

PAPERS 14 Musicalities of (postdramatic theatre)

Chair – Paul Barker
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If Music Be the Food of Love: intercultural acoustemologies and Ong Keng Sen's Awakening

Marcus Cheng Chye Tan

Interculturalism is often conceived in terms of visual metaphors and an epistemology based on the ocular sense has always been privileged. The acoustic dimensions and the sonic qualities of an intercultural performance have rarely been considered and much less the hermeneutics of this hybridised soundscape that certainly interrogates the ways in which cultures are understood aurally.

Staged as an attempt to fuse Shakespeare and Tang Xian Zu's classical Kunqu opera, The Peony Pavilion, Awakening is Singapore director Ong Keng Sen's most recent and prominent attempt at engaging issues of the intercultural through music and sound.

Through a study of the musicalities and sonic expressions of Awakening, the paper seeks to explore the implications of such cultural-musical juxtapositions. It will engage, specifically, the problematics and possibilities of music as a 'universal language' and will further consider the politics of an intercultural soundscape and the acoustemologies of such an acoustic interculturalism.

Melodic intentions: speaking text in postdramatic multimedia dance theatre

Zachary Dunbar

The Cows Come Home was a multimedia dance theatre work performed in the UK and Denmark. Its postdramatic approach to the tragic chorus evoked acts of dying through a choreography suggesting both choral-like collectivity and individuality.

The nested media provided cohesion of heterogenous meanings but the use of live-spoken words in the media scrum presented unique challenges to the performer, and to aspects of vocalisation. Within a media-dense postdramatic environment, the intervention of spoken text necessitated a precise timbre, rhythm, pitch and cadence in the delivery of the words in order to fit within the non-narrative style of the piece. The dichotomy of the semantic and phonetic inflection of the text in particular became problematic, so that one had to negotiate both meaning and sound without privileging either. In short, the speaking performer was compelled to supply a kind of melody in the heterophony of media.

Collaboration, notation, authorship and dramaturgy in the creation of composed theatre

David Roesner and Matthias Rebstock

Since the beginning of the 20th Century it has been an ongoing interest of composers like Schönberg and Goebbels to approach the theatrical stage and its means of expression (voice, gesture, movement, light, sound, image, design) as musical material. The idea re-flourished amongst composers, directors and theatre collectives during recent developments towards postdramatic forms, which de-emphasised text, narrative and fictional characters, sought alternative dramaturgies (visual, spatial, temporal, musical), and focussed on the sonic and visual materialities of the stage and the performativity of their use. The interests in the musicality of the theatrical performance and vice versa the theatricality of the musical performance have given rise to a wide range of forms of literally and explicitly composed theatre.

Roesner and Rebstock ask questions about forms of collaboration, notation, authorship and dramaturgy in the creation of composed theatre based on preliminary findings arising from the first of a series of workshops.