

**The Embodied Practitioner:
Towards A Decolonised Cross-Cultural Performance Practice Within A Glocal
Singapore Context**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Elizabeth de Roza hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 31st March 2020

Abstract

This thesis proposes an embodied performance practice that is simultaneously decolonised and cross-cultural. It articulates the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction between/within/in-between the multiplicities of cultural memory, moving beyond an east-west binary and instead embedding itself in the multi-cultural heritage of a postcolonial Singapore female other/ed body.

I will engage in an embodied practice research methodology to articulate how the contemporary post-colonial performance body is shaped by the layers of cross-cultural considerations and concerns. Through the research, I will explore how embodied memory and history is buried deep within the individual and responds to cultural context. The research attempts to formulate and articulate a decolonised cross-cultural performance methodology specific to my own practice as a female Singaporean Eurasian performance maker.

My research is onto-epistemological, as the focus is on the body as the material, and employs an embodied research methodology. The research is interwoven with an intersection of theoretical frameworks from phenomenology into somaesthetics, and includes both postcolonial and feminist theories, furthering the debate on cross-culturalism. I also propose that my methodology of soft fireworks can contribute to the emerging field of embodied research and is relevant to the current debate on cross-cultural performance practice. I have introduced bodycultures in my research, to recognise how the socio-cultural body influences the performing body, and that

this affects how a postcolonial female other/ed body is perceived and received on stage.

To articulate the emerging field of embodied research, I have chosen to engage in a practice that combines the frameworks of *kalaripayattu* (an ancient South Indian martial arts) as a pre-preparatory tool for the rehearsal process, and an amalgamation of cross-cultural performance practices I have termed soft fireworks. Through these practices I devised two new cross-cultural collaborative performances: a duet entitled *Landscaping a Personal Myth*, and a solo performative mediation entitled *Landscapes of Memories*. Through this embodied research and emerging cross-cultural performance methodology, I hope to contribute to the scholarship around decolonising cross-cultural performance practice within a glocal¹ Singapore context.

¹ The term glocal represents both a local and yet global perspective. Therefore, by glocal, I am expressing the transferability of performance practices embodying and empowering female bodies either in Singapore or elsewhere.

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Accompanying Material

1. **Thumb drive**

Video sequence specific to my practice research outcomes

- Landscaping A Personal Myth – Process and Performance
- Landscapes of Memories – Process and Performance

First Video: Landscaping A Personal Myth – Process and Performance

There are three parts to the video. Part A: Process, Part B: Rehearsals and Part C: Performance. There are five sections in Part A and they ask a series of questions as the two performers work in the space to unpack the previous set of questions I have raised in the thesis.

Part A: Process (First Section) of the video (time-code: 04:24 -14:57) asks:

1a. What is this inner dialogue that is conveyed through the body, how is this strung together to create a physical score and how does the body embody its memory?

Part A: Process (First Section) of the video (time code: 14:57 – 20.00) asks:

1b. The challenges of recalling the embodied gestures and the unpacking of what is a learned gesture. The process of embodiment through the use of objects and the becoming of memory.

Part A: Process (second section) of the video (time code: 20:01 – 32:11) asks:

2. How, through the use of objects, is the journeying of identities and flow of consciousness articulated through the body? How does the use of objects convey embodied memory?

Part A: Process (third section) of the video (time code: 32:12 - 40:12) asks:

3a. Exploring the possible routes of self, self once removed and self twice removed. What is the process of the re-telling of a series of events that provokes embodiment of the 3 selves in the contemporary body? (32:30 – 34:50)

3b. How does the process of retelling through an external impulse such as photographs and objects trigger the embodied memory? (Time code: 34:51 – 40:15)

Part A: Process (fourth section) of the video (time code: 40:16 - 44:02) asks:

4. When embodied memories are evoked and the multiplicities of selves are revealed, the body enters into a vulnerable state. What are the processes of re-telling these multiplicities of selves? At this point, how does the body respond as a site?

Part A: Process (fifth section) of the video (time code: 44:03 – 45:42) asks:

5. How does the body articulate a new possibility, a re-writing of history and the contemporary?

Part B: Rehearsals of the video (time code: 45:43 – 47:46) demonstrates:

Here, the multi-media and sound were created in conjunction with the two performers – with most of the images coming from the performers and the sounds coming mainly from interviews gathered from the performers.

Part C of the Video documents the performance (time code: 47:47 – 1:13.59):

This is the performance within a cross-cultural site. The performance can be described as a site that is defined by the close proximity of relations. It articulates a sense of circulatory networks or linkages of elements put together, to create the multiplicities of voices to be heard, and to call forth the peripheral to speak.

Second Video: Landscapes of Memories – Process and Performance

The video is divided into three sections. First Section is the introduction (time-code: 00:00 – 05:03), the second section is the rehearsals process (5:05– 22:14) and the third section is the performance (time-code: 22:15 – 1:01:31).

The first section of the video (time-code: 00:00 – 5:03) asks:

How embodied memory(ies) reveal themselves and what is being revealed in the studio?

The second section of the video (05:04 – 22:14):

Documents my integration of applied art practices into my methodology with the ritualistic pre-performance preparation of attuning the body. There are four stages to this and they are:

- 1) Observing and experiencing (time-code: 05:05 – 06:11)
- 2) Engaging in ‘sandplay’ using leaves (time-code: 06:12 – 07:53)
- 3) Working with elemental objects (time-code: 07:54 – 09:54)
- 4) Creating a harmonious moment (time-code: 09:55 – 22:11)

The third section of the video (time-code: 22:15 – 1:01:39) documents:

The performance and the discoveries made in the studio through the four stages mentioned made expanded on my argument that the disentanglement of any bodyculture(s) was impossible as these multiplicities of cultures were interwoven within me.

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Introduction

My main reason to undertake this research is to ask if my practice can contribute to the emerging field of embodied research, and if it is relevant to the current debate on cross-cultural performance practice. Asking these questions will help me to formulate my embodied methodology to create decolonised cross-cultural performance practices that defy the fixity of a binary cultural gaze and to embody the plurality of Singapore's shifting identities and aesthetics.

How do I engage with the methodology that I have developed over the past twenty years as both a performance maker and acting/movement lecturer in higher education? Can this be used as a devising method to create new and original work for the stage that embody the plurality of cultural ancestry in a Singaporean body? Can these lead to a new ecology of practices and what is the language of making and describing these processes?

It is important to state here that my research is located within a glocal Singapore context and that I have chosen to base my research on the female body with generations of multiplicities of cultures intertwined and interwoven in her. The multiplicities of cultures are the threads that form the fabric of her cultural identity. To disentangle these threads and examine each strand as a separate, classifiable, observable entity within this body would undo the fabric of her cultural identity, and it is an impossible task. Recognising the impossibility of the task of disentangling the threads of multiplicities of cultures in the body furthers the debate on cross-culturalism, extending the social-political Euro-American gaze of twentieth century interculturalism into a postcolonial feminist argument that the fixity of

“interculturalism” must be de-centred. In their book *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (2002), Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins argue that “the post-colonial agenda is to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 3). I propose to add to the post-colonial discourse through my methodology that offers a new feminist embodied performance practice that is simultaneously decolonised and cross-cultural, that focuses on the female post-colonial body imprinted with layers of cultural intersections. Interwoven within her body of mixed race, new post-colonial material(s) comes into being, materials that write outside of hegemonic boundaries and colonial praxis and exist in the performing space that becomes available at points of intersection and layered identities. My research seeks to break the binary discourse of east and west and/or centre and margin, recognising the possibility of simultaneously embodying multiplicities of culture. I argue that it is this simultaneous embodiment of multiple cultures and histories that form the fabric of the 21st century post-colonial other/ed female body in Singapore and is here to dismantle the social-political Euro-American gaze of the twentieth century’s fixity of “interculturalism”.

As stated, the main focus of the research is on the body, more specifically the marginalised post-colonial female body. My research asks how a body that is other/ed is received and perceived on stage. The body as defined by Gilbert and Tompkins (2002) is “a major physical symbol; [she] is distinguished from other such symbols by [her] capacity to offer a multifarious complex of meanings (p. 203). Therefore, asking how other/ed bodies are received and perceived is to also ask how other/ed bodies are acculturated into society. It interrogates the reciprocal

relationship between the viewer and the viewed, examining how reception and perception of the performing body on stage might be influenced by its audience, and where such a body locates herself/is located in performance in contemporary Singapore.

In unpacking my practice through an embodied methodology, I argue that once we look beyond interculturalism into cross-culturalism as threads that interweave and intertwine, we will find that the other/ed post-colonial body is at intersections of the threads' weaving and crossing.

Cross-cultural

So why the terminology cross-cultural? My main rationale for using the terminology cross-cultural is twofold: firstly, because my body is an embodiment of multiple cultures and histories, and I am arguing that these simultaneous embodiments form the fabric of the 21st century post-colonial other/ed female body in Singapore.

Secondly, through a cross-cultural framing, I actively engage in a process of cross-referencing, encountering, experiencing and negotiating, meeting the multiplicities of cultures physically in the studio, and creatively in the performance space.

By engaging in the framework of cross-culturality, I am asking what these perimeters of encounters are; I address these spaces of the encounters and how they occur. How do marginalised bodies exist within cross-cultural spaces? Whose grounds are we standing on? What are the power relations inscribed within a cross-cultural creative space? How do we create a space that acknowledges these cross-cultural threads? What are the different shifts of perception after we interrogate the

relationship between what is viewed on stage and the viewer? How might my practice call forth these new shifts of perception and create a new transversal creative space?

In the accompanying videos, especially in *Landscaping a Personal Myth: Process and Performance*, the reader is brought into the studio to experientially view how my collaborators and I are constantly negotiating, encountering, experiencing and expressing through our bodies. The studio practices embodies the idea put forth by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert in their article *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis* (2002) that “cross-cultural theatre inevitably entails a process of encounter and negotiation between different cultural sensibilities ...” (p. 31).

Furthermore, as Dollimore (1991) reflects on cross-cultural: “to cross is not only to transverse, but to mix (as in to cross-breed) and to contradict (as in to cross someone), suggesting some of the possibilities for cross-cultural theatre to radicalise and intervene in hegemonic art practices” (p. 288, as cited in Lo & Gilbert, 2002, p. 32). Thus, Dollimore’s observation serves as a reflection for me to ask how my research contributes to the larger field of cross-cultural performance practices. It spurs me to interrogate how emphasising a decolonised cross-cultural methodology of soft fireworks ² as an embodied technique can push for and allow for a female space of knowledge and bodycultures within academia. Soft fireworks is a crossing of cultures in Dollimore’s multiple interpretations of the word; it is a transference of

² Soft fireworks is an amalgamation of cross-cultural performance practices that I have encountered in my training. This is elaborated in chapter one.

strategies of embodied technique for the Singaporean female post-colonial body existing at the intersections of cultures and those of mixed race. It creates a space for these bodies to perform within and between the range of cross-cultural practices defined as multicultural, post-colonial and intercultural without a need to tether and define the Singaporean post-colonial body in only one locus or practice.

I am arguing that my methodology of soft fireworks is a decolonised, cross-cultural performance practice that pushes forward the cross-cultural debate, going beyond notions of dramaturgical and aesthetic frameworks. This performance practice defies the fixity of a binary cultural gaze, and embodies the plurality of Singapore's shifting identities and aesthetics within a glocal context. Regarding post-colonial societies, Christopher Balme argues in his book *Decolonizing The Stage* (1999), that “[in] syncretic theatre...the cultural text undergoes a process of recoding, there exists a consciously sought-after creative tension between the meanings engendered by these texts in the traditional performative context and the new function within Western dramaturgical framework” (p. 5). Balme's thesis assumes an interpretive encounter rather than an active process of bodies existing together through an experiential encounter. Syncretic theatre, Balme argues, is a fusion of the indigenous material into a western dramaturgical framework. The juxtapositioning of culturally coded performers' bodies on stage expresses post-colonial concerns embedded in newly written western dramaturgical scripts. But rather than asking for an interpretive analysis of the cross-cultural space, my research is proposing an onto-epistemologic category of how the contemporary 21st century Singapore female performing body exists within a glocal context.

To read the performing body on stage we need to be aware of how a fixed cultural gaze perceiving a performance contributes to an erasure of the other/ed body, rendering the performing other/ed body mute, invisible, unable to make her voice and experiences heard. My research highlights the need to decolonialise the other/ed body on stage because “decolonisation involves not just a verbal/textual counter-discourse but a reviewing of the body and [her] signifying practices” (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p. 204) so that an open and shared space between the performer and audience might be possible. By having an open and shared space, I am highlighting the presence of the female body; she is the site for decolonisation because in this shared space, “the performance centralises the physical and socio-cultural specificities of its participants” (Gilbert & Tompkins, p. 204) and in this instance the post-colonial female body.

A post-colonial feminist perspective within a cross-cultural space

I have made the deliberate choice to work with the female body so that I can further the post-colonial feminist debate that challenges the construction and production of representation of women’s bodies in contemporary culture, especially the contemporary Asian female body, and more specifically the contemporary other/ed Asian body. My argument is that as a Singaporean Eurasian female practitioner who is constantly placed at the margins, erased from the contemporary Singapore mainstream that continues to engage in the voices and discourses of the western canon of plays and the country’s three major racial narratives, my body is, to use post-colonialist feminist critic Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) term, the subaltern body.

Spivak applied Foucault's term *epistemic violence* to the female subaltern, arguing that it is a "body caught in translation, never [allowed to be] truly expressing herself, because the colonial powers destruction of her culture pushed to the social margins her non-Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and knowing the world" (Spivak, 1988, p. 308). Therefore, rather than have the contemporary Asian female body pushed to the margins, erased from discourse and rendered invisible on stage, I am arguing for these female bodies to be recognised and visible in their embodied, varied and variable her(his)stories. To include these other female bodies means not so much that we are shifting the margins, but that the centre is losing its fixity and the binary of other/ed becomes the cipher, rendering the implied twin and equal but different playing partner, the subaltern still alternating, shifting embodying ever shifting points, but no longer the subaltern. At the same time, Spivak (2014) argues that by "putting [the female body] in the position of the questioning subject, [we] are really thinking about phallogentrism. [And] a critique of discourse of woman as produced, as defined by men" (p. 42). Expanding on Spivak's post-colonial feminist theories, I am therefore asking "where is my space", "what is my space", and "how can I claim my own space" and not "who is a woman" (Spivak, 2007).

I am also hoping that through contemporary methodologies and analytical strategies of performance practices such as an embodied research, I can further the debate on post-colonial feminist theory as we move from a central point to which everything else measures proximity towards a transversal space that becomes present through the points where it connects to others. But, in order for us to do that, we as post-colonial Singapore female bodies must first own our history, our narratives. These narratives must also include the everyday experiences, the interweaving of multiple

cultures that is in the Singapore female body, and the cross-cultural shifts that affect the body as there is no fixed self. Because it is impossible to have a self without the body, I am engaging in an embodied methodology that argues from a post-colonial feminist epistemology that experience is not a truth that precedes culturally given representations of experience but is actually mediated by representations.

Postmodern feminist Donna Haraway (2003), for instance, has emphasised the discovery that visual experience is not mere reception of reality but an active process informed by expectations. This expectation appears to us, however as if it simply reflected external reality. Arthur Frank (1991) notes, “feminism has taught us that the story of society, on which many questions of power and control rest, both begins and ends with the body” (p. 42). I am hoping that through my practice, the Singapore Eurasian post-colonial female body will be re-examined and that the way we perceived and received the (now) other/ed body be re-framed and making it possible to exist in a transversal space and place.

As I situate my practice within an embodied, decolonised and feminist framework, I am positing a politicised and a decolonised embodied methodology. I argue that soft fireworks is both a politicised embodied technique that pushes for and allows a female space of knowledge sharing, and system of training within academia and performance making. Soft fireworks is a technique to excavate repressed cultural memories in the post-colonial Singaporean female body. The reader should also bear in mind the varying degrees of state/self-censorship imprinted on the contemporary Singaporean body. The awareness of state/self-censorship(s) as articulated in chapter one needs to be taken into consideration because as a Singaporean, I am constantly negotiating what my censorship boundaries are and

how I work towards a process of decolonisation within state sanctioned censorship laws that have rendered the body self-censored.

Research Methodology

The question now is how will I frame my research? I have decided to frame the research as an onto-epistemological undertaking, while engaging in a comprehensive embodied research methodology. I have chosen to use the language of two scholars, Ben Spatz and Robin Nelson, because I needed a framework to successfully communicate what was happening in the studio and to argue what constitutes embodied research. This language also facilitated the framing of video documentation that accompanies this thesis.

I would also like to highlight that in describing the body, I will use the pronouns she, her and hers, rather than the generalised and/or masculine body that is often used in describing practice. My rationale behind this is that because I am engaging in a post-colonial feminist theory by foregrounding the female identity throughout the language of my thesis, I am locating the female body at the transversal centre of everything. My thesis begins with a series of questions borrowed from Ben Spatz's book titled *What the body can do?*(2015). I am adding on to Spatz's list of questions and asking these questions with a post-colonial feminist's perspective. In the wording of my questions I replace Spatz's "the body" with "her body", rendering the female body as an "active-subject" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p. 207).

What can her (the) body do with the methodology of soft fireworks?

What can (the) female body do with the various training methodology?

What can her (the) body do in devising?

What can her (the) body do when she is moving?

What can her (the) body do when she is not moving?

How does her (the) body remember?

Can her (the) body remember?

What does her (the) body remember?

What can her (the) body do as she works through the unravelling of her memories?

What does her (the) body do on stage?

How does her (the) body decolonise herself?

How does her (the) body unlearn, relearn and learn?

These questions were the spine of enquiries that I held firmly in my palm as I worked in the studio with my collaborators in creating a duet *Landscaping A Personal Myth* and my solo performative meditation *Landscapes of Memories*.

The research is framed in a comprehensive embodied practice research methodology.

The intention for this was to have a methodology that can be applied throughout the different phases of research and as argued by David Pears (1971), who writes that

“practice nearly always comes first, and it is only later that people theorize about practice” (p. 129). Therefore, the research outcomes from the process and into the

two performances are generating, emerging and selecting because in the studio the

materials that are emerging are unexpected. As I unpack my practice throughout the thesis, I am aware that my research is moving from a tacit knowledge as a performer

and trainer into a verbal articulation of key observations through a post-colonial

feminist theoretical contextualisation and an embodied studio based investigation as

an emerging cross-cultural practice and pedagogue. My methodology of a

comprehensive embodied practice research is a subset of Nelson’s “Triangulation Dynamic Model”.

Nelson’s “Triangulation Dynamic Model” consists of three areas, “Practitioner Knowledge”, “Conceptual Framework” and “Critical Reflection” as seen in the figure below.

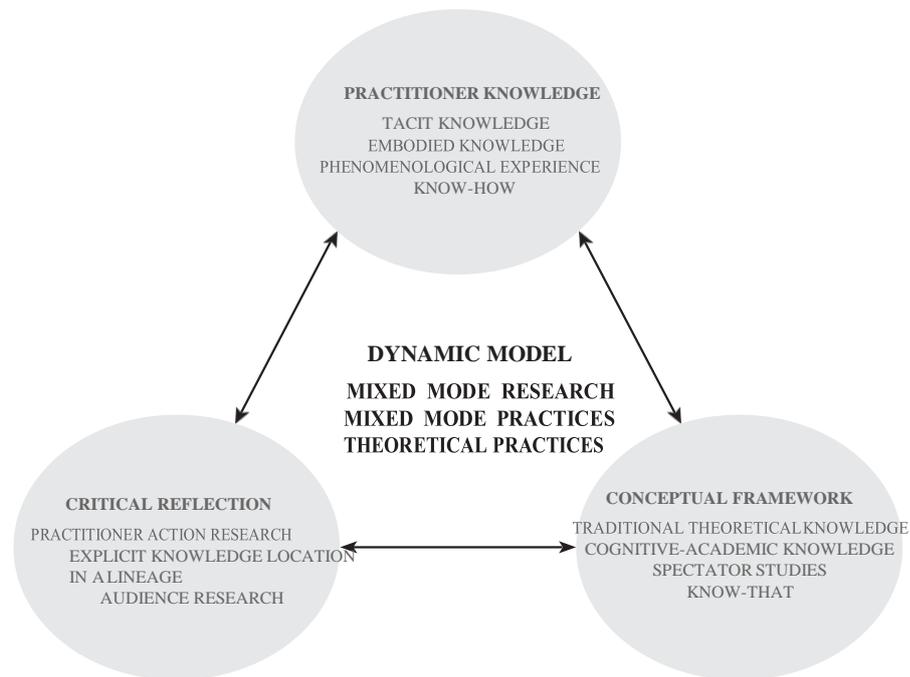


Figure 1. Robin Nelson’s triangle (Nelson, 2006, p. 114)

In reference to Nelson’s triangulation model, my practice and the technique that I have embodied falls under “Practitioner Knowledge”. Through my practice and technique, my embodied research asks what bodies *can* do. By asking this, I am emphasising that the primary focus of my investigation are the possibilities and potentials of bodies individually or together. My research also asks whether my methodology can be taught, what is the way of doing and can this be shared? In using practice as both technique and research methodology, I am in alignment with Spatz (2017, p. 5) who would argue that this is what makes my practice a technique

and a form of knowledge to/into embodied research. Therefore, my practitioner knowledge according to Nelson's first triangle is what informs my research; it is the accumulation of various cross-cultural practices that I have amalgamated into my embodied practice and methodology and term *soft fireworks*. I have given an overview of my training process and practice in chapter one.

The second aspect of Nelson's triangle that I have worked with is the conceptual framework of my practice research. In phase one of my research, I collaborated with two female Singaporean Peranakan Chinese performers and together we formulated a performance vocabulary. According to Spatz (2017, p. 8), the second aspect of an embodied research methodology is to take note of the language and how one describes and frames an embodied technique. Thus, the second part of my thesis provides a clear account of my practice, of my sources and analyses of my practices, this is found in chapters two and three. To articulate my research outcomes in these chapters, I intertwined them with theories of phenomenology, cross-cultural practices, post-colonial feminist and decolonial theories. The intertwining(s) are the intersections of theories that support my argument that soft fireworks is a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice and that the reading of an other/ed female body on stage needs reframing because of the socio-cultural frameworks that the body finds herself constantly in. My inclusion of the term socio-cultural is because bodies are socially and culturally intertwined and this influences how we perceived the world. I examine this more deeply in chapter three, when I propose a performance that embraces slowness, non-action and silence, with my body almost at a point of stillness as another element in my research.

In chapter three, I write that silence and stillness are instrumental to (re)claiming and (re)owning the body. I am arguing that a transversal creative space is achieved through both silence and stillness, and that within this transversal space we can navigate a shared and safer space. Through silence and stillness, we can experience how bodies are at an intersection of cultures within a transversal creative space. This awareness is a process of cross-referencing and is a “strategic essentialism”. Spivak coined the term “strategic essentialism” (1988, p. 205), to advocate for provisionally accepting essentialists’ notions of identities, that other/ed bodies tend to be viewed rather than experienced. I postulate that through silence and stillness, an embodied decolonising and radical process is expressed through the body and thus calls forth a transversal creative space where both performer and audience can exist and experience each other. And, in the silence and stillness, we are “made” to encounter and ask who these bodies are, and through whose bodies I am experiencing these bodies. Therefore, both silence and stillness are necessary as a tool to soften the political edge of any controversial material deemed by the state, where both audience and performers are invited to take in their own lived experience, to reflect how we are viewing and through whose bodies we are experiencing these cross-cultural encounters. By asking these questions, we are “tracing the blindspots and aporias that underpins systems of philosophical truths”, as argued by Stephen Morton in his book *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (2007, p. 42). Spivak (2014) herself goes on to say that we must be “vigilant against simple notions of identity which overlaps neatly with language and location” (p. 38). She also highlights the need to be aware that we are constantly on the move, always citational in one way or another, and that this marks one’s own citationality.

The decision for creating the solo performative meditation, *Landscapes of Memories*, that employed slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, resulted first from finding my body resisting movement in the studio. This resistance forced me on a deeply inward trajectory, it necessitated a certain quality of silence so that I could process what was happening within. I had to re-examine my methodology and realised that I should add silence as a cross-cultural “metaphysics of presence”. By adding silence in my methodology, I discovered a strategy for subverting the western construct of a metaphysics of presence. Feminist critic Toril Moi (2002) argues that “the production of meaning implies a fundamental critique of western philosophical tradition. Based as it is on a ‘metaphysics of presence’ which discerns meaning as fully present in the word (or logos), a western ‘metaphysics of presence’ comes to favour speech over writing precisely because speech presupposes the presence of the speaking subject” (p. 105). Moi goes on to argue that “in speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, an inward and immediate realisation of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding” (p. 105). By adding silence to my methodology, I discovered a strategy for subverting this western construct of a metaphysics of presence. However, the question of what my performance of silence and stillness brings to this argument remains, in light of Moi’s further argument that a female space is “more internal because presumably the female body participates more in a process of nature (through giving birth and menstruation)” and the female body is always culturally and politically “inscribed” (p. 15).

In my performance through slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, I resisted performing my ethnicity as prescribed by the mainstream Singaporean discourse of

what it means to be female and Eurasian on stage, instead presenting myself as a female other/ed body on stage with a unique her(his)story. My (non)action asked how a Singaporean female other/ed body should be performed? How is she perceived and received, and how she is “marked of [her] citationality” (Spivak, 2014, p. 38)? Through the inclusion of silence in my methodology, I proposed looking at how other/ed bodies are performed on stage and to acknowledge that the metaphysics of presence can be more profoundly felt when the performing body is in stillness and in silence. Therefore, my solo performance argues for a space to permit a more inclusive metaphorical reading of what is happening on stage. In the accompanying video of *Landscapes of Memories: Process and Performance*, the reader is encouraged to enter into my female space and to meet me at the intersections of the multiplicities of cultures and her(his)stories that I contain, and view/cite my body for what she is.

Theoretical frameworks

My argument for the intersections of theories supporting my practice and methodology was first drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (2001) in which he posits that the understanding of the “functions of the living body is by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world” (p. 87). Therefore “analyses of how we move in and with the world shaped our understanding of it and ourselves” (Bleeker et al., 2015, p. 11). And because the research is primarily investigating my practice, I am also making sense of how I, as a Singaporean Female other/ed body, am also perceived and received by the world. So, using phenomenology as a conceptual framework that intersects with post-colonial feminist and decolonial theories, I attempt to further the

debate on cross-culturalism by foregrounding my research with the notion that other/ed post-colonial bodies are at intersections of cross-cultural threads interweaving.

In chapter one, I argue for an erasure of these boundaries of east and west and/or centre and margin and introduce the term *bodycultures* to articulate the multiplicities of existence and layers of cultural intersections that are emphasised and built up through sensory responses of perception and receiving in the body. I further argue that the performing body should have the right to express her *bodycultures*, as Merleau-Ponty (2001) argues in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* – that how we experience the world is from the material and the social environment; interaction is not determined only by how we experience the world, but also what we experience of it. Phenomenology considers perception of the world as an act or a series of acts rather than a given state of being; the world is what we perceive it to be. Merleau-Ponty (2001) further argues that “we must plunge into the world instead of surveying it” (pp. 38-39). On this note, I am arguing that my lived experience as a Singaporean other/ed female body is derived from my engagement with the environment and yet within me are this intersection of cultures. My perception of the world is perceived with this intersection. Therefore, I am adding *bodycultures* to the discourse as we cannot pull apart the interwoven threads that form the fabric of cultural identity. Because as bodies, we are different and the experiences we encounter are inexhaustibly different, as a female Singaporean Eurasian other/ed body, my perception of the world and how I am received is exponentially different from that of others.

Post-colonial theories ask us to take note of these (inexhaustible) different experiences of the world and to include the other/ed post-colonial body perception in dominant western-centric framed discourses. So, my research posits to include bodycultures as an extension to the debate of the post-colonial and decolonial discourse. Phenomenology theories argue that through our bodies, we experience the world and perceived the world. I am asking who are these bodies, whose bodies are they and where are these bodies located? More importantly, does this include an other/ed post-colonial body's perception of the world? I am arguing that as an other/ed body, we perceive the world differently and tend to be placed at the margins, and the bodies that are not other/ed, that as individuals perceive the world differently, are predominantly placed at the centre. Therefore, to reframe this is to acknowledge the existence of a western hegemony of bodycultures and the necessity to decentralise and include other/ed bodycultures, to work towards a process of decolonisation is to disrupt the western hegemony of bodycultures and shift the margins. When we shift the margins, we erase boundaries and begin the process of decolonialising the imagination and reconstructing how all bodies are received. My practice argues for the right to reconstruct how all bodies are received, and to make visible the currently marginalised bodycultures through performance.

The third aspect of Nelson's "Triangulation Dynamic model" is "Critical Reflection". For this aspect of the model I taught my methodology of soft fireworks to the two performers using a practitioner action research model. I then collected their responses through interviews, asking specific questions. I carried this process through by devising a duet *Landscaping A Personal Myth* with the two performers. Throughout the process I asked specific questions relating to my practice and found

that the responses supported my theoretical framework aim of working towards a simultaneously decolonised and cross-cultural performance practice within a glocal Singapore context.

It is important that the reading of chapters two and three is done together with the viewing of the two videos that accompany the thesis: 1) *Landscaping A Personal Myth: Process and Performance*. 2) *Landscapes of Memories: Process and Performance*. The videos document how through the process, my two collaborators in phase one, and I, in phase two, made sense of the various stimuli through our bodies, reflecting what was happening in the body, how were we intrinsically encountering these stimuli and how the body was giving shape to these stimuli. My final iteration of my practice was the creation of the two performances mentioned above, and they serve as a critical reflection on how my embodied practice of soft fireworks can create a decolonised space for the socio-cultural body to perform in. The two performances contextualised the practice within a specific time and space that hopefully establishes a contemporary dynamic aspect of my research. In finding the language to articulate my research outcomes, I have included a practitioner narrative within my thesis and the accompanying video so as to capture an embodied spectatorship of the findings in the studio. The embodied spectatorship is intended as a means to create for the reader an experiential exploration of the research outcomes and performance, and to hopefully create a space for the work to resonate with the reader/spectator. In this way, as postcolonial feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991) argues, “the reader can approach these findings indirectly, opening up a space in which absence and presence never work as mere oppositions, a soundless space of resonance and a language of its own” (p. 8). The intention here is to open up

an internalised shared space of critical reflection on whether my methodology was able to express an emerging decolonised feminist performance vocabulary. By opening this shared space, I am inviting the reader/spectator to enter into the studio. And as the reader/spectator experience the process, I ask how as individuals we view the practice. The strategy is to destabilise the notion of universality and to make apparent that there are differing ways in which culture shapes how we respond to our environment. Therefore, we need to acknowledge the multiplicity of cultural experiences present in the performing and the reading/spectating, and to recognise that the body placed at the centre of the research is a contemporary Singapore other/ed body. This contemporary Singapore body does not subscribe to one specific culture but she is at an intersection of cultures, and responds to her environment with a very contemporary anglophile viewpoint specific to who she is. So, the way a Singapore female body would embody her environment is different from her other Asian counterparts. As argued in Charles Larson's article "Heroic Ethnocentrism" (1973), the term "universal" ignores the multiplicity of cultural experiences, and there are differing ways in which culture shapes our interpretations of how we read meaning.

I have also listed down a comprehensive view of the various influences I have had in my practice, and then broken them down into a set of distinct elements and processes that I have amalgamated towards my embodied practice of soft fireworks. It was only after conducting my practice in the studio that I was able to critically reflect on the research outcomes and ask whether my research was able to set out what it proposes. It was in the writing that I realised that it was impossible to make a clear distinction between the three corners of Nelson's "Triangulation Dynamic Model" as

they are constantly intersecting. Therefore, using Spatz's proposed embodied research methodology helped me design appropriate practice structures and the assessment of my research criteria. Spatz proposes four assessment criteria for embodied research and they are 1) comprehensive 2) constructivist 3) positivist 4) utilitarian.

The comprehensive assessment criteria explores a well-defined area of embodied technique and the need to specify which area and to give detailed account of the exploration. Constructivist research asks whether the research could help with the development of a better world based on implied social, cultural and political values. The positivist asks whether the research outcomes can be transmissible. Finally, the utilitarian asks how the research outcomes can be used outside of the field of research. I have chosen to combine these four structures in my methodology as the readers will see in my thesis the intersections of these structures. In chapter four, I was able to share my research outside of my field of research and into applied art.

In my critical reflection, I provide the reader with a female practitioner narrative so that my female voice is heard and included in the practice research discourse within the field of theatre and performance emphasising the importance that my other/ed voice be included, addressing the power relations that feminist theories destabilise. The inclusion of my voice and those of my two other female collaborators is to shift the margins and make our voices centre. Importantly, my argument is that as a female Singapore Eurasian other/ed person, I am a stranger in my own country not so much in that I am unfamiliar, but rather estranged from contemporary mainstream Singapore culture through the way I am placed within my country's racialised

system; I am other/ed. Trinh (1991) argues that to undertake a process of decentralisation is to be aware of the “margins within the centre and the centres within the margin. And then as an Asian American woman, she is often reminded that she holds the permanent status of a ‘foreign worker’” (p. 216). Similarly, for me, I am a Singaporean and yet I am reminded that although I am not a foreigner, I am institutionally foreign to my own country because of the country’s racialised system. Thus, it is important for me to write in the first person. By doing so I am asking for my reader to meet me at the margins first, and then together create a transversal space and disrupt the relational power structure of who is at the centre and who is at the margins.

Chapter outlines

Chapter One: The Body at Stake

Chapter one begins by asking why the body is at stake and articulates how my research can contribute to the current debate on cross-cultural performance practice. The chapter also maps out my trajectory of practice and into my methodology of soft fireworks. It also argues for bodycultures to be included in phenomenology studies and argues that the socio-cultural body and the performing body influences each other especially in a Singaporean other/ed body.

The metaphor of the salmon swimming against the current to breed can be used as an analogy of how the late Kuo Pau Kun, doyen of Singaporean theatre, established that there was a need for Singaporean theatre to find its own home and its own voices to reject the western canons and insert a new canon. However, it must be noted that it

was not to create one type of identity but to encapsulate the multi-levels of ethnicities of Singapore.

To include these multiple voices is to ask these questions. Who created this site of representation and systems of reception and perceiving and where did these come from? Were these sites created to suggest uniformity? Or were they to act as an indicator for the mainstream and imply that anything outside is considered less and marginalised?

Though the rationale behind my research is to determine the various possibilities of cross-culturality in performance making and the existence of this transient space, which means that the notion of transit must exist in both substantial forms (concrete spatiality) and, as sets of relations between individuals and groups, an embodiment and medium of the social life itself, there must be this openness which my practice seeks to be in.

Chapter Two: The Body as a Keeper of Memory

Prophecy Coles (2004) in her book *The Uninvited Guest from the Unremembered Past* argues that a vulnerability exists in those who do not know where they come from and that there is an “epistemological rupture” that freezes space and time (p. 88) and can be described as a place of “entombment”, where there is a “loss of meaning”.

Therefore, in this chapter, I am investigating how through my practice I might reclaim the past and find a living space to generate meaning. Through my practice, I

am developing interstices of theoretical perspectives with specific methodology in the excavation of embodied cultural memory. I ask how I have contributed to the emerging field of embodied research. Can my embodied methodology be used as a devising method to create new and original work for the stage that embodies the plurality of cultural ancestry in a Singaporean body? Can my methodology be taught as a technique? To articulate the process, I have collaborated with two performers, a sound designer and a multi-media artist to create a duet *Landscaping a Personal Myth*.

Chapter Three: The Decolonised Body with/in a Cross-cultural Performance

Site

To articulate issues within post-colonial feminist theories and embodied research methodology, I focus at this stage on the creating of a solo performance that proposes that we decolonise cultural gaze and the performance stage. The performance is created using slowness, non-action, stillness and silence as a metaphor for bringing the audience into my private space as many aspects of the Eurasian identity are situated in private spaces and not easily found in the public sphere.

The reader should bear in mind that the Eurasian community makes up only a very small percentage of the population, numbering only approximately 15,000 in a population of 5.5 million as of 2015. Although the Eurasian community has been formally denoted as a “founding race” of Singapore by the state (Wee, 2002), with significant contribution by prominent personalities – including former president

Benjamin Sheares and former law minister E. W. Barker (Ho, 2013), the Eurasian community has reached nowhere near the public profile of the largest three racial groups (Chinese, Malay and Indian) in Singapore today. The community still remains in relative obscurity, though recently the community itself celebrated its one hundred years of existence.

Through my solo performance, I will examine the importance of the body in processes of identities that occur in spaces of encounter. I will use the concept of intersections and cultural-gazing to challenge how the other/ed body is conventionally conceptualised, embodying the desire to move away from the centre and towards expanding the marginal, thus creating a transversal space as an inclusion for other/ness to exist.

The act of decolonising both the body and the performance space is to recognise the limitation of the confined space³ to manifest itself through recognition and through inhabitation. When the body inhabits, intervenes in the space, be it social or artistic, the individual questions the confinement of the space and the desired meaning/experience can be created.

³ By space – I mean the site of representation and systems of reception and perceiving

Chapter Four: The Body Renews as she/they Learn(s), Unlearn(s) and Relearn(s)

The chapter asks whether my practice has led to a new ecology of practices and what is the language of making and describing these processes? My desire to work in a daring and vulnerable state of being, with moments of intensity where meaning or with reading of meaning are not inherent in discourse and its structures, but contextual and ambiguous – insists on the co-existence of strength and weakness. In order for me to achieve this desire, openness is one of the key elements of my practice and without seeming didactic, there was a challenge in creating this awareness of co-existence and the inter-relation between the work and the viewer. Fundamentally, my research outcomes articulate that the process of decolonising is done through embodied research and methodology through which voices that have been other/ed are heard and validated. Additionally, the outcomes articulate that the social body and the performing body influence each other as seen in both the duet performance *Landscaping a Personal Myth* and my solo performative meditation on *Landscapes of Memories* as well as the additional reflections that I was able to draw from, when I conducted a workshop of embodied practices with students from the Masters of Arts Art Therapy programme at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Chapter one:

The Body at Stake

Introduction

This chapter begins by asking, why is the body at stake? By asking this question, I am building up this chapter to provide the reader a trajectory of my practice as a performance maker (this includes the various creative undertakings of a performer, solo artist, embodied researcher/practitioner, theatre director, actor/movement lecturer in higher education). At various incidents, I have found that my post-colonial body tends to be both subjectified and marginalised in a global performance context. This is because of three specific incidents that had happened to me while participating at various sessions of the international *Magdalena Festival of Women in Contemporary Theatre*⁴. It is important to state that this is not a criticism of the organisation but that it was these three isolated incidents that prompted me to reflect on how my body was received and ask why my body was perceived in a certain manner. This was ironic for me, because the ethos of the *Magdalena Project*, an international network of women in contemporary theatre, emphasises women's artistic endeavour. But I was framed in a particular manner and I felt marginalised in a place that attempts to shift the margins of women's artistic work to the centre. I felt this because there was a certain expectation of how my post-colonial other/ed body should exist on stage and that my post-colonial other/ed body did not subscribe to

⁴ 'The Magdalena Project is a dynamic cross-cultural network of women's theatre and performance, facilitating critical discussion, support and training. It is a nexus for diverse performance groups and individuals whose common interest lies in a commitment to ensuring the visibility of women's artistic endeavour'. (<https://www.themagdalena-project.org/en>)

the stereotypical and ready recognition of an other/ed Asian body. Albert Memmi (1974/2003) argues that “the colonised is never characterised in an individual manner and s/he[my emphasis] is entitled only to drone in an anonymous collective (‘They are this. They are all the same’)” (p. 129).

It was strange but I felt that my performing body was expected to behave in a certain manner on stage. And as a performance maker, my ideas, thoughts and influences are situated from within my context - contemporary post-colonial Singapore - a country that has a racialised system and that encompasses multiplicities of cultures. It was ironic that at these three isolated events, I was asked to be more Singaporean and to speak Singaporean, this was a paradoxical mode of representation of other/ness and that even on an international platform, the colonial dependence on “fixity” in the ideological construction of other/ness was ever present. But as I probed deeper, I realised that it was important for me to communicate more and present my work more so that my performance can create this space for my international audience to enter imaginatively into my space and challenge the very generalised view of an other/ed body. But more importantly I asked who is this female Singapore Eurasian other/ed body that is on stage?

In light of what had happened to me, rather than push the contemporary Singaporean body to the margins, I am asking for a shift of this marginalised framing. It is important for me to be allowed to express myself and to be “present”. To do that, I decided to embark on sharing my work to a wider audience that articulates a trajectory of cross-cultural performance practice, to decolonise the performance

space that hosts my performing body so that my subaltern body is not caught in translation but is truly expressing herself.

The reader should understand that my trajectory is an emerging, inevitable and purposeful unpacking of my process through a lens of embodied cross-cultural practices that are experimental and presented in/around an expanding glocal Singapore's contemporary performance practice. The reader should also understand that it is through my/the body that I am framing my trajectory and it is necessary to establish that within my practice, embodiment is the central focal point. In fact, it is through embodiment that I am asking what my/the body does with the development and undertaking of the various cross-cultural performance practices that I have been exposed to. How does my/the body work within frameworks of embodiment, what can she do, will she do or need to do and even resist?

I am emphasising that the manner through which embodiment manifests itself in my contemporary performance body is shaped by layers of cross-cultural considerations and concerns. The exploration of this embodied memory and her(his)story is buried deep within the self and responds to cultural context. My cross-cultural performance methodology is thus specific to my practice as a female Singaporean Eurasian⁶

⁵ Singapore is an interesting interplay between race, identity, and impacts of multi-culturalism because since gaining independence in 1965, it has relied on racialized frameworks –inherited from the British and subsequently reclaimed under the term multiculturalism to structure and shape much of her public policy (Ackerman, 1999; Chua, 2003; Heng and Devan, 1995; Goh 2008; Kong and Yeoh, 2002; Yeoh, 2004).

⁶ Eurasians are loosely defined as people with both European and Asian ancestry. Historically, the term referred to people from Eurasia, as a geographic region that is located between Europe and Asia. However, the Eurasians of Singapore are generally not people who have come from Eurasia. Instead, Singapore's Eurasians are mostly a product of the European colonialisation of Asia, which started in the 15th century, and more recently, Europeans who have migrated to Asia. As such, Eurasians today

performance maker. By drawing from the layers of cross-cultural considerations and concerns arising from a multi-cultural heritage/collective memory, I am asserting that a process of an excavation of embodied cultural memory is the route for the unravelling of her(his)storicity. This unravelling of her(his)storicity then allows contemporary beings to work towards a reclaiming of their cultural identities from a colonial past.

Salmons and Metaphors

The late doyen of Singapore's theatre, Kuo Pao Kun, uses the analogy of the salmon swimming upstream for reproduction, following a familiar scent that leads them back to the location of their birth. Salmon swim upstream to breed and die after reproduction. Kuo used this metaphor of a circle of life to urge a need for Singapore theatre makers to find their work and their voices to reject the western canon and to be liberated and create a new canon. To go against the mainstream of thought, and to reproduce their voice and stories and do away with imitation. Interestingly, as I am writing this chapter in 2019, two significant events are happening in Singapore.

- 1) The Singapore Bicentennial – commemorating 700 years of history.
- 2) The Eurasian Association 100 years celebration of existence.

The two celebrations are pointing to the need for Singapore/Singaporeans to look back and reflect on the history of their existence. The Singapore Bicentennial celebration in a very subliminal way seems to mask the monstrosity of colonial rule and history; a past that inevitably shaped our assimilation toward an anglophile

could claim Portuguese, Dutch, British, and other lineages on the European side, as well as Chinese, Malay, Indian, Filipino and other lineages on the Asian side. (Pereira, 2015)

identity and ignored the subliminal repression and oppression in a country that is known for its force in economy and trade within South East Asia. Singapore has become a country famous for its pristine airports, efficient service, and the iconic image of the “Singapore Girl” clad in her sarong kebaya as a recognisable motif of our national carrier Singapore Airlines. Perhaps this recognisable motif, played to the mythical portrait of the subaltern body that is caught in transition of never truly fully expressing herself and playfully subverts the mythical portrayal of the colonised?

The Singapore Bicentennial

According to the Singapore Bicentennial website, “the need to celebrate the Bicentennial is because even though 1819 is a turning point in Singapore’s trajectory, our history is only complete if we look at 500 years that led to the point. For Singapore’s rich history goes even further back, to 1300. If Singapore is to face the challenges of today and continue to prevail in the future, we must look at our past for lessons” (About). All this is excellent if you just took everything as it is. You might say that it is excellent that a country is now reflecting further back and stating that Singapore’s colonial history goes beyond the year of Sir Stamford Raffles founding this island. Perhaps it is my naivete, but the series of events lined up to celebrate Singapore’s bicentennial seems rather banal as we are caught in a circle of performing culture and heritage. Such a celebration might lose sight of the smaller picture of how the celebration seems to slant to a preferred majority whilst ignoring others.

About the Eurasian Association 100th Year Celebration

The second celebration, The Eurasian Association 100th year celebration, seems to be geared towards a strong desire to reflect on the Eurasians' contributions to both the Eurasian community and the wider Singapore. The Eurasian Association's 100th year celebration lays claim and perhaps eases its anxiety of how the community is constantly needed to state its existence and contribution because Singaporean Eurasians today have multiple ethnic roots, as a result of many layers of inter-marriages between the Europeans and Asians in the region. Along with the diversity of cultures that their ancestors have passed down, their openness to racial integration and adaptability to life have shaped a Eurasian community. During colonial times, the majority of Eurasians served as civil servants. The Eurasian community faced difficult times during the Second World War when the Japanese army treated the Eurasian community with great suspicion as British collaborators. After the War, some Eurasians were uncertain about the process of decolonialisation, and though they had fought a war and served as civil servants and helped shape present Singapore, the Eurasians are still classified as "Others" within Singapore's racialised system of categorisation.

However, this research is not about unpacking Singapore's political, racialised and sexualised identity as it will be too complicated to go into detail here. I am making an association here because as a Singaporean contemporary artist, I am affected by the creation and representation of national identities and political movements. The consequences have a rippling effect as my seeming disassociation impacts on my body with a creation of a national movement by the state. This disassociation is triggered by Singapore's rigid essentialist multiracial system that works on

categorising races into three prominent ones – Chinese, Malay, Indian. Any race that does not fall into the previous three is categorised as Others. Therefore, my Singaporean Eurasian body is marginalised within such a framework. I am acutely aware that I am other/ed within my own country, and that I carry this sense of other-ness in me constantly and in the varying state in which I find my body. This constant carrying of other-ness has imprinted and affected my body through the creation and representation of national identities and political movements. The impact of being other/ed and of having the desire to be part of the main racial narrative or not being part of it has led to my disassociation with my other/ness.

Moreover, this disassociation is imprinted in my body, and there is isolation from the national past because my internalised process has been regulated by this prescribed site of representation that remains isolating. So, in order for me to respond towards a way forward I have to do more than acknowledge or have knowledge of the past. However, it is through the process of embodiment that the body can renew herself as an internalised decolonisation happens, but what about the environment she finds herself in? How can we reflect what is within outwards into the environment?

State/Self-censorship

To answer the above question, it is essential for me to include the challenges of censorship that are prevalent within the Singapore cultural landscape. As a contemporary Singaporean artist, I am unable to ignore the impact that state censorship has had on me, as an individual and on my practice. In order for me to unpack the effect of both state/self-censorship on my practice, it is/has been

necessary for me to look at my process internally and as such urge me to create a transversal space, so that a combination of cross-cultural practices can exist and destabilise the national narrative and seek for inclusion.

State censorship and her laws are real in Singapore, and their effects have impacted all aspects of the arts practitioner's creative and professional lives. Members of various arts groups and independent artists have rallied together to urge that a process of regulation is needed, rather than censorship. Members of the arts community in Singapore have met and presented a different view on the state's censorship policies in the last ten years, arguing for the necessity to have an even more open and transparent process for how the state determines permissible works. As such, members of the arts community formed Arts Engage, a network of arts practitioners from various disciplines, to come together to discuss policies that govern their various practices.

As a network of artists in Singapore, we all agree that we are affected by the uncertainty and the anxiety censorship has had on our lives, as published as a statement on the Arts Engage website (Basic Position). Arts Engage states that:

as extensive consultation with our peers has made plainly apparent to us, it is primarily because of how insidiously the censoring impulse has spread through institutions and the social body more generally. Today, the outright banning of cultural products is relatively rare; but censorious interference by the state in all levels of the creative process and the presentation of its outcomes are all too common. This banning of cultural products, in turn, appears to have fed a risk-averse culture among institutions that take their

cue from the government, and an expectation of censorship-on-demand among certain individuals within society. In light of the very real social and moral challenges Singaporeans face in the global age, this situation is untenable.

Arts Engage's proposed recommendation to the state is to regulate rather than censor. The recommendations are based on the following notions as stated on the Arts Engage's website:

- (i) Censorship is a restriction on personal freedoms, imposed by the government but reflecting the will of a substantial majority of the people. To be accepted as valid, it must be seen to fairly reflect widely-held sentiments.
- (ii) The boundaries of censorship, being subjective, should be set through an ongoing engagement with the public.
- (iii) Censorship decisions should be sensitive to context. Depiction is not necessarily promotion, and discussion is not necessarily incitement.
- (iv) There should be clear accountability for censorship decisions. The competent authority should be identified when a decision is taken to disallow or censor.
- (v) The Internet revolution has rendered some forms of censorship ineffective. For example, the proliferation of film content on the Internet has made the disallowing of a film primarily a statement of disapproval rather than an effective means of preventing the film's propagation.

- (vi) Greater emphasis should be placed on education, awareness and parental empowerment. Token gestures should be replaced by more effective tools.

The proposal for regulation instead of censorship is still an on-going process.

Though there have been some changes in the state's censorship policies, it is still imperative that as a Singaporean contemporary artist I acknowledge that there is a shadow of doubt lingering over me as I make various creative decisions in my work.

This doubt trickles into my process because of the state-imposed censorship and the fear of any repercussion rather than the uncertainty of any trajectory of practice.

However, I am sharing the challenges that Singaporean contemporary artists face, to indicate that the way forward is not just an acknowledgement or knowledge of one's history, but also knowledge of the effects of being that surround the body, in this instance, censorship. Moreover, this research is saying that through the process of embodiment, the body can renew herself as an internalised decolonisation happens and with that awareness of the environment she finds herself in, we can then reflect what is within us outwards into the environment even though the tainted lens is coated with layers of self-censorships.

The apparent challenge now is more than just an unravelling of a colonial past but to ask how my body has had to navigate state censorship and how my other/ed body has been accultured through the racialised systems of the state. Furthermore, the law decentres the more European-American focus of "interculturalism" and seeks to extend the debate further is to move away from the conventional fixation of a system of classification of self/other into bodycultures. Bodycultures proposes that within

the body there are intersections of cultural existence and that these intersections are our cross-cultural encounters within ourselves, constantly shifting because the self that is embodied is also constantly shifting.

How do we work towards a reclaiming of cultural identities, the right to express through performance, our culture(s) embedded in the self through the body? Contemporary Singapore provides an interesting location to study various possible presentations and representations of identities and cultures through performance making. As a Singaporean Eurasian, I live with the constant interaction with multiple cultures from the “east” and “west” in my daily interactions.

Historically, as Singaporeans, we have lived with plurality. One might say that “inter” and “multi” culturalism have been inscribed into our bodies and memories as part of our colonised experience and our way of being. When we make “Singaporean” performance (theatre), and particularly when we make contemporary experimental performance inspired by our embedded cultural memory, how do our colonised experience, cross-cultural interaction and pluralities influence our creative processes?

This claiming back of our identities rides on Edward Said’s (1978) reading of “orientalism as a form of thought for dealing with the foreign [that] has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinction as East and West to channel thought into a West or an East compartment” (p. 46). To de-compartmentalise and re-channel thought away from an east and west binary is to rethink/redraw the artificial boundary between east and

west, and to start thinking that any map is not the territory⁷. This is a provocation to think about how boundaries are drawn, and suggest that since boundaries can be drawn, they can also be erased. When we start erasing boundaries, we are beginning the process of decolonialising the imagination, allowing the body to claim back the culture(s) embedded in the self, and the right to express the bodycultures through performance.

Bodycultures

I am introducing the term bodycultures to articulate that there are multiplicities of existence and layers of cultural intersections that are emphasised and built up through sensory responses of perception and receiving in the body⁸. Bodycultures includes the layers of cultural intersections and interactions and extends the argument that in phenomenology, embodiment is more than just having a body. Rather, “we exist through intersubjectivity” (Bleeker et al., 2015, p. 8). In my Singaporean Eurasian body with multiple cultural lineages and a body that is other/ed, what do I take away as my own? In truth what is my own is the intersection of multiplicities of cultural existence articulated through my body. The intersections of cultural existence acknowledge that all bodies are culturally different and

⁷“The map is not the territory” was coined by the Polish American Scientist and Philosopher, Alfred Korzybski. In 1931, he gave a paper at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the paper, he spoke about this concept. He developed the theory in his book “Science & Sanity” (1933) where he stated that any map may have a structure that is either similar or dissimilar to the structure of the territory; the map is not the territory. This was a significantly different way of thinking to conventional Aristotelean thinking, which supported the concept that ideas are either right or wrong. In Aristotelian thought, things just are a certain way, and can be described in some finite and satisfactory manner (Farrow, 2013).

⁸ In p. 29, I explained how these multiplicities of existence and layers of cultural intersections are both emphasised and built up through the sensory responses of reception and receiving in the body.

therefore bodies must be viewed differently. Such intersections also ask what it means to create a performance vocabulary for a body with these multiplicities of cultural existence. What sort of cross-cultural encounters will be evoked in the creative process because of the multiplicities of existence and the fact that there is more than one cultural memory embedded in the body? How is this complexity of existence translated and transcended in the realm of performance? Bodycultures propose that within the body there are intersections of cultural existence and that these intersections are our internal cross-cultural encounters, constantly shifting because the self that is embodied is also constantly shifting.

Bodycultures moves away from the search of one's "source culture" as proposed within a Grotowskian schema that was evident in most systems of western hegemonic twentieth century cross-cultural performer training. I will comment on this in chapter two. As a performance maker, I make choices based on various combinations of form, representation, history, culture and individuality. I engage in a cross-cultural practice, calling for the expansion of the centre. The imperative is to look from the margins rather than a centralised point of reference, breaking from a unitary form of representation and calling upon multiplicities articulates a post-colonial feminist theoretical framing. Through this framing, I am de-centring as I recognise where my present is, and unravel my own her(his)tory. The unravelling of my own her(his)tory recognises that my body is an embodiment of my post-colonial past and a site through which I encompass the multiplicities of cultures.

As mentioned before, my Eurasian racial identity is marginalised within the rigid racial categorisation framework of Singapore. How then does the body respond to a racialised national system and articulate its memory within this system? Can racialised identities as dictated by the national system fully encompass the multiplicities of cultures embodied in real contemporary post-colonial Singaporean bodies that are constantly being othered? Can my female subaltern body truly express herself as I explore how I can engage with embodied memory practices to create cross-cultural performances that shake the fixity of the post-colonial gaze, refuting the binary of east and west, to enact and embody the plurality of Singapore's shifting identities and aesthetics?

I am acutely aware that I am other/ed within my own country, and that I carry this sense of other-ness in me constantly and in the varying state in which I find my body. In this constant carrying of other-ness, my body is imprinted and shaped by the power of categories. As such, the lens through which I see or respond is tinted with this dominance of power. The theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler and Susan Bordo argue that "bodies are both shaped by power and employed as an instrument to maintain the power" (Shusterman, 2008, p. 20). This argument opens up my analysis of why the body is at stake, or more specifically, why my Singaporean Eurasian body is at stake. And as post-colonial female writer and literary critic Trinh (1991) writes, "*Not a foreigner yet a foreigner*" [Trinh's emphasis] (p. 216), I am positing the need for my body to subvert the framing of my marginalised female Eurasian body as we shift the margins.

Why is the body at stake?

Before I begin my analysis, it is important for the reader to note that when I articulate my analysis on the body, it is my body that is the material. My analysis is an onto-epistemic (ontological and epistemological) approach because it is through my body that my being is represented to the world and through my body that I have experiential encounters. It is also through my body that I am able to articulate a comprehensive understanding of these encounters. The articulation of my being and experiential encounters recognises the “body’s complex ontological structure as both material object in the world and intentional subjectivity directed toward the world” as argued in Richard Shusterman’s (2008) book, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (p. 20). I examine the combination of the body’s complex ontological structure and the use of my “body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman, 2008, p. 18). This examination allows a comprehensive epistemic unpacking of why the body is at stake, to begin charting a methodology for a new decolonised, glocal, embodied cross-cultural performance practice.

In order for me to articulate why my body is at stake, the reader must be aware that as a body that is other/ed within my own country and globally, my body is positioned on the periphery. I am thus peripheral because my body is coloured and the skin into which I have been born places me in a particular position that I sometimes find compromising. This race sits at the *intersection* of cultures because of many generations of inter-marriages between Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English colonisers and local women in this part of the world, known as Malaya in

the 15th century AD. Leaving behind their colonised families, the colonisers returned to their respective countries after the dissolution of various trade agreements and treaties. I am using the word *intersection* rather than *hybrid* because although historically Eurasian(s) refer to the descendants of intermarriages between western colonisers and local Asian women, over the generations, cultural intermixing has become much more complex. I thus argue that being a Eurasian is more than just a hybrid of east and west, but a constant shifting of cultural identities located within one body. Being Asian also places me at the periphery within global cultural politics. As argued in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2001), the synthesis of the body is composed of physiological, psychic and mental activities, my postcolonial body is at stake in my articulation of the bodycultures of imprints that colonisation has had on me, whether directly or indirectly felt through the generational layers of experience that pass through my body. And so when/if my body rejects any of these bodycultures then the essence of my whole state of being is in denial and a process of decolonisation is hindered because the synthesis of my body is broken.

However, this chapter is not about unpacking these colonised imprints, which will be done in chapters two and three. In chapter two, I begin a comprehensive and reflexive embodied research on my methodology that charts towards a new contemporary decolonised cross-cultural practice in the duet performance of *Landscaping a Personal Myth*. In chapter three, I begin to unravel my methodology in my solo performance *Landscapes of Memories*. My intention of highlighting these imprints here is to signpost for the reader that as I articulate the trajectory of my practices, it is necessary to be aware of the varying degrees of experience and/or

intensity that I have been exposed to in my practice and articulated through a body that is other-ed. My body is at stake because my bodyculture(s) is emplaced in a somatic (living) reflective exposition that articulates my trajectory of practices. When strung together, the trajectory of practices proposes a new contemporary decolonised cross-cultural practice within a Singaporean performance setting that is glocal. This new proposal articulates a state of existence/being that negotiates towards a new space, a space where my practice encompasses the everyday experience of living and the unravelling of embodied memories that become new narratives. The unravelling allows me to reclaim and (re)own my bodycultures and chart towards a decolonised contemporary cross-cultural performance practice that is glocal.

Trajectory of Practice

I place myself as an independent performance maker in order for me to break away from the stricture of the conventions of both western and eastern ideas that are attached to a more commercial or industry-driven style of theatre here in Singapore. My reason for this is because my practice is *in situ* and responds to whether I am creating a solo performance, a duet, an interdisciplinary performance, collaborative performance, or whether I put on the hat of being a theatre director or as an actor/movement lecturer in higher education. However, it is essential that regardless of the environment/situation in which I find my work, a comprehensive embodied cross-cultural methodology of practices that I have developed over the past two decades is incorporated. This is so that the work can be shared with the public, or the audience, in the same time and space.

The central focus of my methodology emphasises the body as the focal point of any form of articulation, representation and aesthetics, as mentioned in the previous section on the body's complex onto-epistemological structure. By placing the body at the forefront, I am actively engaging in embodied practice research that extends from Merleau-Ponty's theory of *Phenomenology* into Richard Shusterman's *Somaesthetics*, layered with post-colonial feminist theories/practices, performance theories/practices and embodied arts practices into a process of decoloniality⁹. My reason for engaging in the theory of phenomenology is firstly derived from Husserl's (1936) lecture on the introduction of *life-world* that

“In whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each "I-the-(person)man" and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together.'”

As further argued by Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology explains how our experience and embodied cognition come from our interactions with both the material and social environment. These interactions determine both how we experience and what we experience, “that we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceived a world, we must say: the world is what we perceived” (2002, p. xviii).

⁹ The process of decoloniality addresses the unravelling of my postcolonial past and the necessity to acknowledge that my embodiment of the multiplicities of cultures is marginalised here within a country's rigid essentialist multiracial system. And within this multiracial system there is a systemic power of dominance through which my body is framed, viewed and acknowledged. The unravelling propels the need to re-claim and re-own my body because the country's multi-racial system does not recognise my Eurasian body but that I am other/ed.

The extension of phenomenology into somaesthetics as argued by Shusterman (2008), that the body is the site of knowledge and experience as it houses the ethos and values through which our skills of perception and performance can be honed. This propels Merleau-Ponty's argument that the "phenomenology of perception constitutes the tacit cogito, the silent cogito and the unspoken cogito" (as cited in Shusterman, 2008, p. 49), as he ignores the body's silent soma reflective such as explicit kinaesthetic or proprioceptive feelings. Silent soma reflection is derived from Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics that argues that because the body is a living (soma) being and that it is through the materiality of our bodies that we are able to sense, feel and act in the world and at the same time a 'creative fashioning' self. Therefore, the explicit kinaesthetic or the proprioceptive feelings are how we experience our bodies and how we present our body, in other words how our body is both subject and the object (Shusterman, 2012, p. 3, 27). These silent soma reflections are essential as I engage in a contemplative reflection on how my body engages and responds in my practice. It is in this silence that I am able to articulate this silent soma reflexive investigation of my body of practice. These practices are articulated through my body and in chapter two, the two bodies of the performers through action-images, which is also a tacit language and the grounding/foundation of all expression because of how the body is experientially encountering the environment and how the body is culturally shaped. It is important for me to remind the reader that I am framing my research with the theories of phenomenology into somaesthetics, working through an intersection of post-colonial feminist theories into decolonisation while engaging in an embodied research methodology.

I have written earlier that I will engage in an onto-epistemological practitioner narrative of my methodology. I will give a practitioner narrative, similar to an autoethnographic account in anthropological research, on my encounters and the experience of these encounters. I have situated my practice as embodied research, and will engage in its epistemological style as argued by Ben Spatz in his article *Embodied Research: A Methodology* (2017, p. 22). Spatz mentions four evaluative criteria when assessing embodied research, and his suggestions are based on Michèle Lamont's "epistemological styles". These styles are "*comprehensive, constructivist, positivist and utilitarian*" (Spatz's emphasis). I will not detail what the four styles here as I will be explaining them in my chapters on methodology and findings, but I want to inform the reader that I am engaging in a combination of the four styles as I present my research. I will use the pronouns she and/or her or their/them to describe the body as I identify myself as a female and it is my female body that is both the "questioning subject" (Spivak, 2014, p. 42) and "active-subject" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p. 207). Therefore, my body is at stake while presenting to the reader my trajectory of practice. By identifying the body and the bodies that I will work with in the first phase of my practice as female, I am making an argument that it is essential to recognise (an)*other/ed* female perspective, as bodies are never neutral and more shifts of power and representation are needed both in contemporary cross-cultural performance practice and within academia.

A Practitioner Soma Reflective Narrative: A First Influence

The most influential strand of my practice is the work that I did and the training that I had under the tutelage of the late William Teo and his theatre company Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre, Singapore. Teo was instrumental in my development as a

performance maker and introduced me to the various Asian forms of performance techniques especially that of Traditional Chinese *Wayang* (xìqǔ), Kathakali, yoga, Zen meditation and South East Asian aesthetics. I am using the Malay word *Wayang* here instead of the English term Opera to describe Xiqǔ (as its pinyin name) because the Chinese *Wayang* that I am referring to is the form practised by the Malaysian opera troupe that visited Singapore in 1991. Teo joined and stayed with the troupe for four nights whilst they were in Singapore and also travelled with them for several weeks as he was fascinated by the performance genre and the ethos of the group. Teo was fascinated with how the group, though struggling, still kept on as they were the last remaining Chinese *Wayang* troupe in Malaysia. Even though they had meagre audiences, the performers would still perform every night, with the belief that the real audience is not discernible to a casual person, but are deities that remain unseen. Teo was autodidactic and he developed his performance principles through many years of observation, travel and encounters. Teo's performance principles were a cross-cultural eclectic trajectory of methods that he had been exposed to. Teo claimed that in the very beginning his work relied a lot on imitation, but it was the actors' and actresses' bodies that needed to make sense of the imitation. Actors need to understand what is happening internally through the imitation and then claim their new-found understanding and own the process. For Teo, his main philosophy on theatre and his reason why he engaged in theatre can be seen as both spiritual and existential quests.

Before I proceed any further with my narrative, I want to emphasise that the accounts written here come in three folds: firstly, my personal encounters with Teo as his actor, mentee and collaborator; secondly, an unpublished interview that was

conducted over two months in June and July in the year 2000, a year before his passing on his methodology; thirdly, programme notes/books with inputs from the various invited actor-trainers that Teo had invited to train his actors and/or reflection from his actors working on particular productions. These programme notes date back to Teo's first productions in Singapore from 1987 to 1997. An authored book by Sonny Lim published in 2003 contains reflective essays on his work between the early 90's to 2000. My encounters with Teo began in 1996 right up to the last production under Teo's artistic direction of the company Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre in 2000 and my last encounter with him. His influence on me can still be felt today in my body and in my work as he was probably the person with whom I had spent the longest time researching, learning and travelling. Teo passed away in 2001 and I would have been working with him for five years.

Who is William Teo and Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre?

Teo was one of the first generation of theatre directors in Singapore and was instrumental in shaping and cultivating the cultural landscape in Singapore. His theatre group was formed in 1986 with their first production in 1987. The group was initially named Asia-in-Theatre Research Circus (which will be known as ATRC from hereon) from 1987 to 1995, but Teo changed "Circus" to "Centre" in 1995 as the group had found a base. It thus became known as Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre (ATRC).

The word "circus" was chosen deliberately as Teo wanted to re-create the raw elements of street theatre that he was exposed to and he saw the group as people forming communities together. In the Singaporean context, the raw elements of

street theatre refer to the traditional unique Singaporean night markets in the 1970s, known as *pasar malam* (a Malay-language word that most Singaporeans associate with a night market). These *pasar malams* were and are still a food-fair event held at open spaces at night, however, traditionally in the 1970s to 1980s there would be Chinese *Wayang* performances, roadside medicine sellers, story-tellers, merchants, ferris wheels and games etc. However, ATRC was more inclined to create this concept of a temporary home, like travelling *pasar malam* vendors, where for a brief moment members of ATRC could unpack their “pots” and “pans” and have a space to rehearse, research and store all their materials. ATRC was also looking to preserve the local and unique talents of the few Singaporean individuals involved in theatre at the time. By integrating these elements, the group was creating an environment that embraced this sense of evolving, as the group encountered and responded to new spaces. It is with this concept of evolving that a collective of people would come together to express the various stages of the country’s cultural development, within a climate of change, finding their own expression but without being a fixed entity.

Teo is the first theatre director in Singapore who worked with the intersection of classical Asian forms and Western text. Asian influences that he worked with include the stylistic performative gestures of Chinese *Wayang*, the various rhythmic tempi of foot-work in *Bharatanatyam* and *Kathakali*, and the stillness of Nō theatre and *butoh* dance. Teo commented in a 1987 interview conducted by a member of ATRC, Caroline Smith-Laing, that he was not merging both eastern and western theatrical principles, but distilling the best of them, because Singapore’s education was highly western-influenced, and was then looking towards the east. He further

elaborated that he was inspired by readings of Antonin Artaud's vision just as Artaud was inspired by the Balinese performance he saw in Paris, and that perhaps Mnouchkine was right that "theatre is oriental" (1996, p. 97).

The distillation of forms was Teo's search for a new cross-cultural direction for contemporary Asian theatre, and not just a Singaporean kind of theatre. Teo's search also highlighted Singapore's unique geographical location as a meeting point of east and west, resulting from the historical imprints of a culturally and ethnically mixed society; a polyglot society. Teo realised that it was impossible to pursue a totally eastern form of theatre without denying the many western influences which have historically played on Singaporeans, and neither did he want to reproduce western style drama without finding a way of making it accessible and more appropriate to Singaporeans. This is evidently true in the current cultural landscape of Singapore, where there is no one dramatic form that can truly succeed in revealing the complex multi-racial society that is uniquely Singaporean.

The reader should also note that, in line with the racial categorisation mentioned earlier, the Singaporean theatre landscape is segregated along the lines of language: English language theatre, Chinese language theatre, Malay language theatre and Tamil language theatre. Within these are a handful of theatre companies that have successfully received government funding. Although ATRC was an important element in crafting the cultural landscape of Singapore, the company received only a marginal amount of funding as compared to other major theatre companies in existence at the time. Teo did not want to be part of Singapore's Renaissance City

Plan (RCP)¹⁰ of establishing the country as a global arts city; he had the desire to operate outside of the plan.

What does it mean to truly succeed in revealing this multi-racial complexity? This question became ATRC's commitment and Teo's search for a means of expressing oneself in an appropriate dramatic form that can embrace this multi-racial complexity. It is important to state that there were already at that point various theatre groups that had succeeded in developing a form along specific ethnic lines, such as Tamil language, Malay language and Chinese language theatre. However, Teo was attempting to create a working environment for the members of ATRC so that they could evolve their own unique form, drawing from the various Asian tradition theatrical traditions that surrounded them. At the same time, Teo inclined very strongly towards a research driven process, through which an understanding of a play was a vehicle to study the life of various traditions and folklores that were literally at Singapore's doorstep. The research that went into each of the plays made them much more than just a performance designed for an audience, but an anthropological study of the environment, as Teo and the group searched for a new form of dramatic expression.

This search for a new direction and the distillation of forms can be argued to be similar to works of theatre directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Brook, Grotowski and the theory of theatre of Artaud. This was because Teo lived in Europe

¹⁰ The RCP provided a vision and a plan for the promotion of arts and culture in Singapore. A Renaissance City Report reviewed the progress made in the local arts and cultural scene and made key recommendations for the establishment of various arts and cultural institutions and created a cultural infrastructure for government investment. ("Renaissance", 2000).

in the late 1970s, and acknowledged that his theatre education came from Europe. His main form of analysing theatre bore a strong European influence, which began with questions; he compared this approach to his encounters with eastern practice, largely based on imitation for long periods of time until the body realises what it is doing.

In an interview that Teo gave to Kari Scott-Matthew on his creative process and his theatre theories, Teo shared that the creative process also began with traditional dance to develop the body. The next step would be free-form dance (or movement). There was always music, especially drums. Teo believed that the bodies in space and the music were important elements to move away from words. Once the body has started to move, there would be vocal and physical improvisations. The groups would always work with no words or with very few words. Teo felt that when words are taken out, the group members are forced to play. For Teo, theatre and dance forms were not learnt for a specific production; everything was developmental and the actors and actresses would learn a particular form and then distil it to its essence. Teo likened this to the spiritual theatre that could be found in the later phase of Grotowski's work. However, Teo affirmed that these distillations of a form have been familiar to the Balinese and Chinese *Wayang* for thousands of years. He also stated that the group's philosophy of theatre was influenced by Brook's and Grotowski's philosophies and that the group was not training to be original, but to grasp an emerging group ethos. Teo stated that the group would imitate and from there find a new way.

In the same interview with Kari Scott-Matthew, Teo commented: “Why do you want to be original and then throw away what somebody has spent their life working for? Why be afraid of using Brook’s and Grotowski’s ideas? ... whatever they found makes good starting point for theatre.” (1996)

In another interview dated 27th June 2000, Teo shared that he did a lot of imitation in the earlier years of his artistic career and was hence accused of copying. He lamented that it was because he did not fully understand what he was doing. However, it was through this process of imitation that he was able to learn, and he acknowledged that the masters of these traditional Asian performance practices have spent their whole life studying the form. As Teo became more serious about his artistic process, he began to focus more on the state of the body and mind, and through a deep practice he began to focus the actor and his/her body. Teo’s argument was that:

unless you truly understand your body, you never truly understand art. So, you must work on your body and be in control of your body. And most important after that is to control your mind. So, it needs a lot of hard work, a lot of practising. A lot of discipline. Which is difficult for most people and especially for artists who are living in urban societies where they have to live their everyday life. It’s difficult to find the harmony. Trying to find your living and your spiritual growth. Cause if we grow two ways, I always say it’s a difficult way and then spiritual. (2000)

This quest for and exploration of the self, became the root of every work that I encountered with Teo. With each new performance, we had to follow a structure of practice and it consisted of: four hours of rehearsals thrice a week, 3 hours of zen meditation once a week during an evening with Teo's Zen master and a full day of training that consisted of yoga and body/mind practices. It was a journey that could last up to six months and it was crucial for all actors to be present. Teo reckons this to be like a spiritual path and within the Singapore performance setting, his theatre was always closely associated with spiritual theatre; his actors/actresses were all monks and nuns because Teo saw each new performance as a start of the quest for the self and for an artist to generate energy. Teo felt that this energy was important for any work to be alive, hence the practice of meditation and yoga. The fundamental practice of both meditation and yoga involves an awareness of one's surroundings, and this awareness would lead the actors and actresses to find their creative selves.

Teo was also committed to bringing back the strong spiritual aspect of theatre. He felt that this aspect had been forgotten especially within the Singaporean context. He also felt that to do theatre was a social responsibility: the responsibility to tell stories that have been forgotten – stories of people who have suffered – and to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Over the years, we have forgotten the strong spiritual aspect of theatre and have packaged it to become just like another product ... What is theatre? For me it is a very clear art form. It's one of the finest art forms, dealing with the living self, life and energy. So, it's important when you are alive to do theatre

because then you can celebrate life. My main concern is to tell a good story, a story that concerns you and me, we are not entertaining you. (Teo, 2000)

And so, Teo insisted that his actors go through this rigor of body/mind exercises such as Zen meditation and yoga as mentioned in the previous paragraph. As a young practitioner, I was willing to work in this manner as I too was unknowingly interested in this existentialist quest of understanding the self. However it was more my quest of wanting to be a better performer and artist, and inevitably to create works that matter. At the same time, I was keen to learn more about the various traditional Asian practices and it was through my encounters with Teo that I began to realise that here within Singapore, we sit on these gems of knowledge. We have within our reach these rich Asian practices.

The reader might now ask again why this is any different from the practices of established theatre directors such as Brook, Mnouchkine, Grotowski and Barba. Teo himself had clearly stated that he was influenced by his readings of Brook and Grotowski, and spent quality time observing Mnouchkine's company while living in Paris and travelling extensively with the Malaysian Chinese *Wayang* company.

There is no denying that each of the above theatre artists, who are also closely associated with the term intercultural theatre, made an impact in the mid- to late 20th century. It is necessary here to highlight to the reader once again, the context of the initial carving out of a cultural landscape in the early 1990s in Singapore, where there were very few trained Singaporean theatre directors, actors and writers. At that time, shows or performances that were staged tended to be very Euro-Anglocentric. Singapore in the 1980s had rapidly progressed from a developing country in 1965 to

one that was pushing ahead in both trade and commerce; it soon became one of the Four Asian Tigers. But in its pursuit of rapid economic progress, perhaps the country had lost its cultural identity, such that theatre companies such as ATRC seemed to be always operating on the fringe. Endeavours of humanistic pursuit, such as theatre, are not recognised by the cultural landscape of Singapore. Kuo Pao Kun in a programme note on ATRC's 10th Anniversary production wrote that "groups such as Asia in Theatre Research Centre must continue to strive at the margins because Singapore has yet to develop an insight to recognise such worthy bridges and evolve and reward such humanistic pursuits" (1997).

To strive at the margins was an almost impossible task in Singapore because of lack of funding and lack of public interest. Due to burnout of its members, ATRC eventually began to dissolve especially with Teo's passing in 2001, one month after I was asked by Teo to take over the direction of the production *Sita*. As a young theatre director, I was left without a mentor and a company to work with. However, Teo's influence could be felt through my body and the search for the understanding of how the body could lead me into things that I was unaware of, like memory, dreams and imagination in the creative field. I had found a process of working, and a realisation of the importance of embodiment. The most important instrument for the actor is the body. Echoing the philosophy of Teo, to understand art, you must truly understand your body.

After Teo's passing, I continued the work that was started by Teo through my personal encounter with him. This work was on my body; I strove to be in control of my body so that my work can be alive. So, I turned my gaze inward and began

working first on my body so that I could be in control of my body, after which I could work towards controlling my mind. I had also gone through five years of training and working with Teo and in the last two years, Teo started asking me to lead the training and to share whatever little knowledge I had. That to me was the beginning of my practice. Teo kept on reminding me, just take what is working for you. For example, Teo would say to me “if you feel that the essence of *jo-ha-ku* (beginning-middle-end) in performance principles of a tradition Nō theatre makes sense for your body then use it but make it your own” (personal communication, 1998). And so, I became a champion of these performance techniques, leading older and newer members in the rehearsal process. It was also at this time that I had the opportunity to attend many different master workshops on physical theatre, *butoh* and devising methodology. Teo left me with a question and a task to work on my body so that I could own this body of mine. Even though it is a body that is other/ed, it is my body that is making sense of my surroundings; my body negotiates these cross-cultural encounters and, in the process, I am claiming my own body. My body is no more at risk of being a reproduction of techniques but fully embodies the multiplicities of cultures that is uniquely ‘I’. Through a sense of ownership of this assortment of distillation of performance practices, my body creates cross-cultural paths. As my body makes sense of the surroundings, my body responds to how she is emplaced within her country’s racialised system and chooses not to be operating from the margins or be other/ed by refuting the binary of east and west to enact and embody the plurality of Singapore’s shifting identities and a contemporary Asian performance aesthetics.

Though through my encounter with Teo, I was given the opportunity to develop my own practice. I became more aware of who I am and of my Eurasian roots and cultural memories. I became aware that I am other/ed within my own country, and that I carry this sense of other-ness in me constantly and in the varying states in which I find my body. In order to break away from this construct, I had to own my body, my memories and my practice. I have earlier argued that the lens through which I see or respond is tinted with this dominance of power. I will articulate the process of breaking away in the next two chapters on my practice as I chart towards a new contemporary decolonised cross-cultural practice through my encounters of different philosophies of working, training and practice. I will not detail every encounter in this thesis but will highlight the more impactful ones that have nudged or even provoked me to chart my own cross-cultural practices. My practice is constantly *in situ* because my bodies and the bodies that I work with are continually evolving. This evolving practice is an amalgamation of my various encounters of the different philosophies of practice and Teo's guiding principle to distil the essence of these practices, and then claim them through the body.

The amalgamation of practices created for me an image of my body becoming a container of energised particles that could create a force of creative explosion like fireworks. The body is an instrument through which you can draw patterns and shapes in space and with this control there can come ease of releasing a dynamic force that can be gentle and soft. Just like calligraphy, the body is the calligrapher and each stroke is drawn with a precise force that eases into the paper. Each stroke is determined by the length and rhythm so that there is this beginning-middle-end, and in each beginning, there is another smaller beginning-middle-end and so forth. Each

stroke can be described as flames, as described in Eduardo Galeano's *Book of Embraces* (1992), and each flame contributes to the amalgamation of my cross-cultural encounters of practice that I will now claim to be my own and call it *soft fireworks*.

A man from the town Negua, on the coast of Colombia, was able to climb way up into the sky. On his return, he told of his trip. He explained how he had contemplated human life from way upon high. He said that we are a sea of tiny flames. 'The world,' he revealed, 'is a huge mass of people, a sea of tiny flames.' Each person shines with his or her own light. No two flames are ever alike. There are large flames and little flames, flames of every colour. Some people's flame is so serene that don't even flicker in the wind, while others have such wild flames that they fill the air with their sparks. Some foolish flames neither burn nor shed light, but other blaze with life so fiercely that you just can't look at them without blinking and whoever approaches them, will light right up (Galeano, 1992, p. 15).

Soft Fireworks

I am now introducing the term soft fireworks to describe and introduce my methodology of practice, a way of working towards a new embodied performance practice that is both decolonised and cross-cultural. Why the term soft fireworks? I am using the term soft fireworks because of qualities engaged in fireworks such as movement, light, sound and the reactions of chemical elements. However, I am not here to do a full scientific explanation of how fireworks work. I am drawing upon this scientific reasoning to articulate the term soft fireworks as a metaphor to best articulate my practice.

The fundamental anatomy of fireworks is the fuse that sets off a charge, igniting the gunpower and propelling the fireworks into the sky. This creates different patterns and colours of fireworks. There is a need for precision in the igniting of fireworks, otherwise the whole pattern is ruined.

How is this done? There are five elements in fireworks that parallel my practice; they are:

- 1) **The stick** which ensures that the fireworks are shot in an intended direction and do not fly in a random direction. I would associate this with how we need control of our body within the creative process so that there is a clear trajectory or intention.
- 2) **The fuse** is the main part of the firework because it ignites and burns the firework to create interesting and colourful patterns in the sky. This is associated with a body that is energised so that the body creates the necessary shapes or patterns in the rehearsals space, performance space.
- 3) **The charge** is an explosive designed to blast the firework into the sky. This is associated with the articulation of practices that the body encounters, makes sense of, and in the process, owns.
- 4) **The effect** is the part of the fireworks that makes an amazing display once the fireworks are propelled into the sky. A single firework can have either one effect or multiple effects, packed into separate compartments. This is the beginning-middle –end of a body’s performance, which I have mentioned earlier.

- 5) **The head** which is the top part of the firework, containing the effect. I associate this with the body as a container; the body making the decision of which direction it wants to go.

But I am adding “soft” in front of “fireworks” to describe my practice because my practice is not about an explosion of practices, but the activation of an energised body. As mentioned earlier in Teo’s practice, it is important for an actor/actress to have this energised body so that s/he can be aware of the surroundings. “Soft” also conveys the idea of fluid, so that the body can be fluid/open and responsive to its surroundings, constantly evolving.

Elements of soft fireworks

As I continued my practice post Teo, I began to have a more introspective search as I was making sense internally of how the distillation affected me. I have earlier mentioned how in the process of working with Teo, I was becoming more aware of my own other/ness. The reason was that my body felt slightly out of sync with the physical gestures of some traditional Asian practices. I was reluctant to replicate these gestures on stage, and to move towards creating a body of work that would encompass what inherently lay within me. Even though I was a Singaporean, my outlook was through the lens of someone who has had a western formative education. It was a most precarious position to be – here I was in my own country, made to feel like a foreigner in the studio. The more I began to develop my practice, the more I began to realise that the process of other/ness is laden with the appropriation of many cultures happening within my body, and that I needed to excavate what has been buried deep within so that I can reclaim my own body. But

yet, I was also aware that this excavation needed a process. Thus the elements of soft fireworks are an eclectic mix of the various encounters that I have interwoven, so that a way of working can be discovered, articulated and owned. These encounters are my practice in *kalaripayattu*, a traditional South Indian Martial Art; devising methodology that charts the geography of memory; a working process towards the politics of an/other(ed) body; and the impacting influence of Teo's philosophy of observing and learning.

The practice of *kalaripayattu*

My first encounter with *kalaripayattu* was in 1999, when I attended a summer workshop organised by the Performance Research Centre in Aberystwyth. The summer workshop was entitled the Body and the Landscape. My intention of attending the summer workshop was because I was more curious about a workshop on *kalaripayattu*. At the summer workshop, we were introduced to two other Asian practices, *butoh* and *Bharatanatyam*. This was an important turning point for me because it was here that I was reminded of Teo's words on the principle that within my body already sits a gem of practices. The practice of *kalaripayattu* felt very familiar to me and my body was attuned to the practice. The exactitude needed in the various animal poses in *kalaripayattu* was instinctive.

Kalaripayattu is a traditional South Indian martial art dating back more than 2000 years. At the workshop in Aberystwyth I was introduced to the practice by Phillip Zarrilli who was one of the first westerners to attain the *gurukkal* status to teach *kalaripayattu* outside of India. Attaining a *gurukkal* status means that the person has gone through the different levels of training and achieved the highest level of

mastery in the practice. Thus, my next encounter after Teo, that formed the second link to the development of my practice, was through the west in a traditional Asian practice. This was a curious experience for me because I was travelling to the west when just at my doorstep, I had access to the various Asian practices. But I was travelling to the west to experience this and it was through the west that I was learning to grasp the language of articulation and authorship. This awareness opened the desire for me to lay claim to my own practice. But before I could do that, I needed to first gain knowledge on what I saw/experienced as useful and necessary for the contemporary Asian actors that I would be working with, and the work that I was drawn to develop and create. This awareness is significant because contemporary cross-cultural performance practice is more than the combination of Asian traditional practices with contemporary Western practices. The layers within cross-cultural practices are intersectional and it is the intersectional that needs articulation and where my practice sits. These intersections break the binaries of east and west, insisting on multiplicities of cultural networks that exist within the contemporary Asian body – more than just one race/culture. Therefore the reading of contemporary Asian performance becomes a new framework.

In the next section, I will provide an overview of a typical training in *kalaripayattu* and my encounters that led to the sowing of the development of my methodology and the beginnings of a decolonised contemporary cross-cultural performance practice.

What is *kalaripayattu*?

There is a schema in the teaching and practice of *kalaripayattu*. As mentioned above, my training was first through Phillip Zarrilli in his studio in west Wales (visits taken between 1999 to 2014) and then subsequently at the Sri C.V Govindan Kutty Nair Gurukkal (CVN) Kalari Sangham (2014 to 2019) in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala in India, under the same lineage of Zarrilli's practice and teaching. I will provide an overview of the structure of the training of *kalaripayattu* that is still in practice at both Zarrilli's studio and at the CVN based on my last visits in 2014 at Zarrilli's and 2017 at the CVN. I will, however, as written in previous paragraphs remind the reader that soft fireworks are an amalgamation of my encounters. I will articulate how I have strung the various practices later in chapter two when I write and articulate the research with two other performers in the creation of a duet performance.

One other important aspect is that in Zarrilli's studio there is a slight variation because the structure of the training consists of three other elements before the actual training and teaching of *kalaripayattu*. They are:

- 1) A series of breathing exercises that allows the student/practitioner to enter into the work. These exercises as shared by Zarrilli to me in West Wales in 1999 were from another teacher that he had encountered. Zarrilli had found that it was useful as the three breathing exercises allowed the student to become focused and centred.
- 2) *Hatha yoga* poses for muscle flexibility.
- 3) *T'ai chi Ch'uan* (an East Asian Martial arts form) for more body/mind awareness.

I will now list the systematic training structure of *kalaripayattu* that is similar in both Zarrilli's studio and CVN Kalari Sangham and will indicate any slight variations. These indicators are just for the reader's knowledge and awareness but they are not to make any comparative study of the teaching in the two places.

The schema of *kalaripayattu* practice is listed below as written in Zarrilli's book *When the body becomes all eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in kalarippayattu, a South Indian Martial Art* (1998) and my own encounters with the practice.

The training of *kalaripayattu* and balance through a series of preliminary leg exercises (*kal etupp or kaluyarttal*) such as:

- a) *nerkal* (straight legs)
- b) *tiriccukal* (turning leg),
- c) *konkal* (angle leg)
- d) *iruttikal* (sitting back leg)
- e) *akamal* (instep leg)
- f) *puramkal* (outside leg)
- g) *catipuramkal* (jumping outside leg)

The above exercises involve the kicking of the legs, and the constant practice of doing the kicks is to also develop one-point focus. This is where the external eye focuses on a point in front of you and your internal eye (which is described as your internal focus and/or internal sense of the bodymind awareness). In Zarrilli's studio, before leg exercises, kicks, steps and jumps, students are first introduced to the basic animal poses, and configurations of movement within the animal poses that

embody the internal and external essence of the animal represented by the poses.

This is a slight variation from at the CVN. I have actually found this variation more accessible as the leg exercises into the kicks can be rather daunting as a beginner and in my practice, I tend to focus more on the execution of the animal poses within a movement sequence called *meippayattu* to develop a sense of dynamic stillness (this will be elaborated in chapter two) within in the body.

These are the eight animal poses:

- a) *gajavadivu* (elephant)
- b) *simhavadvu* (lion)
- c) *asvadvu* (horse)
- d) *varhavadvu* (wild boar)
- e) *sarpadvu* (serpent)
- f) *marjaradvu* (cat)
- g) *kukkuvadvu* (rooster)
- h) *vatsyadvu* (fish)

The practice of executing the animal poses within a movement sequence is to develop an animal-like awareness where both the external and internal focus on the “body becomes all eyes”. The term “when the body becomes all eyes” is derived from a Malayalee phrase *meyyu kannakuka* when the body becomes Lord Brahman with the thousand eyes (Zarrilli, 1998, p. 19). *Meyyu kannakuka* is an optimal state of intuitive and instinctual awareness where the body is ready to respond to any stimuli in any environment. This state of being is attributed to the body being in dynamic stillness where the body become an activator of energy. This activator is the fuse in fireworks that charges the body to move in the specific direction needed on

stage and articulate what is needed as I have written in the earlier section on soft fireworks. Once the student has made sufficient progress on the different animal poses, the student is led onto a sequence of exercises known as *meippayattu*. Only after the *gurukkal's* (teacher) assessment can the student then make progress onto some weapons work.

My primary interest in accessing *kalaripayattu* as part of my practice is the activation of the heightened spine that creates the articulation and precision needed when the body gestures herself on stage. It is now necessary to state that this is where I depart from my encounters with Zarrilli's intercultural actor training practice that incorporates the two other pre-rehearsal schema of both *hatha yoga* and *t'ai chi ch'uan* as mentioned earlier. The departure point is crucial to take note of as my practice is focused more on the activation of the basic animal poses in the series of movement as an activator of energy and the charge through which the body can articulate herself. Questions that arise include what is articulation, where does this articulation come from, and what shape does the articulation take? These questions form the backbone of my practice and the stimuli of my creation process. I now turn to the next elements of soft fireworks forming my practice – as a reminder and signpost for the reader – the development of a devising methodology that charts the geography of memory, and a working process towards the politics of an/other(ed) body.

The geography of memory and the politics of an/other(ed) body

The geography of memory is a devising methodology that I had encountered when I first attended a short 7-day workshop in 2006 in Singapore and thereafter at the

Teatro delle Radici (Switzerland) summer laboratory 2007 led by their Artistic Director Cristina Castrillo. I also encountered the methodology in an intensive rehearsal process in collaboration with another Singaporean actress in 2008. Even though my encounters with Castrillo seemed rather short, the impact of her methodology has had a rippling effect on my working process because of the way through which she frames the uncharted geography of memory. The principle behind “memory” as an uncharted territory, the centre of a performer’s way for any creation of work, became the territory through which I orientate myself. This principle frames my practice as a performance maker.

Who is Cristina Castrillo and her work?

Most of what I am relating regarding Castrillo is my first-hand experience with working with her, watching her performances and my on-going conversations with her. Castrillo herself has also recently-authored and published a book in Spanish, *Rastros* (Traces), that charts her journey and process. I would like to highlight that I will not be providing a detailed genealogy of Castrillo’s work, but that my encounters with her in the laboratory became for me the core of my practice and research on the process of excavation of memory. As I string the varied exposures that I have had into soft fireworks, it is crucial for me to articulate my encounters with this uncharted territory of memory.

My first encounter with Castrillo was at the Rhode Island USA *Magdalena* festival in 2006 when I watched her solo performance *Umbral*. The performance *Umbral* was framed as a performative work-demonstration that charts an actress’s journey, mainly Castrillo. I was struck by her presence, the specificity of her actions on stage

and the thought process that shaped the dramaturgy of the performance. The next day, I was fortunate enough to meet Castrillo and strike a conversation with her about actor-training and process. I listened intently to the halting conversation on her process and methodology, which she terms research, first in Italian and then translated into basic English by her associate Bruna Gusberti. She spoke about her research on the actor's heart of creation, and explained that the geography of memory is a network of cues through which a creative action can emerge. As I listened intently to her process and research, I immediately made a connection to the two other training systems that I had been exposed to, Teo's philosophy of theatre and *kalaripayattu*.

What is the methodology of Teatro delle Radici?

Teatro delle Radici was founded in 1980 by Castrillo. She is a Swiss Argentinian, who has been in exile from Argentina since before the founding of Teatro delle Radici. Before founding Teatro delle Radici, she was part of another theatre group, Libre Teatro Libre, one of the most famous Latin American theatre companies based in Argentina in the 1970s. Whenever you meet Castrillo, she will always mention her strong association and theatre heritage with Libre Teatro Libre, and with her own teacher María Escudero who founded Libre Teatro Libre. This heritage is important to her, as her own practice is formulated by the history that threads the uncharted territory of memories, a network of cues for a creative action to emerge.

In her book *Rastros, El Mapa De Un Oficio* (2015), Castrillo writes that on the many occasions that she had been asked to define her work, she tends toward a creative approach that privileges memory as a network of cues from which an emotion might

appear, or a reaction through which a movement or action is produced. The shape of this action is created through the body. The body will determine our gestures and behaviours, and that inscribes our feelings and words. She further elaborates in an email in August 2018, where I asked how she perceives memory is articulated within the body, and when a memory is evoked, what are the possible shapes it can take through the body:

If I talk about memory and its relationship with the body, I almost never use the word memory. The memory is deceptive and without an exhaustive practice of the body in what I call "actions-images" can lead to the temptation to repeat the events that are nothing but a copy of a lived experience. What matters most, at least to me, are the feelings of a lived experience, not the anecdote. The sensations seem more elusive but in contact with the body and possible spontaneous associations (associations are not a thought), the territory becomes more precise and more extensive (wider). It is the feelings we have experienced that need a body language, not the autobiographical story we want to deal with. And if they are sensations, the body can not represent them only with a graphic representation, it needs to have those other tools that can lead them to draw the essence of its presence, its shape.

And she continues to write in her book that “memory is unrepeatable and irreproducible and the only possibility of preserving it on stage is to create an equivalent form that contains and represents it. . . [the equivalent form] gives us an indelible thread that amalgamates what we were to what we will be, determine our gestures and behaviours, that inscribe our feelings and words” (2015, p. 33).

As mentioned earlier, I will not be providing a detailed genealogy of Castrillo's work, but will draw from my encounters with her in a workshop, the laboratory and in the intensive rehearsal period we had together, which helped shape for me the core of my practice and research on the excavation of memory.

In 2006, I first attended a 7-day workshop led by Castrillo and Gusberti. The workshop focused on composition through a series of rules that created a physical response from the body. This was similar to Teo's methodology of free form movement and arguably other systems of actor-training; however, I am acknowledging that it was from Castrillo and my first introduction to her five rules that my body began creating a series of shapes through which a network of cues was evoked.

The five rules are:

- 1) Lines/Curves
- 2) Changing directions
- 3) Speed
- 4) Paused
- 5) Levels

These rules were for me a map of the uncharted geography of memory that I have associated with all of my encounters with Castrillo.

How were the five rules executed?

Castrillo would use the metaphor of imagining the body as a paint brush and the space as the canvas.

1) Lines

The body paints the lines onto the canvas. The lines can be a long line across, a short line across, diagonally, or even a curve.

2) Changing directions

As the body “draws” the lines across, the body can decide to change the direction of the line and create a disruption and/or a surprise.

3) Speed

To move in different speeds – fast, slow, normal speed, run, walk, crawl.

4) Paused

For the body to pause in mid direction/speed; this was a held position and it is at this moment that a change or a surprise element can also be created. This was important because it is at this “paused” moment that the body can hold attention.

5) Levels

There were 6 levels – the body on the ground, the body hinged slightly up from the ground at ankle level, then up to the knee, waist, shoulder, head. This was to disrupt the upright stance of the body. Sometimes during the workshop we would be in these various levels moving through the five rules.

Action-images

The next thing that I was introduced to was action-images. Action-images are tools of articulation of the body’s lived-experience. These action-images are what Castrillo signifies as the “body’s inexhaustive practice” or the tools through which the body can draw the essence/ presence of her lived experience and the shape. Importantly, action-images are a sensation of the lived-experience and not an anecdote and an introspective way of working. These two ways of working, the rules

for the body and the creation of action-images, is the map that Castrillo provided as I charted my way through my uncharted territory of memory and began a process of excavation where I could re-claim my body, and in the re-claiming, devise my personal narrative.

Rehearsal process

The next stage of my work with Castrillo was the laboratory in Lugano and an intensive month-long daily rehearsal process towards a creation of a duet here in Singapore. The encounters with Castrillo in Lugano provided me with another layer, and the reader will notice her influence on my aesthetic choices especially in the videos of both the duet and my solo performances. But before I elaborate any further, it is important for me to share another insight of my encounter with Castrillo. Another metaphor that I tend to associate with Castrillo is the story that she would always share about Picasso's *Guernica* painting. In my email with Castrillo in August 2018, I asked her to elaborate what she meant by associating Picasso's painting with actor-training and action-images. Castrillo replied that the reason why she associates action-images with *Guernica* is the endless research on the detail of each brush stroke onto the canvas and that it:

has to do with the need to push a gestural material to other possibilities.

It is not the richness inherent in his painting, but the material seen by me in a distant exposition of the *Guernica* painting, in which the endless researches on every detail of that painting were exposed, as it meant: in that that I want to work there is not only the immediate gesture but the how that gesture, changing only a small part, can become. If I associate the way of using the body to have in the body a pencil or a brush, that is,

to draw with the body the essence of a personal content, those variations on the theme that Picasso has made for his work are an important example.

The small changes in gesture added another element to the map that Castrillo provided and I have come to rely on these small changes in gesture as an introspective tool for a further excavation of memory to unravel what is hidden and to disestablish any prevailing structures. The small change is a disruption to an image/shape created by the body, and such small changes are encouraged through continued repetitions and interruptions. These disruptions were the triggers of action-images that I had mentioned earlier.

Repetitions and interruptions

To Castrillo, repetitions create more “awareness” and provide an objective point of view for the actor who is already deep into the exploration of her memory. This objective eye allows the actor to decide on whether the material that is excavated is closer to her sensations of re-remembering. Interruptions give a rational, reflective thought and observation of the creative impulses. The two elements are beacons of light for when you lose your way within the uncharted territory of your memory because when you are deep in the work,

your thinking is something else, it runs parallel and messy immersed in what your body is doing, and many times you cannot notice if ‘your’ need to say is stronger than what you did, or if what you have done or are you doing is compatible with theatricality or corresponds to its true intentions. It serves to reflect on the creative material without falling into

condescension or to respect a proposal just because it is humanly important. It is used to bring a human creative territory back to the territory of a human theatricality (Castrillo, 2018).

Objects

Objects are the final elements in the map of uncharted geography of memory because they are the central pivot of any personal narrative, and provide an insight into what is within the body. Both objects and text are added later in the devising process because it is crucial for the body to first create the sensation of the memory through shapes and gesture rather than the object being the tool of that creation or an anecdotal representation. The object is also the instrument through which other theatrical elements are put together, such as sound, video and costume. I will elaborate on this more in chapter two.

The theatre philosophy of Teo and Castrillo's uncharted geography of memory

In an earlier paragraph, I had written that through my encounter with Teo I was given the opportunity to develop my own practice, and through that I became more aware of who I was and of my Eurasian roots and cultural memories. But the awareness of who I was and my other/ness prevailed more strongly in the work with Castrillo, as the map that she laid out provided a deeper sensation of memories evoked and charts my creative impulses. In the introduction of Castrillo's book *Rastros* (2015), Julia Valey, a close associate of Castrillo and a long-time actress with Odin Teatret, writes that "creating our history, it remains for all of us, the task and the challenge of finding how not to let the personal remain only in the field but

to transcend . . . and that Cristina doesn't use the word history, she prefers 'memory'. Memory not as a language reproduction of facts but as an unknown geography with which we manifest, act, represent and transmit" (p. 11). As a development from Castrillo, I was interested in creating a cross-cultural performance through the process of excavation, and through expressions of the marginalised contemporary post-colonial Singaporean body, allowing alternative narratives that are rooted in deep-seated embodied memory to emerge.

The awareness of how I was other/ed within my own country was revealed in my excavation. My memory/history was an important narrative that needed to be included in Singapore's history rather than being side-lined against the narratives of the nation's three major races. It was not so much to have a more inclusive narrative, but to decolonise the already existing narratives and to create a space for new narratives to emerge.

While Castrillo evoked this deep-seated awareness of my cultural history/memory in me, Teo reminded me that I needed to search, to feel that my embodied cultural memory is within me and most importantly to believe that my cultural memory is relevant. And to believe that my cultural memory is relevant, I need to unpack what my mind is at. "Because if you don't believe in your mind, then how can you work on your mind, if that's what you want to work on? A lot of people don't believe the mind is something to work on. . . They won't tell you that there's something more precious" (Teo, 2000). And the practice of *kalaripayattu* was a way for me to work on the control of the bodymind because to work on the mind, it was important that I could control my body.

Conclusion

The evocations of my cultural identity and the awareness that my body has been at stake because I was ignorant of my own route of re-membering were a turning point in my practice. The evocation of my cultural memory became a strong impulse to have other narratives included within the Singapore performance setting and to create a space for these other narratives. To have a new space was to de-centralise the centre so that we can have a transversal space. To create this transversal space meant that new works were necessary. I had to ask how these narratives were created and what the tools that I had were. I could not use the “master tools, as the masters’ tool will not dismantle the masters house” (Lorde, 2018, p.19). I had to create my own tools.

Through Teo, I was encouraged to find my own tools, through Castrillo’s uncharted geography of memory, I was encouraged to find and own my material, for it was my own material that writes the stage. Through them, I was able to individualise the tools and propose soft fireworks as a decolonised, embodied technique that excavates the embodied cultural memory of my post-colonial Singaporean female body. As such, soft fireworks is a methodology that pushes for a female space of knowledge sharing and bodycultures within contemporary cross-cultural performance practices. Therefore, my new tool soft fireworks is an amalgamation of practices from a postcolonial Singaporean Chinese practitioner, a Swiss-Argentinian practitioner and the practice of a South Indian Martial art; the amalgamation of the three practices already indicate a practice that is non-western, and is a cross-cultural

combination. I will now turn to this practice in the next chapter: The body as a keeper of memory.

Chapter two:

The Body as a Keeper of Memory

‘The more you know your history, the more liberated you are’
(Maya Angelou 1928 - 2014)

Introduction

This chapter first acknowledges that the body is a keeper of memory, and secondly investigates the methodology of soft fireworks as an embodied technique of working through the body’s uncharted geography of memory, excavating cultural memories in a post-colonial female body. Through soft fireworks as a system of training and performance making, I will start from/with the body, acknowledging the body’s relationship with action and object, to move towards creating other narrative and dramaturgical structures in a duet performance *Landscaping A Personal Myth*. I bring the reader into the studio through an onto-epistemological practitioner narrative of soft fireworks with a video documenting the process.

In the previous chapter, I stressed that as a female Singaporean Eurasian performance maker, the challenge is to create a space for other narratives to be included within any performance setting. In order for these newer narratives to exist, there is a need to first acknowledge that there are many multiplicities of cultures existing within the individual and thereafter begin a process of excavation of these multiple cultures. The realisation of varying degrees of cultures existing within the individual creates a shift of perception and requires a more introspective exploration

of a cultural memory. This introspective exploration is the excavation of uncharted geography of memory, buried deep within a body that has been marginalised and itself colonised¹¹. The body begins to shift and break down its multiplicities of cultures when we excavate the memory, and in so doing, the body recognises that she has alienated herself from who she is. Because, she recognises that through her body she is imitating a (coloniser's) gestures and is not own but necessary in daily living. The postcolonial body has learned the (coloniser's) gestures as a way to communicate. However, the argument here is that there is a double dilemma because suppose the colonised has manage to learn the language of the coloniser, as argued by Memmi in the post-colonial debate, that the colonised has to recreate something in a new language. But, there is no one to hear this within the community and so places the post-colonial body at the margin once again while communicating to the colonisers' community.

However, I had also argued that the body is at stake if the body does not articulate the imprints of colonisation and other/ness felt through the generational layers and networks of experience that are passed through the body. The body is at stake because of the learned gestures and the body must recognised that these are learned

¹¹ In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles founded the colony of Singapore by signing a treaty with the ruler of Johor, Sultan Hussein. Singapore was a wealthy and successful colony and, as a free-trade port, attracted thousands of immigrants; Malays, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Europeans. These immigrants came to escape war or economic troubles to pursue free trade, job opportunities and eventually settled down. The British surrendered to the Japanese during World War II and Singapore went under Japanese rule. The British returned after the surrender of the Japanese and stayed on to rule until 1953. It was here that Singapore's government selected Sir George Rendel to write the Rendel Constitution. The Rendell Constitution was intended for empowerment and allowing Singapore's government to oversee their home affairs while the British handled internal security and foreign affairs. But this led to the yearning for independence and control by the local Singapore government, who wanted more autonomous self-government. This eventually happened on 28th November 1958, with the establishment of the Singapore (Constitution) Order in Council. (Ng, 2009)

gestures and to do that is to peel away the layers of imprints and only then can the body unlearn these gestures. As such, I emphasise again that my investigation begins with working through the body as sense making, a site of action, re-action and sometimes a site of non-action that articulates a post-colonial feminist framework, as shifts are being made in the body through this unpeeling. The term “the body as a sense-maker” was first argued for and by cognitive neuroscientist Francisco Varela (1946 - 2001) in which bodily experience is not merely associated with cognition; rather, lived experience is foundational to consciousness, mind and thought (Batson, 2014, p. 75).

I argue that within my creative process, I am creating a process of decolonisation, because for decolonisation to happen within the creative space, there must be constant interplay of cultural memory, suggesting and proposing the varying degrees of identities and behaviour as self-representation. This constant interplay of cultural memory within the creative process through performance calls for fluidity and openness to create the various possibilities of presentation and representation. These various possibilities of presentation and representation provide the lens to look through/inwards and therefore start an introspective viewing of the self that exists within the body. This introspective viewing of the self within the body acknowledges that the body is a keeper of memory, more specifically the personal cultural memory. At the same time, breaks the modes of representation that are “inscribed” onto the body, especially on other/ed bodies, are broken, thus paying attention to “corporeal acts of meaning making, coding and decoding” (Thomas, 2007, p. 3). The first part/step of the process of breaking these modes of representation is to first unmark the body. As Spivak (2007) argues, as we unmark these corporeal acts of meaning

making, we are also marking “the place of one’s own citationality” (p. 38).

Therefore, as we mark the place of our own citationality, we begin to first look at ourselves and to ask not so much who am I or “who is a woman” (Spivak, 2007) but what does it mean to claim my own space? To have my own voice? By asking these questions, we are recalling Spivak’s argument in the Introduction.

The constant interplay of cultural memory is necessary because the uncharted geography of memory, as much as it is about looking back, is also about moving forward. This looking back and moving forward extends the theory of decolonising; decolonising is not static and must not simply remain as a metaphor (Tuck and Yang, 2012, pp. 1- 40) because the process must disrupt the existing states of being as it acknowledges that the body is a keeper of memory. Through the acknowledgement of the body as a keeper of memory, we are identifying bodycultures as a complex ontological state that embraces an epistemological process of excavation, requiring the act of recalling and recovering spaces of silence thus questioning issues of identity. The constant interplay of cultural memory also places embodiment as the emphasis of bodycultures and asks how personal cultural memory is allowed to be expressed through and within a contemporary post-colonial body. How do we, as a contemporary post-colonial body, begin to excavate the act of recalling and recovering the buried spaces of silence within? Can the recovery of these buried spaces of silence go beyond the act of remembering and into the act of recalling? To go beyond the act of remembering into recalling, is to move away from the image of the mind as a keeper of memory and into the body as the keeper of memory. How does this embodied memory travel and how is it revealed through the body as the keeper of memory? It is at this point of the body as the keeper of memory that I

explore various performance strategies specific to my work – in my search of decolonising and reclaiming both the body and imagination and evoke the embodied memory. In the evocation of the embodied memory, we begin to feel empowered to create other narratives, and frames a post-colonial feminist's call for other spaces of existence and for these uncovered spaces of silence to be heard within Singapore's glocal performance setting and experimental theatre landscape.

Predecessors and Influences in my Practice

In articulating the strategies used within my practice in this chapter, it is necessary to remind the reader that my aesthetic influences and the principles of practice as written in the previous chapter have set me in my particular direction of looking at the body as sense-making. I am conscious of the viral influences that Brook, Barba and Mnouchkine – pioneering western practitioners associated with the intercultural – have had in 20th century contemporary performance making and practices. I am aware that there will be traces of their influence and aesthetics. Their practices have defined the intercultural based on form and aesthetic principles, through the appropriation of forms from the east, which can be traced back clearly to distinctive cultural and performance traditions. Some of these examples are; Brook's

*Mahabharata*¹²(1985), Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides*¹³ (1992) and Barba's *The Marriage of Medea*¹⁴ (2008).

However, I argue that their intercultural practices are limited because they do not fully reveal the dynamics of the interaction or the specific processes of cross-cultural encounters as they occur through the performers' bodies. The making of a work of theatre especially on bodies that are other/ed and whose bodycultures are at the intersections of the varying degrees of cultural identities, as mentioned in my previous chapter, is not fully addressed by these practitioners' work. Their engagement can be argued as a borrowing of eastern formal practices into their western theatrical space, rather than a full engagement with the history and culture of the specific eastern practices, or to have equal interactions and transactions across these cultural practices (Tuan, 2010). In her book *Crossing Cultural Borders Through Actor's Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge* (2008), Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento argues that interculturalism grew out of the ideological, social and racial aspirations of multiculturalism in the 1970s which filtered into artistic practices. Paul Allain writes in *The Art of Stillness* (2003) "that interculturalism has been useful in that it does inform the theoretical debates on the ethics of practical engagements, it needs to take into consideration the varied socio-political locations of the

¹² Brook's *Mahabharata* was criticised by Rustom Bharucha as a showcase of the system of powers when India was still a colony of the British – "very different in tone from the Raj revivals, it nonetheless suggests the bad old days of British Raj, not in its direct allusions to colonial history, but in its appropriation of non-western material within an orientalist framework of thought and actions [...]" Bharucha (1988, p.1642-1647).

¹³ Mnouchkine used what can be described as a multicultural device such as a neutral space with performers appearing in colourful Asian-like costumes. The stage hands were *kabuki*-ish and the chorus choreography emulates the *kathakali* dance drama. (Rich, 1992).

¹⁴ *The Marriage of Medea* was Eugenio Barba's continuous search in acting traditions and used elements of Balinese performance with western acting techniques and seeks to show the heart of intercultural in the performance through the marriage of forms and in the marriage of the characters. (McGrane, 2008)

practitioners involved or reception on end of the intercultural stage.” The interculturalism of the 1970s into artistic practice is viewed from a very Euro-American practice. My practice questions the dynamics of encounters of the embodied memory through and within the body and the creation of an emerging cross-cultural performance practice within a Singapore glocal performance setting through bodycultures.

I introduced the term bodycultures in chapter one and am emphasising that bodycultures move away from the search of a source culture (a reference point that Thomas Richards uses in his book *At work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (1995) and to account for his association with Grotowski. I am alerting the reader to the difference between bodycultures and source culture because rather than searching for a “source culture”, the post-colonial Singaporean body does not have one “source culture”. Therefore the categorical understanding that all post-colonial bodies can be reduced to one source is the same as placing all post-colonial bodies in an anonymous collective – “They are this. They are all the same” (Memmi, 2003, p. 129).

Therefore, my argument is that the map that Castrillo provides, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is an epistemic framework of a working methodology that consists of five rules, action-images, repetitions, disruptions and objects that articulate the body’s lived-experience. These act as concrete structures and provide a map to return to and to nest. This nest is a place of returning (decolonising) that is evident in levels of humanity and provides a space to recall and recover as this returning helps us articulate the bodycultures within us.

In my exploration of action-images as explained in the previous chapter, I am proposing a returning to an inner memory of being (bodycultures) through the body as sense-making. This returning to an inner memory of being reaches back across years and creates a space for the embodied memory to be evoked. The body is acknowledged as a keeper of memory because the returning articulates this nest of an emotional state that calls us to look into this womb of being where a foetus of knowledge sits (Bachelard, 1958; Gyllenhaal, 2016). This foetus of knowledge as argued is the imprint of a long history of felt trauma that remains from generation to generation. It can be described as functional networks of multigenerational imprints, buried deep within individuals. In reality, even if we are not conscious or are ignorant of it, each one of us has roots as within us are layers of humanity (Gyllenhaal, 2016), and these leave a trace. Prophecy Coles in her book *The Uninvited Guest from the Unremembered Past* (2011) argues that a vulnerability exists in those who do not know where they come from, and that there is an “epistemological rupture” that freezes space and time (p. 88) and can be described as a place of “entombment”, where there is a “loss of meaning” and Spivak borrows Foucault’s “epistemic violence” where the female body is unable to fully express herself. In order for a process of decolonising to take place, I am proposing that we have to first return and acknowledge that each inner memory of being is a layer of bodyculture(s) with multicultural influence. Therefore, to prevent an epistemological rupture and violence, the route to remembering must be fluid, flexible and has a variety of styles rather than a particular source culture because there is no one source culture in a post-colonial contemporary body of the 21st century.

Situating the Contemporary Bodycultures within Singapore's Glocal Performance Setting

What does it mean to create a cross-cultural performance vocabulary for the multiplicities of bodycultures with layers of cultural intersections? In a body whose lineage is multiple, what do we take away as our own and what can be articulated through it? What sort of cross-cultural encounters will be evoked in the creative process because of the intersections of cultural existences? How is this complexity of existence translated and transcended in the realm of performance?

In order for me to answer these questions, I will now bring the reader into the studio where I begin to engage in the methodology of soft fireworks, an amalgamation of three major influences, Teo's philosophy of theatre, Castrillo's uncharted geography of memory and *kalaripayyatu*.

I will now detail my process of working in the studio with two performers. For the sake of clarity, I have included my two collaborators' (Chanel Chan and Vanessa Toh) unedited practitioners' narratives within a text box and in italics. The reader will be guided to a specific time code of the accompanying video *Landscaping a Personal Myth: Process and Performance*. It is important to stress that as a decolonising strategy, I have purposefully integrated the narratives of my two performers' findings in the process and ensured that their voices are also heard. The intention of doing this is to bring the reader into the studio and propel an embodied spectatorship while experientially witnessing the use of the methodology of soft

fireworks as a way of working through the body's uncharted geography of memory in a duet performance, *Landscaping A Personal Myth*.

In the Studio

Before starting my process of investigation on the uncharted geography of memory and to raise questions of how embodied memory(ies) reveal themselves and what is being revealed in the studio, I asked myself these questions first.

1. What is a creative space?
2. How do we exist in the creative space?
3. What do I want to happen in the creative space?
4. Do I even want anything to happen?
5. Can something happen?
6. And if something happens, how did it happen?
7. What is the something that had happened?

These questions were provocations and provided me with an introspective gaze; a way of dissecting and opening up my practice. In doing this, I am giving myself the space to ponder and am raising a reflective mirror to the artistic choices I make as a performance maker while in the studio. Why am I working in the way that I do? Why do I choose to work in this manner? What is it that I want to communicate?

These provocations are also checklists which become building blocks for me to articulate the strategies used in my investigation on embodied memory. My investigation of embodied memory comes from a kinaesthetic awareness of the

existence of embodied routes, that articulates memory as movement (Tuan, 1977).

This movement expresses a sense of inhabitation of the fluidity and flexibility of the embodied memory that seems to be fluctuating because of the multiplicities of existence within the body. These intrinsic pluralities are the interweaving threads of cultures intersecting and are also the movement of the embodied cultural memory.

I am asking what lies within the routes of embodied memory, when there are multiplicities of existence that intersect. How are these routes created through the body? How are these routes constructed? What is the threshold between how the body remembers and forgets? What is the process of embodiment? Are there any social pressures that may have forced the body to denounce its memory? How does the body remember or choose to forget? How do the multiplicities of cultures intersect, exist and function? Do they work against each other or align with each other?

Before I can actually answer these questions, I must first strip away the layers of post-colonial complexities within the body and ask another set of questions.

1. Who are you/we culturally?
2. What do you/we carry culturally?
3. What are your/our behavioural patterns, gestures? Are these gestures part of your/our cultural narrative?
4. What is the history of your/our body and the environment that your/our body is exposed to?
5. What is the negotiation of what seems to be happening internally and what you think is happening in the space?

6. What is this inner dialogue that it creates – and what memories surface?

In asking these questions, I realise that there is an emergence of a human individual space that begins the process of allowing the embodied silence to be heard. This human individual space is the site of representation and of systems of reception and perception. These sites and systems, as argued by Poles (2011) who references Lacan, provide an inward gaze into the human psyche because it consists of the “imaginary, the symbolic and the real” (p. 33).

To further investigate the process, I decided to work with two Peranakan Chinese Singaporean female¹⁵ performers on a duet *Landscaping a Personal Myth*¹⁶. Peranakan refers to people of mixed Chinese and Malay/Indonesian heritage and their origins date back to fifteenth century Malacca, when their Chinese trader ancestors married the local women. Today, some Peranakans retain their particular cultural practices but many have assimilated into the larger Chinese community here in Singapore. This was a deliberate choice as I was conscious that within the experimental Singapore theatre landscape there is a lack of female voices, and as an other/ed female myself I needed to lay claim to this lack of female presence to ask what the different female narratives that needed to be heard are. What untold stories lay within us? I hope that the inclusion of female narratives will provide multicultural perspectives to the female identity in the contemporary Singaporean experimental theatre landscape, and reflect on a post-colonial and cultural

¹⁵ I am highlighting that I am engaging in a female embodiment of inclusion within my creative practice.

¹⁶ I am using the word myth as it relates back to the three levels of human psyche; the imaginary, symbolic and the real.

complexity of what being female/a woman means in contemporary post-colonial Singapore. How did our history shape this? How does our culture /multi-culturalism (passed on from generations) shape how we see ourselves as women?

In order for me to create a space for inclusion and a multicultural perspective to the female identity, I first needed to look at what sort of other narratives I wanted to include and ask what the processes of inclusion are. I decided to work through the articulation of female embodiment, recuperating an introspective re-telling and fore-telling of three generational narratives through (self) daughter - (self once-removed) mother - (self twice-removed) grandmother.

The process of recuperating is to rethink and to open up the possibility of multiplicities and intersections of imprints of a long history of colonisation with roots within each of us. These imprints of colonisation are the spectrum of traumas that have been passed from generation to generation leaving a trace in the body. As I articulate this female embodiment, we begin to discover the roots that we have within us; imprints of an ancestral history of lived-experiences. These imprints are argued within the theory of epigenetics; every woman who has a child will leave an imprint of her lived-experienced and those before on her own child. This is every woman's heritage. A functional network of cues of our past within us as the foetus is a felt entity rather than a mental entity. This realisation slowly allows us to reclaim our imagination and call forth our past to be heard, thus lifting us out from the "entombment of existence" (Coles 2011) and offer something new.

Interestingly, these questions framed the orientation of the two female performers' bodies in space, in terms of how they responded to their memories and related to each other in space. In turn, this provided a perspective on their psyche on how they related with/to the world. With this inward gaze, there was an awareness of the composition of the body as a signifying object. The body as signified cannot be understood as being "neutral" as both the body and her(his)tory presuppose each other. Spivak (2005) calls for a philosophy of experimentation in a "neutral" space as a level playing field allowing for exchanges of open-ended possibilities. As a philosophy of experimentation this level playing field is in acknowledgement of an open future that we could consider in the creation of potentiality, and a heightened level of inter-connectedness in which transference can be limitless because the creation of meaning and experience of value is at its most potential and most profound. However, neutrality glosses the buried internal silence and I want to give space for the silence to be heard in order to decolonise the body and the imagination. This signifying body is a site for which the body as a keeper of memory creates various possible routes for the embodied memory to process; the journeying of bodycultures are never neutral.

Saying that the body is a site is an acknowledgement that the body is a vessel through which we can experience things. The body stands amongst things in the world. It has a point of view through which it sees things (Bachelard, 1958; Merleau-Ponty, 1954; Shusterman, 2012). The body is marked by her own experiences. The body is marked by her experiences because within a site of action, there is liveness. This liveness is the body's response to the experiences that she encapsulates. Through these experiences, the body makes sense of how she is affected and

comprehends what is happening around her. As a body, we feel, and as we become aware of this, we slowly begin to acknowledge that the way in which we see or perceive things comes from a point of view because “to see the world, we must see it from some point of view: a position that determines our horizon and directional planes of observation, that sets the meaning of left and right, up and down, forward and backward, inside and outside, and that eventually shapes the metaphorical extensions of these notions in our conceptual thought” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 33).

Therefore, I turned inwards to reflect on what the body does, and being in the studio with the two performers helped me frame my argument that the body is a site of action, re-action, acceptance, and resistance. Furthermore, within us there is memory. As the process developed, I was aware of how memory seems to take its form from the body because the concept of memory is an abstraction of time¹⁷ as we are unable to fully live in the particular duration of that memory. So, to recuperate our memory is to allow it to be expressed within the being and in the being within that is through the body.

So far, I have outlined the process of discerning the routes that the embodied memory takes through the body of the performer. In what follows, I will discuss in more detail the work in the studio through the methodology of soft fireworks.

¹⁷ The idea of memory as an abstraction that needs to be housed so that we can express it, and that the more securely memories are fixed in space, the more they can be expressed through the body, is taken from Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* (1958). He articulates that the house (but I have replaced house with body as the keeper of memory) is one of the greatest integrations for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at time opposing, at others, stimulating one another.

The Way of Working in the Studio

My process of working with the two performers was in five stages. These stages helped me put up a mirror of reflection; as I looked closer at the reflection, I was able to magnify and dig deeper into this reflection. I was also aware of the personal nature of the investigation and how this might raise ethical issues of privacy and confidentiality of the subject in the management of the gathered data. To ensure that the two performers were aware of my intention, a letter of undertaking was written, outlining my research and intention, providing an overview of how I might use the data. Ensuring that there were constant debriefs, checks and communication, providing the two performers with the space to access freely their process and for me to resist going to the space and intervening with the thought process. I maintained the role of the observer whilst my two performers became the subject of research.

The Five Stages

1. Working through the practice of *kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool so as to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating a physical score.
2. Working with three specific objects that triggered a memory for the two performers. I asked for three objects from the two performers as I was keen to explore three possible routes of the embodied cultural memory, the self (daughter), the self once-removed (mother) and the self twice-removed (grandmother).
3. A retelling of memory through the body using a series of personal photographs.

4. Collection of conversations with the performers' family members as a way into the self once removed and twice removed.
5. Creating a cross-cultural *mise-en-scene* of re-telling and a for-telling through the use of personal narratives, sound and multi-media.

Stage 1: Working through the practice of *kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool so as to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating a physical score

I spent the initial six months working with the two performers to be more attuned to their body, through *kalaripayattu*. We worked through the framework of *kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool to tap into the intuitive processes that existed in the rehearsal space and the somatic influences of my current practice provided a base of understanding. Questions that resided in a somatic embodied experience could also be accessed. For example, how, with a heightened spine, a response is triggered that raises questions of embodied memory. It is important for the reader to note that I am using the essence of the practice of *kalaripayattu* with particular focus on the concept of breath. Breath is vital to the achievement of *meyyu kannakuka* (a Malayalam folk expression that translates to “the body becomes all eyes” (Zarrilli, 1998). Classical practitioners of body-arts such as yoga and *kalaripayattu* believe that the physical body is linked to the subtle body (considered the seat of the soul, and believed to consist of centres of energy (chakra), organs that aid internal awareness, and the mind and through breath, or *prana*. It is necessary to activate the breath correctly at the root of the navel, variously called *nabhi mula*, *tan tien*, or *hara* in Indian, Chinese, and Japanese practices respectively (Zarrilli). This proper

form of breath control can assist practitioners in coordinating the breath with their movements, as well as developing and maintaining *ekagrata*. *Ekagrata* allows the practitioner to shift from a mental state of being to one of kinaesthetic awareness, experiential sensitivity or dynamic stillness.

Breath in the body refers to the *wind power* that develops when a *kalaripayattu* practitioner is mindful enough of their breath to coordinate breath with movement. Breath is the manifestation of the internal energy that brings life and power to the external body, and is responsible for the circulation of this energy throughout the body. Through this mastery of breath, *kalaripayattu* practitioners can learn to activate the energy centre of their bodies, a spot just below the navel termed *nabhi* in Malayalam and *tan-tien* in Mandarin. The activation of the *tan-tien* creates a dynamic state of readiness for defence or attack, even when still, and allows movements to flow easily from one to the next.

By starting with *kalaripayattu*, the two performers were required to enter the space leaving behind their daily body and to centre the bodymind so that the body could move in synchronicity with the breath. The term bodymind was first coined by David Shaner, a scholar in Japanese Buddhism, but used explicitly in actor-training by Phillip Zarrilli. *Kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool equipped me to develop an inner dialogue with the breath and create unitive-ness of bodymind. With an emphasis on breath, the performers were able to tap into their intuitions.

Chanel Chan (Performer B) reflects (23rd Nov 2015):

What happens when there is a connection? There's a heightened awareness of each other's breathing. The focus also zeroes in on [the] self and body. An exchange is made through breath, eye contact and movement. My tan-tien was more engaged. I feel an energy that's leading me from my centre. There's ease. It is alive and meditative. [There was] more of an honest exchange. Breath is deeper and more conscious. The space feels different and it moves in between and around the body.

The activation of breath as an inner dialogue corresponds with a thought or a physical action and with proper breath control the two performers could use breath to excite the psycho-physiological energy in their bodies that could intensify the expression of emotion as argued by both Aristotle and Artaud. Artaud's fascination was with the breakthrough of language into the physical and how we need to stir up emotion so that we can go beyond language and push what needs to be communicated on stage, as elaborated in chapter one on Teo's philosophy of theatre. Artaud (1958) argued for "a theatre that is based on signs. To link the theatre to the expressive possibilities of forms, to everything in the domain of gestures, noises, colour, movements is to restore it to its original direction, to reinstate it in its religious and metaphysical aspect, is to reconcile it with universe" (p. 70).

Breath in the body can also imbue the actor's body with dynamic energy, as evidenced by trained Kathakali performers, who have undeniable stage presence (Zarrilli, 1987). Focusing on the breath allowed the two performers to access their embodied memory, as the meditative state of breath in the body also created a philosophical shift from end-gaining to a more curious awareness of their body as a site of action (International Association of Dance, Medicine & Science).

Thus, the training vocabulary of *kalaripayattu* became for us an entry point of possible insights into this embodied memory of the two performers, as each physical score / movement seemed to be initiated from an acute kinaesthetic awareness of the heightened spine. This awareness of the heightened spine is the activation of the two performers' dynamic stillness and created the internal embodiment of their memory. As the two performers began to inhabit their movement of memory, a network of cues emerged to create this physical action (Bachelard, 1958). The creation of physical actions streamed from the responses and created a natural impulse to act. These physical actions are the creative processes of an uncharted geography of memory mentioned in chapter one.

Figures 2 to 5 are images of a series of breathing exercises and *kalarippayattu* poses (as described in chapter 1) as part of the initial months of practice in the studio.



Figure 2. A series of breathing exercises



Figure 3. simhavadivu (lion)



Figure 4. marjaravadivu (cat)



Figure 5. gajavadivu (elephant)

I used the epistemic framework of the uncharted geography of memory as a devising strategy to create an exchange of remembering and action-image. Action-images as mentioned in chapter one are tools of articulation of the body's lived-experience. These action-images are what Castrillo signifies as the "body's inexhaustive practice" or the tools through which the body can draw the essence/presence of her lived experience and the shape. Importantly, action-images are a sensation of the lived experience and not an anecdote and an introspective way of working. The action-image is the elasticity of a muscular reaction to a subtle intimate response of breath after pre-preparatory work in *kalaripayattu*.

Within this structure of the uncharted geography of memory, each person searched for a response that was "encoded" within their bodies and explored ways through which their body could/would move. They rediscovered a flow of consciousness articulated through the body; the way of moving within the body seemed encoded and with each discovery the body entered into a vulnerable state. What layers of cross-cultural considerations and concerns will arise from a multi-cultural heritage/collective memory? As the body enters into a vulnerable state of being, a process of an excavation of embodied cultural memory becomes the route for the unravelling of her(his)storicity. This unravelling of her(his)storicity, allows contemporary beings to work towards a reclaiming of their cultural identities from a colonial past. This unravelling is a discovery of an embedded memory of physical actions that can be strung together to create a physical score. As these physical scores develop, there is a sense of duality that exists within the body, as seen in the creative exploration of the two performers: as the performers began to move and get

a sense of the inner dialogue with their breath, a duality existed which became an inner dialogue.

Studio findings.

To articulate my findings in the studio, the reader is now advised to watch the accompanying video. There are three parts to the video – Part A: Process, Part B: Rehearsals and Part C: Performance. There are five sections in Part A, asking a series of questions as the two performers worked in the space to unpack the previous set of six questions that were listed in the section “In the Studio” above.

Part A: Process – First Section; 1a. What is this inner dialogue that is conveyed through the body, how is this strung together to create a physical score and how does the body embody its memory?(video time code: 04:24 - 14:57).

In this section, Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects on the process, and how there was a duality of a transaction of reframing and transiting within her. She must find a balance between what already exists in the body (the past gestures as mentioned earlier) and acknowledging that there is a kind of detachment from the absence of active presentation (bodycultures’ gestures).

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects (29th October 2015):

So, at the beginning I felt like there was a strong, grounded beginning. There was no necessary image, I just felt like my foundation was strong somehow. And the first half, it was carried out by a lightness throughout. So I was bouncing, I was light and there was a change in tempo from slow to fast. I felt like the build-up to the climax only began after I got up from the ground. The tempo sped up, my breath started

quickenning and I felt like I had an outer body experience, as in I felt like I was watching my body move. I was outside of my body, I had no control. I had control, but I was not in it. My mind was not controlling the movement.

Definitely felt like the ups and downs of the text because I had the movement in my head. Even though I was still walking through it, there was a lightness, and I played with it cause it was in my head still. And there were parts of my score that required physical strength and the chair itself was heavy, and I was trembling to keep it up and away from my body and it also fed into the delivery of the text as well.

I am arguing that this reframing and transiting, as seen in the video (time-code: 09:24 –10:46) helps to excavate the embodiment of memory, as Toh slowly begins to embody her breath as an inner dialogue, her memories occupy the body and take shape through the body in the engagement of the imaginative creative process.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) continues (31st October 2015, time-code: 10:46 – 13:40):

It's like going over in your head, over and over again, your mind doesn't only hear it and your body hears it. Well, for me is my memory, is the phrase that she always said, but now I'm hearing it different all the time when I am recalling it. I feel different all the time when I hear it. And then you just react, you know. And you're so in it because your body and your mind is in it. Then the memory changes from the original.

The nature of memory is that it's easily manipulated, right? And you make it how you want it, actually. Sometimes, you think about it so much that it becomes different from the original and I feel like when I was going through it, it was changing. It was suddenly like a memory of my grandmother came up when it didn't even occur to me, even when I chose this rice – I didn't even think about it. It only came to me after exercise 1 and 2, and I suddenly remembered the way my grandmother used to wash rice before you microwaved it, because she used to microwave it.

You said that we had to embody our grandmothers, and then I just started distributing rice to all my family members. One for my son-in-law, one for my daughter, one for my grandkids, and then one for me and I did it until the bowl of rice was empty. Then, I didn't feel good that – like I felt like they needed more food or something and I started dividing my portion to them until I was left with nothing, but I didn't feel like I was hungry or needed rice. And god, it was like, what the shit and – I mean, we know that she sacrifices for us but she gave everything. I mean, we just don't see it like that, you know? And to her it's nothing, it's just "okay lah give

lah, you hungry? You eat ah?" It's like, I don't know. Then I felt really shitty when I was my grandmother.

Execution of the five rules within the uncharted geography of memory.

For Chanel Chan (Performer B, time-code: 13:42 – 14:56), we explore and experiment more with the primary five rules that exist within the map of the uncharted geography of memory in chapter one. In the video, the reader will be able to see the execution of the five rules:

- 1) Lines/Curves
- 2) Changing directions
- 3) Speed
- 4) Paused
- 5) Levels

Through these five rules, Chan is slowly able to create a series of shapes and from there a network of cues are evoked as she slowly begins to articulate her body's lived experience through action-images and chart her own memory. The reader will see this in the later section of the video.

Part A: Process – First Section; 1b. The challenges of recalling the embodied gestures and the unpacking of what is a learned gesture. The process of embodiment through the use of objects and the becoming of memory (video time code: 14:57 – 20:00).

The evocation of the embodied memory turns into waves of expression as the two performers begin to experience their body moving in a particular manner. It is perhaps strangely familiar as they try to connect and yet at the same time, are disconnected, but there is a sense of flow as the performers are caught in an in-between state, where there is a sense of opening. This openness becomes a possibility as we can look at what is being revealed through the waves of recalling. As the process develops, I begin to be more curious to know and understand how the various memories were evoking and emerging in the space from within the two performers.

Chanel Chan (Performer B) reflects (22nd Oct 2015, 23rd October 2015, 31st October 2015, time code: 15:39 – 20:00):

I guess because there's this socialised kind of habit that when a text comes, it comes from a part of your brain, and when we are moving, and you ask our text to come from the physical movement, there is a struggle to disconnect, disconnect the mind and the body and, but then when I stop thinking of it in a linear sense, in a way that it's supposed to make sense. I thought about what are the sensations and the sounds of the words that can be sort of in the same world.

I guess that's why for me, I find it very hard to comprehend this no-thought, no-intellectualisation. But more in a sense of when I thought I get it, then you said I didn't, then it confuses me. Because my thought was wrong, so there must be some sort of disconnect in two different thoughts – the thoughts you wanted us to think, and the thought that I thought.

Chanel continues in her reflections on 31st October (17:24 – 20:00) :

I think that from the train of their thought, that we dissect the first part, second part, third part. The first part for me was, I don't know why, but after my (exhalation) move, I forgot. I blanked, and I completely blanked on my score. And I knew the other gestures that I could play with, but I blanked on what was going to happen next. So, then I sort of thought back on the story and say, if this is the part of the journey, what is the next part of the journey and fit the next score into it. So, it was basically a lot of linking my, and then I found it after one blank, but it was linking the story to the physical score. And then the second part I just distilled everything down to that one sense with the whole story, the journey with my grandfather and my grandmother and the two places and the plants and the

fish and everything, and I put everything in one container, one tactual. And I wanted to explore it in my body and into every pore of my body. And then, I went in the third segment and I just, it was like getting lost in her and there was this – my knowledge of her body now being discarded away and almost possessing her young self, and then, it's quite apparent from what other people have been saying, that the emotions inevitably came with it, and other memories, for example, like her boat disappearing, and like her brother dying in front of her and all that, and I looked at the seaweed, and I saw that, like the dried up seaweed around the boat, or like around the boat, or like the ashes of her brother. And I just fed from that imagery for a while, like I didn't live it, but I created her living it.

Stage 2: Working with three specific objects.

Part A: Process – Second Section; 2. How, through the use of objects, is the journeying of identities and flow of consciousness articulated through the body? How does the use of objects convey embodied memory (video time code: 20:00 – 32:11).

I asked the two performers to bring in objects that they were drawn to or have a close association with. These were the objects: Rice, Bowl and Umbrella for Vanessa Toh (Performer A) and Flowers, Bowl and Water for Chanel Chan (Performer B).

I gave specific instructions that they were to work with the object through the body:

1. To sense the tactility of the object
2. To listen to any possible sound the object might make through the performers' interaction with it
3. To be aware of the initial impulse that any association makes and be conscious of where that impulse comes from.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects 5th November 2015 (time code: 20:10 – 23:19) as she works with her chosen objects:

There were flashes of images and sounds, and there were memories of my associations with the umbrella and then I really did not know – because I was struggling because you were giving me instructions and everything, and how do I bring this out here, into my body. And then only – your water helped, the spray, throwing the bowl of water at me, and then it kind of woke me up, to get out of my mind a bit. And I was very frustrated already – it wasn't even that, I really lost track of time actually. I forgot about the alarm and everything. I felt like, I don't know, I felt like there was something, but there was nothing. But there were some moments that worked for me. There was a moment where I was just lying down the umbrella and I already very very frustrated, and then my legs started spinning me around the umbrella, and then I started getting really dizzy, and then I started getting more frustrated, because I didn't know where I was spinning my body towards. But that really helped me to get out of my – of that closed-ness that I felt.

I think it helped that you started from ground zero, like reminding us of the rules (of the uncharted geography of memory). Because all the other days that we met, it was just “okay, let's do the work. Let's do the items straight away.” But then, when we did that hour without the items, without the story, without the grandma or anything, just interact with the space in your body in whatever, it kind of conditions your body again, like warmed up. Cause I think we were just coming in kind of cold. Like even though we were warming up, it was just not warmed up for the work.

In a separate conversation with Toh, she communicates that she feels the strongest impulse with the rice, rice bowl and umbrella.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects (10th March 2016):

I felt the strongest impulse with the rice, rice bowl and umbrella. But definitely the rice. The sound it made when I poured it out of my hands into the bowl. The way it felt between my fingers. The smell of raw rice. It has a comforting nature to me. Reminded me of my grandmother, reminded me of my childhood.

I argue here that the process of remembering is a phenomenology of the imagination (Bachelard, 1958) that emerges from the intimate immense experience of the objects to evoke the embodied memory. As the performers begin to excavate their memory through the usage of objects, they begin to embody their memories and as they

embody their memories, their bodies become objects of knowledge and we begin reinvesting in the body (Grosz, 1990).

The use of objects as articulated in chapter one is one of the elements in the map of uncharted territory because objects are the central pivot of any personal narrative, and provide an insight into what is within the body. The reader should be aware that objects and text are added later in the devising process because it is crucial for the body to first create the sensation of the memory through shapes and gesture rather than the object being the tool of that creation or an anecdotal representation. The object is also the instrument through which other theatrical elements are put together, such as sound, video and costume in the performance itself.

I posit that through using the objects, the body is historically placed within the construction of time and space, where time is the service of space and the interior, and space is the creation of readings and poetics. The latter space is understood as a passageway between the point at which the two performers encounter the different dynamism of the past and present. It is the “go between” of the different dynamisms that is the state of “betwixt and between” that situates the site of action, retaining its peculiar quality of temporality. It is in this in-between space, that a heightened level of inter-connectedness and of transference is limitless. The potential of creation of meaning and experience of value is at its most potential and most profound. It is the “inter—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) and invites forms of proximity and the appeal to connect. This interplaying is constantly changing, it is in the in-between, the liminal, and the threshold. Creation takes place “betwixt and between structures

or situations [...] being neither here or there – neither completely inside nor outside a given situation” (Turner, 1969, pp. 94-113), allowing for a constant interplay, suggesting and dictating identities and behaviour. The process is to locate where the buried silence sits with the individual. to break apart the entombment and facilitate the articulation of embodiment. This self-explorative mode of recalling through objects of memory becomes a way for the two performers to access the buried silence through the journeying of memory articulated through images and shapes of the body.

The process of embodiment through the use of objects is the excavation of this network of cues, creating a phenomenology of the soul (Bachelard, 1958) as the two performers begin to access the centre of their being – their foetus of knowledge – and slowly begin to recuperate the intersections of bodycultures and the areas of silence that need to be recuperated. Through the recuperation of silence, they begin to reconstruct and embody this nest of remembering.

The function of the object is for the two performers to experience and inhabit their embodied cultural memory. The functional experience of the objects becomes this phenomenon of the imagination and the two performers enter into an intimate immerse world that refers directly to their imagining consciousness. In the video (time code: 23:19 – 32:11), the reader will witness how Toh’s body is immersed in her embodied memory through the use of the rice and rice bowl. This inner immersion provides a wave of expression. Referring to Merleau-Ponty (2001), as we decolonise our imagination and become clear of where we are at, where we are from and where we are heading, we are awakened. Therefore, as the two performers

experience their immense past starting first from their relationship to their mother and their mothers' relationship to their grandmothers, they become liberated and more aware of their history; there is an expansion of their intimate space and the two performers begin to reclaim their body. Both performers were able to experience the unravelling of her-self in the process.

Stage 3: A retelling of memory through the body using a series of personal photographs

Part A: Process – Third Section; 3a. Exploring the possible routes of self, self once removed and self twocs removed. What is the process of the retelling of a series of events that provokes embodiment of the three layered selves in the contemporary body (video time code: 32:12 - 40:12).

I was curious to look at Guillaume's theory of Deleuze's findings; how the actions - or rather for the purpose of my research, the series of events - that are external create a dialogue within the individual and trigger her embodied memory, which in turn creates "thoughts, conceptions, and cognitions, which are corporeal dispositions of the mind. Thought, in turn, has a power of corporeal utterance, within which subsist incorporeal 'sayables' that signify corporeal states of affairs" (Guillaume, 2011, p. 103). At the same time, I am creating an internal space, when we can let things resonate and so that these utterances can be approached indirectly. As argued by Trinh, "when you let things resonate and approach them indirectly, you are opening up a space in which absence and presence never work as mere oppositions ... a 'soundless' space of resonance, and a language of its own" (1996, p. 8). This

soundless space allows us to go back to one's embodied memory and "in the case of people of colour, one's denied heritage, in order to reinvent one" (p. 10).

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects (2nd April 2016) (time code: 32:30 – 34:50):

We focused a lot on other people, other people in our lives, in my mother's life, my grandmother's life, and then when the spotlight was on my own life, there was that, "okay, what am I made of?" And then I tried to think back what makes Vanessa, and I was blank for a while because, "shit, is there nothing interesting about my life?" Because, well I thought that there was nothing much to say about me, you know, my mom and my grandmother had gone through a lot. And not that I haven't gone through a lot, but I couldn't think of it at that moment. So I just shake it off, just move around. Started playing with my feet, going slowly, looking at myself on the outside first, and moving bits of my body, parts of my body, exploring that. And then slowly the things started to come along, like my legs started moving in a certain way and I got reminded of my training in Indian dance, then that went into my memory of primary school or secondary school. And then little bits here and there, I suddenly jump from being Vanessa, when I was twelve or fifteen to Vanessa when she was in kindergarten, to Vanessa when she was in day-care, and then I quickly jotted the memories and that experience down on paper, and as I was writing, more memories came after that. So the movement helped, but as I was writing, the writing also triggered something else, and I remembered more just by scribbling whatever I thought of. Then I would go blank again, I would just stop, and started getting out of mind, trying to move around again.

3b. How does the process of retelling through an external impulse such as photographs and objects trigger the embodied memory? (video time code: 34:51 – 40:15)

My next step in the process was to ask the two performers to bring in photographs that they were especially drawn to. I asked them to bring in photographs of their mothers that they really liked. These photographs provided another perspective for me to look at the route of their embodied memory and investigate how the re-telling of the events in the photographs would trigger a memory.

I created a space for the two performers to explore within an encoded value system of placing the image in a specific time and place through the use of old photographs.

This search was to connect the two performers to a past and to create a series of images from the impact of recalling into this wave of expression. The photographs were a phenomenological document (Bachelard, 1958) as the two performers crossed this bridge of memory (between past and present). This crossing of the bridge of memory encompasses two axes: the expansion of the inner space and the expression of intimate experiences, the intersection of the past, the present and the future – the multigenerational history that is within us. The use of photographs allowed the two performers to place the memory in a contained space as memories are motionless and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are (Tuan, 1977).

Chanel Chan (Performer B) reflects 5th November 2015 (time code: 37:44 - 40:15):

When I was lying down with the water, and then you said, “connect with your tan tian, move with the vibration, stay in there” and all that, I just distil it to the bare minimum of what am I, what is my body telling me. If my body is not telling me anything, then I’m just going to wait till I have something, so it was less, “oh I should do this shape now.” It was more like what is this feeding, this need to go this place, go the water, touch the water. And then the stories and the memories came. You didn’t give us a task of connecting to a story, just explore with the objects, but somehow, it came into my mind. A few of the sensations from the earlier on – the seaweed and all – felt stronger with this, than it was before.

And at the end, when you said, this was the hardest part and to keep trying, keep trying, keep finding more new things. So it was quite like a struggle to find more things. It felt like a story was used up, but then there’s more within that, like what if it is not anymore, what if it’s this and that, and then other connections to the story – like what other connection that I can draw, you know?

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects (23rd March 2016) in a conversation to me:

There was something about the pictures that stood out for me. It was 'comfort'. The comfort I feel when I look at them. Hands on each other shoulders. Hands that were there to comfort me. Hands that I wish were here to comfort me right now. That was something for me. I dropped whatever I was working before and focussed on that sensation. Or missed sensation in my body.

I played with my hands. I started patting myself on the shoulder. And extended it to my whole arm. And then my body. I was caressing my body. It felt familiar. It felt nice. I went to the floor. I felt like a baby/child wanting the comfort of a mother or my grandma.

The process of recalling is a bridge for creativity as the images link the past and the present. This bridge, I argue, is the uncharted geography of memory with the network of cues that allows us to cross over to find our own answers, confront and acknowledge our colonised gestures and lived-gestures. By crossing over to their roots, the two performers can trace this source of memory(ies) buried deep within their body. By tracing, the two performers are looking backwards and as they begin to cross over this bridge of the past and into present, they are slowly redrawing the territory and reclaiming their own narratives. The two performers begin mapping a new route that can only be imagined as they reclaim their forgotten narratives and decolonised the body.

The process of decolonising the body is the liberating 'force' of ownership and forms an insight, an awareness of a cultural memory that forms a series of actions and shapes for the for-telling of a new narrative that reflects an embedded cross-cultural encounter. This new narrative is the recognition of a process of unlearning the body's colonised gestures and being conscious of their lived-gestures, yet at the same time to ask what the gestures are revealing.

Stage 4: Collection of conversations with the performers' family members as a way into the self, the self once-removed and the self twice-removed.

Part A: Process – Fourth Section; 4. When embodied memories are evoked and the multiplicities of selves are revealed, the body enters into a vulnerable state. What are the processes of re-telling these multiplicities of selves? At this point, how does the body respond as a site? (video time code: 40:16-44:02)

The task given to the two performers was a way of isolating the “becoming” and the “being”, and to see whether there were any possible cross-overs. This was an onto-epistemological approach of incorporating Deleuze’s theory of becoming and being. The task for the two performers was to record their mother’s and grandmother’s memories of each other. The two performers recorded their conversations and brought them back to the studio. We listened to the recordings in the studio. After listening to the recordings, I asked the two performers to spend some time with the material and to embody the listening by using the speech pattern of both their grandmother’s and mother’s memories as an impulse to create an action. Here, I was curious to know how and when the body begins her process of becoming, whether it was possible for the embodied memory to be evoked, and if it was, what the possible action-images were. What would this journeying of identity be? By asking the performers to engage in an embodied listening, I was able to investigate the existences of the multiplicities of selves. Here, the performers were becoming both the object and the subject as there was an interplaying of constant remembering. This state of constant remembering became a site of re-action. Through this site of re-

action, there was a cross-cultural journey of identities and cross references of the embodied listening of the memories of both performers' mothers and grandmothers.

Chanel Chan (Performer B) reflects on 18th March 2016 (time code: 41:24 – 44:02):

I needed more time to kind of find her, and then you gave instructions, but I couldn't hear you and I wasn't sure if you were talking to me, and then in that confusion, I was just kind of something just pushed me into my mother. Like while doing all those actions trying to find her, it was hard to find her, but when during the confusion, I was – at that moment I was like, are you going to repeat yourself, what is the next impulse, what is the next instruction going to be. And then suddenly it just, it like, something just came out. And in the talking about my mother, I don't know why, Chanel has a lot of guilt in the mother's voice. My tears kept coming out because I felt, I felt really guilty and a bit dirty saying her words, because it made me realise how unappreciative I am to her, when I'm saying her life, and I just cannot shake off that feeling of this, I should have been better, I should have been a better daughter, and all that, while I'm saying her words. And when it comes to the talking about my siblings part, it was the first time I made that connection about my brother's name, and I knew that he was about to be aborted, and I knew that she had a dream about the goddess, and I knew his name was Tiansheng, but now, it's the first time I've made that connection, "Oh! That's why his name is Sky Born, because he – the gods literally gave him a life."

Part A: Process – Fifth Section; 5. How does the body articulate a new possibility, a re-writing of history and the contemporary? (video time code: 44:03 – 45:42)

From here, the two performers begin to construct images and slowly break away from societal expectations. Using their action-images, I begin to flip the lens around to create a narrative that is situated in a contemporary post-colonial body – a narrative that is reflective. This becomes a medium of personal exploration, of understanding and insight into a state of being that calls for a sense of sharing, a kind of communication where we mark the special moments of life and we move from

moment to moment until the final moment. It is from here, I argue, that the contemporary post-colonial female body begins to speak.

As argued in chapter one, the central focus of my methodology emphasises the body as both the “active-subject” and “questioning subject”, through forms of articulation, representation and aesthetics. Therefore, through my practice in the studio, the reader will be able to witness an embodied process of research as the two performers’ bodies are placed at the forefront. The findings in the studio align with my methodology of soft fireworks, which has extended from Merleau-Ponty’s theory of *Phenomenology* into Richard Shusterman’s *Somaesthetics*, layered with post-colonial feminist theories/practices, performance theories/practices and embodied arts practices into a process of decoloniality. The process of decoloniality in the two performers’ bodies addresses the unravelling of their colonial past and the necessity to acknowledge that within their embodiment is the multiplicities of cultures needing to be re-claimed and re-owned.

Soft fireworks is an amalgamation of my three influences and is a further articulation that the body is the site of knowledge and experience as it houses the ethos and values through which our skills of perception and performance can be honed. This propels Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the “phenomenology of perception constitutes the tacit cogito, the silent cogito and the unspoken cogito” (as cited in Shusterman, 2008, p. 49). Through the body’s silent soma reflective, such as explicit kinaesthetic or proprioceptive feelings, we can create an awareness of our experiential encounters. Silent soma reflection is derived from Shusterman’s theory of somaesthetics that argues that because the body is a living (soma) being and that it

is through the materiality of our bodies that we are able to sense, feel and act in the world and at the same time “creative fashioning” the self. Therefore, how we experience our bodies and present our bodies is from the explicit kinaesthetic or the proprioceptive feelings and that is also how our bodies are both subject and object (Shusterman, 2012, p. 3, 27). These silent soma reflections were essential as the two performers engaged in a contemplative reflection on how their bodies engaged and responded. It was in this silence that they were able to articulate their narratives. Through the silence both performers are aware of the embodied construction of their narratives. It is also, through the silence that an awareness of the socialised body influences the performing body in the studio.

*Chanel Chan (Performer B) reflects on 2nd April 2016 (time code: 44:09 - 45:40):
When I was first given this task, this task being to move and to find a personal story about myself, in mind I was thinking, “where do I start?” I mean, I have a lot of things to say, at the same time, I don’t have anything to say. So, I think Elizabeth saw that and said “all of you are going into your head, you are overthinking, just do, just go.” So I just started and I just, I found myself a comfortable spot on the floor and I just kind of waited. Waited for something to come. It took a while before I actually had something, but once that started, everything started to flow. I didn’t even have to move that within 5 movements, I got a new memory and another new memory and I started to write them down. When you said something is nothing, I was trying very hard to kind of stay genuine to my memories.*

Vanessa Toh (Performer A) reflects (19th April 2016) in her journal:

Chanel and I had to try to recall our sequences through body and muscle memory. We were supposed to through our own narrative (grandma) and develop and allow it to evolve. I felt like I totally went off tangent with my narrative today. It started with my grandmother. Suddenly my body went through what seemed like the body of my popo¹⁸. Quite unexpectedly there was a point where the hands and fingers started to move voluntarily by themselves ... I explored that a little. I just allowed my body to tremor how it wanted. But then, I tried to stop it and I

¹⁸ Popo – means grandmother in Cantonese dialect

couldn't and it made feel almost helpless like how my popo actually feels.

Stage 5: Creating a cross-cultural *mise-en-scene* of re-telling and a for-telling through the use of personal narratives, sound and multi-media.

Part B: Rehearsals (video time code: 45:43 – 47:46):

Here, the multi-media and sound were created in conjunction with the two performers – with most of the images coming from the performers and the sounds coming mainly from interviews gathered from the performers.

Stage five is the start of a cross-cultural *mise-en-scene* collaboration. At this stage, the two performers would have created a series of personal narratives. It was also a point of reflection for me. As I put the narratives together for the performance of *Landscaping a Personal Myth*, I argued that we are culturally embodied, and this embodiment allows us to be aware of who we are culturally. As we become more culturally aware, we will notice that there are culturally inscribed gestures that the contemporary body has forgotten. Through the reflections of the two performers, we note that there is a history that is exposed through the body, and this exposure acts as a negotiation between the creation of inner dialogues and what is articulated in the space.

I am also conscious that within the creative process there are three levels of interaction: the physical, the emotional and creative. The three levels are the varied levels of humanity which is the essence of life, that needs to flow onwards and be expressed in terms of time and space. These levels allow the two performers to

engage with their histories and reveal their distant past. By giving the two performers specific tasks and asking them to tell specific human stories of their cultural and emotional landscape, they slowly begin to feel this space emerging within them. This emerging space is the articulation of bodycultures that are emphasised and built up through sensory responses of perception and receiving in the body. Within the two performers' post-colonial Singapore Peranakan Chinese bodies are multiple cultural lineages, so what do the two performers take away as their own? Because, in truth what is their own is the intersection of multiplicities of cultural existence articulated through their body. And as argued, bodycultures moves away from the search of one's "source culture" but, instead proposes an unravelling of the two performers' her(his)story. Bodycultures recognises that their bodies are an embodiment of the post-colonial past and a site through which they encompass the multiplicities of cultures.

The embodiment of the multiplicities of cultures highlights an engagement of embodied memory practices to create cross-cultural performances that shake the fixity of the post-colonial gaze, refuting the binary of east and west, to enact and embody the plurality of Singapore's shifting identities and aesthetics. This embodiment is the emerging of bodycultures; certain cultural information is carried within an individual, and this information is internal as it is really the performers' individual memories and responses to my tasks and/or questions. These responses are a schema to the performance space, as both space and time are structured for the presentation of the two narratives.

Part C of the video documents the performance (time code: 47:47 – 1:13.59)

This is the performance within a cross-cultural site. The performance can be described as a site that is defined by the close proximity of relations. It articulates a sense of circulatory networks or linkages of elements put together, to create the multiplicities of voices to be heard, and to call forth the peripheral to speak.

In the performance, the series of narratives are strung together only when the sound designer creates two distinct soundscapes for the two narratives and uses the recordings as another layer to the soundscape. This allows a kind of crossing over of voices and signifies the fluidity of existences of selves within the body. At the same time, it acknowledges that the body provides a route for the embodied cultural memory as each memory takes its shape through the body. The multi-media is created in conjunction with the two performers – with all the images coming from the performers. At this stage, I am more aware that my role is to gather these personal narratives through reflexive devising strategies of working with images that were triggers from the performers' memories through the body.

Throughout the process, there are inter-connections between the two performers themselves and between the two performers and me. These inter-connections create a sense of intimacy, the intimacy of feeling of participation expressed in the time shared and in the studio. This feeling of intimacy suggests that the female embodiment and inclusion can be more a part of the Singapore experimental theatre landscape.

To this point, I have articulated that within the contemporary post-colonial Singapore body sits the multiplicities of culture. Some of these cultures have been silenced through the process of colonisation and Singapore's racialised frameworks. The excavation of these cultures is to decolonise and reclaim the body. My process of excavation is articulated in the way of working in the studio. In the next section, I am arguing that an alternative mode of representation is needed where multiple narratives are presented in the realm of contemporary performance making within a glocal Singapore context.

Conclusion

In the duet, *Landscaping a Personal Myth*, the two performers reflect back on their personal history – the retelling of stories from their past through their mother and grandmother, the for-telling of their present and future. The process articulates the strategies used in creating a cross-cultural collaborative *mise-en-scene*, foregrounding the process of inquiry and raising issues of the placements of the multiplicities of voices. The performance emphasises the juxtaposition of two simultaneous narratives and questions this sense of belonging of a transient society and demonstrates a complex pattern of circulation and affiliation in space, encouraging a rethinking of binary approaches. It experiments with alternate forms of argumentation – using stories, juxtaposition, metaphors articulating a personal discovery for one doing. Through the process of creating the duet, there is a reproduction of the embodied memory and a new possibility is articulated, a re-writing of history and the contemporary. I would argue that it calls for a new way of reading as the revealing provokes questions, not to settle them - to move away from

the generalised equivalent “woman” who inhabits (Spivak, 2014, p. 46), to map new ways of thinking rather than to set new boundaries of thought because, as Spivak argues, “we are always moving” (2014, p. 38).

This reproduction of the embodied memory in a sense does destabilise the state of ongoing formation, deformation, and reformation, acknowledging the changing needs of the moment as the two performers reflect on how their memories are evoked and what is being said as these evocations emerge out of the spatial/temporal context of their production. They serve different needs, interests, change dramatically over time and through space. Revealing that the centre from which my practice is situated is not western or singular but rather it is scattered, interactive, multiple and that the embodiment of memories exists outside these boundaries in the specificity of their own time and place (Freidman, 2015).

The reproduction of embodied memory is also a paradox of the familiar and the unfamiliar – the position of the observing gaze, of the body, the human, the subject of perception. In other words, it is the very experience of familiar and unfamiliar – the strangeness of one’s own origins. This strangeness of one’s own origins confronts the “mythical portrait” of the individual. This sense of confrontation breaks the mirror of representation(s). However, the breaking away is (at first) a difficulty as seen in an interview with Chan (Performer B). Chan shared that it was a very difficult process for her and she wanted to reject what was being evoked, that this reproduction of her embodied cultural memory became a struggle and put her in a very vulnerable state.

I am drawn to this vulnerable state as it reveals an act of resistance and it is at this moment where the body is in transition of being in a site of action or non-action. Curiously this act of resistance is a rewriting of the self and wherever necessary becomes a state of awareness of knowing what the body is repressing and the attempts to break the very containment of the position of the observing gaze.

In conclusion, I am acknowledging that the body is a keeper of memory and that through the methodology of soft fireworks, I was able to create a space for other narratives to be included within a performance setting. This space recognises that there are many multiplicities of cultures existing within the individual. To exist within this space, a more introspective exploration of bodycultures was necessary. This looking inwards articulated a female embodiment, as the two female performers discovered the imprints of an ancestral history of lived experiences.

The performance demonstrates how the body begins to shift and break down the multiplicities of cultures within when we excavate the memory, and in so doing, argues that the existence of female ancestral imprints is the pathway of decolonising our imagination, lifting us out from the entombment of existence as mentioned in chapter one. I will now look at how my marginalised performing body can exist within the glocal Singapore context.

Chapter three:

The Decolonised Body with/in a Cross-Cultural Performance Site

Introduction

This chapter is a further extension of my research of how my embodied practice is contributing towards a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice. However, this chapter focuses on how my other/ed body is acculturated through my performative body. The chapter argues that embodiment as a practice and research in performing arts can shift the perspectives of cross-culturalism, and discusses how bodycultures influences cultural-gazing. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) argues that “by emphasising the bodily being-in-the-world of humans, embodiment creates the possibility for the body to function as the object, subject, material and source of symbolic construction as well as the product of cultural inscription” (p. 89). This argument is the basis of why the creation of the solo performative meditation *Landscapes of Memories* illuminates slowness, non-action, stillness and silence.

My proposition of the illumination of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence through the performance on the stage, is a decolonisation process and strategy affecting both the performance and audience space. Gilbert and Tompkins (2002) argue that “other modes of communication [such as silence] can destabilise the political position and [decentre] a dominant transmitter of meaning” (p. 12). This is because “silence can be more active than passive especially on stage where [silence] still speaks the languages of the body and of space” (Gilbert & Tompkins, p. 190).

In the final creation of my solo performative meditation, slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, I propose that the whole performance environment is a larger decolonising process. My argument here is that in the slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, I am asking the audience to “please look at me, see me for who I am and recognise me for who I am.” I am also asking the audience “how are you looking at me, how is your socio-cultural body looking at me? Will you be able to enter into this space with me and are you able to separate my socio-cultural body from my performing body?” Perhaps this will chart a way forward by expanding already existing performance practices, but most importantly, I am asking as a Singaporean Eurasian performance maker that my audience share in my work, and that we can exist together rather than me attempt to show them “what I can do” and perform my culture. I am creating my own subjectivity and recuperating my post-colonial body. Gilbert and Tompkins (2002) argue that “the post-colonial subject is often pre-occupied with refusing colonially determined labels and definitions” (p. 205). Spivak reiterates that it is not so much “who is a woman”? Through my performance strategies I am asking “what does it mean to claim my own space? To have my own voice?” Most importantly, it is through my lived experiences expressed through my body that I am recuperating my post-colonial body. And through recuperation, I claim my space. Through my body, I posit a decolonising effect of my encounters, which in turn propels an embodied technique. It is my post-colonial body imprinted with layers of cultural intersections, interwoven within a body of mixed race that becomes new material(s) that now writes the performing space.

This performance of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence can be traced back predominantly to western postmodern dance in the 60’s to 70’s, first presented at the

Judson Church in New York. The dance that was presented at Judson Church was classified as “presenting a new alternative tradition at Judson Church” (Macaulay, 2019). Dancers that were part of the Judson Church included Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Lucinda Childs, and Deborah Hay. Rainer’s philosophy can be seen in her “No” manifesto¹⁹, which she wrote in 1965. The act of creating a performance that involves slowness, non-action, stillness and silence served as an action against spectacle, virtuosity and much more. This much more, in Rainer’s “No” manifesto, is for me the beginning of decolonising the performing environment so that we (both performer and audience) can exist in a shared space.

It is now important for me to remind the reader that as I acknowledge a history of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence in western post-modern dance performance, my intention for having a performance such as this is to work towards breaking the fixity of the post-colonial cultural gaze. That, as a Singaporean Eurasian female, I am unlike any other Asian and that within me are many intersections of cultural ancestry so I am asking that my audience really see both my socio-cultural and performing body on stage – to ask how are they viewing my body – my body is placed at the centre and no more on the margins – my performing body takes over my socio-cultural body on stage and directs the cultural gaze to where I, the post-colonial other/ed body is being presented to you, my audience. I am asking the audience to be aware of the modes of representation; with my body present on stage, maybe there is no need to do anything else but to be “still” standing, and allow the silence to “speak”.

¹⁹ The text of Rainer’s “No” manifesto can be found here: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/yvonne-rainer-trio-a-1978/.

In the process of creating *Landscapes of Memories*, I had to work more with an inward gaze. And, through this inward gaze, I became even more aware of what was affecting my socio-cultural body. The emotional condition that I had found my socio-cultural body in, was also affecting my signifying body; as mentioned in chapter two, the composition of the body is a signifying object. I will share my research outcomes in the following sections; however, it is important for me to highlight that while I was working in the studio, I wanted my audience to meet me and to enter into my internal space so that we can critically reflect on the modes of representation. In my studio findings and in the video that accompanies this chapter, I reflected that the more silent I became in the process, the more I could “say”. This was an important reflection, as I had mentioned in chapter one, censorship laws are prevalent in Singapore. As a Singaporean performance maker, I am constantly aware of these laws and I am constantly negotiating how to present my work around the system in Singapore and asking how do I truly express myself? How do I create and present works in a glocal Singapore context? How do I create a philosophy of experimentation, where two persons or more can exist in a space? Rather than speaking directly, I need to create an indirect approach so that I will not be directly infringing any censorship laws. At the same time, I am asking whether there is space for other/ed narratives. The reader will also notice that my socio-cultural body was affected by my emotional environment and refused to move in the video. So I used silence and found that the phenomena of experience constitutes the tacit, silent and unspoken consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2001), as argued in chapter one. I also recall Shusterman’s (2008) argument that it is in our silence that we are able to sense, feel and act. Therefore in my performance of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, my body will be experienced by the audience through meeting me. As

the audience meets me in the performing environment, we will experience each other through our silent soma reflections.

Therefore, I argue, that as we chart towards a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice, the environment in which the performing body finds herself must also be decolonised and then, only then, we can exist on what Spivak (2005) calls a level playing field for experimentation to happen with openness, in a shared space that recognises the silent body. Because in a decolonised performing environment, bodycultures exist and we meet each other at the intersections; we do not criss-cross each other but simply exist in a shared space.

In my performance of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, the performance stage was decolonised. Decolonising thus happens on more than one level (looking inwards), but because it affects the shared space of both the performance and audience space, cross-references are made, so an inward and then an outward reaction transpires. The slowness, non-action, stillness and silence added layers to my embodied methodology of soft fireworks and through my solo performance, because “decolonisation involves not just verbal/textual counter-discourse but a reviewing of the body and its signifying practices” (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p 204). I argue that these layers contribute to the debate on a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice within the theatre and performance.

Landscapes of Memories was performed on May 25th 2018 in Singapore and in Lugano, Switzerland on August 25th 2018. The decision to create this particular solo performative meditation of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence might seem

contradictory because the intention of this solo performance was performativity of my ethnicity as a Eurasian in post-colonial Singapore, acknowledging the particular embodied characteristics of my ethnicity. However, as I have argued, it was necessary to break the conventional fixation of a system of classification of self/other and to move towards an ideology of uncovering what cross-cultural practices can unmask and bring forward, as within the body are shifts and processes of identities. These shifts and processes are multiplicities of existences and layers of cultural intersections that are emphasised and built up through sensory responses of perception and receiving in the body in spaces of encounters. Ultimately, it is also the intent to disrupt any fixation of what the centre is, and expand a space for self/other/ness, so that the centre becomes about a (re)making of the self and any culture, a shifting of perspectives of any meaning implicated. This expansion must recognise the subliminal existence of the limitation of the confined space and its existence, manifested through recognition and inhabitation. Moreover, this deliberate slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, allows the performing body to inhabit and intervene in the space, as the performance questions the confinement of the space and the role of one's practices and choices.

The choices made in the performance were deliberate as I, the performer and the researcher, became the subject of the process of decolonisation. In so doing, I chose not to be the object but a subject that destabilises the objectification of a self. The destabilisation process was an embodied process at its most reflective manner. Moreover, I, the researcher held up a mirror to what was on stage and what the audience saw/experienced. Thus, in returning and interrogating cultural-gazing, the performance raised questions about the modes of cultural inscription on a self. The

performance highlighted that it was necessary to resist any mode of representation and of cultural inscription, to ask why is there even an inscription and why we were so quick to accept the inscription on the self.

I am introducing the term *cultural gazing* as an argument that other/ed bodies are the subject of cultural inscription, a source of symbolic construction of a colonial history. I therefore acknowledge the existence of a cultural dynamic of a post-colonial body that is embedded in performance and theatrical representation of the self. It is not so much a microscopic view on the male gaze but an extension into a cultural gaze, asking my audience to be part of the performance through an unravelling done in slowness, non-action, stillness and silence. I disrupt the commodity of performance, creating a space that asks the audience to engage in an exchange of attentiveness rather than showing of meaning to the audience. At the same time, as a female subject, I am also proposing to shift the perception and reception of the cultural gaze inwards and ask how is culture and the other/ed female socio-cultural perceived, received and performed on stage.

Through the performance and the theatrical representation of my socio-cultural body, I am arguing that like Fischer-Lichte (2014) that “performances in general take on a paradigmatic role in society. . .both between the performers and between the performers and spectators. Performances may reflect, condemn, or negate the surrounding social conditions and/or future ones” (p. 13). Cultural gazing is therefore an embodied tool for the performance to become self-reflexive for both the performer and the audience. As the performance frames this mirror to be held up against the reflection of the performing self and the audience, I am both a subject

and object, re-directing the post-colonial cultural gaze that engages in an exchange of attentiveness rather than looking. This self-reflexive cultural gaze is anti-conclusive, and questions illocutionary and perlocutionary implications of how a shared experience is created and shared, extending the boundaries of how social, cultural and personal identity are involved within this performance. I had written in my introduction that post-colonial theories ask us to take note of this (inexhaustible) different experience of the world and to include the other/ed post-colonial body perception in dominant western-centric framed discourses and to decentralise the discourse. So my research proposes the inclusion of bodycultures as an extension to the debate of the post-colonial and decolonial discourse. Though phenomenological theories argue that it is through our bodies we experience the world and perceive the world, I am asking who these bodies are, whose bodies, and where are these bodies located? More importantly, does this include an other/ed post-colonial body's perception of the world? I am arguing that as an other/ed body, we perceive the world differently and tend to be placed at the margins. If in my performance through slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, I was resistant to perform my ethnicity but instead presented myself as a female other/ed body on stage with her(his)story, I was also asking how should a Singapore female other/ed body be performed? And, how is she received and perceived? My inclusion of these new layers in my methodology proposes to look at how other/ed bodies are performed on stage and to acknowledge that the metaphysics of presence can be more profoundly felt when the performing body is in slowness, non-action, stillness and in silence.

Therefore, to reframe the mode of representation on a culturally inscribed body such as my female Singapore Eurasian body, is to acknowledge the existence of a western

hegemony of bodycultures; the necessity to decentralise and include other/ed bodycultures. To work towards a process of decolonisation is to disrupt western hegemony of bodycultures and shift the margins. When we shift the margins, we are erasing boundaries; we are beginning the process of decolonialising the imagination and reconstructing how all bodies are received. Thus, my practice argues for the right to express the bodycultures through performance. I am arguing that it is necessary to question the illocutionary and perlocutionary implications of a shared experienced because bodycultures are constantly shifting. My other/ed body has been acculturated and we need to be aware of where we direct our cultural gaze.

During the creation process, as I, the performer began to strip the layers of performative training methods, a new space was created where the body recognised the need for a new way of knowing herself. The body re-recognised herself, and as the body was placed at the centre of the work and was the primary decision maker, she resisted any performance virtuosity and became a slow unveiling of a post-colonial body that existed beyond cultural forms. This act of re-recognising the body and resisting the commodity of performance virtuosity reinforced the idea that decolonisation is more than an internal process and that an awareness of shifting bodycultures proposed the need for my performing body to be in slowness, non-action, stillness and silence in performance. Through this iteration, I am presenting the self with a history, and it was a self that has come through with all its her(his)storicity, through my performing body. At the end of the day, both my socio-cultural and performing body interwove and intertwined and was “still” standing and presenting herself. The process granted self-ownership of time and space to speak with another and to go beyond who this self was to who the self was becoming.

Through this sense of disruption via the performance, the process of decolonisation was happening within the body and the environment. Through this disruption we could clearly see my body. Unveiled everything that the body is revealed – there is no hiding behind anything. The slowness, non-action, stillness and silence called further attention to my female post-colonial body that was on stage and a subliminal subversion of the cultural gaze – because I was presenting my performing body as both subject and object. This was a resistance to any kind of universality and insisted on the authenticity of the female post-colonial body and the active (re)making of this new cross-cultural performance space that shook the fixity of the post-colonial gaze, refuting the binary of east and west, to enact and embody the plurality of my Singaporean Eurasian shifting identity and aesthetics within the solo performative meditation of *Landscapes of Memories*.

As I have argued in chapter one, my Singaporean Eurasian body is an intersection of multiplicities of cultural identities located within the body and therefore it is through the body that we are able to expand on the term cross-culturalism. Pushing forward my embodied methodology of soft fireworks as a system of training and performance making allows for a female space of knowledge sharing and bodycultures. As argued, bodycultures are the intersections of the multiplicities of cultures and they are constantly interweaving and intertwining. Through my body and with/in my body, “these multiplicities of cultures recognises itself and that there is no one homogeneous culture because these cultures are difficult to disentangle from each other” (Fischer-Lichte, 2014, p. 11).

Thus, cultural gazing breaks the binary of understanding the process “that occurs in contemporary productions of combining elements from different cultures and that interculturalism implies a sharp division between ‘our’ and other cultures” (Fischer-Lichte, 2014, p. 7). This sharp division is also articulated in my other/ed body within Singapore’s racialised system. My body articulates a state of existence/being that negotiates towards a new space. A new cross-cultural space is created as my embodied practice encompasses the everyday experience of living and the unravelling of embodied memories that become new narratives. The unravelling allows me to reclaim and (re)own my bodycultures and chart towards a decolonised contemporary cross-cultural performance practice that is glocal.

Of non-action

As in most performance training, the body is the site of knowledge, and it is the body that produces the training. Whether the body fully imitates or interprets the training, there is a display and movement. However, here, in the solo performance, there was much non-action; one could even say the lack of the sense of virtuosity of any display of the training. But yet, I am arguing that the desired outcome of having virtuosity in a performance is a mode of representation. And, that the body does embody the training in the slowness and non-action that allows silence to enter through this metaphysics of being ‘present’ manifested through dynamic stillness. Perhaps non-action is itself an action in the body to disrupt, destabilise and decolonise and asks for my audience to meet me at the margins so that we can move to the centre together.

This non-action is an action because, within the body, there is a sense of slowing down and stillness. This sense of stillness adds another layer of the disruption of time because the body is now moving at a pace where there is no visible virtuosity but this kind of passivity.²⁰ This sense of passivity seems to be the core of the phenomenon of quietude (Boyd, 2006), and though varied, a sense of a stripping away and reduction is evident. The shift from this place of non-action to stillness is to recognise this zone of slowness emerging: before the body moves and after. Before the body moves, the body is in its entirety and finds herself in a state of modesty but a small gesture happens as the body moves towards stillness. Here, the body in its entirety, moves inwards for authenticity.

The argument for stillness and authenticity is a significant contribution of research to my embodied methodology of soft fireworks and the uncharted geography of memory towards decolonisation because as the body moves slowly towards this sense of stillness, the modality of a universal rhythm of how each body should move is broken. In a performance, there is this sense of a prescribed tempo-rhythm. This notion of a prescribed tempo-rhythm creates another insight to the research, and that is time, or its tempo-rhythm, which can also be an agency of colonialisation because there is a universal concept of understanding on how time needs to flow. As such, I make a distinctive choice by slowing down and incorporating a sense of non-action in my performance.

This sense of non-action must not be seen as a block, and is not a fascination of

²⁰ Instead of trying to aggressively transmit, passivity exercises a spirit of self-reliance (Boyd, 2006).

being in a state of stillness, but importantly, an active choice to exist with what Zeami calls the “deepest self, which is a metaphysical reality identical for all things ... [it is] the moments of non-action, as well as those before and after, are all rooted in the same deep reality, the *kokoro* (spirit) of all things which provides the profound continuity to the apparent non-continuity of action” (Nagatomo, 1981, p. 69). This “profound continuity” of non-action is an active choice of listening to the body and a conscious decision to create the performance of such nature because then the performing body will unravel itself. The unravelling, as argued by Fischer-Lichte (2014), “probes the emergence, stabilisation and destabilisation of the intersections of cultural identities into an emergence of an embodied transformative aesthetics” (p. 12). As the performing body begins to recognise herself, I am standing at the centre, and I am refusing to be marginalised, and so question how the cultural gaze is framed.

Of slowness

Drawing on the parallelism of Milan Kundera’s (1996) writing on the secret relationship between “slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting”, then what we remember is “directly proportional to the degree of slowness and the intensity of memory: the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting” (p. 33). This articulates my cross-cultural practices. Using a cross-cultural performance methodology of soft fireworks, philosophy of slowness, post-colonial, feminist and contemporary performance making strategies, I explain why a delay was necessary and how these systems have important implications for our understanding of the formation of my cultural identity and practice.

It is crucial that the performance further argues for slowness and stillness; the performance is not about a kind of romanticism of looking backwards, but emphasises the historical nature of knowledge and memory. The argument for slowness is forward-looking: proposing an engagement with the future as much as with the past. Slowness is in itself a temporal notion, and in many ways the opposite of the notion “static.” It is an unreflective fastness that always returns you to the same place.

About the Underscore of Slowness, non-action, Stillness and Silence

This underscore of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence helped to highlight who I am. I am a female minority but yet, in this underscore, I have put myself in the centre, and I am asking my audience to come, slow down and experience with me an unravelling of and the creation of a new centre/space. At the same time, I ask them whether there is a true centre – how did they decide that any centre exists, where did this decision come from and who is making this decision? I also ask them where and to whom they are directing their cultural gaze.

The underscoring is a negotiation between the performer and the audience, as it implies that a constant negotiation happens in any process of decolonisation. So, the underscore suggests a kind of passivity of the performing body and the reading of who she is – and what she is – to break this kind of expectation or/and perhaps ask what is the audience’s expectation. Alternatively, it might also make the audience question what are these expectations and where do they come from – what are the audience’s expectations when they decide to watch this solo performance? Do they

expect to watch a performance that will provide a conclusive context of my cultural identity and form?

Moreover, my choice of using an underscore of both non-action and slowness becomes a performance of an indirect rebellion and a subversion of the cultural gaze. It creates the opportunity to bring my audience into my inner landscape rather than manipulating meaning and reading to the audience. With this underscoring, I am making space for a spirit of self-reliance that completes attention and focus for the audience to also enter into a state of self-reflection. These underscores are a fundamental argument as the performance returns the cultural gaze to the audience and seeks to make the change on how we look at things. The performance encourages the audience to be more actively engaged, to actively think about rather than passively consuming the performance. It is a creation of a shared cross-cultural space through which the everyday experience of living and the unravelling of embodied memories become new narratives. The apparent tension between the slowness and stillness of my other/ed body is in contrast with the performing space that becomes a cross-cultural site, filled with the theatricalising of the unravelling of my embodied cultural memories. Without my performing body doing anything more than being-in-the-space, the space works its way through the unravelling and in doing so summons my embodied cultural memories to be experienced by the audience.

Through the practice and exploration in the studio, I was able to make this unexpected discovery on the disruption of time. The disruption of time happens when we slow down because we are allowing time to move us. Slowness and

stillness are not static notions but active reflections. As I am looking inwards to reclaim the body, I am proposing that once a body is reclaimed, it is once again able to move forward, and the phenomenological experience of stillness resembles the present. As it is in the present that we can make known to ourselves what is the past and then perhaps through that make the future knowable through the re-assembling of the present. In this way, through the excavation of my memory, I can extend the present into the future, and this process is also an interaction with the everyday. This interaction forms embodied networks of interweaving my cultural identities. This network forms the embodied memory; the process of remembering is slow. The quality of remembering equates to the speed at how we move, and as such a more reflective being is excavated, and a richer, deeper, better-integrated memory opens up.

Of the performance

The questions to ask now would be whether the performance was able to articulate that in my process of remembering, I was able to reclaim my decolonised body, and what are the new frameworks proposed. Before I can answer them, it is essential for me to state that the emotional environment that I had found myself in did affect some of the memories evoked. The environment in which I had found myself, or the emotional landscape, required that I filter myself. The vulnerable state of my interiority impacted the route of my remembering. This state of vulnerability created a pathway of unknown space and unknown self and as such the dynamics of remembering were affected.

This pathway of unknown space and unknown self, required that I made some clear distinctions between the space that I, the embodied researcher, was in and that space that I, the performing body, needed to reclaim my body. This distinction is a realisation that a body could have an implication on the process of remembering and that she just cannot reflect, or act on, everything that is going on in the space at any given moment. If that were the case, the body would always be merely a reflection of her environment and would have no identity of her own. In order for the body to be reclaimed, the body must have her own identity, that can react to the space and not merely mirror the space. The body can resist the space she finds herself in, and the process has been about slowing down or in the notions of delay.

The body within a space can choose how she wants to respond, and for how she chooses, she does not affect the environment unless the significance of how the body is responding is established in time “as it is re-enacted in the space and carried over into the future” (Cilliers, 2006, p. 3). In this way, as my performance reveals my process of remembering, a series of lived experiences is being established but never complete. And as I move within each lived experience, I am establishing what is to come and as such slowing down time. When done in slowness, I am resisting and providing more time for remembering, and resisting the velocity that is associated with forgetfulness. The audience is thus made to hold on to what is being revealed, and as the performance takes shape, there is a temporal space for the past to play itself out with the present and reflect on a possible future. Creating time for reflection and the slower the tempo, the more productive and more reflective we

become. Moreover, as everything is moving slowly, my memory is objectified as I reclaim my body and decolonise both the body and the performance space.

Of the process and of the practice

In this section, I will provide the reader an insight into the process of how the final performance was created by articulating the strategies and performance techniques used. I will highlight the steps towards the final decision for engaging in the technique of slowness and non-action as the crux of the performance vocabulary for the solo performative meditation *Landscape of Memories* as the final phase of my practice research.

For the sake of clarity in reading this next section, I have engaged in a practitioner narrative that have two modes of writing. I will also, at various points of my writing, guide the reader to a specific time code of the accompanying video of my final phase of embodied research. The intersection between reading and viewing the video is my way of bringing the reader into the studio as I formulate and extend my methodology through an embodied process working through and with/in my body into my solo performative meditation of *Landscapes of Memories*.

The two modes of writing are:

- 1) A notebook of process²¹ in the studio with a more self-reflective embodied

²¹ This notebook of process extends from feminist theorist Hélène Cixous's "writing said to be feminine and that by writing herself, woman will return to the body and an act marked by woman to seize the occasion to speak...to become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system" (Cixous, 1981 p. 250).

mode of writing that reveals my authentic voice and charts a map of how my theoretical frameworks were developed in the studio with the endless beginnings, discoveries, unforeseeable contradictions and confusions.

- 2) A parallel mode of writing so as to provide a distance between the two roles that I have embodied; the performer/practitioner and the researcher. I write on how I have engaged in the frameworks of embodiment through contemporary Asian performance techniques, post-coloniality and feminist theories to support my argument that the methodology of divestiture²², especially that of slowness and non-action, is also needed to decolonise the body and the performance space. Adding the element of divestiture as an aesthetic choice, provided me with the performance vocabulary to break the mirror of cultural gazing, through the silence and stillness and the empty space that are specific techniques of quietude (Boyd, 2006).

However, before I dive into the section, it is essential to separate the two phases of my practice that formed the totality of my embodied research. The first phase was a duet performance *Landscaping a Personal Myth (LPM)*. *LPM* was an investigation on how our embodied cultural memories are excavated and expressed through my embodied methodology of soft fireworks and exploration with various performance strategies specific to my work as an independent performance maker. I have asked whether the strategies that I have developed and evolved can be applied to other

²² Divestiture is a core methodology in the theatre of quietude found mainly in traditional Japanese No theatre was one of the main aesthetics of Ōta Shago's (an avant-garde theatre maker and playwright in Japan). Specific techniques of quietude do differ but general do consist of silence, stillness and empty space (Boyd, 2006).

performing bodies as I engaged with two other performers of Peranakan Chinese descent. My process explored the five stages listed below to unpack a set of six questions so as to create multiplicity and allow other narratives to be heard in Singapore's experimental theatre landscape, all of which are elaborated in my previous chapter on the process and methodology of *LPM*.

Five Stages

1. Working through the practice of *kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool so as to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating a physical score.
2. Working with three specific objects that trigger a memory for the two performers. I asked for three objects from the two performers as I was keen to explore three possible routes of embodied cultural memory, the self (daughter), the self once removed (mother) and the self twice removed (grandmother).
3. A retelling of memory through the body using a series of personal photographs
4. Collection of conversations with the performers' family members as a way into the self once removed and twice removed.
5. Creating a cross-cultural *mise-en-scene* of re-telling and a for-telling through the use of personal narratives, sound and multi-media.

Questions

1. Who are you/we culturally?
2. What do you/we carry culturally?
3. What are you/our behavioural patterns, gestures? Are these gestures part of

your/our cultural narrative?

4. What is the history of your/our body and the environment that your/our body is exposed to?
5. What is the negotiation of what seems to be happening internally and what you think is happening in the space?
6. What was this inner dialogue that it created – and what memories would surface?

In the second phase of my practice research through the creation and performance of the solo piece, I attempted a process of reclaiming a sense of authenticity and how I, as an embodied researcher, engaged with the process of an excavation of memory that defied this fixation of the post-colonial cultural gazing in order for a process of decentring to begin. The performance did not ask for a particular centre to exist but instead suggested for more shifts in cross-cultural perspectives. The performance also recognised the subliminal presence of a re-figuring of a post-colonial body and encouraged the audience to “see” differently, a need for a transformative performance space to hold my body and to re-envision the commodity of performance into a “spectacle” of non-action with an underscore of slowness.

I will now engage in the two modes of writing in the body of text so as to propel a more embodied readership and encouraged more interweaving textuality of how I, as an embodied practitioner, am also embodying the process of writing about my practice. In this way, to allow my voice/writing to come through and claim my own body as a site of both practice and writing, thus expanding on both feminist and post-colonial theories.

In order to achieve this, I will divide the voice/writings into two sections and I will indicate the two voices/writings, one as a stream of consciousness and the other presenting a reflective and critical distance as the embodied researcher. The voice in the stream of consciousness will be in italics while the other, in normal typescript. The next section is my analysis of my process and discoveries made in the studio that should be viewed through the accompanied video with specific time-code.

Video

The video is divided into three sections. The first section is the introduction (time code: 00:00 – 05:03), the second section is the rehearsal process (05:05– 22:14) and the third section is the performance (time-code: 22:15 – 1:01:31).

The first section of the video (time code: 00:00 – 05:03) asks once again how embodied memory(ies) reveal themselves and what is being revealed in the studio. I had to ask myself these questions again because my body was in a state of non-action and the process took an unexpected turn as I found that my body wanted to be in a particular emotional state of being of stillness and silence.

1. What is a creative space?
2. How do we exist in the creative space?
3. What do I want to happen in the creative space?
4. Do I even want anything to happen?
5. Can something happen?
6. And if something happens, how did it happen?
7. What is the something that had happened?

The second section of the video (05:04 – 22:14) documents my integration of applied art practices into my methodology with the ritualistic pre-performance preparation of attuning the body. There are four stages to this and they are:

- 1) Observing and experiencing (time code: 05:05 – 06:11)
- 2) Engaging in ‘sandplay’ using leaves (time code: 06:12 – 07:53)
- 3) Working with elemental objects (time code: 07:54 – 09:54)
- 4) Creating a harmonious moment (time code: 09:55 – 22:11)

When the body refuses to move (First section of video, time code: 00:00 – 05:03).

At the start of the process, I found it difficult for the body to move and because my body refuses to move, I felt a sense of betrayal, and this bodymind separation. The fact that my body is having difficulty to move and refuses to move caused an unpacking of the pre-rehearsal training methods that I had been subscribing to and methods used to evoke the embodied memory for any creative material.

I had to unpack my subscribed understanding that memory is evoked through physical ‘attunement’ that comes only when the body is vividly active. Because my stream of conscious thought and memory was caught in my body and became a prisoner chained/clinging on within. It was as if the memory was unable to take any shape or in any form thorough the body.

This process of finding myself in this state required me to slow down. In doing this, a different perspective to the research was discovered. I find myself in this state of quietude which requires distancing of the self and yet at the same time, providing the space in which I can restore an emotional atmosphere or ‘heart’ to the experience of understanding and indicating that is understanding is existentially situated (Heidegger 2010). This space provided a new observation of how the viscera can be slow and allow quietude to exist within the silencing and stillness.

This attributes to pre-performative training methods that I have engaged in through kalaripayattu in attuning the bodymind.

I decided to begin the practice by going through some sequence in kalaripayattu and after urging the body to complete the sequence, there was slightly more energy (Neuro Linguistic Programming²³ – change of state of being) and as the body is energised, the mind began to listen actively to a kind of internal dialogue

I began to listen and became more aware of what I was saying to myself and how am I talking with myself and what am I talking about?

Figures 6 and 7 are images from the studio engaging in a *kalaripayattu* as a pre-preparatory tool so as to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating a physical score



Figure 6. simhavadi (lion)

²³ Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a process of learning the language of your mind and is a methodology that was developed by communicators and therapists that will bring about changes in perception, responsible communication and developing choices of responses and communication.



Figure 7. gajavadivu (elephant)

As I begin to strip away the many layers of my expectations and embracing the state that my body is in, I proceeded to work on the metaphor of pre-destination. Pre-destination is a paradox of how an individual is caught in a loop of events that “predestines or predates himself/herself to travel back in time”. This loop of events were pre-determined by my grief and I had also found that I did not want to move but to remain still so that I can hold on to the memories of my mother. This started with the awareness of what was happening in my body both physically and emotionally.

I decided that I will work with some applied arts therapeutic practices and combine this with the ritualistic pre-performance preparation of attuning the body in an attempt to established a sense of unitive-ness. This unitive-ness is the heightened awareness of the breath, the self and the body. This was expressed and shared in chapter two on my findings in the studio. I decided to work with the notion of how breath can perhaps change my understanding.

This “breathing in” according to archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1989) is a response to an image presented, breathing in, stops us, bring us to a standstill. The flow of time is invaded by the timeless and describes a moment of stand-still.

With that deeper inhalation, I began an even more profound realisation that my body has aged and that the velocity of movement seems slightly limiting to what I am expecting – but then there was an even more profound sense of stillness that was within.

As an embodied researcher/practitioner, I had to make some new adjustments as I reflected and asked: Why does my body refuse to move and what was this

resistance? Is my mood²⁴ affecting my understanding of what is happening in the studio? I found my body to be in this state of rebellion, a refusal to enact the years of various prescribed actor-training. As such, these questions were raised: how do I bring my research forward, when there is a refusal to move? How do I reclaim my own body as site of practice? This refusal to move is a non-action. So how do I begin this process of decolonisation; can I recognise this process or how am I embodying this process of decolonisation? What will it mean to my practice, when I begin a process of stripping away the layers of practice inscribed in my body?

While asking these questions and with my body in a state of rebellion, I sensed a kind of destabilisation as there was a refusal to produce/ parade a training methodology, a refusal to perform. In refusing to move, I was destabilising my practice through this refusal to produce the training, to parade a training methodology. The refusal created this sense of stand(ing)-still. This process of stand(ing)-still caused me to interrogate my practice and to return this interrogating cultural gaze of who I am, as an embodied practitioner, what my practice is and whether it can chart towards a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice through my body.

²⁴ According to Heidegger, mood is intimate to understanding and, in our humanness, we are able to evaluate things because we have feelings and purpose. Mood also establishes a “distance” from an object/perception, when one is in a certain mood, the self is pre-objective and hence is unable to establish a “distance” from a given state, understanding distance here as an inability to objectify oneself from a given state (Nagatomo, 1992).

The four stages (second section of video, time code: 05:04 – 22:14).

1. Observing and experiencing (time code: 05:05 – 06:11).

This presence of being is a creation of my myth and is described as an awakening towards consciousness and this creation of myth is essential as in ancient religion the telling of myth forms essential teaching of ritual initiation (von Franz). Moreover, through this creation of myth, I begin to excavate the embodied cultural memory and translate the authentic self.

Standing in a shadowing of observing and experiencing, the silence becomes this route that vibrates within me and forms this route of telling.

The process of stripping away found my body to be in this state of slowness as I engaged with the materials in the studio. Being in this state of slowness was a way of distancing myself as both the embodied practitioner and researcher as I returned and interrogated the gaze of my ethnicity. It was not so much as to lay claim of my ethnicity and/or saying that this is who I am and how I am, but it was more to ask, is this who I am and how do I resist any clichés of performativity?

The slowing down /slowness in my stripping away (via negativa)²⁵ became for me a new and tentative realisation of my own process of how I began decolonising my female Eurasian performing body when I embodied those layers of performance training. I wondered whether through my post-colonial learning I would articulate that the stripping away was the process of removal. Therefore, this slowing down was now an essential and deliberate process to re-trace and reclaim my authentic body. With this, I propose a new shift of understanding that the decolonising of the

²⁵ I am expanding on Grotowski's concept of via negativa as a concept of elimination or a "complete stripping down...laying bare one's own intimacy," to "achieve a freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction," so that "impulse and action are concurrent." (Jerzy Grotowski). However, my stripping away was for me to put my body in a state of non-action because the body has refused to move.

body needs to be more than just an ideology but a practice and that the space/place in which the body exists also needs a process of decolonisation of both thought and being.

How do I then propose this other process of decolonising my thought and being? Are they separate entities, and if they are, which comes before and after? In order for me to answer that and articulate my argument that both thought and being are one entirety, and one cannot exist without the other, I am outlining the findings and questions I raised in the studio through the observing and experiencing, engaging in “sandplay” using leaves, working with elements and finally creating a harmonious moment.

2. Engaging in ‘sandplay’ using leaves (time code: 06:12 – 07:53)

The process of using objects as an analogy is a further emphasis on Jung’s ideology of “sandplay” and object associated with the uncharted geography of memory.

“Sandplay” is a process that is based fundamentally on Jungian theories of the self and was further developed by Dora Klaff (1991) who taught the transformational process of “sandplay” therapy as the belief that engaging a person imaginatively with elements of sand and water at a cellular level can touch upon the deepest sources of the self. However, the use of an object in my investigation must not be seen as a therapeutic process but as a means for me to engage with my embodied memory. The parallel of the engagement with the imagination at a cellular level must not be compared to the research on physical actions by Stanislavski and Grotowski. The difference here is that I am locating or seeking to identify that at a cellular level sits a dormant inter-generational memory. Unless we excavate the

dormant memory, we cannot begin the process of unlocking. It is at this cellular level of excavation that a deeper understanding of my her(his)storicities exists. Arguably, decolonisation should begin at a cellular level as it is behavioural, it is about the observer and the one that is experiencing. It is also about the process of how we unlearn such behaviours and if it is at a cellular level then we need to understand that to turn the process of colonisation around we must decolonise and the process of decolonisation is not just recognising but of being.

The process of engaging the imagination at a cellular level creates a more viable aspect of wholeness. The totality of imaginative play is the totality of the body and spirit. We as being, functioning within this “telemagistic global collage, forever in movement, composed of fragments ripped from their contexts, their serrated boundaries advancing and receding in an unending deadly dance with their neighbours, their imbricated times violently clashing, diverging—only to collide again” (Burgin, 2009, p. 323). As such, there is a loss of this embodied intellect engraved within our memory. This loss of embodied intellect is a lack of connection and is sometimes expressed in contempt or as something unclear and as such a kind of disempowerment.

As I slowly begin to reclaim my body in slowness, images begin to take shape in objects. The veins of the leaves became for me an excavated embodied memory as I traced the routes of his(her)storicities of my embodied memory. This experiential encounter with the leaves is a process of consciousness and an integration of memories.

This reclaiming is a unitiveness of the bodymind, which a brief moment of stillness when in a harmonious movement can create a condensation of time integrating the person who has made the movement in respect to the space that

surrounds them (Morz 2011) and a quieting of both mind and body. Through this, I experience both an inner and a transpersonal state of being, and my historical epoch is an appreciation of the inner subjective world of the Being which is the route of my excavated memory.

Upon analysing and reflecting on what had happened in the studio through the use of “sandplay,” the necessity for both slowness and stillness was more apparent because the research provided me with two sensations: I became the observing (the explicit processing system) self that was the experiencing (implicit processing system). The explicit processing system provided me with the distancing, through which a kind of sensory memory was evoked particularly through the concept of imaginal nurturing. The implicit processing system, on the other hand, provided me with a kind of analytic evaluation through the felt-senses. As the two systems began to intertwine, images were evoked, and these images gave shape to objects, which began for me an identification of memory being excavated. Arguably, these excavations could be a construction that is both material and mental but yet this construction shaped my remembering and understanding of my embodied memory that then became the form in which my memories could communicate (Pallasmaa, 2009).

This intercommunication is achieved through the sensory and somatic nerves activated through the muscle, communicating with the connective tissues and thus initiating a series of movement which takes shape through the body. These shapes are series of patterns that are familiar and yet unfamiliar and create two sensations that seem to suggest that both thought and being are embodied and are intertwined. A new means becomes evident for me as I include as part of my research both “sandplay” and a stripping away as a possible extension of embodied memory

practices. The solo performance is created from both these aspects, defying the fixity of the cultural gaze, and embody the plurality of my shifting identities and aesthetics.

3. Working with elemental objects (time code: 07:55 – 09:54).

This discovery in the studio became for me another process of decolonising and a realisation for me to look at how my imagination is formulated, only for me to then further suggest another layer of decolonising and that is of the imagination. To begin the process of decolonising the imagination, it is useful to ask first why this is necessary and how it can justify my decision-making process. My justification for this is to understand that the imagination is a means through which we formulate new ideas, images or concepts that are not present yet. With this in mind, I then make the argument that the formation of any new ideas is influenced by the various modalities of thoughts that I as both object and subject have been exposed to. These modalities are attributed to our social, political and education infrastructure.

Undoubtedly, I cannot ignore that my own education process and the formation of most of my performance training is an exposure to more western-influenced thinking. Hence, my awareness of these influences requires me to acknowledge that in truth, most western theatre deals with this sense of compressed and sped-up time and seems to go against “natural” time²⁶.

²⁶ Here, I am extending the Asian aesthetics of passivity of Ōta Shōgo (avant grade playwright and director in contemporary Japan) and the works of Robert Wilson (an American theatre director), who have articulated the need for a specific tempo-rhythm for this sense of complexity of perception that will enable us to see differently. Robert Wilson in an interview says that “ his work is not slow, its in natural time. Most theatre deal with speeded-up time but I use the kind of natural time in which it takes the sun to set, a cloud to change, a day to dawn. I give you time to reflect, to meditate about other things than those happening on stage. I give you time and space in which to think.” (Shyer & Wilson, 1989, p. xvii)

4. *Creating a harmonious moment (time code: 09:55 – 22:10).*

As the process develops, more questions arose and I begin to question how my grief might influence the process because as an embodied researcher who is working primarily through her own body, the difficulty of separating the individual from the self and the work seemed impossible.

A lot of the conjured memories were of an unspoken past of my unknowing.

And so, I decided to go even slower where I am almost not moving outwardly but through the principle of movement stirred within.

This inter-connection is where my body finds herself in stillness and unpacks her inter-gestures that is culturally labelled as my body translates the memories within.

How do I interpret my body as this translator?

Within this stillness sits a negotiation of how my memory is migrating from within into a form that takes its shape through how my body is remembering.

I was cautious with using objects such as my father's identification paper, my parents' marriage certificate and some old photographs because I knew that these objects were related to my grieving process as these objects belonged to my late parents. I need to register how I am in relations to these objects and to do this in a pre-reflective and unthematized manner.

I am cautious with using objects such as my father's identification paper, my parents' marriage certificate and some old photographs because I know that these objects were related to my grieving process as these objects belonged to my late parents. I need to register how I am in relation to these objects, and do this in a pre-reflective and unthematized manner.

This was the real challenge as the emotional landscape was flooded with my sense of loss. It was important to further distance myself and to avoid picturing. To avoid creating imagery, visual, auditory and touch that related very closely to the passing of my mother as the more real the situation is to me, the more it will be brought closer to myself. The more I can separate myself, the less I will risk any traumatic reactions. This was the great challenge.

As my body slowly begins to move, there was a kind of awakening or an intercommunication with my brain and my body's nervous system.

As my body slowly begins to move, there was a kind of awakening or an intercommunication with my brain and my body's nervous system.

How does the body move? As the excavated memory takes its shape through the body, I started looking at how my body encounters with the space. Expanding further on the idea of divestiture, I started to explore how does my body relates to the space that I am encountering.

What does it mean for the body to be imbalanced and in fact, there was an imbalance as I feel this sense of being dragged onto the ground because my body refused to move in the manner that it once did.

This perception of imbalance equates to this sense of disequilibrium that I was experiencing. If I held onto to this imbalance, I will remain in the state of recalling and not in process of reclaiming. However, should I give in to this disequilibrium and fall?

This sense of falling requires me to let go, to lose control and open up this sensation of fragility.

This falling finds the body in this state of stillness and yet moving, silence and yet experiencing because the way we are always engaging with the world or the space around us is through constant movement, it requires us to be more in balance. We are always in motion, moving towards, or away from objects in a shared environment. To be present in the world or to act in the world, requires us to know where we are in the space.

This sense of falling creates this innate awareness of how the body is functioning and activate the proprioceptive sense (Charles Sherrington, 1910). This refers to the position of the body in the space and the limbs in relation to the rest of the body, which in turn directs the perception and cognition of the environment and sees the body as this interaction of how the body explores its manipulation of the space and through that, a movement of the embodied memory.

The slow process of remembering is taking shape in my body through quietude, thus tracing the fundamental principles that already existed within my body of practice. The slowness that I seem drawn towards, required me to look deeper within. As I work on excavating my implicit memory, I notice that the slower I move, the more intense my remembering was and I became more silent.

This silence created more space and within this space, stillness. This state of becoming was a way of expressing the unsaid and the unsayable, to speak of the silence of "Being" without compromise.

These shapes are a series of patterns that were familiar and yet unfamiliar, and created two sensations. These two sensations were:

- 1. I became the observing (explicit processing system) self.*
- 2. I was experiencing (implicit processing system) the self.*

The explicit processing system provided me with the distancing and through which, my sensory memory was evoked through the concept of imaginal nurturing.

The implicit processing system provided me with analytic evaluation through the felt senses.

As the two systems intertwine, images were evoked and gave shape to objects. This became for me, an identification of the excavated memories. These excavations are

both material and mental constructions that shaped my remembering and understanding of my embodied memory.

The performance (third section of video, time-code: 22:15 – 1:01:31)

The discoveries made in the studio through the four stages mentioned expanded on my argument that the disentanglement of any bodyculture(s) was impossible as these multiplicities of cultures were interwoven within me. There was no one route of memory because each cultural memory intersected with another. So, how does a Singaporean post-colonial Eurasian body perform on stage and what are her narratives? This brings me back to my previous chapter on cultural gazing. My argument is that cultural gazing is a fixation of a cultural inscription of a self; other/ed bodies are the subject of cultural inscription, a source of symbolic construction of a colonial history, therefore accepting the existence of a cultural dynamic of a post-colonial body. Therefore, with the awareness of how my silent body is able to articulate the unsaid and unsayable, I decided to create a performance that is with stillness and a slow tempo-rhythm. By doing this, I am subverting the cultural gaze inwards and asking how bodycultures are embedded, perceived, received and performed in performance and the theatrical representation of the self/other.

In putting forth the need for both slowness and stillness in the solo performance, I am giving the audience time and space to think about what is happening on stage. I am enabling the audience to see things differently, and the “normal” sped-up time found in most western-centric theatre is socially constructed. By allowing the

audience the space, I am engaging in both their and my process of decolonisation of the imagination and formulating a new shift of perspectives. To formulate this new shift is to engage the imagination at a cellular level as this creates a more viable aspect of wholeness. The totality of imaginative play is the totality of the body and spirit and that we as being, functioning within this “telemagistic global collage,” (Burgin 2009) as the threads of cultures embodied within us and it is through a slow process of unravelling that transformation can happen.

Through the process of slowness and stillness, the performance provides this space of transformation and creates awareness of a renewed sense of scrutiny and attention to something familiar and so to see it differently. If we were to continue to remain unaware, there remains this sense of unconsciousness, and distorted images can seep into our everyday. Being unaware, would mean that we are simply accepting the prevailing values and institutions, but modern values which are ultimately subversive of colonial rule ask that we ask questions about ourselves and of our history.

Shifts of perspectives

The renewed sense of scrutiny and attention that the performance evokes questions our society, history and practices at a more conscious level. The evocation requires us to dig deep into the past and reinterpret our intellectual resources through the interrogation of how we formulate our imagination while being aware of the range of responses that we might trigger because of colonial cultural history.

The triggered range of responses might raise issues in the decolonisation of the imagination especially in how power and culture, image and reality are represented both socially and historically. What is falsehood and truth? Who is the other and the self? This requires a deeper self-decolonisation, which I address in a performance of slowness and stillness. Thus, I suggest an attitude change through the returning and interrogation of the cultural gaze, towards a new “imagination” of perspectives, or at least a provocation of greater awareness.

This new imagination is a proposal of transgression of a fixed framing of any cultural representation within a performance, and a move towards a more inclusive narrative of bodycultures. Moreover, as contemporaries, we do sometimes frame the other and self as two separate entities but in truth, there is no one frame, but a frame within a frame. The phenomena of decolonisation are defiance for any fixation of a definitive centre. We must be conscious of what we put in this shifting centre-ness, and aware that each new centre-ness will propose new shifts. Each shift will not necessarily be a product of just one school of thought that involves our ways of seeing, thinking and talking about our cultural representation but a varied combination and a possible stripping away.

The process of decolonisation of the imagination then proposes to ask what if the structure of change includes more than western ideological frameworks of “interculturalism,” and acknowledges overlapping cross-cultural modalities that already exist within both the self/other? Perhaps this will alter our cultural modalities of representation and in turn changes of daily practices? Therefore, my argument for this slowness and stillness within my performance provides this new formulation of

cross-cultural practices through a shift in perspectives. The process of decolonisation has subverted the cultural gaze towards new cross-cultural performance practices. Thus, I acknowledge that a space for slowness and stillness in contemporary performance provides the reading of other possibilities and creates the necessary elements in contemporary cross-cultural and analytical strategies for performance practices through decolonising the performing and audience space.

The Structure of the Performance

Entering the performance space, I am standing there doing absolutely nothing for 10seconds. After 10 seconds, a small action of my collaborators coming into the space to set up the performing space.

The intention for this is for my audience to be part of the setting up and to invite them to meet me in the performance. It is to say, “here I am standing in front of you, I am standing as I am, and I am inviting you, my audience to meet me as you are.” The placing of the various objects in the space is done at a prescribed normal tempo-rhythm and choreographed. The reason for this is deliberate as I am now starting on a slow revealing and require the audience to “move” in my tempo. As the audience and me meet, the audience sees me as who I am standing there being still, open and vulnerable as seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8. The preparation of the performance space

After all the objects have been placed on the performing space, I begin to slowly engage in playing of an element of water as a trigger of memory. Once the various objects are in place, the audience begin shifting in their seats because they have to adjust to what is happening and perhaps their focus and attention is being attuned to the slowness that the performance requires.

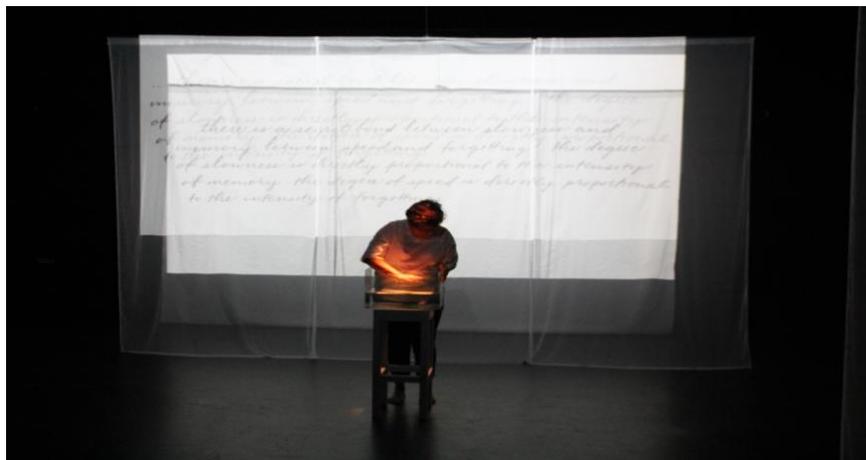


Figure 9. The beginning of the performance

Slowly, as the audience becomes slightly more adjusted after watching ten minutes of non-action, a voice-over is heard and a projection of textual underpinning for a process of slowness is projected as seen in the Figure 9.

As documented in the accompanying video, I engaged with sandplay in the performance, and interweaving these textual underpinnings became the innerscape of my existence in the performance.

Voice-over of my thought process in the studio

My body has betrayed me, it refuses to move, I am refusing to move, I cannot seem to move, I seemed to be stuck in this void – I find myself in the shadow, maybe being in a shadow is good. So that I can take flight at night, stealing the heavenly darkness for myself, navigating through the stars and the constellations of my own making in the delight and terror of my uncertainty.

Textual underpinning

“There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting... the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory: the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.” (Milan Kundera 1996)

Text

It is essential for the reader to know that I was interweaving three elements here: 1) my body as the material, object and subject, 2) Textual underpinning in the performance as sign-post of my argument for the need of slowness in the performance, 3) The interweaving of my original writing and that of Terry Tempest Williams’ book *When Women were Birds* (2013). My reason for integrating William’s text into the performance was because her text was about her mother’s death. So, the text provided me with a way to integrate the emotional environment that my socio-cultural body was in and a shared narrative on how grieving is a shared experience for all, and also everyone experiences that grief. Thus, with my socio-cultural body intertwined with my performing body and with William’s text, I am sharing the interiority of my whole being. In the shared narrative of grief, my audience and I are meeting in a transversal space that I have created in the performance through slowness, non-action, stillness and silence. I have highlighted within the dialogue boxes when I am integrating Williams’ text with quotation marks.

Performance text as voice-over in the performance

I am drawn to water / I feel like the goldfish in the bowl – swimming in circles – not going anywhere. Maybe I can swim out of this depth / slowly but for the moment here is where I need to be, where I am.

“I am water, I am water, I am evolving to a consciousness that has pulled me up ... My body between worlds – the invisible world can speak to us. In this shadow, I am cradled. So much of who we are originates and remain here in water. We are born from what is fluid, not fixed. The ocean is mother, mesmerising in her power, a creative force that can both comfort and destroy.” Terry Tempest Williams

This forest of relentless thoughts – a fog of memories. My thoughts / my body are both travelling on different speed. I am water.

Practitioner Narrative

As I play with water, a sensation is evoked and I use action-images and slowly a sensation becomes a series of thoughts and words. The sensation becomes concrete as I begin to articulate through my body, the lived experience. The lived experience then provides me with a kind of personal geography, a kind of introspective representation of what the body is used to and the process of stripping away forges an intra-gesture of non-action. As I explore these intra-gestures, I am drawing a parallel path. I am working though my thinking and what my body is immersed in. Through this process of intra-gesture, my interiority is shaped further through my reflection and a kind of embodied writing of the performance text emerges. This helped me discover that my need to say is stronger than what I am used to do, what I have done. It serves to reflect on the creative material without falling into condescension.

Performance text as voice-over in the performance

I love the rain, I remember the rain, I love the smell of rain I can hear the rain, the water flowing down the pipes ... I am playing in the rain ... Sometimes, all I want to do is to play in the rain ... the rain brings me back to a past ... I am listening to the rain – For a moment ... I see my child self ... The rain is asking me to listen, I am afraid to listen because what I hear is echoes of a distant childhood. I am afraid to listen as a memory is evoke, a tiny pulse awakens and I am taken to an unknown place. There I am alone in a place of feeling. It is not necessarily a place of comfort and as I listen closely to the echoes, I tremble. A sound vibrates from the core ... once again, I find myself, crossing over the rusted iron gate. Separating reality and perceptions. Perceptions of dreams are imaginations and illusion for seeds of flights...wherein the body and soul lives...Between each raindrop, the moment becomes real. Between each raindrop, the body remembers ...

A Performance Score of Non-action and Slowness

“We understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental.”

Juhani Pallasmaa (2007, p. 188)

The above quotation was used to provide a signpost of the next section on the writing of mythological stories of how the Portuguese arrived in Malacca in the 18th century. Portuguese colonisation forms part of my lineage and history. Whether true or fictional, the performance text suggests that there is a sense of (re)author-ing of what is truth and fictional or suggestion of this fictional truth. Pallasmaa (2007) argues that “human constructions have also the task to preserve the past, and enable us to experience and grasp the continuum of culture and tradition” (p. 188).

My intention of having voice-overs with the textual underpinning was 1) to share with my audience how my socio-cultural body was experienced when creating the work; 2) to invite the audience to meet me in my innerscape - as argued by Alva Noë in his book *Action in Perception* (2004), “the task of phenomenology, or of experiential art, ought to be not so much to depict or describe experience but rather to catch experience in the act of making the world available” (p. 176). Therefore, with my body being almost still, with a sense of non-action, moving slowly, being in silence but with the textual underpinning interweaved, I am providing my audience through my performing body, a perspective on who I am, what I am experiencing and to make my world available to them. At the same time, my audience is meeting me through their bodies and with my body, we can experience each other simultaneously in the performing environment. In doing so, a space is created for us

to truly see and reflect on how we experience each other. Each audience member will have different experiences as they meet me in the space, and my intention is not to create the same experience for everyone but for my audience to also experience themselves as they experience me. Therefore, the performing environment creates this new transversal space. Noë further argues that because we can “experience each other through the perspectives on the body and that through that experience how the world is made available to us” (p. 176).

Through an intersection of phenomenology, post-colonial feminist and decolonial theories, I am arguing that through my performance, I have created this transversal space and shifted the margins by turning the cultural gaze inwards because of the different experiences encountered in the performing environment through the performance. Phenomenology states that consciousness and experience can account for the relationship between action, perception and environment, post-colonial feminist theory posit that we meet each other and see who we are and where we are standing and decoloniality asks that when we meet each other, we will have different experience. And so, we must acknowledge that difference exists and move towards allowing the different experiences to be accounted for so that we can all exist in the same space and work towards creating this new space of encounters for the bodycultures to be present and accounted for.

Performance Score of a Construction and Reconstruction of Fictional Truth through a Re-telling of a Childhood and Oral History

I made another deliberate choice to disrupt the slowness and moved into a mimicry of my cultural heritage and colonial past. The intention here was to create a sense of juxtapositioning of the performance of slowness and non-action to the spectacle of mimicry of how a performance of any ethnicity is portrayed. My intention was to return the cultural gaze and a critical intervention and disrupt the colonial and “patriarchal modelling” of any prescribed notion of meaning-making. The “patriarchal modelling” as argued by feminist critics, (Diamond 1989 and Aston 1999) is a theoretical framing for a feminist praxis where ‘mimesis can be retheorized as a site of, and means of, feminist intervention’. Thus, through my performing body that I am stating that I am the author of my cultural heritage. Through my actions on stage, I am presenting a cultural history and in my socio-cultural body are traces of the past. But, because I am the author, I can also (re)author the past. And as I (re)author, the audience meets me and, in the meeting, I imagine a particular narrative and the audience becomes part of this new altered narrative.

Performance Text

Spoken: I don't really know much about my father and his family. What I know are stories told to me by others. I know that he was from Malacca and my Grandfather was also from Malacca. My Great-grandfather came from ...

Song

*Jinkli nona, jinkli nona²⁷
yo kereh kazah*

²⁷ This is a typical folk song of the (Portuguese) Eurasian community. It is a love song between a man and a woman. The song is usually accompanied by the *Barong*, a folk dance. The lyrics are in *Kristang* a colloquial spoken language and it is a combination of the Malay language, Portuguese Language and Latin.

*kaza nunteng porta nona
klai logu pasah?*

*Teng kantu teng
kantu teng falah nunteng
amor, minya amor
amor minya korasang*

Continues speaking:

To be honest, I actually really don't know. All I know for certain, was that my Father was from Malacca. And so my great-great-great-great grandfather, you know what? I am going to imagine this – I am going to imagine that he was this young, great sea merchant, that sailed across the vast ocean – and all through the far east – just so he could change his fate – to hold destiny in his hands. Now, all this happened when Europe under this god-fearing supremacy of the Catholic faith. Kings, Princes and aristocrats would gain the Pope's favour by discovering of new land, new converts for Christ and Rome.

But, not my great grandfather. He was this young man of mix- heritage of Moorish and Portuguese blood. He was so thrilled by the stories that his grandfather told him, that he decided he would sail across the vast ocean and onto the shores of the far east. And there, he saw a fair maiden and fell in love ...

Through my body, I begin to craft the performance text, as I write, I am interweaving the discovery made in the studio into the performance text. While in the studio as seen in the accompanied video, I continue to explore the process of playing with the leaf and in that I was able to weave the sensation of smaller gestures into the performance score.

Performance Text

Voice-over:

The veins are the vascular tissue of the leaf. Veins are Cells that bring water and minerals from the roots into the leaf.

*I am my mother but I am not
I am my grandmother but I am not
I am my great grandmother but I am not*

Spoken:

I have always been curious of my ancestry –what my history is – the more my parents remain silent, the more curious I became. It didn't help that I had a very inquisitive mind. So I decided that I would visit this palm leaf astrologer in India.

Voice-over:

I am holding a question like a trapped bird inside my cupped hands.

I am afraid of silence because it leads me to myself, a self I may not wish to comfort, it asks that I listen. And in listening, I am taken to an unknown place. Silence creates a pathway to peace through pain, the pain of a distracted and frantic mind before it becomes still. Silence leaves me alone in a place of feeling.

Textual underpinning

There is something clearly atavistic in the process of recollection, if only because such a process is never linear. Also, the more one remembers, the closer perhaps one is to dying.

Voice-over:

My mother's photographs are this expanding and collapsing universe each time I take them out and put them away. They are of a distant past and when I look at them, I imagine the space she fills. A motion circling the void – and I imagine that both she and I are in motion ...

“Air is made of ... Nitrogen (78:09%), Oxygen (20.95%), Argon (0.93%), Carbon Dioxide (0.039%), water vapor (2%)

The unseen world is real ...

The unseen world is real. I visit this unseen world not as a repeat of memory but as a reminder of how we evolve in time and place ... I will never know[my parents'] full story. But I can imagine ... and as I am seeing this unseen world, I am linked to my distant past ...

I am this cell that is evolving to a consciousness that has pulled me up ... The invisible world can speak to us ... so much of who we are originates and remain here in salt water. In this vast, undulating ocean, we are cradled.

I stand in the shadow” (Terry Tempest Williams)

Conclusion

“With the dizzying acceleration of the velocity of time today and the constant speeding up of our experiential reality, we are seriously threatened by a general cultural amnesia. In today's accelerated life we can ultimately only perceive, not remember”.

Juhani Pallasmaa (2007, p. 197)

In conclusion, I am arguing that through the performance of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, we can be more critically engaged in the activities of

decolonisation. Through this cross-cultural performance, both my socio-cultural body and performing were influencing each other and present. However, through the slow unravelling of my solo performance, because there was a meeting between me and my audience intertwined with my socio-cultural and performing body, we can become an active agent of passivity for activities of decolonising through bodies of experience²⁸. The body of experience is the lived body that embodies the socio-cultural and performing body and the meeting of experiences between me and the audience. And through embodied reflection, we recognise the limitation of the confined space²⁹ because when the body inhabits, intervenes in the space, be it social or artistic, the individual questions the confinement of the space and the desired meaning/experience can be created. By using these modalities of silence and stillness, both audience and performers are invited to take in their own lived experience, to reflect on how we are viewing and through whose bodies we are experiencing these cross-cultural encounters. By asking these questions, we are “tracing the blindspots and aporias that underpins systems of philosophical truths”, to recall Stephen Morton’s argument as mentioned in the Introduction.

²⁸ By bodies of experience, I am including the performing body and the audience’s experiences in the shared space.

²⁹ By space – I mean the site of representation and systems of reception and perceiving.

An Audience Member's Reflection on the Performance

What is, if at all, an embodied metaphor? If I say I am a fish, and go on to play like a fish, to make believe that I am one via the indexical body language of "fish" as best as my imagination can afford me to, when do I transit from the metaphor to embodiment? Is there such tension? If so, where is the threshold between both poles? How do my internal metaphors, the narratives I have used to be-in-me, become visible apparitions of my self without recurring to a theatricalized version of my body? And why should we be suspicious of the theatrical?

Perhaps embodiment can be metaphorical. Yet for us to say so, we would need to understand embodied metaphors as something else -- as something outside of the logic theatrical or semiotic representation, as something that escapes the ephemerality of words and signs yet does not fall into a platonism, that is not eternal. To say that I am a fish is indeed always already the summoning of a self that although not apparent under any visible semiotic regime, is embedded in the bio-historical contingency of my body, which in turn will always escape absolute legibility. An embodied metaphor may be therefore a layer of memory that calls for its own performativities and accompanying normals.

Chapter four:

The body Renews as she/they Learn(s), Unlearn(s) and Relearn(s)

Introduction

In this final chapter, I am positing that through embodied reflection we are able to articulate a performance practice that is simultaneously decolonised and cross-cultural. This is because, as argued in chapter three, “embodiment creates the possibility for the body to function as the object, subject, material and source of symbolic construction as well as the product of cultural inscription.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 89) I have also discussed my embodied practices in the studio and the two performances, the duet *Landscaping a Personal Myth*, and the solo performance *Landscapes of Memories*, created as part of my practice research. Through embodied practice and research in the performing arts, we are able to see a methodology learned and embodied, and then encounter a process of unlearning as the body experiences a state of non-action/stillness. Through that process the body relearns, reclaims and renews herself and themselves while acknowledging that the body with all her(his)storicities is the centre within the space of encounter(s).

In the previous chapters, I have shared my methodology of soft fireworks in the studio through working with two performers and in creating my final solo piece with slowness, non-action, stillness and silence as a fundamental aspect of my performance vocabulary. The first phase of my research is a framework through which I was able to articulate the methodology used in the first instance. The

excavation of the embodied cultural memory was necessary for the re-claiming and re-telling of the her(his)story. It was necessary to have a multiplicity of voices heard, so as to create a new transversal space illuminating pluriversal and interspersal bodies. The pluriversal bodies are the many bodycultures existing in the individual and the interspersal bodies are the intersection of cultures that exists within each bodyculture(s). Therefore, this new transversal space is the continuing process of exposing the various her(his)storicities. As a continuing process of decoloniality, the space recognises that the post-colonial body is present, she is an active-subject and never a passive object and because “performance centralises the physical and socio-cultural specificities of [her] participants” (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002, p. 204). Therefore, within this transversal space, there is a disruption of the universality of human existence from which the contemporary (global) can exist as individual bodies, as commented by Mignolo and Walsh (2018). Because in a transverse space of practice, we ask “who and what is speaking through the body and in what language, of what discourses inscribed on/in the body” (Balme, 1999, p. 167) and thus, disrupt the very existence of the universality of human existence. As such, embodiment proposes this internal process of affective reflection as we chart towards a reimagined thinking of a new doing.

The Emerging Field of Embodied Research and Practice

The two performances that form an integral part of my practice research thesis and the articulation of my methodology of how the body excavates, reclaims and renews herself is a way of putting the practice of embodiment forward. Embodied research and practice provide a macro-action of reflection and can intrinsically notate how the

body comes into contact with other bodies, her environment, her cultural memory. The embodied macro-action(s) break down the systemic procedural structure of how bodies are looked at and conditioned to respond. This macro-action reflection is a method of an anti-systemic procedural structure that highlights further that no two bodies are the same even if they might be of the same ethnicities because each self has her(his)storicities, and argues that there is no universality of human experiences and existence. So, if each experience is different, then it is through the process of embodied reflection that we can destabilise the theory of universality. The destabilising of the theory of universality is also a way through which cross-cultural performance practices must go beyond the broad washboard of a mere articulation of any trajectory of practices. To go beyond this washboard is to re-state that as the body learns, it first imitates, and as the learning becomes part of the body's process of understanding, eventually, the learning is then embedded in the body through the repetition — these repetitions then become the training method of the particular trajectory of performance practices. So here the question to ask is whether these become part of the body's authenticity? What do we make of this embodied reflection that the body embraces and therefore adds to the already complex and evolving politics of identities that resides within us? Rothfield (2015) asks "what does it mean to make space for something new to occur in the body-beyond habit- and how might this be conceived?" (p. 100). Though Rothfield is using the practice of the Alexander technique as a strategic response to her question, she does argue for the possibility of the body to defuse habit and thus to unlearn, relearn and learn. Being in non-action in Alexander technique is for the body to unlearn, and the technique is focussed more on loosening rather than maintaining grip.

However, as my research is not on Alexander technique, I am arguing that the shared space that was created in the performance environment between me through my performance created proposes a diffusion and asked how are our bodies meeting, and how are we receiving each other and that in the performance, I am creating a transversal space where we can learn how to fully receive each other. Arguably, the reading of any cross-cultural identities of the body is mostly seen through the lens of performance studies, allowing us to recognise and read the body on stage through various artistic expressions. However, I would like to highlight that this chapter is not mainly about the reading of the body through performance studies but how through embodiment, the body makes these self-reflections of how she has learnt and how the body is encoded. The body is placed in the forefront of embodiment because embodiment is a transverse line that cuts through the two lines in performances as a site of diversion between the performer and the audience. This site of diversion serves as a transversal container on how through a macro-action reflection, a tripartite action of learning, unlearning and relearning, can start the process of renewal. The process of renewal will decentre the encompassing western hegemonic techniques of performer training.

The embodied practitioner and performance stage can be in a transversal space

Figure 10 below.

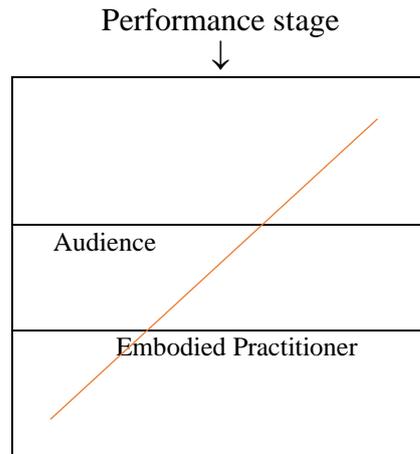


Figure 10. A transversal space

A transverse line (the red line) in Figure 10, borrowing from geometry, crosscuts two parallel lines and creates corresponding angles that collide. This transverse line at any point can destabilise the relationship between performer and audience. The destabilising happens because of the non-action, slowness, stillness and silence in the performance. These create a space for a more internal embodied reflection. Both the audience and I meet each other in this transversal space, that is neither the margin nor centre, to fully encounter each other. It is a sensation of meeting; allowing the space for the sensation to meet you and then letting go and following where the sensation might lead you to.

In this transversal space and through the sensation of meeting, there is openness and possibilities. And, in this new space, how might a new structure of existence be? What are the new proposed structures of hegemony? And, in our reflection, we realised that it is not about creating new structures, but more about recognising the binary discourses, which exist at a very conscious level because to experience ourselves we will need to experience the other. My argument is that, by recognising this, we can work more consciously on allowing bodycultures in the transversal

space. Therefore, through the methodology of soft fireworks, we excavated the embodied cultural memory and in the performance space, we exist, meet, and experience each other in a space where the socio-cultural body intertwines with the performing body and interweaves in the performance space.

However, what of a contemporary Singaporean Eurasian practitioner whose trajectory of practices and identity have been multi-layered and embedded in my whole psyche of being? These multi-layered identities are synonymous, and encapsulate the multi-culturality of Singapore. However, Singapore's racial policy seems to place emphasis on the singularity of a race/culture majority and places my ethnicity as an Other and so my body is always "other-ing."

To include these multiple identities is to ask this set of questions as in chapter one:

- 1) Where did these sites of representation and systems come from? Who created this site of representation and the systems of reception and perceiving?
- 2) Were these sites created to suggest uniformity? Alternatively, were they to act as an indicator for the mainstream and imply that anything outside is considered less and marginalised?³⁰

³⁰ In 2018, an article in 'Timeout', an entertainment magazine, listed that these are the best theatre companies in Singapore: *Pangdemonium*, *Drama Box*, *Wild Rice*, *The Necessary Stage*, *Singapore Repertory Theatre*, *Dream Academy*, *Andsoforth* and *GoLi*. The writer writes that these companies are either doing some original works or adaptations and are a must see. However, it would be useful to note that although these companies form the main theatre landscape of Singapore, the article does not mention any other independent works. The productions listed in the article are of high standard but do not fully portray the spectrum of Singapore's cultural landscape. The productions do portray cast members of the other three major racial categories. They are text driven and have very high production value. I am highlighting this because it is important to notice the high production value of these works versus the very pared-down performance in the thesis. The institutionalised support of these theatre companies, both through funding and state-owned media, underscores my argument that we need more female space and to recognise that there are voices, narratives and bodies that need to be heard/seen rather than invisible and marginalised. Therefore, in quoting Kuo Po Kun, I am the salmon that is swimming against the masses and state censorship and am pushing for a more female space within the Singapore cultural landscape. The use of silence provides the space for my female

The rationale of proposing that embodied research and practice as a methodology is to articulate the use of the various possibilities of cross-culturality in performance making, because embodiment creates a sense of co-existence and the inter-relation between the work and the viewer. As such, there is a need for contemporary performance practices and techniques to create a space for vulnerability, openness and affectability of embodiment. Creating this space will underpin the understanding that possibilities must co-exist in an unresolved dialectical tension, with moments of intensity where meaning, or a reading of meaning, are not inherent in discourse and its structures, but contextual and ambiguous – insisting on the co-existence of strength and weakness. To create this transient space, it is essential for the notion of transit to exist in substantial forms (concrete spatiality). This transient space underpins sets of relations between individuals and groups, an embodiment and medium of social life itself. This space must embrace openness, which my practice seeks to do. This openness is one of the critical elements of my practice and without seeming didactic, it is a challenge to create this awareness of co-existence and the inter-relation between the work and the viewer.

Through the creation of the two performances *Landscaping a Personal Myth* and *Landscapes of Memories*, I have provided this collage of juxtaposition, a comparative understanding, and state that processes in cross-cultural performance practices requires a new space of aesthetic exchange. Due to heterogeneity in the work, the imaginary borders become melted, not melted but *fudged* out. It is a kind

body to be seen and heard. Silence is my quiet revolution and through my body I am heard and seen and am existing 'loudly'. (<https://www.timeout.com/singapore/theatre/alternative-and-interactive-theatre-companies-in-singapore>)

of new territory because the collaborative exchanges in cross-cultural performance allow individuals to inhabit the creative space.

Moreover, this research is saying that through the process of embodiment, the body can renew herself as an internalised decolonisation happens and with that awareness of the environment she finds herself in, we can then reflect what is within us outwards into the environment even though the tainted lens is coated with layers of self-censorship.

The apparent challenge now is more than just an unravelling of a colonial past but a questioning of how my body has had to navigate through state censorship and how my other/ed body has been acculturated through the racialised systems of the state. Furthermore, the law decentres the more European-American focus of “interculturalism” as argued in chapter one and three. To extend the debate further is to move away from the conventional fixation of a system of classification of self/other into bodycultures. As argued in chapter one, bodycultures proposes that within the body there are intersections of cultural existence and that these intersections are our cross-cultural encounters within ourselves, constantly shifting because the self that is embodied is also constantly shifting.

Moving Forward

How do we move forward through embodied research as a methodology of practice? I am arguing here that this new transversal creative space through the cross-cultural collaborative embodied practice is a collage of juxtaposition, a comparative

understanding of bodycultures and cultural gazing. Therefore, through this collage of juxtapositioning, we can have a new space of cross-cultural aesthetic exchange and performance. This transversal creative space acknowledges the intersections of bodycultures within and between, can be established through performance. Fischer-Lichte (2014) argues that “performances in general take on a paradigmatic role in society...both between the performers and between the performers and spectators – may reflect, condemn, or negate the surrounding social conditions and/or future ones” (p. 13). In order to move towards a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice within the glocal Singaporean context, it is necessary to be aware of cultural gazing through both Western and Asian lenses on bodies that are other/ed. As an other/ed body in both my country and globally, I had to work from the margins. I am arguing that even though I am working from the margins, my contemporary cross-cultural performance practice is located at a transversal creative space, because this transversal space knows that bodies are shaped by power and employed as an instrument to maintain power. But because it is a creative space, as performance maker, we can re-imagine other narratives.

In chapter two, I wrote about the process of embodiment as a methodology for sharing my practice with my two collaborators, and the deliberate decision to work with two female collaborators. Given the lack of Singaporean female narratives in the theatre landscape, I felt that it was important to have more female narratives, so as to provide more multicultural perspectives to the female identity in the contemporary Singaporean experimental theatre landscape. I also wanted to present a post-colonial and cultural complexity of a female/woman presence in contemporary post-colonial Singapore.

The main reason for working with female narratives was to unpack the question: How does our culture /multi-culturalism (passed on from generations) shape how we see ourselves as women? Using Kuo's metaphor discussed in chapter one, of the salmon swimming against the current to give birth, I am reiterating that it is necessary for Singaporean contemporary women artists to swim against the current of the present canon of narratives that do not include enough contemporary Asian women's narratives, especially here in Singapore. As contemporary female artists, our narratives should be shared, and to include our narratives is to have a collision of both pluriversal and interversal bodies in a transversal space. This collision of bodies, without a doubt, needs to work around the challenges of censorship. So, how do we work around the challenges sanctioned by the state and at the same time, seek to decolonise our bodies inscribed with layers of both generational and colonial history?

Positioning and Repositioning the Body

While working on the solo performance *Landscapes of Memories*, I discovered that a slow unveiling of a body was an essential element to invite the audience into a shared lived experience with their reflection and through this introspective viewing, I created a shared space. The slow unveiling of the body allowed for a shared present moment and created an expanded perception of what is on stage, and at the same time, a reflection inwards. This expanded perception is created because we become aware of how our bodies sense each other and after that orientate, thus creating a tripartite experience:

- 1) the body learning of this new orientation

- 2) the body unlearning as the body becomes aware of how it usually orientates
- 3) the body reflecting internally about this awareness and deciding whether to return to the state of being before encountering the slow unveiling. Alternatively, the awareness nudges the body to move along this internal reflection to lay claim to/reclaim how it orientates towards other bodies and in this situation reflect on the encounter of the slow unveiling.

This tripartite experience makes us an active agent of our negotiation in how we orientate towards something or maybe disorientate ourselves. The tripartite experience charts an internalised cross-cultural process because of the multiplicities of cultures/identities that exist within the space of encounter as the body is seen and experienced through the slow unveiling of the performance. Arguably, this experience is the practice of cross-culturality, and it goes beyond formal properties of practice. Placing emphasis on embodiment as a methodology, we become our agent; my research charts a cross-cultural practice that highlights an internalised excavation of embodied memory, and a process of negotiation happens within the body.

Embodied practice as a methodology in performing arts places emphasis on the body, what she can do and how she responds to the environment that she finds herself in. Along these lines, I have argued that cross-culturality is an internal process and that embodiment itself is an act of that is both cross-cultural and decolonising. It is through embodiment that we become this active agent of negotiation and as a contemporary artist in Singapore, we can work towards creating this shared space of shared narratives.

In an earlier paragraph, I had mentioned a tripartite approach of embodiment:

1. How the body learns,
2. How the body unlearns and
3. How the body relearns

The above tripartite process of/towards embodiment provides a path into a state of being and a process of understanding for what is happening internally through the body, and as such we can also begin to unpack and at the same time decolonise the process.

This tripartite process resulted in the articulation of my methodology when I worked with the two female performers on their duet and through the use of slowness and stillness in my solo performance of my ethnicity. The process emphasised how the body was responding as she/they worked to process what is encoded onto the body and what memories lay barren. This process of reflecting on what is encoded is a self-reflection/realisation and so this begins renewal as the body learns that renewal in herself/themselves is the body in contact with their/her(story). When coming in contact with her(his)story, the body slowly orientates herself outward and acts in the world from the centre of her being, anchored into a renewed consciousness of body-mind-spirit and bodycultures.

A Rippling Effect

To conclude my research, I include a new framework into my practice and in my teaching, and that is an emphasis on embodiment as an internalised cross-cultural process towards a pathway for furthering the argument on cross-culturalism and

decolonised learning. The impact of my research can be situated both within the fields of theatre and performance and outside for a renewed consciousness of body-mind-spirit.

1. To emphasise in my practice and teaching what the body does in the practice of *kalaripayattu* as a practice for attuning the body-mind-spirit.
2. To emphasise soft fireworks as an embodied methodology in both my practice and teaching to initiate an internal reflection on how the body orientates itself through the practice of *kalaripayattu*, thus drawing out the essence of the training for the attuning of body-mind-spirit and asking how the body “readies” herself for this internal reflection and awareness.
3. To include the process of observing and experiencing, as a way through which our bodies relate with each other and experience each other.
4. To include elements of “sandplay” as the practice of listening to how our bodies respond in any given space/ environment that we find ourselves in. To notice how our body is reacting, i.e. is there tension in the body when encountering another body, and if so, where this tension is coming from. This way, we are more body-conscious – even though mentally we may seem or appear “comfortable” in a situation, our bodies are not because of the tension within the body. We can reflect on this tension and the cause of this tension, or we can be conscious that there is this tension and so we can be more

attentive to the environment we find ourselves in and attune to how we relate to the other bodies in the space.

5. To create a harmonious environment through the embodiment of slowness and stillness within my practice and teaching.

Why am I Proposing This and Why is it Necessary?

I propose the framework above to allow space for everyone to be more conscious and to create a sense of a more in-depth body consciousness of their history, that is acknowledged and embraced in any environment so that there can be a more in-depth understanding, appreciation and acceptance of each other. I aim to create a space for different female embodiments and narratives in performance where the culture(s)/multi-culturalism (passed on from generations) shape how we each experience ourselves as women, as seen in the two performances.

To support my proposal for a new framework of practice with an emphasis on embodiment as a renewed consciousness of body-mind-spirit for bodies, I am sharing below the results and feedback on a two-day workshop that I was invited to give to students from the Masters of Art Therapy as part of their Group Training module at LASALLE College of the Arts:

The two-day workshop “Body, Space, Imagination” emphasised what the body can do and explored the process of slowing down, stillness and deep listening. For the first day of the workshop, I introduced a series of breathing exercises that I had used with my two performers in the duet, working through the pre-preparatory rehearsal technique of using *kalaripayattu* to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating

a physical score. However, for this workshop, the students did a basic breathing exercise to attune their body-mind-spirit and to be more body conscious.

The students stood with their two feet a foot length apart with their toes facing forward. Hands hanging by their side, with their palms facing outwards. On an inhalation, the hands are brought up above their heads with palms facing each other. On the next exhalation, they will bring the palms back to the side of their body with the palms facing outwards as in the starting position.

Just as with the two performers in the duet, through the breath, the students were required to enter the space leaving their daily body and to centre the bodymind so that the body can move in synchronicity with the breath.

After the breathing exercise, I gave this series of instructions to the students.

- 1) Move at your own pace*
- 2) You can step out whenever you need to or want to*
- 3) Whatever you perceive the instructions to be – just do it*
- 4) If you need to close your eyes – please do so*
- 5) When in doubt, just stick with it and explore and sense*
- 6) Be gentle with yourself*

In my previous two chapters, I have written on my process of discovery in the studio and the deliberation of choices made especially on my discovery and argument for slowness. The discovery and advocacy of slowness and stillness through the devising strategies and the performance/aesthetic vocabulary would trigger creative responses that raised questions of embodied memory within the contemporary body. Upon reflecting on how the body responds to the cultural context/environment, I am reinstating a new framework of practice towards understanding how the intuitive processes existing in the rehearsal space lead to a new ecology of practice thus extending Castrillo's uncharted geography of memory as written in chapter one.

Using slowness, non-action, stillness and silence, I began a series of exercises that provided a space for the students to excavate their own embodied memory and to listen to what their body is doing. I also asked everyone to slow down and to allow the body to lead the process slowly. Following the process of using slowness, the students created a composition of physical gestures and objects. Below in italics are some of the reflections and feedback about the two-day workshop from the students that seal my argument that the multiplicities of cultural memory embedded in the multi-cultural heritage of the contemporary Singaporean body is manifested through embodiment. It is through the embodied framework of soft firework with slowness, stillness and silence, that the body gave shaped to the cultural memory drawn from within the multi-cultural heritage/memory that is the body and that this embodied cultural memory is a legacy of our ancestry.

Reflections

As an ethical consideration I have kept the feedback anonymous and have not edited as I want to provide the space for an embodied writing for the students' reflection.

Reflection 1 (female mature-age student)

The whole slowing down process was intriguing, especially when there were 2 different settings that stimulated different responses. In the theatre, I found myself more open. The exercise where we had to melt down to the floor with different speeds allowed me to notice how at different phases my body was behaving differently. The thing about slowing down is that it gave me time to think - even if I didn't want to. The embodied memories I had with my item was vividly recalled when I was moving to and for the stage, away and towards my item. The actions that came with the memories also aid in bringing forth the exact sensation I felt in the past.

Reflection 2 (female student, trained *Bharatanatyam* dancer)

Just some background on me. I am a professionally trained Bharatanatyam dancer so movement is not new to me and I've never been triggered by movement either. So I was caught by surprise when I ended up breaking down during the first session. Dancing has always been quite meditative for me even when I do my own practice so I was not expecting to be triggered at all.

When we started the movement I quickly went into what I usually do which is [quite] down the mind and let the body take over. But since you (Elizabeth) asked us to simply witness our minds and body separately I realised that there was a huge disconnect. My body and mind were speaking two different languages and it was quite painful to experience. It even caused me to have flashbacks of experiences in my childhood which were quite traumatic. Through therapy and reflection i realised later that these flashbacks were actually memories I thought I did not have as there was a time in my childhood that I do not remember at all.

After this session every time I practice my dance my body felt very different. Initially I felt like I had less control and I had to spend a lot of time reflecting and learning what was so different. I've been going to a personal therapist ever since that session and over the year I've made a lot of progress as a dancer and I'm learning things about my body that I never knew.

Reflection 3 (female mature age student)

My peacefulness was during breathing and silence - less so though when we did the vigorous exercises with sticks/balls etc. but when we did the last exercise on the 2nd day it felt amazingly serene.

How aware were you of the space that you were in after the exercises?

I think I was very aware particularly on the 2nd day. You had us explore the place before we started and that made a difference to really feeling the space. When the exercise ended , I had totally slowed down and been totally at peace with myself, knowing the space and feeling safe contained.

Were you more sensitive, and if yes, why?

Yes, I think so - after that last exercise which was quite intense I felt exhausted physically but mentally very alert and perhaps this made me more sensitive?

The last reflection was a crucial signpost for me on the impact of my research because of the discovery made by this student that linked “movement to memories, body experience is not linked only to cognition but through lived experience, being a foundation to consciousness” (quoted from a student’s reflection).

Reflection 4 (female Student – visual artist)

I am particularly interested in Elizabeth's deliberate slow-down of time and gestures to magnify the body-mind impact. "Internal dance" even if you have minimum mobility. Her work with awakening the elderly through movements holds great promise. Neuroscience has shown abundant evidence of neural networks re-growing and routing new pathways when the body's nerves are activated. Using electrical impulses to stimulate the body and physiotherapy has helped patients regain previously damaged muscles and nerves.

I had never experienced body induced memories and image projection before. The experience is quite compelling. Movement and "slowing down" is a new pathway to elicit hidden emotions for me.

In the second workshop, I gained a deeper understanding of how we relate to another person or object in a sensory manner. Just from sensing, feeling, receiving body feedback (action-interaction), moving in rhythm, you can establish very strong connections emotionally, and psychologically beyond the physical touch, into attunement. And later how we learned how we can "dispose" of the object symbolically.

It has never struck me that my body was capable of communicating an image/visual to my mind. Today I realized slowing and tuning to all parts of my body, aligning the rhythm to the natural vibration in a private safe space could conjure colourful imagery! The below is a sensory response and image that I recorded straight after:

"Rhythmic movement, me, a dancer moving in the wind, Hands fluttering like butterflies, body swaying tree but with feet and heart firmly rooted to itself. Soothing breeze is on my face and neck. The shoulder as a brace holding my dangling arms and moving them like swings in the garden. Feelings of warmth, mellow tones of sunset touching on my body, a melting of the colours into the environment. Being alive and whole, together with myself as it should be.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I propose that an emphasis on embodied practice and research as critical reflection is fundamental for a contemporary Singaporean body and especially for any artist based in Singapore because of the various censorship policies in place and the need to recognise that within the body sits multiple cultural identities, a history that interweaves. It is essential to state that there is no one history, but it is about having a space to hold the various interwoven cultural

histories and memories excavated and recuperated. If we work within the premise of a slow unravelling, we can and will recognise the effects that censorship has impacted on the body and search for alternative ways to regulate the policy to work around the system imposed. This way, we can create this transversal space for the multiplicities of culture and identities to exist. So this transversal space will contain all bodies, whether censored or uncensored, to stand together and be seen. Through the process of embodiment we can experience each other more intentionally.

This transversal space is where the body learns, unlearns and reclaims itself and within contemporary Singapore, we could use this to look at how the challenge of censorship has impacted the cultural and artistic landscape. The process of regulation is to seek an optimal creative space without unduly upsetting community harmony and social values. At the same time, I emphasise soft fireworks as an embodied technique for unpacking the layers of colonial history that have impacted the post-colonial body. Through this unpacking, a process of decolonising can start, and we lay claim to the ownership of one practice and lineage. Moreover, with history behind us, we are standing in this transversal space looking forward. We stand with both feet firmly on the shoulders of the ones that came before so that we can spring forward to decolonisation and acknowledge a future of practices in a manner that evokes a slowing down and stillness, one that is without aggressive transmission but with a sense of deep listening and slowing down.

Finally, as a performance maker, as a researcher/active observer of the process, I have made choices based on various combinations of form, representation, history, culture and individuality in the two performances. I have engaged in a cross-cultural

meeting of practices that allow for the expansion of the notion of the peripheral, where the point of reference is not centralised but to look from the margins, breaking unitary forms of representation and calling upon multiples to recognise one's history first. Unfettered by the east and west binary, I find the connections and oppositions among the multifarious cultures contained within the body.

As a Singaporean myself, I am aware of the cultural differences that exist within the body and I acknowledge the various cultural attributes that through the methodology of soft fireworks, we can probe deeper into our narratives. The premise of my practice research articulates my process of inquiry and experimentation of the embodied memory that is shaped by the layers of cross-cultural considerations and concerns. I am continually making cross-references of the different bodycultures to work against each other, align with each other, disengage and engage, and it is without the cultural implications of any new "dominating frameworks", as the bodies are not used to create unitary "selves".

Through the practice of soft fireworks as a system of training and performance making, I argue for a female space of knowledge sharing. And by laying claim through my body, I am positing a decolonising effect of my encounters that propels an embodied technique because it is my post-colonial body imprinted with layers of cultural intersections, interwoven within a body of mixed race to become new material(s) that now writes the performing space.

A transversal space was present in our embedded memory and history, buried deep within the individual and through the creation of the two performances. This

transversal space was one that responded to a cross-cultural context that allowed new and other narratives to exist. Moreover, as the body reclaims all her cultural memories, we can begin to visualise and create a transversal space where both the pluriversal and interversal bodies can intertwine. This transversal space acknowledges that bodies must experience each other for a process of decolonisation. The process of decolonisation allows new frameworks of practices to exist alongside other existing frameworks without discrediting the various lineage of practices. Instead, a new space is created, not a centralised viewpoint but a transversal space emerging from the margins that include the sharing of embodied practice as a methodology for a broader community.

Finally, through my practice of soft fireworks with the inclusion of slowness, non-action, stillness and silence in both my teaching and performance environment, I am proposing a transversal space of being. It is important to highlight that in our midst, there are still voices that are unheard and narratives untold. In this transversal space, we might feel safe to exist and safe enough to experience each other. When we feel safe, we will allow the sensation of meeting to flow in us and through us, so that we can break the body's mode of representation and fully embody the experience of the exchange. In a transversal space, a process of healing can also be triggered and sometimes healing is necessary so that we can begin to account for each other by existing together and working towards a process of decolonising. In this space we can begin a silent revolution for the presence of a decolonised female space of knowledge sharing through performance making and in academia.

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Gyllenhaal (Director and Writer). (2016) *In Utero* (DVD), USA: MRB studios and

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Appendix A

List of Figures

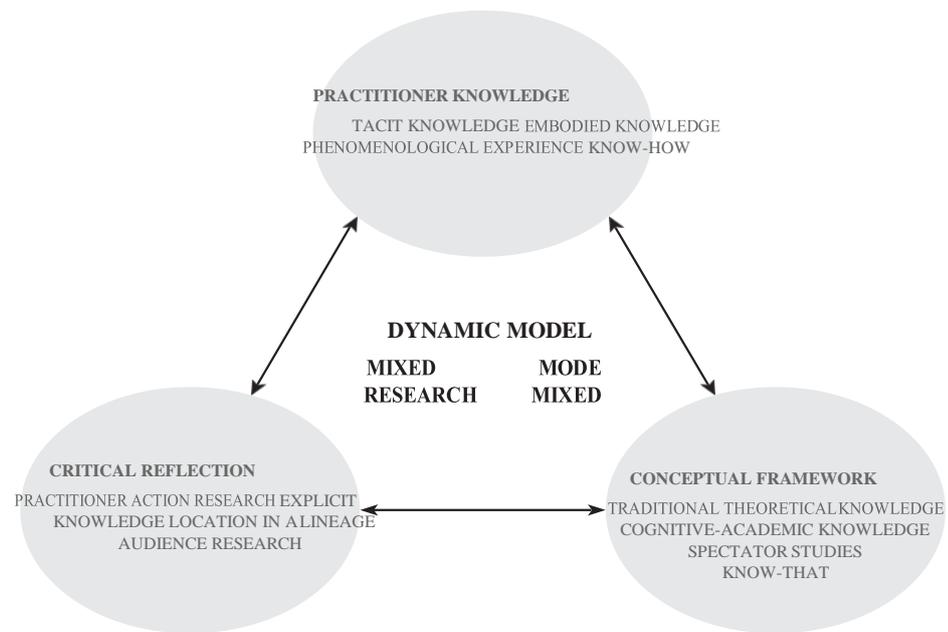


Figure 1 – Robin Nelson’s triangle (Nelson, 2006, p.114)



Figure 2 – A series of breathing exercises

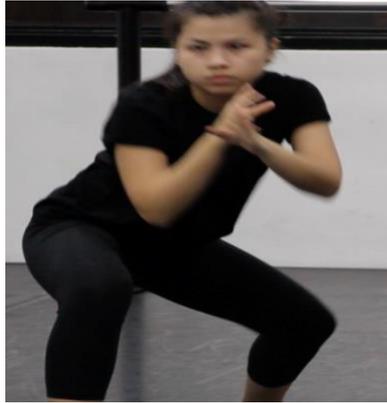


Figure 3 – *simhavadivu* (lion)



Figure 4 – *marjaravadivu* (cat)

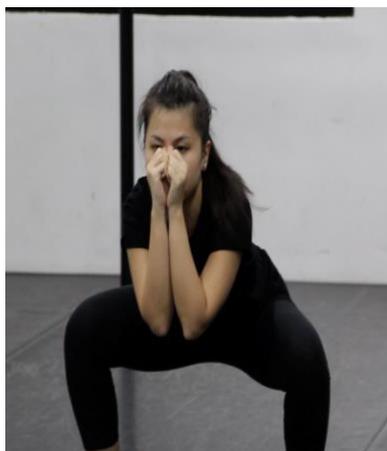


Figure 5 - *gajavadivu* (elephant)



Figure 6 – extended *simhavadivu* (lion)



Figure 7 – *gajavadivu* (elephant)



Figure 8 - The preparation of the performance space

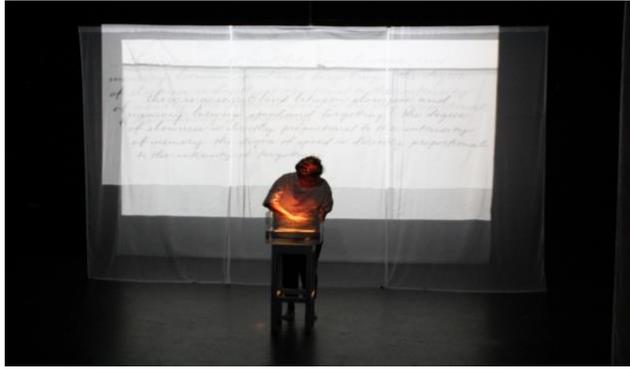


Figure 9 – The beginning of the performance

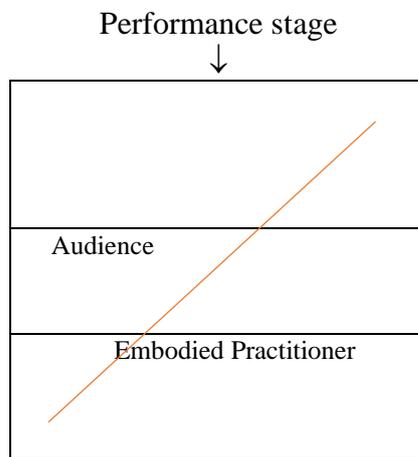


Figure 10 - A transversal space

Appendix B

(Video Transcript) Landscaping a Personal Myth – Process and Performance

[00:01]

This video article is my investigation of a decolonized cross-cultural performance practice. This investigation forms Phase 1 of my practice research.

In the video, the viewer will witness two performers in the studio as they devise a new duet performance *Landscaping A Personal Myth*.

The process started in October 2015 and ended on 3rd May 2016 with the presentation of the duet performance.

Landscaping A Personal Myth was performed twice. Once in Singapore as part of a research seminar held in LASALLE College of the Arts (3rd May 2016) and again in Denmark at the Odin Teatret as part of Magdalena, an international network of women in contemporary theatre: Transit VIII Festival (1st June – 12th June 2016) *Beauty As A Weapon: Theatre-Women-Conflict*.

Below is a list of questions that helped frame Phase 1 of my practice research as a performance maker within a cross cultural site.

1. Who are you/we culturally?
2. What do you/we carry culturally?
3. What are you/our behavioural patterns, gestures? Are these gestures part of

your/our cultural narrative?

4. What is the history of your/our body and the environment that your/our body is exposed to?

5. What is the negotiation of what seems to be happening internally and what you think is happening in the space?

6. What was this inner dialogue that it created – and what memories would surface?

My process of working with the two performers was in five stages:

1. Working through *kalaripayattu* as the pre-preparatory tool so as to utilise the breath as an inner dialogue of creating a physical score.

2. Working with three specific objects that trigger a memory for the two performers. I asked for three objects from the two performers as I was keen to explore three possible routes of the embodied cultural memory, the self (daughter), the self once removed (mother) and the self twice removed (grandmother).

3. A retelling of memory through the body using a series of personal photographs.

4. Collection of conversations with the performers' family members as a way into the self once removed and twice removed.

5. Creating a cross-cultural mise-en-scene of re-telling and for-telling through the use of personal narratives, sound and multi-media.

[01:56]

The video article is divided into three parts.

Part A: Process.

Part B: Rehearsals.

Part C: Performance.

Part A: Process.

There are five sections here and they are marked accordingly. These 5 sections are the findings that convey the cultural embodiment of the multiplicities of selves within the body in a cross-cultural site.

Part A: Process.

First section

1a. What is this inner dialogue that is conveyed through the body, how is this strung together to create a physical score, and how does the body embody its memory?

1b. The challenges of recalling the embodied gestures and the unpacking of what is a learned gesture. The process of embodiment through the use of objects and the becoming of the memory.

Second section

2. How, through the use of objects, is the journeying of identities and flow of consciousness articulated through the body? How does the use of objects convey embodied memory?

Third section

3a. Exploring the possible routes of the self, self once removed and the self twice removed. What is the process of the re-telling of a series of events that provokes embodiment of the 3 selves in the contemporary body?

3b. How does the process of re-telling through an external impulse such as photographs and objects trigger the embodied memory?

Fourth section

4. When embodied memories are evoked and the multiplicities of selves are revealed, the body enters into a vulnerable state. What are the processes of re-telling these multiplicities of selves? At this point, how does the body respond as a site?

Fifth section

5. How does the body articulate a new possibility, a re-writing of history and the contemporary?

Part B: Rehearsals.

Here, the multi-media and sound were created in conjunction with the two performers – with most of the images coming from the performers and the sounds coming mainly from interviews gathered from the performers.

Part C: Performance.

This is the performance within a cross-cultural site. The performance can be described as a site that is defined by the close proximity of relations. It articulates a sense of circulatory networks or linkages of elements put together, to create the multiplicities of voice to be heard, and to call forth the peripheral to speak.

[04:01]

My role was to gather these personal narratives through reflexive devising strategies of working with images that were triggers from the performers' memory through the body.

In this process, I also collaborated with a sound designer and a multi-media designer to create this cross-cultural performance space where the stories of the two performers are juxtaposed. The cross-referencing of the different narratives thus conveys the crossing of bodies within the site.

[04:23]

Part A: Process.

1a. What is this inner dialogue that is conveyed through the body, how is this stringed together to create a physical score, and how does the body embody its memory?



Video still of Part A of Process – Vanessa Toh (Performer A), October 2015

[05:15]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

So at the beginning I felt like there was a strong, grounded beginning. There was no necessary image, I just felt like my foundation was strong somehow. And the first half, it was carried out by a lightness throughout. So I was bouncing, I was light and there was a change in tempo from slow to fast. I felt like the build-up to the climax only began after I got up from the ground. The tempo sped up, my breath started quickening and I felt like I had an outer body experience, as in I felt like I was watching my body move. I was outside of my body, I had no control. I had control, but I was not in it. My mind was not controlling the movement.

[06:06]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

Definitely felt like the ups and downs of the text because I had the movement in my head. Even though I was still walking through it, there was a lightness, and I played with it cause it was in my head still. And there were parts of my score that required

physical strength and the chair itself was heavy, and I was trembling to keep it up and away from my body and it also fed into the delivery of the text as well.

[07:22]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

And then I felt a lot of other things. But then when you said don't to give in to that emotional side, then the physical really took over and I had to push through the score and finish the score with the – cause I ended up with raised hands and I had to ... and even though it was a chair at the time, I felt like it was so heavy and hard to push it to my final position, and I think it also allowed me to push through with the breath as well. I felt like I took a lot more breaths in the last part as well.

[08:33]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

29 October 2015

I tried to go through the score with that extra weight and still commit to the score 100%.

Elizabeth:

What was different compared to the last time?

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

It just generated from the score and the chair and I didn't have the extension of my other scores – with my fingers and all that, I just, all I had was the chair and I gripped on. I just had that and that was all I could express myself with.

[09:28]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

“My popo Catherine came from Ipoh, Malaysia. She came from a family of eleven siblings – four brothers and seven sisters and she was the second youngest. She met *gonggong* at a disco party. A disco party. She fell in love and got married. Popo made a big move from Ipoh to Singapore. ...”

[10:45]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

31 October 2015

It’s like going over in your head, over and over again, your mind doesn’t only hear it and your body hears it. Well for me is my memory is the phrase that she always said, but now I’m hearing it different all the time when I am recalling it. I feel different all the time when I hear it. And then you just react, you know. And you’re so in it because your body and your mind is in it. Then the memory changes from the original.

Elizabeth:

What do you mean by that?

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

The nature of memory is that it’s easily manipulated, right? And you make it how you want it, actually. Sometimes, you think about it so much that it becomes different from the original and I feel like when I was going through it, it was changing. It was suddenly like a memory of my grandmother came up when it didn’t even occur to me,

even when I chose this rice – I didn't even think about it. It only came to me after exercise 1 and 2, and I suddenly remembered the way my grandmother used to wash rice before you microwaved it, because she used to microwave it.

You said that we had to embody our grandmothers, and then I just started distributing rice to all my family members. One for my son-in-law, one for my daughter, one for my grandkids, and then one for me and I did it until the bowl of rice was empty. Then, I didn't feel good that – like I felt like they needed more food or something and I started dividing my portion to them until I was left with nothing, but I didn't feel like I was hungry or needed rice. And god, it was like, what the shit and – I mean, we know that she sacrifices for us but she gave everything. I mean, we just don't see it like that, you know? And to her it's nothing, it's just “*okay lah give lah, you hungry? You eat ah?*” It's like, I don't know. Then I felt really shitty when I was my grandmother.

[13:40]



Video still of Part A - Process – Chanel Chan (Performer B), 16 October 2015

[14:58]

Part A: Process.

First section

1b. The challenges of recalling the embodied gestures and the unpacking of what is a learned gesture. The process of embodiment through the use of objects and the becoming of the memory.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

22 October 2015

I guess because there's this socialised kind of habit that when a text comes, it comes from a part of your brain, and when we are moving, and you ask our text to come from the physical movement, there is a struggle to disconnect, disconnect the mind and the body and, but then when I stop thinking of it in a linear sense, in a way that it's supposed to make sense, I thought about what are the sensations and the sounds of the words that can be sort of in the same world.

[16:35]

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

23 October 2015

I guess that's why for me, I find it very hard to comprehend this no-thought, no-intellectualisation. But more in a sense of when I thought I get it, then you said I didn't, then it confuses me. Because my thought was wrong, so there must be some sort of

disconnect in two different thoughts – the thoughts you wanted us to think, and the thought that I thought.

[17:14]

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

23 October 2015

I think that from the train of their thought, that we dissect the first part, second part, third part. The first part for me was, I don't know why, but after my (exhalation) move, I forgot. I blanked, and I completely blanked on my score. And I knew the other gestures that I could play with, but I blanked on what was going to happen next. So then I sort of thought back on the story and say, if this is the part of the journey, what is the next part of the journey and fit the next score into it. So it was basically a lot of linking my, and then I found it after one blank, but it was linking the story to the physical score. And then the second part I just distilled everything down to that one sense with the whole story, the journey with my grandfather and my grandmother and the two places and the plants and the fish and everything, and I put everything in one container, one tactual. And I wanted to explore it in my body and into every pore of my body. And then, I went in the third segment and I just, it was like getting lost in her and there was this – my knowledge of her body now being discarded away and almost possessing her young self, and then, it's quite apparent from what other people have been saying, that the emotions inevitably came with it, and other memories, for example, like her boat disappearing, and like her brother dying in front of her and all that, and I looked at the seaweed, and I saw that, like the dried up seaweed around the

boat, or like around the boat, or like the ashes of her brother. And I just fed from that imagery for a while, like I didn't live it, but I created her living it.

[20:00]

Part A: Process.

Second section

2. How, through the use of objects, is the journeying of identities and flow of consciousness articulated through the body? How does the use of objects convey embodied memory?

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

5 November 2015

There were flashes of images and sounds, and there were memories of my associations with the umbrella and then I really did not know – because I was struggling because you were giving me instructions and everything, and how do I bring this out here, into my body. And then only – your water helped, the spray, throwing the bowl of water at me, and then it kind of woke me up to get out of my mind a bit. And I was very frustrated already – it wasn't even that, I really lost track of time actually. I forgot about the alarm and everything. I felt like, I don't know, I felt like there was something, but there was nothing. But there were some moments that worked for me. There was a moment where I was just lying down the umbrella and I already very very frustrated, and then my legs started spinning me around the umbrella, and then I started getting really dizzy, and then I started getting more frustrated, because I didn't know

where I was spinning my body towards. But that really helped me to get out of my – of that closed-ness that I felt.

I think it helped that you started from ground zero, like reminding us of the rules. Because all the other days that we met, it was just “okay, let’s do the work. Let’s do the items straight away.” But then, when we did that hour without the items, without the story, without the grandma or anything, just interact with the space in your body in whatever, it kind of conditions your body again, like warmed up. Cause I think we were just coming in kind of cold. Like even though we were warming up, it was just not warmed up for the work.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

It’s not a physical thing, it’s – you have to go through a process, then you would warm up. That kind of feeling.

[23:19]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

18 March 2016

My *Popo*, Catherine Yuen Kuai Chun, came from a family of four brothers and seven sisters. She was the second youngest. The Yuen’s were rich, but my *popo’s* family lived simply. Simply but happy. Her brothers continued studying while her sisters and her stopped. She said her brothers were clever, and they were stupid. She met my *gongong* at a disco party. A disco party. Her sister introduced both of them. My *Gong’s* name is Lim Kwai Choon. My *popo’s* name is Yuen Kuai Choon. She told me that they were meant for each other. I guess you could say they fell in love and they

got married. She moved from Ipoh to Singapore with my *gong gong*. She was so young, and so brave. But my *gong gong* didn't treat her well. My *gong gong* didn't treat her well. His mother didn't treat her well, but she worked hard. She took a lot of short courses, she studied short-hand, and typewriting, she worked for a big business firm. She was an assistant to a lot of rich British people. They liked her a lot. They promoted her. She worked there for 32 years. When she came home at nine o'clock every night, there was no food for her to eat. Her mother-in-law, my *gong gong's* mother didn't have the nerve to leave her dinner to eat. All she had to eat was rice and soya sauce. All she had to eat was rice and soya sauce. Where was my *gong gong*? He was out, playing mah-jong till late at night, didn't even call home to make sure she was safe – no. He was out entertaining his friends. Playing mah-jong. But she was strong. She ate that rice and soya sauce and continued working for 32 years. She was so strong. And now she's sick. Now my *popo* is sick. My *popo* is sick and I cannot do anything about it. I just watch her as she struggles. She can't even control the tremors in her body. All I can do is say, "It's okay *popo*, let it go...let it go, let it go." It's because of *gong gong* that she's sick. Ever since he passed away, she has never been the same. And I still don't understand. I don't understand how, how she can love a man who gave her so much shit. Who made her feel like shit. She misses you, *gong gong*. She misses you. I miss you. She is going further and further away and I cannot get her back. Help me get her back.

There's no one particular family event that sticks out to me right now. But, I always look back and reminisce of my childhood days. My parents were both busy working full-time jobs in the day, so it was my grandparents who were there constantly looking after me. My sisters and I were doted on a lot because we were the first batch of

grandchildren to arrive on both my mother's and father's side. We would be passed around from grandparent to grandparent. Usually we would spend the weekdays with our grandparents, and then the weekends with our parents. I really enjoyed staying at my mama's house, my father's mother. So it was always a sad day whenever Friday evenings came, because that meant that my father was going to come and pick me up, and I didn't want to leave my mama's house. My mama would always try to mentally prepare me, by reminding me on Thursday night that my father was going to bring me home on Friday. "Vaness, today is Thursday, so tomorrow is what day? Friday. That means papa is going to bring you back home, okay? That means, you cannot cry, okay? I will see you next week when you come back to mama's house on Monday, can?" Of course when Friday came, the tears began to stream in, and I would be tugging behind on my mama's *baju*, not wanting to leave. Sometimes it would be so bad, that I would be lying on the floor, bawling my eyes out and going on full-on tantrum mode. There will be times when I would be hiding from my dad. Because if he couldn't find me, it would mean he couldn't take me home. There was once I hid behind my mama's arm chair in her room, and stayed completely silent. So silent that both my dad and my mama gave up looking for me. So it was always a struggle whenever my parents had to take us home and spend time with us on weekends. Because weekends were our only time together, and it didn't help that we were reluctant to go home. So there was always bribing involved, whether it was with candy and sweets, or trips to the zoo. But I had fond memories of my sisters and parents at the zoo. We were friends of the zoo, so every other weekend, we would go to the zoo and have picnics there.

[32:11]

Part A: Process

Third section

3a. Exploring the possible routes of the self, self once removed and the self twice removed. What is the process of the re-telling of a series of events that provokes embodiment of the 3 selves in the contemporary body?

[32:30]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

2 April 2016

We focused a lot on other people, other people in our lives, in my mother's life, my grandmother's life, and then when the spotlight was on my own life, there was that, "okay, what am I made of?" And then I tried to think back what makes Vanessa, and I was blank for a while because, "shit, is there nothing interesting about my life?" Because, well I thought that there was nothing much to say about me, you know, my mom and my grandmother had gone through a lot. And not that I haven't gone through a lot, but I couldn't think of it at that moment. So I just shake it off, just move around. Started playing with my feet, going slowly, looking at myself on the outside first, and moving bits of my body, parts of my body, exploring that. And then slowly the things started to come along, like my legs started moving in a certain way and I got reminded of my training in Indian dance, then that went into my memory of primary school or secondary school. And then little bits here and there, I suddenly jump from being Vanessa, when I was twelve or fifteen to Vanessa when she was in kindergarten, to Vanessa when she was in day-care, and then I quickly jotted the memories and that

experience down on paper, and as I was writing, more memories came after that. So the movement helped, but as I was writing, the writing also triggered something else, and I remembered more just by scribbling whatever I thought of. Then I would go blank again, I would just stop, and started getting out of mind, trying to move around again.

[34:50]

Part A: Process.

Third section

3b. How does the process of re-telling through an external impulse such as photographs and objects trigger the embodied memory?

[35:10]

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

26 April 2016

It's not the pretty photos, where they said their vows in church, or the photos taken with their friends. It's a photo of my father, carrying my mother, into their bedroom for the first time, in their new house. My father was still in his tux, and my mother was still in her big, white, poufy bridal gown, and they had the widest smiles on their faces. And their friends were all around, cheering them on, because right before that, my father was about to throw my mother onto their new bed.

So I just, breathed, first, and then, so my hands started doing something with the floor. And then, I think then I just went with what my body was trying to tell me. So I didn't try to capture any memory or what, I let it find me instead. And I think from the floor,

something started. I stepped into a younger version of myself. And then, I just followed it and breathed into it and just said. “okay, whatever.” And then after that, it was a lot easier because I didn’t try anymore. And then I picked up a lot of things that hit me, and I just followed the impulse to do it.

Whatever that was happening was new because it hasn’t happened before, because it wasn’t a memory, or a past thing that I went to. It became a life exploration of myself.

[37:20]

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

5 November 2015

When I was lying down with the water, and then you said, “connect with your *tan tian*, move with the vibration, stay in there” and all that, I just distil it to the bare minimum of what am I, what is my body telling me. If my body is not telling me anything, then I’m just going to wait till I have something, so it was less, “oh I should do this shape now.” It was more like what is this feeding this need to go this place, go the water, touch the water. And then the stories and the memories came. You didn’t give us a task of connecting to a story, just explore with the objects, but somehow, it came into my mind. A few of the sensations from the earlier on – the seaweed and all – felt stronger with this, than it was before.

And at the end when you said this was the hardest part and to keep trying, keep trying, keep finding more new things. So it was quite like a struggle to find more things. It felt like a story was used up, but then there’s more within that, like what if it is not

anymore, what if it's this and that, and then other connections to the story – like what other connection that I can draw, you know?

[40:15]

Part A: Process.

Fourth section

4. When embodied memories are evoked and the multiplicities of selves are revealed, the body enters into a vulnerable state. What are the processes of re-telling these multiplicities of selves? At this point, how does the body respond as a site?

[40:28]

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

18 March 2016

It wasn't a happy marriage. She hates my *gong gong*. She'd rather not talk about him these days...

I needed more time to kind of find her, and then you gave instructions, but I couldn't hear you and I wasn't sure if you were talking to me, and then in that confusion, I was just kind of something just pushed me into my mother. Like while doing all those actions trying to find her, it was hard to find her, but when during the confusion, I was – at that moment I was like, are you going to repeat yourself, what is the next impulse, what is the next instruction going to be. And then suddenly it just, it like, something just came out. And in the talking about my mother, I don't know why, Chanel has a lot of guilt in the mother's voice. My tears kept coming out because I felt, I felt really guilty and a bit dirty saying her words, because it made me realise how unappreciative

I am to her, when I'm saying her life, and I just cannot shake off that feeling of this, I should have been better, I should have been a better daughter, and all that, while I'm saying her words. And when it comes to the talking about my siblings part, it was the first time I made that connection about my brother's name, and I knew that he was about to be aborted, and I knew that she had a dream about the goddess, and I knew his name was Tiansheng, but now, it's the first time I've made that connection, "oh! That's why his name is Sky Born, because he – the gods literally gave him a life."

[44:02]

Part A: Process.

Fifth section

5. How does the body articulate a new possibility, a re-writing of history and the contemporary?

[44:10]

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

2 April 2016

When I was first given this task, this task being to move and to find a personal story about myself, in mind I was thinking, "where do I start?" I mean, I have a lot of things to say, at the same time, I don't have anything to say. So, I think Elizabeth saw that and said "all of you are going into your head, you are overthinking, just do, just go." So I just started and I just, I found myself a comfortable spot on the floor and I just kind of waited. Waited for something to come. It took a while before I actually had something, but once that started, everything started to flow. I didn't even have to move that within 5 movements, I got a new memory and another new

memory and I started to write them down. When you said something is nothing, I was trying very hard to kind of stay genuine to my memories.

[45:44]

Part B: Rehearsals.

Here, the multi-media and sound were created in conjunction with the two performers – with most of the images coming from the performer and the sounds coming mainly from interviews gathered from the performers.

[47:47]

Part C: Performance.

This is the performance within a cross-cultural site. The performance can be described as a site that is defined by the close proximity of relations. It articulates a sense of circulatory networks or linkages of elements put together, to create the multiplicities of voice to be heard, and to call forth the peripheral to speak.

Landscaping a Personal Myth was performed twice. Once in Singapore as a part of a research seminar held in LASALLE College of the Arts (3rd May 2016) and then in Denmark at the Odin Teatret as part of Magdalena, an international network of women in contemporary theatre Transit VIII Festival (1st June – 12th June 2016) *Beauty As A Weapon: Theatre-Women-Conflict*.

[48:23]

Performance:

3 May 2016

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

My *popo* was born in a small fishing village Guangzhou. Or was it Hangzhou. Because her family was poor, they moved to another fishing village in Malacca. Back then it was during the Japanese occupation. Once, a Japanese soldier came to their kampong and wanted to take their fishing boat. It was their only means to a livelihood. *Popo* was still a young girl then, so her brother was the one that stood up to the Japanese soldiers. (beat) *popo* watched the Japanese soldier beat her brother to death. *Popo* says whenever she thinks about the Japanese Occupation, she can't sleep. So, she rather think about money. All she thought about was: how do I get more money? Where to get the next job? How to feed my family? The most lucrative thing to do then was to get married.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

Rice and soya sauce... Rice and soya sauce...

My *Popo* came from a family of 4 brothers and 7 sisters. She was the second youngest. She stopped studying at secondary school while her brothers continued. She said that that was because her brothers were smart and her sisters and her were stupid.

My *popo* met *gong gong* at a disco party in Ipoh. A disco party. Her sister introduced both of them. My *Gong Gong*'s name was Lim Kwai Choon. My *Popo*'s name is Yuen

Kwai Chun. She said that they were meant to be together. I guess you could say they fell in love and got married. My Popo moved from Ipoh to Singapore to start a family with my *gong gong*. But *gong gong* did not treat *popo* well. *GongGong's* mother didn't treat my *popo* well. Even after giving birth to my mother. But it's okay. My *popo* worked hard. She took up short courses in shorthand and type-writing. And she managed to get a job as a secretary for a big British company. They liked her so much that they promoted my *popo*. She worked till late in the evening. Till 9pm.

But when *popo* went home, she went home to nothing to eat. *Gong Gong's* mother didn't even have the cheek to save her some dinner. So sometimes all my *popo* had to eat for dinner was rice and soya sauce. Plain rice and soya sauce. Where was my *gong gong*? He was out playing mahjong with his friends. But my *Popo* was strong. She was so strong.

And now she's sick. My *popo* is sick and I can't do anything about it. I think that she's sick because of you, *gong gong*. I think she misses you. And I still don't understand. How can she love you after all that you did and said to her and to us. Everyday, I feel like she's fading further and further away from me. Help me bring her back, *gong gong*. Help me bring *popo* back.

Chanel:

Popo met *gong gong* in an arranged marriage. Her dowry, her worth, was \$400. It wasn't a happy marriage. Together they had 7 children. Mommy was the 4th one. *Popo* gave birth to mommy on a bridge. She was looking for work in Malacca, heavily pregnant with my mother, she was crossing a bridge and my mother just popped out.

Gong gong was probably gambling or drinking somewhere. All the men in my family are the same, my *gong gong* was like that, my father was like that. The women in my family are the strong ones. And me?

(Vanessa starts humming “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean”.)

Vanessa:

My *Popo* used to love singing to me this song whenever she put me down for my afternoon naps.

(Vanessa sings the whole song. After that, she opens the umbrella and stands.)

My *popo* loves umbrellas. I don’t know why but she collects them. She has a whole collection in her closet. When my *Popo* buys umbrellas, she put it through 3 tests.

First.

She will check the inner lining of the umbrella. Make sure that everything is sewed on nice and tight. Second. She will open and close the umbrella a lot of times. To make sure the mechanics of the umbrella is working. Third.

Ah! Now this is a good umbrella!

Popo makes sure that all of us never leave home without our umbrella and one plastic bag. Why plastic bag? For your wet umbrella! So that you won’t wet the inside of your bag when you want to keep your umbrella.

One day... One day, I decided to be rebellious and not bring my umbrella. Because it was so big and bulky and what were the chances of it raining on the one day that I didn't bring it, right? And then true enough, it rained. And I was stuck at the bus stop opposite our house. So I had no choice but to call my *popo*, "Hello, *popo*? Yah it is very heavy over here... Yah, I know you always tell me to bring my umbrella out with me. And I always do... I always do! But *Popo* ah... I... I forgot today. Can you fetch me from the bus stop?"

"See lah! I told you how many times.... Always bring your umbrella out. Now see what happens. Rain on you! Give me 5 minutes, I'll be there soon."

Now, I make sure that I don't forget my umbrella and my plastic bag. Because now, my *popo* can't fetch me from the bus stop anymore.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

My mom grew up around the sea. While growing up, she spent her a lot of time fishing. She would say "last time where did you get money to watch movie? Last time we don't have magazine to read, no money to go shopping with friends and all that. Fishing lor. Fishing is free."

(Chanel's mother recording plays)

You see when you fish, you have to be patient and you can't give up. My mother believes that the fishes can hear your thoughts, and if you don't want it hard enough,

the fish will never catch your bait. Frustrated? The fishes will know. Doubtful? The fish will know. Fretful? The fish WILL know.

You also can't be scared to get your hands dirty. Fishes love the smelliest, bloodiest, wormiest bait. You have to attach it nicely on the hook. Hook it up nicely so the fishes can't see the hook, so that they will swallow the whole bait.

When you catch the fish you have to hold the fish firmly in your hands. If it's a big fish you can step on it firmly. Remove the hook carefully. Pray that the hook is not in too deep or you will have to rip the whole fish head out. And you don't want that because the fish head is the best part.

My mother says: when you work hard to get the fish you want, that feeling is ... indescribable.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

I asked my mother, "Mummy, can you tell me about *popo*?"

(A recording of her mother plays.)

Sometimes, I wish I could turn back time. I want to follow my *popo* when she goes to the tailor's. I want to see what kind of fabrics she chooses for her dresses. I want to follow my *popo* to that famous button shop in the Chinatown. I want to know what kind of hair and makeup my *popo* likes to wear. I can only imagine. And in my imagination, she is always beautiful.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

My mother has very simple likes. Fishing. Beer. And karaoke. She's not a very good singer. She is a bit tone deaf, like me ... But when she sings, she doesn't give a damn in the world. She loves it.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

My mother was an only child. So she was a very lonely child. And so my *popo* and *gong gong* buy her all kinds of toys and all kinds of pets. She has dogs, birds... All kind of birds! Parrots... anything, you name it.

You know, one day my mother was so bored that she took a *sapu-lilly* stick and poked one of her parrot's eye out! And then it died! My mother would be so lonely that she would sit outside her front gate and talk to anyone who passes by. "Eh Aunty! You went to the market ah? What did you buy ah? Oh... you need to go home ah? Okay never mind, bye bye... bye bye..."

"Eh! Where you going! Huh, tuition...? Come and play with me la! Huh okay... if you come and play with me, I'll give you my *masak masak* set! You want? Ah never mind, I give you I give you! Okay!"

My *popo* and *gong gong* would be so angry with my mother because she would give away her brand new toys to strangers just so that she could bribe them to play with her for just one afternoon. But to my mother, it was worth it. Where was my *popo*? She was busy working. Where was my *gong gong*? If he wasn't in school teaching, then he was out playing mahjong with his friends.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I get it. I understand why my mother loves fishing. I felt it too. Once, my mother took the family on a fishing trip to Batam. We took a ferry, another short car ride and finally arrived at this *kelong*. As we walked in I noticed an eagle. It was the pet of the place. Once in a while it swooped down the sea to catch a fish and it will always fly back. It's funny that it never flew away. You walk in some more and you see a pool table that's ripped up so no proper game of pool can actually be played. And then there's a really old karaoke machine. Which my mom loves. Other than that, there was nothing else to do but fish. You eat, sleep, fish and repeat. Anything that you catch, you can give it to the kitchen and they'll cook it for dinner. Needless to say my mom's table is always full of different types of seafood. The first time I tried my hands at fishing, my mom did all the dirty work for me. like hooking the bait up and everything. she gave me a simple thin hand line, no need for a fishing rod for a beginner like me she says. I didn't think much of it as I lowered the line down the water, looking at all the tiny fishes swimming around my bait. In no less than 10 minutes, I suddenly felt a sharp tug. So sharp that I got a rope burn from the nylon line. But in that moment, I knew I got a fish. I could sense it was a big one too! I shouted : "MOM! I GOT A FISH! I GOT A FISH!" she put down everything and ran behind me to help me reel in the fish. Not too fast or the line will break. We didn't mind that it hurt our hands because the fish was bloody strong. Finally we managed to get the fish out of the water. My mother looked at it and said it's one of those coral fish. They're not for human consumption. Too many bones! But it doesn't matter. I caught a fish! I have my mom's fishing gift!

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I have moved house 9 times in my life. The last time I saw my father was at the first house. This is my only memory of him. I woke up in the middle of the night because I heard shouting. I left my room and peeked into my mother room and I could see standing on the bed, cornered at the edge of the wall. Throwing things at my father. She's crying and shouting "don't come near me, stay away from me" I panicked and went to the living room. I started to rock my brother's cot. The more I rocked it, the more force I used. I became very violent and woke my brother up. He started wailing. I heard the fighting stop and I immediately ran to my bed closed my eyes really really tight.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

I have a favourite picture of my parents. It's from their wedding day. It's not the official pictures that they took in church while they were saying their vows or during the tea-ceremony. It's a picture of my father carrying my mother over the threshold. They had the widest smiles on their faces. I don't know... I just want that for myself.

A lot of people say that I look like my father and that my sisters looks like my mother. But what they don't know is that my mother says that I'm actually a lot like her. My *popo* says that my mother is like a lot like my *gong gong*. So does that mean, I'm like my *gong gong*?

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I use to steal a lot. Candies, dollar coins, cds, items from my friends, stickers from my school bookshop all sorts of knick knacks. And then I got caught. That night my

mother punished me. She took chopsticks from the kitchen and clamped my hand. While I cried in pain, she started to tear too. Then she told me the story of when she stole a duck for *popo*. I guess I'm just like my mother.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

Sometimes, I envy people. I envy people who have strong and rich family histories. People who know the names and the backgrounds of their great-great-great grandparents, all the way back to their ancestors.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

My popo name is Liew Niew. My gong gong name is... My father's name was James Chan Lian Hin. But presently he has changed it to Ronnie Chan.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

Because at least they know where they come from. They know what they are made out of. And with that, then at least they know where they are going.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I've never met my father and I don't want to either.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

For a long time, I felt a little lost. Because no one in my family could give me answers past my great grandparents. And so I came to a point where I realized that I may not be able to trace back my roots that far.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

My mother was born on a bridge on May 2nd.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

I am 23 years old this year.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I am born on may the 3rd. I'm 27 years old this year.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

There are many things that I am learning every day and many things that I know I will never find out.

Chanel Chan (Performer B):

I have a lot of nicknames: xiao niao, se niao, seashell and most commonly, Channel.

Vanessa Toh (Performer A):

But I'm not that lost anymore. I may not be certain about alot things but there are some things about me that I know for a fact and that I will carry as my truth.

(My name is... recording)

End

Appendix C

(Video Transcript) Landscapes of Memories – Process and Performance

[00:01]

This video article is my second and final investigation of a decolonised cross-cultural performance practice.

In the video, the viewer will witness the various process that I had to take as my body was in a stage of non-action. The process took an unexpected turn as I had to acknowledge that my body was in a state of grief and therefore refusing to move and so I had to go back to ask myself some very basic questions such as:

How do we exist in the studio/rehearsal space?

What do I want to happen in the studio/rehearsal space?

Do I even want anything to happen?

Can something happen?

And if something happens, how did it happen?

What is the something that had happened?

These questions asked whether I could propose any other process of decolonising my own thought and being. In attempting to acknowledge that another process was needed, I created a solo performative meditation *Landscapes of Memories*.

The solo performative meditation created an apparent tension between the slowness and stillness in my body, in contract with the busy stage and several things were put in there.

The performing body was then, not doing anything more than being-in-the-space, while the space was working its way through the metaphors and in doing so summoning them to be experienced by the audience and as such to experience my other/ed body.

[1:09]

Landscapes of Memories:

Rehearsal Process

When the body refuses to move

[1:15]

(24 April 2018)

At the start of the process, I found it difficult for the body to move and because my body refuses to move, I felt a sense of betrayal, and this bodymind separation. The fact that my body is having difficulty to move and refuses to move caused an unpacking of the pre-rehearsal training methods that I had been subscribing to and methods used to evoke the embodied memory for any creative material.

[1:30]

I had to unpack my subscribed understanding that memory is evoked through physical ‘attunement’ that comes only when the body is vividly active. Because my stream of

conscious thought and memory was caught in my body and became a prisoner chained/clinging on within. It was as if the memory was unable to take any shape or in any form thorough the body.

[2:03]

25 April 2018

This process of finding myself in this state required me to slow down. In doing this, a different perspective to the research was discovered. I find myself in this state of quietude which requires distancing of the self and yet at the same time, providing the space in which I can restore an emotional atmosphere or 'heart' to the experience of understanding and indicating that is understanding is existentially situated (Heidegger). This space provided a new observation of how the viscera can be slow and allow quietude to exist within the silencing and stillness.

[3:23]

I decided to work with applied art practices and combine this with the ritualistic pre-performance preparation of attuning the body.

These practices were:

1. Observing and experiencing
2. Engaging with 'sandplay' using leaves
3. Working with elemental objects
4. Creating a harmonious moment

[05:05]

1. Observing and experiencing

This presence of being is a creation of my myth and is described as an awakening towards consciousness and this creation of myth is essential as in ancient religion the telling of myth forms essential teaching of ritual initiation (von Franz). Moreover, through this creation of myth, I begin to excavate the embodied cultural memory and translate the authentic self.

Standing in a shadowing of observing and experiencing, the silence becomes this route that vibrates within me and forms this route of telling.

[06:12]

2. Engaging in 'sandplay' using leaves

[06:25]

As I slowly begin to reclaim my body in slowness, images begin to take shape in objects. The veins of the leaves became for me an excavated embodied memory as I traced the routes of his(her)toricities of my embodied memory. This experiential encounter with the leaves is a process of consciousness and an integration of memories.

[07:54]

3. Working with elemental objects

[09:55]

4. Creating a harmonious moment

As the process develops, more questions arose and I begin to question how my grief might influence the process because as an embodied researcher who is working primarily through her own body, the difficulty of separating the individual from the self and the work seemed impossible.

A lot of the conjured memories were of an unspoken past of my unknowing.

And so, I decided to go even slower where I am almost not moving outwardly but through the principle of movement stirred within.

This inter-connection is where my body finds herself in stillness and unpacks her inter-gestures that is culturally labelled as my body translates the memories within.

How do I interpret my body as this translator?

Within this stillness sits a negotiation of how my memory is migrating from within into a form that takes its shape through how my body is remembering.

[10:40]

I was cautious with using objects such as my father's identification paper, my parents' marriage certificate and some old photographs because I knew that these objects were related to my grieving process as these objects belonged to my late parents. I need to register how I am in relations to these objects and to do this in a pre-reflective and unthematized manner.

[11:06]

As my body slowly begins to move, there was a kind of awakening or an intercommunication with my brain and my body's nervous system.

How does the body move? As the excavated memory is taking its shape through the body, I started looking at how my body encounters with the space. Expanding further on the idea of divestiture, I started to explore how does my body relate to the space that I am encountering. What does it mean for the body to be imbalanced and in fact, there was an imbalance as I feel this sense of being dragged onto the ground because of my body refused to move in the matter that it once did.

[11:33]

This perception of imbalance equates to this sense of disequilibrium that I was experiencing. If I held onto this imbalance, I will remain in a state of recalling and not in process of reclaiming. However, should I give in to this disequilibrium and fall? This sense of falling requires me to let go, to lose control and open up this sensation of fragility.

[11:53]

This falling finds the body in this state of stillness and yet moving, silence and yet experiencing because the way we are always engaging with the world or the space around us is through constant movement, it requires us to be more in balance.

We are always in motion, moving towards or away from objects in a shared environment. To be present in the world or to act in the world requires us to know where we are in the space.

This sense of falling creates this innate awareness of how the body is functioning and activate the proprioceptive sense (Charles Sherrington). This refers to the position of the body in the space and the limbs in relation to the rest of the body, which in turn directs the perception and cognition of the environment and sees the body as this interaction of how the body explores its manipulation of the space and through that, a movement of the embodied memory.

[14:36]

The slow process of remembering is taking shape in my body through quietude, thus tracing the fundamental principles that already existed within my body of practice. The slowness that I seemed drawn towards, required me to look deeper within. As I work on excavating my implicit memory, I noticed that the slower I move, the more intense my remembering was and I became more silent.

The silence created more space and within this space, stillness. This state of becoming was a way of expressing the unsaid and the unsayable, to speak of the silence of 'Being' without compromise.



Video still of Landscape of Memories: Process

[18:55]

These shapes are series of patterns that were familiar and yet unfamiliar and created two sensations. These two sensations were:

1. I became the observing (the explicit processing system) self.
2. I was experiencing (implicit processing system) the self.

The explicit processing system provided me with the distancing and through which, my sensory memory was evoked through the concept of imaginal nurturing.

The implicit processing system provided me with analytic evaluation through the felt-senses.

As the two systems intertwine, images were evoked and gave shape to objects. This became for me, an identification of the excavated memories.

These excavations are both material and mental constructions that shaped my remembering and understanding of my embodied memory.

[22:15]

Landscapes of Memories was performed twice in Singapore on May 25th 2018 as a part of LASALLE College of the Arts inaugural embodied research symposium and in August 2019 in Lugano, Switzerland as a part of the 30th International Master's series laboratory organised by Teatro delle Radici.

[22:39]

Performance

25 May 2018

[26:04]

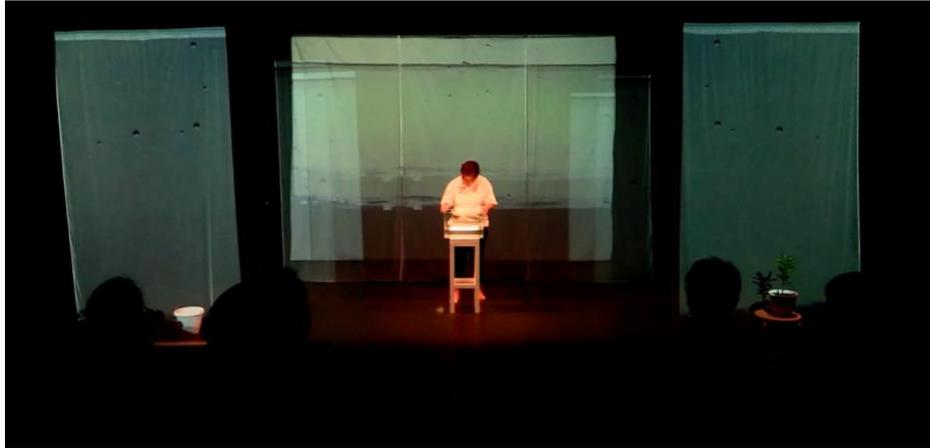
Multimedia:

...there is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting
... the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory : the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.

[26:40]

Elizabeth VO:

My body has betrayed me. It refuses to move. I am refusing to move. I cannot seem to move. I seem to be stuck and this void. I find myself in the shadow. Maybe being in the shadow is good. So that I can take flight at night. Stealing the heavenly darkness from myself, navigating through the stars and the constellation of my own making and the delight and terror of my uncertainty.



Video still of Landscape of Memories performance

[28:48]

Elizabeth VO:

I am drawn to water. I feel like a goldfish in the bowl, swimming in circles, not going anywhere. Maybe I can swim out of this depth. Slowly. But for this moment, here is where I need to be, and here is where I am.

[31:30]

Elizabeth VO:

I am water. I am water. I am evolving to a consciousness that has pulled me up. My body between worlds. The invisible world can speak to us. In the shadow, I am cradled. So much of who we are originates here in water. We are born for what is fluid, not fixed. The ocean is mother, mesmerizing in her power. A creative force that can both comfort and destroy. This forest of relentless thoughts, a fog of memories, my thoughts, my body are both travelling on different speed. I am water.

[34:40]

Multimedia:

“...we understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental”

[35:32]



Video still of Landscape of Memories - performance

Elizabeth VO:

I love the rain. I remember the rain. I love the smell of the rain. I can hear the rain, the water flowing down the pipes. I am playing in the rain. Sometimes, all I want to do is to play in the rain. The rain brings me back to a path. I am listening to the rain. For a moment, I see my child-self. The rain is asking me to listen. I am afraid to listen. Because what I hear is echoes of a distant childhood. I'm afraid to listen to the memories we hold. A tiny pulse awakens and I am taken to an unknown place. There, I'm alone in a place of feeling. It is not necessarily a place of comfort and as I listen closely to the echoes, I tremble. A sound vibrates from the core ... once again, I find myself, crossing over the rusted iron gate. Separating reality and perceptions. Perceptions of dreams are imaginations and illusion for seeds of flights...wherein the

body and soul lives...Between each raindrop, the moment becomes real. Between each raindrop, the body remembers ...

[37:57]

Elizabeth:

I don't really know much about my father and his family. What I know are stories that others told me. But I do know that he was from Malacca and my grandfather was from Malacca, and my great- grandfather was also from Malacca and my great-great-grandfather was...probably from, you know, Malacca, and my great-great-great-great grandfather...

To be honest, I actually really don't know. All I know for certain, was that my Father was from Malacca. And so my great-great-great-great grandfather, you know what? I am going to imagine this – I am going to imagine that he was this young, great sea merchant, that sailed across the vast ocean – and all through the far east – just so he could change his fate – to hold destiny in his hands. Now, all this happened when Europe under this god-fearing supremacy of the Catholic faith. Kings, Princes and aristocrats would gain the Pope's favour by discovering of new land, new converts for Christ and Rome.

But, not my great grandfather. He was this young man of mix- heritage of Moorish and Portuguese blood. He was so thrilled by the stories that his grandfather told him, that he decided he would sail across the vast ocean and onto the shores of the far east. And there, he saw a fair maiden and fell in love ...

[41:00]

Elizabeth:

You know, It has been 20 years since I've been to confession in Church, 5 years since I have last had a cigarette, 3 years since my last accident, 20 minutes ago since I had to pee, 3 ago seconds since I danced, and 5 months since you were gone ...

Multimedia:

Air is made up of ... Nitrogen (78:09%), Oxygen (20.95%), Argon (0.93%), Carbon Dioxide (0.039%), water vapor (2%)

The unseen world is real ...

[44:08]

Elizabeth V/O:

Veins are the vascular tissue of the leaf. Veins are cells that bring water and minerals from the roots into the leaf.

[45:30]

Elizabeth V/O:

I am my mother but I am not

I am my grandmother but I am not

I am my great grandmother but I am not

[46:10]

Elizabeth:

I have always been curious of my ancestry –what my history is – the more my parents remain silent, the more curious I became. It didn't help that I had a very inquisitive mind. So I decided that I would visit this palm leaf astrologer in India.

[47:25]

Elizabeth V/O:

I am holding a question like a trapped bird inside my cupped hands.

[49:10]

Elizabeth V/O:

I am afraid of silence because it leads me to myself, a self I may not wish to comfort, it asks that I listen. And in listening, I am taken to an unknown place. Silence creates a pathway to peace through pain, the pain of a distracted and frantic mind before it becomes still. Silence leaves me alone in a place of feeling.

[50:40]

Multimedia:

There is something clearly atavistic in the process of recollection, if only because such a process is never linear. Also, the more one remembers, the closer perhaps one is to dying.



Video still of Landscapes of Memories, performance

[53:50]

Elizabeth V/O:

My mother's photographs are this expanding and collapsing universe each time I take them out and put them away. They are of a distant past and when I look at them, I imagine the space she fills. A motion circling the void – and I imagine that both she and I are in motion ...

[54:50]

Elizabeth V/O:

Air is made of ... nitrogen (78.09%), oxygen (20.95%), argon (0.93%), carbon dioxide (0.039%), water vapor (2%)

The unseen world is real. I visit this unseen world not as a repeat of memory but as a reminder of how we evolve in time and place ... I will never know my parents' full story. But I can imagine, and as I am seeing this unseen world, I am linked to my distant past ...

[57:53]

Elizabeth V/O:

I am this cell that is evolving to a consciousness that has pulled me up ... The invisible world can speak to us. So much of who we are originates and remain here in water. In this vast, undulating ocean, we are cradled.

[59:30]

Elizabeth V/O:

I stand in the shadow

[1:00:00]

Multimedia:

in remembering, I have conjured a kind of returning to an inner rhythm ... a space for the buried silence to be heard ... calling me back into this womb of an uncharted personal geography of who I am, what I am and what I transmit ... Through this recuperation of silence, I begin to reconstruct and embody this womb.

[1:01:31]

Ending Credits:

Landscapes of Memories

Devised and performed by Elizabeth de Roza

Original Music by Terence Lau

Multi-media Design by Koo Chia Meng