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The Empty Space Never Is: The Living Synthesis of Self/Community Performances-in-the-making

For Peter Brook the theatre maker, an empty space is meant to be ‘a bare stage’, inviting an actor to walk upon it while someone else is watching. In my experience, in face of such an ‘open space’, the actions triggered thereupon by actors often unveil the Self in view of the Other, re-contextualizing the body-mind with either newly found logic in the Present or directly/indirectly imposed conditioning acquired in the Past.

Having been working as a theatre maker for the past 30 years, my experiences working with actors, directors, playwrights and designers as storytellers, I have kept re-inventing the Self-in-the-making through reflections made through play. The conscious re-enactment of experiences shaped in the Past and represented through transformative acts into the Present has mobilized my actions further into pedagogic reflections and inventions. Subsequently, I have extended such experiences through a series of community performances and education workshops, including Theatre Fanatico’s community series, Drumming Voices Youth Workshop, the Remapping Hong Kong Series, and the 6-year long workshops with social work and social policy students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In the process of (re-)inventing such theatre-at-play, I have ended up coming to terms with the Self (mine and the participants’) along side with the Other (the reflections made thereof as projected through the interplay among the initiating self and the participating body-mind at play). Through a process as such, I have constantly found myself re-entering the phenomenal act of theatre in search of the betterment of self/community performance among common folks.

My research, as reflected in my dissertation presented at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, is very much to re-examine the particular transformation of ACTor’s body-mind and the potential community building, seeded within the landscape of the body through the ACT of story re-telling, not only in words, but also in images devised from objects, time/space and non-verbal actions. This paper is an attempt to re-examine the living synthesis in re-contextualizing conflicts, sharing and discoveries of the ever re-cultivated/re-cultivating bodily existence at play.