formed name that marshalls all the various forms of experiences of South Asian settlers’ (2006: 8). Sayyid, like Harris, also refers to its potential in enfolding the variety of experiences within the BrAsian community rather than homogenising them.

In the field of performing arts, Kaur and visual artist and scholar, Alda Terracciano (2006) posit Indian dance in Britain within the binary of South Asian/BrAsian and argue that Jeyasingh forges a new ‘BrAsian’ identity in Britain through her new choreographies, disrupting the binary of East and West. Drawing on Jeyasingh’s works, autobiographical notes and archival sources, they state that ‘her creations are not a process of bringing together two discrete entities, the Eastern and the Western, but something much more heterogeneous, a dynamic and fluid response to her experiences’ (Kaur & Terracciano, 2006: 347). This fits into the definitions laid by Sayyid and Harris. In the same chapter, Kaur and Terracciano raise a pertinent question drawing on Hall’s argument (1996) whether ‘the arts should be described as South Asian/BrAsian by virtue of their motifs or their practitioners?’ (2006: 356) without delving deep inside the query.

I now illustrate how conflicting perceptions, interpretations and meanings are ascribed to representations of BrAsians by my research participants. When I asked them to explain the term, most of them agreed that BrAsianness does not exist in a pure state; rather, it is ‘a blend of Indian and British cultures’. From my fieldnotes I noted that most of my respondents have a sense of belonging to two communities - they asserted hybrid identities that simultaneously traced their Indian, Bangladeshi, Punjabi, Sikh<sup>25</sup> and North Indian lineage along with their Britishness in terms of birth rights and citizenship. For example, a respondent paradoxically swayed between the two cultures and said: ‘I consider myself BrAsian because my parents are *obviously* from here, but they are *originally* from Bangladesh’ (my italics, Fieldnote, October 28, 2011). Also, this argument highlights that her identity is not static but practised geographically. Throughout our discussion, she mentioned Britain as her ‘motherland’ (Fieldnote, June 23, 2013) and situated herself on the cusp of the divide between West and Non-West (Sayyid, 2006).

Another participant claimed to be a BrAsian, also described his mixed racial identity and priorities:

Well, I am a BrAsian because I have a mixed parentage. My dad is from India and my mom is from Britain. Theirs was a love marriage [...] I love British culture, but I prefer to have Indian food when I’m in India. I don’t like the way how food is being served there. My cousins have often ridiculed me as I didn’t know how to use my hands while eating [...] I got very upset on them, but then I realised that they are not rich and cultured (Fieldnote, February 21, 2014).

This respondent is intimately entwined with English cultures and identity, and constructs a set of differences that separates BrAsian from Indian culture. He prioritises the English table manners which is different from ‘theirs’ (relatives in India). BrAsians’ cultural superiority is a sign of the perceived incompatibility between middle-class Indian values and set customs. His statement oscillates between the affirmative (‘I

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<sup>25</sup> The Sikh community has migrated to Britain from India and via East Africa (Ballard, 1972; Drury, 1991; Singh, 2010).

prefer to have Indian food’) and negative (I don’t like the way food is being served’). He is torn between feelings (‘upset’ and compassionate understanding of the Other as ‘not rich and cultured’). Here and there and the Self and the Other are deconstructed and the lines separating them are erased. This dialectic is an interesting illustration of how multiple identities of a person can come ‘under erasure’, as conceptualised in Sayyid (2006: 7).

A participant who saw herself as a believer of Hinduism, asserted: ‘Well, I’m a BrAsian because of my family. My dad is British, but he is also mixed and my mom is from India. I have learned yoga and Bharatanatyam, and I don’t mind mixing the stuffs’ (Fieldnote, October 28, 2011). In this case, ‘BrAsianness’ is articulated as a cultural and racial hybridity, intersecting with religious identity. Another female respondent, whose mother is ‘British White’ and father has a ‘Punjabi’ lineage, narrated:

I have never visited India [...] and keep no contact with my paternal relatives, but sometimes I speak with my grandma on phone [...] When I was a child, I used to enjoy Bhangra dance and other Indian festivals, but as I grew up, I got inclined more towards western dance forms (Fieldnote, March 15, 2014).

This respondent distances herself from her Indian roots, although she feels an affinity to her grandmother. The questions I asked myself: why does she remember her Punjabi lineage? Why does she call her grandma back in Punjab when she never intends to visit her? How does she shift her affinity from Bhangra to ‘Western dance forms’? Erasure in the above narrative does not make the presence (of her race, new ethnicity, love for her new culture) to disappear from the absence (from family bondage, belonging and old ethnicity). I argue that this ambiguous bi-focality ‘signifies the impossibility of a hyphenated identity’ (Sayyid, 2006: 7).

In another interview, a respondent who has a Punjabi lineage told me: ‘I love BrAsian music and bands in clubs ... BrAsian means something exotic, but it also refers to our cultural life here’ (Fieldnote, February 23, 2014). As mentioned earlier, BrAsians are the members of settler communities who ‘articulate a significant part of their

identity in terms of South Asian heritage', (Sayyid, 2006: 6) at the same time, they are neither simply Asian nor British and thus have the potential to disrupt the balance of power away from the national majority.

Another Bangladeshi respondent who identified herself as BrAsian unfolded social relations among groups that configure different experiences of exclusion and inclusion with the place of living. She informed me about her exclusion due to her skin colour and how often it had stemmed from her 'inability to dress like British people' at her work place (personal interview, November 12, 2013). From our conversation, I derive that although she asserts the inclusion of this new ethnicity in the mainstream culture, she simultaneously points out the real struggles that lie beneath the surface. This is a construction of BrAsian identity through 'lived experience' (Harris, 2006).

Sayyid argues that BrAsians are ironic citizens because they experience 'persistent and deep-seated skepticism about the dominant mythology of Britishness' (2006: 8). In the above case, the dynamics operate as a double-edged fact: first, although she is born in Britain, failure to integrate into the mainstream British culture (her act of dressing and skin colour) makes her an 'ironic' citizen. Second, throughout our conversation she struggled to detach herself from the essentialist fragments of the 'Non-West' (for example, 'in my culture', 'in my religion' and my 'home' in Bangladesh), which dismantle the boundaries of inclusiveness/exclusiveness. She neither neglects histories (ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural identity and her imagined 'home' which is in Bangladesh within which she finds herself secured) nor suppresses the contradictory nature of BrAsianness (power hierarchy, the politics of positioning and the dialogic relationship between the Self and the Other). Thus 'ironic citizenship' in practice is far more complicated than the allocation of people to nation-states.

A few respondents constructed their BrAsian identities through the notion of citizenship, national identity, gender and working network. A respondent having a



Pakistani ancestral connection told me: ‘It means I belong to this new generation. New means...well, I’m a citizen of this country and I work in this country’ (Fieldnote, May 30, 2014). This respondent, contrary to the earlier one, sees BrAsianness as a site of inventiveness and idealises BrAsian as having an equal power structure and rights to perform democratic functions. But this newness itself is dynamic and under construction, due to its infinite and unstable nature. In this sense, BrAsianness is an open-ended discourse, repeatedly shifting. Governed by neither the inclusive logic of both nor the exclusive logic of either (Sayyid, 2006), it captures something in-between.

Another audience (after knowing that my husband resides in India) from the same family shared: ‘We are highly educated and went to school of repute in this country...Women in our family are contributing equally in running our house’ (Fieldnote, October 28, 2011). This respondent perceived education, material prosperity and economic independence of women as cultural assets in BrAsians. The limited narratives that I present and discuss here suggest that BrAsian is emerging as a new ethnicity that is not rooted in one common past but is based on a form of cultural collectivity which recognises differences, oppositions, lived experiences and fragmentation. By describing BrAsian as a fusion of different nations, both Sayyid (2006) and Harris (2006), put forward an alternative discourse that invites a re-examination of power structures where a sense of belonging and legitimacy has transcended the bounds of ancestral ethnic purity. Despite its problematic connotation, the term is gaining currency in practice and is valorised in scholarship because it ‘is certainly not intended to be just another homogenising term, nor does it imply assimilation’ (Harris, 2006: 13) but a flexible term that is always ‘under erasure’ (Sayyid, 2006) to accommodate differences.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter has examined how the existing dance labels are debated by various ranges of people involved in the contemporary dance scenario. The narratives from various groups have demonstrated how the South Asian dance label continues to be a contested term, also evident in the previous literature (Grau, 2001a; Lopez y Royo, 2004; Meduri, 2008a, 2008b; Prickett, 2004, 2007). I have revealed how the dance artists and dancers under examination articulate their multiple identities, entwined with the questions of race, ethnicity, renaming, citizenship and gender. The narrative analysis has indicated that their identities are not unified (Hall, 1992, 1996) but ‘layered’ (Anzaldúa, 2000), and are complex, sometimes contradictory and thus difficult to homogenise. By bringing in the discourse of BrAsian in the concluding section, this chapter has activated a discussion on the rise of a new, hybridised ethnicity. Drawing on the conceptualisation of BrAsianness as a postcolonial construct (Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006) and narrative analysis, I have argued that BrAsians are the new subjects who not only blur the stable identities of the past, but set forth a new paradigm of self-identification in relation to the cultural systems, disrupting the Self/Other relation. In this chapter, ‘under erasure’ has also functioned as a writing tool which insisted on the inadequacies of the labels discussed, however at the same time, offers room to analyse them.

While I recognise the indeterminacy that postmodern identities call for, I am equally intrigued to observe how the dance artists have drawn a set of inclusion of exclusion to challenge and broaden their practices. Hence in the following chapter, I go on to further engage with how the dance artists’ displacements and their ruptured identities have affected their choreographic works in terms of erasing borders.

## Chapter 3

### Porous borders: performing hybridity

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter engages with how hybridity is manifested as a choreographic tool in contemporary practice and attempts to examine how such practice intersects with dominant local and historical discourses and institutions. With the increase in the global travels and flow of ideas, the dance artists are increasingly seen to bring in new elements from various sources to create their works. For this, I argued in favour of an adoption of the binary organic/intentional hybridity as an analytical tool as this model responds to the need for adopting multiple practices through conscious inclusion of movements across cultures. The following research questions are investigated for the purpose of the chapter: how is the organic and intentional hybrid practice defined in this context? How are such new works critiqued? To investigate how such practice is questioned, resolved and re-imagined, the following choreographies are analysed: *Dark Matter* (2006; full length: 12 minutes) by Shamita Ray, *na asat* (2010; full length: 12 minutes) by Anusha Subramanyam, *The Shiver* by Subathra Subramaniam (2010; full length: 25 minutes) and *Sivaloka* (2010; full length: 12 minutes, video length: 3:31 minutes) by Mayuri Boonham. Building on a Bakhtinian binary model and its postcolonial and cultural re-interpretations, I argue that the term hybridity in practice is largely becoming synonymous with ‘contemporary dance’, constantly blurring the binary of ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’.

Earlier in this thesis, I mentioned how cultural hybridity is often seen as a potential threat, leading to the destabilisation of essentialised identities. Also, I narrated a few autobiographical anecdotes and indicated how hybrid practices displaced the idea of purity. As mentioned previously in Chapter one, the comment by the Bhavan’s founder-director Krishnamurti indicates how he saw any hybrid practice as ‘otherness’.

On another occasion, a mother of a learner, whom I interviewed at London's Bhavan, told me: 'I want my daughter to learn pure (stressed) Bharatanatyam and proper *margam* [the complete repertoire of Bharatanatyam], not some fusion steps from here and there' (personal interview, May 9, 2011). Another mother respondent, whom I interviewed in Wembley, expressed her dissatisfaction after she came to know about my research topic and subject: 'We really can't understand how a pure Bharatanatyam dance artist can be interested to work on such topics and those dancers!' (personal interview, February 12, 2011).<sup>1</sup> So initially I was interested in looking at how the line of 'purity' ruptures and hybrid practice begins in different groups of people. When conducting interviews, I was attentive to the question of whose interests are served by labelling works in terms of 'fusion', rather than 'purity' in specific instances.

While interviewing the dance artists, I observed that they have privileged hybridisation under the influence of various funding bodies. Simultaneously, I recorded how this privileged experience of hybrid practice was celebrated. The dance artists under scrutiny have not used the word 'hybridity' to define their practice. In fact, they defined their practice as 'mixture', 'contemporary' and 'eclectic'. In addition, I also noted they use verbs, for example, 'fuse', 'blend', 'juxtapose' and contrast to define their activity in bringing in different elements and label this act of hybridisation as 'contemporary', 'theatrical' and 'modern'. So the problem revolves around the question of methodology: why should I advocate a term that is not used by the practitioners? As the nature of the choreographies discussed has greatly varied, my initial intention was to see how this framework could be adopted to examine a triangulated relation among hybridity, practice and appreciation. Bakhtin himself favoured the lens of hybridity in analysing novels because this is 'broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror' (1981

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<sup>1</sup> See *Performing Indian Dance in America: Interrogating Modernity, Tradition, and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Srinivasan, 2003).

[1935]: 414-16). The strength of the Bakhtinian framework of organic/intentional hybridity is that it restricts any 'closure' of ideas, which keeps pushing the boundaries of practice to its margin, engendering multiplicity of meanings and aesthetic choices. Therefore what has taken place is a journey from intention to outcome through an unfolding of theoretical and practical concerns, which inform and influence each other.

While watching performances in London and some other cities in the UK, I recorded how these contemporary practitioners have blended ideas and techniques from diverse dances along with interdisciplinary aspects, languages and religions in their dances. From archival and online research I came across the transformative capacity of the South Asian dance companies to control matters that create a hierarchy between dance traditions and open new spaces. For instance, a call for an audition on the South Asian Dance Alliance's Facebook webpage advertised on February 6, 2013 attracted my attention:

Sadhana Dance [Subathra Subramaniam's dance company] [is] looking for one female and one male dancer to be part of their next work, a collaboration between choreographer Subathra Subramaniam and a surgeon [...] Dancers must have 2 years professional experience in Contemporary Dance training and *at least some knowledge of Bharata Natyam* (my italics).<sup>2</sup>

The orchestrations in practice that are created out of mixing forms did not face any questions regarding 'purity' or authenticity (because of the funding body's definition), but it is also not neutral. It clearly privileges Western Contemporary dance over Bharatanatyam that shapes practice by saying "I am me' in someone else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]): 315).

Prior to this, David's report *Negotiating Natyam* (2005) discusses how *Akademi* functions as a producing institution for commissioning new choreographies by emerging young performers. The relation between choreographic practices and policies of the funding bodies are inseparable; in fact, several dancers' narratives have clearly

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/southasiandancealliance?ref=ts&fref=ts>, (accessed: 06/10/2013)

indicated how an institutional marketing agenda affects their flexibilities and choices. Akademi's *Daredevas* is aimed at featuring upcoming artists as stated: '*Daredevas* features the brightest young talents in contemporary Indian dance. *British based with International roots* (my italics), these artists provide a fresh take on traditional Indian dance styles, showing a mixture of bold and adventurous choreographies'.<sup>3</sup> Thus *Daredevas* has become a unique locus for raising the profile of South Asian young artists by creating its own version of South Asian identity. By overlapping Britishness and Indianness, I argue that Akademi's *Daredevas* heralds a new liberal hybrid practice and opens up room for intentional hybridity.

I came to know from personal interviews that trainings in various dance styles have led Mukherjee (Bharatanatyam and Classical Ballet), Ray (Bharatanatyam, Western Contemporary dance and Classical Ballet) and Kasturi (Bharatanatyam and Kathak) to mix movements in their works. For example, Ray's *Dark Matter* (2006) blends contemporary idioms with the recitation of *shollukattus*<sup>4</sup>. Although this choreographic hybridity is arguably perceived as intentional by many of the audience members, to Ray it is organically devised as she told me in our various meetings. Thus the borders between practice and appreciation operate as a series of dialogic relationships marked by internal fissures and slippages, and highlight some of the problems of bounded definitions of practice.

In my next section, I contextualise how hybridity is conceived variously by scholars from various fields as well as South Asian dance studies, and following that, I discuss the Bakhtinian (1981 [1935]) concept of organic and intentional hybridity. Through detailed analyses of the dances, study of press reviews, programme flyers and personal interviews, this chapter reveals how the dance artists hybridise their practices

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <http://www.akademi.co.uk/productions/daredevas.php#8>, (accessed: 11/11/ 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Rhythmic and metrical sequence to which elemental dance (*nritta*) is performed in Bharatanatyam dance is called *shollukattus*.

and generate a pluralistic application of hybridity that paves the way for a wider application of this conceptualisation. With this in mind, I shall now continue by embarking upon a more detailed examination of the term hybridity.

## **3.2. Background**

### ***3.2.1. Hybridity: a contested terrain***

The term hybridity has been employed by various researchers since the 1990s as one of the most popularised leitmotifs in diasporic and transnational studies (Bhabha, 1994; Bailey et al., 2002; Clifford, 1994; Mitchell, 1997). Originally, drawn from genetics to characterise an end product created out of the crossing of two species (Stross, 1999; Baaz & Palmberg, 2001), the term hybridity in colonial discourse has a derogatory connotation because it is imbued in nineteenth-century eugenicist and scientific-racist thought (Young, 1995). Chambers defines hybridity in the context of diaspora as ‘the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or ‘hybrid identities’’ (1996: 50). On a similar note to Chambers, globalisation theorist Jan van Pieterse defines hybridity as ‘a wide register of multiple identity, cross-over, pick-‘n’-mix, boundary-crossing experiences and styles’ (2001: 221). Cultural theorist Marwan M. Kraidy considers hybridity as a ‘fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities...which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries’ (2005: 5). From the global perspective, this term is very challenging because, as Pieterse argues, ‘hybridity is often held as inauthentic because it problematises boundaries’ (2001: 220).

In postcolonial discourse, the notion that any culture or identity is pure or essential is disputable (Ashcroft et al., 1998). Bhabha argues that ‘all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity’ and no culture is ‘pure’ or ‘essential’ (1985: 156). Likewise, Hall professes a similar opinion: ‘*modern nations are all cultural*

*hybrids*' (italics in original, 2005: 617), and therefore abundant attention to hybridity in literature has remained problematic for many scholars. Gilroy, a cultural theorist, expressed his concern for the overuse of this term: 'Who the fuck wants purity? [...] the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities [...] I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity [...] that's why I try not to use the word hybrid [...]' (1994: 54-5). Several social scientists and cultural theorists have agreed that 'because of its ambiguity, the term hybridity is bothersome' (Kapchan & Strong, 1999: 240).<sup>5</sup> However the problematic associations with this term do not prevent academics from celebrating it as a conceptual apparatus for eradicating essentialist notions of culture.

Postcolonial studies emerged as a reaction to the notion of fixed identities within the binary colonial thinking. For instance, hybridisation receives further development in Bhabha's (1994) notion of 'third space' with regard to cultural exchange.<sup>6</sup> Bhabha introduced the concept of hybridity to challenge the essentialist view by arguing that 'all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity' (Bhabha, 1990: 211). The meeting of two cultures can generate a new understanding of cultural distinctiveness where each culture 'retains its presence, but it is no longer a representation of an essence; it is now a partial presence' (Bhabha, 1994: 176). Bhabha's 'third space' is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity' (1994: 21) and 'enables Other positions to emerge' (Bhabha in Rutherford, 1990: 211). Bhabha argues that the new hybrid constructions contain multiple voices, practices and feelings and set up 'new structures of authority, new political initiatives' (Bhabha in Rutherford: 1990: 211). Thus the third space is not a physical space, but a

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<sup>5</sup> Other words, such as 'syncretism', 'fusion', 'acculturation', 'intertextuality', 'bricolage', 'mestizaje', 'creolization', 'transculturation', 'anthropophagy' and many of such kinds have been used by scholars, with similar or divergent meanings to suggest the cross-cultural processes (Burke, 2009: 34).

<sup>6</sup> See the application of Bhabha's 'third space' in contemporary Kathak dance choreographer Akram Khan's works (Mitra, 2011).



‘separate space’ through which ‘newness enters the world’ (Bhabha, 1994: 227). It provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that ‘initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation’ (Bhabha, 1994: 1).

Hybridity theorists have had to grapple with all kinds of resistance, yet this term is considered important because, as anthropologist Pnina Werbner argues: ‘Transnational links are by their very nature ‘hybrid’ in the sense that they are boundary-crossing connections [...]’ (2004: 897). Thus within a diasporic setting, hybridity is not seen as a mixture or impure, but celebrated ‘as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference’ (Hoogvelt, 1997: 18). Hybridity is not the solution, but alerts us to the difficulty of living with differences as argued by cultural theorist Ien Ang (2003: 8). Similarly, cultural theorist Rita Felski agrees that hybridity is a key part of this new modelling that is entwined within the coordinates of migrant identity tackling differences and linking the host connections:

Metaphors of hybridity and the like not only recognize differences within the subject, [...] but also addresses connections between subjects by recognizing affiliations, cross-pollinations, echoes and repetitions, thereby unseating difference from a position of absolute privilege (1997: 12).

The above quote situates the metaphor of hybridity as a flexible lens that privileges the scope of cross-fertilisation of elements that can have equal stature or the space of the asymmetrical power relations. In this sense, hybridity, as an imaginary of social encounter, expresses the constructions of difference that are divergent, conflicting and irreconcilable. Thus the experience of the hybrid is not ‘a question of simple shaking hands, of happy, harmonious merger and fusion’ (Ang, 2003: 151) and this heterogeneity calls for a new conceptualisation of social phenomena in which the effects of differentiation should be taken into consideration.

Moving towards the research question posed in this account, it is important to consider how assimilation as well as differentiation takes place in the contemporary

choreographies. Prior to entering into any such discussion, I examine in the following section how hybridity is deployed by various scholars while critiquing the South Asian dance.

### ***3.2.2. Hybridity and South Asian dance scholarship***

Hybridity is a much referenced analytical lens, particularly in South Asian dance studies in Britain (Briginshaw, 2001; Lopez y Royo, 2004; Meduri, 2011). I mentioned in Chapter one that Briginshaw (2001) studies hybridity, especially from the contexts of migration, identity and city architecture and complicates it with the theorisation of ‘nomadic subjectivity’ to critique Jeyasingh’s *Duets*. Borrowing from Bhabha’s ‘third space’, Briginshaw argues that ‘[t]hrough dismantling the oversimplified binaries of East and West, Jeyasingh reveals complexities and interconnections that exist on the borderlines in the many spaces between’ (2001: 99). She concludes that Jeyasingh’s *Duets* expands national and physical boundaries, and resists any attempts to fix notions of Indianness/South Asianness.

Lopez y Royo recognises hybridity as a choreographic device in South Asian contemporary dancing in Britain, which fuses ‘South Asian classical dance genres with western contemporary dance techniques’ (2004: n.p.). She professes that the South Asian dancers in Britain are provoked to create hybrid works by the funding bodies ‘to produce innovative, challenging work’ (Lopez y Royo, 2004: n.p.). Previously, Grau attested that hybridity in practice was ‘synonymous to ‘challenging’ and something ‘innovatory’, and therefore thought worthy of funding (2001a: 10). The artists are ‘expected to engage with a western dance aesthetics - constantly pushing boundaries in terms of presentation, stagecraft, music, the unfolding and development of the theme...informed by western performance standards’, states Lopez y Royo (2004: n.p.). And this new work should be ‘different, never-seen-before work, to experiment with hybridity, to break boundaries, bowing to western modernist and postmodernist

aesthetics that seem to reign unchallenged' (Lopez y Royo, 2004: n.p.). Most of my respondents contended that the mixing of genres was the key to securing funding for the production of contemporary South Asian dance, and a few dancers thought that one may not attract the attention of the mainstream British audience without mixing dance forms.

Meduri (2008a; 2008b) interprets the complexity of Bharatanatyam from both the local and global perspectives in the UK and attempts to articulate an identity of the Indian/British artists through their hybrid practice. In her account, a new performative hybrid identity is not disputed; rather, she liberates this term from negative articulations of it as a diluted version of pure practice:

Jeyasingh articulated a new, aesthetic vision for "contemporary" South Asian dance in Britain by deconstructing *Bharatanatyam* dance vocabulary and urbanized the classical form of combining it with Western postmodern movement genres' (Meduri, 2008b: 305).

Meduri (2008a; 2011) privileges the hyphenated identities that Jeyasingh's choreographies create as a product of the mixture and multiple origins as opposed to the purity demanded by single root identities and lineage of traditional practice.

Extending the influence of the hybrid model, O'Shea (2008) illustrates how Jeyasingh's artistic subjectivities have blurred fixed distinctions between classicism and contemporariness in practice. Through analyses of Jeyasingh's choreographies including *Romance...with Footnotes* (1993), *Phantasmaton* (2002) and *Exit/No Exit* (2006), she argues that Jeyasingh's dances allow formation of new conceptions that draw on multiple and re-configured histories. Like Meduri, researcher Shezad Khalil (2009) examines Jeyasingh's choreography *Faultline* (2007), a piece inspired by Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani* (2006), which explores the British Asian 'street' culture of Hounslow, West London, articulated through an amalgamation of codified gestures from Bharatanatyam, contemporary dance, ballet, street dance and Capoeira.

Thus hybridity has undeniably gained currency in contemporary Bharatanatyam practice as well as in dance scholarship.<sup>7</sup> It is theorised as a marker of dislocation and displacement and informed by postcolonial and cultural theories (Briginshaw, 2001). As a choreographic device hybridity dismantles purity and allows a western hegemony as argued by Lopez y Royo (2004: n.p.), and also acts as a means for transnational artists not only to assert their identities, but to redefine hybridised cultural identity in their migratory land (Meduri, 2008b, 2011). I explicate later drawing upon my research-participants' choreographies that hybridity in practice is heterogeneous and always undergoing transformations. But prior to this, Bakhtin's binary classification model that comprises organic and intentional hybridity and how this model is appropriated by a few postcolonial scholars are discussed, while touching upon briefly on Bhabha's 'third space'. Finally, I demonstrate how these dance artists reconfigure a new, dialectic aesthetics of dance by drawing upon four dances. I argue that the border between organic and intentional hybridity is ever shifting, constructed by subjects and practice.

### **3.3. Analytical framework**

#### ***3.3.1. Organic and intentional hybridity***

The beginning of the twentieth century saw hybridity as a term that moved beyond the biological and racial framework and entered into linguistic and cultural areas. Earlier in Chapter one, I introduced Bakhtin's notion of hybridity in which he argued that when the two voices mix, a new rhetoric emerges; and these different points of views are what give birth to new 'potentials' and 'promote renewal and enrichment' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 271). Bakhtin developed a linguistic version of hybridity that was related to the concepts of polyphony, dialogism and heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, hybridisation is 'a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single

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<sup>7</sup> See *Performing Indian Dance in Malaysia* (Thiagarajan, 2012) for multi-faceted artistic hybridities as practiced by Bharatanatyam dancers in Malaysia.

utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor' (1981 [1935]: 358). Two or more dissimilar utterances constitute 'heteroglossia'. Polyphony literally means 'multi-voicedness' (Bakhtin, 1984 [1929]: 279). Bakhtin defined polyglossia as 'the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system' (1981 [1935]: 431).

In his binary model Bakhtin proposed hybridisation as organic and intentional. While organic hybridity, for Bakhtin, is an 'unconscious' one (1981 [1935]): 360) being assimilated more naturally, intentional hybridity is a 'collision between different points of view on the world' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]): 360). He argued that organic hybridity is an evolutionary process which is also a subtle negotiation of cultural contacts that go unnoticed, but is 'pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world...' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 360). As opposed to this, intentional hybridity is an encounter that threatens to disrupt social order. I analyse later in this chapter how Ray, Subramaniam and Boonham are using different languages from various repertoires, creating what Bakhtin (1981 [1935]) called a 'double-voiced discourse'.

Bakhtinian ideas have been implemented while interpreting hybridity in the mixed expression of postcolonial literature, combining western and non-western genres, languages and literature (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002). In his postcolonial studies, Young critiques the Bakhtinian model as racial and double-edged and one that posits antagonistic elements of blending and separation together. Young explains that:

Bakhtin's doubled form of hybridity therefore offers a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically (1995: 22).

In organic hybridity one voice ‘ironize[s] and unmask[s] the other within the same utterance’, while creating ‘the new forms of amalgamation rather than contestation’ (Young, 1995: 21). Young was critical about the fact that intentional hybridity reveals diametrically opposite viewpoints and produces an unequal mixture. But having said this, he also recognised that such types of transformation generate ‘a certain elemental energy and open-endedness’ (Young, 1995, 20-22). Applying the Bakhtinian model to study cultural analysis, Werbner argues that organic hybridisation is a natural way of bringing in a new set of images and words into cultures and languages and thus does not perturb the sense of continuity, in spite of its potential to alter. She argues that ‘despite the illusion of boundedness, cultures evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, mimetic appropriations, exchanges and inventions’ (Werbner, 1997: 4). Set as opposed to the former, she further argues that the purpose of intentional hybrid is ‘built to shock, change, challenge, revitalize or disrupt through deliberate, intended fusions of unlike social languages and images’ (Werbner, 1997: 5).

Having contextualised the background of hybridity as a choreographic device, a funding category and a liberalised and a Westernised, aesthetic sensibility in South Asian dance as well as after introducing the Bakhtinian organic/intentional model, I now turn to the analyses of the choreographies.

### **3.4. The dances**

#### ***3.4.1. Dark Matter (2006)***

*Dark Matter* is a solo work, choreographed and performed by Shamita Ray with music composed by John-Marc Gowans and Ray and lighting designed by Bill Deverson. Various fragmented movements including sliding, stretching of feet and arms and alternating heel contacts deconstructed from several group of *adavus*<sup>8</sup> are juxtaposed

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<sup>8</sup> An *adavu* is the co-ordinated movement of hand and feet sequenced to particular syllables within a temporal framework. It is considered as the basic technique of Bharatanatyam dance.

with Limon and Cunningham techniques.<sup>9</sup> Richmix, a performance venue in London, advertised it as having ‘jazzy Indian score’ and the fluidity of Western contemporary dance.<sup>10</sup> Ray describes that the inspiration for this piece came from ‘the scientific discovery that 90% of the universe cannot be seen, and has never been understood’.<sup>11</sup> In consonance with the theme of darkness, Ray wears a high neck, black-coloured, translucent chiffon, sleeveless top and black long, loose trousers, and abstains from using any temple jewellery (worn in a traditional performance) and elaborate face make-up. Its music lends a captivating ambience that allows the audience to contemplate the paradoxical beauty of a universe in motion and in the darkness.



**Fig 3.4.1.1.** Straight leg throw to the side. *Dark Matter* (2006) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

The piece opens with Ray standing off-centre, back turned to the audience; her body is lit while the rest of the stage space remains dark. Her bent arm is placed on her

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<sup>9</sup> Western contemporary dance includes a range of dance techniques, including Graham, Limon, Cunningham and Release. While Release dance technique focuses on breathing and explores the body in relation to gravitational pull and weight in terms of fall, recovery and suspension, Cunningham privileges creative freedom and relies much on abrupt change in motion, speed and orientation. For having more information on contemporary dance techniques, see Albright (2010); Copeland (2004); Foster (1986) and Horosko (1991).

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://www.uktw.co.uk/archive/London/Rich-Mix/Dance/Dance-Showcase-The-UnknownDark-Matter-Ring-CycleLaughing-to-Stop-Myself-Crying/L1919658306/>, (accessed: 30/01/2011)

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://shamitaray.webs.com/choreography.htm>, (accessed: 21/01/2011)

head as she takes swift whirls, which are contrasted with a sharp, side battement with a relaxed foot typical of Western contemporary dance (Fig 3.4.1.1). A slow tune is played on a violin following the stamping of feet. Gradually her body gains momentum- the jumping sequences convey a sensation of lightness that energises the space (Fig 3.4.1.2).



**Fig 3.4.1.2.** Lack of frontal orientation. *Dark Matter* (2006) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Maria Falconer.

Seen/unseen, light/darkness and appearance/disappearance are in a continuous state of flux arousing tension and curiosity in me:

*What was most striking to me was how the concept of darkness was highlighted by the works of light and sound. The theme of mystery and the unknown was visualised by flickering light on the backstage, stage floor and ceiling, leaving no space. Ray clad in a black costume appeared and disappeared unpredictably. The sound of mridangam added density to space. The voice of the percussionist sounded eerie at times taking us into the realm of the unknown (Reflective Journal, October 30, 2010).*

Ray stated that her intention was to challenge the gaze of the audiences by denying them to see her lit face (Fig 3.4.1.3) and also to provide the audience with more choices:

I am aware that facing the audience is more conventional, but I was more interested to situate my body in off-centre positions or at the back stage. Sometimes, I used spiral body twisting movement and half of my body is



exposed to the audience, the other half is left hidden. Sometimes, my body is heard and not seen, challenging the traditional way of choreographing [...] This effect could be more mystical and gave the audience more choices of interpretations' (personal interview, November 24, 2010).

In this way she employs 'intentional hybridity' through the interplay between light and darkness that challenges and contests each other.



**Fig 3.4.1.3.** (In/)Visibility. *Dark Matter* (2006) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray.

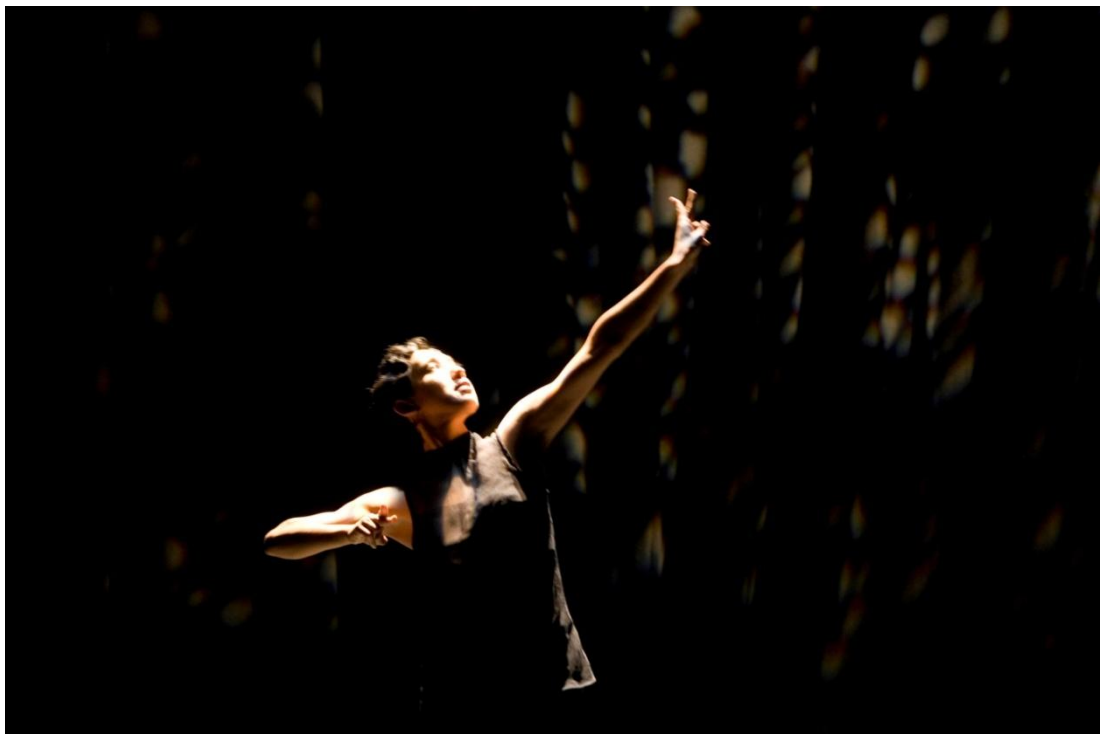
Photo: Allan Parker.

Abundance of poly-centrality and lack of frontal orientation reflect a deviation from Bharatanatyam tradition. Dance critic Cerise Andrews recognised the continuous off-centredness, 'abrupt changes of direction and flicking of limbs'<sup>12</sup> as the dominant aesthetic tools embedded in this piece. Ray told me that: 'I weaved movements which are off-centred, although the piece might have begun with an in-centre position' (personal interview, November 24, 2010). There is a quick succession of standing,

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<sup>12</sup> Available at: <http://www.ballet-dance.com/200611/articles/Akademi20061007.html>, (accessed: 19/11/2010)

sitting and lying postures. Quick bends and controlled leg throws are set in opposition to her renderings of diagonal lines (Fig 3.4.1.4). A tension between Eastern and Western dance idioms is created. Like Bakhtin's dialogic model, such encounters and mixtures open up new possibilities for creating artistic forms that can combine different styles, languages, modes and genres.



**Fig 3.4.1.4.** Diagonal in space. *Dark Matter* (2006) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray.  
Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

The piece concludes with rolling, curving and twisting of her lower body with force. The drumming accelerates and the stage light focuses on Ray who moves around the stage. A solemn, male voice recites the rhythmic metrical sequences vigorously, and Ray plays with the metre by stamping between the metrical pauses. Throughout the drumming session, linearity is contrasted with broken lines of torso and knees. Towards the end, the light spills start fading away while keeping her face half-lit and the rest of the body in total darkness. Her body merges with complete darkness when the chanting comes to a sudden halt, although her stomping is heard from the dark space. Soon the stage is brought to an unmoving silence.

### 3.4.2. *na asat* (2010)

Inspired from the *Rig Veda* text known as the *Nasadiya Sukta*,<sup>13</sup> *na asat* (meaning ‘no non-existence’ in Sanskrit) (2010), choreographed and performed by Anusha Subramanyam, is a solo work that deconstructs Bharatanatyam aesthetics to visualise the laws of the universe.<sup>14</sup> Commissioned by British-based organisation, Alliance for Religious Conservation (ARC),<sup>15</sup> it attempts to bring out the paradox of creating something from ‘no non-existence’. Its music is composed by Michael Ormiston and narration is by Omar Ebrahim. Like a traditional theatrical production, it largely uses movements from Bharatanatyam technique, alternating between lyrical and theatrical sequences. Repetitions of swirls and Subramanyam’s tailored Bharatanatyam pant-costume with gold semi-circular pleats arranged centrally acts as metaphors that blur the boundary between the body and the universe.

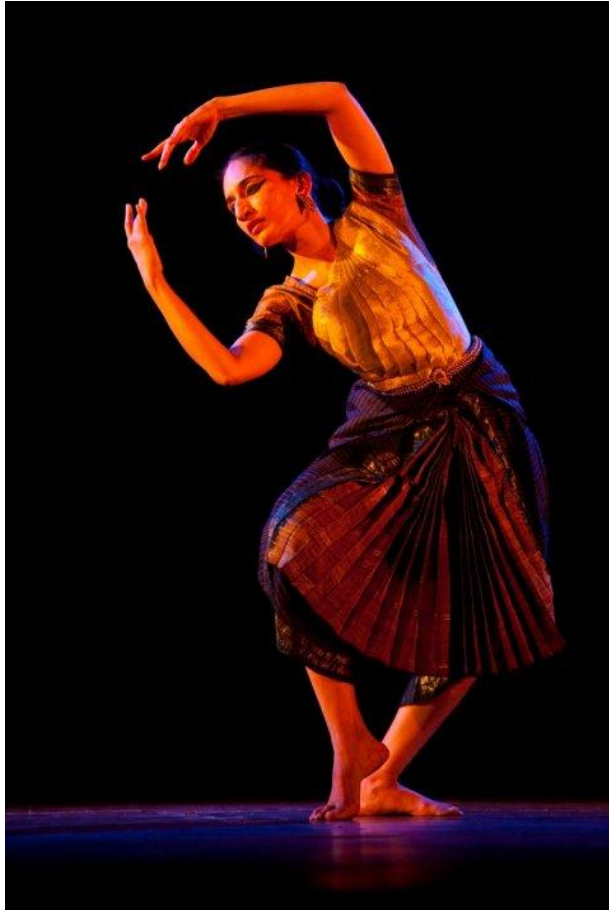
It begins with a series of gyrating movements, keeping the arms stretched out, accelerating the tempo. The imagery of time is abstracted and connected with human corporeality. Subramanyam navigates the stage space by creating multiple curvatures around her body. All these repetitive movements reinforce the earth’s rotational axis. Movements become more fluid, disrupt the centre of gravity and take vigorous swirls throwing arms up, bringing her body down towards the earth and then again raising up in rotation.

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<sup>13</sup> This is also known as the *Hymn of Creation* and deals with cosmology.

<sup>14</sup> Earlier another Bharatanatyam choreographer Lata Pada similarly produced a dance called *Cosmos* (1999) that centres on the contradiction of the Vedic and scientific explanations of creation. See O’Shea (2003).

<sup>15</sup> ARC is an organisation that promotes the world’s major faiths –their core teachings, beliefs and practices, as well as produce environmental awareness programmes. See <http://arcworld.org/> for more details.



**Fig 3.4.2.1.** The orbital position. *na asat* (2010) by Anusha Subramanyam. Performer: Anusha Subramanyam. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

Subramanyam displaces centrality by performing movements beginning at various corners of the stage, deviating from Euclidean geometry<sup>16</sup>. The rotational movements and sudden bends are contrasted with irregular jerks, which appear to indicate unpredictability that exists in the universe. The other movement highlights include bends, breaks, turns that diffuse with the planar or angular quality of Bharatanatyam dance technique. Her right foot is placed in *agratala* position<sup>17</sup> and hands are curved (Fig 3.4.2.1), while she keeps her face subdued and maintains a

<sup>16</sup> Euclidean geometry comprises the plane and the solid geometry in three-dimension and deals with ideas such as angles, circles, triangles and polygons. For instance, Bharata in his *Natyasastra* had terminologies such as *rekha* (line), *ayata* (rectangle), *mandala* (circle), *bhramari* (circular movements) - all these relate to geometric shapes (See Bose, 2001). I have used this particularly because Bharatanatyam basic postures and unitary movements have Euclidean geometrical features. The basic posture called *araimandi* consists of several triangles (Vatsyayan, 1982). This phrase also appears in Briginshaw (2001) when she critiques Jeyasingh's *Duets* and other choreographies.

<sup>17</sup> *Agratala* is one of the six foot positions from Bharata's *Natyashastra* in which the toe rests on the ground whilst the heel is raised.

detachment from the audience, subverting a traditional practice that demands eye contact and engagement with the audience.



**Fig 3.4.2.2.** Subdued face. *na asat* (2010) by Anusha Subramanyam. Performer: Anusha Subramanyam. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

According to Subramanyam, *na asat* narrates the creation tales such as the warming of the universe, its explosion and its condensation into the formation of galaxies and stars. She explained why she had chosen to draw on the elements from the Veda because ‘the ideas of the *Rigveda* are very abstract and universal’ (Skype interview, March 1, 2013). Abstractness and theatricality, with no colliding effects, are set in binary opposition, and thus organically hybridised in a Bakhtinian sense. The soundscape in this piece is primordial, mysterious and meditative. The luminosity and texture of blue light changes intermittently; light intensity increases - glowing and fading away, suggesting constant flux that reigns in the cosmological creative process.

The light plays across, momentarily revealing the sculpted space carved with her arms, feet and fingers. Much of her undulating movements resemble a puppet dancing on a string, head bowed, eyes covered and arms folded in front of the face (Fig 3.4.2.2). She moves gently and switches to vigorous movements, unfixing regular intervals.



**Fig 3.4.2.3.** Theatrical rupture. *na asat* (2010) by Anusha Subramanyam. Performer: Anusha Subramanyam. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.

The piece also interprets how the universe was expanded in consonance with the ‘Big Bang’ theory. While performing a sharp and upward arm throw, she stomps her feet on the floor alternately and raises both heels with a slight jump, and then one foot is brought back to rest while the other foot balances on the toes (as in ‘*etta adavu*’). Small jerks from the belly rise towards her bosom, and she spreads her arms sideways in a circular manner. Following that, she jumps on her toes and then strikes the ground with heels (as performed in ‘*kudettimetta adavu*’). Her sideways movements in fast tempo are placed before slow oscillating moves. A series of gasping movements symbolises the expansion of the earth. Her opened face and widened eyes magnify the theatrical expression (Fig 3.4.2.3). While the jerks expose the instability of the universe, the

percussive, rotational movements invoke the earth's cyclical rotation, represented also by the *damaru*<sup>18</sup> and the *chakra*<sup>19</sup> hand gestures.

Musical instruments from varied cultures are used; two (a male and a female) voices are heard over the sound system. The *swara*<sup>20</sup> from Carnatic music tradition is rendered along with the English text and Sanskrit hymns.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on Bakhtin, I argue that these dances represent 'polyglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]). On the other hand, I argue that the voice narrating Sanskrit verse is set in dialogue with the 'other' (narrative in English) within the same utterance. In this way, the notion of borders in *na asat* are constantly being redefined that tends to erase differences by dismantling the power structure and insisting on the acceptance of the 'other'.

Stylised dance movements and codified gestures dominate in the culminating section. Subramanyam is continually knocked to the ground following sudden breaks and bends defying the central median (*brahmasutra*). The imagery of the universe is explored through wave-like energies and 'somatic movements' (post-performance discussion, October 30, 2010). The vast tremor, turmoil and whirls of this story are powerfully evoked by using the dance floor. The fast drumming pauses abruptly; when the stage slowly drowns in darkness, the chant of Sanskrit verse fills the atmosphere with mystery.

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<sup>18</sup> In Hindu mythology, the *damaru* is a musical instrument that is held by Shiva in his hand and is believed to be a symbol of creation.

<sup>19</sup> *Chakra* literally means 'rotation'. In Hindu iconography, it is held by Lord Vishnu, one of the Trinity gods from Hindu mythology, in his hand as a weapon.

<sup>20</sup> In Indian classical music, *swara* in Sanskrit means a note in the scale. There are seven basic musical notes in a musical scale as follows: *shadja* (sa), *rishabh* (ri), *gandhar* (ga), *madhyam* (ma), *pancham* (pa), *dhaivat* (dha) and *nishad* (ni). Collectively, they are known as *sargam* in Hindusthani Classical music. In Bharatanatyam, *swara* are combined and set to a particular *raga*, such as in jathiswaram.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, Kasturi's *NowHere*, which I analyse in chapters four and six, incorporates colloquial Tamil words, Sanskrit verses chanted in Vedic style and English text, which creates a distinctly translocal flavour.

### 3.4.3. *The Shiver* (2010)

*The Shiver* (2010),<sup>22</sup> choreographed by Subathra Subramaniam, explores the scientific and emotional reasoning behind the physiological response of shivering. It was performed by three female dancers: Anusha Kedhar, Kamala Devam and Elena Jacinta. It uses spoken dialogue, music, and dance to invoke a location and time, and develop the physiological and psychological state of ‘shiver’. A programme note informs the audience that: ‘Three dancers explore the psychology and physiology, the emotions and events, behind why we shiver...whether through pain or pleasure’.<sup>23</sup>

The origin of this work lies in the ‘Cape Farewell Project’ - in which both Subramaniam and writer Lemn Sissay spent time in the Arctic working with groups of young people’.<sup>24</sup> In the same note Sissay said: ‘*Shiver* is the ‘apex of any given experience, the bridge between the emotional and the physical, the connecting wire, the electricity that sparks a reaction, acknowledging its power’. In an interview Subramaniam commented: ‘I don’t want dance to be educational; I want to create good work, interesting work, work that people can enjoy aesthetically’, though she insisted that ‘dance has a role to play in the public engagement of science’.<sup>25</sup> *The Shiver* receives a material treatment at the hands of Subramaniam by exploring the multiplicity of possibilities and generating movements from traditional techniques with a new sensibility. According to neuroscientist Morten Kringelbach: ‘Shivers give us unique insights into ourselves...if we look deep into our brains, we find that the same kinds of circuits that are involved in emotion are also involved in motion’.<sup>26</sup> The circuits are

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<sup>22</sup> It was partly funded by an Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust in Britain.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/environment-institute/past-events/shiver>, (accessed: 29/10/2013)

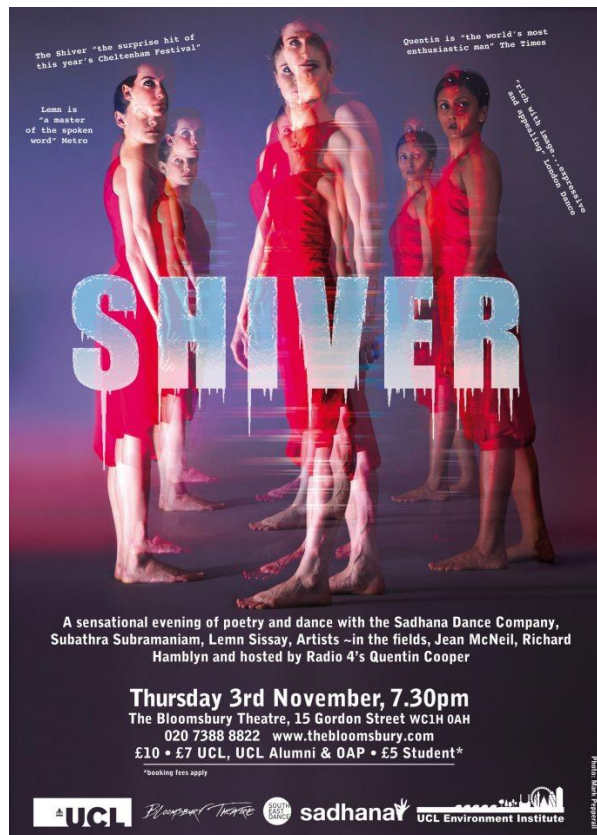
<sup>24</sup> Available at: <http://dorchesterfestival.co.uk/news2/index.php?id=3183036782323817209>, (accessed: 20/01/2013)

<sup>25</sup> Available at: <http://writingaboutdance.com/interview/subathra-subramaniam/>, (accessed: 31/07/2014)

<sup>26</sup> Available at: <http://dorchesterfestival.co.uk/news2/index.php?id=3183036782323817209>, (accessed: 20/01/2013)



noted in its performance flyer where the dancers' shaky layered and digitally enhanced bodies evoke the visual imagery of shivering (Fig 3.4.3.1).



**Fig 3.4.3.1.** Advertising flyer. *The Shiver* (2010). Available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/sadhanadance/photos/a.139461442785969.27350.100729713325809/216890148376431/?type=3&theater>, (accessed: 15/11/2012).

The piece begins with three dancers facing backstage, sitting. They tap and explore the space punctuated by sudden pauses. Linearity is a distinct feature throughout this piece: dancers perform *nadai*<sup>27</sup> forming a vertical line. Although they do not touch or look into each other's eyes, they keep a measured pace. Disparate repetitions become competitive in a friendly manner. As the piece progresses, Subramaniam adds more complex metrical sequences, sometimes going on-beat, and sometimes off-beat. The dancers' rhythmic steps contrasted with sudden pauses add drama to this piece. The concentration of energy that is invested in each movement

<sup>27</sup> The fast stomping while walking is called *nadai*.

becomes dense. Slow bodily curves are drawn as sudden contrasts to the loud foot stomping.

A theatrical flourish takes place when their hands are joined in *anjali*<sup>28</sup> hand gesture and a voice recites: ‘electrical to chemical and back to electrical again’. The dancers slowly progress with the joined hands and this is contrasted with the digital reflection of neurons moving on the screen at the back of the stage (Fig 3.4.3.2). Carving space with stretches and large leaps, they perform codified hand gestures from Bharatanatyam from the Sanskrit text, but in an abstract way (Fig 3.4.3.3).



**Fig 3.4.3.2.** Digital neurons. *The Shiver* (2010) by Subathra Subramaniam. Performer: Kamala Devam. Photo: Mark Pepperall, Hot Pepper Design.

From Kedhar’s writing, we get an understanding of how Subramaniam instructed the dancers to ‘make a movement sequence based on the last time you shivered’, ‘make a trio based on an experience of pain that moves in a diagonal’, ‘make a standing duet with your backs to the audience’, or ‘make a contact duet in which each movement is a reaction to the other person’ during rehearsals (2011: 111). This is quite

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<sup>28</sup> *Anjali*, in Sanskrit, means ‘offering’. It is a gesture of reverence and salutation widely used across India as an act of greeting people. Classified as a combined hand gesture in *Abhinayadarpanam* this hand gesture is performed by joining and pressing the palms of the hands together, keeping the fingers together with fingertips pointing up.

interesting that Subramaniam subverts the visual associated with the word shiver: jerks, shudders or robotic actions are rare and often the dancers move in a regular pattern. In an act of shiver, the orderly grid actually challenges the bodily gestures anticipated and disrupts the logical expectation of the audience by bringing in more structured geometrical shapes (Fig 3.4.3.4).



**Fig 3.4.3.3.** Codified hand gesture. *The Shiver* (2010) by Subathra Subramaniam. Performers (left to right): Anusha Kedhar, Elena Jacinta and Kamala Devam. Photo: Mark Pepperall, Hot Pepper Design.



**Fig 3.4.3.4.** Angularity. *The Shiver* (2010) by Subathra Subramaniam. Performers (left to right): Anusha Kedhar and Elena Jacinta. Photo: Mark Pepperall, Hot Pepper Design.



**Fig 3.4.3.5.** The eroticised bodies. *The Shiver* (2010) by Subathra Subramaniam. Performers (left to right): Elena Jacinta and Anusha Kedhar. Photo: Mark Pepperall, Hot Pepper Design.

Set in contrast to Ray's *Dark Matter* where Ray plays with the audience's gaze to rouse mystery through her conscious interplay between appearance and disappearance, in this episode the dancers were instrumental in attracting the audience through sensuality. Kedhar elaborates on the 'pleasure cycle', which has 'anticipation or desire, moves on to the sensation of pleasure from the consummation of that desire, and ends with the feeling of satisfaction after attaining the object of desire'. She informs the reader how the dancers used their bodies for rousing sexuality: 'There is nothing innocent about what we are doing on stage...I leave my gaze longer, tilt my head coyly, stick my hip out more, glance over my shoulder, and arch my back (Kedhar, 2011: 93). The costume is designed 'to reveal just a sliver of our midriffs when we stretched or bent backwards and accentuate the shape of our hips, thighs and calves' (Kedhar, 2011: 94) and Fig 3.4.3.5 clearly demonstrates this. So what is intriguing to note here is that

shiver which is an external physiological expression, aroused by a sensation of fear or coldness, is devised to demonstrate the sensuousness of female bodies. Whereas, in the following piece (Boonham's *Sivaloka*), I demonstrate how a sacred place is imagined as an object of sensual gaze.

The concluding part comprises variegated movement vocabularies across cultures, ranging from the gentle dangling of neck<sup>29</sup> and stomping from Bharatanatyam dance and stretches with supple hip sway and contact movements from the Western contemporary dance techniques. There is an episode where Devam dances solo where she constantly gazes at the audience to lure them in. Then she turns her back slowly, lifts her body, holding a sculptural pose; her left hand rises in the line of her buttock and she takes a half-turn by leaning her head sideways again to look at the audience.

Keeping the bodies against gravity, the dancers bend towards the ground with a sudden jerk. The numbness is heightened with soft, gentle movements, contrasted with long stretches, which creates an atmosphere of fear. The trio forms a tight cluster. They disintegrate and stand in a semi-circle to deconstruct a few sets of *adavus*. The *dola hasta*<sup>30</sup> and the joined hand rotations appear vulnerable and sensuous. The dancers sensitize it further by lying slowly on the ground and keeping their heads on the resting hand. The red light begins to fade out; dancers sinking all scattered on the stage. Kedhar covers her face with hands and others play with their hands on the floor, turning the fingers around, while keeping a constant eye on the audience. Their constant gazes continue to hold the audience's attention, until the stage is immersed into complete darkness.

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<sup>29</sup> It is known as '*sundari griva*' in practice.

<sup>30</sup> A *dola hasta* is a combined hand gesture rendered by keeping the hands in a swinging position at the sides. This is used in *nritta* and *abhinaya* techniques to indicate 'the beginning of the performance'. In many schools it is adopted to add beauty and grace in a performance.

#### 3.4.4. *Sivaloka* (2010)

Commissioned by Art Asia and Gem Arts, funded by the British Council UK - India Culture Award,<sup>31</sup> *Sivaloka* (literally means ‘abode of Shiva’) is choreographed by Mayuri Boonham and performed by four female dancers Archana Ballal, Luisa Lazzaro, Shreya Kumar and Pauline Reibell. Inspired by the sculptures from the Elephanta Cave Temple in Mumbai, India,<sup>32</sup> *Sivaloka* explores the idea of divine space using traditional Indian vocabulary with an urban sensibility that gives way to sensuality and visual delight. Its music is composed and directed by Mdival Punditz. By re-locating the original temple sculptures on the transnational stage, Boonham takes a fresh look at the histories that occurred at different times and places.

To produce this piece, Boonham visited the Elephanta rock-cut cave with a team of seventeen members comprising musicians and sound engineers to invoke acoustics from the place. In a press interview, she said:

The process for this work started [...] when I visited the first retrospective of Rothko’s work in Rome after his death, then again at Tate Modern. Rothko’s *Seagram Murals*, a sequence of panels that looked and felt to me like a series of Siva lingams [iconic phallic symbol] [...].<sup>33</sup> Since revisiting the great temples in India last year, I became very interested in bringing a sense of the atmospheric sacred world into the theatre, where Gods are at play and the indefinable unfolds.<sup>34</sup>

In the same interview, Boonham mentioned that her visit to the site in Mumbai with a team of musicians has connected her dance to this place. Her idea was to transport ‘the essence of this cave’s environment to the stage’ (“Mayuri Boonham Mdival Punditz

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<sup>31</sup> It was also supported by Dance South West, Bournemouth Pavilion, The Place and Dance4.

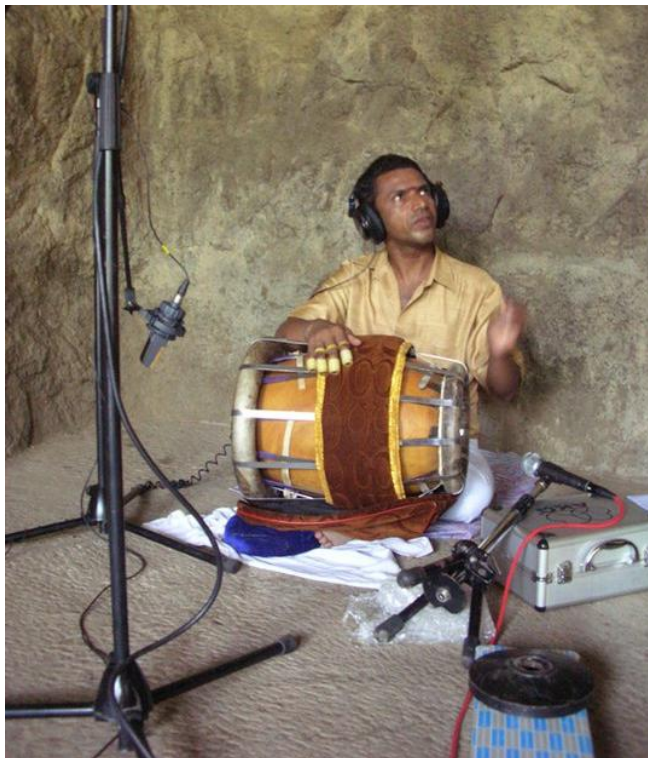
<sup>32</sup> Elephanta Cave is a declared ‘World Heritage Site’ by UNESCO in 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Rothko was commissioned to paint a set of ‘500-600 square feet of paintings’ (Breslin, 1993: 373) by Philip Johnson, architect of the Seagram building, New York in 1958 for the “Four Seasons” restaurant. Eventually, he realised that the restaurant was an unsuitable place for the paintings since they were only accessed by the elite class, and thus he decided to donate them to the Tate Gallery, London.

<sup>34</sup> Available at: <http://londondance.com/articles/interviews/mayuri-boonham-qanda/>, (accessed: 29/01/2013)



Elephanta Video Diary”).<sup>35</sup> In the same video diary, one of the music directors Gaurav Raina echoed Boonham: ‘The idea is to document the natural acoustic expressions of this building and how it reacts to music. So the music recording was conducted inside the cave (Fig 3.4.4.1). Thus Boonham uses Indian art, mythology, culture and religion, but choreographically, blurs the distinctions between expressions of the sacred and the secular, by juxtaposing Hindu iconographic details with Mark Rothko’s murals. The reference to Seagram Murals of Rothko expresses her interest in having interaction with diverse cultural narratives and travel routes. This is an instance of intentional hybridity where Boonham ‘fuses the unfusable’ (Werbner, 1997: 5), intersecting movements and sound through the politics of place.



**Fig 3.4.4.1.** Elephanta Cave Temple - Recording Music for “SIVALOKA” album,  
Available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.471853414354.256945.172256739354&type=3>  
(accessed: September 13, 2014). Courtesy: ATMA Dance.

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<sup>35</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTnnB1uZiHQ> (accessed: 12/03/2014). The other quotes from the video diary are referred from this site, unless stated otherwise.



**Fig 3.4.4.2.** Holding the *damaru*. *Sivaloka* (2010) by Mayuri Boonham. Performer: Archana Ballal. Photo: Becs Andrews. Courtesy: ATMA Dance.

The opening scene shows a female dancer in between half-sitting and lying *padmasana* posture,<sup>36</sup> in semi-darkness with the aroma of incense filling the auditorium. Although the dancers had no background pillars, their postures appear on stage as they are coming out of the frame of the stony walls. The light designs illuminate Euclidean geometry by forming squares on the floor. Four dancers in space perform different sets of movements and frame a longitudinal line, which reinforces poly-centrality. The dancers place strong emphasis on the position of the feet and also on the starting position by keeping the torso firm.<sup>37</sup> Their hands are kept in a *gaja hasta* position.<sup>38</sup> Boonham portrays different characteristics of the iconographic objects such as *damaru* (Fig 3.4.4.2) and *agni* (fire) found in Shiva's form (Fig 3.4.4.3). Dressed in figure-hugging Western suits, the dancers clearly create a visual tension between iconography

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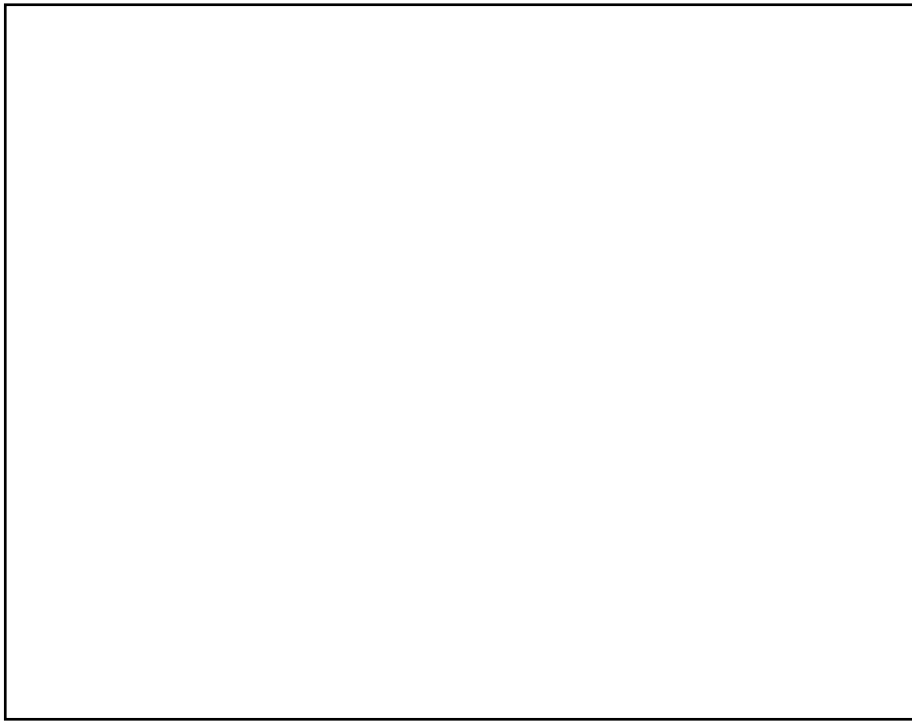
<sup>36</sup> It is a cross-legged meditative sitting position in yogic practices of ancient India in which the feet are placed on the opposing thighs.

<sup>37</sup> This position, known as either *sama* or *natyarambhye* (beginning of a drama position), is taught to beginners in Bharatanatyam schools in India.

<sup>38</sup> *Gaja-hasta* in Sanskrit literally means 'hands of an elephant' and Shiva holds this gesture with his left arm that stretches and curves down to his feet.



and physical bodies. Incense, the erotic bodies and the sculptural pose transform the urban stage into a borderline between the secular and the sacred. Regardless of organic hybridity - a subtle mixture of the arts, what evolves here is a new performative aesthetics as they interact with other cultures, as agreed by several cultural and postcolonial theorists whom I discussed earlier.



**Fig 3.4.4.3.** Shiva as Nataraja. Available at:

<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2723/stories/20101119272305800.htm>, (accessed: 15/06/2011).

In this piece there is a subtle transition from motion to motionlessness, a salient characteristic of traditional *tillana* from Bharatanatyam repertoire.<sup>39</sup> Boonham creates a dialectical relationship with the Euclidean geometry and contemporary dance canons such as flexible turn, slow moves on the floor and energetic leg throw. In Fig 3.4.4.4 the dancers capture a sculptural pose and this intentional punctuation gives a relief to the spectators. Boonham draws on Shiva's iconographic details from the cave in the 'Shiva

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<sup>39</sup> *Tillana* is a musical piece in Carnatic music which is performed at the end of the recital. The genre usually has a tripartite structure and is set to a particular metre. *Tillana* in Bharatanatyam abounds in metrical sequences, but often it culminates with an appended literary couplet known as 'sahitya'.

Parvati duet' section (Fig 3.4.4.4). Shiva's virility, which is portrayed with strong shoulders, uplifted chin, broad eyes and firm waist, contrasts sharply with Parvati's feminine beauty. Boonham's dancers replicate the main sculpture from this cave, popularly known as *trimurti* (literally means a tri-faced icon) (Fig 3.4.4.5).<sup>40</sup> Ballal, Kumar and Reibell, the cast members informed me that during rehearsals Boonham brought several paintings and sculptures in her studio to motivate them and set the task.



**Fig 3.4.4.4.** Shiva Parvati duet. *Sivaloka* (2010) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Shreya Kumar and Pauline Reibell. Photo: Becs Andrews. Courtesy: ATMA Dance.

A new sequence begins with the drumming where the dancers continually deconstruct the varied *adavus* from the repertoire, which are contrasted with the contemporary bends, flicks and leaps. The different permutations and combinations of metrical sequences open up many possibilities in *Sivaloka*. Kumar tells how this work makes use of elements from various fields: 'This work had many sections and I remember that it had a Fibonacci section'.<sup>41</sup> It's my favourite section. It's technically so

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<sup>40</sup> This triad bust, also called *trimurti* which represents Shiva, has called for an attention of several British Orientalist and European scholars (Sykes, 1839; Collins, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> The Fibonacci numbers are the sequence of integers, named after the mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci. The reference of Fibonacci sequence occurs in Indian mathematics, in connection

engaging. It's just not working with your body, but with minds' (personal interview, June 18, 2013). In a sense, Boonham's experimentation with Fibonacci number series regards Carnatic musical histories of having an intimate connection to integers used in *jati*.



**Fig 3.4.4.5.** A pose inspired from Elephanta's triad. *Sivaloka* (2010) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers: Archana Ballal, Luisa Lazzaro, Shreya Kumar and Pauline Reibell. Photo: Becs Andrews. Courtesy: ATMA Dance.

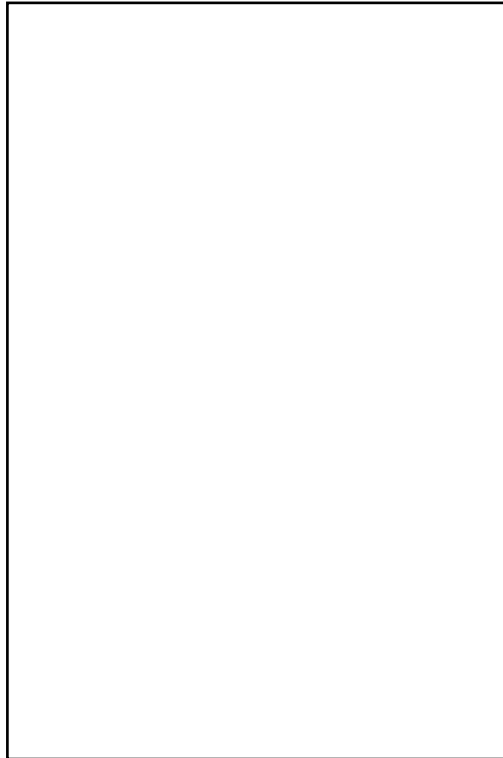
What follows next is a scene where three dancers are lying on the ground and among them one dancer captures a *tandava* position very similar to dancing Shiva sculpture (Fig 3.4.4.6). Spaces are marked and divided by the effects of lights. Drumming sounds continue and dancers' bodies roll on the floor. A dancer lifts her leg, similar to *urdhva tandava*<sup>42</sup> posture from Shiva's iconography (Fig 3.4.4.7). Varied rigorous movements are weaved in a temporal framework to signify Shiva's masculinity

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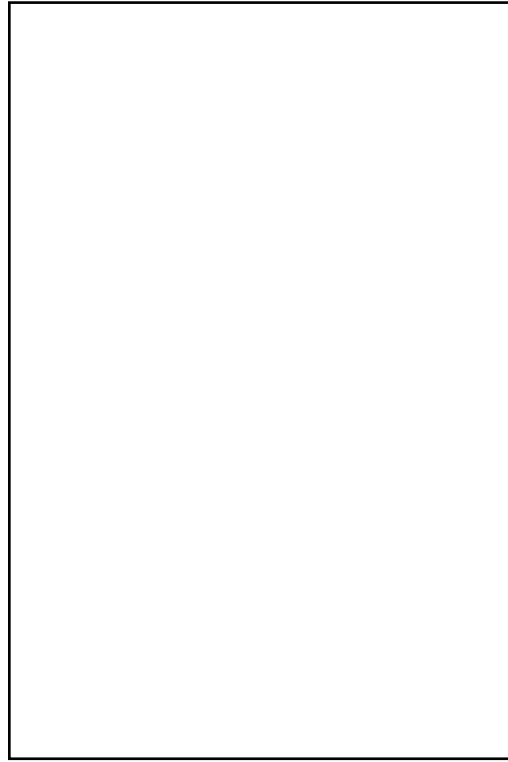
with Sanskrit prosody (Singh, 1985). Such series of integers also exists in Indian drumming sequences (Hall, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> The tale of *urdhva tandava* episode is spun within the Hindu mythology where a dance contest takes place between Shiva and his consort Kali. Shiva playfully demonstrates the position of *urdhva tandava* by lifting his right leg towards the sky and thus wins this dance contest.

and virility. In this section, the audience's attention is called to the formal technical details embedded in the form of Bharatanatyam and also, in Indian sculpture. The dancers occupy the centre stage to replicate a sculptural motif from the cave. Three dancers roll on the floor, whilst lifting their feet in the air. A sudden shift in rhythmic phrases disrupts the prevailing metre. While standing taut, dancers face different sides to form Shiva's triad. The sounds of the conch and the bell intensify the ritualistic mood. Its non-unitary, multi-layered and dynamic spatio-temporal framework takes the audience to an imagined land of *Sivaloka*. The whole oeuvre slips into the spaces among sculpture, temple architecture, painting and dance. Interplay of blue lights and darkness enhances the mystical atmosphere.



**Fig 3.4.4.6.** *Urdhva tandava* in Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchipuram, Chennai. Photo: Manoj Radhakrishnan. Available at: <http://500px.com/photo/24363365>, (accessed: 15/06/2012).



**Fig 3.4.4.7.** Dancing Shiva in Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchipuram, Chennai. Photo: Manoj Radhakrishnan. Available at: <http://500px.com/photo/24363359>, (accessed: 02/03/2013).

In the next section, I examine the dance artists' narratives to find out how they devise hybridisation in contemporary practice.

### **3.5. Discussion**

#### ***3.5.1. Organic versus intentional***

As hybridisation consists of exchanges, it necessarily implies a fluidity of the boundaries between dance traditions, and in that sense, Ray's *Dark Matter* expresses the inevitable blurring of the line between such fixed categories through cultural blending. The diffusion of organic/intentional hybridity in this piece precisely occurs through an additive endeavour that accentuates double-voicedness. In a post-performance discussion Ray commented that:

My intention is to blend Western contemporary dance with Bharatanatyam. By Western contemporary dance, I mean very specifically to that which had originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century and see how they co-habit in the same

place. I won't see it as a tension. Well, I'm trained in both the forms and so they are ingrained in my body anyway.<sup>43</sup>

Dance critic Mary Brennan noted Ray's natural ability to fuse two languages of dance: 'Ray melds contemporary moves with the percussive stamp of Bharatanatyam, travelling from one to other with enjoyable ease'.<sup>44</sup> Thus Ray's body itself is an in-between space that articulates a sense of occupying a dual space, where boundaries between the two traditions are permeable. Drawing on Brennan's comment, I argue that it is an example of organic hybridity in a Bakhtinian sense in which 'two linguistic consciousnesses' are co-present and they are dialogic, but not contested.

In a personal interview, Ray also validated that her intention was to blend two techniques to create a novel form:

I wanted to create a new dance style that was personal to me and coming out of my body [...] *Dark Matter* was my first exploration of blending two styles [...] For instance, I have looked at the footwork element of Bharatanatyam and thought how I could use them with contemporary dance. What can I do to syncopate the rhythm to change the upper body in order to make it contemporary? Another point of thought was how I can make the floor work look like contemporary dance and layer with Bharatanatyam on top of it (personal interview, December 10, 2011).

In the above quote, Ray emphasises that these two forms are stored organically in her body. She describes organic hybridity as 'innovative', which enables her to create a new vocabulary out of the forms that are 'traditional'. Ray's experimentation can be reviewed in the light of Bakhtin's comment as it 'actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages', two semantic and axiological belief systems' (1981 [1935]: 304).

Besides, Ray exhibits hybridity by taking inspirations from the traditional musical instruments such as *jathi-s* from the drumming of mridangam and a regional

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<sup>43</sup> This post-performance discussion was recorded at Patidar House on October 30, 2011. The discussants were Avanthi Meduri, Nina Rajarani, Anusha Subramanyam, Divya Kasturi, Shamita Ray and Usha Raghunathan.

<sup>44</sup> Available at: <http://www.heraldscotland.com/in-the-new-age-there-are-no-limits-1.863151>, (accessed: 30/01/2013)

Bengali tune from Tagore. Ray candidly accepted that her parents' migration and her exposure to varied dance forms and cultures in the UK have resulted in dealing with new themes in contemporary dance have lead them to explore new theses in contemporary dance:

I used music from diverse tradition, for instance, Carnatic, Western and Bengali music. I used mridangam [a percussive, musical instrument] [...] I recorded the *jathis* and sliced them in time using music editing programs so that the audio effect is no longer that of a conventional pattern (my translation from Bengali, personal interview, November 23, 2010).

What Bakhtin meant by dialogism, with regard to the novel, is the 'artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 361), and I find the same is applicable here. The above quote indicates her interest in deviating from the traditional acoustic effect and temporal aesthetics. The fusions of cultural traits from different social and cultural backgrounds challenge the traditional syncopation of rhythm and its cyclical order. In this manner, it permits 'a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships [...]' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 263)', thus opening up a greater range of possibilities for a coexistence of compositional differences.

In *na asat*, Subramanyam exploits cultural hybridity by aligning the scientific Big Bang theory, a cosmological model for the early development of the universe, with Hindu religious scripture and thus conceptualises organic hybridity by mixing two cosmological laws from two different cultures (Vedic laws with the Big Bang theory), masking all contestations. The deliberate inclusion of the Big Bang theory in Vedic cosmology in Subramanyam's *na asat* was however paradoxical. Subramanyam accepted that the paradox comes from the theme itself:

What was very apparent in *na asat* is that everything is a question and paradox. It is just not about Hindu philosophy, but asks how everything came into existence in a very abstract way [...] On one hand, *Nasadiya Sukta* says that 'it doesn't exist'. On the other hand, as it's about the existence of the universe, I wanted to bring in the idea of the Big Bang into it [...] As a dancer, I am a visible creature - we make invisible visible. Then how do I make something

invisible, visible but invisible? It was challenging for me to portray something that does not exist [...] (Skype interview, March 1, 2013).

Though, at first glance, these two theories appear to offer parallel visions, they fundamentally present two different views of the creation tales. Contrasting the textual references from the ancient Hindu treatise with the Big Bang exemplifies clearly a double-voiced narration in a Bakhtinian sense. Personally to Subramanyam, the resulting discourse is a translation into a visual language in an ‘abstract’ way that is readily understood by people on both sides of the border. This double-voicedness gives us insights into how a cultural encounter - in this case, Indian and British - confronted and negotiated the difference of each ‘local culture’.

Her ability in bringing Bharatanatyam idioms including the codified hand gestures and the dramaturgical element of *natya*,<sup>45</sup> with an awareness of western stage sensibility, produces double-voicedness. Also, two different languages (Sanskrit verse and English text) are ‘contested’. These opposing ideological positions are easily understood by drawing on Bakhtin’s heteroglossia – ‘the living mix of varied and opposing voices’ (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 49) is in dialogue with each other, renewing each other. Cultural studies academic Rey Chow asserts that:

Central to the question of borders is the question of propriety and property. Conceivably, one possible practice of borders is to prepare for the new proprietorship by destroying, replacing, and expanding existing ones [...] (1993: 15).

Hence the deliberate appropriation of cultural forms (Carnatic music and western instrumentals) ‘shock’, ‘change’, ‘challenge’, or ‘disrupt’ (Werbner, 2004) the existing practice, which in turn, brings new elements.

In her conversation Subramanyam draws attention to her ethnicity, training, displacement and also how she represents the ancient dance tradition in order to find her

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<sup>45</sup> *Natya* is the ancient dramaturgical technique and histrionics, especially in Sanskrit theatre.



voice within the transnational setting. When I asked how she sees or labels her practice, her answer was:

My work is eclectic [...] I am still on my way to define what my works are about. I'm still on a journey [...] for me, they are very much Bharatanatyam, even though I use storytelling [...] I feel my choreographies are dance theatre. I'm using largely Bharatanatyam like the dance drama, but using different aspects of dance and text [...] (Skype interview, March 1, 2013).

Her notion of hybrid practice is still in the process of becoming, although unlike Ray, she highlights her essentialist identity as seen below:

*Na asat* for me is not a classical Bharatanatyam. I would say it's a contemporary work. It's a new piece and an innovative work. I feel that I am very much a contemporary dance practitioner and very true to be an Indian [...] (Skype interview, March 1, 2013).

In the above statement, Subramanyam brands her choreography as 'contemporary' because it is not a 'classical' piece. Again, contemporariness is equated with innovation. She is privileging her national identity ('true to be an Indian') and in practice, Indianness is expressed through her use of the codified language of Bharatanatyam as she accepted: 'Bharatanatyam is the language that I know the best' (post-performance discussion, October 30, 2010). Thus there is always the reconstitution of borders for contemporary practice because there has to be some 'new' elements in it that are 'never seen before'. The tension and reconstitution of borderlines of these two terminologies (contemporary and traditional) have always existed as a binary and remained fluid, as also noted by Meduri in a post-performance discussion.<sup>46</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Mukherjee used the metaphor of calligraphy for depicting his process of intentional hybridisation:

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<sup>46</sup> Meduri commented and raised some questions that have remained to be the concerns of theoreticians and practitioners equally:

[...] the 'Classical and the contemporary' seem to follow the same continuity [...] so are they or we on the same continuity when we do the contemporary? Are they fluid categories? Do they co-exist? Are they polarised categories? [...] These are the questions with which we grapple with everyday we deal with classical and contemporary forms [...] So classical and contemporary - are they two sides of the same coin? Are they different? Is there a tension? Is it continuity? Can we portray all stories in new ways that we did in Bharatanatyam for the last eighty years? (post-performance discussion, October 30, 2010).

I see different dance styles as different tools, almost like I can write calligraphy, where you can choose different font for different expression. You use a particular font for particular theme [...] I didn't want to use Bharatanatyam or ballet or a combined stuff [...] I thought to focus on what is the theme [in *Song of the City*], what is the story and how I'm going to express the theme using those dance styles [...] (Skype interview, March 5, 2013).

Rather than fusing the various elements, Mukherjee recognises the strength and differences of various dance forms, often in conditions of dependency and suitability for his choreographic themes.

Again, Subramanyam accepted that her work builds on other materials and resources: 'I worked with gestural language of Bharatanatyam dance and drew upon Butohesque quality<sup>47</sup>, which is an embodied representation. It's very abstract and comes from an internal space [...]' (Subramanyam, Skype interview, March 1, 2013). In her comment, we hear what Bakhtin termed a 'double-voiced discourse' (Bharatanatyam and Butoh) to be where 'two voices, two meanings and two expressions' (1981 [1935]: 324) are in conversation with each other. By mixing Bharatanatyam aesthetics with 'Butohesque' sensibility, Subramanyam re-constitutes a new 'borderline' which is unfixed. Another interesting feature is that although Ray, Boonham and Subramaniam borrowed largely from western contemporary dances, Subramanyam's adoption of Butoh aesthetics deserves attention as she puts Bharatanatyam in conversation with a non-western form of dance. What I derive from other interview narratives is that often hybrid practice usurps the label of 'contemporary dance'. Implicit in Bakhtin's work is the idea that genres are not cultural fossils, but continually reconstituted within new contexts and in the hands of new users.

Like *Dark Matter* and *na asat* there is also a conscious return to certain traditional aspects and a breaking away from the boundaries of fixity in *The Shiver*. It

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<sup>47</sup> Butoh originated as a form of Japanese dance theatre in the World War II era as a reaction to the overt imitation of Western dance forms in Japanese society. Traditionally performed in white body makeup with slow hyper-controlled motion, its movement vocabulary was built on 'crude physical gestures and uncouth habits...a direct assault on the refinement (*miyabi*) and understatement (*shibui*) so valued in Japanese aesthetics' (Sanders, 1988: 149). Butoh is gradually becoming a borderless dance form (Fraleigh, 2010).

exhibits hybridity in various ways: Subramaniam's use of live music in conjunction with digital media; her use of traditional movements and English text; and her profound interest in bringing in the traditional vocabulary in her practice through contemporariness. Apart from displaying science, theatre and psycho-physical emotion, Subramaniam contrasts different styles in the same body or coalesces bodies through contact improvisation, resulting in new signifying visions of the 'Self' and the 'Other'.

From dance analysis, I realise that there is a constant tension between the Western and Indian dance aesthetics in Subramaniam's *Shiver*. She sets a dialogue between Western contemporariness and the sensuality of Indian dance vocabulary organically not only to merge two distinct traditions but to create a new aesthetic sensibility. Moving back to Bakhtin's 'intentional' hybridity where he referred to those instances in which 'the important activity is not only [...] the mixing of linguistic forms - the markers of two language styles' but also 'the collision between different points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 360). It is through this mixture of cultural forms along with her distinct interdisciplinary approach, Subramaniam produces a new cultural identity from their intersections and collision (which is intentional) to challenge stability. In this sense, Subramanyam's *Shiver* weaves a permeating borderline of organic and intentional hybridity.

In a press release, Subramaniam said: 'I am thrilled to have received funding from the Arts Council and that they have decided to support this exciting new project. The project brings together artists and practitioners from many different fields from dance to science'.<sup>48</sup> This validates earlier comments of Grau (2001a) and Lopez y Royo (2004) who also noted that hybridity is becoming synonymous with 'new' and exciting works. Subramaniam's hybridity relies on traditional vocabulary and contemporary aesthetics, perpetuating the 'living in two worlds' concept, which necessitates that she

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<sup>48</sup> Available at: <http://londondance.com/articles/news/the-shiver/>, (accessed: 24/07/2012)

keeps one foot in the past and one in the present. As commented by Kringlebach: ‘We have thus been interested in further exploring the shiver beyond its thermoregulatory, physiological role to include its role in emotional processing and pleasure; to further explore with dance the role of the shiver in social interactions and in subjective experience’.<sup>49</sup> This is consistent with what Bakhtin sees as the goal of hybridisation that is ‘the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language’ (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935] 361). Thus hybridisation of disciplines (dance and neuroscience) is employed in an effort to create work that is more appealing and accessible to mixed audiences.

In *Sivaloka*, Boonham endeavours to highlight the ‘innate’ sculptural qualities of Bharatanatyam with a contemporary touch. As I mentioned earlier, Boonham was highly influenced by the sculptures from Elephanta Cave and Rothko’s Seagram Murals. The conscious hybridisation process makes use of contrasts and oppositions, mixing incongruous elements from disparate domains to ‘bring otherness from beyond the boundaries’ (Werbner, 2001: 141). On one hand, connecting Rothko’s Seagram murals (which was shifted from an elite restaurant in New York to Tate Gallery in London) with Elephanta Cave rock cut temple architecture has problematised the national imagination. On the other hand, Rothko’s Jewish origin (Breslin, 2012: 48) and his Murals evoking the imagery of *shivalingam* in Boonham’s *Sivaloka* have blurred the distinction between the sacred and the secular. As Bakhtin pointed out, in intentional hybridity the emphasis is placed not so much on the activity of mixing as on ‘the collision between different points of view on the world’ (1981 [1935]: 360). This dialectic thus both mediates and challenges the marginal spaces that are occupied by differences. In this way, Boonham challenges and disrupts dominant cultural

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<sup>49</sup> Available at: <http://www.sadhanadance.com/works/the-shiver/>, (accessed: 24/07/2012)

delineations by deliberately bringing in disparate cultural practices and codes together, thus refusing any closure.

The crossing of iconographic references with contemporary movements is actually mixing one linguistic system to another, to say that ‘I am me’ in someone else’s language, and in my own language, ‘I am other’ (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 315). This relocation of style from one genre to another, according to Bakhtin, ‘not only alters the way the style sounds, under conditions of genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre’ (Bakhtin, 1986 [1929]: 66). He argued elsewhere that a genre ‘always remembers its past’, but ‘lives in the present’ (Bakhtin, 1984 [1929]: 104). From Boonham’s narratives, it is evident that *Sivaloka* responds to a conciliatory effort by merging past tradition, several arts, sources, roots and travels, with a strong hybridisation of gender through iconographic details.

Hybridity typically invokes the concern for cultural ‘authenticity’, and Boonham is no exception.<sup>50</sup> Boonham reveals this ambiguity of the notion of authenticity and ‘tradition’ in a press interview:

No and I wouldn’t ever claim to be traditional or authentic. However the work I make is made with the vocabulary and technique of Bharata Natyam – it’s the only dance style I am trained in, so it is the medium with which I work [...].<sup>51</sup>

However all the dancers (Ballal, Kumar and Reibell) thought that Boonham uses authentic details of movements and that her choreography is deeply rooted in Bharatanatyam technique. Ballal asserted that: ‘Mayuri’s work is much more Bharatanatyam-based [...] She would do *adavu* classes with us and show how to deconstruct them’ (personal interview, November 23, 2011).

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<sup>50</sup> See Banerjee (2009) that situates hybridisation of practice within a global perspective and intersects it with the notion of authenticity in Bharatanatyam.

<sup>51</sup> Available at: <http://londondance.com/articles/interviews/mayuri-boonham-qanda/>, (accessed: 24/07/2012)

In visualising the concept of the abode of Shiva Boonham's treatment of movements and aesthetics through corporeality is intentional. *Sivaloka* exemplifies heteroglossia contesting the gender identity of the dancers:

Bharatanatyam has both *tandava* and *lasya* elements<sup>52</sup> [...] At some point I thought: should it be danced by male dancers? [...] But, then I thought it would be too straightforward and obvious. So what will be interesting is to get it done by using female dancers [...] but yes, they have to be very strong-Shiva like [...] there was contradiction everywhere in the Elephanta Cave [...] war, marriage, *ardhanarishwara* (half-man and half-woman God) [Fig 3.5.1.1] [...] (personal communication, November 25, 2011).

I argue that *tandava* and *lasya* are two contrasting elements in a Bakhtinian sense that are juxtaposed to create a dialogue between oppositions. What *Sivaloka* embraces is a polyphonic artistic experience, facilitating a dialogue between the artistic languages and techniques, the public space (stage) and the sacred space (cave) and male iconic image with female live bodies.



**Fig 3.5.1.1.** *Ardhanarishwara*, Elephanta Cave, Mumbai, India. Photo: Leif Petersen.

Thus from the above discussion, I conclude that Ray, Boonham, Subrahmanyam and Subrahmaniam - all have adopted organic/intentional hybridity through a

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<sup>52</sup> *Tandava* is defined as the forceful virile dance. *Lasya* is a feminine dance with soft movements that is dominant in erotic mood. Bose (2001) refers that there was no connotation of gender while defining *tandava* by Bharata in his *Natyasastra*, but in due course of time, *tandava* and *lasya* were used in denoting the dance of men and women respectively.

combination of diverse elements. Although Ray and Subramanyam use the universal laws of creation (dark matter theory and Big Bang and *Nasadiya Sukta*), the treatment of the themes has remained strikingly different. Whilst Boonham in *Sivaloka* celebrates the concept of hybridity in offering an alternative mythology on stage by recognising affinity between Rothko's Murals and Shiva's iconic phallic symbol, Subramaniam connects neuroscience with Bharatanatyam to portray the feeling of shiver. What Bakhtin (1981 [1935]) describes, with regard to the novel, can easily be applied to both choreographies as they bring different languages in contact with one another.

It is also noted that the binary of organic/intentional hybridity is underpinned by multiple factors such as dance training, religious beliefs, education, travels, cultural background of the audience, funding and the subjectivities of these dance artists. While Boonham is preoccupied with paintings and sculptural arts, Subramaniam's science education background from King's College, London definitely contributes to making a piece like *Shiver* or *Under the Skin* (2013). In fact, within this context, such an act of hybridisation is often culturally desirable to cater to the taste of the local audience. Arguably, this gives birth to a double-voiced syntax in these choreographies.

After discussing how various conceptualisations of organic/intentional hybridity are applicable to these choreographies, I move on to discuss how these dances are critiqued by the audience members.

### **3.5.2. Perceived hybridity**

In this section my analysis draws on voices collected from the viewers from performance venues (The Place and Patidar House). For the dances which I attended in person, I interviewed the audience members (n=44) on the site. As mentioned earlier, I also visited some of their houses when they invited me to talk on this topic. Audience members who attended these shows labelled them as 'innovative', 'new', 'cultural collaborative piece', 'fusion dance', 'modern', 'Classical' and 'contemporary

Bharatanatyam' in a survey questionnaire (Appendix IV). Choreographically, the cultural negotiations in these pieces demonstrate dialogism, unsettling the traditional performance aesthetics. For instance, after watching *Dark Matter*, many audience members denied recognising Ray's *Dark Matter* as a classical piece, although a few mentioned that she drew on Bharatanatyam vocabulary. Most of the audience members agreed that it blended traditional with contemporary movements. Meduri noted that Ray's contemporariness was founded on the avoidance of mime, isolation of metrical sequences and the use of tailored costume and light in a new way.

In Shamita's work, I saw her isolating Bharatanatyam and removing the *abhinaya* from the movement, but inheriting the emotion in the form itself. Emotion was isolated for simplification. I saw the costume was different. I saw a new look in her choreography. I saw her using light and darkness in an interesting way. This was what I would say was contemporary about her work (post-performance discussion, October 30, 2010).

Another audience member similarly noted that the newness in Ray's piece was brought through contemporary movements and light works, energising the space: 'I felt that the stage was moving with light. There was a steady flow of energy on the stage through light' (personal interview, October 30, 2010).

Although *na asat* largely draws its material from Hindu scripture and juxtaposed with the Big Bang theory, it remains 'mute and opaque' (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]: 360) without expressing contestation and thus exemplifying organic hybridisation. Similarly, Subramanyam's experimentation, on the other hand, with Butoh technique, had remained 'mute' to all the audiences (n=19) whom I interviewed but one. This audience member, who is also an Odissi dancer, commented:

It was interesting to see how Anusha has used the Butoh technique in this piece. [...] The adaptation was not problematic for me. I think the choreography has highlighted Bharatanatyam, but there was a subtle flow of Butoh technique underneath, and this dialogue has paved the way for newness. One could see how her movements subtly transit from one another and new thoughts put into creation (audience member, personal interview, October 30, 2010).



In this way, interactions and collisions emerging from these encounters go beyond what Bakhtinian termed as ‘organic/intentional hybridity’. I argue that evolution of contemporary practice is not limited, but rather constantly engaged in bringing in ‘opaque’ modifications (organic hybridity for the viewers), or a double consciousness deliberately applied to create a new dance aesthetic (intentional hybridity for Subramanyam).

As seen above, hybridity in *na asat* has remained both mute and communicative, despite mixing various cultural elements. In contrast, a comment from an audience member indicates that hybridity displaces the notion of authenticity, although it was entertaining:

I enjoyed this piece. It’s different. I was taken into another universe, which was interesting. I also could see various uses of *mudras* [codified hand gestures]. I learned Bharatanatyam when I was young, but it seems Bharatanatyam has changed a lot in the UK (audience member, personal communication, October 30, 2010).

The above audience member clearly linked this displacement with her ‘memory’. Many audience members however informed me about obscurity of this piece. Meduri commented: ‘I see the use of minimalist space. I see the earth’s rotation in it and liked the use of lights, but really could not understand anything beyond that’ (post-performance discussion, October 30, 2010). As mentioned earlier, this paradox and obscurity come from the juxtaposition of the creation of the universe with ‘that which does not exist’. My argument is that these cultural exchanges and translations occur in historical, cultural and political contexts which make each of them a unique case, and thus cannot be generalised.

My following reflection shows how Subramanyam creates intentional hybridity on stage:

*There was a constant tension between the irreversibility of time and the deterministic sense of temporality embedded in the art of Bharatanatyam. Juxtaposition of the Big Bang theory with the Vedic theory was also very curious. Echoing Sanskrit verse recitation and the narration in English offered*

*another element of contrast. The space was not one of order and repose as Subramanyam borrowed on imageries from creations of the universe, such as fire, lightning, winds, storms, flash floods and earthquakes [...] (Reflective Journal, October 30, 2010).*

The words ‘contrast’ and ‘tension’ indicate that this piece exemplifies intentional hybridity. The conceptualisation of temporality in *na asat* is intentional, and ‘sets different points of view against each other’ (Young, 1995: 20-21) in contest. It counters essentialised ideas of homogeneous national cultures and languages, and celebrates cultural fragmentation which thrust identity into perpetual becoming. Thus Subramanyam is able to connect organic and intentional in a subtle manner as most of the audience members defined it as a ‘Classical’ piece despite of having abundant instances of ‘heteroglossia’ in it.

### **3.6. Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated how hybridity as a choreographic device is empowered and enriched by cross-cultural borrowings, while drawing on four contemporary choreographies. Although ‘hybridity’ is deployed by Bakhtin in his discussion of processes affecting the evolution of language, it is appropriated as an instrument for choreographic innovation. Organic/intentional hybridity does not exclusively exist as an inherent property in practice, but a relational concept dependent on several factors such as language, culture, religion, history, dance training and artistic choices. While discussing the danceworks, it is revealed how the process of organic hybridisation, that is ‘unconscious’ and unintentional, is ‘pregnant with potential for new world views (Bakhtin, (1981 [1935]: 360) and thus can be recognised as one of the driving forces in the evolution of practice. I have demonstrated how in these choreographies boundaries have dissolved, contradictory meanings collide and interstices emerge to accommodate differences. Drawing on Bakhtin’s classification of hybridity as ‘intentional’, I have argued that the ‘double-voicedness’ serves as a promising modality for generating

differences and as a result, is capable of expanding cultural and artistic borders. Often the lines between organic and intentional hybridity are blurred and thus do not necessarily exist in binary opposition; rather, they continuously inform each other. In this regard, a crucial concern is a relative awareness of the visibility/invisibility of cultural hybridisation which is dependent on gaze (of the artists and audiences). In other words, this model approaches the dances with a boundary-blurring (un/)conscious assortments, lending new forms and meanings, whilst recognising that they are asymmetrical and unsteady. In my understanding, this makes the framework subjective and heterogeneous with multiple possibilities. By continually shifting the borderline and redrawing contours that have a new set of exclusions and inclusions, the dance artists have constructed a fluid discourse of hybrid practice. Drawing on the Bakhtinian definitions (1981 [1935]) and the dances, I have argued that the margin of organic and intentional hybridity is an on-going process of becoming, and thus is liminal and always evolving.

In the following chapter, I elaborate on how real and virtual urban spaces are hybridised, while crafting a digital identity within the field of contemporary practice. Furthermore, I demonstrate how urban cities such as London, Kolkata and Chennai are choreographed and can be read against the discourses of the ‘soft/hard city’ and ‘heterotopia’.

## Chapter 4

### City dances/dancing cities<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: firstly, using Raban's (1974) conceptualisation of hard/soft city dichotomy, it demonstrates how a realistic representation of urban space is not entirely 'hard' but has allowed the dance artists to reconstitute their 'soft' identities. Secondly, it reveals how these dance artists are appropriating heterotopia, may be unwittingly, as an aesthetic device to portray kaleidoscopic patterns of cultural, historical, geographical and psychological climates of urban cities. At this point I want to make it clear that heterotopia is not directly alluded by the artists, rather, I am associating their methods and work with heterotopia and while doing so, I am presenting heterotopia as a choreographic tool to analyse dances. For the purpose of this chapter, the following research questions are studied to examine the interrelations among city, space and practice: how are the hard and soft imageries of the city embedded in the choreographies? How do the counter-arrangements of disparate spaces shape social relations, identities or subjectivities? How do the city and heterotopia as choreographic tools contribute to contemporariness? To address these queries, I particularly select the following dances which contrast various incompatible places with artistic subjectivities: *Quick!* (2006; full length 15 minutes) and *Bend it...* (2005; full length: 20 minutes) by Nina Rajarani, *NowHere* (2011; full length: 50 minutes) by Divya Kasturi, and *Song of the City* (2011; full length 38 minutes) by Ash Mukherjee. Through the analyses of these choreographies, I demonstrate that there is a constant

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to all those scholars who engaged me in a debate after presenting a part of this chapter at the 35<sup>th</sup> Society of Dance History Scholars' Conference "Dance and the Social City" at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, USA (Banerjee, 2012). Among them, I would like to specially thank Jessica Fiala for her time in explaining a nuanced application of heterotopia and sharing her working paper with me. See also Fiala (2014). A developed version of my arguments was presented at the joint conference organised by the *Society of Dance History Scholars* and the *Congress on Research in Dance* "Writing Dancing/Dancing Writing" at The University of Iowa, USA (Banerjee, 2015a).

encounter between the material hard and imagined soft city (Raban, 1974) to capture the urban rhythms (Simonsen, 2004). Borrowing from Foucault's heterotopology, I discuss how these dances are bounded by the notion of multiple spatiality and discontinuous temporality. Furthermore, I discuss how soft/hard city and heterotopias in these city dances demonstrate conjectural links between identity, places, travel stories and artistic subjectivities.

In chapter one I mentioned how some contemporary dance artists navigate the city in pursuit of commerce, culture and travel. From archival research, performance observation and interviews, I noted that these practitioners have imagined cities through personal stories, while charting the passage of flow between the concrete, lived city and also the city as they dream. Scholars have argued that cities not only have a material existence, but they also contain the spaces of imagination. Sociologist James Donald, for instance, states that the city is not just 'a set of buildings in a particular place' but a replication of 'an *imagined environment*' (italics in original, 1992: 422). As stated earlier, Raban (1974) proposed a dual nature of urban city as 'hard' (materiality) and 'soft' (imagined). While giving his personalised account of London, Raban professed that '[c]ities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose a personal form on them' (1974: 10). Drawing later on this, I demonstrate how the city in such selected choreographies is no longer defined solely by its materialistic reality, but also by the artists' subjective perceptions, whilst being caught in the midst of the 'plastic' and real city.

Returning to the contemporary dance scenario in Britain, Jeyasingh's *Duets* situated Indian female bodies against a corporate office building in London. While Meduri (2008b) explores the hybrid and complex identities of urban city dwellers in Jeyasingh's choreographies, Prickett (2013) examines the politics of 'place' in non-

proscenium performances. Thus there are rising interests amongst scholars to situate Bharatanatyam dance as an urban practice.

During my fieldwork in various performance venues, I also noted how the representation of ‘digital city’<sup>2</sup> in these choreographies has resulted in juxtaposing several disparate spaces such as secular, public and private, challenging the materiality of city buildings. For instance, I observed that multiple public places unfolded a practice of mobile spaces in Rajarani’s *Quick!* (2006) and a romantic/realist dualism was personified in *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Scholars have argued that postmodernity is heterotopic in nature because it brings contrasting elements together (Relph, 1991: 98), and therefore they often adopt the heterotopian model to study postmodern cities, including Los Angeles (Soja, 1995); Las Vegas (Chaplin, 2000); Dubai (Petti, 2008); Singapore (Guillot, 2008). Thus I am interested in examining whether the relationships among these heterogeneous city places in contemporary practice fit much more closely with Foucault’s conceptualisation of heterotopia.

Another key issue in Foucault’s conceptualisation is the problematic entwining of temporality with place and how time is perceived by individuals within a heterotopic environment. While observing Rajarani’s *Quick!*, I noted a continuous ‘*slicing of time*’ and ‘*a flow of city spaces*’<sup>3</sup> (Reflective Journal, October 30, 2010). Such experimentations have provoked me to ask: how does theatre represent ‘other spaces’? and how are these spaces different than previous ones? On another occasion, I noted how Kasturi’s choreography *NowHere* (2011) exhibited ‘*a continuous temporal rupture*’ and ‘*a collision of religious and secular spaces*’ (Reflective Journal, February 11, 2012). In all these dances the commonalities that reside are the mediations of here

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<sup>2</sup> The “Digital City of Amsterdam”, initiated in 1994, is one of the first examples of ‘digital cities’ that is rebuilt into a real-time virtual format city (Aydemir, 2004: 63).

<sup>3</sup> See the conceptualisation of ‘space of flows’ by Manuel Castells (1996, 2004). I examined *Quick!* and *Song of the City* against Castell’s theorisations (Banerjee, 2012). Considering the length of the chapter, I plan to develop this concept to its fullest in my future research.

and away and of past and present that are articulated across localities, histories, routes and differential temporalities. Drawing on such assumptions, I argue later that heterotopias in contemporary dances are not only sites of resistance or subversion, but also characterise a new order between private and public spaces as well as between indoor and outdoor spaces.

In the rest of this chapter, I explore selected theoretical frameworks that assist in developing arguments, especially, how the city, heterotopias and dance practices intersect to provide new understandings of urban spaces in contemporary practice. This is followed by dance analysis of four selected choreographies. Then I compare and contrast various choreographies to inquire how soft/hard city images are represented and pertain to the process of dance-making. My argument is that all of these four choreographies constantly challenge the boundaries of soft and hard city and situate heterotopia at the juncture of personal narratives and divergent histories.

In order to understand the city images produced through these dances, it is essential to explore conceptualisations of city as put forward by various scholars.

## **4.2. Analytical frameworks**

### ***4.2.1. Theorisations on the city***

The rapid industrialisation of European cities towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had transformed traditional cities into metropolises, which had engendered not only a conspicuous cultural transformation, but also has roused more recent academic interest among scholars to study these new urban phenomena. Sociologist Georg Simmel articulated how a metropolitan person is affected by the particular experiences of urban life (2002 [1903]). Another sociologist, Louis Wirth coined the term ‘urbanism’ to refer to a set of ways of living that is distinct from rural values, which might have acted as a precursor leading to the emergence of urban studies as a discipline. He depicted a city to be ‘a mosaic of social worlds in which transition from one to the other is abrupt’ (Wirth,

1938: 193). While pre-modern or rural cities were noted for their slow speeds, the global cities are characterised by speed, acceleration (Virilio, 1986 [1977]) and ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1989: 284).<sup>4</sup>

The adoption of the city as a subject in the past two decades in diverse disciplines has positioned it as a site for contestation. Various urban researchers have reflected on the themes and metaphors that the city has to offer and those have changed over a period of time (Rodwin & Hollister, 1984). Scholars (for example, Sennett, 1994; Mitchell, 1995; Boyer, 1994) attest to the creeping commodification of the city spaces, the erosion of values and loss of cultural ethos in cities. Some scholars have examined specific cities, pre-dominantly capital cities, to find out the nature of urbanism. Like many urban cities, London is always in a state of flux, and perhaps because of this, it has remained an object of appreciation as well as criticism by several authors (Wolfreys, 1998, 2004; Hartung, 2002).<sup>5</sup> The phrase ‘unreal city’ is used by T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Wasteland* (1922) for depicting London. Later, this phrase has been borrowed and appropriated as a metaphor for modern urban living (Timms & Kelley, 1985). I demonstrate later that there is a constant interrelation between the material city (projections of actual locations) and its imaginative existence (the unreal, mental city) in contemporary practice.

Drawing upon the works of philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984 [1980]) and Henri Lefebvre (1996 [1968]), various other academic attentions (for example, Simonsen, 2004; Edensor, 2000) has offered an insight into everyday city life and urban rhythms that are constructed through personal experiences and spatial narratives. Theoreticians have also linked the city with theatricality and performativity. David

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Giddens (1994) echoes a similar concept on ‘transformation’ of space and time.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Joseph Rykwert (2004) focuses on the process of Manhattanisation in his study of New York through the lens of globalisation, whilst Lynn Lees (1999) and Will Self (2007) have engaged in undertaking a comparison of sites, such as London to Paris and London to New York respectively.



Harvey, a geographer, depicts a city to be a 'theatre, a series of stages upon which individuals could work on their distinctive magic while performing a multiplicity of roles' (1989: 5). Although in one sense, city buildings have a materiality and permanence which performances do not, yet the performance and theatricality are intrinsic to urban life as affirmed by historian and sociologist Lewis Mumford:

The city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theater and is the theater. It is in the city, the city as theater, that man's more purposive activities are focused [...] The physical organization of the city may [...] make the drama more richly significant, as a stage-set, well-designed, intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play (1996 [1937]: 185).

In a similar vein, Raban argues that 'living in cities is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relationship between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living' (Raban, 1974:10). He describes how public spaces in the city 'often resemble lit stages awaiting a scenario' with characterised clothing, buildings and skylines all in theatrical and semiotic terms to suggest the 'grammar of the city' (Raban, 1974: 25).

According to Raban, the 'soft' refers to the imagined side of the city which allows a certain indeterminacy, fluidity and subjectivity of city dwellers, whereas the 'hard' refers to the material fabric of the city that is visualised on maps and city buildings:

The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture (Raban, 1974: 10).

Raban's conceptualisation of the city as a soft space hints at the contradictions that a city dweller has to face in a fast-paced city like London. That is why he imagines the city as a fluid and fixed canvas simultaneously as argued below:

[...] goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or worse, it invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in [...] Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a position on a map fixed by triangulation (1974: 10).

The malleable city offers temporary freedom to its dwellers to construct identity and contrastingly, imposes fixed cartographic identities.<sup>6</sup> Borrowing upon Raban's conceptualisation of the city as a soft space, I demonstrate later how a city dweller becomes alienated in a fast-paced city like London. For example, the city in Mukherjee's *Song* is unfolded around the musical selections from Tagore and physical movements in ways that accentuate the experiential flow of urban living. He, through various city images, reveals his fragmentary identities and the hardcore competitiveness that lies within the core of London.

While depicting London, Raban is critical of apartments where space 'has been sliced, horizontally and vertically, into a higgledy-piggledy pile of chunks of living space [...] There are strangers, not on the street, or across the square, but in the very next room' (1974: 7). In the above depiction, Raban undeniably points to a downside of this anonymity. In spite of the alienating facet of the 'vertical space' of the skyscraper, it implicates the growth and development of the city - an image of a colossal building that can actually reach the boundless sky. The city seems to grant more artistic independence, as agreed by many of the artists, and is layered with variable subjectivities of everyday urban living. I demonstrate later in this chapter how Rajarani, Mukherjee and Kasturi use various city images to configure an urban identity on stage by blurring the boundaries between exterior and interior and proximity and estrangement.

Before moving onto the dance analyses, the next section focuses on the conceptualisations of heterotopia.

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<sup>6</sup> A similar distinction is made by Michel de Certeau in his discussion of the 'map' and the 'tour'. A 'map' refers to the cartography of the city map, whilst 'tour' means living the city space through subjective narrativisation. See de Certeau, 1984 [1980]: 118-121.

#### 4.2.2. *Unpacking heterotopia*

In Chapter one I introduced the concept of heterotopia and here I elaborate on the six principles briefly as proposed by Foucault. The etymology of ‘heterotopia’ is derived from the Greek *heteros* which means ‘another’ and *topos* that means ‘place’.<sup>7</sup> Originally, it was borrowed from medical science where it refers particularly to dislocated tissues (Lax, 1998). Foucault introduced and appropriated this term to conduct spatial studies in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> According to him, heterotopias are:

[...] real and effective spaces that are outlined in the very institutions of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 24).

Foucault professed that heterotopias ‘have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect’ (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 24).

Because of its slippery associations, various scholars have criticised the model as problematic and incomplete. Foucault’s heterotopia has been also criticised as ‘unfinished, the examples varied and speculative and the outcome inconclusive’ (Hetherington, 2011: 466), ‘inadequate...for analyzing spatial difference’ (Saldanha, 2008: 2081) and ‘briefly sketched, provisional and at times confusing...open-ended and ambiguous’ (Johnson, 2006: 81). Foucault himself thought that heterotopias are ‘disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, ... make it impossible

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Space’ and ‘place’ are two fundamental geographic concepts that are contested. Debates centring on the concept of place have intrigued many geographers in the recent past (see Massey, 1994; Graham, 1998). Researchers from diversified disciplines have also used concepts of ‘space’ to understand the complexity of the social world, see Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]; Massey, 1994; Soja, 1996 to name a few.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault conceptualises heterotopia on three occasions: first, in his preface to *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) published in 1966; following that, in the same year, within a radio broadcast as part of a series on the theme of utopia and literature; and finally, in a lecture presented to a group of architects in 1967. In two short broadcasts on December 7 and 21 in 1966, Foucault spoke on ‘spatial’ for a French public radio about utopia. The broadcasts have recently been issued on an audio CD entitled “*Utopies et hétérotopies*” (Foucault, 2004 [1966]). The published lecture, “*Des Espaces Autres*”, has been translated into English as “Of Other Spaces” (Foucault, 1986 [1967]) and “Different Spaces” (Foucault, 1998 [1966]).

to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance' (Foucault, 1970 [1966]: xvii-xviii), yet this model has gained currency across various disciplines to explore the hybrid and complex transformation of places in urban cities (Chaplin, 2000; Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008; Hetherington, 1997; Johnson, 2006; Soja, 1996). There are rising interests amongst theorists to appropriate heterotopia to read arts and performances (Allo & Piliang, 2010; Anderson, 1994; Birringer, 1998; Franko, 2011; Manning, 2008; Tompkins, 2014). Dance scholar Lena Hammergren (2009), who studies works created by artists Ram Gopal, Lilavati Devi, and Rani Nair in Sweden, argues that Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopia is problematic because of the assumed common locus of classification, as topos itself is in a constant shift.<sup>9</sup> Borrowing largely from Foucault's assumptions, the danceworks and interview narratives, I utilise heterotopia not only as a methodology for writing as well as a model to bridge praxis and theory, but also to reflect on the choreoscape that is ever-shifting. I particularly favour the use of this concept because such interrogation shows us how urban practice can be read 'as texts and contexts, how to see other spaces hidden in the more obvious and diverting multiplicity of real world sights and situations' (Soja, 1996:162). Such readings also demonstrate how cityscapes are imagined and constantly reconfiguring the multiple identities of the artists, especially who are always in a state of transition.

Heterotopias are defined as concrete, physical places, in contrast to utopias that are 'sites with no real places' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 24). To elaborate on this concept of heterotopias, Foucault (1986 [1967]) enumerated six principles of heterotopology while conjuring up a wide array of examples: boarding school, cemetery, cinema, garden, library, fair, honeymoon resort, brothel, colony, amongst many others, and meticulously pointed out their nature and diverse functions. The first principle is

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<sup>9</sup> I appreciate the opportunity of having dialogues with Sevi Bayraktar at the University of Iowa, USA in 2014 and thanks are due to her for drawing my attention towards Hammergren's argument on topos.

‘heterotopia of crisis’ in which ‘there are privileged, or sacred, or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis’ (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 18). In his second principle, Foucault showed the example of privileged middle-class boys being sent ‘elsewhere’ such as boarding school to become virtuous individuals. Foucault cited prisons and psychiatric hospitals to be ‘heterotopias of deviation’ where people are displaced due to their abnormal behaviour. The third principle centres on the partition of one space into several conflicting spaces or emplacements, producing incompatible juxtapositions, such as a theatre or a cinema.

As mentioned earlier, the fourth principle pivots on how heterotopias that are temporally linked as in ‘heterochronies’ (for example, in a museum) and argued that there exist complex configurations of heterotopia and heterochrony:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 6).

With regard to time, he referred to places such as festivals that spring into life at certain points of the year. These spaces are classified rather as specific ‘heterochronies’ as they embrace ‘temporal discontinuities’ and are ‘marvellous empty emplacements on the outskirts of cities that fill up once or twice a year with booths, stalls, unusual objects, wrestlers, snake ladies, fortune tellers’ (Foucault, 1998 [1966]: 182). From a close reading of the dances against Foucault’s notes, I argue later how heterotopia is a deconstruction of time, either by accumulating temporally discontinuous moments or assorting objects from different time frames.

Foucault posited that heterotopias are inaccessible as public spaces in his fifth principle, but in such case ‘the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications’ (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 27). I discuss later how this fifth principle can be applied to the image of

temple in Kasturi's *NowHere*. Foucault's sixth principle is based around illusion or illusory space such as gardens, theatres, cinemas, fairs, stock exchanges, bordellos, casinos and museums. He argued that the role 'is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside which human life is partitioned as still more illusory' (1986 [1967]: 27) and in such places space and time could be converged at discretion and codes of behaviour undergo mutation very rapidly. This illusory sense of space reinforces the notion of 'soft' cities. Drawing on such assumptions, I demonstrate how *Song* partitions illusory spaces in portraying a city dweller both as a realist and romanticist. Intersecting the discussion of heterotopia with the discourse of the city, I further unveil how the boundaries of cities, spatial patterns and temporal rhythms are broadened, challenged and subverted. Before doing that, I go onto the selected dances for analysis.

### **4.3. The choreographies**

#### **4.3.1. *Quick!* (2006)**

Winner of the Place Prize<sup>10</sup> in 2006, Rajarani's *Quick!* situates Bharatanatyam dance in the world of business, using four male dancers dancing in fast tempo, symbolising the capital flow and the impending struggle for existence in an urban competitive world.<sup>11</sup> Aptly titled, *Quick!* is largely about momentum and speed as supplemented by the vocalist's fast articulation of *shollu* and *tanam*<sup>12</sup> singing. Even dance critic Deborah Jowitt noted this: 'You wouldn't believe the speed of composer-vocalist Y Yadavan's

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<sup>10</sup> The Place Prize is one of the most prestigious award competitions for contemporary dance choreography in Europe which was initiated in 2004. It is sponsored by Bloomberg and the competition runs every two years and commissions twenty UK-based choreographers to create new works.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that the revised edition of *Quick!*, which I watched at Patidar House, a performance venue in London on January 30, 2010, included a female cast member Bhakti Raval, dressed in corporate business suit. However I used the recording from its debut performance at the Place Theatre in 2006 for dance analysis. I also used some video still photos from my field shooting to describe heterotopic elements.

<sup>12</sup> *Tanam* in South Indian Classical music is the vocal improvisation of a particular melodic mode called *raga* with repetition of syllables like *aanam, tham, taa, nam, thom, tha, nom, tom thada* etc.

tongue as he articulates the syllables that guide and emphasize the choreography'.<sup>13</sup> Towards the end, renditions of varied movements demonstrate concentrated energy. Both the judges, Brian Eno, a musician, record producer and visual artist and Chris Ofili, who is a painter, stated: 'This work of unstoppable energy places Bharatanatyam firmly in the world of London business'.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig 4.3.1.1.** Business managers perform *adavus. Quick!* (2006) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Performers (left to right): Vikas P Nadayil, Ash Mukherjee and Shafeekudeen. Photo: Hugo Glendinning. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

In the first scene London city is depicted as a collection of objects and images - its electronic kitchen appliances set the urban rhythm. A virtual moving image of an electric kettle and digital timer on a microwave oven are projected on a wooden white board, followed by a toaster lifting a piece of bread ready to eat. In making energy visible through the home electronic gadgets, Rajarani not only indicates that there is a relation between consumption and technology, but also broadly signifies the passage of chores, routines and practices of urban life. With the recitation of metrical syllables, live

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<sup>13</sup> Available at: <http://www.villagevoice.com/2007-10-02/dance/high-on-speed/>, (accessed: 28/10/2010)

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <http://www.theplace.org.uk/658/news/nina-rajarani-wins-25000-place-prize-for-dance-sponsored-by-bloomberg.html>, (accessed: 28/10/2010)

bodies move in blue light (Fig 4.3.1.1), concealing and revealing the contours of the male bodies, whilst encapsulating them in its penumbra.

An urban city is often defined by its aesthetics of illumination. Light or illumination underpins an alternate way of understanding urban cities and our lived experience in them, which urban theorists Mikkel Bill and Tim Flohr Sørensen (2007) call 'lightscape'. Lighting alters the materiality of space and enhances the aesthetic sense for the creation of spectacle. As geographer Tim Edensor notes, '[t]he lighting of modern cities has transformed the nocturnal urban experience, widespread artificial illumination producing cityscapes of regulation, hierarchical selectiveness, consumption, fantasy and imagination' (2011: 230). With the effective use of contrasting shades of lighting, these scenes transform the stage into an illuminating London cityscape - the blue light reminds us of the London Eye and the pink of the National Theatre of Southbank Centre.<sup>15</sup>

Rajarani's portrayal of a London scene contains several trappings, tensions and ambiguities. For instance, its rhythmic contour is interspersed with centripetal gyrations, rolling, sliding steps that feature in *sarrikal adavu* and jumps revealing the slippery and uncertain city pace. A swift jump and alternating flat steps in fast tempo to travel space (as seen in *peri adavu*) are contrasted with the solid, static raising the heels (as performed in *kudittametta adavu*). The four male dancers form a quadrilateral in space and a *tirmanam* sequence in a vigorous speed comes as a climax. At this point, with the beginning of a new metrical cycle, the stage is transformed into a quasi-street where the dancers move as pedestrians. Scholar Sally Banes notes that 'repetitiveness' (2011: 104) is dominant in postmodern dances. For instance, repetitive pedestrian walks which

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<sup>15</sup> Southbank Centre in London is a multiplex of artistic venues which stretches from Waterloo Bridge to the London Eye and situated on the bank of the River Thames (between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge). It is considered to be the Europe's largest centre for the arts that comprises three main buildings (the Royal Festival Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room), and attracts innumerable number of visitors annually.



include fast walking movements, where bodies collide and overtake, signify the underlying rat-race that exists within the core of the business world.

In a key moment, the music comes to a halt, breaking the cyclical metrical framework. Performing *adavus* and wearing shoes in the heart of the city subverts the status quo because of Bharatanatyam's association with sacred space. Lopez y Royo (2010) examines the sacredness of Indian Classical arts and argues that the boundary of Classical arts is an ever growing field and which is predicated on modern subjectivity and on the agency and interaction between performers and spectators. Rajarani earlier in a press review challenged the traditional conviction by arguing: 'I have always strived to maintain the authenticity of classical Bharatanatyam whilst being fresh, creative and contemporary in the approach to its presentation'.<sup>16</sup> Geographer Kevin Hetherington further discusses on Foucault's writing on space, and argues that heterotopia 'as spaces of alternate ordering' (2002: 41). Thus it is an instance of heterotopia in a Foucauldian sense as the sacred space is alternated with public space. What makes the space sacred is not alone the material hard city, but has to do with the subjectivity of the characters, and thus I argue that it also intersects the conceptualisation of hard and soft city (Raban, 1974).

A horizontal line on stage is formed, and while doing so, the dancers exchanged glances for the first time. The slowing down of bodies parallels virtual images of cars stopping at the signal crossing [Fig 4.3.1.2]. While scratching his ear, a dancer looks at his wrist watch, signifying the tedious wait at city signals. This act of scratching amuses the other passersby. This collage of fragmentary stories mirrors the hurried and often uneasy experiences at the signal crossing. In fact, this episode has been inspired by a visual stimulus as Rajarani expressed:

One day, I was walking across a pedestrian crossing and happened to catch sight of a driver who was so impatient [waiting] for pedestrians to get out of his way

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<sup>16</sup> Available at: <http://www.narthaki.com/info/reviews/rev394.html>, (accessed: 21/05/2011)

and for the light to turn green - an image of myself when I'm waiting for the light to turn green.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the city space is like a theatre that is livened by human interactions (Raban, 1974). At this juncture, Rajarani blurs the boundaries between *lokadharmi* and *natyadharmi* techniques.<sup>18</sup> Repetitive realistic acts of dancers' fixing their neckties in front of a mirror, a pedestrian walk and casual sitting postures on the ground while scratching one's ear (*lokadharmi*) are contrasted by stylised gesticulations and facial expressions (*natyadharmi*).



**Fig 4.3.1.2.** Signal-crossing. *Quick!* (2006) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Performers (left to right): Ash Mukherjee, Vikas P Nadayil, E.D. Venkata Subramaniam and Seshadri Iyengar. Videography: Channel 4 Television. [Video still]. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

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<sup>17</sup> Available at: <http://www.scfta.org/home/Content/ContentDisplay.aspx?NavID=417>, (accessed: 21/05/2011)

<sup>18</sup> *Lokadharmi* is the realistic portrayal of life movements in a theatrical production as defined in Bharata's *Natyasastra*. *Natyadharmi* relies more on the theatricalised or stylised way of representation of events as opposed to *lokadharmi*. Today's modern Indian play adopts the technique of *lokadharmi* style. Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Kathak, Kathakali and all other Classical dance forms of India and many other folk theatrical forms, such as 'yakshagana' utilise largely *natyadharmi* mode of narrating tales (Barba & Savarese, 2006: 7-8).

Disruption of stasis occurs when the dancers crawl on the ground, which I interpret as the utter helplessness and struggles of postmodern city living. A new phase begins with *tanam* and all the musicians enter the stage space. Rhythms of the dancers' bodies and the city merge through the experience of walking ceaselessly on the city streets (de Certeau, 1984 [1980]), without being aware of anyone's existence (Fig 4.3.1.3). Urban researchers have argued that walking is not an informal activity (Gehl, 2011 [1987]) but also is an aesthetic experience (Basset, 2004; Careri, 2002). This also exemplifies subtly the theme of urban alienation (Raban, 1974).



**Fig 4.3.1.3.** Pedestrian walk. *Quick!* (2006) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Performers (left to right): Ash Mukherjee, Vikas P Nadayil, Seshadri Iyengar and E.D. Venkata Subramaniam. Videography: Channel 4 Television. [Video still]. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

Towards the end there are long sequences of footwork in a fast tempo. The dancers and musicians are seen standing around a board table signifying a business meeting. In the culminating scene, the digital city building is projected on screen, followed by the image of the bread toaster as a symbol of just another similar dawn in an urban city. This whole piece is heterotopic because it supports 'contrast between

public and private space, family and social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space of pleasure and the space of work' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 23).

#### **4.3.2. *Bend it...* (2007)**

Rajarani's *Bend it...*<sup>19</sup> approaches football as an urban phenomenon with a distinguished rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> Its music is improvised from a traditional Carnatic composition by Y. Yadavan and its movements are largely drawn from football repertory: 'bending the ball', 'bicycle kick', 'head jump', 'corner kick', 'cross', 'defender' and 'free kick' to name a few. Set to a cycle of 8 beats and performed by four South Asian male dancers Sooraj Subramaniam, Seshadri Iyengar, Vikas P Nadayil, Arun Sankar and a female dancer Bhakti Raval, this piece portrays this game through appealing aesthetics, embodiment and humour. Drawing on a *tillana*<sup>21</sup> punctuated by metrical syllables and Sinhalese vernaculars, this piece employs various emotions associated with this game such as pain, anger, violence and frustration. Throughout this piece there runs a parallel between the idioms of football and Bharatanatyam dance, challenging and alternating order of two distinct practices [Fig 4.3.2.1].

Masculinity is interwoven as a potential power with the national identity through the game of football and critics have noted its 'masculinity' and 'testosterone qualities'. *Bend it...* explores how a football game is experienced, represented and reinterpreted in urban cultures. Previously, a British film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), directed by Gurinder Chaddha, narrated the story of Jess, an 18-year-old daughter of a Punjabi Sikh family from London who aspires and eventually succeeds to become a football player fighting all social odds. Although its title refers to the technique of footballer David

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<sup>19</sup> The dance analysis draws on an earlier production of this piece. However audiences' narratives discussed in this chapter were recorded at Southbank Centre, London during "Alchemy Festival", 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Earlier Jeyasingh produced a choreography *Raid* (1995), inspired from Indian wrestling sport kabaddi. An excerpt of this piece may be viewed at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/zdhkxnb>, (accessed: 11/01/2011)

<sup>21</sup> The *tillana* used in this piece is popularly known as 'Kalinga Narthana tillana' which was composed by Oothukadu Venkata Subbaiyar in *raga Gambheera Nattai* and *Aadi talam* (8 beats).

Beckham for free scoring by ‘bending’ the ball past a wall of defenders, the plot hints at how sports celebrities can be perceived as role models in shaping youth’s behaviour. Underpinning is also the inherent politics of gender identity involved in the game of football (Caudwell, 2009). The marketing blurb on the show reads:

The 2002 movie *Bend It Like Beckham*<sup>22</sup> might have been first to explore the potential of contrasting the sporting rituals of the beautiful game against the backdrop of Indian tradition, but London-based Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations - take the concept to a whole new level [...].<sup>23</sup>



**Fig 4.3.2.1.** Interface between Bharatanatyam and football idioms. *Bend it...* (2007) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Performers: Ash Mukherjee, Y. Yadavan and Vikas P Nadayil. Photo: Chris Nash. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

When I asked Subramaniam if there was any association between the movie and this piece, he informed me that he had neither seen this movie nor heard about any kind of

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<sup>22</sup> The theme of football match has gained popularity as an academic subject. For example, scholars have critically engaged with the questions of identity in the game of football (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1999) and how British Asian identity is negotiated through the game of football (Burdsey, 2006). *Bend it like Beckham* has attracted scholastic attention in examining the politics of British Asian identity (Giardina, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/what-s-on/whole-new-ball-game-1-1242434>, (accessed: 28/11/2010)

borrowings from it (personal interview, March 24, 2014). Later when I interviewed Rajarani, she told me that the ‘movie didn’t influence this piece at all’, rather, the technical term ‘bend it’ (literally means ‘moving a ball in curves’) has actually been the inspiration for it (personal interview, May 24, 2014). She went on discussing why she conceptualised this piece:

Younger generation people are not watching or engaging much with Indian Classical dance and music. So, I wanted to do something to draw their attention. And football is something that they enjoy and it is very British to follow a football team. I was creating this piece for England and football is a very popular sport here in the UK. Also, my eldest son is football crazy [...] It is a way of forcing young people to watch a classical performance (personal interview, May 24, 2014).

But what is important to note here is that Rajarani privileges the city identity through theatre, movements, language and the game of football. Earlier Rajarani in a press interview commented that:

It [has] taken me a few years to find the balance between retaining the authenticity of the traditional form, and making it relevant to contemporary audiences [...] People need something to relate to, and I think we close a lot of doors when we deal with traditional material, because it’s all about Gods and Goddesses.<sup>24</sup>

From the above quote, I argue that the city encompasses a cartographic tradition which draws together artistic subjectivity, the body, language, realistic theme and practice.

*Bend it...* opens with a scene where eight male performers including the musicians stand in a row in blue and red jerseys in oath taking position, whilst a digital face of a player is projected on the screen (Fig 4.3.2.2). The players jog to *shollus* recited by Yadavan and exploit a wide range of *adavus* in its deconstructed form, whereas the screen projects a real football match happening in a playground. Much importance is laid on the intricate patterning of footwork in fast tempo highlighting the importance of kick or footwork as used in football. Like a real game, a kick shot varies according to the position of a player. It also comprises cross, corner shot and goal kicks

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<sup>24</sup> Available at: <http://www.list.co.uk/article/6106-play-ball/>, (accessed: 29/08/2013)

compared to a pass in, each demanding a different force and torque to ‘bend’ the ball. Stylised foot positions are used to demonstrate ‘back heel’<sup>25</sup> and ‘toe poke’<sup>26</sup>.



**Fig 4.3.2.2.** Real and digital spaces. *Bend it...* (2007) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Videography: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations. [Video still].

Rajarani in a press interview revealed how she conceptualised and produced this piece: ‘When I told them we were making a piece about football, they [the dancers] were all horrified,’ laughs Rajarani. ‘Not one of them had ever even kicked a ball before’.<sup>27</sup> This is also validated by Subramaniam, who told me that:

None of the dancers had any experience with football. We had a football coach who came to train us in a field close by to show some basic football movements and some other tricks they do [...] (personal interview, March 24, 2014).

Subramaniam also apprised me further how they reworked on those movements in a studio:

We looked for the parallels between football and Bharatanatyam. For example, they do a flip and a kick and the way we can imitate this in Bharatanatyam is by

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<sup>25</sup> A ball kicked using the back (heel) of the foot.

<sup>26</sup> It is a movement that uses the toe to strike the ball

<sup>27</sup> Available at: <http://www.list.co.uk/article/6106-play-ball/>, (accessed: 16/04/2011)

doing *swastika* [a cross-legged foot position] and a jump (personal interview, March 24, 2014).

I notice in the above two statements of Subramaniam that he weaves a common spatial reference to bring things together in time. From his journey between ‘horror’ and ‘humour’, Subramaniam reveals the interplay of self/city identity. The city place (playground near Rajarani’s house) also leads us to social interactions and thus to memory, emotion and desire (which is an imagined side of the city).

The spatial boundaries exercised in this choreography are about its lines of regulations and disciplines found in a football match: the marked spatiality exists in the circle, penalty area and goal area and penalty spot. Unlike in a ‘real’ game, the audience remains passive. Like *Quick!, Bend it...* also blurs the *natyadharmi* and *lokadharmi* boundaries as explicated above. An audience member told me:

Quite an interesting interplay between the *lokadharmi* and *natyadharmi* takes on dance as a means of communication, between the two different items. This piece was a brilliant success in the appropriation of the popular Kalinga Nardhana tillana, and reuse of the tune and the catchy rhythms to the contemporary setting of soccer (e-mail communication, May 27, 2014).

I wrote:

*The Alchemy Festival brought together different objects from different places and eras (e.g., a decorated rickshaw from Bangladesh, Bollywood posters and food stalls from various South Asian regions)* (Fieldnote, May 25, 2014).<sup>28</sup>

All these materials have undeniably lent the venue a heterotopic dimension. According to an audience member, whom I interviewed at the performance venue, informed me that its ambience heightened its overall effect:

[...] I wonder if some of these items work better in the sort of ‘mela’ [fair]/carnival sort of feel to the atmosphere in the Southbank’s Clore Ballroom, whereas it may potentially be less effective in a more formal proscenium setting (e-mail communication, May 27, 2014).

In the above comment, the performance venue becomes a ‘mela’. As stated earlier in this chapter, Foucault (1986 [1967]) classified ‘fair’ as an instance of heterotopia. The

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<sup>28</sup> “Alchemy” is the annual festival of the Southbank Centre that showcases music, dance, literature and theatre performances influenced by South Asian arts around the UK.



Cloze Ballroom setting from my description and transcripts meet some of the categories: it is, on one hand, is ‘capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces’ that are ‘incompatible’ (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 25), and on the other hand, the illusory nature of the hall (as fair) generates transitory experiences to the audiences, and thus is bound to temporality.

Music composition in this piece plays a significant role as seen in a football game. Scholars have argued that football songs produce identity through their ritualised performance in public space. For instance, sociologist Les Back comments that ‘it is primarily through songs and banter that a structure of feeling is produced in football stadiums’ (2001: 311). Such a secular but ritualistic act provides ‘an affirmation of community’; ‘an act of exploration’ and ‘an act of celebration’ (Small, 1998: 95). Subramaniam in an interview mentioned how Yadavan adeptly constructed the song like a football commentary: ‘The ball now goes in this way [...] he is following [...] now goal, oh frustrating! [...] The whole experience was humorous and different’ (personal interview, March 24, 2014).<sup>29</sup> This fragmented narrative of Subramaniam expresses the way the city places are constructed through the game of football which is a metaphor of the city life with its codes, rules, rituals, emotion and order. Overall, it reveals the commonalities shared by these two disciplines: the entertainment value and rigour that each one demands.

Previously, Roy in his review mentioned on the way new languages of the trans-migrants infiltrate into the auditory and sensory motion of urban living:

None of this would work without Y. Yadavan’s vocal accompaniment, a classical tillana rewritten in modern Sinhalese and sprinkled with various English words: free kick, offside, foul. With its motoric rhythms and catchy crescendos, this tillana sounds just like an overexcited football commentary.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The linguistics and semiotics of football commentary have been studied to reflect a set of social and urban behaviour (Lavric, Pisek, Skinner & Stadler, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Available at: <http://sanjoyroy.net/2008/06/nina-rajarani-play-ball/>, (accessed: 29/08/2013). All the quotes of Roy on *Bend it...* is drawn from this link.

In the above case, fragments of different languages cannot be arranged in order, so they challenge places and concepts. Foucault argued that heterotopias ‘destroy ‘syntax’...and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things...to ‘hold together’ (1970 [1966]: xviii).

Roy also mentioned that a ‘peacock dance’ was introduced by a peacock-costumed character. According to Kavita Jindal, who also reviewed this piece, the peacock dance was out of place and disrupted the flow of the performance: ‘The peacock interlude is meant to be an extremely odd contrast to the testosterone of the game [...]’.<sup>31</sup> The ‘peacock song’ is heterotopic because it displaces the syntax of commentary (spoken in Sinhalese) by juxtaposing it with the peacock song (sung in English) and thus displays the difference inherent in their syntaxes. This conforms to Foucault’s argument about heterotopia having the power to undermine syntax and grammar. I argue that such juxtaposition creates a new order and aesthetics, encompassing the artist’s root/route (Yadavan was born in Sri Lanka) and identity.

Virtually, all kinds of sports struggle over space with a finite goal. Therefore like any other outdoor game, football is subjected to ‘territoriality’ (Sack, 1986), which is evident when players deny others’ intervention within their circumference. Extending this imagery of territoriality, I argue that the football field and the stage as a football field are heterotopic sites as they are ‘not freely accessible like a public place (Foucault, [1986] 1967: 10). The meticulous use of *peri adavu* in exploring space in a fast pace with light jumps and stomps suggests the craving for and consumption of power by keeping the ball in one’s domain. Like a traditional structure, the tripartite rhythmic phrase (*arudhi*) follows the sequences of *adavus* (*korvai*) to mark the transition. In the following sections movement phrases are accentuated with jumps, hops, cross-legged

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<sup>31</sup>Available at: <http://kavitajindal.com/other-work/play-ball-by-srishti-dance-company/>, (accessed: 29/08/2013)

jumps, turns and swings. Like *Quick!*, the musicians also become the part of the performance spectacle on the stage in this piece.

As a social practice and interaction, the sound score includes roars and whistling. Some dancers explode with angst following the referee's blow of whistle declaring foul for violating game's rule, while their opponents take delight in this. Again, when some burst with passion, celebrating the goals, their opponents sink in grief. Philosopher Roland Barthes writes that: 'In sport, man experiences life's fatal combat, but this combat is distanced by the spectacle, reduced to its forms, cleared of its effects, of its dangers, and of its shames: it loses its noxiousness, not its brilliance or its meaning' (2007 [1960]: 61). Thus this piece is not only an urban collage inside a football stadium, but largely heterotopic by nature because it contrasts the practice of Bharatanatyam dance with an urban sport (football), and presents sets of binaries: victory/defeat, abiding/violation of rules and tension/relaxation.

#### **4.3.3. *NowHere* (2010)**

Divya Kasturi's *NowHere* is a contemporary work, performed by Kasturi and another female dance artist, Urja Desai Thakore.<sup>32</sup> The music composition is by John Marc-Gowens and its light and set are designed by Anthony Hateley and Helen Murphy respectively. Trained in Bharatanatyam and Kathak, Kasturi has experimented with these forms to explicate city living through props, narratives and the digital arts. Reviewer Michael Seaver critiqued this piece as: 'Playing on the word "nowhere" as "now here", she asks how our roots create our identity, and how much the past can really define the present'.<sup>33</sup> By bringing in various city objects and imageries, Kasturi constantly blurs the territories between public and private, past and present and real and imagined.

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<sup>32</sup> It is supported by Arts Council, Escalator Dance, Watford Palace Theatre, Dance East, Dance Digital and Akademi.

<sup>33</sup> Available at: <http://michaelseaver.net/dublin-dance-festival/>, (accessed: 29/05/2013)

This piece opens with Kasturi standing in semi-darkness at the corner of the stage. She begins to narrate her travel story which contains fragments of Tamil language, although keeping the main narrative in English. A salutation is enacted by touching the floor with hands and seeking blessing from the mother earth. Kasturi tells audience her experience of hurt when she was taught how to stomp, and in the background, the sound of *tanpura*<sup>34</sup> heightens this nostalgic mood. The set divides the stage space horizontally from the downstage right to left (Fig 4.3.3.1) where Kasturi's debut Bharatanatyam and Kathak costumes hang longitudinally on both the sides representing her past and 'home'. The walks, swirls, waving hand movements, all show the passage of time.



**Fig 4.3.3.1.** Costumes as heterochronies in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performer: Divya Kasturi. Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Divya Kasturi.

Visual perception and narratives combine to give the audience a sense of collage of cities. Researcher Katja Vaghi (2012) in a review commented that *NowHere* 'brilliantly re-explores the topos'.<sup>35</sup> Kasturi brings a divide of east and west through the

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<sup>34</sup> A tanpura is a supporting string instrument played in all classical musical concerts to support and sustain the melody by providing a harmonic resonance to one precise musical scale.

<sup>35</sup> Available at: [http://dubeyashish.com/images/confluence\\_march\\_2012.pdf](http://dubeyashish.com/images/confluence_march_2012.pdf), (accessed: 20/04/2012)

screen - with east being in her past 'home' and traditional dance and west in her present immigrated home as recognised through the mix of western music and performance sensibility. Her urban presence in London is constantly alternated with the city of her origin. She unfolded her creative process in a discussion with me:

The creative idea also stems from the fact that I find myself travelling back and forth trying to balance a career in both places simultaneously [...] During discussions and initial brainstorming sessions, the idea of 'memory' was strong and fleshing out more from that eventually, both of us [she and John Marc-Gowens] felt it would be great to use projections and images of both the countries/ 'space' [...] (email communication, April 16, 2013).

Switching from dance class memories to her exquisite and intricately woven silk costume worn for her maiden performances, she performs heterochronies. As the back stage lights focus, Kasturi crawls, keeping her hands in fists. She slowly folds her knees, while Desai Thakore stands behind the Bharatanatyam costume, replicating the shoulder, neck and eye movements from the first part of *alarippu*<sup>36</sup>. By crossing and uncrossing her legs, Kasturi then moves to place her arms diagonally and takes short jumps. A sudden metrical halt freezes Kasturi's body, while the stage lights fade away.

The second part opens with a digital projection of the *gopuram*<sup>37</sup> of the Parthasarathi temple from Chennai in blue light, whilst Kasturi's foot work is heard in the dark. This part emphasises a range of the borderlines of body and space that can be explored in the real and virtual environment. I argue that this counter-arrangement of the materiality, religious practice and city architecture that is located at another site is brought to represent in contrast with other sites, and thus is heterotopic. Kasturi blends the *tattametti*<sup>38</sup> from Bharatanatyam and *tatkars*<sup>39</sup> from Kathak with slow movements

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<sup>36</sup> *Alarippu*, a short *nritta*-based invocatory piece, is performed at the beginning of a Bharatanatyam recital.

<sup>37</sup> *Gopuram* is a monumental and intricately carved tower which appears at the entrance of any Hindu temple and forms a prominent feature of the temples of the Dravidian style in Southern India.

<sup>38</sup> *Tattimetta*, *tattimett*, *tattimetti* or *panchanara* as known in various schools is the combination of tapping feet contrasted with the position of toes and heels.

from release technique, also noted by Vaghi (2012) in her review. While making spins, jumps and outstretched leg movements merging with her virtual image, Kasturi repeatedly walks to the edge of the stage near the screen. The virtual city street fades away; an animated image of Kasturi appears on screen.

Whilst transcending the fixed borderline Kasturi merges her performing space with geographical space, suggested by the passages of travel across the sea depicted through her hand gestures. With the virtual projection of London streets on the backdrop, the focus on her hands disrupts. In the next few minutes, London cityscape is supplanted by Kasturi's native city, appearing with its busy street - moving auto rickshaws, parked cars, running motorcycles and noises. It converts the performance space into a heterotopic regime.

The piece culminates with the virtual image of a temple from her home city, evoking the nostalgic imprint of her imagined city. This city temple acts as a map of social and religious belief, as well as a repository of collective memory. What emerges here is a new urban environment increasingly characterised by the superimposition of material ('hard') and immaterial ('soft') regimes. In the final scene, Kasturi's recorded voice chanting Sanskrit verses gradually diminishes and the blue light disappears slowly, to perfect extinction.

#### ***4.3.4. Song of the City (2011)***

To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, Akademi commissioned *Song of the City* (2011) in the Vault at Southwark Playhouse in London. Choreographed by Ash Mukherjee, this piece was performed by Kim Amundsen, Kamala Devam and Gian Luca Loddo, and its music was arranged by Arun Ghosh. Its set consists of a space that is divided into city streets comprising wall and narrow lanes on both the sides. Two male dancers are seen in white shirts, long black cloaks and

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<sup>39</sup> *Tatkar* is the fundamental footwork in Kathak dance and executed in various tempos.

black trousers whereas the female dancer wears a deep neck cut, figure hugging black top with a black straight skirt above the knee that has a long cut in its front. Inspired by the songs from Tagore's anthology and a poem that is translated from Bengali into English by William Radice,<sup>40</sup> the city in *Song* is 'stitched' together from fragments of experience, often fleeting and transient, articulating with historical and idiosyncratic narratives of particular places and architectural heritage.



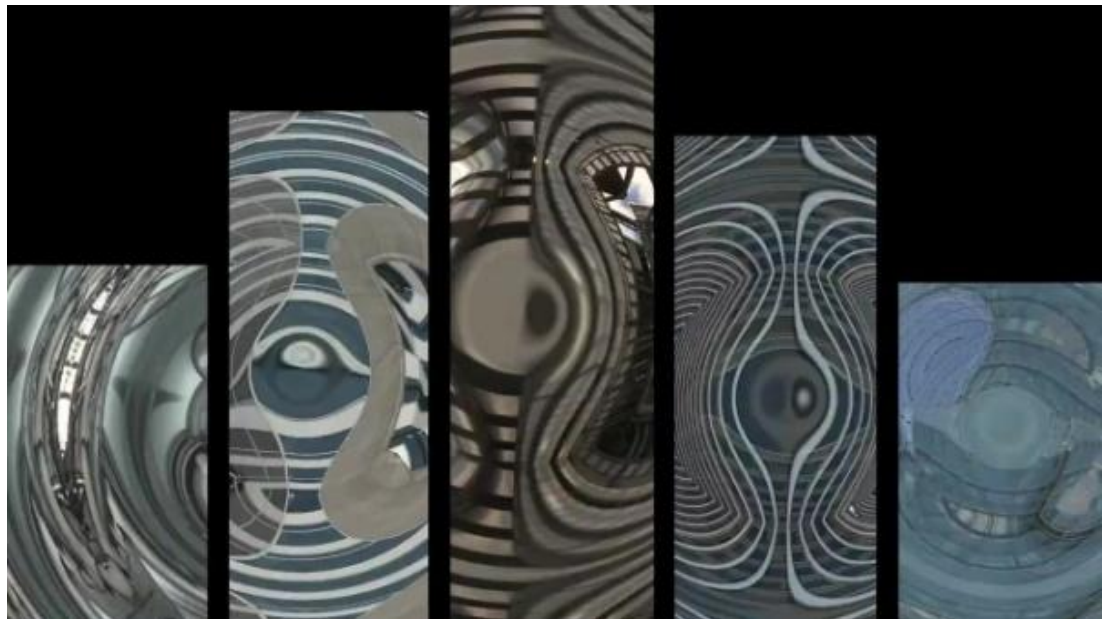
**Fig 4.3.4.1.** Skyscrapers. *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Videography: Akademi. [Video still].

Before going into movement analysis, I focus on its promotional video.<sup>41</sup> The visible images of hard city in it include: city skyscrapers (Fig 4.3.4.1), household, cranes, factories, riverside, government office and public buildings. An urban environment that is in a state of flux is represented by virtual moving cranes. Material and immaterial existence manipulate architectural space and architectural elements (Beckmann, 1998). In Fig 4.3.4.2, the blurry outlines of skyscrapers symbolise the soft

<sup>40</sup> Available at: <http://www.williamradice.com/Dancing%20Words/Song%20of%20the%20City.htm>, (accessed: 21/01/2012)

<sup>41</sup> Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXPgua4aNZA>, (accessed: 21/01/2012)

and fluid nature of urban living. Also, these ‘incompatible’ places are juxtaposed to depict a fragmentation of spatial reality and a pluralist architectural and urban identity.



**Fig 4.3.4.2.** Fluid architecture. *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Videography: Akademi. [Video still].

Cultural theorist Ben Highmore (2005) begins the second chapter of his book by quoting Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* (1978 [1840]) in order to foreground the theme of the illegibility of street scenes which create the spirit of modern urban existence. Mukherjee represents the theme of the ‘city-ocean’ in the video. Drawing on the urban crowd as a metaphorical ‘ocean’ of humanity, I see countless human heads moving ceaselessly; and the interrelations of the body, the film and the architectural ensemble unfold a practice of mobile spaces. As opposed to this, the video highlights the fragmentary identities of an individual city dweller, as seen in Fig 4.3.4.3. The visualisation represents a postmodern concept of the city by unfolding an incessant dialogue between gained and lost identity. In this way, the identity of the city and its people are constructed mutually.





**Fig 4.3.4.3.** Fragmented selves. *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Videography: Akademi. [Video still].

Akademi has used several promotional photographs for the marketing of *Song*. Amongst them, I read the following photo as heterotopia where gestures are borrowed from Bharatanatyam dance and contrasted with the business attire, suggesting London's multicultural identities and empowerment of women in corporate jobs. The iconic image of the Tower of London (Fig 4.3.4.4) connotes the global flow of capital, culture and economy (Eade, 2000); and there is a collision of soft and hard city because it fabricates a set of lifestyles beyond this materiality of the Tower structure. Mukherjee in an interview told me: 'For instance, look at London city right now - a very vintage or classical architecture is there and modern architecture stands there side-by-side. I wanted to bring all these...' (personal interview, February 28, 2013).<sup>42</sup> Urban theorist Charles Jencks (1993) coined the terms 'hetero-architecture' and 'heteropolis' to depict heterogeneity of contemporary architecture of Los Angeles. This is an instance of 'hetero-architecture' where the old architecture of Tower Bridge is placed against a new

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<sup>42</sup> Earlier Mukherjee expressed a similar view in a press report earlier: 'Historical, elegant and ornate architecture coexists in the London skyline with bold and streamlined contemporary buildings'. Available at: <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/interview-rising-talent-ash-mukherjee-talks-run-riots-beth-wood>, (accessed: 12/06/2012)

building, demonstrating a gap between architectural languages. It is this juxtaposition that qualifies (London city) as a heterotopia. Moreover, the business attire and codified hand gesture (use of '*suchi*' hand gesture indicating '*ekabrahman*' philosophy) from Bharatanatyam tradition together bring to surface the metamorphic life of its citizens who aspire to become enlightened, elite and modern, yet cannot resist the lure of a return to the glory of this ancient philosophy. The two distinct worlds, the modern London and the ancient religious belief co-exist; the borders between them are porous and they deconstruct an order by imposing a new order.



**Fig 4.3.4.4.** Tower Bridge in London. *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Performers (front to back): Gian Luca Loddo, Kamala Devam and Kim Amundsen. Photo: Peter Schiazza. Courtesy: Akademi.

In the opening scene, a male dancer extends and stretches arms on the floor, while his face is kept in the dark. Devam enters the stage, performing fluid movements. Several breaks of varying speeds and the gravity-defying movements including long leaps and jumps create a heterogeneous space. The centrifugal thrusts, large stretching movements, sudden vigorous turns, sensuous proximal contacts of the male and female

body, fluid movements and codified gestures are its characteristic features. Against a western musical tune, a Tagore song ‘*Tobu mone rekho*’<sup>43</sup> (‘Yet remember me!’) begins abruptly. Devam performs slow codified movements. Her expression translates this *baitalik*<sup>44</sup> song that heightens nostalgia for lost love. Recitation of syllables set to a metrical cycle of four beats in two tempos recited against western instruments creates a sudden break when another Tagore song, ‘*prothomo adi tabo shakti*’ (‘Oh, thou art the source of primal strength’) begins.

Codified gestures and geometric sequences are contrasted with ballet and contemporary moves. For most of the part, *Song* adopts the broad techniques of Bharatanatyam, i.e. *nritta* and *abhinaya* and also features movements from western contemporary dance and ballet. Like *Quick!* and *Bend it...*, *Song* compels its audience to think through the constellations of temporalities. Speedy recitation of the poetic lines emphasises the textures of ‘urban rhythm’ created by transport technologies. It also indicates mobility and restiveness of dancers in the city space. Fleeting contacts include expressions of caress, embrace, leaning, rolling on, pushing to throw away and squeezing one’s throat, which are then contrasted with hand gestures (for example, ‘*kartariswastika*’, ‘*utsanga*’ and ‘*swastika*’) to signify union. Erotic and fluid curves are contrasted with linear geometry. As Foucault remarked, a heterotopic space is always a contrasting one, and all above movement matrices, which I have presented, validate this claim.

Mukherjee did not perform in *Song*, yet the work abounds in autobiographical elements that underpin his struggle to maintain his identity as a Bharatanatyam dancer in London. Reviewer Clifford Bishop commented that:

By using Tagore’s work as inspiration rather than text, Mukherjee [...] has gained is the freedom to create his own allegory, using contemporary dance and

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<sup>43</sup> Translation of this song is available at: <http://pilanipoets.blogspot.in/2010/06/even-so-remember-me-tobu-mone-rekho.html>, (accessed: 29/04/2012)

<sup>44</sup> *Baitalik* is classified as a musical genre which lacks a temporal framework.

classical Indian Bharatanatyam, about the conflicts of realism and creativity in the daily obstacle course of urban living.<sup>45</sup>

Geographer Steve Pile (2005) argues that the reality of cities encompasses the emotional and imaginary elements of urban living which have been ignored. Drawing on case studies, Pile (2005) demonstrates how cities can be, and are lived as dreams, evident in the use of the term, 'phantasmagorias' in the title of his book. *Song* portrays Mukherjee's desires, dreams and nostalgia of his 'root' city (Kolkata) as well as his present city (London).

The dichotomy between the romantic and realist self of the artist has existed in society as ever and Mukherjee endeavours to portray the dual nature of a city through a binary fission of romantic and realist selves. In a personal interview Mukherjee asserted that:

You know, when Tagore used to go to Bangladesh to collect land revenues, which he didn't like doing that, and while travelling on his boat, he used to write poetry [...] So there was an executive aspect which we all artists have to learn [...] Nothing has changed since then. Here [in London] I was writing the grant application and also choreographing for this piece. I presented my 'self' as the executive realist and other as the romantic creative [...] (Skype interview, February 28, 2013).<sup>46</sup>

Thus the new and the old autobiographical stories come together, offering the narration of urban living in identical and contradictory ways. The cities from two distinct worlds (real/imagined) are presented as fractured and constantly in the process of construction. The integration of two cities allows Mukherjee to connect the fissure between the present and the past and contemporaneity and antiquity. The city becomes 'unreal' for the spectator because it is experienced as a dream. This idea recalls Simmel's mental city life (2002 [1903]) and Raban's (1974) 'soft' city.

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<sup>45</sup> Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/song-of-the-city-southwark-playhouse-vaults-londonbrdon-quixote-royal-opera-house-londonbrhomage-to-fokine-royal-opera-house-london-2333062.html>, (accessed: 29/08/2013)

<sup>46</sup> Earlier in a press interview Mukherjee conveyed similar things. Available at: <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/interview-rising-talent-ash-mukherjee-talks-run-riots-beth-wood>, (accessed: 12/06/2012)

As mentioned earlier, one of the overriding features of *Song* is the tension that exists between two worlds - one is materialistic and the other is imaginative. Mukherjee asserted that: ‘The entire space represented one person’s mind. The left and right sides are fighting and the Muse is posited at the centre, maintaining the balance’ (Fig 4.3.4.5) (Skype interview, February 28, 2013). This duality is reinforced by the use of costume colours:

Mira’s [the Director of *Akademi*] inspiration came from the black and white aesthetic[s] behind many of Tagore’s paintings [...] I interpreted black and white as duality or polarity [...].<sup>47</sup>



**Fig 4.3.4.5.** Dualism. *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Performers (left to right): Gian Luca Loddo, Kamala Devam and Kim Amundsen. Photo: Peter Schiazza. Courtesy: Akademi.

This dualism is further underlined by Mukherjee’s use of the two classical dance styles as told to me: ‘Classical ballet is very romantic to me as a form since my childhood and then I look at Bharatanatyam - the mathematical and geometrical aspects of it and I combined them together to portray this dualism’ (Skype interview, February 28, 2013).

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<sup>47</sup> Available at: <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/interview-rising-talent-ash-mukherjee-talks-run-riots-beth-wood>, (accessed: 12/06/2012)

Drawing on all the above details, I argue that this is heterotopic not just because *Song* juxtaposes different times and places, but because it presents a more profound kind of difference between concepts and the city places. Clearly, histories, dreams, nostalgia and pathos manifold soft city (Raban, 1974) in *Song*.

Mukherjee weaves multiple emotional stages of urban living, especially through the last three songs: *je toreya pagol boleya tareya bolish ne kichu* ('If they ascribe you lunatic, revert not to them') and *jodi tor dak shune keu na ashey tobe ekla cholo re* ('If thy call remains unanswered, move on all alone'), he suggests solutions about how to deal with the dark spaces of city life. The culminating song *baje karuno surey, haay durey* ('It plays tune on pathos, alas far away!') is filled with desolation, melancholy and nostalgia. Mukherjee underlines nostalgia for his culture, dance, language and 'home', so he pleads, '*tobu mone rekho*' ('Yet remember me'). His (like any city dweller's) contemporary life struggles tend to generate a cocoon-like existence - an isolated state of being cushioned in a dream-world that is highlighted in both the songs - 'It plays tune on pathos, alas far away!' and 'Yet remember me'. Whilst mediating between the postmodern present and nostalgia of the romantic past, *Song* is a collision of a real and an imagined place that becomes the heterotopia of temporality and of life itself.

#### **4.4. Discussions**

##### ***4.4.1. The saga of hard/soft city***

The choreographies exhibit many features that relate to a postmodern city (Harvey, 1989) and fabricate a rich network of practices, which transform every available space into a potential theatrical space. In Rajarani's *Quick!*, residential enclaves, city streets, crossings, cars waiting at the signals and double-decker buses possess visible/sonic urban identities of a 'hard' city. The microwave oven, toaster and kettle narrate our urban daily chores. The traffic lights show not only the intersections of the city, but it is

also a potent symbol of controlled movement of urban life. The office building is distinctly postmodern, designed in the high rises in London in *Quick!*. Brisk walks on city streets indicate the monotonies of urban rhythm and incessant labour that the business world demands. City speed is invested with huge effects that lead every inhabitant to become a passer-by and a stranger. This image of a 'stranger' is traced in Simmel's early depiction of metropolitan life. For instance, Simmel's (1950 [1908]) idea of the 'proximate stranger' represents a synthesis between 'freedom' and 'fixation', who is near but far and connected yet detached, and it is this vagueness that gives a stranger the unique dimension of being out and within. Similarly, *Quick!* presents alienated characters on London streets who challenge expectations of physical proximity and emotional attachment. This reciprocity between urban streets and the dwellers' mental maps reveal that they are unceasingly reconstituted by one another. Dancers become blasé and indifferent to what happens around them in order to survive in a competitive city. Borders between insider and outsider are simultaneously expanded and restricted.

Set in contrast to *Quick!*, Rajarani's *Bend it...* represents the materiality of a football playground and an imagined stadium where male players express emotions including aggression, anger, frustration and smiles in victory. Often they enact the role of cheerleaders as well as multiple forms of conflict. Although the playground is presented as a hard city, various linguistic and theatrical elements are used to demonstrate the soft city. Football ground is theatricalised with the lexicons of Bharatanatyam.

In *Nowhere* the hard city appears when Kasturi's native city, Chennai, is projected on the screen along with its busy streets - auto rickshaws, cars parked on a street, running motorcycles and city noises - all convert the performance hall into a 'virtual city'. Roy, borrowing from anthropologist Mary Douglas, conceives cities as

dirty and noisy. Dirt and noise emanate from city activities that are not only physical but cultural:

Cities are dirty, noisy places, not just in a physical sense, but in a cultural sense too [...] Noise is an interference in the communication of information, a disturbance, something that cannot be placed into a recognised pattern [...] Dirt and noises are, therefore, not things in themselves, but relative terms, disorders that are recognised only through a system of order, types of 'otherness' (Roy, 1997: 68-69).

The city noise and dirt have a fluid character that flow to create new meanings. Kasturi adopts this element of noise as an auditory metaphor and complements it with the visuals of the polluted, smoky and crowded streets of London and Chennai.

Urban narratives in these dances comprise various identifiable places that constitute a part of the city: busy streets, cars, park, the skyscraper, the passageways lined with shops displaying goods, congested sidewalks, the electric commercial signs that outline city streets, a moving elevator, traffic signal and a Hindu temple. Raban argued that:

The sheer imaginative cumbersomeness of the city makes us frequently incapable of distinguishing its parts from its whole; and moral synecdoche, the utopia/dystopia syndrome, is part of our essential habit of mind when we think about it (1974: 29).

I argue, these choreographies provide adequate instances of synecdoche of urban living (Raban, 1974).<sup>48</sup> For instance, the digital image of the skyline in *Song* is a part of the 'whole' city - a part of the commercial city space and also representative of it. Again, it is a part of the 'whole' city experience that suggests the contradictions and alienation of people. While, *Quick!* contains the rhetorical device of synecdoche by exhibiting speedy poetic outbursts which vivifies London as a 'city of acceleration' (Virilio, 1986 [1977]). Similarly, the streets in London and Chennai in *NowHere* function as a microcosm of urban living.

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<sup>48</sup> Synecdoche is a figure of speech that literally means a part of the whole or vice versa. It is often believed to be a sub-class of metaphor (Seto, 1999).



According to Boyer (1994), a ‘crisis of collective memory’ is a shared disjunction of our relations to the past and linked to rapid urban changes. This crisis provokes a desire to reframe the past in urban cities in order to produce a new and fluid urban experience. Kasturi’s *NowHere* weaves a spatial narrative revealing the fragmented nature of postmodern space, with its souvenirs, codes, language and its myriad connections to her home city. Sitting in the auditorium, I experienced how the architectural spaces of a hard city are reconstructed on an urban stage to evoke Kasturi’s nostalgia, exemplifying the ‘soft city’.

*Song* reassembles various fragmentary hard city images of London, especially in its promotional video. What Mukherjee uses is the materiality of the city to figuratively move the audience to experience softness and malleability through various compilations of emotive songs. The haunting memory of place is evoked to portray various emotional states such as alienation, loneliness, separation, pity and restlessness. Mukherjee’s identity as an artist is constructed in the temporal and the linguistic mobilisation of space. Portraying the contradiction between two dual figures (artistic and real selves) on the stage by pairing of the black and white coloured apparels, *Song* tells a seductive tale of a postmodern city where people meet, collide and interact, unimpeded by the structural constraints of time or space. Extending this concept, I argue that the manifestations of romanticist and the realist are imagined as ‘soft, amenable to the dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams, and interpretations’ (Raban, 1974: 8).

From the above discussions, city narratives have formulated a soft architectural fiction, whilst binding together stories, histories and dreams of the artists. Now I move on to examine how these dances produce heterotopias in the performance place.

#### ***4.4.2. Dislocated places and fragmented temporality***

In order to understand how city dances are in their essence heterotopic, I focus on Foucault’s claim that heterotopias represent, contest and reverse the cultural order to

which they are linked. With digital technology, the spaces constantly juxtapose themselves, one against another, which is similar to Foucault's heterotopia: 'a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 15). *Quick!* invokes heterotopias by creating visual tension between the dancers' virtual movements on the backdrop portraying the high pace of an urban city, and the stage space transformed into a world of business using stylised idioms from Bharatanatyam.

Rajarani, in a press interview, said that *Quick!* portrays:

[...] a businessman's typical day in London from the time he woke up in the morning to when he went to bed only to wake up to the alarm clock the next morning to start all over again. Actually, it could be anyone of us who has a crazy, chaotic non-stop lifestyle.<sup>49</sup>

Rajarani theatricalises London as an entrepreneurial city, narrating its breathless competitiveness and extreme mobility of capital through imageries. To Foucault, a bed is a 'semi-closed place for rest' (1986 [1967]: 3), and I argue that putting an alarm clock adjacent to it is a contradiction that ruptures the moment of rest, and thus brings temporal discontinuity. Further, city life is fragmented between the heterotopias of dream and reality through these two images.

Jowitt noted how Rajarani places the sacred art of Bharatanatyam in an urban locale:

In Rajarani's skilful hands, a onetime temple-dance style usually performed by women in saris becomes a vehicle for expressing the daily, cut throat rat-race of urban businessmen. Why not? In both professions, you have to be precise to succeed, and be able to maintain poise and a rapid pace whether the task involves navigating fiendishly complex gestures or runaway spreadsheets.<sup>50</sup>

By situating the sacred space against urban space and the geometry of Bharatanatyam dance close to Microsoft Excel graphs and Powerpoint presentations, Rajarani constantly challenges and overturns the places in a Foucauldian sense. Jowitt in her review commented that:

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<sup>49</sup> Available at: <http://www.scfta.org/home/Content/ContentDisplay.aspx?NavID=417#Nina>, (accessed: 05/05/2011)

<sup>50</sup> Available at: <http://www.villagevoice.com/2007-10-02/dance/high-on-speed/>, (accessed: 21/10/2011)

Rajarani sets the expressiveness, intricacy and energy of traditional Bharata Natyam in opposition to the blank face of urban commuter office life. Both dancers and band participate in this energetic and entertaining performance that travels through the working day from the journey into work, to battles round the boardroom table, to late night drinking and ultimate collapse before the whole cycle begins again.<sup>51</sup>

*Quick!* demonstrates how various heterotopic elements perform to contrast and combat places. In *Bend it...*, two forms of representation and syntaxes collide - the representation of the real urban language (game) and the representation of gestural language (Bharatanatyam). Drawing on Foucault's assumption that heterotopias are spaces 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 25), Rajarani's *Bend it...* is heterotopic because it juxtaposes the experience of playing an urban sport with a religious classical dance form. Drawing on Foucault's sixth principle, I argue that the football ground is constructed as a theatre where players and spectators are segregated through boundaries. The digital goalpost (Fig 4.4.2.1), which is made up of two upright bars and a net, is usually a place for contestations and reversals - it functions differently for a number of people at the same time. It is the place where a player's skill is tested for striking a goal and simultaneously, a goalkeeper's expertise to prevent an opponent's ball entry into it. For the winning team, this is the most important and decisive place as it determines their victory. So the failure and success are contrasted through this goalpost and hence 'invert[s] the set of relations' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 23). In addition to this, I argue that the goalpost concurs with the fifth principle in Foucauldian sense as this is an 'opening' where the ball has to pass between the posts below the crossbar. Yet, this digital goalpost is not real, and thus the players cannot really access this and it remains closed to them.

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<sup>51</sup> Available at: <http://flailbox.wordpress.com/category/place-prize/>, (accessed: 28/10/ 2010)



**Fig 4.4.2.1.** Goalpost as a counter-site. *Bend it...* (2007) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Videography: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations. [Video still].

Another frame that captures my attention is where the players are dispersed due to rain (Fig 4.4.2.2). The element of rain reflects more accurate visions of the real world, and allows many alternate readings of the place. According to Rajarani:

The film was used to add another dimension to the choreography and the things that are not possible to show on stage. It was accentuating the same point but in different layer [...] The umbrella does not signify anything [...] As you know, football is a robust kind of a game and players are used to play in the rain. I had taken the footage when it was raining, while the football coach was training them. But, all these dancers were with umbrellas [...]. I found it very funny (personal interview, May 24, 2014).

I argue that the rain scene represents the ‘other space’ ordered differently to its surroundings, disrupting the game. Here four umbrellas are out of place, allowing multiple reconfigurations of reality. The motion, energy and combativeness of the game are alternated with stasis, rest and friendliness.



**Fig 4.4.2.2.** The rain scene in *Bend it...* (2007) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Videography: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations. [Video still].

Set in contrast to the football stadium (as seen in *Bend it...*), the heterotopic environment in Kasturi's *NowHere* is both spatial (between London and Chennai) and temporal (now and then). The function of heterotopias is to 'create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned' and 'to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy' (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 27). And, Kasturi's costumes and other props create 'meticulous' partition. In an interview, Kasturi informed me how her costumes were displayed like a museum art object:

These costumes had a museum-like effect with the plastic sheets in front of them and the costumes were encased behind them. They suggest a sense of 'past' lurking in the background [...] They suggested a 'layer' that I put on and off [...] Another suggestion was also to do with colours: the costume colours represent India and when I wear black that is denotative of the UK for me (Skype interview, April 4, 2014).

Foucault (1986 [1967]) acknowledged museums as an instance of heterotopia, as they bring together disparate objects from different times in a single space and attempt to enclose the totality of time. Kasturi's biographical account presents the stage as a

museum that contains and represents the totality of her migration history, dreams, desires and nostalgia.

In Fig 4.4.2.3 the living room of Kasturi's *guru* created through the artificial line of separation might look as an isolated place and the sofa in the living room is heterotopia standing 'outside' of the social order, yet it is 'localisable' (within a geographical location and a temporal framework). In an interview, Kasturi mused on how a sofa was brought on stage (Fig 4.4.2.3):

A sofa was used in order to denote a sense of the living room in the performance space. I used to learn dance in the living room of my guru. Yes, in Chennai a very few teachers would have studio and dance is still an integral part of our culture. And most interestingly, I converted my living room here [in the UK] into a dance class and started teaching dance, although this was not intentional. [...] (Skype interview, April 4, 2014).

I was told, Kasturi purposefully created this divide to denote past and present life: 'I used a thin cloth material called gauge to make that partition and drew a line between my past and present life' (Skype interview, April 4, 2014). Through this heterotopic stage set, she upholds the cultural value of a living room in the dance training in Chennai.



**Fig 4.4.2.3.** Migrating living room. *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performers (left to right): Divya Kasturi and Urja Desai Thakore. Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Divya Kasturi.

The temple in *NowHere* contends with Foucault's fifth principle where spatiality is a cut-out place within the fabric of the city. It establishes a clear distinction between inside and outside spaces, to enter into the place one needs some special items to carry such as flowers, fruits and incense sticks for offerings. Kasturi in an interview told me about the temple:

It is Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane or Tiruvallikkeni in Chennai [...] We are Vaishnavite<sup>52</sup> [...] and this temple is linked to the identity of my family and ancestors. I make it a point to visit this temple every year (Skype interview, April 4, 2014).

I contend that this temple image (Fig 4.4.2.4) is an instance of alternate ordering as it unsettles the geographical border. The sacred space of temple exists separately from the urban landscape which Kasturi has to cross to enter or exit as told to me: 'The street you saw as projection lies just outside the temple and we have to cross the road to enter the temple' (Skype interview, April 4, 2014). The projected temple image is an appealing example of heterotopia as it separates sacred from profane space to perform rituals (Owens, 2002).



**Fig 4.4.2.4.** Temple as heterotopia. *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Videography: Suparna Banerjee. [Video still].

<sup>52</sup> Vaishnavite as a religious group worships Hindu deity Vishnu in his any incarnations.

In contrast to the specificity of London streets projected in *NowHere* and *Quick!*, the performance venue of *Song* gives its audience a sense that they are outside of city space. Foucault insisted that ‘the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place’ (1986 [1967]: 10), and the site in *Song* has remained to be an ‘uncomfortable place for rehearsals’ (Devam, Skype interview, March 3, 2013). The audience was forewarned of the damp and cold environment in its advertising flyers. These aesthetics comply with Foucault’s fifth principle that heterotopias discourage any easy admission. As a performance venue the tunnel is neither private nor public, and thus it provides an understanding of how such spatio-temporal experiences are negotiated, unsettled or shifted. Privy to these codes of exclusion, the audience is aware of its ‘out-of-place[ness]’ and the tunnel helps the audience to create a fictive atmosphere in their minds along with the sense of the thrill that the thought of a tunnel conjectures.



**Fig 4.4.2.5.** Materiality and flesh collide in *Song of the City* (2011) by Ash Mukherjee. Performers (left to right): Gian Luca Loddo, Kamala Devam and Kim Amundsen. Photo: Peter Schiazza. Courtesy: Akademi.



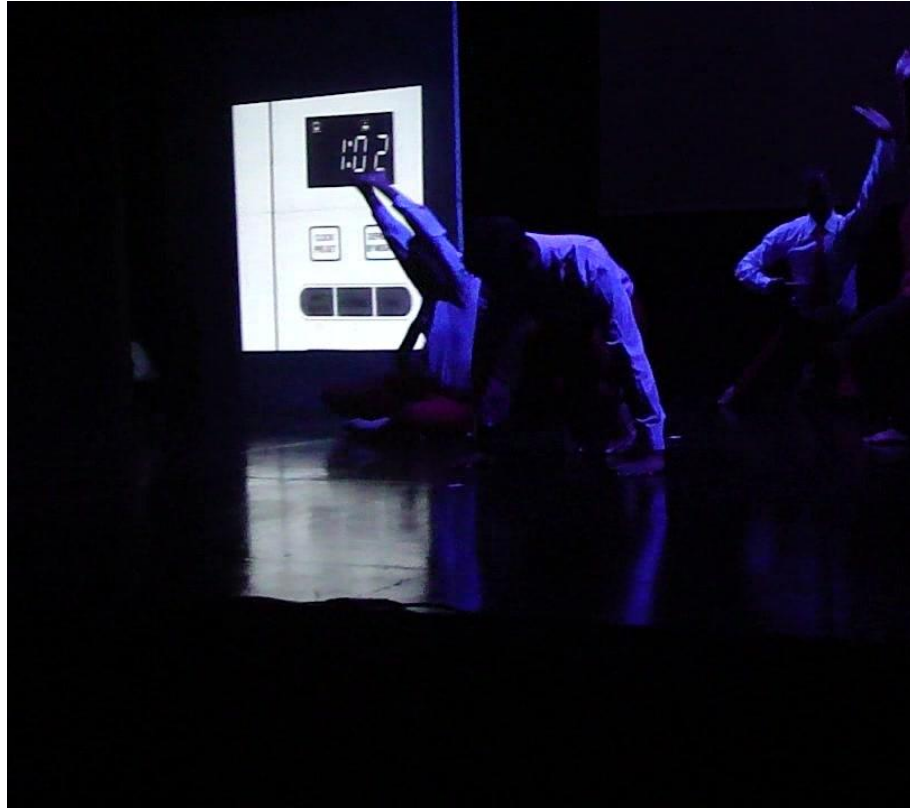
Many audience members thought that visiting an underground place, which was perhaps a protective place for soldiers during the war, exposed them to unhidden histories (Fig 4.4.2.5). The tunnel, as Bishop noted, ‘is mysteriously fitting for the subterranean arches of the Southwark Vaults. Its [...] exact percussion of stamps and claps re-animate the gloom, like ghostly gears and levers of the engines that once cut the tunnels’.<sup>53</sup> Critic Beth Wood personified this tunnel as ‘a kind of inner chamber, like a rib cage that contains the heart or the Self’ as opposed to Roy who felt the tunnel looked like ‘eye sockets or earholes’.<sup>54</sup> To Mukherjee: ‘It had two arches [...] one for the romantic self and one for the realist. The entire space represented one person’s mind. The left and right sides are fighting and the individual self is posited in the centre’ (Skype interview, February 28, 2013). The juxtapositions of the two psychological states as well as multiple cultures are ‘alternative spaces’, and thus they are heterotopic in the Foucauldian sense.

On the basis of the theoretical speculations advanced so far, I argue that these dances are the sites of appropriation of heterochrony. All the artists examined have their individual way of visualising time and space to narrate tales. For example, in *Quick!* the digital space is, in fact, an alternate space which could be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things that exemplifies ‘heterochronies’. The performance space in *Quick!* is partitioned and simultaneously connected by porous boundaries, through which everyday chores are mutually performed. In this instance, the theatrical space fits Foucault’s third principle of heterotopia where a single space can juxtapose several spaces that are incompatible (1986 [1967]: 25). In this piece, temporality is further suggested by projecting a microwave timer on a vertical board (Fig 4.4.2.6) and a signal-crossing on the city street.

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<sup>53</sup> Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/song-of-the-city-southwark-playhouse-vaults-londonbrdon-quixote-royal-opera-house-londonbrhomage-to-fokine-royal-opera-house-london-2333062.html>, (accessed: 12/06/2012)

<sup>54</sup> Available at: <http://sanjoyroy.net/2011/09/ash-mukherjee-song-of-the-city/>, (accessed: 12/06/2012)



**Fig 4.4.2.6.** Microwave's digital timer. *Quick!* (2006) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Videography: Suparna Banerjee. [Video Still].

Time is however not as obvious as a library or a cemetery in *Bend it...*, but one can say that a football game exists physically from time to time and game to game, and for this short period of two hours it requires that ground space. Sometimes the stage performers move in slow motion, which is contrasted with fast-paced movements of the live game players, while the ball still follows the laws of motion. This provokes the audience to think this game is happening in two different time units.

The ability of temporal distortion or annihilation, replication and merging of distinct physical spaces make the study of Kasturi's *NowHere* an attractive prospect when considering applications of the heterochronies. For instance, the spatial journey across cities is suggested by stage props (costume) whereas temporality is indicated by the metrical and cyclical percussions of *tattakali*.<sup>55</sup> I argue that the title *NowHere* is

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<sup>55</sup> Widely used by Bharatanatyam dance trainers, *tattakali* is a wooden small stick used in beating the measure on a block of wood to show the temporal framework.

heterotopic because it alternates and challenges places. This is effectively brought out by the use of digital space which exists nowhere. Another aspect of this word signifies temporal discontinuity. In this piece the geographical boundaries are blurred; as the temple building is moving out of the 'home city' digitally and posited in the transnational city. This illustrates how the function of space changes throughout Kasturi's travel history to mirror the ideas of the time. The juxtaposition of Chennai and London in *NowHere* is an instance of heterochronies because of the chronological repositioning of city roads, transports and buildings. Similarly, the transit landscape (from Kolkata and London) is a heterochrony, not only it alternates spaces, languages, histories and culture, but also merges Mukherjee's past with his present city.

#### **4.5. Summary**

In this chapter city dances demonstrate a melange of real, imagined and nostalgic cities woven around the interpretive lenses of the hard/soft city and heterotopia. Here the discourse of the soft/hard city and heterotopia are utilised as choreographic devices in contemporary performance to reveal the new lexicon and the aesthetics of urbanism. The soft city identity is constructed, remade and reinvented through social interaction, countering the seeming association of concrete city that is something akin to permanence. City dances as an orchestrated assemblage of urban rhythms depict a city that exists in multiple dimensions - the city of the floors in the sky, the city on the ground below, the city as a complex mixture of simultaneous events and slices of time. Especially, heterotopias in *Song* and *NowHere* are not 'other spaces' but integral to the performances that have enabled the audience to have a better understanding of the artists' lives as well as the performances. Set in contrast to traditional items from Bharatanatyam repertoire, the contestations of heterotopias have unsettled known patterns by projecting the multiple images of city places and articulated new spatio-temporal formulations of urban living.

The next chapter extends this argument further and visualise how the urban architecture is articulated and sensed by the dance artists, cast members and audiences in non-proscenium dances.

## Chapter 5

### Performing the site: the senses and sensibilities<sup>1</sup>

#### 5.1. Introduction

As my main research interest is to look at the emerging choreographies in contemporary Bharatanatyam dance field, in this chapter I specifically focus on the dances which are created for non-proscenium venues. Site or Site-specific performance is an emerging generic term in the context of South Asian dance in Britain, which has gained its currency in dance scholarship in the new millennium; and is still an open ended discourse, with multiple possibilities, methods and interpretations. As mentioned previously, site dance and non-proscenium dance will be used in the place of each other. At this point I want to mention that all the dances that I examine here are not performed in a single site and also are labelled differently by producers, dance artists and cast members, about which I discuss briefly later. While interviewing the viewers on site and making transcripts of interviews, I realised how narrations of sites by these dance artists and dancers have differed due to their subjectivities. The way that a site is variously defined through a collage of sensorial experiences creating a certain amount of flexibility is intrinsic to this study. I noted that in many cases their narratives had subtle sensorial transitions between the senses (audible and visual, visual and tactile) and also encompassed histories, cultures and identities. What has remained largely unexamined in contemporary Bharatanatyam choreographies is how various 'sites' are perceived and articulated by the dance artists, dancers and audiences through the senses. With this gap of knowledge, I address the following research questions: how do the dancers perform the site through their senses via a site dance? How are the spectatorial experiences shared? Along with these comes the methodological inquiry: how is a method devised

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<sup>1</sup> A fragment of this chapter has been presented orally at the "New Visions on Dance Symposium", Middlesex University, UK (Banerjee, 2013c). I am thankful to all those scholars who helped to enrich my arguments. Special thanks are due to Alexandra Kolb for her constructive comments on my overall presentation.

to understand the interrelation among a site, the senses, a performance and its reception. To address the above research questions, I analyse the following dances: *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009; full-length: 45 minutes, video length: 21 minutes) by Rajarani, *Paradiso* (2011; full-length: 20 minutes) by Mayuri Boonham, *Maaya* (2012; full-length: 20 minutes) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi and *First Light* (2012; full-length: 15 minutes) by Seeta Patel. Drawing on multi-modal sensorial theories, the dances and interviews, I examine how the overlapping of the senses creates a complex web, entwining histories, cultural experiences and memory through these dances. I argue that a site is always in a state of becoming and reconstructed subjectively by the performers and audiences alike.

The term ‘site-specific’ was originally coined by the visual art world in the 1960s and 70s to describe sculptures made for particular public locations in the United States. Later *Dancing in the Streets*, a dance company founded by Elise Bernhardt in 1986, used the same term for producing dances. The trend however was initiated much earlier in the 1960s by the avant-garde choreographers in the United States who created revolutionary works that brought dances outside the frame of the proscenium stage, including churches, museums, gymnasiums, galleries, sidewalks, public parks and many other places.<sup>2</sup> Following that, this term gained currency as a model for contemporary theatre in the mid to late 1980s, and due to its conceptual borrowing from visual art theory, this term has been debated by many scholars to fix its guidelines in performance. A growing number of performance scholars, journalists, and critics outside the United States have now begun to pay attention to critically examine this growing trend in site-specific performances (Hunter, 2005, 2007; Kaye, 2000; Pearson,

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<sup>2</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s contemporary dance choreographers, Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp in the USA created several non-proscenium dance pieces. The titles of their works were self-explanatory, e.g. Brown’s *Man Walking Down Side of Building* (1969), *Walking on the Wall* (1971) and *Roof Piece* (1971) and Tharp’s *Dancing in the Streets of London and Paris* (1969) (Banes & Baryshnikov, 2003).

2010; Wilkie, 2002). I discuss later in this chapter how the term, site-specific performance is defined by various scholars.

While doing archival research on my research participants, reviewing dance artists' websites and interviewing the dancers, I learned about the dancers' experiences of a site. For instance, Janhavi Harrison, a cast member of Rajarani's *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009), writes in her blog that: 'Our biggest challenges were using the stones creatively in the choreography without prior rehearsal, and dancing on grass - a surprisingly resistant surface' (June 9, 2009).<sup>3</sup> Her expression 'resistant surface' clearly reflects on her tactile subjectivity. During an interview, Patel revealed how the site for her choreography *First Light* (2012), situated in an underused space near London's Hungerford Bridge<sup>4</sup>, also known as Charing Cross Bridge, had an uneven floor (Skype interview, November 12, 2013), while many audiences mentioned about its 'damp environment' and 'chilled weather'. Mukherjee depicted the site for his *Song* as a 'beautiful space; but the air is really cold and you can't rehearse there for long' (Skype interview, February 28, 2013). Unevenness of floor space was also reported by Devam, a cast member in *Song*: 'Honestly, it was so challenging to dance in that uninviting space. The floor was so uneven [...]' (Skype interview, March 3, 2013). The audience members of *Maaya* (2012), a performance taken place in the majestic, 900-year old Westminster Hall, on the other hand, spoke about the 'echoing hall' and its optical exuberance. I noted how the feeling of smell and taste of food transformed my visual experiences in *First Light* performed in the Southbank Centre. All these experiences and readings of the dances roused my interest for understanding a 'site' through multiple layers of sensorialities which are constructed subjectively.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://jahnvi.wordpress.com/tag/nina-rajarani/>, (accessed: 14/04/2013)

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47042>, (accessed: 17/03/2012)

Although the theoretical interest of the senses in urban studies is not new, the subject of the material and cultural environments of cities through the sensescape of its people has not received academic attention until the past three decades (Corbin, 1986; Degen, 2008; Manalansan, 2006). Scholarly collections, such as *Sensible flesh: on touch in early modern culture* (2003) by feminist academic Elizabeth Harvey and *The Sensory Formations* series, acknowledge the cultures and histories of sensations outside the medical context, interrogating the hegemony of ‘ocularcentrism’.<sup>5</sup> Anthropologist Constance Classen (1997) proposes the multi-modality of the senses, and I argue in favour of the importance of such a model, specifically how it offers live, multi-sensory and flexible experiences to the dancers and the audience. In a recently edited anthology, anthropologist Sally Banes and performance studies academic André Lepecki (2006) recognise the multi-sensoriality in the domain of art and culture and indicate the rising interest amongst scholars to examine a wide range of performances through sensory theorisations. There is also an increasing scholarly attention to find out what the sensoriality of a place would mean in site-specific dances or theatre performances (Hunter, 2005; Taylor, 2007; Wilkie, 2004).

During my fieldwork in London, I also noticed that the background noise of the urban space, natural sound (for example, air and water) and recorded music were blended to configure a sonic collage. For instance, *First Light* abounded with city noises (grating, loud laughter, rattling, a deep resonating hum and so on). These sounds highlight the fact that sound descriptions are differently processed and interpreted through the shared meaning given to the object-source emitting the noise. Thus I favour the ‘soundscape’ design methodology that combines public installations, spatial poetics

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sensation Formations* is published by Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York and the series editor is David Howes. The titles of this series include: *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003) edited by Michael Bull & Les Back; *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (2005) edited by David Howes; *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (2005), edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer; *The Book of Touch* (2005), edited by Constance Classen; *The Smell Culture Reader* (2006), edited by Jim Drobnick; *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* (2008), edited by Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik; *The Sixth Sense Reader* (2009), edited by David Howes.



and sonic theory as a qualitative approach to read urban places and subjectivity. Building on my field experience and composer Raymond Murray Schafer's (1994) conceptualisation of 'soundscape' as an everyday urban sound composition, I utilise this methodology to read architectural space as sonic compositional space. While doing dance analyses (*Dusk* and *Paradiso* from their videos), a set of images led me to see, hear and feel texture of the place, without ever physically seeing or touching it. This drew me towards media theorist Laura Marks' (2000) conceptualisation of 'haptic visuality' for analysing theories of spectatorship because it not only suggests all-encompassing visceral, emotional and sensual form of engagement, but also value spectator's embodied experience. I unpack these theories later in this chapter.

I now embark upon a brief review of related literature and then set out a range of site-specific productions by Akademi and others in Britain. This is followed by a discussion on the broad concepts that are relevant to develop my arguments, and then I analyse four dances that are performed in varied sites. Drawing on the theories related to the senses and site-specific theatre discourses, my personal observations, interviews, dance videos and other sources (photographs, advertising brochures, blogs and blurbs), I inquire how these dances can be viewed as sensory experiences of the performers and audiences in relation to the sites.

My sensory experiences have provoked me to link multiple sensorialities with architectural traits of the sites. This subjective approach lent me to search for an appropriate lens to describe the viewing experience I at once held the role of archivist, interviewer, audience and critic; in de Certeau's terms, a walker and a voyeur (1984 [1980]: 92-93). The experiences in such performances were subjective and constructed with the intersection of multiple senses, which disrupt the notion of site specificity. To explore the way dancers, audiences and my own senses as tools have responded to various objects in the sites, I draw on anthropologist Sarah Pink's (2009) multi-

sensoriality as an ethnographic tool to read an urban scene. Throughout this chapter, an interlude structure shifts between theoretical annotations and narrative vignettes to contextualise practice and highlight multi-sensory appreciation of the site. In examining how a 'site' is informed by the interweaving of the senses, I draw on a range of theories which I discuss later to read how the senses function and contribute to the dance making process in the selected choreographies.

Given the vast histories of such performances in all over the world, I limit my discussion in the following section only to key definitions of site-specific performance.

## **5.2. Background**

### ***5.2.1. Site-specific performance: a brief introduction***

Theatre studies academic Patrice Pavis states that the term 'site-specific':

[...] refers to a staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo outside an established theatre) [...] The insertion of a classical or modern text in this found space throws new light on it, gives it an unsuspected power and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place and the purpose for being there (Pavis, 1998: 337-8).

Pavis' definition links two key criteria: first, a site-specific performance should exist outside the proscenium stage and the outside place is seen as the 'real world'; and second, by blurring the line between the audience and performer, the unconventional places empower the former to reinterpret it as a new text. Theatre and dance academic Cheryl Stock (2011) argues that a triangulated relationship is created in a site-specific performance through the interactions of the performer(s), site(s) and the audience(s). Performance and drama academic Fiona Wilkie notes in her survey of site-specific theatre that there is a trend amongst the companies in Britain 'to treat site-specific theatre work as a means of moving away from the strict codes of the traditional theatre and encouraging creative freedom' (2002: 249). UK-based performance company, *Red Earth* describes that site-specific performance is inspired by and designed to integrate with the physical and non-physical aspects of a specific location (Wilkie, 2002: 149).

However in some cases, both these arguments limit the use of this term because there have been several performances, for example, David Leddy's company *Fire Exit's Sub Rosa* (2009), referenced as site-specific which has used a theatre as the site. Another example is Wales based theatre company Brith Gof's *Patagonia* (1993) which regarded the auditorium as a non-theatre space: 'the stage as a site with a particular set of architectural characteristics rather than a neutral space of representation' (Pearson, 2010: 165).

Many definitions of site-specific performances have highlighted the spatial noun 'site'. For example, Mike Pearson, the co-founder of the Welsh company Brith Gof and archaeologist Michael Shanks argue that site-specific performances are 'inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible' (2001: 23). The qualifier, 'specific' further accents this; and thus most of the artists integrate details of the performance site, including the architecture and community demographics into the choreographic design (Kloetzel & Pavlik, 2009: 17-19). As noted earlier, the term 'site-specific' has its root in visual arts theories and originally referred to those artworks made for a particular location, exposing the material condition of the galleries. Performance academic Nick Kaye refers to a controversy in 1981 when the municipal authorities in Manhattan, New York attempted to move a site-specific sculpture designed by sculptor Richard Serra. He defends Serra's argument against the removal of his sculpture *Tilted Arc*: 'To remove the work is to destroy the work' (Serra cited in Kaye, 2000: 2). This shows sites' interdependence with art works and thus locating it elsewhere will definitely affect the art's aesthetic framework. Kaye argues that 'site specificity should be associated with an underlying concept of a 'site,' rather than with any given or particular *kind* of place or formal approach to site' (Kaye, 2000: 3). Architectural historian Miwon Kwon asserts the unavoidable connectivity between a site and the work by stressing on the physical properties of the site and argues that any

site-specific work establishes ‘an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site’ (2002: 11).

But the term evolved gradually in the realm of the visual arts to mean moving further away from referencing an actual location. Pearson and Shanks in a similar vein argue that: ‘Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused [...] site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop’ (2001: 23). Performance studies academic Gay McAuley defines site-specific performance as one that ‘emerges from a particular place and engages with the history and politics of that place, and with the resonance of these in the present’ (2001: 32). Pearson and Shanks (2001) argue that it is problematic to fix the notion of a site as they profess a site to be multi-temporal comprising many interrelated ‘layers’, full of juxtapositions and discontinuities. Thus ‘site-specific’ may still refer to a piece of work that is commissioned for a particular site, if not only influenced by the site. All these debates make the discourse of site-specific performances complex. A number of alternative models have been suggested by practitioners and critics and a variety of terms have been used by scholars to define these dances such as ‘site-determined’, ‘site-referenced’, ‘site-conscious’, ‘site-responsive’, ‘context-specific’ (Pearson, 2010: 8). Notwithstanding the label given, there is a prominent emphasis on the ‘site’ or ‘location’ for inspiring movement for performances.

In the next section I discuss some non-proscenium dance produced in Britain that use South Asian dance vocabulary and others. The goal of the section is not to provide an overview of all the choreographies performed by all the artists in the field whom I am examining, but to engage in brief with the themes and the places they have used for creating them.

### 5.2.2. *South Asian dance and non-proscenium dance productions*

As mentioned earlier, the surge of site-specific or non-proscenium performances sponsored by Akademi has attracted the attention of South Asian dance scholars (Meduri, 2008a; Prickett, 2013). I searched for videos from the Akademi's archive and also online sources (YouTube and Vimeo), reviews, photos, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) and blogs. These materials were helpful as they provided clues to comprehend the variety of site-specific performances and trace their development as a genre with its own historical trajectory within a dance tradition. For instance, Akademi sponsored *Coming of Age* which featured 85 dancers at London's Southbank in 2000; *Escapade* (2003) engaged 10 choreographers and more than 100 performers from a diverse range of professionals who danced in the outdoor spaces of the Royal Festival Hall, London, and *Waterscapes* which was produced alongside the courtyard of London's Somerset House alongside the cascading fountains in 2004 (Prickett, 2013).<sup>6</sup> Meduri argues that the site-specific dances produced by Akademi provided 'a new spectacular identity for Indian dance forms' and through these dances Akademi created a 'new expansionist stage' (Meduri, 2008a: 236). Her comment is indicative of the herald of a new genre in the domain of South Asian dance by pushing the boundaries of the stage.

It is noted that incongruity or inconsistencies of terminologies among producers (for example, Akademi), artists and audiences make this a complex area. For example, Akademi labels *Coming of Age* and *Escapade* as 'site-specific' dances. *Paradiso* by Boonham is described as 'a site specific open-air dance performance inspired by the architecture of Sheerness, Dante's *Paradiso* and the language of South Asian Dance'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Somerset House is a renowned arts and cultural centre in the heart of London. More details may be found at: <http://www.somersethouse.org.uk/>.

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://www.encounter-northkent.co.uk/2011/10/05/encounter-lets-talk/>, (accessed: 17/06/2012)

and *First Light* is described as ‘a new creative contemporary performance experience’ (Akademi’s Facebook webpage). In order to see how practitioners are defining these performances, when I interviewed them, they mentioned most of the dances as ‘site specific’. For example, *Dusk* and *Paradiso* were made for particular sites, however *First Light* was staged later as “First Light and Choreogata” in the Purcell Room by Akademi at the Southbank Centre in 2014. Although *Song* has been labelled as ‘site-specific’ by many,<sup>8</sup> Mukherjee and Devam described it as a ‘site-responsive dance’ in personal interviews.

Akademi’s ability to reproduce some of its productions, such as *First Light* and *Maaya* in different sites, displaying varying characteristics of sites, makes the site-specific term undeniably contested. Similarly, *Maaya* was later performed at Granary Square on the occasion of Camden Olympic Torch Relay in 2012. Prickett favours the use of the term ‘location specific’ (2013: 168) over ‘site-specific’ since some productions can be performed in multiple sites as well as cities. Due to variations in their labels used, nature and place of performances of the dances, as mentioned earlier I prefer to discuss the sensory engagement in them broadly as site/non-proscenium dances, without entering into the debate of what site-specificity pertains to. For this purpose, I particularly select those dances that are labelled differently and display varying characteristics of site-specificity. I am not going to enter into much detail; my intention is to indicate that all these statements keep the debate on the question of site-specificity in motion.

Prickett (2012b, 2013) examines the role of Akademi as a case study in propagating highly visible outdoor dance productions that engage with rich city of London and national histories of the migrants.<sup>9</sup> Her research primarily interrogates site

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<sup>8</sup> Available at: [http://lydia\\_fraser-ward.ideastap.com/Project/451a9e86-169d-4f9e-a8dd-9f63000c5715/outdoor-site-specific-producing---akademi](http://lydia_fraser-ward.ideastap.com/Project/451a9e86-169d-4f9e-a8dd-9f63000c5715/outdoor-site-specific-producing---akademi) (accessed: 17/05/2015)

<sup>9</sup> I am thankful to Stacey Prickett for granting me permission to videotape her lecture “Akademi’s South Asian Dance Productions: Dancing London Outdoors” which was presented at the *British Dance*

specificity using the discourses of ‘place’ and spatial politics.<sup>10</sup> For instance, she discusses *Awaz* (means ‘voice’ in Urdu) (2006), choreographed by Bharatanatyam dancer Chitra Sundaram, which portrayed the issues of migrants in Britain:

In Sundaram’s choreography, representations of migrant women labouring at sewing machines are viewed against the imperial columns of the National Gallery [...] Putting on sunglasses, scarves, red high heels and carrying a suitcase, the *Awaz* women transform from the traditional and exotic into the trendy and confident Londoner [...] Bharatanatyam and kathak steps and gestures were interspersed with other material that moved into and out of the floor in moments of contact and pedestrian gesture (Prickett, 2013: 170-171).

Prickett depicts this site’s texture through abundant ocular and haptic metaphors. The above passage dominates in optical images (such as ‘sunglasses’, ‘scarves’, ‘red high heels’, ‘sewing machines’ and ‘imperial column of the National Gallery’), and the phrase - ‘moments of contact and pedestrian gesture’ - dissipates the border between a vivid, optical realisation of the performance site and tactility.

While conducting online research, a performance blurb on another choreography, *Initium* (Where Dreams Begin) (2008), created on Hounslow High Street, a suburb in West London, attracted my attention:

Imagine a street. An ordinary street in the city. Car engines rumble beneath pedestrian chatter as life whirls about an urban landscape. Out of nowhere comes a sound -- A sound that belongs to another time and space. It’s the sound of the shennai [an Indian wind instrument which is commonly spelled as ‘shehnai], luring you into another atmosphere. The air smells sweeter. You feel heady, weightless [...]?<sup>11</sup>

This above online blurb directed me to imagine the place largely through an aural soundscape (‘rumble’, ‘chatter’ and sound of shennai):

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*Institutions: Past, Present and Future* Conference on May 19, 2012 at the University of Roehampton. All the quotes in this chapter are however drawn from her book *Embodied politics: dance, protest and identities* (Prickett, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> I came across Jeyasingh’s choreographies, such as *Counterpoint* (2010), which was commissioned by Somerset House and English National Ballet as part of “Big Dance 2010” and is a grand-scale site-specific dance. Jeyasingh created *TooMortal* (2012) for churches in the cities including Venice, London, Worcester, Stockholm and Belgrade, and it was advertised as a ‘site-responsive’ piece. Available at: <http://www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/TooMortal/>, (accessed: 05/05/2013).

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://www.danceuk.org/news/article/akademi-new-site-specific-work-initium/>, (accessed: 12/05/2013)

*The imaginary sound of shehnai connected me to those luxurious marriage gatherings in Kolkata where shehnai artist Bismillah Khan's mellifluous renditions of shehnai were played on the stereo. Apart from hearing the city, I could smell its smoke and experience its busy street. The reality of the past was enlivened in my mind. A complex shift of culture, history, place, sound and temporality evoked the sensorial collage of memory in estrangement (Reflective Journal, March 12, 2013).*

This is sometimes how we know and make sense of the world. Such intersection of the senses and culture provides a forum for discussion further in this chapter.

I go on to discuss various sensory conceptualisations put forwarded by the scholars from various fields. Although an all-pervading analysis of theorisations on the senses is beyond the scope of this chapter, I specifically focus on the theories which are relevant to furthering my arguments on the selected four choreographies mentioned earlier. I particularly engage with Classen's multi-sensorial model (1997) and other conceptualisation such as 'haptic', 'haptic visuality', 'soundscape' 'aural architecture' and 'aural tactility'.

### **5.3. Conceptualisation**

#### ***5.3.1. Making sense of the senses***

Privileging the sense of sight over the other senses has been debated in Western tradition.<sup>12</sup> Amongst many others, David Levin (1993, 1999) argues that we live in an age that is dominated by ocularcentricism. Ocularcentricism describes an epistemology that privileges visual or ocular metaphors. Martin Jay, a historian, coined the term 'ocularcentricism' (1988: 3) to describe the overt reliance of the modern and postmodern society on sight in experiencing the everyday practices. Mark Paterson, a geographer, alleges that the act of privileging sight has led to an under-representation of the other senses. As a response to this, academic interest in the senses is gaining importance in the field of anthropological studies and various scholars have highlighted and developed

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<sup>12</sup> Since Plato, numerous philosophers and theologians have believed the sense of sight to be the purest one (Synnott, 1991).



the multi-sensoriality embedded in human living (Bull & Back, 2003; Drobnick, 2006; Howes, 2003; Paterson, 2007; Law, 2001). This decentres the hegemony of ocularcentricism by encompassing the ways in which the various senses interact to create new meanings through a structured language.

Within this context, several sensory critics consider that the concept of ‘synesthesia’ (Cytowic, 2002, 2003; Campen, 1999) is pivotal to assert a multi-directional interaction of the senses. Classen introduces the key notion of the ‘sensory model’ by arguing that:

When we examine the meanings associated with various sensory faculties and sensations in different cultures we find a cornucopia of potent sensory symbolism. Sight may be linked to reason or to witchcraft, taste may be used as a metaphor for aesthetic discrimination or for sexual experience, an odour may signify sanctity or sin, political power or social exclusion (1997: 402).

Her above statements claim that the senses are not merely biological, but they are subject to human construction, and in the same book she argues that the ‘sensory perception is a cultural as well as physical act’ (Classen, 1997: 401).

In a similar way, academic Stephen Pattison argues that: ‘Sensual perception is not the province of separate, clearly demarcated individual senses; it is the sum of those senses interacting with the whole of the external world. Perception is a whole-body phenomenon’ (2007: 3).<sup>13</sup> Pattison argues that we often verify our sense of sight through additionally touching an object or a surface to gain a stronger sense of reality. Both Pattison and Paterson developed a modified appreciation of the sense of vision, which is interdependent of touch, and creates the concept of haptic vision. The term, ‘haptic’ has a Greek origin, which means contact or touch (Kurfess, 2004) or something that is pertaining to the sense of touch (Redondo et. al., 2009). It has often been used interchangeably with ‘tactile’. In a similar way the tactile is ‘an outer-directed sensory

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<sup>13</sup> A similar assumption has been laid by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1992 [1945]) who challenged that our five senses are discrete and suggested that our experience of the world is multisensory. In the commentary of Bharata’s *Natyasastra* by Abhinavagupta, the nature of *natya* (dramaturgy) as text is specified as ‘*drishya kavya*’ (visual poetry) and thus optical-aural in nature (Deshpande, 1989).

modality that corresponds to reliance on vision’, as argued by art theorist Rudolf Arnheim (1983: 23). For this chapter, I use the term ‘haptic’ to designate a sensory experience which relates to or proceeds from the sense of touch, sight or both.

Haptic perception is thus considered as a multimodal perception (Hiss, 1991). For example, James J. Gibson, a psychologist, explained the haptic system as ‘the perceptual system by which animals and men are *literally* in touch with the environment (Gibson, 1966: 98, original italics). Pallasmaa advocates the need for re-evaluating the importance of touch and tactility in order to make sense of one’s environment and ‘understanding of the world’ (2005: 10). The recognition of the importance of haptic in everyday embodiment valorises an ability to use the body ‘as an instrument of research’ (Crang, 2003) or as a ‘tool to gain insights into research subjects and their geographies’ (Longhurst et al., 2008). Likewise, geographer Paul Rodaway comments that the body acts as a mediator between the self and the world: ‘In fact, without our bodies we would have no geography - orientation, measure, locomotion, coherence’ (1994: 31). Rodaway asserts that: ‘The senses are geographical in that they contribute to orientation in space, an awareness of spatial relationships and appreciation of the specific qualities of different places, both currently removed and experienced in time’ (1994: 37). Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychotherapist Félix Guattari argue that: “‘Haptic’ is a better word than ‘tactile’ since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this non-optical function’ (1987 [1980]: 492).<sup>14</sup> My argument about the tactility in these dances does not undermine sight, but it operates on the assumption that perception is inherently integrated and thus multi-modal.

Building on Deleuze’s and Guattari’s assumptions, media theorist Laura U. Marks explores the notion of the ‘haptic visuality’ to mean vision in which ‘the eyes

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<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have also differentiated between tactile and kinesthetic perception (Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008; Witkin, 1954).

themselves function as organs of touch' (Marks, 2000: 162). While discussing an embodied experience of intercultural films, she proposes a binary classification of 'optical visuality' and 'haptic visuality. The former 'sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space', and the latter 'tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture' (Marks, 2000: 162). Haptic perception 'privileges the material presence of the image' (Marks, 2000: 163). Marks' conceptualisation also retains a link between spectator and image as she writes, 'it is not proper to speak of the object of a haptic look so much as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image' (Marks, 2000: 164). Since I am keen to understand the relationship between a journey through a site and its sensory perceptions, I favour this lens as Marks' argument of haptic visuality offers an aesthetic methodological framework by including spectator's subjectivity, while also indicating that the climactic frame is fleeting and always in motion ('more inclined to graze than gaze'). I shall later turn to discuss how the haptic vision in the dance videos stimulates a relationship between the image and the audience through evocation of tactility.

In their edited collection, historians Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward (2007) note that Simmel's works on the metropolitan city reflect upon the links among the senses, social interaction and urban culture. Geography academics Mags Adams and Simon Guy privilege 'the sensory turn in studies of the city' as multi-sensual experiences of urbanity which are tied to urban policy, consumption, identity, and governance' (2007: 136). Pallasmaa argues that as people traverse in the city; their sensory experiences are being determined within the urban context. I was particularly drawn to the following statement because of the nature of the 'sites' (Westminster Hall and Southbank Centre) that I examined in London:

I confront the city with my body;<sup>15</sup> my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the side of the cathedral, where it roams over the moldings and contours, sensing the size or recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience (Pallasmaa, 2005: 40).

What Pallasmaa describes is the way he encounters an urban space. He first perceives space in metrical terms ('length' and 'width') and then connects it with the senses ('grasp' and 'pull'). He argues the way city architecture strengthens our bodily experience and there is a mutual construction between the body and the city. While shifting between material (for example, 'door', 'arcade' and 'cathedral') and immaterial ('dark' and 'void'), Pallasmaa connects the elements of architecture with abstractness and subjectivity. He further argues in favour of the interdependence of the senses when he says: 'We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world becomes organised and articulated around the centre of the body [...]' (2005: 64).<sup>16</sup> It is this interaction of architecture and human senses that serves as a tool for narrative analysis later.

This chapter also introduces the concept of 'soundscape' that arises from the interaction between a given time and environment of an object to discuss a differentiated acoustic image of a city. The field of acoustic ecology was formed in the early 1970s, initiated by Schafer (1994)<sup>17</sup>, who introduced the term soundscape to provide an account for noise in cities and also a narrative for subjective experience.

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<sup>15</sup> Similar to Pallasmaa, feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1998) provides an 'interface' model that explores the constitutive capacities of bodies and cities. She delimits the scope of cities by arguing that they 'link together [...] a number of disparate social activities, processes, and relations, with a number of [...] architectural, geographic, civic, and public relations (Grosz, 1995: 105). This model therefore does not understand bodies/cities binary as fixed categories but they are equally porous to one another in reconstitution.

<sup>16</sup> Architects Jacques Herzog (2004), Steven Holl (Holl & Woods, 2007) and Peter Zumthor (2006) amongst others, who like Pallasmaa, acknowledge architectural environment as a multisensory experience.

<sup>17</sup> World Soundscape Project (WSP) at the Simon Fraser University, Canada in the 1970s was devoted to electroacoustic composition in academia. Project members who were included were composers, Murray Schafer (director of the project), Barry Truax, Peter Huse, Bruce Davis, and Howard Broomfield.

Historian Emily Thompson describes soundscape as ‘simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment...both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world’ (2004: 1). From the transcripts, I noted that my respondents have mentioned about the source of the sounds - road traffic (vehicles, bus horns, screeches of tyres), garden (birds), other transportation (for example, railway, streamer and aircraft), electronic gadgets (recorded music and mobile phones), people (speech, laughter and coughing), musical instruments (piano, guitar and violin), nature (wind) and animal (barking of a dog). In addition to our physical hearing, our day-to-day aural experiences are increasingly shaped by the mediated acoustics of the land.

Engineer Barry Blesser and scholar Linda Ruth Salter assign the term ‘aural architecture’ to study psycho-phenomenological effect that the sonic experience of space casts on us. According to them, the aural architecture of a place provides us ‘acoustic cues that can be interpreted as objects and surfaces’ and imbued with ‘social meaning’ (2007: 3). In their argument, Blesser and Salter celebrate the interdependence of the senses (aural and visual): ‘Aural architecture, with its own beauty and aesthetics, and symbolism, parallels visual architecture. Visual and aural meanings often align and reinforce each other’ (2007: 3). Besides, they also contend how the aural architectural influences our emotions: ‘The acoustics of a grand cathedral can create an exalted mood’ (Blesser & Salter: 2007: 76).

While discussing reverberation of the cathedral, Blesser and Salter argue that it is a result of ‘millions of sonic reflections [...] or millions of resonances’ (2007: 250). For example, bells reinforce the political and religious powers of the Church in Europe, and the sense of time and religion is audibly highlighted by the toll of Big Ben in First Light. It is argued later how an aural architecture, especially within the context of the urban environment, is never a neutral phenomenon. It is imbued with its own lexical code and aims to increase people’s awareness of their sonic environment. In this way,

soundscape acts a culinary metaphor as argued by Blesser and Salter: ‘sonic events are the raw ingredients, aural architecture is the cooking style, and, as an inseparable blend, a soundscape is the resulting dish’ (2007: 15). I later demonstrate how these conceptualisations are applicable in the dances discussed in this chapter.

Another key concept that I utilise in my discussions of sound and its influence on identity is that of ‘schizophonic sounds’ (Schafer, 1994). This term is used by Schafer not only to describe ‘the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction’ but also ‘to convey the same sense of aberration and drama’ (Schafer, 1994: 91). In another word, schizophonic sounds have been recorded elsewhere and displaced from their original context, spatially nor temporally (for example, radio). And this synthetic reproduction of sound supplants the natural sound and ‘machines made substitutes are providing operative signals directing modern life’ (Schafer, 1994: 91). I noted how the integration of loudspeakers with the environment provides a diffused schizophonic environment in *First Light* or *Maaya*. I return to this later.

Considering the aim of this chapter, I analyse four dances that demonstrate how a site is explored through sensory receptors. While borrowing from fieldwork, reflective journal notes and interview narratives, I demonstrate later how such a shift of gaze from the sites to the senses leads towards an active construction of meanings of sites through the interdependence of the senses. Prior to the critical discussion, I analyse the dances in the following section.

## **5.4. The danceworks**

### ***5.4.1. Dusk at Stonehenge (2009)***

Funded and commissioned by the Salisbury Art Festival and created by Nina Rajarani, *Dusk at Stonehenge* favours an interdisciplinary approach in which Rajarani collaborates with other artists, including Y. Yadavan (Carnatic vocalist), Judith Seelig (Shaman vocalist) and Tom E. Morrison (electronic producer). The music is directed by

tabla artist Kuljit Bhamra. Six dancers (one male and the rest female) wear a stitched traditional costume in orange and green whose styles and fabrics look uniform. Its choreographic patterns mirror the natural atmosphere of Stonehenge<sup>18</sup> and tie the various movement cultures, Hindu mythology and histories. Its steps are largely borrowed from Bharatanatyam and, at times, mingled with Odissi dance steps. Live music installations utilise instruments, such as tabla, djembes, clay pots, bells, steel drums, shakers, snare drums and mridangam, mentioned by a cast member Harrison; and the composition is punctuated by recitations in English. The scores are countered by polyrhythmic pulsations, which match the dancers' playful structured movements and also their sounds of bells. Shamanic traditional music and auditory senses engage in the construction of 'aural architecture'.<sup>19</sup>

At the outset, Yadavan's melodious non-metrical vocal, followed by an ensemble of percussion instruments open the performance by leading the dancers in front of the stones. This invites the audience to direct their attention to the stones.<sup>20</sup> A coupling between rhythm and the ecology is highlighted by the sound of drumming. While performing in a circle and sometimes in pairs, the green grass connects the dancers' bodies to the soil (Fig 5.4.1.1). Proximity of the dancers with soil establishes strong connection with ecology and draws the viewer's attention to the tactile quality of the surface.<sup>21</sup> Harrison, a cast member whom I introduced earlier in this chapter,

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<sup>18</sup> Recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England, which is situated 13 km north of Salisbury. It has the remnants of a ring of standing stones set within earthworks. The site is also considered to be a place of religious significance and pilgrimage in Neo-Druidry. Presently Stonehenge is a national legally protected Scheduled Ancient Monument and is managed by the English Trust. Available at: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stonehenge-landscape/>, (accessed: 14/04/2013)

<sup>19</sup> Shamanic philosophy relates the ecological surrounding to the inner psyche of people, and various anthropologists have engaged with shamanic tradition and practices from various lands (Aldred, 2000; Lewis, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> A few video snippets are available online. See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdeYi9\\_O8P8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdeYi9_O8P8); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owA-wD38oQw>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmcS3ioJLqE>, (accessed: 14/04/2013)

<sup>21</sup> Stonehenge is a protected site and currently, visitors are not allowed to touch the stones. This fact calls for an attention to study the politics of 'place'; however I intend to keep this for my future research.

revealed her ecological experience: ‘The sun lowered as we began, and our worries floated away as we just enjoyed dancing in the open air, surrounded by rolling fields, staring sheep and birds circling overhead’.<sup>22</sup> Subramaniam told me: ‘The sun was beautiful; we adapted a *surya namaskar* [a yoga practice to show obeisance to the Sun God] into it... *Bhumi pranam* (Fig 5.4.1.1) was done through the stones because those are sacred’ (personal interview, March 12, 2011). In Indian culture, the green colour symbolises prosperity of the land. Subramaniam informed me: ‘The bright colours were chosen to reflect the resplendence of nature, and to coordinate amongst all the dancers’ (Facebook interview, April 29, 2013). It draws a parallel between two different ways of experiencing the culture and histories, one haptic and one optic.



**Fig 5.4.1.1.** Touching the sacred land. *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009) by Nina Rajarani (MBE).

Photo: Bimala Nayasmith. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

*Dusk* draws shoulder movements from *alarippu* (Fig 5.4.1.2) along with many others, such as sitting on one knee, rising from the ground and moving into a swirl. Other sacred and ritualistic movements borrowed from Bharatanatyam, including the hand gestures (*‘anjali’* and *‘pushpaputa’*), express offerings and benediction. Usage of such gestures for paying obeisance is also seen in Boonham’s *Paradiso*, which I analyse

<sup>22</sup> Available at: <https://jahnavi.wordpress.com/tag/nina-rajarani/>, (accessed: 14/04/2013)



shortly in this section. Ritual hand gestures and movements are also borrowed from Odissi dance style; and the rhythmic sequences contain varied episodes, creating a synergistic ambiance. Although there are differences between the views of sacredness, this choreography has superimposed the sacredness of Hinduism on the marginal land of Druids, which I argue later.



**Fig 5.4.1.2.** Shoulder movement in *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Photo: Bimala Naysmith. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

In the next phase, the energy dynamics of the movements change when the dancers switch from abstract movements to depicting mythological tales from Hindu scriptures (such as the origin of the river Ganga). Subramaniam invokes the universal elements of earth, water and fire through Hindu mythology with a nuanced theatricality. The shot changes briefly and then the dancers are in pairs, and subsequently move in a scattered fashion in the field using folk dance movements. A real-time processing of the acoustics from the instrumentals, microphones, amplifiers and natural sound (wind, birds) creates an integrative environment of processed sounds. This merging of natural and amalgamated sounds contributes to its ‘aural architecture’ (Blessner & Salter, 2007).

Varied combinations of *adavus* are performed; the music becomes dense with polyrhythmic intonations. Towards the end, Yadavan walks holding a metallic bell used

for a Hindu religious oblation; the sound of the metallic bell clashes with the sounds of the dancers' dancing bells as they stomp in a vigorous speed. Dancers cross along each other in diagonal lines in fast tempo. A disruption of linear travel is highlighted when it is alternated with turns. Being a bordering line between sunset and evening in a literal sense, 'Dusk' manifests as a construction of in-between space.

The iconographical layering of stones merges with the live bodies to create a picturesque location; and the shamanic music combined with the sound of a metallic bell (used in Hindu religious ritual) produces a soundscape, constantly negotiating subjectivities within a hybrid, cultural space and aural architecture. Liquid sounds of the bells and continuous echo are opposed to the visual stony texture of the site. Sound becomes tactile, which is an apt instance of aural architecture. At the end, the dancers disappear behind the stones only to leave the dusk to illuminate the stones beautifully.

#### ***5.4.2. Paradiso (2011)***

Produced by Akademi, choreographed by Mayuri Boonham and commissioned by Encounter, a summer festival featuring 'site specific public art' at Kent, *Paradiso* is a site dance performed in a garden ('in the area between the car park and the sea wall')<sup>23</sup> on the Island of Sheppy. Inspired by the illustrations of Dante's *Paradiso* by poet William Blake, this piece deconstructs Bharatanatyam vocabulary by bringing movements closer to contemporary dance and balletic movements. Its dancers are Archana Ballal, Shreya Kumar and Pauline Reibell who cover the distances between concrete raised platforms in various ways, including stretches, walks and exploration of the concrete ground in kneeling position. In some sequences, the performers take on the quality of sentient phenomena through hand gestures - that of a leaf falling from a tree, waving trees and flowers. *Paradiso* articulates a curious displacement from a real site to an imagined site of Blake's poetry.

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<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://www.sheppeylittletheatre.org/promsat.html>, (accessed: 23/09/2012)

A dance production officer at Akademi, Lydia Fraser-Ward in an interview said:

It's an interesting place. There are raised areas and garden features but I was more excited by the sea wall, acting as a barrier. It's an unreachable place, however, as soon as you climb the steps and can see the beautiful sea view, the whole feel of the place changes [...].<sup>24</sup>

The expression, 'you climb the steps' reveals the profound connection between what is seen and touched. Like Fraser, Boonham told me about this unseen sea: 'What was interesting about the site is that it had a barrier between the garden and the sea, which was located at the other side of the wall. You can see it, hear it and touch it' (personal interview, November 25, 2011). The sea remains to be unseen and untouched, though it can be experienced as informed by Boonham. The site requires attention to urban dimensions beyond the visual and sonic. I argue it prepares the audience to experience multiple sensory perceptions - a binary of seen/unseen; touched/untouched and heard/unheard.

The piece opens with a drummer sitting on an elevated place with green bushes by her sides. A clear blue sky, sound of free flowing, gushing wind and a few yellow, fluttering butterflies - everything together frames a rich sensescape. Slowly the drumming comes to a halt; and following that, a dancer appears rolling her body along the top railing of the garden. While swinging her legs over the side of the wall, she rolls and slowly raises her feet (Fig 5.4.2.1) until the soles of her feet are securely planted on the stairs. It has been a surprise for the audiences viewing the other two dancers coming out suddenly from the edge of the concrete wall. Their bright red dresses stand out against the green bushes. Three dancers are rolling on and curling up, while performing at the edge of the metallic blue railing. The array of textures - the rough brick floor, the metallic sharp-edged grill and the soft butterfly skin - all images highlight surface rather than depth, a touch rather than a penetrating 'gaze'.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1YsnGgIBhs>, Available at: <http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/Performance-inspired-paradise/story-12971652-detail/story.html#ixzz2TOyNlmGB>, (accessed on: 10/05/2013)



**Fig 5.4.2.1.** Raised heel in *Paradiso* (2011) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Archana Ballal, Pauline Reibell and Shreya Kumar. Photo: Jacob Perimutter. Courtesy: Akademi.

By this point, a small crowd gather in the garden and also in the attic of the next building to watch it with much curiosity. Depending on the camera's angle, the uprightness of the wall and green bushes are contrasted with the horizontal position of the ground and the body. Low creeping movements engage with the garden space. The dancers hold hands, crawl on the ground, clasp their hands together and run together. They certainly reconfigure the border of the bodies and make connections between body and landscape, also seen in *Dusk*. Pedestrian and everyday movements are contrasted with codified steps. According to Ballal, 'Boonham is interested to show pure movements and therefore she includes movements and phrases from the classical dance' (personal interview, December 7, 2011). They traverse space in a line with *pushpaputa* hand gesture symbolising offering and oblation to this land (Fig 5.4.2.2). The audiences

take a tactile pleasure in the surroundings, and in witnessing how the dancers' movements create a contrasting tactility arising from the hardness (the concrete floor) and fluid space (articulated through their hands).



**Fig 5.4.2.2.** Travelling on concrete. *Paradiso* (2011) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Pauline Reibell, Archana Ballal and Shreya Kumar. Photo: Jacob Perimutter. Courtesy: Akademi.

The audience moves with the dancers, with the children in prams; a middle aged man appears with his dog and gets captivated for a few seconds and then passes by with a disinterested look. A security guard in the fluorescent lime jacket moves around keeping constant surveillance on the people. A sense of disjuncture is juxtaposed through *nadai* (stylised walking) on the lush grass with the movements from Bharatanatyam, ballet, contemporary and release techniques. Dancers' red costumes are contrasted with the white sacred mark on the forehead, blurring the line of cultures. While sight is undoubtedly the primary means for reading space, it coincides with tactility. Their hand-touched movements, with heels resting on the ground and toes in



raised positions, luxuriate in the textures and surfaces of the daily life movements (Fig 5.4.2.3).



**Fig 5.4.2.3.** The hand-touched movement. *Paradiso* (2011) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Archana Ballal, Pauline Reibell and Shreya Kumar. Photo: Jacob Perimutter. Courtesy: Akademi.

An overarching sense of fluidity is gained through travel. As Boonham expressed: ‘I have always loved the illustrations of William Blake on Dante’s *Paradiso*...This [*Paradiso*] is a journey of every man...It is a metaphor...And, the site actually had a very strong parallel to visuals that I was looking at...’ (personal interview, November 25, 2011). A tale through Dante’s vision is spun by encompassing and incorporating the dancers’ nomadic life. The allegorical travel narrative is seemingly infinite which offers a liminal space: the poetics of the site reveal and conceal fragments of a real and an imagined travel, a space of perpetual un-/re-making.

An elevated platform with codified hand gestures and contemporary moves is explored (Fig 5.4.2.4). Looking at the elevated concrete, the audience feels its solidity

and the weight of its mass. Three-dimensionality is accentuated - the space is cubic measurable. Underpinning of this material palette, which is hard, rough and concrete, actually has a tactile intonation. As discussed earlier, the concept of ‘haptic visuality’ (Marks, 2000) rests on physical relation between viewer and images, while emphasising abstraction, distance and subjectivity. Philosophical ideologies merge: ‘one absoluteness’ (conveyed using ‘*suchi*’ hand gesture by the dancer in the middle) complements the Dante’s concept of ‘paradise’. The law of gravity is set in contrast to the centrifugal projection of the leg extension that redefines the boundary of the land. An open, stretched concrete road, the boundless arching sky overhead, chirping birds, soft wind and the greenery lend this site an air of poetry. The piece ends with the dancers’ sudden, dramatic exits, leaving the audience bewildered.



**Fig 5.4.2.4.** Dancing on the elevated platform. *Paradiso* (2011) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Archana Ballal, Pauline Reibell and Shreya Kumar. Photo: Jacob Perimutter. Courtesy: Akademi.

### 5.4.3. *Maaya* (2012)

*Maaya* (2012) was produced by Akademi and presented in the majestic, 900-year-old Westminster Hall<sup>25</sup> as part of Arts in Parliament.<sup>26</sup> It was choreographed by a set of four dance artists Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi who also performed in it. It featured a team of dance practitioners, including female dancers, Heenal Amin, Archana Ballal, Dhruvi Dattani, Kavita Kaur, Arunima Kumar, and male dancers Javed Sanadi, Ash Mukherjee and Revanta Sarabhai, although a few dancers have remained unidentified. The production manager was Simon Robertson and the lighting was designed by Prema Mehta. The performance comprises three segments as written on the program note distributed on that day, ‘An undulating wave of colour’, ‘Inner tranquillity’ and ‘Intimate rapture’ and following that a garland of dances from the repertoire of Bharatanatyam is performed by Priyadarshini Govind, a guest Bharatanatyam artist from Chennai, India. In *Maaya* the theme of colour recurs and interweaves the issues of otherness, diversity and class. Dancers animate Westminster Hall by mapping a nomadic journey across multiple sites, which challenges the notion of fixed identities by indicating the fluidity of contemporary urban existence in multicultural London.

The endeavour to situate Indian dance traditions into this illustrious architectural space has once again affirmed the interrelation of architecture and Indian dance, also evident in its invitation card (Fig 5.4.3.1). Although one would recognise the hardness of the stone and brittleness of glass windows, the photo gives us a haptic feeling. *Maaya* establishes a spatial geometry between choreographic patterns and concrete stairs.

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<sup>25</sup> Best known for its architectural and historic references, London’s Westminster Hall has remained a popular attraction for tourists. Located on the bank of the River Thames, it is the meeting place of the House of Commons and the House of Lords of the United Kingdom Parliament.

<sup>26</sup> The ‘Arts in Parliament’ was a performance series that brought art, music, dance and poetry into the iconic setting of the Houses of Parliament in the Olympic year 2012. Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/arts-in-parliament/about-arts-in-parliament/>, (accessed: 14/09/2013)



While watching I wrote: ‘*The fluidity of textile colours appeals to my optical nerves and it is also as if the resonating ripples of sound are painted visually, which make the architectural space a sinuous curve*’ (Fieldnote, July 5, 2012). The emphasis lies not on the architectural space, but on the theatrical encounter of the perceptual situation(s) in which the dancers find themselves. As a result, the image is constantly unfolding a lively dynamics among ocular grandeur, aurality and tactility, giving rise to a new mode of experience.



**Fig 5.4.3.1.** An invitation card. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Photo: Pete Schiazza. Courtesy: Akademi.

The dance begins with two lead female and male dancers, Gauri Sharma Tripathy and Jesal Patel, standing on the top stair as seen from below with a firm grounded foot (Fig 5.4.3.2) and fluid hand movements. They gyrate slowly, and following that, Sharma Tripathy bends her torso, allowing the male dancer to balance her body from falling, whilst keeping his feet securely planted on the concrete floor. By this point, a large crowd had gathered in the hall, watching with anticipation. Sharma

Tripathy gradually makes her way, step by step, down the stairs swiftly, while performing rotational movements of arms from Kathak dance vocabulary. They blend contact movements and Kathak dance idioms.



**Fig 5.4.3.2.** Grounded on the top stair. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Photo: Catherine Bebbington. Courtesy: Akademi.



**Fig 5.4.3.3.** The swirl of costumes. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Photo: Suparna Banerjee. Courtesy: Akademi.

A group of dancers joins in. Bharatanatyam dancers draw a parallel historical journey of geometrical lineage in the cultural products of architecture, dance and body

contrasted with the quick whirls of Kathak dancers (Fig 5.4.3.3). The fluidity of movements in contemporary dance style harmonises with the flowing chiffon costumes, which are juxtaposed with the hard and arid concrete stairs on which the dancers traversed. In not taking haptic and optic as binaries, in fact, both as modes of perception slide and synthesise one with the other. Westminster Hall turns to be an intimate space of touch, listening and viewing. A recurring motif of spins is contrasted with the gravitational placing of footwork on the floor by a group of Bharatanatyam dancers. These intimate points of contact of bodies and the sounds of bare feet, people's chattering sound, echo and recorded music have transformed the architectural space to divergent travel routes. The work succeeds in incorporating stylised as well as pedestrian movements for travelling (Fig 5.4.3.4). When some dancers travel forward, while gyrating in fast speed, other dancers perform Bharatanatyam *adavus* establishing contact on the stairs.



**Fig 5.4.3.4.** Energetic stumps. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Photo: Catherine Bebbington. Courtesy: Akademi.

The hands of four Bharatanatyam dancers move in flowing gestures and their intimate exchange of glances transforms the materiality of the British historical and political building, making it more ‘homely’ and personalised. Gravity and spiraled moves are contrasted. Three female dancers throw and stretch legs while a group of Kathak dancers kneel down on the concrete floor, making connections with the tradition, architecture and design. The fluid hand moves of Patel and Sarabhai suggest tactile subjectivity. Kaur, an Odissi dancer, deconstructs the *tribhangi* posture<sup>27</sup> blending with release technique to fit into the stairs. Mukherjee performs Manipuri whirls (in the shape of figure 8), while light energises the floor. Suddenly all the dancers’ movements become random; the rhythm changes. Nine dancers form a line by clasping their hands and move in circles. Sarabhai lifts Patel and the interchange of weight between them is intended to animate the concrete through touch. They rotate very slowly by keeping their arms up and straight. Rhythmic stomps vibrate the stones; the dancers run and merge with the audience, and then reappear only to receive applause from the audience.

#### ***5.4.4. First Light (2012)***

Commissioned by Akademi, *First Light* is a site installation that is choreographed by Seeta Patel, featuring two male dancers, Adam Kirkham, Luke Divall and Patel herself. In collaboration with the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Light Space Modulator”, *First Light* was performed along a 50 metre stretched rectangular space artificially created under Hungerford Bridge. Its lighting is designed and conducted by Ben Cowens while its music is composed and arranged by John Metcalfe and Alistair Murray respectively. The title *First Light* itself is rich in optical metaphor; however in its performance blur, Akademi depicts:

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<sup>27</sup> *Tribhanga* literally means as something that is ‘tri-bent’, and consists of three bends in the body; at the neck, waist and knee. This is abundantly used in Odissi dance and also found on many temple sculptural reliefs.

Taking inspiration from the age old concepts of good overcoming evil, light overcoming darkness, and the divine female energy of the Hindu goddess Durga in her nine incarnations, this work evolves through a myriad of different colours culminating in an interplay between dance, music, light and space.<sup>28</sup>

This clearly prepares its audience that it is going to portray the arrival of a new dawn in an urban city, through mythology and arts and light installations - a new public event that will actively devise multiple senses as aesthetic tools.

The evening began with artist Daisy Vatalaro's cello performance (as seen in Fig 5.4.4.1). The lights gain momentum with the onset of rhythmic musical scores. Such luminosonic composition shapes the spectator's negotiation of meaning. Spectators have variably reacted to this installation. They found it to be: 'dazzling', 'sacred', 'a rainbow', 'a blend of mythology and symbolism' (Fieldnote, November 12, 2011). The installation highlights classical geometry, but the suspended light installations at various sides unfix a single viewpoint (Fig 5.4.4.1). In describing contemporary installation art, Claire Bishop describes installation art as 'theatrical,' 'immersive' or 'experiential' (2005: 6). She asserts that installation art represents a multi-sensorial narrativisation of the place through vision:

[...] differs from traditional media (sculpture, painting, photography, video) in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose sense of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision (2005: 6).

Throughout the history of Eastern/Western thought, light has been a predominant metaphor of truth, a symbol of goodness, salvation, and the divine. Hidden away underneath the city, the place (Hungerford Bridge) has an evocative atmosphere of dark, damp and wet, musty smells. I discuss this later how the interplay between light and dark, and this ambivalent relationship shapes the audience's experience and understanding of an urban city.

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<sup>28</sup> Available at: <http://www.akademi.co.uk/productions/first-light.php>, (accessed: 17/03/2012)





**Fig 5.4.4.1.** Light installations in *First Light* (2012) by Seeta Patel. Photo: Vipul Sangoi.  
Courtesy: Akademi.

The dance opens with the dancers struggling to stand straight on their spine; their sudden breaks and bends indicate extreme mechanisation of fast paced urban living, heightened by the grating noise created out of a string instrument. Gravity bound movements are set on a string to symbolise how they are entrapped by the city motion, undoing the geometry of Bharatanatyam dance. The frequent passing trains on the bridge and the vibrating metallic sound provide a tangible reminder that the venue is a symbol of commerce and industry. The tall buildings standing perpendicular against the vertical motion of the street cars and the linearity of the long metallic pillars - all are ‘performing’ classical geometry.

The male dancers hold *mushti* - the fist - suggesting power; Patel’s hand moves in a circular fashion to match the London Eye’s rotation<sup>29</sup> with sudden pendulum swings and upward arm movements. The hazy architectural outline of Westminster tower reminds people about the grandeur of architecture that this city has to offer;

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<sup>29</sup> The London Eye is a giant wheel structure situated on the bank of the River Thames in London, erected in 1999. It adjoins the western end of Jubilee Gardens on the Southbank of the River Thames between Westminster Bridge and Hungerford Bridge.

simultaneously, it transforms the architectural materiality as fluid (Fig 5.4.4.2). The audience watches Patel perform the architectural shape of Big Ben; her feet soak in emitted rays from the installations. At times, the attention is also focused on hand gestures adopted from Bharatanatyam. The haze of light blurs the boundary of dream and reality.

Movements dominated in throw away, swings, lunges of limbs, curves, bends, suspension of the torso and lift are borrowed from contemporary dance. Often the audience is drawn towards the naked surface of Patel's back and her ribs stand out against the covered body of the male dancers. The delineation of the long upward stretches and the movements such as body lifting and continuous hurls challenge the classical geometrical patterns of Bharatanatyam dance. Patel's fluid, loose movement appears to articulate a connection with flowing river at her back and the three bodies construct space around them while moving. The city and body constantly construct each other (Pallasmaa, 2005).



**Fig 5.4.4.2.** Enacting architectural movement. *First Light* (2012) by Seeta Patel. Performer: Seeta Patel. Photo: Vipul Sangoi. Courtesy: Akademi.

The installation stimulates the optical nerve by marking it clearly through texture, colour and light, and inviting the visitor to investigate moving space. The choice of the colour for the costume was ‘to absorb all the colours from the light installations’ (Patel, personal interview, May 11, 2012) (Fig 5.4.4.3). Yet, often the dancers’ bodies are kept in semi-darkness, which is a subversion of its title, challenging and forcing the audience’s opticality. A continuous interplay of appearance/disappearance, reflection/polarisation and seeing/not seeing makes the piece mystical.



**Fig 5.4.4.3.** Costumes absorb colours. *First Light* (2012) by Seeta Patel. Performers (left to right): Seeta Patel, Adam Kirkham and Luke Divall. Photo: Vipul Sangoi. Courtesy: Akademi.

Dancers walk randomly in various directions, keeping a safe distance from metallic pillars. Thus optical sensoriality is inextricably related to tactility. Patel performs off-balance, off-centred, fractured and robotic jerky movements. Chaos, dispersion and discontinuity are evident and feminine and gender codes are visible. This is a very dominant sequence in this section where Patel’s body responds to the arm throw, thrust, turn, twist and jerks of the male dancers. At the end, Patel emerges as a new woman power in the urban space. Dancers disappear behind the metal bars, the lights gradually faints.



## 5.5. Discussion

As the principal question is to examine how we experience, perceive and interact with the site through our senses and body, in this section I present excerpts from the interview transcripts which are then analysed to obtain an understanding of the sensory qualities of the site. In any site dance, it is not only the performers who are interrogating space through movements, but it also extends to an audience who experiences it. For a better structuring, I have divided this section into two parts: the first part focuses on how the dancers engage to depict the site through various sensory receptors and the latter part discusses the multiple constructions of the sites through the viewers' sensuous subjectivity. Through these sections I endeavour to draw parallels between the dances, theories and qualitative data for my argument.

### 5.5.1. *Dancers narrating the site*

The dances analysed here engage with various spaces, ranging from historical, marked spaces to underused space in downtown, and from an ancient archaeological site to a public garden, all these have brought to fore the narrativity of everyday spaces through the senses. The coloured apparels of the dancers, stained glass works (Westminster), light works, noises of busy city streets, rumbling of trains, enthralling dusk, sounds of river water, walk on the green grass and concrete floor, flavours of soups and hot *samosa*-s, chirping birds and the echoing wind - they present urban spaces rich in optic, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory sensations.

In *Dusk* the performance is designed imaginatively to retrace the histories of the place and to acknowledge the land (as evidenced in set of movement vocabularies built upon *bhumi namaskar*), agreed by Harrison and Subramaniam. Both Subramaniam and Harrison's narratives contained abundant tactile metaphors about having contacts with grass underfoot (Fig 5.5.1.1). Subramaniam informed me that: 'We had choreographed

and rehearsed in a studio, so the texture of the grass made it difficult to move initially' (Facebook interview, April 29, 2013).

From the transcription I found that the dancers variously depicted the site as: 'soft', 'resistant', 'hard', 'uneven' (texture), 'huge', 'small', 'magnanimous' (size), 'airy', 'fresh', 'stuffy' (olfactory), 'illuminated', 'dark' (visibility) and 'sacred' (belief). As most of the dance artists and dancers agreed that it was meant to pay tribute to the site, I narrow down my discussion to the concept of sacredness drawing on a set of three selected photos and narratives. Subramaniam said that: 'The stones felt sacred, each was feeling like a deity with personality and compassion. We were blessed with extraordinarily good weather and the sun provided perfect lighting' (Facebook interview, April 29, 2013). *Dusk* expands the concept of 'sacredness' through cultural and religious appropriations. In Fig 5.5.1.1 the proximate vicinity of the stones forces the dancers to experience them as skin. Their gorgeous silk costumes heighten the opticality of the image.



**Fig 5.5.1.1.** Dancing on the grass. *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009) by Nina Rajarani (MBE).  
. Performers (front to back): Sooraj Subramaniam and Janhavi Harrison. Photo: Bimala Naysmith. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.



**Fig 5.5.1.2.** Benediction in *Dusk at Stonehenge* (2009) by Nina Rajarani (MBE). Photo: Bimala Naysmith. Courtesy: Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations.

However the acts of paying tribute to the sacred land of Stonehenge in *Dusk* (Fig 5.5.1.2) and bowing down in obeisance to the land in *Paradiso* (Fig 5.5.1.3) have different visual and tactile sensations. In the former, stones striate the space; even though it is linear, there is a seamless fluidity created by the presence of the bed of grass. It instills a sense of quietude, and there is also an ethereal quality in the way a fragmentary glimpse of the sky peeks in between two stones. Thus there is interplay between empty spaces and a firm density that is in a state of flux and flow. In the latter the entire ritualistic gesture of obeisance converts the concrete space to be ‘sacred’ (Fig 5.5.1.3), yet the sense of religious sacredness collides with a new performance practice marked by the presence of ballet shoes.<sup>30</sup>

Kumar, a cast member of *Paradiso*, reflected on the inclusion of the ballet shoes: ‘We were wearing ballet shoes to protect our feet because the surface had kept changing from grass to concrete. There is a hard runway on which we had to perform’

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<sup>30</sup> In my previous chapter, I mentioned how this practice of wearing shoes in contemporary practice is appropriated by Rajarani in her *Quick!*.

(Skype interview, June 19, 2013).<sup>31</sup> Although it creates a contrasting ideology of practice, a closer vision of the silky ballet shoes induces a sense of what Marks (2000) implicated as ‘haptic visuality’ in me:

*The light hued, soft fabric offers a threshold between reality and dream-like states. Its lustrous texture provides a visual and tactile delight. My attention wanders between the dancers’ embodied ways of touching the green grass and the rough-textured concrete space of the landscape with their ballet shoes. I am not only gazing at the shoes, but grazing with the dancers in my mind (Reflective Journal, September 23, 2012).*

The above passage indicates that the dancers’ movements and spatio-temporal dimension are a key characteristic of understanding tactility which, unlike sight, is dependent on movement in time as a way of acquiring impressions. The mutual exchange between touch and sight lies at the core of haptic visuality, which is linked with a subjective viewpoint.



**Fig 5.5.1.3.** Obeisance. *Paradiso* (2011) by Mayuri Boonham. Performers (left to right): Pauline Reibell, Archana Ballal and Shreya Kumar. Photo: Jacob Perlmutter. Courtesy: Akademi.

<sup>31</sup> Prickett (2013) identifies health and safety issues in outdoor performances in South Asian dance. Some of my participant dancers raised the question of safety issue repeatedly. Although I am not engaging with this issue of safety here, it did not go unnoticed that the aesthetics of performance is definitely shifting with the inclusion of shoes.

Again, the materiality of Stonehenge (Fig 5.5.1.1) is set in contrast to the elevated platform in *Paradiso* (Fig 5.4.2.4). Reibell informed me that the movements of the performance are directly influenced by the place:

We wanted to connect to each other in the space [...] There's a stony and hard raised platform and it's a great challenge to perform on that. We never had that platform in our studio and so we imagined the place and rehearsed. Sometimes even we brought some raised trolley like thing for rehearsal (Skype interview, June 21, 2013).

In constructing her experience Reibell essentially represents the characteristics of sight in interaction with the materiality of the place. Her phrases, for instance, 'stony and hard raised platform' have tactile dimensions in addition to visuality. Her spatial awareness ('raised platform' and hence challenging) is directed by the sight of the place. This, in fact, captures 'the measure of our tactile apprehension of space, an apprehension that is an effect of our movement in space' (Bruno, 2002: 250). Similarly, watching this on screen is not presenting haptic and optic as binaries, but as modes of perception that switch and synergise with one another to 'restore a flow between the haptic and the optical' (Marks, 2002: xiii).

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan connects architecture with the senses and comments that: 'Art and architecture seek visibility. They are attempts to give sensible form to the moods, feelings, and rhythms of functional life' (1977: 164-66). A combination of architectural magnificence and spatial information creates a complex web of time, space, history and religion in *Maaya*. For example, Mukherjee in an interview told me:

I have done many performances in temples before, so it wasn't different for me. It's a huge stained glass window and it's like an altar [...] The height and length of the space really matters. When you dance in a small temple, your movements are more concentric. But when it's magnanimous, you project yourself differently [...] the light was coming from behind - all had created magic in that space! (Skype interview, February 28, 2013)

The above narrative informs Mukherjee's complex spatial conditions, his practice and also the fact that his dance has two important roots - architecture (temple, altar) and religion (Hindu). Fig 5.5.1.4 encourages us to take a note on its (pixelated) concrete

texture that derives from the exposure of its floor. A solitary journey of Mukherjee represents a laborious navigation across borders. As an immigrant artist in Britain, his identity, sense of place and sense of belonging are entwined together in his performance. Tactility crosses over with the spatial movement; a constant redrafting of sites occurs with the circularity of origin and return (strengthened by the word ‘concentric’).



**Fig 5.5.1.4.** Concrete texture. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Performer: Ash Mukherjee. Photo: Catherine Bebbington. Courtesy: Akademi.

Both *Dusk* and *Paradiso* encourage us to indulge our delight in textures and surfaces of the green grass and the stony structures. Each one of them invites our attention to let our fingers play over their surfaces. A close-up of the stones in *Dusk* and the *anjali* hand gesture highlights ecological bondage, as also shown earlier. The texture of the site in *Paradiso*, on the other hand, continuously shifts and recalls sensual liminality of urban and rural surroundings. Set in a Gothic building, Mukherjee’s narratives in *Maaya* take us back to the architectural settings of Indian temples. I argue that dancers’ depictions of the site have not only been about geographical or

architectural settings, but also have provided information on their religious and cultural backgrounds. Their narratives project who they are as well as who they become on the site.

Now I discuss how the aural dimension of architecture influences our idea of the place. For example, as mentioned earlier, the site for *First Light* is situated close to London's Southbank Centre, and to enter this site (Hungerford Bridge), one has to pass beneath one of the two bridges that carry trains to Waterloo station over the River Thames. Blesser and Salter argue that the 'aural architecture' emanates from the interaction of sound with the 'numerous surfaces, objects and geometries' in the physical environment (2007: 2). In this following quote from Patel, we see the aural architecture is creeping into the performance: 'It's an exciting site. There were many interesting aspects like water, the rumbling of the train ...' (Skype interview, May 11, 2013). Thus sound is significant for the audiences to participate, experience and remember places. I also noted how the score of shattering, metallic sounds echo the environment. The digital sound was contrasted with live screeches, chortle and the siren of the sailing boats on the River Thames, creating a 'schizophonic space'.

While *First Light* intended to bring the sounds of the performance space, *Stonehenge* records the acoustic profile of the stones and the environment of the religious land. The integration of amplifiers makes it difficult to localise the sound sources, providing a diffused soundscape. For instance, Subramaniam discusses the interplay between the sensory responses to components of the site space and its character and the generation of man-made sound:

The music had an ethereal quality simply because it was outdoors, and much of it was improvised. Certainly, there were set sections to which we choreographed movements, but the overall feeling was poetic. Also, the music resonated between the stones, and so it was felt as if the music was coming from the stones. The stones felt sacred, each was appearing like a deity with personality and compassion (Subramaniam, Facebook interview, April 29, 2013).



In his statement, the senses used are auditory ('resonated', 'music' and poetic), visual ('colour', 'stone', 'the sun' and 'lighting'), kinesthetic ('dance' and 'ethereal') and tactile ('good weather'). Benediction through Hindu rituals and Shamanic musical tradition created a complex set of religious beliefs, transforming it into a hybrid site. These manipulations produce a theatrical element - the large-scale images of stones create a backdrop, and in such condition ambiguity, strangeness and transience produce dreamlike apparitions. In this way, sound dramatises the spatial experience (Tuan, 1977: 16).

As mentioned earlier, Blesser and Salter argued that aural architecture has its own beauty that parallels visual symbolism. *Dusk* is an instance of aural architecture (Blesser & Salter, 2007), where both sound and visibility illuminate the site. The contemplation of their geo-psychic terrains facilitates a journey into our inner worlds and provides an opportunity for self-reflection. By interfacing it with tactile vision (touching the stone) and using the aural-optical effects, *Dusk* is an ode to the site where the dancers experience the site and a 'schizophonic' soundscape rouses an intimate feeling of piety through the lyrical music and poetic rupture.

### ***5.5.2. Spectatorial experience***

In this section I present some spectatorial narratives to exemplify how the experience of sensing a site intersects with social, cultural and historical factors. Although *First Light* primarily dominates in ocular experience, many audiences shared how Cowen's installations affected them physically. The light works actually suspended audiences' sense of realism and many of them told to me about its 'dream-like' effect. Another member entwined his optical experience with hapticity and then broadened it by integrating it with the cultural landscape of the city:

I have a background in Physics, so light interests me. The lights were so powerful that I could feel the geometric pointed structures in my hands. I suppose the 3-D effect was responsible for creating this optical illusion [...] I



was watching those moving lights and also the blue light from the London Eye which was standing still [...] To me, the blue colour stood for unity and the light installations for diversity. I could see people from diverse races, languages and religions came here today. I think this piece is a true representation of London city as it is now (personal interview, October 18, 2012).

The above statement of the audience member abounds in optical imageries ('geometric pointed structures', '3-D effect' and 'blue light'); but a recognition of the tactile dimensions of it ('feel the geometric pointed structures in my hands') gives us a sense of convergence of hapticity and opticality. What is more interesting is the way he integrates his haptic sight with spatiality, urban living, religion and multiculturalism, while adding a temporal dimension to it ('London now').

The site in *First Light* creates a combined visceral, optical and aural experience for me:

*The sky was overcast and it was quite cold outside. By the time the performance had begun, the sun had already set [...] As the performance progressed, more and more people gathered in the special marked area. The audiences occupied many positions: top of the balcony, both the sides of the constructed boundary under Hungerford Bridge and on Golden Jubilee Bridge [...] When I stood on the Golden Jubilee Bridge, I noticed the alight faces of tourists across the world that were set in contrast to busy corporate passersby who remained unperturbed by this spectacle. The sounds of traffic and passing trains on the bridge provided a discordant, yet lively soundscape [...] (Reflective Journal, October 18, 2012).*

The above narrative apparently does not contain any words that immediately evoke an understanding of tactility other than the word 'cold', but the metallic texture (of Golden Jubilee Bridge and the sight of moving trains) and the gloomy reflection of the sky on the River Thames. I was travelling from Golden Jubilee Bridge to the performance place under the Hungerford Bridge and then back to the balcony space) through corporeal engagement which serves to bring closer the narratives of an urban city, flashes of moments and people's (e)motion.

Sensory experiences entail a critical distinction between an embodied and a material urban space in *Maaya*. For instance, the effect of the colours heightens the audience member's ocular experience:

The extraordinary site alone, being so ancient, inspires awe. The site, coupled with the echoes, music, dancing and colourful choices of fabrics [Fig 5.5.2.1], have made it an enchanting experience. I felt that I was moving with them. I could see only colours around me (audience member, *Maaya*, personal interview, July 5, 2012).



**Fig 5.5.2.1.** Costume hues. *Maaya* (2012) by Gauri Sharma Tripathy, Shivani Sethia, Seeta Patel and Yamuna Devi. Performer: Khavita Kaur. Photo: Catherine Bebbington. Courtesy: Akademi.

The light projected from a height literally perplexes the audience, and probably even leaves them with a feeling of mystification. Light is often used as a symbol that leads us to the path of truth, and thus weakens the sense of illusion. On the contrary, the title *Maaya* (which in Sanskrit means ‘illusion’) indicates that one cannot solely rely on eyesight in order to perceive truth. There is an interplay between disclosure and concealment. I argue that in *Maaya* the theme of light successfully heightens the experience of deception.

Westminster Hall has a distinctive appearance and ambience that is at once expansive and inviting, told to me by many audience members. My initial feeling after I crossed the security point to enter the magnificent hall:

*I felt this space as boundless as the sky. I was enthralled by its gorgeous carvings chiselled on stones; and bright colours of the stained-glass windows shone on my retinal walls [...] While walking further down, I felt that I touched the boundlessness of this architectural space - built yet cannot be seen or touched* (Reflective Journal, July 5, 2012).

Seeing-touching occurred to me in a synthetic manner, as Marks (2000) puts it. The first line is concerned with tactility and texture: it mimics tactile impressions (hardness of glass, carvings, touched) as well as visual knowledge (stained glass, retinal wall) of a place (Tuan, 1977). The above sensory details can also be seen in the light of Paterson's comment: 'Touch can be split into sense of actively touching, and passively being touched' (2007: 48). There is an obvious boundary blurring construction when my senses move beyond this spatiality (boundless space), discreetly lending the fictional air of concreteness ('built yet cannot be seen and touched'). Another interesting feature is that although this experience is felt as a non-entity ('cannot be seen and touched'), it involves a combined sensory effect. Thus this experience allowed me to shuffle the metaphysical impressions without taking away the basic sensory solidity.

During my fieldwork, I was equally drawn towards the fact that 'tasting a site' does not literally mean having simply a gustatory experience; on the other hand, I realised that a space can be tasted through the combination of the senses of sight, smell and touch, entwined with the spectator's history and memory. When I was watching *First Light* from the elevated area adjacent to the Jubilee Bridge that was meant for special company guests, the site was a conglomeration of the senses at play:

*Just before the performance started, hot soups, samosa and spring rolls were served. The environment was filled with the flavours of spices from various cultures [...] Quite a tasty samosa but lacked the aroma of the fried ginger paste in it like the Kolkata one [...]* (Reflective Journal, October 18, 2012).

Geographer J. Douglas Porteous introduces the term 'smellscape' to complement ocular-centric landscape. Porteous argues that, like visual impressions, smell may be

spatially ordered or place-related (1985: 359).<sup>32</sup> Although it often occurs subconsciously, smell can rekindle nostalgia tied to past experiences of place as argued by Pallasmaa: ‘A particular smell makes us unknowingly re-enter a space completely forgotten by the retinal memory; the nostrils awaken a forgotten image, and we are enticed into a vivid daydream. The nose makes the eyes remember’ (2005: 54). A similar explanation is also given by Rodaway, who argues that olfactory geographies evoke ‘memories of place’ (1994: 68). Drawing on the above theories, I argue that the sight and aroma of *samosa* created the effect of ‘olfactory maps’ of the city (Classen et al., 1994: 18) and thus evoked my nostalgia.



**Fig 5.5.2.2.** Illuminated London Eye. Photo: Partha Sarathi Dey.

Contrastingly, when I was watching the last part of *First Light* from the Golden Jubilee Bridge, I noted that the borderline between ‘reality’ and fabrication was

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, Porteous elsewhere provided a redolent description of the ‘peculiar smell’ of India: ‘half-corrupt, half-aromatic, a mixture of dung, sweat, heat, dust, rotting vegetation, and spices’ (1990: 29). See also *Scent and Sensibility* (Howes, 1989).

becoming increasingly indistinct. I was drawn to an illusionary spatial flow of blue light emanating from the London Eye (Fig 5.5.2.2). The following outburst was inspired from the poignant life-stories of the audience members which I collected at the Southbank Centre:

***Illuminated city/dark spaces***

*The etherised arms lie in the diffused blue light,*

*Icy eyes cast spells in a vacuum*

*To let solidified desires swoon.*

*Lurking thoughts are encased in arid bosom*

*To entwine purple, frosty hands tight.*

*Irresistible glowing tongue flickers,*

*Sharp nails dissect the pulpy skin,*

*A smear of oblivion freezes flesh*

*When voices die out in ecstasy,*

*Abandoned love moves on afar,*

*The scarlet memories pulsate,*

*Sulky smell of stillness pervades* (Reflective Journal, October 18, 2012).

The title itself is indicative of the inherent conflict between the glittering affluence and the veiled impoverishment of the city. Not only does lighting illuminate urban landmarks, it effectively casts unfathomable darkness. The interruption of vision is exploited to evoke a dream-like quality. Visual erotics and lust are pronounced (in phrases, such as ‘sharp nails’, ‘pulpy skin’ and ‘tongue flickers’) and intersect with tactility. It mimics the spatial and subjective qualities of the land, while the intoxicating blue light ruptures the boundaries between the dream and reality. Hapticity is theatricalised through the notion of the uncanny and it leads me to think: whose hands are etherised? Touch, distance and proximity are permeated through the web of memories. The silent view of the River Thames and imagined lover moving to the end of the bridge evoke a feeling of overwhelming isolation. The London Eye symbolises a continuum of time. A haunting sense of loneliness is contrasted with the discreteness of the pulsating city. So the hapticity of the sensation not only suggests the connectivity and regularity, but also describes the disruption of spaces, temporalities and attachment.

Most of the audience members from *Maaya* at Westminster Hall commented on the echoing quality while watching it.<sup>33</sup> Here I indicate how the interplay of an intimate contact combines with the reciprocity of vision which then mingles with its sound to define the ‘aural architecture’ of the place. Blesser and Salter assert that in an architectural place, such as a cathedral, ‘the visual vastness...communicates through the eyes, while its enveloping reverberation communicates through the ears’ (2007: 3). In any site dance, I noted that the audiences have varying opinions. A Bharatanatyam dancer, who is also pursuing her doctoral studies, shared her viewpoints: ‘I think the title is very attractive. It was an abstract performance, colourful [...] but I did not like the acoustics of the space. I think an open-air theatre would have been the best choice’ (*Maaya*, personal interview, July, 2012). For instance, another audience member, who is also trained in Bharatanatyam, opined:

I could see colours. I could hear echoes and music. But for me site-specific is not only a piece in which you engage with the site [...] but it should reflect that ‘site’ in the dance [...] It’s called *Maaya* at the Parliament but it can be called *Maaya* anywhere [...] *Maaya* in park, street or market. To me: why parliament? What is the Parliament story? Where is the history of this site? I expected to see all these things here (personal interview, July 5, 2012).

The above viewer stresses that the history of the site should be of focal importance, which she fails to see in the dance.

In *Dusk*, the ecological habitat places are constructed through natural environmental sounds (birds and wind). Recorded music and the resonating hall create a schizophrenic sound acoustics in *Maaya*. In *First Light* the ‘aural architecture’ is created from the muffled quality of the soundtrack and the constant presence of ambient noise, mobile ringtones and camera click sounds. A mutual dialogue between a listener and sound maker is established as expressed below:

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<sup>33</sup> Additionally, I prepared a semi-structured questionnaire for the audience-participant to understand which kind of sound they pay attention to in a site. My questions were: i) which kinds of sound do you hear? ii) Are they pleasant or unpleasant? iii) How would you describe them? iv) Do you connect to the sounds from the site? v) Do you think these sounds can contribute to the performance?

It is a very clever concept underneath the bridge as it integrates the place beautifully with the noise of the railway being woven into the actual sound. It was great to see the space being used in a different context, especially with the nice view of Big Ben and the River Thames. The sound and noise of the river and the trains were competing with the music. The environment was very spherical, theatrical, unreal and still very London (audience member, e-mail communication, November 23, 2012).

The hybrid sound effect certainly alters the concept of dialogue between listeners and the space, with people becoming generators of both real and processed sounds. Sound of cello, street noises, siren of the steamers, mobile rings and recorded music comprise 'schizophonic environment' and render the architecture of the urban space. Drawing on such assumption, I argue that the various sounds emanated from multiple sources in these sites, and the audience's lived and embodied response to it convert it into soundscape (Schafer, 1994).

## **5.6. Summary**

This chapter has revealed how site dance, as a method for examining new practice explored through four performances, contributes to the sensory knowledge and aesthetics. Various conceptualisations including 'optic-haptic' and the city (Pallasmaa, 2005), 'soundscape' (Schafer, 1994), 'aural architecture' (Blessner & Salter, 2007), 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000, 2002) have been studied in order to explicate sensory interrelations among the city, culture, time and space. Through a range of selected narratives of the artists, dancers and viewers, this chapter has demonstrated how an assembly of the senses intersects with different layers of time, geography, history and culture to construct a site in non-proscenium dances. Although the senses, such as smell and taste, have been underrepresented subjects in sensory research, this chapter has briefly touched upon how smell, sight and taste of food have invoked memories and defined the urban locale (Porteous, 1985). In other words, this multi-sensory aesthetic model, derived from a combination of sensory theoretical lenses, has not only provided us information about urban buildings, city architecture and weather, but also about how

these places are lived when explored by people who visit them. Sites, like other analytical lenses including identity, hybridity or the city discussed in this thesis, are always constructed with subjectivities, and thus never were stable. Located at the intersection of sensuous and site performance scholarship, this chapter has demonstrated how the senses have functioned in conjunction towards articulating self-identities in appreciating non-proscenium dances, where the senses not only have defined the sites but also reconstituted by them.

Having analysed the sensory and experiential narratives in non-proscenium dances, I move on to examine digital performance to enquire further how the dance artists negotiate their identities in the digital world by using their techno-bodies.



## Chapter 6

### I and digi-I: reading the digital double<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.1. Introduction

As my research interest centres on the examination of the contemporary performance culture of Bharatanatyam, the aim of this chapter is to interrogate the integration of digital technology in practice through the discourse of the digital double. Technically, the digital double is a simulated image that is generally understood to refer to a second self taking a digital human form. Sociologist Jean Baudrillard defines a simulated image as ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal’ (1983 [1981]: 2) and argues that ‘simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “real” and the “imaginary”’ (1994 [1981]: 3). As I mentioned earlier, some of my research participants in their dances are seen to weave stories by projecting their digital images on screen. This new technological intervention has definitely challenged the traditional ways of presenting dancing bodies, and thus called into question the ontology of such performances. To provoke discussions surrounding the discourse of the digital double and performance, the following research questions are examined: why do these artists replicate their technologised selves and how do they explicate their experiences of seeing the digital doubles? What do these doubles represent and how do they fit into the existing theories? To address these queries, I analyse the following dance choreographies from the video recordings of the performances: *Last One Standing* by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam (2009, full length:

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<sup>1</sup> A part of the chapter was submitted to the Society of Dance History Scholars’ (USA) annual graduate paper-writing contest and I was conferred “The Selma Jeanne Cohen Award” in 2013. For this, I was invited to present this paper at the Joint NOFOD/SDHS conference “Dance ACTions - Traditions and Transformations at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Banerjee, 2013d). I am thankful to Purnima Shah for her constructive suggestions on my paper. A fragment of this chapter was also presented at the “Journeys Across Media Conference: The Body and the Digital” (Banerjee, 2013e) at the University of Reading, UK. I was also invited to present a talk on this topic at the “Digital Echoes Symposium 2015: Intangible and Performance-based Cultural Heritage, Coventry University, UK (Banerjee, 2015b).

15 minutes), *Many More Me* (2011; full length: 12 minutes) by Shamita Ray, and *NowHere* (2011; full length: 45 minutes) by Divya Kasturi. Drawing on media theories and psychoanalytic theoretical lenses along with the dances, interviews and photographs, I reveal how the dialogic interaction between the live and the simulated images of the dance artists uphold their relationships not only with themselves, but also with the world in which they reside.

Performing with the digital double is a conceit that offers the possibility to enact the age-old desire of a human being to create and control life through another medium. An early example of the technologised double can be traced in theatre artist Robert Whitman's video projection in *Prune Flat* (1965) (Weibel, 2003). Dixon recognises Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* (1938) as a primary inspiration to develop this concept of 'digital double' (2007: 241) and categorises four incarnations of the digital double: i) double as 'reflection' that refers to the double which replicates the actions of its live counterpart; ii) double as 'alter-ego' that resembles the *doppelgänger* or the shadow-self of the performer, a splitting of the analogue self into multiple selves; iii) double as 'spiritual emanation', a manifestation of the performer's astral body or soul, drawing on mystical and shamanic traditions; and finally, iv) double as 'manipulable mannequin' that is borrowed from traditional puppetry, which produces online avatars and animated characters created by imitating those of their live counterparts via motion capture technology (2007: 244).

Returning to the contemporary Bharatanatyam dance scenario in Britain, my observation is that the artists under scrutiny privilege the aesthetic tool of digital double to address a wide range of themes and thoughts. Going by Dixon's definitions, I observed that the themes of the 'double as reflection' and 'double as alter-ego' frequently occur in the selected pieces. I mentioned earlier that the double as reflection is an identical reflection of the human body without any distortion moving in real time

(Dixon, 2004, 2007). In a personal interview, Ray informed me about her engagement with an exact-timed double to dance a ‘duet’ in *Many More Me*. In contrast to the continuous and linear reflexivity of the mirror in Ray’s piece, Kasturi’s preoccupation with her ‘self’ in *NowHere* is not only located in visual perception, but in its spatio-temporal displacement and memories (in-betweenness created from her ‘now here’ and ‘then there’). Much different from the above-mentioned two choreographies, *Last One Standing* not only builds on self-images of Patel and Devam, but also reflects their split selves to connote the art of survival in an urban city.

While discussing alter-ego, Dixon draws on the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’ to suggest a double reality where ‘the familiar becomes frighteningly unfamiliar’ (2007: 242). For instance, I observed how the digital double acts as a psychoanalytic lens, uncovering the concealed uncanniness of life stories of urban city dwellers through the metaphor of game in *Last One Standing*. On another occasion, I was attracted towards the use of shadows and animated figures in *NowHere* where Kasturi becomes ‘unfamiliar’ to underline her suppressed thoughts and haunting memory. I return to the three dances and set my readings against the artists’ narratives to demonstrate how these technological extensions have enabled to split them as ‘storyteller’, ‘role player’ and ‘game player’ both in real and fictional life.

In the remaining part of the chapter, I contextualise the background by discussing how various theorists have strived to define digital performances and other related terminologies. Following that, I briefly touch upon the prominent challenges to the conceptualisations of liveness by looking at possible relationships between live performance and technological mediation. I discuss the ‘double as reflection’ by intersecting it with the apertures of narcissism and Lacanian ‘mirror stage’. Based on the readings of the dances, interviews and archival sources, I further explore how ‘digital doubles’ and the animating body images in these choreographies produce an

uncanny effect by borrowing from Freudian and post-Freudian literature. Finally, I argue that these artists have featured their digital doubles (as ‘reflection’, ‘alter-ego’ and ‘manipulable mannequin’) to expand the psycho-digital aesthetics in contemporary Bharatanatyam performance.

## **6.2. Background**

### ***6.2.1. Digital performance as a genre***

Theatre, for instance, has always tended to include contemporary technologies (e.g., painting sets as backdrops, mechanical devices and lighting effects) to enhance the aesthetics and the spectacle of a production. Although Dixon argues that no medium is totally ‘new’ (2007: 4-6), the inclusion of digital technology has unquestionably broadened the scope of practice. Over the last two decades, a range of critical debates has emerged focusing on the dance works that adopt technologies and also addressed how such notions of performance ‘space’ are affected by technological interferences. Contemporary digital performances are situated within the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries’ avant-garde experimental theatre.<sup>2</sup> However many scholars have countered the use of digital media in theatrical performances. For instance, pioneer theatre director Jerzy Grotowski argued that theatre should exclusively be about the actor and the message, not the tool. He asserted that contemporary theatre (which he termed as ‘rich theatre’)<sup>3</sup> is a construction of ‘hybrid spectacles, conglomerates without backbone or integrity’ (Grotowski, cited in Dixon, 2007: 28). Theatre historian Arnold Aronson also questions this act of recreating ‘virtual’ imagery on a real, three-dimensional stage’

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 of *Avant-Garde performance: live events and electronic technologies* (Berghaus, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Grotowski defined ‘rich theatre’ as ‘a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines - literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting...’ (1991: 19). Although Grotowski’s was not alive to see the application of digital technology in theatre, he disapproved bringing in any additional equipment on stage for theatrical performances. In his words: ‘By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc.’ (Grotowski, 1991: 19).

(Aronson, cited in Dixon, 2007: 28). Despite these contestations, Dixon articulates the romanticism of the digital capacity of virtual bodies and argues that:

Virtual bodies are new visual representations of the body, but do not alter the physical composition of their referent flesh and bones [...] The virtual body is an inherently theatrical entity, and there is an enormous amount of suspension of disbelief going on in relation to it (2007: 212).

This debate indicates that the ‘theatricality’ that lies in the art of presenting a body digitally against a real body has provoked interest in scholars and practitioners to study such experimentations critically.

In fact, many scholars have endeavoured in defining methodologies and theoretical approaches towards a greater understanding of the epistemology of live and digital dancing (Anker, 2008; Broadhurst and Machon, 2006; Kozel, 2007). Dance educator Judith A. Gray (1989) presented research on computational dance notation systems, robotics, computerised lighting design, dance science research, and motion capture. While academic-practitioner Susan Broadhurst employs the term ‘digital practices’ to refer to performance practices that utilise technologies such as ‘motion tracking’ and ‘3-D modelling and animation’ (2007: 1), media studies academic Gabriella Giannachi (2004) uses the term ‘virtual theatre’ to denote performances where even the audience is ‘simulated’. With the advent of the Internet as the medium of communication, ‘telematic’ or ‘distributed choreography’ has emerged as a new genre. Artist-theorist Roy Ascott argues that telematics is the technological interaction ‘between human beings and between the human mind and artificial systems of intelligence and perception’ (1990: 241).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The earliest experiment with telepresence was conducted in academic-performance artist Allan Kaprow’s *Hello* (1969), a ‘multi-site happening’ which utilised the facilities of WGBH-TV in Boston to link four locations of that city (Giannachi, 2004: 103). Artists Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz created “Satellite Arts Project” (1975), which was one of the first telematic performances that used a live video satellite link to connect artists performing in different places around the world. Available at: <https://bromberg.dpp.sandbox.lib.utah.edu/related-works/adapt-telepresent-artistic-collaboratories/>, (accessed: 10/01/2013). Practice-based media academic Paul Sermon have produced various installation projects using telematics, such as *Telematic Dreaming* (1992), *Telematic Encounter* (1997), *A Body of Water* (1999) and *Picnic on the Screen* (2009). Scholars-practitioners Lisa Naugle, Ellen Bromberg, John Mitchell, Dough Rosenberg and Johannes Birringer founded the “Association for Dance and Performance

In the beginning of the new millennium, practitioner-playwright Helen Varley Jamieson justifies why she has introduced the term ‘cyberformance’ because this new form grafts ‘the real-time confluence of the stage and remote locations’ (Jamieson, 2008: 32). In a similar vein to that of Jamieson, Naugle defines ‘networked performance’ to denote: ‘[...] a synchronous approach to communication; that is, a shared activity between two or more people who are collaborating at the same time [...]’ (Naugle, 2002: 56). Recently, practitioners have also shown a great deal of interest in creating performances using streaming technology.<sup>5</sup> A team of researchers has studied how to virtually choreograph over a physical distance using Internet based technologies.<sup>6</sup> From a choreographic standpoint the definition of telepresence involves notions of interactivity, space, and collaboration. In this context, it is pertinent to mention the notion of the ‘intermedial audience’, proposed by Jamieson, which is equally relevant since it simultaneously covers both online and live audience who is involved actively in multiple tasks by assuming various roles that of a spectator, recorder and voyeur.

Thus in this section we have seen how a digital performance adds a new dimension to theatrical performances because it contains ‘extra technologies...extra effects, extra interactions, extra prostheses and extra bodies’ (Dixon, 2007: 28). Also, the range of practices and platforms that engage with digital and online performance is as varied as it ever was. Although the theoreticians and practitioners have differed in naming the genres, it is important to note that all the terminologies discussed above

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Telematics” in 2000 for investigating the practice of video-collaboration using the internet. Available at: <https://bromberg.dpp.sandbox.lib.utah.edu/related-works/adapt-telepresent-artistic-collaboratories/>, (accessed: 12/12/2014)

<sup>5</sup> Streaming technology enables data to be sent in a compressed form from a server which is decompressed by programmes known as plug-ins or players (for example, Real Player, Windows Media Player, QuickTime, and Macromedia Flash/Shockwave).

<sup>6</sup> Media studies academic Sita Popat (2013) has investigated the relationship between interactivity and creativity in interactive dance making via the World Wide Web. She has pursued research with an extensive selection of streamed videos depicting different stages of a creative process, using tools such as web forms, email and the iVisit teleconferencing tool.

have one thing in common that they foreground the notion of presenting live and digital bodies through technology. This has led various scholars to engage in debates on liveness/mediating bodies which I discuss very briefly in the following section.

### ***6.2.2. The binary of liveness and recordedness***

With the rise of the internet and increasing usage of digital bodies, the juxtaposition of 'live' and 'recorded' body is getting even more complicated. The ontology of liveness has contributed to contestations in theatre and performance studies. Traditional theatre has used the idea of liveness to distinguish it from other forms of mediated performance, such as television and film, and thus digital intrusion in any theatrical performance is often critiqued as something that detracts from what is authentic. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan is critical about the role played by technology in reproduction of a performance as it tends to mechanise and control the performances artificially:

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology (1993: 146).

Phelan argued that performance is defined by its non-reproducibility and 'liveness' can take place only when there is no mediation. She indicated that the mediatised world does not place importance on the presentness of a performance since it is sustained by the reproductive technology, and so she placed importance on the presence of the performer's body (organic) and stated: 'Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies' (Phelan, 1993: 148). This clearly raises the debate between the real and the unreal body and the live and the (re-)produced body.

Auslander contested Phelan's definition of liveness by creating another conception of presence and mediation. In response to the questions on what is 'original' and what is 'reproduced', what is considered 'authentic' and inauthentic, Auslander

introduced the term 'liveness' to debate on the presence of a live body, suggesting a new understanding of 'live' performance. For him 'the question of liveness prompts consideration of non-human bodies: Are there bodies other than human ones that can be said to be "live"?' (Auslander, 2008: 269-70). To support his arguments, he cited instances from popular music, theatre and television to examine the mutual entanglement of live and mediated performances that sought to question any ontological differentiations between live and recorded performances.

One thing is clear for Auslander: there was no need for a distinction of 'live' performances before reproduction (for example, photography, television and web) and 'historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around' (Auslander, 1999: 51). The concept of 'live' is only debated when there is an inclusion of recorded reproduction materials. Perhaps the only thing 'live' depicts is something that is 'not recorded'. Auslander debated on the notion that a live performance is 'pure' and argued: 'Live performance now often incorporates mediatization such that the live event itself is a product of media technologies' (Auslander, 1999: 24).

The digitally mediated confrontation of the performers' corporeality together with the notion of 'liveness' in contemporary Bharatanatyam dancers would be a highly contested topic in the state-of-the-art discussion on performance and new media. Without elaborating on the entire debate on live versus recordedness, I have contextualised this binate concepts of 'liveness' and 'recordness' to prepare the ground for discussing digital double as an extension because the theoretical model of digital double - the act of seeing oneself on screen against one's live body- clearly indicates a dynamic relationship between a live performer and the projected image. In my view, a mystical interplay between corporeality and the digital image, the self and the 'other', the real and the unreal enhances the theatricality of a performance. Furthermore, the



digital or mediatised body holds potential to complicate the notion of the self as it splits into many to narrate untold biographical stories, offering the audience an alternate lens to view the artists' actions and read their minds creatively. In this way, it extends the psycho-visual aesthetics of contemporary Bharatanatyam performance.

Keeping in mind the two research questions mentioned earlier in this chapter - how do the dance artists articulate their experiences of seeing their doubles on screen and how can their doubles be read in the light of theorisation of the digital double? - I have narrowed down my focus on those choreographies that address the current concern of presenting the digital double on stage. But before reading the dances, I discuss the theoretical lens of digital double critically in the next section.

### **6.3. Analytical framework**

#### ***6.3.1 Concept of the digital double***

As a literary motif, many writers have employed the double as an imagined figure, a soul, a shadow, a ghost or a mirror reflection in their works.<sup>7</sup> Dixon (2007) situates his discussion of digital double under the broad topic of the body and acknowledges his inspiration from Artaud's 'double'. Artaud's biographer Stephen Barber suggests: 'For Artaud, the enduringly provocative idea of the 'double' was always both that of a force which threatened to supplant and destroy his identity and also that of a counterforce with which he could combatively reassert and transform his identity' (1999: 59). Dixon's digital double is a neo-Artaudian aesthetic tool in its desire to manifest and articulate a new language for digital performance. I analyse later how the lens of double is adopted by my research participants to construct and reconfigure new identities on

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* (2003 [1846]) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2000 [1818]) are some literary examples that deploy the double as a motif. Anthropological data however establish that the double emanates from myth and popular beliefs and thus it is not a strictly literary motif but a construction of traditional culture. Psychoanalyst Otto Rank (1971 [1925]) provided an overview of the history of the double in literature and anthropology and offers insights into some of the superstitions and beliefs surrounding the double.

stage by setting up an ambivalent set of responses - 'it is both me and not-me,' 'I am both real and not real' and 'it is my 'twin'.

Technically 'digital double as reflection' is 'a digital figure which mirrors the identical visual form and real time movement of the performer or interactive user' (Dixon, 2004: 13). Dixon recognises the broad functions of 'the double as a reflection' in his following comment:

The digital double is a mysterious figure that takes various forms and undertakes different functions within digital performance. This reflection double announces the emergence of the self-reflexive, technologised self, conceived as becoming increasingly indistinguishable from its human counterpart (2007: 268).

As mentioned above, 'the digital double as reflection' intends to create identical 'technologised self' and a dialogic interface between the real and digital body, which undeniably forces us to read how such techno-human figures control and shape behaviours of the real self.<sup>8</sup>

Dixon (2007) further complicates this discussion of 'the digital double as reflection' by relating it to the myth of Narcissus<sup>9</sup>, without entering into its depth. While a complete discussion of this conceptualisation in psychoanalytic theory is beyond the scope of this study, I touch upon the relevant part to demonstrate how the digital double can explicate narcissism. In his seminal essay *On Narcissism*, Freud outlined the various objects of desire appealing to narcissists, for example, 'What he himself is (i.e. himself)'; what he himself was; what he himself would like to be; someone who was once part of himself [i.e., a child]' (Freud in Strachey, 2001 [1914]: 90). Read against Freud's classifications, I reveal later how Kasturi's double corresponds to the narcissistic type on the grounds that the reflections are what she is 'now' and what she was 'then'. On the contrary, Ray creates her split selves to marvel what she does

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<sup>8</sup> See *Digital Parts/Modular Doubles: Fragmenting the 'Digital Double'* (Ploëger, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Narcissus is an archetypal mythological figure, who is enthralled and infatuated by his own image when he sees his reflection in a pool. Much of his character is exploited in literature, drama, paintings (Edwards, 1977; Goldin, 1967; Harris, 1994).

presently. A more comprehensive discussion follows later in this chapter on how the myth of Narcissus is used as a method for articulating split self and artistic subjectivity. At this juncture, I would like to mention that I do not wish to use the tale of Narcissus to read these works in a way that challenge orthodox understandings of gender difference as all dance artists discussed in this chapter are females.

Dixon draws an analogy between double as reflection with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's fragmented body in the 'mirror stage'. Building on Freudian narcissism, Lacanian 'mirror stage' is a quest for the self in another medium. Lacan stated that in the mirror stage an infant begins to grow an awareness of the self as an 'I' as a subject when he/she sees him/herself in the mirror:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image - whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago* (1977 [1949]: 2).

In the above statement, Lacan has allowed us to clarify the interrelation between the body and its virtual image by opening up a new set of behavioural matrices through which an individual learns to respond and interact with his/her surroundings. He further argued that a human child's captivation with its own image comes from the natural tendency of human fascination with the virtual image. The narcissistic pleasure a child derives from looking at its mirror image is also due to the reassuringly visual identity it sees in the mirror. Drawing on the dances, I demonstrate later how Lacanian mirror stage suggests self-identification of the split self, which I call 'digi-I'.

While engaging with 'mirror stage', feminist theorist Laura Mulvey argues that the child:

[...] imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition; the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others (1975: 9-10).

What becomes central to the mirror stage is that there exists a simultaneous sense of identification and ‘misrecognition’, and this is something we see later in relationships with the digital doubles as exemplified in the choreographies. A similar thought was expressed by media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who commented that: ‘men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves’ (1967: 51). A growing interest in bringing the myth of Narcissus was noticed in medial installations through technology beginning in the 1980s. For instance, art critic Rosalind Krauss (1986) posits narcissism as the defining aesthetic feature of early video art and video installations by artist Vito Acconci and raises the question if the video art is all about narcissism. Although the most commonly narcissistic traits that are described in the clinical psychology literature are vanity, exhibitionism and arrogant ingratitude (Lasch, 1979), the image of Narcissus has been exploited in several literature and paintings (for example, *Narcissus* by Caravaggio) as an aesthetic tool.<sup>10</sup>

As opposed to reflection, ‘digital double as alter-ego’ represents the Id, split consciousness and the schizophrenic self’ (Dixon 2007: 268) which has an uncanny effect. Dixon draws on paranormal researcher-writer Hans Holzer and argues that alter-ego double is the dark *doppelganger*<sup>11</sup>. *Doppelganger*, a concept found in German folklore, denotes a ghost or an apparition of a living person. Freud drew on Rank in his discussion of the doppelganger figure and described it as a ‘ghastly harbinger of death’ (Freud, 1990 [1919]: 141). The concept of the ‘uncanny’ was first theorised in an essay by psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch (1996 [1906]) and then developed by Freud in his essay

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<sup>10</sup> Artists Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss created the archetypal myth of Narcissus as interactive installation entitled, *Liquid Views: the virtual mirror of Narcissus* (1997). A glimpse of this piece may be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjq13wjyhA8>, (accessed: 07/09/2014). Among other experimentations, artists have engaged in viewing the spectator’s narcissistic gaze by utilising and simulating the mirror. See Christian Möller’s *Electronic Mirror* (1993). Available at: <http://users.design.ucla.edu/projects/arc/cm/static/page35.html>, (accessed: 07/09/2014)

<sup>11</sup> I have used the accepted anglicised spelling ‘doppelganger’ without the umlaut. However when referring it in quotation, I have reverted to the original German spelling.

“Das Unheimliche” (1990 [1919]).<sup>12</sup> Both Jentsch and Freud in their essays referred to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s eerie tale “The Sandman” in which an automaton is mistaken for a real woman. According to Freud, the word ‘heimlich is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other - the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden’ (Freud, (1990 [1919]: 132). Film theorist Susan E. Linville argues that the uncanny functions as a deconstructionist term (2004: 29) because it blurs boundaries of apparent antonyms and margins. Freud also pointed out that the word in Arabic and Hebrew means something that is demonic and gruesome and which arouses dread and creeping horror (Freud, 1990 [1919]: 122). In spite of the fact that the uncanny deals with feelings having horror and mystery, theorists often seem to prefer it as an aesthetic category which is appealing (Linville, 2004; Royle, 2003).

Informed by a psychoanalytical Lacanian position that proposes the double as the dissociation of self, Causey situates the digital double within the concept of the uncanny, and presents a visual metaphor of split subjectivity (1999: 394).<sup>13</sup> He argues that:

[...] the presence of the Double is presented through mediated duplication, the simple moment when a live actor confronts her mediated other through the technologies of reproduction [...] the experience of the self as other in the space of technology can be read as an uncanny experience, a making material of split subjectivity’ (2006: 17).

While discussing the Freudian concepts of the uncanny, philosopher Avital Ronell, like Causey, observes how this phenomenon of the uncanny recurs through the subject’s

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<sup>12</sup> The academic research on the uncanny has remained diverse, ranging from the fields of literature (Botting, 1991; Royle, 2003; Johnson, 2010), film studies (Linville, 2004; Spadoni, 2007) and architecture (Vidler, 1994) to visual arts (Kligerman, 2007) and also in a wider sense, feminist theory (Zwinger, 1992) and postcolonial conditions (Masschelein, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Earlier while discussing the experience of actors in cinema whose images are mechanically reproduced, Walter Benjamin argued that the ‘feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera ... is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror’ (1985 [1936]: 230). Barthes describes this uncanny splitting and doubling of the self when he looks at his photographic image as ‘the cunning advent of myself as other’ (1993 [1980]: 12).

experience of displacement within technology: ‘The more dreadfully disquieting thing is not the other or an alien; it is, rather, yourself in oldest familiarity with the other, for example, it could be the Double in which you recognize yourself outside of yourself’ (1989: 69). This concept of self as other is the key to the uncanny and my interest lies to see how representations of these artists’ doubles offer possibility for creating the uncanny.

Theorists have also argued that an interplay of nostalgia and memory give rise to the uncanny. For instance, literary theorist Svetlana Boym writes: ‘Reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts’ (2001: 251). Building on such assumptions, I show later how through film projection Kasturi upholds the feeling of unhomeliness that arises from her shifting homes. Also, I unfold how Patel and Devam deploy the uncanny motifs against the backdrop of rapid urbanisation, competitiveness and the restructuring of all aspects of everyday life by a burgeoning commodity culture.

In order to examine the applicability of the doubles as reflection and alter-ego, I examine in detail later how these two categories function in the selected dances. Before going into more critical discussion of how these doubles underline the common conceit of self-reproduction and fragmented subjectivities, the following section centres on the dance analyses of the performances from their videos either recorded from the live show or collated from the online sources (for example, YouTube).

## **6.4. The dance compositions**

### ***6.4.1. Last One Standing (2009)***

*Last One Standing*, the winner of the “Kadam Choreography Prize”<sup>14</sup> in 2009, is a duet created by Devam and Patel which was performed in the Hat Factory in Luton (situated

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<sup>14</sup> “Kadam Choreography Prize” is supported by the Hat Factory, Luton for the promotion of South Asian dance in Britain. It offers cash prize, studio space and performance opportunities within the country for the winner.

North of London). It features film sequences by Maria Åkesson and most of its musical score was by composer Jason Sweeney. When performed at Rich Mix, it was advertised as ‘a sensitive and humorous take on the game playing used as metaphor for life, explored through a physical and theatrical use of contemporary South Asian dance’.<sup>15</sup> These words clearly prepare the audience to witness a theatricalised game which is full of challenges. The metaphor of ‘playing a game’ has been associated since ages with theatrical performances.<sup>16</sup> And, *Last One Standing* adopts this tradition and underscores the concept of the game - its challenges, failures, competitiveness and aspiration of winning the game as observed in real life through the use of digital technology. The narrative of this piece is developed around the players’ encounters as opponents, their attempts to safeguard vulnerabilities and insecurities, and also their tactics for survival in an urban city.

The choreography opens with the digital images of Devam and Patel on screen, when Patel walks away from the virtual screen, without recognising Devam. This act as split selves of moving away gives us the feeling of strangeness. The principal set around which the players are seen to move is a table on which many wooden blocks are piled up (Fig 6.4.1.1). A recorded male voice announces the rule of this game:

The game is played with 54 wooden blocks. The blocks are stacked in a tower formation. Since stacking the blocks neatly can be tedious, a plastic loading tray is included. The game ends when the tower falls in any significant way. The loser is the person who makes the tower fall (Recorded narrative from *Last One Standing*).

Perhaps more suggestively, this prepares the audience’s gaze towards the game. Since the characters are constantly trying hard to keep balance while alternating positions, tension rises in the audience as to see what follows next. I read this game as a social experience, whether it is between two friends sharing a place or battling out a game

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<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/find/dance-performance/tickets/aakash-odedra-sanjukta-sinha-seeta-patel-kamala-devam-hetai-patel-51675>, (accessed: 27/10/2012)

<sup>16</sup> For example, Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* (1958 [1957]).

against one another, presenting a curious mixture of illusion and reality in which the performers are alternating their dominant and submissive roles.



**Fig 6.4.1.1.** Two game players combat. *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers (left to right): Kamala Devam and Seeta Patel. Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Kamala Devam and Seeta Patel.

As the virtual game begins, Patel moves her body distinctively - whirling, stretching, twisting, and also turning her back sharply pointing to the screen. The arrangement of blocks is zoomed; a sudden deflection of Patel's hip follows a swift hand rotation. Patel's act of stretching her feet apart on the floor in order to find the centre of gravity corresponds to the balancing of the wooden blocks on screen. Roy critiqued this piece as follows: 'The video is great to watch, but is also the work's main downfall: film is an attention-grabbing medium that often, as here, overpowers live action'.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, I argue that it would have been practically impossible to

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<sup>17</sup> Available at: <http://sanjoyroy.net/2010/07/aakash-odedra-sanjukta-sinha-seeta-patel-kamala-devam-heta-patel/>, (accessed: 11/01/2012)



isolate the digital double from the live body as they complemented each other, and this technological ingenuity has undeniably condensed the theatricality of this piece.



**Fig 6.4.1.2.** Digital text in *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers (left to right): Kamala Devam and Seeta Patel. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].

A sharp bend follows the dropping of Patel's head; the tension rises when Patel performs the act of balancing her body by pulling her feet apart. Devam tries to protect the fall of wooden blocks, but without success; the tower tumbles down and Patel crashes down on the ground. The voice and text projected on screen tell the audience that: 'Life isn't fair' (Fig 6.4.1.2) (Recorded voice from *Last One Standing*). The recorded male voice was mysterious and this aroused an uncanny feeling. Architecture academic Anthony Vidler argues that the uncanny is 'a metaphor for a fundamentally unbelievable modern condition' (1994: x) which 'cannot be pinned down or controlled' (1994: 15-16). The uncanny can be read in two layers: first, there is a repression of something too familiar, kept hidden by the inaccessibility of the unconscious, which is accentuated through the projected text and in the narrator's voice. Second, there is a revelation of familiar subject perceived as fearfully strange because of the players'

challenges and tough survival war for existence in an urban city. The basic Freudian definition of ‘the familiar that has become strange’ is inextricably connected to the feelings, such as estrangement, competitiveness and existential crises of the postmodern age.



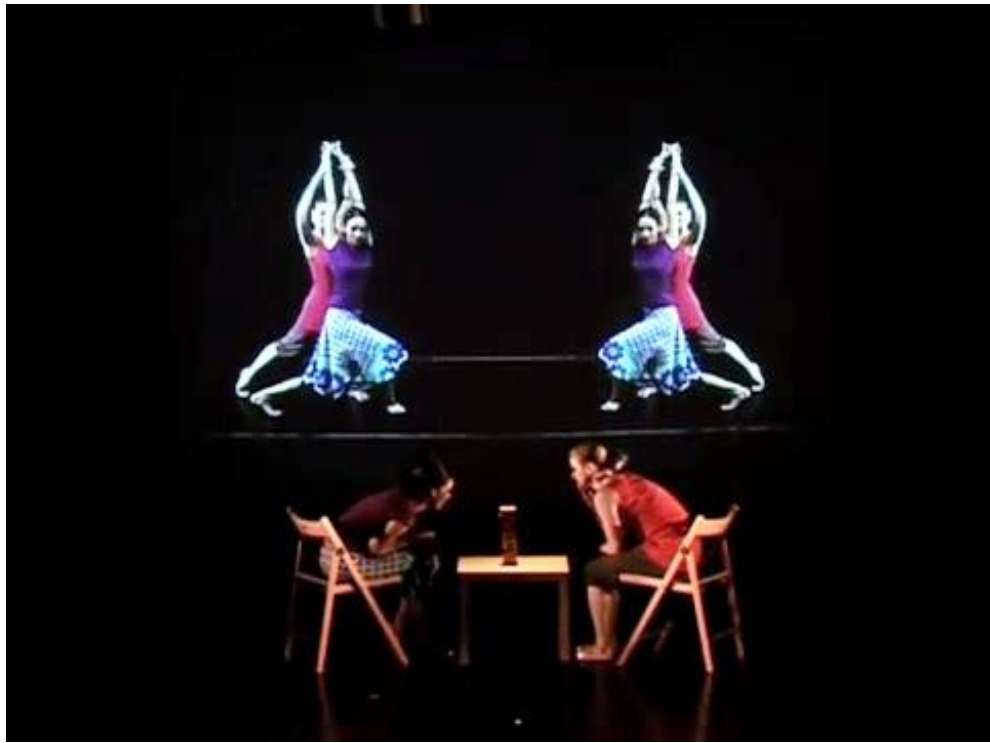
**Fig 6.4.1.3.** Angled hip in *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers: Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].

A continuous focus on the player’s body by jump-cutting between two professional game players working up in tension for winning by not disturbing the wooden blocks in stacks remains to be the central activity. As a game-within-a game this piece is built on analogies and repetitions, Devam and Patel include isolated *adavus*, hand gestures and *abhinaya* technique from Bharatanatyam. Simultaneously, they borrow movements from contemporary dance vocabulary, such as swings, sharp curves, angled hip (Fig 6.4.1.3) and long leg stretches. Devam adjusts Patel’s body in different postures to make her stand on the ground. Patel’s unexpected and forceful push makes Devam fall on the ground, which is complementary to what has been shown on screen suggestively with hands. Both the players express their intention to win by balancing the wooden tower to stay unperturbed. Yet, both of them act as ludicrous

stage manipulators who are unlawfully trying to end the game by making the tower fall and control the result.

In Fig 6.4.1.4, doubling digitally is intimately associated with narcissism and insistent attraction to the mirror image. In many ways, this is a drama about ‘struggle for existence’ and it also suggests that escape from such struggle is impossible. Åkesson smoothly pans back the camera to show each player. Often she uses techniques such as oblique angles or close-ups, which denaturalise everyday objects. Literary theorist Nicholas Royle claims that: ‘Uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense, however momentary and unstable. As such it is often to be associated with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers’ (2003: vii). *Last One Standing* adopts several other uncanny elements, which add mystery to this piece, such as obscurity, blurred hands, paranormal images, falling movements on the ground leading to death, isolated figure walking on stage and blindfolding one’s opponent. I argue that the crossroads of fearful intrusion provide a liminal moment of uncertainty and provoking a sense of restlessness in them.

Straightforward pity is not being encouraged even when Devam’s body falls off failing to resist the impetus given by her opponent. Rather, I was drawn towards subtle levels of human complexity when the voice once again tells the audience that: ‘This game actually teaches the reality of life’, and following that, the screen displays another comment for them: ‘It’s just a game!’ These comments motivate them to rise from the ground and walk towards the table to begin a new set of game where Patel and Devam pay an extra importance to repetition and the act of balancing the wooden blocks.



**Fig 6.4.1.4.** Digital double as reflection. *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers on stage (left to right): Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].

The choreographic plot continues to delineate the lines of conflict and sharpens the ambiguities of the game playing. Violent pushes and quick turns are rendered to prevent resistance. The opponent's face is turned forcefully and as a response to such stimuli, Patel is reciprocating with an equal thrust to bring her face to the front, suggesting her innate determination to continue this battle. Devam, who is once familiar as a friend and a collaborator to Patel, is identified as unfamiliar and thus evokes the uncanny. At the end, the protagonists undergo complete annihilation; and there is no further sign of rejuvenation. The music fades away, but what leaves behind is the wisdom of the invisible voice: 'It is just a game and there is no real winner!' (Recorded voice from *Last One Standing*). The narrative provoked the audience to ponder: is it designed just as a comic game or does it mirror real life stories of the artists? The performers-players are careful not to shatter the illusion of the audience that they are watching just a game. Devam and Patel construct a core of the slumbering uncanny

underneath an idyllic surface of ‘humour’. This piece fails to give us any concrete clue to the crucial question: who are they? And in this way, they pose a challenge because we realise that we are, or could be, even them and there is no escape from playing this game in real life. It is at this point the uncanny precipitates and when the horror beyond the surface is finally revealed, we realise that it has always been there and is still lurking in every sphere of urban living.

#### **6.4.2. *Many More Me* (2011)**

*Many More Me* is choreographed by Shamita Ray and commissioned by the “International Festival of a Necessarily Lonely You” (I.F.O.N.L.Y.)<sup>18</sup> and *Legitimate Bodies Dance Company*, Ireland. Its music is composed by Mukul Patel and film is made by Thomas Tracey. As a solo piece it juxtaposes Indian sculptural elements with the sharp bends, stretches and jumps of the Western contemporary dance. Its musical score is densely heard as the piece progresses. The theme of the double is explored throughout as indicated in its title. Black is the primary fabric palette for other Ray’s choreographies, including *Dark Matter* discussed in Chapter three. Seen in a monochrome, she produces a minimalistic aesthetics by restricting stage props and set in order to shift the gaze of the audience towards the interface between the live and the digital body. Trapped in an array of interconnected mirrors (fictive and the digital mirror), this piece provides countless opportunities not only for Ray to reflect and multiply, but also to the audience moving between them.

The piece opens up with Ray’s virtual image on screen facing back, whilst her live body faces the audience. This split selfhood itself sets the dramatic mood, beyond the textual frames. Conflicts between silence and rhythm, light and dark, detachment

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<sup>18</sup> The “International Festival of a Necessarily Lonely You” is dedicated to solo dance works in Ireland. Each year this festival features national and international dance artists who come to Birr to share their choreographies. The three day festival comprises several exciting events including lectures, dance screenings, site-specific performances, cabaret-night, social gatherings and workshops.

and attachment are felt. The metallic sound of a bell being struck conjures up an array of imaginary representations of place and time. In the beginning, her live body explores space with fluidity when her double remains unperturbed. A balancing act shown by stretching arms intersects with fluidity of *dola hasta*. Ray experiments with a new temporal aesthetics, splitting the beats into irregular intervals, while deconstructing *adavus*. Her recorded movements are playing duets in consonance with an exact real-time mirror image (Fig 6.4.2.1), exemplifying the digital double as reflection (Dixon, 2007). Occasionally, she alternates movements with her double and again merges to dance in harmony. Quick switches from breaks to harmony demonstrate Ray's choreographic strategies and also highlight the theme.



**Fig 6.4.2.1.** Mirror-image in *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray.

Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.

Unlike the mirror image, which exists in real time, the digital double as reflection allows a temporal dislocation. Ray twists the mirror-image as seen in Fig 6.4.2.2. The act of balancing recurs throughout. The *Nataraja* pose, which is held reverse, emphasises the act of mirroring, whilst Ray's meticulous oscillations of feet in the air suggest temporality in a subtle way (Fig 6.4.2.3). Ray enables such dialogic and

corporeal exchanges between her real/digital selves ultimately to reconcile them into a ‘balancing’ act.



**Fig 6.4.2.2.** A real-timed twisted mirror-image. *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray.  
Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.



**Fig 6.4.2.3.** The balancing act. *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.

The recurring mirror holding posture<sup>19</sup> suggests it as a self-reflective piece - a constant battle between the conscious and the unconscious, as well as between the external world and the internal desire. In a personal interview, Ray admitted that she did not intend to use any mimetic element or plot. Her refusal to embrace any narrative structure rouses a level of curiosity in me, especially when I happened to read the following blurb about this piece:

Sound egotistical? [...] This piece is like looking into a mirror and seeing our myriad identities in action, often in harmony, sometimes in conflict [...] this piece is for anyone who has ever juggled their selves, and marvelled at the delicate balancing act!<sup>20</sup>

In the above statement the use of the words, 'action', 'conflict' and 'the delicate balancing act', reveal that there lies a tension between 'looking into the mirror' and 'seeing the self'. Her doubles distance the audience from reality and condenses the fictive atmosphere. Ray and her fragmented 'technologised' body act as mirrors for each other, and there is a transition between imagination and alienation, as occurs in a Lacanian mirror stage. The word, such as 'egotistical' echoes Ray's extreme love for the self, leading to the formation of subjectivity (through her 'digi-I') and she is clearly enthralled ('marvelled') by the power of a balancing act while shifting her various roles. Surprisingly, unlike Narcissus at the pool, she has never recognised her double on the stage.

Some prominent movements which this choreography includes are: quick side bends, angularity of limbs, fluid movements, floor rotations, upward long leg extensions and gyrations. With an increasing circumference of the circular movements and speed, Ray's double on screen evokes an image of larger concentric circles. By continuously playing with her image size, she engages viewers in the drama of the gaze. Ray's abrupt lift of hands is contrasted with the gentle swinging. A series of gyrations are performed,

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<sup>19</sup> A mirror-holding pose in Bharatanatyam dance is inspired from sculptural niches found in Indian iconography of *salabhanjika*-s, a decorative feminine figure in Indian sculpture (Roy, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> Available at: <http://shamitaray.webs.com/choreography.htm>, (accessed: 30/11/2012)



magnifying the digital body (Fig 6.4.2.4). The camera at times zooms to redefine gravity of the space; her fragmented hands are enlarged on screen, although her defragmented body limbs do not cause arousal of fear like *Last One Standing*.



**Fig 6.4.2.4.** Gyration in *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray.  
Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.



**Fig 6.4.2.5.** Fragmented doubles in *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.

Towards the end, Ray's body lies on the ground quietly whilst her multiple images play with each other on the screen (Fig 6.4.2.5). Ray's live body on the stage begins to move and the projected ones are frozen suggesting the contrast between motion and motionlessness. In the next scene, her four images configure a rhombus justifying the title *Many More Me* by this act of splitting the self into many. Ray is not simply a woman enthralled by her ability to play multiple roles in life, but rather a subject engaging with possible selves. Through her fragmented images she experiences an external wholeness and subjectivity as complete and unified. She loves the coherent identity which the techno-mirror provides, and at the same time, these images are profoundly conflicted over because the techno-mirror separates the subject and the object of gaze, and thus entertains a profoundly ambivalent relationship to that reflection. Ray's multi-tasking comes to an ironic end when her miniature digital image disperses with a grating noise and her real body lying on the floor in supine position. Interplay between presence and absence, movement and stasis and abstraction and theatricality frames a new performative language.

#### **6.4.3. *NowHere* (2011)**

Divya Kasturi's *NowHere*, already discussed in Chapter four, evokes the sense of in-betweenness, fragmentation and alienation through props, narratives and the digital body which Kasturi perceives in the particularities of her migration to Britain, but it simultaneously portrays her emotional experiences which are universally recognisable. For the purpose of this chapter, I analyse its second part that opens with a digital image of a temple in the blue light; the audience hears the sound of Kasturi's footwork rather than seeing her because of low luminosity. This part is an exploration of traditional elemental rhythmic dance sequences: the footwork, hand gestures, repetitive spins and body positions which are used to delineate various spatial patterns. But, gradually Kasturi moves out of the traditional canon, symmetry and gravitational rule to create a

complex texture of time and space: a crystalline geometry contrasted with fluidity. The complex rhythm of her footwork is matched with the musical accompaniment. Although the basis of dance movements is rooted in the tradition of Bharatanatyam, it is routed towards the complexity of urban life and travel trajectories that define the new space.

In this section, Kasturi situates her body both in the past as well as her present. She repeatedly walks to the edge of the stage near the screen while making spins, jumps and outstretched leg movements that merge with her virtual image. By bringing in the imagery of flow of the river and passages of travel across the sea through her hand gestures, she transcends the fixed borderline. The busy streets of Chennai and several voices screeching convey the fractured postmodernist self. The digital image of the *gopuram* of a temple remains at the backdrop, while Kasturi renders rhythmic steps in a fast tempo. A sequence of the recorded movements of Kasturi is paced in slow motion on screen and is contrasted with live movements rendered in fast tempo. Without the integration of past and present, there remain only remnants of fragmented memories. Her past is increasingly seen as a phenomenon which failed to provide answers to her uneasiness. A fragmented psychic experience is portrayed and universalised which inhabits the world of 'nowhere'. This poses a familiar situation for the viewers who also have a diverse array of migratory encounters, allowing them to enter into a cathartic realm through a safe zone of technology.

The screen blackens and Kasturi's double reappears and the audience hears her live voice uttering unintelligible sounds in contrast to the part one where Kasturi's narratives were dominant. In the absence of words, the reality of the self is diminished and buried underneath a mound of disguises. Her shadows appear as a dark figure connoting her duality and in-betweenness (Fig 6.4.3.1), and thus can be viewed as 'doppelganger'. In the light of Mulvey's (1975) analysis, this could be seen as an instance of the Lacanian mirror stage where Kasturi recognises her as an aesthetic

object in the techno-mirror. Simultaneously, Kasturi is in the process of discovering herself as the ‘other’ - her new self in a ‘now-here’ situation - with whom she has not been acquainted before (‘misrecognition’). The recurrent transitions between familiarity and unfamiliarity build up the additional tension as well as connecting the ‘mirror stage’ with the uncanny.



**Fig 6.4.3.1.** The representation of the uncanny. *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performer: Divya Kasturi. Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Divya Kasturi.

A series of flowing and energy releasing movements are performed live, whereas Kasturi’s double as alter-ego, draped in an orange sari, dances on the screen. A bleak pair of animated images of Kasturi that performs in slow motion with *shollu-s* (Fig 6.4.3.2) enhances the effects, creating an atmosphere of eeriness and mystery. Kasturi’s nuanced animated bodies and shadow can be read as hidden conflicts arising from her constant travels between the two nations and her ambiguous position in the Indian Classical dance scenario, as mentioned previously. There is a deep-rooted anxiety from her past at the root of this blurry rendering of the apparition. The

apparition is thus a metaphorical visualisation of her suppressed displeasure and anguish, from which she cannot recover. As told by Kasturi: '[...] I chose to use my visuals to refer to this 'other' person dancing inside my mind while physically there was the 'real me' (email communication, April 16, 2013). In a Lacanian sense, Kasturi maintains her imaginary 'I/Eye' to fantasise a newly formed autonomous self (who can dance independently, ignoring the social pressure).



**Fig 6.4.3.2.** Animated images in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Videography: Suparna Banerjee. [Video still].

Kasturi's dramatic monologue comes to an end with her sudden disappearance. Her screen presence is also dissolved and the space appears static. The flesh is replaced by the materiality of the temple, building a sense of solitude that characterises the hidden experience of her inner restlessness. In this subtle way Kasturi's wriggling experience of in-betweenness is impersonalised - the temple is the platform upon which she seeks refuge and an extreme sense of isolation underlies the psychic conflict of the split self, the 'then I' and 'now I'. The sight of the *gopuram* of the temple drenched in

the blue light encourages the audience to imagine there may be hopes of reconciliation between these warring psychic forces. The concluding Sanskrit chants articulate the unuttered words and the unconscious flow of Kasturi's conflicting thoughts, leading her to an unpredictable future and destination ('nowhere'). Freud argued that 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced' (1990 [1919]: 367). Kasturi employs such ambiguity to blur the boundaries of real and unreal of her urban existence and 'precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming' (Vidler, 1994:11).

## **6.5. Discussion**

### ***6.5.1. Seeing/articulating the self***

By largely relying on the interviews, in this section I review the research questions posed to investigate why Devam, Patel, Ray, and Kasturi chose to play out with their technologised selves and how they articulate their identities through their digital doubles. While analysing the transcripts, I found their narratives abounded in personal pronouns ('I' and 'we') and many other possessive cases ('my' and 'our'). On such ground, I argue that the digital doubles of Patel, Devam, and Ray embrace their identical techno-images in order to construct and empower their technological identity which is designated as 'digi-I'. Yet, the engagements and interactions of the artists with their doubles have remained strikingly different.

Patel asserts that her aim to use the digital technology was 'to expand the work on stage and use it to show the subtext' and that the double has been just her 'twin' (email communication, March 1, 2013). I argue that Patel affirms Lacanian 'mirror stage' in the process of discovering the self in her digital image and confirming that it is the true self. In personal meetings, Devam expressed her sincere admiration for Patel's creative skills and Patel also reciprocated the same. In an interview, Patel stressed that:

‘It’s not that about the work; it’s about that we work together well’ (personal interview, November 12, 2013). On one hand, through the ‘media mirror’ (Cleland, 2008) they reflect the good friendship that both share, on the other hand, I argue that their actions evoke a sense of the uncanny because they are producing familiar (friends) and unfamiliar (playing as opponents) situations. Their digital doubles are used to articulate the ‘alternate’ selves who want to conquer the game of life in a light-hearted way. At the same time, this displays comic vanity and self-confidence in overlooking the game of life where there can be no ‘real winner’.

Going against the darker elements associated with the concept of the uncanny, Devam’s feeling of ‘unhomeliness’ is connoted through communication in her daily life in the UK:

British culture has lots of subtexts which they don’t want to mention and the presence of subtext is always there in our communication that happens in our daily life. So we wanted to have this as subtext (Skype interview, March 11, 2013).

Devam being an American sees the British culture as the ‘other’ and is feeling out of place. Her feeling of estrangement and difference becomes evident when she highlighted the theme of subtext. In this way of bringing up the subtext, both (Devam and Patel) lose their self-identities by being transformed into fictional characters for others in a fictional world. Much different from Ray’s *Many More Me* is *Last One Standing*, in which narcissism of Devam and Patel are monitored every moment, positioned by a gaze (the anonymous male voice), which they cannot tame. Even the title, *Last One Standing* is appealing because the protagonists see themselves as the ‘others’. This results in another split: the speaking subject represents itself as a subject (the postmodern city dweller in real life), and simultaneously, is an object of the speaking subject (a game player in a fiction). In objectifying the subject, *Last One Standing* shatters the dyadic world of narcissism.

In contrast to Devam and Patel, Ray's double is not designated as a supernatural or a darker embodiment; rather it is meant to play a duet, as Ray informed me:

Basically, in the film I am dancing and the live performer has to dance a duet with the projected image on the screen. Sometimes the live performer and the video are dancing the same steps that are in unison, and sometimes in contrast [Fig. 6.5.1.1]. Sometimes the video image is the same size of the performer; it appears as if two people are standing next to each other; sometimes, the video image is huge as compared to the live performer (personal interview, December 17, 2012).

Certainly, Ray sees herself being seen ('live performer', 'video image'), although the other who defines her selfhood is not portrayed clearly. Accentuating, and yet effacing, the offstage addressee (who 'can be anyone'), Ray creates the binary of the 'I' or 'Eye'- she is at the same time the object of the gaze and the subject of 'the eye'.



**Fig 6.5.1.1.** Disintegrated selves in *Many More Me* (2011) by Shamita Ray. Performer: Shamita Ray. Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon.

Seen through the Freudian lens, this piece explores the narcissistic possibilities for illuminating and dramatising Ray's multiple selves. Her double suggests both unity and split simultaneously. The postures, along with the screen as the mirror and a fictive mirror that Ray is holding, demonstrate postmodernist and post-structuralist thinking. Ray's multiple selves are liminal which are placed between the borderline of fantasy



and reality, overturning the determinacy and stability of self. Through these, Ray also intends to reflect her maturity which she has successfully cultivated through her years of experiences and travels.

In this manner, she empowers her double to determine her present movement. Here I draw on art theorist Amelia Jones, who depicts how a mirror image causes an oscillation between the processes of splitting and othering of identification:

[...] in the narcissistic scenario it is the *image* (the reflection in the water) that allows the self to love the self, affording a *distance* between the self and the self-as-image, producing the self as other. This distance—like that required by aesthetics—is necessary for the self to master the other (the artist/the artwork) (1998: 180).

I agree with Jones that the myth of narcissism has been made more relevant due to technological doubling and have weaved links between aesthetic distance and Ray's split identities while she manages various roles in life.

The role of the mirror in reflecting the autobiographical self is manifestly complex, and thus can be analysed in the light of Lacan's discussion of the mirror stage and the myth of narcissism. Previously, Lacan stated that:

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and - which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity [...] (1977 [1949]: 7).

Lacan suggested that the subject's viewing of its image in the mirror constructs for it an ideal self-image through misrecognition. An imaginary self is born from Ray's imaginative mind - her digital images which are seen moving independent of her real self on the stage clearly engender the superiority and flexibility of her double. She expressed that the digital filming has offered her more 'freedom to manipulate the choreography' (personal interview, March 3, 2012). In fact, the following passage yields interesting insights into the nature of narcissism and romantic attraction and sheds light on Ray's aesthetics:

When on the screen you will find three images of me dancing plus the live, obviously there is going to be a message which people will read into it. When the image on the screen is much, much bigger, obviously there is a scale change and that's going to affect the audience [...] (personal interview, December 17, 2012).

Like Narcissus, Ray identifies her with a reflection in the digital mirror and she does call attention of the audience to see her double as the visual subject/object. On several occasions, as mentioned in the dance analysis section, Ray holds a fictive mirror in her hand, resembling the sculptural dance figure, inducing the memory of her past tradition. As mentioned earlier, in a performance blurb Ray informs the audience that this piece itself acts as a mirror reflecting a world in which everyone has to juggle among their multiple selves. Her doubles act and interact at a distance under the direct control of the artists with varying levels of autonomy, denoting their will and freedom. Locating Ray's mirrors (the fictive and real) at the intersection of postmodern culture, tradition and myth, *Many More Me* activates the mirror stage and her multiple selves in virtual space take the form of a drama.

Like Ray, Kasturi mentioned about the unstoppable juggling of activities in this fast-paced life, but in a realistic manner: 'As in everyday life, we multi-task constantly and sometimes, one activity lags or supersedes the other; similarly the digital double would do the same' (email communication, April 16, 2013). Contrastingly, Kasturi exploits her double to identify 'pastness' in the present and reinforce a distance between the enlightened 'now' and traditional 'then':

The piece has been made to convey notions of 'there' and 'here'; the former denoting India while the latter the UK [...]. Sometimes, when I am 'there' I think of 'here' and vice versa. So there is [...] a co-existence that is both pleasurable and chaotic at once [...] (email communication, April 7, 2014).

It is clearly evident from Kasturi's narratives that the use of technology has endeavoured to merge spaces, cities, countries, her transitory body and identity. The notion of distance implies not only near or far, but temporal (past and present) as well,

which may be understood in the light of Foucault's comment describing a mirror image as a paradoxical mixture of the real and virtual:

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent [...] (1986 [1967]: 24).

I argue that digital space blurs the boundaries of 'here' and 'there', and her 'present-I' is simultaneously giving the audience a sense of her 'past-I'. Another complexity achieved through her double is that 'here' is not merely a point of space and 'now' is not merely a point of time (Tuan, 1979). However unlike the doubles of Ray, Devam and Patel, Kasturi's digital double has a psycho-geographic dimension. Additionally, Kasturi interweaves language (narrative), image (imaginary) and subjectivity (reality) together to explore the repressed ideas, desires and fears that are locked into the discursively constructed concept of human self in relation to the technological 'other'.

### **6.5.2. *Being watched in the techno-mirror***

In the previous section I investigated how the dance artists explicate the understanding of their doubles and in this section I specifically present my readings of these doubles, although I borrow from the narratives of the dance artists in support of my interpretations. The doubles exemplified in these choreographies fit largely under the categories of double as 'reflection', 'alter-ego' and on a very few occasions as 'manipulable maniquinn' (Dixon, 2007). Ray's *Many More Me* adopts a more conceptual approach of the digital double as reflection (Dixon, 2007). For most of the part, Ray in this piece plays a duet with her digital self, giving me a sense of mirror-image. In fact, the backdrop acts as a mirror to show the audience reflected images of Ray in the present. Patel and Devam, on the other hand, hardly perform real-timed duet in *Last One Standing*, although their doubles affect their real time action because they are playing a game. The doubles in *Last One Standing* and *Many More Me* are dressed identically, and hence remain 'indistinguishable from its human counterpart' (Dixon,

2007: 268). Kasturi uses costumes as props to signify her alter-ego. Although Dixon asserts that 'alter-ego' is a 'darker embodiment' (2007: 250), the choreographies examined here feature dark spaces differently. Ray neglects this element completely by stating that lack of scenic settings, bare minimum lighting and the use of monochrome for her costume are intentional to avoid any theatrical element, as discussed above.

On the contrary, Kasturi exploits several theatrical elements to represent dark spaces to bring in a feeling of otherness through her 'black' costume colour. Kasturi's animated self exemplifies the 'manipulable mannequin', playing 'myriad dramatic roles: as a conceptual template, as a replacement body' (Dixon 2007, p. 268) and composes her spatial narratives within a complex temporal framework ('now here' and 'then there'). Interestingly, in *Last One Standing*, Devam and Patel exploit several theatrical elements, such as the act of game playing to highlight the state of 'unhomeliness'. The sense of estrangement is expressed by threatened, charged, and uncertain feelings. The alter-ego (Dixon 2007) of personality characteristically features the artists' dark spaces, such as 'frustration' (Devam, Skype interview, March 3, 2013) of living in such a competitive environment.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Freud also refers to the profound uncanniness of detached body parts: 'Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, feet which dance by themselves - all of these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove able to move themselves in addition' (1990 [1919]: 243). In several close-ups in *Last One Standing*, Devam's and Patel's bodies appear as fragmented into constitutive parts: a face, a hand, feet, neck and fingers. Such close-ups contend Lacan's description of the fragmented body experienced by the subject in dreams of 'disintegration' and 'disjointed limbs' (1977 [1949]: 4) and represent the uncanny return of the infant's experience of its fragmented body. It generates a feeling of unease, a wary mistrust when a set of

animated approaching hands of Devam attempts to blindfold Patel from behind (Fig 6.5.2.1). On another occasion, the supernatural adaptation of the arms evokes a sense of horror and mystery (Fig 6.5.2.2). A sudden leg thrust displaces the arranged wooden blocks (Fig 6.5.2.3) to represent their power relationships and a degree of uncertainty in a competitive environment is equally unsettling.



**Fig 6.5.2.1.** Blindfolding the opponent in *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers: Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].

Kasturi's double in *NowHere* is not just the depiction of a performer who narrates her tales in strips about her two debut performances, dance classes and travels, but also represents the present urban world. A mesh of stories generated by the mediated digital double reveals her journey, thereby invoking the paradoxical play of shifting identities and nomadism. The uncanny effect is amplified by a more familiar reality and the disquieting appearance of the Kasturi's shadow and the use of lights (Fig 6.5.2.4). Superimposition of multiple selves brings into focus the unseen and could make things appear and disappear, multiply and reconstitute bodies and play with temporality. Kasturi's unmediated shadow, which is a darker embodiment of her

unsettling feeling, is derived from her ‘in-betweenness’. Theorists have also considered the issues of ‘liminality’ in connection with the uncanny (Royle, 2003). Liminality is neither here nor there (also mentioned in Chapter two), much like Kasturi’s new home, which is ‘here’ (in the UK) as well as ‘nowhere’.



**Fig 6.5.2.2.** Hands expressing angst in *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers on stage (left to right): Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].



**Fig 6.5.2.3.** A dismembered leg thrust in *Last One Standing* (2009) by Seeta Patel and Kamala Devam. Performers on stage (left to right): Kamala Devam and Seeta Patel. Videography: Maria Åkesson. [Video still].



**Fig 6.5.2.4.** Merging darker embodiments in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performer: Divya Kasturi. Videography: Suparna Banerjee. [Video still].

Often Kasturi's doubles that are projected as animated images render her somewhat beyond recognition. Giannachi argues that: 'The interplay of the real and the virtual is schizophrenic in nature' (2004: 104). The individual's awareness of self shifts between the experience of an embodied physical self (her 'here body') and the digital body (her 'there body'). I interpret the animated figure wearing a traditional dance costume on the screen as her alter-ego that represents something which is repressed in Kasturi's psyche:

The digital double of myself was a result of me being alienated many a time in the past during my training in Kathak as I used to be constantly picked out as a 'Bharatanatyam lady'; [...] it was hard for many to understand that I could do both [the dance forms]. Back in Chennai, my hometown, I was called as the 'Tamil girl' doing a North Indian form [...] I chose to use my visuals to refer to this 'other' person dancing inside my mind while physically there was the 'real me' [...] (email communication, April 16, 2013).

It indicates that Kasturi's digital double is her imagined-self, a self who can perform and portray her split selves physically on stage [Fig 6.5.2.5]. The aesthetic of the

uncanny often includes the animated bodies moving on the screen independent of Kasturi's live movements.



**Fig 6.5.2.5.** Imagined self in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performer: Divya Kasturi.

Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Divya Kasturi.

Looking more particularly at *NowHere*, I argue that Kasturi deploys a mode of reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). She recapitulates her past through autobiographical and reflective narratives that include stories from her early childhood, learning experiences in her teacher's drawing room, the city with busy streets and noises and especially the temple which she visits when she gets back 'home'. Kasturi wrote to me:

The streets are the streets of Chennai- especially the ones with colour and chatter noises from voices and traffic denoting Chennai- my hometown; while the greyish streets denote London streets - i.e. the concept of 'there' and 'here' which denotes when I am there, I think of 'here' and vice-versa (email communication, April 16, 2013).

I discussed earlier in Chapters two and four that Kasturi's costumes from her *arangetram* and *machapravesh* performances are actually corollaries of her nostalgic self. Color of those traditional costumes from the past fabricates an Eastern self, while black colour encourages her to assimilate Western culture in Eastern Other: 'I wear



black that is denotative of UK for me as that's the most common colour of attire here' (email communication, April 16, 2013). And, her nostalgia which is located in the digital double (in her animated dancing figures) indicates the return of the repressed self as a Kathak dancer. Kasturi's narratives theatricalise the darker presence of those people who raise boundary against Kasturi's idea of performing Kathak as a 'Tamil' woman. Enigmatically, Desai Thakore's head, which peeps behind the costume, offers an illusion of Kasturi's suppressed self dancing Kathak, rousing the uncanny familiarity with the audience due to the inherent strangeness (Fig 6.5.2.6). An important trait of the uncanny is also the erasure of the boundary between animate and inanimate objects and the real and the unreal (Freud, 1990 [1919]; Vidler, 1994). Jentsch argues:

Among all the physical uncertainties that can become a cause for the uncanny feeling to arise, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate [...] (Jentsch, (1996 [1906]): 221).

As such, the otherness and her past are heightened, yet at the same time a liminal space is opened up for consideration of how that silenced past might be expressed by the props. This thought is brought by magnifying the size of her projection (Fig 6.5.2.7) which signifies the empowerment of her new self in Britain. In several telephonic chats and personal interviews, Kasturi mentions about her concern on how to transform Bharatanatyam as a contemporary practice for the local audience in Britain. Her willingness to break boundaries reconfigures her dance movements which suggest her aspirations to embrace the new world (Fig 6.5.2.7). It is in this way that the double underlines the cultural practices of 'here' and 'there'.



**Fig 6.5.2.6.** The uncanny head in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performers (left to right): Urja Desai Thakore and Divya Kasturi. Photo: Simon Richardson. Courtesy: Divya Kasturi.



**Fig 6.5.2.7.** Magnified digi-I in *NowHere* (2011) by Divya Kasturi. Performer: Divya Kasturi. Videography: Suparna Banerjee. [Video still].

## 6.6. Summary

This chapter has revealed how the intervention of digital technology shapes artistic subjectivities of Devam, Patel, Ray and Kasturi and incites novel ways of scrutinising contemporary practice as patterns of social relations and culture. The digital doubles in the choreographies have not only allowed new forms of virtual embodiment such as doubles as ‘reflections’, ‘alter-ego’ and ‘manipulable mannequin’ (Dixon, 2007), but also enabled reflections on intangible feelings and postmodern realities. Drawing on

media theory and psychoanalytic lens, I have argued that these choreographies demonstrate a dialogic relation between 'I' and narcissistic 'digi-I', upon which the identity of the self (and other) is placed. Through compelling projections of the digital doubles, these dance artists have also played an important role in helping interrogate such replications of the digital bodies in practice. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the increased occurrence of the uncanny in digital performances has expanded the psycho-visual and corporeal aesthetics of contemporariness.

The following chapter, which is the finale of this thesis, discusses the principal findings and draws conclusions from the study and methods that were designed to investigate the contemporary choreoscape of Bharatanatyam dance and finally, it proposes the future possibilities of this research.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

#### 7.1. Salient findings

This section sums up my findings pertaining to the research questions posed in the beginning of the thesis. I began by interrogating how the global flow of ideas, practice, people and culture reshape the contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam in Britain. I was also interested in examining which new dance genres are created by the dance artists (Mayuri Boonham, Kamala Devam, Divya Kasturi, Seeta Patel, Ash Mukherjee, Nina Rajarani (MBE), Shamita Ray, Anusha Subramanyam and Subathra Subramaniam) and how they negotiate their identities not only in real life but also in the digital world. My pursuit was also extended through investigating how these new genres are perceived by the spectator. The various interactions with different people in the field each time and their distinct and differentiated ways of identifying themselves for the past four years have drawn me to look at this world as heterogeneous where construction of multiple identities is complex and always in a state of becoming.

So after setting the scene, I engaged with the politics of identity in Chapter two. This chapter offered a critique on the South Asian dance label by focusing on its enduring tension since its inception in the field of practice in Britain and indicated the way it has been broadened or challenged by various groups of people, constantly constituting its new set of definitions. Drawing on ethnographic narratives, this chapter also discussed how the identities of the dance artists, cast members and dancers, who are primarily trained in Bharatanatyam (and also in other forms), are negotiated at various tiers. Their multiple identification process has become more open-ended, variable and problematic (Anzaldúa, 2000), cut-cross by concerns such as ethnicity, race, citizenship and (re-)naming. It further demonstrated that the constructed identities of the dance artists and dancers are not always nostalgic, but are embedded in the

present context. Illustrations of how multiple identities are constructed through an antagonistic relationship of inclusion and exclusion are highlighted. While drawing upon interview narratives, this chapter concluded with the interrogation of ‘BrAsian’ identity which demonstrated how ‘BrAsians’ as postcolonial subjects constantly negotiate their identities between discourse and practice (Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006). The significance of such findings lies in the diversity of meanings related to a shared common background that is by no means homogeneous or static, conforming to the postmodern version of identity construction, which is always contextual and in a state of becoming (Hall, 1996). In the light of Derridean deconstruction (1976 [1967]), I also demonstrated how identities are always ‘under erasure’, so dance labels are.

This study identified the following hallmarks of contemporariness: hybridity of practice, ‘city dances’ as urban spectacle, site dances as sensescapes and the encounter of the digital and real bodies in digital performances. The Bakhtinian linguistic hybridity model (1981 [1935]) in Chapter three enabled me to examine the new choreographic trends that occur through encounters with a range of people, places, disciplines and cultures. It demonstrated how organic/intentional hybridity serves as a promising choreographic tool for studying cross-cultural innovation that created porous borders of practice in the postcolonial context. It also revealed how various arts institutions and funding bodies play an active role in shaping contemporary practice and also how hybridity has been the strategic choreographic device for satisfying funding conditions over more than a decade. It examined four choreographies (*Dark Matter*, *na asat*, *The Shiver* and *Sivaloka*) that draw on inspirations from sculpture, mythology, religion and science. My analysis showed that in contemporary practice, hybridity has not only resulted from the conglomeration of Bharatanatyam with Western dance styles (in Boonham’s *Sivaloka* and Ray’s *Dark Matter*) but also with other Asian dance forms (for example, Butoh in Subramanyam’s *na asat*) or other Indian dance forms (for

example, Kathak in Kasturi's *NowHere* that I discussed in Chapters four and six). On another level, hybridisation has also occurred through the blending of the dances with other allied arts (for example, mural arts, sculpture and music in Boonham's *Sivaloka*) as well as other fields (for example, neuroscience in Subramaniam's *The Shiver*).

Thus the answer to the question - 'What is organic and intentional hybridity?' - was determined by an array of things such as dance training, artistic subjectivities, social experiences, cultural identities and historical contexts. In fact, the dance artists' encounters and ongoing flow of subjective experiences are forcing them to continually appraise and integrate knowledge from other cultures (for example, Bharatanatyam and ballet, release technique, Western contemporary dance) or mixing different disciplines (for example, Bharatanatyam and neuroscience). They develop multiple competencies - gained either because of the rules set by funding bodies or from movements in time-space, and these oscillations make this contemporary choreoscape as flexible as ever. Drawing on examples and interview narratives, this chapter argued that there is no singular hybridity, rather there exist multiple and heterogeneous hybridities in contemporary dance practice. It also argued for dismantling the binary between organic and intentional hybridity (Bakhtin, 1981 [1935]) because perceptions of (un/)conscious mixing in contemporary Bharatanatyam practice have remained subjective, and thus cannot be grounded in a set of fixed definitions (Derrida, 1989 [1978]).

This study of new genres also demonstrated how performances inform something about the material and imagined fabric of urban cities (for example, London, Chennai, Kolkata), and also how such cities are experienced as performances. To look at the city as a performative device, Chapter four analysed a set of danceworks (*Quick!*, *Bend it...*, *NowHere* and *Song of the City*) and suggested how they incorporate myriad images, roles, scripts, languages and cues from urban living. It demonstrated how the dance artists (Rajarani, Mukherjee and Kasturi) recognise the city as a locus of

discontinuities, crossroads, turning points, fragmentary realities and short-lived contacts. All the dances discussed have juxtaposed ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ city (Raban, 1974) that encompasses the material and imaginary elements of urban life. The deconstructive task leads towards unpacking and reconstruction of the urban meanings through these pixel identities in which the images, signs, symbols and practices are coded, decoded and juxtaposed in a new fashion. As a result, the architecture of the city is no longer erected with bricks and mortars but raised as a ‘digital city’ or ‘city of bits’<sup>1</sup>. Thus in practice, the dance artists transformed theatre space to confront, navigate and create the city through artistic imaginings, as we read, write or sense the ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ city.

Using combined methods, it revealed how city dances bring together disparate objects from different locations in a single space either physically or digitally, and second, the juxtaposition of temporally discontinuous objects to present the totality of time or to isolate temporality in slices. What emerged particularly important are the theatre spaces that appeared as ‘slices in time’ (Foucault, 1986 [1967]: 26), and thus they exemplify ‘heterochronies’. Drawing on Foucault’s heterotopology (1986 [1967]), this chapter argued that the variegated places and temporally discontinuous events collide to create a new spatio-temporal performative aesthetics. The city and ‘heterotopia’ functioned not merely as aesthetic tools, but also as methodological tools to read urban realities and identities of the dance artists in which they live and dream.

Newness was also perceived in the creation of non-proscenium dances, where urban places are not only performed, imagined and read, but experienced through the interlacing of the senses. Chapter five in this thesis engaged with how a site is articulated and perceived through the senses in four non-proscenium dances (*Dusk at Stonehenge*, *Paradiso*, *Maaya* and *First Light*) in which fragmented city images are running like enjambments, as in a poem, representing the endless movements of the

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<sup>1</sup> This expression appears in the title of William J. Mitchell’s book, *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* (1995).

world around. It argued in favour of a multi-sensory experience beyond the ocular-centric regime (Classen, 1997; Howes, 2003) by demonstrating how various sites (for example, South Bank and Westminster Hall in London) were articulated through multi-sensorial experiences where the senses may not be always in harmony, but rather, intersect to inform each other. What makes the cities extraordinary in these dances is the tactile experience of architectural space (Tuan, 1977) - material, spatial, and temporal - shared by the dancers' bodies that enabled us not only to see the texture of the dance floors but to feel them. Drawing on the concepts 'soundscape' (Schafer, 1993) and 'aural architecture' (Blasser & Salter, 2007), it analysed how conglomeration of sounds configured our urban experience. Often, in the field, my nose and tongue enlivened memories, relating to place and cultural identity (Pallasmaa, 2005). Such experiential and multi-sensorial constructions of sites have opened up the knowledge of the previously excluded senses, such as gustatory perception, olfaction, tactility and combinations of them.

Drawing on interview narratives, it revealed how these performances encouraged the participation of the audience through a more direct experience of the sense of a site and whose perceptions are framed through the images of their 'present' as well as their 'past' cities. It was thus argued that the reception of these dances is not restricted to the bounds of materiality of the city, but is reconfigured through sensoriality and memories. The audience members' narratives also highlighted the interplay of multiple sensorialities, torn between urban realities and phantasmagoria of postmodernism. Their dreams - with their abundance and sordidness - at once were alluring and menacing. Drawing on practice and theories, I argued that 'sensescapes' reflect real/imaginary and material/lived experiences; along with cultural identities and histories.



The evidence presented also showed that interactions of the human body and technology bring a critical lens into the study. Drawing on Dixon's (2007) definitions of the digital double as reflection and alter-ego, Chapter six investigated the way the digital double act as a mirror for the dance artists enabling them to create multiple selves and intriguing views of the 'alternate' self. Three choreographies (*Last One Standing*, *Many More Me* and *NowHere*) were analysed to explore how the bodies of the dance artists continuously overlap between real and projected space to conceal and reveal split subjectivities and fragmented postmodern realities, blurring boundaries of detachment and attachment. Borrowing upon the Freudian conceptualisation of narcissism and its Lacanian interpretations, it revealed how new danceworks develop new and fertile grounds for extending relationships between the self and the other. Again, using the psychoanalytic lens, the chapter revealed how the dance artists empower the 'uncanny' (Causey, 1999; Dixon, 2007; Freud, 1990 [1919]) as a performative tool to articulate their suppressed thoughts, in-betweenness, memories and nostalgia. I argued that the triumph of the presence of the digital double in contemporary practice lied in constructing the imagined boundary of the body with a new 'pixelated' identity beyond the physical existence.

Although the audience members have not been my primary respondents, I noted that their self-identification and identities have been deconstructed unevenly and asynchronously each time. Drawing on interview narratives and existing theories (Sayyid, 2006; Harris, 2006), I revealed how the new, hybridised ethnicity, 'BrAsian' (Chapter two) was articulated in a way that accounted for the fluidity and multiplicity of meanings. The comments of the audience members on the dances were equally divergent depending on their social, cultural and spatial sensibilities. On an average, the spectators' voices contained a mixture of allusions, references, travel stories, quotations and vernacular expressions. Like the dance artists, the spectators' narratives in Chapter

three re-imagined genre distinctions while being caught between ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’. Consequently, the concept of organic and intentional hybridity in perceiving the dances questioned the ideas of homogeneity and thus opposed essentialist notions of culture or identity (Young, 1995). I argued that the receptions remained variable due to diverse matrices of routes, sensations, understanding and cultural identity. To conclude, hybridity in reception has remained heterogeneous and thus is subject to transformation.

Chapters four and five showed how the viewers’ narratives introduced a new dimension of perceiving urban performances, characterised by the overlap of material and mental regimes (Raban, 1974) along with sensory *mélange* (Pallasmaa, 2005). Stunning illumination of the urban landscape in the dances had not only altered the mental image of the dance artists, but equally enthralled the audience members. Their voices also abounded in geometric terminologies, especially while looking at the urban practice. For example, several audience members whom I interviewed at various venues presented transient viewpoints, capturing fragmented images by extending their travels, family stories, work, culture and religious beliefs. Thus I argued that the spectators remained producers of texts and not merely observers or decipherers.

As discussed in Chapter five, the visual opulence of Westminster Hall in *Maaya*; the tactility reflected in the concrete structure in *Paradiso*; the tender grass floor and solidness of the stones in *Dusk* and the wet scent of the foggy weather on the Jubilee Bridge and the damp odour under the Hungerford Bridge in *First Light* created complex matrices of the senses. Through the multiplicity of sounds - mobile phones, the metallic sound and city noises, the audience members had perceived the city as a ‘soundscape’ (Schafer, 1994), which displaced the hegemony of ‘ocularcentricism’. The uneven sensorial ensemble emerging from the various ethnicities living in multicultural London demonstrated that sensory perceptions were not neutral, but intersected with the

viewers' cultural histories (Howes, 2005), identities and aesthetic sensibilities. The audience members in site dances assumed the persona of 'flâneur' who felt compelled to escape the monotony and drabness of domestic life in order to engage with a quest for meaning in the urban landscape. Their identities were not rooted in a particular geographic location, but routed through various trajectories. The various arrangements of cross-cultural histories, identities and sensorialities in experiencing urban living are ever-fluctuating, which I argue, also conform to Appadurai's scape theory and Derridean deconstructive lens.

Similarly, the differentiation in receptivity created by technological doubling remained striking. The digital technology remained to be an external influence mediated by the subject at the point of reception. I contended that the importance of the digital body was based precisely on account of its ephemerality and the emotion they generated in them. Despite considerable evidence that calls into question the blurred division between the real and the digital body in digital performances, the audience members have reported the use of 'topos' (in *NowHere*), constantly blurring the line of animate and inanimate. Their narratives were often intensely personal and experiential in terms of their reception of subject and characters. The viewers also exulted both in the feeling of the uncanny and delight of the spectacle. While dancing bodies were seen both as objects and subjects, technology was only the object of gaze. By dealing with technobody, the dance artists have given the viewers deeper knowledge about the redefinition of the body affected by technology - especially concerning the perception of the body and the techniques of replicating self and identity as 'twin' and 'other'. Furthermore, the digital body connecting the audience with dance artists' inner psyche has undeniably expanded the choreoscape of contemporary practice.

Based on my findings, I now outline the contributions that this study has made within the realm of dance studies.

## **7.2. Contributions to knowledge**

This thesis has offered a new perspective on the disjuncture and reconfiguration of Bharatanatyam practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century British context, provoking new ways of seeing, interpreting and appreciating contemporary performances. Through the fluid metaphor of choreoscape, it has demonstrated how new genres of contemporary Bharatanatyam practice are continually being reworked and novel genres are emerging from it. Due to their diversified root and route identities, the dance artists, dancers and others have chosen to self-identify, and are identified by others in multiple ways, which make this context more complicated and malleable.

This interdisciplinary research is informed by a varied repertoire of theories to provide a nuanced analysis of the transitions taking place within contemporary practice of Bharatanatyam dance. The originality of this research is not limited to but lies in its study of the new themes brought in by the post-Jeyasingh dance artists in Britain. A significant contribution of this research lies in its exploration of digital performance which has not been much explored in the scholarship of South Asian dance studies, especially amongst post-Jeyasingh dance artists. The encounter of contemporary Bharatanatyam performance and digital technology as a discursive context is studied using the discourse 'digital double'. Drawing on Dixon's (2007) definitions of the digital double and the Freudian concept of narcissism (Freud, 2001 [1914]) and the uncanny (Freud, 1990 [1919]), this thesis argues that contemporary choreographies project doubles to conceal and reveal split artistic subjectivities and fragmented realities. In other words, it has opened up a new option for dance studies by developing an effective method for reading the digital body and precisely, knowing how these contemporary dance artists negotiate their identities in the digital world, creating a technoculture within the field.

Where hybridity in South Asian dance in Britain is the concern, previous studies have focused on the relationship between the transmigrants and the host nations in the postcolonial context (Briginshaw, 2001; Lopez y Royo, 2004; Meduri, 2011). This study has however attempted to move beyond the postcolonial lens and endeavoured to demonstrate hybridity as a choreographic tool by doing the cultural analysis of the choreographies. Such a practical orientation has provided a lens to explore the issues of hybridity by interrogating how the movements and gestures across cultures are absorbed in contemporary Bharatanatyam dance practices as an emblem of displaced new reality. This subsequently has offered methods of interpreting the emerging choreographies that (re)draws new aesthetic borders.

This thesis has further demonstrated how city dances blur the boundaries of soft and hard city (Raban, 1974) by linking the digital body with the architectural space, and thus fashioned a new kind of technocultural practice. It explored the relationships between heterotopia (Foucault, 1986 [1967]) and city spaces, entwining critical issues with the art of making dances, which has remained largely unexplored in dance studies. My analyses of the nature of sounds (Blasser & Salter, 2007; Schafer, 1993), smell (Porteous, 1985), tactility (Tuan, 1977), 'haptic visuality' (Marks, 2000) in the urban environment demonstrated how the senses could be considered as powerful tools to engage the dancers and the viewers in constructing meanings about sites. Analyses of the ethnographic narrative have generated knowledge about how the site is deconstructed as a palimpsest where both fragmentation (memories, gaps and absence) and assimilation (building a relationship and dialogue with the site and presence) co-exist. The narratives - factual and fictive, and historical and cultural - in such performances are subjective and thus they are constantly unfolding, which somewhat unsettle the notion of specificity of a site. The recounting of sensory expressions, poetic outburst, imageries and metaphors has also provided an understanding of how a

researcher's body could be used as a sensory tool that can enhance one's ethnographic experience into a sensuously creative one (Pink, 2009).

Using a mixed-method approach, the thesis has presented contemporary Bharatanatyam choreoscape as a spatial apparatus of mobility for articulating identities and artistic subjectivities. Each of the chapters (Chapters three, four, five and six) that discussed the dances had different themes, yet together they explicated how new genres are being formed and deconstructed, continuously expanding the border of contemporary practice. The technological mediations have identified that dance artists are constantly moving between the borders of 'soft' and 'hard' cities and between the real and the digital, which further reconfigure their bodily boundaries. The variegated dance practice within the field has provoked in me new ways of thinking about emerging genres, and also encouraged me to follow innovative lines of enquiry, intertwining theoretical borders across disciplines and various methodologies. Drawing on Appadurai (1996), I argue that the increasing international travels between 'here' and 'there' has generated new ways of belonging and defining self and the other and this spatial, temporal and social (dis)locations have given rise to special choreographic imaginings across various cities, which in turn has reconfigured the aesthetic bounds of contemporary practice. In this way, the contemporary Bharatanatyam choreoscape is located outside a closure, where dance terminologies and its reception are always in a state of deconstruction (Derrida, 1976 [1967]) and flux.

I conclude this thesis by touching upon emergent issues that have remained unaddressed in this thesis, and which might eventually open up new spaces for my future research.

### **7.3. Future scope of the research**

There are a few arenas in which future research may be conducted. From various flyers, advertisements, photos and videos, I observed that the dance artists examined in this

thesis continue to create new works that encompass a wide range of collaborative ventures. For instance, whilst Rajarani's *Love is in the Air* (2011) was choreographed in collaboration with "Scarabeus Aerial Theatre", incorporating aerial and acrobatic techniques to portray deep tension in forbidden love relationships, Subramaniam collaborated with professors of medicine to choreograph her piece, *Under the Skin* (2013). Through these performances, one thing is evident that new themes, rhythms and collaborative techniques are gaining currency, and constantly pushing the boundaries of contemporary practice. On another occasion, Rajarani's site dance *Aravind* (2012), performed at Millennium Bridge in London during the daytime, mixed Bharatanatyam and ballet.<sup>2</sup> I am curious to examine how temperature, acoustics, light and the sun have created a different sensescape of the place.

One of the future scopes of this research lies in the examination of installation performance. For instance, in the last phase of my research, I attended a collaborative installation work *Erhebung* (2013) by Boonham and sculptor Jeff Lowe at Rich Mix Theatre. The installation aimed to suggest a new way of conceiving interdisciplinarity, focusing on the transference of live bodily performance to the sonic, temporal and recorded musical installation. While watching Kumar, who was also a cast member in Boonham's *Sivaloka* and *Paradiso* and another dancer Hian Ruth Voon performing around the sculpture, I noted how the 'schizophonic' sounds transformed the 'aural architecture' of the hall. A year earlier, (Subathra) Subramaniam choreographed *Elixir* (2012), an arts-science-education collaboration, that aimed to foster awareness of water issues by juxtaposing sound and visual art installations. While watching these works, I was confronted with a set of questions: how does the collision between acoustics and real and digital spaces activate sensorialities in the audience? How does scientific knowledge blend with creative methods to stimulate new ways of

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j8j2fxhhYE>, (accessed: September 1, 2013)

sensing these performances? These queries therefore invite a detailed and rigorous method for analysing installation performances.

As contemporary dance artists are gradually seen to engage with virtual and electronic media, the scope of experimentations multiplies exponentially. In February, 2014, I was invited to attend Kasturi's 'research and development work', *Forgot Your Password?* (2013),<sup>3</sup> in which she creates a complex labyrinth of movements where the dancers' live and techno-bodies are unremittingly confrontational. As a topical piece it weaves a theatrical climax for the audience who listened to the story of password being hacked and the incessant quests for creating new web identities. At the time of winding up, I noted that in her recent performance of this piece at The Place in May, 2015, she has further revised it and added 'hologram technology', which complicates further the optical presence and spatial quality of the body. In this veritable proliferation of places, a set of questions which will be of interest are: is cyberspace real or a 'non-place' (Augé, 2008 [1995])? Do dancers perform in non-space then? Is the digital space a 'utopia' in the Foucauldian sense because it is not 'real'? It would be interesting to examine how various other practitioners are adopting cyberspace in their practices; hence more of such dances need to be studied to expand the scholarship with regard to the boundary of the 'body'. As I foresee from now, my future study will include internet-based technologies (YouTube, social network systems and online performance) and the interrelationship between dancing bodies and technoculture at large.

Another area of future research could be the interrelation of postmodernism, speed and performativity. During my fieldwork in London, I was also intrigued by the role that speed plays in re-configuring new aesthetics (for example, Rajarani's *Quick!*). In Chapter four I mentioned this piece has two dimensions - firstly, the vigorous traversal of urban spaces, and secondly, the speed indicates a flow of global capitalism,

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCpr0uU-XsU>, (accessed: April 14, 2014)



mobility, consumption and competition. Cultural theorist Paul Virilio (1986 [1977], 1991 [1980], 2004) offered a radical critique on the understanding of the consequences of dromology - the cultural speed and acceleration - in contemporary culture. By bringing speed and urbanism into dialogue with contemporary practice, I am interested in examining how theories of accelerated culture transform performance politics.

From the discussion in Chapter six, one theme emerges: the expressions of the human body are becoming increasingly autonomous and digitally responsive - the interactions between 'I' and 'digi-I' will become even more complex and in turn, will expand the scope of this research. Since the dance artists whom I examined in this thesis are predominantly females, the question of the digital body in such performances is also linked to gender politics, which posits an interesting realm of future exploration. The 'male' digital self from the choreographies, *Quick!*, *Bend it...* and *Quiet, Please!* could be a further appealing topic for enquiry. Besides, very little is known about how the audiences have perceived the male bodies. Thus an additional examination of the digital double through audiences' reflections will broaden the spectrum of this research. While analysing the transcripts of these dance artists, I noticed how their narratives often blurred the boundary between 'liveness' and 'recordedness' of bodies. Therefore this research can further be complicated encompassing Auslander's (1999, 2008) conceptualisations.

There is also a need to study the role gender plays in defining the cultural boundary of the body in 'dance for the camera'. I was intrigued to view the flyer of *The Art of Defining Me* (2013) by Patel, Devam and Åkesson (film direction), where both Devam and Patel are seen in lingerie.<sup>4</sup> According to dance scholar Uttara Asha Coorlawala (2004) the notion of the body in Bharatanatyam dance is seen as an icon of refinement and 'purity'. The following questions that came to my mind have therefore

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eETQ\\_A2atvY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eETQ_A2atvY), (accessed: February 14, 2014)

remained unexplored: how are the boundaries of the body in contemporary Bharatanatyam practices defined? How do these notions of purity and refinement fit into the urban paradigm? Are these dancing bodies holding similar values in urban performances? From these queries, I have developed a strong interest in examining how the historical constructs of the body, its meanings and values get transformed and negotiated within an urban context. All these questions can be of interest to other scholars.

Although my study did not aim to historicise on what contemporariness pertains to in Bharatanatyam dance, the findings emerged from the empirical observations and the methodological blending of the two perspectives (theory and praxis) have reflected on the reconfiguration of contemporary practice through the metaphor of 'choreoscape'. There are several future implications of this research. I have read the dances through specific analytical theories, and I hope that such readings might open up rooms for future scholars who are studying other dance forms. The findings are equally useful for educators, researchers, funders and producers for tracing the growth and direction of contemporary Bharatanatyam practice. As my research has developed diverse methods, it also should exert influence on other scholarships in the field. Due to the several variables in this study, the implications cannot be generalised to all Bharatanatyam or contemporary dance artists who are practising in Britain. Therefore more study needs to be undertaken in this field. I am hopeful that this thesis shall motivate future researchers to include the voice of the other performers in their investigations to expand the knowledge on practice.

Reading the choreographies through a range of theoretical frameworks (identity, hybridity, the 'digital double' and the city) and multiple methods as well as examining the theoretical lenses against the choreographies have enabled a better understanding of the complex embroidery of the emerging Bharatanatyam choreoscape. I am confident

that the findings of this research contribute to understanding how the borderline of contemporary Bharatanatyam practice is incessantly ruptured and reshaped in Britain, and simultaneously expanding the spectrum for dance studies scholars to contest on its repertory and aesthetics.

## *List of Appendices*

### Appendix I: **Biography of the dance artists**

#### **Mayuri Boonham**

Mayuri Boonham is the artistic director and choreographer of ATMA Dance, a London-based dance company (<http://www.atmadance.com/>). Drawing on her training in classical Bharatanatyam dance under Prakash Yadagudde at the Bhavan Centre in London and her upbringing in multicultural Britain, she redraws choreographic boundaries of South Asian art form into new conceptual territories. She also participated in courses with teachers from India and seminal projects with contemporary artists such as Jonathan Burrows, Russell Maliphant and Wayne McGregor. Boonham was a Choreographer-in-Residence at The Place from 2004-2006 and also appointed as a Choreographic Affiliate for the Royal Ballet in 2012. Her choreographies *Sivaloka* (2010) and *Ghatam* (2010) were nominated for the London Fringe Festival award in 2011. Her site-specific choreography *Paradiso* (2011) was commissioned by Akademi in Kent and her installation performance *Erhebung* (2013), which was developed in collaboration with sculptor Jeff Lowe and sound artist Bill Fontana, has been showcased in many cities within the UK. In 2014, Boonham was awarded a commissioning grant from The Royal Ballet Studio Programme at the Royal Opera House in London to create *Ex Nihilo/The Human edge*.

#### **Kamala Devam**

Raised in San Francisco, Kamala Devam is trained in Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Kalakshetra graduates Katherine and K.P. Kunhiraman and received her degree in contemporary dance performance and choreography from the San Francisco State University, USA in 2001. Her choreographies draw on her extensive knowledge of Bharatanatyam and Western contemporary dance. After migrating to the UK, she has toured numerous productions internationally with Shobana Jeyasingh. She performed at the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony with Akram Khan Dance Company and worked with choreographers Luca Silvestrini and Stephanie Shoher. Her solo piece *FretLess* (2010) was performed in several cities, including London and New York. Devam imparts contemporary Indian dance at every level of education, from primary schools to universities, both in the UK and USA. She has co-choreographed with Seeta Patel a short screendance, *The Art of Defining Me* (2012) that has been showcased in several performance venues in the USA, Germany and the UK. This dance film has received much acclaim and received the Best Experimental Film Award at The Lab Film Festival in London in 2013.

## **Divya Kasturi**

Divya Kasturi is a dancer and choreographer with more than two decades of performing experience. Trained in both Bharatanatyam and Kathak, Kasturi is also a Carnatic vocalist who has lent vocals to various albums and films in India and worked with Sir Paul McCartney and Nitin Sawhney in the UK. After earning a bachelor degree in electronics engineering, Kasturi obtained her Masters degree in South Asian Dance Studies from the University of Roehampton, UK. Her Masters dissertation examines her choreographies against post-modern and post-colonial theories. As a part of Look East feature, she has also performed for the BBC as well as toured with Complicite's award winning theatre production, *A Disappearing Number*. Kasturi is known for her innovations in dance incorporating narrative, live and commissioned music, artist-inspired decor and digital technology, as evidenced in *NowHere* (2011) and *Forgot your Password?* (2013). Kasturi's choreography has been featured in Akademi's "Choreogata". Besides, she has received numerous awards and grants for her choreographies from Akademi, Arts Council of England, and others. Currently, she is working to launch her new dance company that will continue to pursue her choreographic intentions.

## **Seeta Patel**

Born in London, Seeta Patel began her training under the guidance of Kiran Ratna and has furthered her studies in Bharatanatyam under the guidance of Mavin Khoo, Adyar K Lakshman, and Pushkala Gopal. Patel has also performed as a company member for Nina Rajarani's *Shristi* (UK tour) and *Angika* (Europe), as well as is working for Liz Lea. She was awarded the Lisa Ullmann Travel and Arts Council England Scholarships. As an Associate Artist with the Akademi South Asian Dance, Patel was a core dancer for Akademi's site-specific works *Sapnay* (2005), *Dreaming Now* (2007) and *Initium* (2008). Patel co-choreographed *Alter Ego* (2007) and *Last One Standing* (2011) with Kamala Devam. She has received several awards, including the Bonnie Bird New Choreography Fund, the Alpha Associate scheme with Swindon Dance and the Kadam Choreography Award. Her solo classical work *Shringara: A Journey of Desire* (choreographed by Mavin Khoo) has been performed in several venues in the UK. Patel has completed a cultural leadership programme in conjunction with Battersea Arts Centre and People Create and worked with DV8 physical theatre in their work *Can We Talk About This* (2012). Her film *The Art of Defining Me* (2012) with Kamala Devam has been showcased in several performance venues across nations and earned many awards.

## **Shamita Ray**

Shamita Ray creates innovative dance pieces that explore the meeting place of Western contemporary dance and South Asian movement techniques such as Bharatanatyam and yoga. Her solo pieces *Dark Matter* and *Ring Cycle* have been performed throughout the UK and Europe, and have been supported by Akademi, the Southbank Centre, Chisenhale Dance Space and Hammersmith & Fulham Arts Team. She has also been an assistant choreographer for the Tatarstan State Opera (Russia). In 2011, she was

commissioned to create *Many More Me* for the “International Festival of a Necessarily Lonely You” (I.F.O.N.L.Y.) in Ireland. She has had an opportunity to work with several distinguished choreographers, including Shobana Jeyasingh and Wayne MacGregor. Over the past twenty years she worked as an independent performer and teacher in various venues across nations. Passionate about opening original ideas to new audience, she blends classical and contemporary art forms. Ray plans to widen her portfolio with future experimentations with yoga, contemporary techniques, digital arts and Bharatanatyam. She is currently based in the UK, but continues to work in several countries in Europe.

### **Ash Mukherjee**

Ash Mukherjee, the artistic director of Ash Dance Theatre: Temple Dance For The 21st Century (<http://www.ashmukherjee.com/>), is trained in Bharatanatyam from Kalamandalam Kolkata under the tutelage of Thankamani Kutty. Mukherjee migrated to England in 1998 to train in classical ballet under ex prima ballerinas of The Royal Ballet, Brenda Last and Doreen Wells, and in Jazz Theatre Dance with Dollie Henry. In 2010 he founded his company Ash Dance Theatre (<http://www.ashmukherjee.com/>) for performing, collaborating and conducting workshops all across the UK and abroad with artists from varied disciplines and genres. The aim of this company is also to bring temple dance and music for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to mainstream audiences by creating a dialogue between artists from contrasting disciplines, thereby creating dance vocabulary that forms a cohesive whole while exploring contemporary and cross cultural themes. Previously, he worked as the artistic director for the Indian Ballet Academy while he taught classical ballet in British Council libraries and various schools in India. His past collaborators in the UK include: FIPA, Akademi, Shivanova and Real Arts. A string of choreographies devised by him are *Aum* (2008), *Meeting Place* (2009), *Oordhava Tandavam* (2010) and *Song of the City* (2011). Mukherjee has also conducted workshops for Surrey Youth Ballet, St Joseph Ballet of Los Angeles, University of Surrey and Acland Burghley School, London. He is leading a South Asian dance history and choreographic practice module at the Canterbury Christ Church University and University of Essex, UK.

### **Nina Rajarani (MBE)**

Nina Rajarani (MBE) began her dance training in Bharatanatyam with noted teacher Prakash Yadagudde at Bhavan Centre, London. She founded the company Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations (<http://www.srishti.co.uk/>) in 1991. Over the last 20 years, her vision has enabled her to create several innovative productions with distinctive movement style and technical virtuosity. Srishti - Nina Rajarani Dance Creations tours both its small-scale and mid-scale performance works nationally in the UK and internationally. Collaborating with state-of-the art designers she experimented with projection of computer generated images onto the stage in *Quick!*, a winner of the Place Prize in 2006. Her early choreographies are: *Mirage* (2006), *Equilibrium* (2004) and *Vaachikam* (2002). Her latest choreographies include: *Love Is In The Air* (2011), *Bend it...* (2009), *Quiet, Please!* (2007). Most recently, she premiered *Jham!*, in 2013. In addition to creating dances, *Srishti Dance School* disseminates the technique of

Bharatanatyam. Rajarani has been awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for her services to South Asian Dance in 2009. She is currently the secretary of the South Asian Dance Faculty of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing.

### **Subathra Subramaniam**

Subathra Subramaniam is a dancer, choreographer and currently the artistic director of the Sadhana Dance Company (<http://www.sadhanadance.com/>). She was trained in Bharatanatyam under Prakash Yadagudde at the Bhavan Centre in London and has a degree in medical biochemistry from King's College, London. Subramaniam spent five years in teaching science in higher secondary schools, until launching *Sadhana Dance* in 2009. She was also the former co-choreographer of *Angika Dance*, *Urban Temple* (2003), *Bhakti* (2004), *Ether* (2006) and *Cypher* (2008). Although rooted in classical Bharatanatyam vocabulary, Sadhana's distinctive, engaging works are a result of cross art collaborations with scientists or professionals in scientific and academic institutions. Besides, Subramaniam aims to be thought-provoking and sensuous in presenting female bodies on stage and has created three new works *The Shiver* (2010), *Elixir* (2012) and *Under My Skin* (2013). Recently, she has been working on a new piece as part of The Place's *Choreodrome Project*, which involves spending an extended period of time working with psychiatrists, neuroscientists, therapists and patients in the Child and Adolescent Unit of the Maudsley Hospital in London. Subramaniam looks forward to continuing to charter new territory - both geographically and artistically - using her knowledge in science education.

### **Anusha Subramanyam**

Originally trained in Bharatanatyam, Anusha Subramanyam is the artistic director of a London based dance and theatre company Beeja (<http://beeja.com/>). She has choreographed a wide range of performances and collaborated with artists from a variety of disciplines to create cutting edge works which are accessible, entertaining and thought provoking. She takes interest in creating dances for the people with special needs, schools and family groups, exploring issues of culture, religion and identity. In her works, she has endeavoured to integrate dance, education, and somatic practices. She has been involved in numerous projects that challenge both the classical dance forms she is trained in, as well as contemporary themes and narratives. Her choreographies include: *Colour Contact* (2004), *Na Asat* (2010) and *From the Heart* (2010). As a freelance dancer, choreographer and teacher, Subramanyam imparts dance education to a wide range of students, both nationally and internationally. She acted as the Programme Director for Dance India 2009-2010, an International South Asian Dance Summer School at Lowry in Manchester, produced by Milapfest, a Liverpool based South Asian Arts organisation and also the Subject Leader for Bharatanatyam at The Centre for Advance Training Programme in Birmingham. She has been the recipient of several fellowships and the Asian Women of Achievement Award in 2011.

## Appendix II: **Structured interview for the dance artists**

The research for this project was submitted for the ethical consideration under the reference DAN 11/002 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on the June 27, 2011.



Date:

Name of the Artist-Choreographer:

Interviewer: Suparna Banerjee (MPhil/PhD Researcher)

Interview Setting:

(Start of Interview)

Interviewer: Could you please inform me of your dance training and background?

Interviewer: How did you get interested to learn two different forms of classical dances?

Interviewer: Do you see any innovation in your practice of Bharatanatyam?

Interviewer: What are innovativeness/contemporariness/tradition to you?

Interviewer: Was it your training or travel that has inspired you to conceive your work?

Interviewer: What terms do you use to depict your practice? Do you like to have any label at all for your work?

Interviewer: What is your view about the label of South Asian dance?

Interviewer: Do the parents of the students whom you teach are aware of this term?



Interviewer: Could you please tell me whether gender plays any special role while you choreograph any piece?

Interviewer: Could you please tell me if you have ever created or performed in site specific choreographies? How do the notions of 'space', 'time' and 'city' create complex layers of meanings in your works?

Interviewer: Are your performances tailored for a particular section of society, if so, which one and why?

Interviewer: What kind of responses do you get from the audiences?

Interviewer: By creating new genres, would you agree that the originality of this dance form is lost?

Interviewer: What are the scopes of such new dance forms here in the UK or anywhere in the world?

Interviewer: Thanks for your time.

Prepared by

Suparna Banerjee

The research for this project was submitted for the ethical consideration under the reference DAN 11/002 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on the June 27, 2011.

### Appendix III: Participant Consent Form



## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: *De-sanskritisation or post-sanskritisation?*  
Hybridity and cultural inflows in Bharatanatyam dance tradition on the transnational stage

### Brief Description of Research Project:

The original aim of the research endeavour is to carry out an exhaustive study on how Bharatanatyam, a form of Indian classical dance, is undergoing transformations on the transnational stage, chiefly in Britain.

Investigator Contact Details: Suparna Banerjee, Department of Dance, Roehampton University, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. Email: banerjes@roehampton.ac.uk. Mobile: 07550044827

### Consent Statement:

I .....agree to take part in this research, and I am aware of my freedom to withdraw at any point. I also understand that any information I may provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name of Participant.....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Director of Studies or the Head of Department below:

#### Director of Studies Contact Details:

Professor Andrée Grau  
Department of Dance  
Roehampton University  
Roehampton Lane  
London. SW15 5PJ  
A.Grau@roehampton.ac.uk  
0208 392 3372

#### Head of Department Contact Details:

Mr. Toby Bennett  
Department of Dance  
Roehampton University  
Roehampton Lane  
London. SW15 5PJ  
T.Bennett@roehampton.ac.uk  
0208 392 3671

## Appendix IV: Audience Survey Questionnaire

Approved by the Ethics Committee for Research, University of Roehampton, London on the June 27, 2011.



TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: *De-sanskritisation or post-sanskritisation?*  
Hybridity and cultural inflows in Bharatanatyam dance tradition on the transnational stage

Investigator Contact Details: Suparna Banerjee, Department of Dance, Roehampton University, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PJ. E-mail: banerjes@roehampton.ac.uk; Phone: 07550044827

By filling out this questionnaire you can help me in understanding the audiences' experience of watching South Asian dance performances in the United Kingdom. Please try to answer as fully as possible – Thank you for your time!

|   |   |                      |               |  |
|---|---|----------------------|---------------|--|
| Age-group   | Under-18 / 18–25 / 26–30 / 31–40 / 41 – 50<br>/ 51–60 / 61–70 / over-70 |                      |               |  |
| Residence area  |   | Sex<br>(Please tick) | Male / Female |  |
| 1) Have you ever been to one of such dance events before?   |   |                      |               |  |
| 2) How many dance performances have you attended in the last 6 months?                              |   |                      |               |  |
| 3) What is the last dance performance you saw live? Please specify the venue and type of dance.     |   |                      |               |  |
| 4) Where do you like to watch dances (auditorium, open spaces, buildings, playground, screen etc.)? |   |                      |               |  |
| 5) Have you ever taken dance classes? If no, please go to question                                  |   |                      |               |  |

|  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
|--|---|-------------|----------|---------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|--------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------|--|--|
| 8.)  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 6) What style/form of dance are you trained in and up to which level? (Teaching/Professional/ Basic etc.)  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 7) Which is your favourite dance style?  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 8) How you came to know about today's performance? (Online advertisement, invitation, magazine, personal contacts etc.)  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 9) Which, if any, of the following words do you feel best describes today's performance? (Please tick on the word. You may choose more than one/ add your own epithets.) | <table> <tr> <td>Innovative</td> <td>Relevant</td> <td>Topical</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Predictable</td> <td>Entertaining</td> <td>Exclusive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Uninspiring</td> <td>Disappointing</td> <td>Boring</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Irrelevant</td> <td>Informative</td> <td>Traditional</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">.....</td> </tr> </table> | Innovative  | Relevant | Topical | Predictable | Entertaining | Exclusive | Uninspiring | Disappointing | Boring | Irrelevant | Informative | Traditional | ..... |  |  |
| Innovative   | Relevant  | Topical     |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| Predictable  | Entertaining  | Exclusive   |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| Uninspiring  | Disappointing   | Boring      |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| Irrelevant   | Informative   | Traditional |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| .....  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 10) What did you like about the today's dance performance? (e.g. theme, costume, light, etc.)  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 11) What is classical dance to you?  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 12) What is contemporary dance?  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 13) How would you like to classify these dances (e.g. Classical/Contemporary etc.)?  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| 14) Is there anything you didn't like about today's show?  |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
| E-mail* (optional)   |   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |
|  | Tel* (optional)   |             |          |         |             |              |           |             |               |        |            |             |             |       |  |  |

Please add your email or telephone number if you are happy to be contacted to talk further about your experience.

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