

Archive Box # 2

Saturday, September 5, 2015

Introduction

Performances

8:15pm - 8:35pm : Rani Nair responds to Chie Ito's Archive Box

8:40pm - 9:15pm : Venuri Perera responds to Natsuko Tezuka's Archive Box

Pause

9:35pm - 9:55pm : Chey Chankethya responds to Tsuyoshi Shirai's Archive Box

Archivists and Users dialogues

10:00-10:15pm : Chie Ito (archivist)/Rani Nair (user)

10:15-10:30pm : Natsuko Tezuka (archivist)/Venuri Perera (user)

10:30-10:45pm : Tsuyoshi Shirai (archivist)/Chey Chankethya (user)

General Discussion Q&A

Dramaturgs' Notes by Nanako Nakajima together with Margie Medlin and Daisuke Muto.

After initial stages of its modernity, one may say, contemporary Japanese dance has developed with a "punk spirit." To be "punk" is an attitude to dismiss conventions and remain altogether different and inimitable, as shown in the avant-garde practice of Butoh in the 1960s which refused Japanese tradition and Western modernity at the same time to depart for an eternal journey, or, an exile. This attitude seems to have become a climate of modern Japanese culture as a result of global geopolitical conditions, which is still more or less carried in the 21st century among prominent contemporary dance-makers. Seven of them are presenting their Archive Boxes here, aiming at leaving something behind to be handed down to the future. In a sense, it may seem obviously contradicting to be punk while aiming at preserving one's own work. However, here lies the very fundamental question regarding the bodies of dance, i.e., embodying, disembodying, and re-embodying a dance across time and place.

How is it possible to separate a dance from communal histories of the dance-maker and produce an Archive Box as a collaborative tool or a source of inspiration for other people? What it means to share a dance without sharing the time with dance-makers? How to archive this most ephemeral art of dance also illuminates political questions concerning dance history, cultural heritage and ownership.

PROCESS

In this project over one year, seven Japanese choreographers - “archivists” - were invited to archive one of their seminal, contemporary performances directed by Ong Keng Sen, Festival Director of Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA). Part 2, seven “users” connected through Gati Dance Forum and the Attakkalari Movement Arts Centre in India met in a workshop hosted by SIFA. At the end of the workshop each “user” chose an Archive Box following their own artistic instincts. Transiting in Singapore, the Archive Boxes were translated into English and shipped to users, separating dance knowledge from archivists’ bodies.

Through the process of making their response to the box, some users start re-experiencing the history of the Archive Boxes and investigating archivists’ personalities, which are included as the performative aspect in the Archive Box. Along the way, linguistic and cultural translation within the global circulation of knowledge have been experienced.

Through their own processes and in the confronting the other, both “archivists” and “users” encountered conflicts, negotiations, control, resistance, arrogance and vulnerabilities. Though the archivists might have tried to retain their original forms, it could never stay as it was in users’ response. In contrast, miraculous coincident also happened through exchange of Archive Box, even though archivists and users had never shared that information before.

LAST WEEK

Archivist, Ikuyo Kuroda’s Archive Box was translated by Padmini Chettur, who developed a lecture performance about her philosophy and history and invited Ikuyo Kuroda herself to read a translation in order to combine their divergent practices. Margie Medlin responded to Mikuni Yanaihara’s Archive Box about her performance work on Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution in the form of video art work. Both used the premise of changes in the law to inform and engage people in the debate.

Preethi Athreya responded to Yukio Suzuki’s box, by literally following his voice instructions through her ear-phones while at the same time integrating her dance language. Archivist Yukio Suzuki described his philosophy in his Archive Box with a performance contract with light bulbs as stage props, which symbolized the idea of his evaporating bodily energy. In his presentation as archivist, Zan Yamashita explained that he was in the generation of analogue technology. His Archive Box included cassette tape recording of his voice describing actions and events to be used freely by Mandeep Raikhy, the user of the box. Raikhy’s response was a corporeal representation by two dancers of the medium of Zan’s archive, the cassette tapes.

THIS WEEK

Tsuyoshi Shirai's Archive Box takes the form of a digital archive, a website which once again returns to tangible objects in Chey Chankethya's response. In contrast, Natsuko Tezuka's glass jar transmitted her concept to Venuri Perera to decolonize the body in relation to Westernization and Modernization. Through Rani Nair's dialogue with Chie Ito's Archive Box, the box is radically deconstructed in the form of lecture performance.

Is it impossible to archive dance because dancing bodies cannot be preserved? While the human bodies cannot be shared, the ideas of the given Archive Box can be shared with someone passed on, like in a game of Chinese whispers individual interpretation and cultural identity takes the fore. By understanding the creative process of the "archivist" in the Archive Box, the "user" finds the way of inheriting the idea of dance, not repeating or copying the original work. In the project, both "archivist" and "users" are offered new paradigms by which to experience the process of creation and by which to imagine their legacy. At the same time, however, this process is also that of resistance, where physicalities unique to local dance cultures contend with the global accumulation of dance knowledge.

Though we are only at the beginning of an experiment, the dance Archive Box project may open up the new way of transmitting dance knowledge through multiple international, distanced artistic collaborations not only between Japanese and the South-Asian contemporary dance makers in Singapore.