



FORUM ON CONTEMPORARY THEORY

A Member of the Consortium of Humanities Centers & Institutes (CHCI)
C-303 Siddhi Vinayak Complex, Behind Baroda Railway Station
Faramji Road, Baroda-390007, Gujarat, India
Tel: (0265) 2320870; E-mail: prafullakar@gmail.com;
Website: www.fctworld.org

A National Symposium

8-9 February 2019

Transcendence in Dance: Techniques of Embodied Performance

Concept Note

In the last two decades, the rubric of humanities has seen shifts from the textual to the visual, to the performative. It has by no means been a linear progression from one insular, self-contained object to another. Rather, there has been a thrust in expanding the study of humanities in domains conventionally differentiated from it. The synergy among the different elements that this has brought together is fast creating interdisciplinary, mutually engaging, informing, occasionally contradicting points of entry into fast-changing topographies of analyses within humanities itself. This paradigmatic shift in the way the discipline is mutating and expanding into a new humanities is being closely informed by the notion of the performative.

Performative here is being understood not in opposition to the literary, or the visual, just as it would be reductive to treat the literary and the visual as binary oppositions of each other. Rather, within the humanities, the performative refers to a discursive practice that produces or enacts a normative cultural entity through reiterations of the norms or conventions associated with it. In these processes of reiteration, it contains both the potential to constitute and at the same time transform the act in question. Performativity cannot be reduced to a single act, it is a process of citation and repetition of normative structures. Despite its emergence within a discussion of solely linguistic utterances, its relevance, and therefore usage, has broadened to encompass all embodied practices within the domain of culture. Thus, performativity as we understand today is irrevocably intertwined with the notion of embodiment: within cultural studies, the body is not only the physical manifestation of a living entity, but also the site of the cultural networks linking normative practices, structures of power and subjecthood. Inasmuch, it is impossible now to sustain a notion of the body that is pre-cultural.

While all acts fall within the purview of this understanding of performativity and embodiment, performance arts allow one to access a more formalised, staged iteration of the concepts at hand. In examining the visual, the literary and the performative aspects of a choreographed performance in relation to each other, simultaneously, rather than in isolation, we help propel this shift in new humanities in hitherto unexplored directions that will-- we hope-- facilitate a more nuanced understanding of performativity and embodiment.

In November 2017, the Forum on Contemporary Theory had pioneered a path-finding and perspective building session on performing art and embodiment. This project was undertaken to open up an interdisciplinary, creative and critical dialogue on the praxis of lived traditions of embodied performative arts in India in particular, and South Asia at large. The performative act is one that both reflects and constitutes a convention, and a study of staged performances-- theatre, dance forms, puppetry, music-- allows one to engage with both their rich and

multiple provenances, and the transformative adaptability they seamlessly incorporate within each rendition across the contingencies of time and space. The team at FCT hopes that this project will enable it to better engage with the nexus of socio-political-economic culture(s) that constantly informs any critical contemplative theoretical exercise. Further, there is an ardent need within the domain of critical humanities to look beyond the literary text to comment on the nuances of social experience. The insularity to which performative traditions are often subjected may be disrupted in forums like that created by this project, in deliberate interactions between the critic and the performer, the academic and/as the audience, the performer and the uninitiated receptor. For our own understandings of the cultural topographies with which we identify, it is crucial to recognise the importance of these binaries of critic/performer, trained performer/uninitiated audience etc, but not be limited by them.

To this end, in last year's "Studies in Performing Art Traditions and Embodiments" the participants--performers, critics, academicians--discoursed on the ways in which the term performance is connotated, the configurations of academic engagements with staged performances, the continuums of pedagogy of embodied traditions, and the stratagem at play in archiving, historicising projects on embodied performances and the way they interact with questions of modernity and identity.

In its second rendition titled "Transcendence in Dance: A Symposium on Techniques of Embodied Performance" to be hosted from 8-9 February 2019, we hope to create a platform that allows for an active engagement on performative embodiment in one of its most fertile sites: dance. The Forum seeks to facilitate these new dialogues within this emerging domain of studies in humanities by creating a platform that encourages a coming together of dance performer-practitioners, academics and critics to allow for an active discourse that is not restricted to a purely academic perusal of dance theory, or limited to the kinesthetic of performing or witnessing a dance recital, but a critical confluence of both.

This year's focus on understanding embodied performative traditions in dance brings together eminent dancer-performers, critics and academics, who will participate in both performances and discursive sessions reflecting on the techniques of performance made accessible thereof. In doing this, we hope to encourage critical reflections and exchange of ideas on the question of embodiment as perceived in dance: Any choreographed composition brings together the bodily motions of an individual performer in constant attunement with neural elements, kinesthetic memory, language, perceptions and personal emotions. We sincerely believe a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the way a dance composition is simultaneously spontaneous, emotive and acquired through rigorous physical training will both open up new directions in our current critical understanding of the concepts of performativity and embodiment, and aid in creating a critical discourse around archiving practices of lived traditions of performance arts in South Asia.

Conveners of the Symposium

Prafulla C. Kar

Convener, Forum on Contemporary Theory
C-302, Siddhi Vinayak Complex
Behind the Railway Station, Baroda-390007, Gujarat
Email: prafullakar@gmail.com

Parul Shah

Former Dean and Head (Dance), Faculty of Performing Arts
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
Opposite Sursagar, Baroda - 390001, Gujarat
Email: paruldances@yahoo.com

