

Akram Khan: Performing the Third Space

by

Royona Mitra

The Department of Drama and Theatre

Royal Holloway

University of London

**A thesis submitted as a partial fulfilment of the university's
requirements for the degree of Ph.D.**

September 2011

Declaration of Authorship

I, Royona Mitra, 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: _____

Abstract

This thesis theorises the practice of the performer and choreographer Akram Khan through Homi Bhabha's conceptual framework of the 'third space', and examines the relationship between his identity and his art. It argues that Khan's meteoric rise to stardom within the contemporary British cultural milieu is worthy of academic scrutiny, and situates his performance aesthetic at the interstices between the politics of diasporic identity and the syncretic genre of physical theatre. Consequently, the thesis challenges popular perceptions of Khan's language as 'Contemporary Kathak' by suggesting that instead, his aesthetic makes a significant contribution to the field of physical theatre, due to its concern with embodied subjectivities, interpersonal politics and socio-political legibility of movement. As a result it is not so much contemporising *kathak*, as it is changing the landscape of physical theatre by injecting into it fundamental philosophies of *kathak*, through a reconfiguration of the principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa* as laid out in the *Natyashastra*, the ancient Indian dramaturgical treatise.

The Introduction outlines research questions addressed in the thesis and the methodological approaches undertaken, before providing a critique of the label 'Contemporary Kathak' and a genealogy of the physical theatre genre. Chapter 2 identifies interlinked biographical circumstances, creative choices and socio-political conditions that have fuelled Khan's rise to success. In Chapter 3 Khan's placement of his corporeality within the landscape of London's Docklands is analysed as an auto-ethnographic enquiry in his televised solo *Loose in Flight* (1999). Chapter 4 compares Khan to Peter Brook as an intercultural performance maker through an analysis of *Gnosis* (2010). In Chapter 5 Khan's multiple evocations of third space are explored in *zero degrees* (2005). Through Chapter 6 Khan's directorial debut in *Bahok* (2008) is examined as a commentary on relocated subjectivities as travelling homes. Finally, the Conclusion theorises Khan within the framework of cosmopolitanism. It then cements the ways in which Khan draws on his predecessors in the physical theatre genre, before identifying how he contributes to it by infusing into its remit the principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa*, thereby lending it a unique cultural syncretism.

Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Declaration of Authorship | 1 |
| Abstract | 2 |
| Contents | 3 |
| Acknowledgements | 4 |
| Preface | 5 |
| | |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 12 |
| | |
| Chapter 2: Khan's Fertile Grounds | 45 |
| | |
| Chapter 3: Inexclusion, London's Docklands and Auto-ethnography in <i>Loose in Flight</i> | 101 |
| | |
| Chapter 4: Intercultural Aesthetic in <i>Gnosis</i> | 127 |
| | |
| Chapter 5: Evocations of Third Space in <i>zero degrees</i> | 162 |
| | |
| Chapter 6: Embodiment of Relocated Subjectivities and Travelling Homes in <i>Bahok</i> | 192 |
| | |
| Chapter 7: Conclusion | 220 |
| | |
| Bibliography | 258 |
| | |
| Appendix | 278 |

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisory and advisory team: Dr Matthew Cohen, Professor Helen Gilbert and Dr Libby Worth at Royal Holloway, for their inspiring and meticulous guidance through my doctoral studies.

The contributions and comments from my examiners, Professor Andrée Grau and Professor John Hutnyk, have been invaluable and I thank them for this.

I am grateful for the support provided by my employers and colleagues at the University of Wolverhampton towards the completion of this thesis.

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous contributions of the Akram Khan Company, particularly from Akram Khan and Farooq Chaudhry whose willingness to provide open access to the company, and engage in dialogue through interviews, access to materials and invitations to rehearsals have been invaluable. My gratitude also extends to Mrs Anwara Khan for her insightful offerings in interview.

The contributions from Mira Kaushik, the Director of Akademi, in interview were valuable and I thank her for this.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through this project with encouragement and good will.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Colin, for his endless patience, positivity, wisdom, and for believing in me.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter Heera and the sparkle she brings to my life.

Preface

In the summer of 1997 Akram Khan, a British man of Bangladeshi descent, graduated from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) in Leeds with a first class honours degree, while an Indian woman arrived in Britain to pursue a degree in contemporary performance practices at the University of Plymouth. Both Bengalis, both trained in the South Asian dance form of *kathak* from the north of India, and both seeking performance languages beyond their classical repertoire, Khan and this woman shared much in common. In the same year, Britain witnessed a momentous shift in politics as Labour returned to power after eighteen years. Over the next decade, in very different contexts, Khan and the woman's career trajectories were fuelled by Labour's policies on multiculturalism and immigration. When they finally met in 2008, Khan was already a successful and influential artist in the field of contemporary British performance, while the woman was a performance scholar vested in analysing this field through the lenses of cultural and postcolonial studies.¹ This woman is me.

Through this preface I wish to chronicle how Khan and my paths crossed in this British terrain to eventually spawn the birth of this thesis. For this, a brief overview of my own performance training in India and Britain is vital as it will substantiate the very different focus of my early doctoral research. My initial PhD proposal wished to engage in a practice-as-research study to examine the physiological and sociological conditions that have shaped me, as I have moved through different cultural landscapes while undertaking performance training in multiple corporeal languages.

¹ In 2005 Khan was appointed Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London's primary venue for showcasing contemporary dance from across the globe. In 2006, a lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton for the previous five years, the woman started her doctoral research at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Between 1984 and 1995 while still living in India, I undertook training in *kathak* under the tutelage of three renowned *gurus*: Rani Karna, Amita Dutta and Bandana Sen. Alongside my classical dance training I also performed *rabindrik* dance, a conglomerate expression that brings together elements of classical and folk forms of South Asian dance traditions, conceived and popularised in Bengal by the Nobel Laureate and visionary Rabindranath Tagore. In 1995 I experienced a dance recital that was to transform my vision of performance forever. Ranjabati Sircar, already an influential force in the emerging label of contemporary South Asian dance, performed her striking and evocative solo *Cassandra* – based on the myth of the Greek princess who was able to foresee the future. In this performance Sircar had done away with elaborate costumes, jewellery and the paraphernalia associated with classical dance recitals. All that remained was the sheer expressivity of her vulnerable and dynamic physicality. What I witnessed that evening was an embodied performer, making decisions in the very moments of praxis, and bringing to her role her lived reality. She was stripped of all codifications that mould South Asian classical dancers and instead evoked the Grotowskian philosophy of the sacrificial ‘holy actor in the poor theatre’ (Grotowski). And it was this innate ability to make an offering of herself through her art that left an indelible mark on me. The intercultural corporeal translation of a Greek woman’s story told through an Indian woman’s body also left me intrigued.

Following this encounter I started contemporary dance training in the *navanritya* style that was being developed and espoused by Ranjabati Sircar and her mother Manjusri Chaki Sircar at their organisation Dancers’ Guild in Calcutta. Alongside embracing South Asian classical and folk movement vocabularies, *navanritya* also drew on South Asian martial arts (such as *kalaripayattu*) as well as western Graham

technique, and was thus emerging as a culturally syncretic movement language. During this period I also briefly trained in *bharatanatyam*, the classical dance from the south of India. I soon began to discover that my *kathak* and *bharatanatyam* training were entering into conflicts with my *navanritya* training through approaching basic principles of movement from oppositional stances. The composite language of *navanritya* engaged my body in a more dynamic and complex relationship between my spine and the floor, and was at variance with the anti-gravity verticality of my classical training. Likewise *navanritya*'s ability to communicate ideas through movement seemed to also draw on stylised everyday gestures, instead of relying solely on the strictly codified languages of *kathak* and *bharatanatyam*. I recognised that what was happening within my body and its ability to communicate through movement was quite distinctive.

My body thus began to simultaneously process the classical codes of *kathak* and *bharatanatyam* and the emergent codes of the *navanritya* language, and triggered in me a need to extend my performance training beyond India. In 1997 I arrived in Britain to undertake a degree in Theatre and Performance at the University of Plymouth. Here my body encountered the movement languages of release technique, contact improvisation, capoeira and most memorably physical theatre, with its interdisciplinary allegiances in European avant-garde theatre and dance.² I chose to specialise in physical theatre with a masters in this genre at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2000, where my multiple corporeal training continued, not as a virtuoso dancer, but as an embodied physical performer. During this time my body found instinctive ways to compartmentalise the idiosyncrasies of each language it was encountering so they could co-exist simultaneously, rarely communicating with each other.

² It is worth noting that while at university, my own performance training began to encounter nearly as eclectic a range of movement languages as Khan's training at NSCD as discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

While at the level of form I was intrigued by the creative possibilities of a multi-corporeally trained body, at an intellectual level I was drawn to artists who sought to not only blur the boundaries between classical and contemporary idioms, but in the process also politicised their own bodies. The ability to use the body as a political medium of expression was for me a vital aspect of the physical theatre genre. It is through this lens that I first witnessed the practice of Khan in his high profile *kathak* solo *Polaroid Feet* (2001) at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Like Sircar in *Cassandra*, Khan's rejection of traditional classical paraphernalia in favour of a minimalist pair of linen trousers and a fitted tunic made compelling viewing. While he performed a codified language of a culturally specific past, unlike other South Asian classical dancers I had encountered before, Khan's presentation was a simultaneous reminder that he belonged to the present milieu. In *Polaroid Feet*, through a humble and eloquent direct address to his largely western audience, Khan deconstructed the key characteristics of *kathak* and drew us into the heart of his practice. He explained the mathematical principles behind *tatkar* (complex footwork), the physics behind the form's incessant *chakkars* (pirouettes), the intricate codes of *abhinaya* (emotional expressivity), and talked at length about the improvisatory dialogue between his accompanying musicians and himself. In removing the fourth wall that hermetically seals the space between audience and performer in proscenium arch environments, Khan de-exoticised himself and his art such that his western audiences could gain access to his classical language. This approach interrupted the western tendency to exoticise the sheer power and beauty of his skill as a dancer, and demystified the language for an uninformed audience. However through *Polaroid Feet*, Khan achieved more than tutoring his audiences about the nuances of *kathak*. By de-exoticising his art and dismantling his audience's Orientalist notions about his South Asianness, Khan placed his postcolonial diasporic

self at the heart of British culture, in order to enter into socio-political dialogue with it. It was his ability to simultaneously negotiate the temporal, cultural, social and spatial levels of his existence that remained with me as I continued my physical theatre training. Moreover his ability to politicise his body in the present moment through a complex dialogue with his past, left me inspired.

As my MA drew to an end, I struggled to initiate creative dialogue between the different movement languages that my body had acquired over time, and its tendency to segregate these different languages frustrated and intrigued me in equal measure. What if these languages could talk to each other productively? Would they create a hybridised lexicon? Would this language be classified as western or non-western? At a physiological level, during my subsequent teaching of physical theatre as a lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton (2001 – present), I began to notice that in shifting between one language and another, my spine was beginning to suffer from negotiating the different demands of my performance training. The creative tensions that surfaced in moving smoothly between different embodiments of my body's central axis, different relationships to verticality and horizontality, and most importantly different explorations of the relationship between gravity and my body weight, were gradually manifesting as physiological tensions at the base of my spine. Even though I was advised to discontinue working with multiple corporeal languages, an intellectual reading of my physiological condition instigated interesting questions about the role of the spine in such multicultural corporeal negotiations. With this auto-ethnographic vision began my doctoral studies in 2006. To situate my corporeality against parallel contexts to my own, I began to search for other performers who had also undertaken

corporeal training across multiple cultural forms, particularly between South Asia and Britain. What I discovered changed the course of my thesis significantly.

In the British context, the most visible artists who were launching auto-ethnographic enquiries into their multi-corporealities were Shobana Jeyasingh and Akram Khan. Jeyasingh's hybridised experimentations were concerned with the form of a new language that can emerge between *bharatanatyam*, classical ballet and contemporary dance. Committed to deconstructing *nritya*, the technical element of *bharatanatyam*, Jeyasingh experimented with its physical repertoire and was not as concerned with rewriting *nritya*, the expressive modalities of the dance form. Her practice situates itself comfortably in the formalist strand of British contemporary dance in its attempt to deconstruct and contemporise *bharatanatyam*, and has made Jeyasingh influential in this field.

In contrast Khan's syncretic language, concerned with the communication of personal politics through the medium of a performance language that emerges at the interstices between *kathak*, the eclectic idioms of contemporary dance, theatre, visual arts, literature and film, is fundamentally multidisciplinary and impossible to categorise into convenient and pre-existent labels. By focusing on *nritya*, Khan was keen to translocate the expressive storytelling tradition of *kathak* into his contemporary existence, through politicising the exoticisation of his postcolonial body. His performance training trajectory paralleled my own, and his vision to communicate personal politics through a new language coincided with my own expectations of performance as a political medium. His second generation Bengali identity in Britain also resonated with my own (albeit first generation) roots, and through his artistic

articulations of diasporic identity, I began to recognise my own experiences of relocation and growth as an Indian now living in Britain. In the French philosopher Jacques Rancière's terms, Khan and his art enabled my emergence as an 'emancipated spectator' (Rancière), and I felt the need to use my nuanced spectatorship to theorise this art.

Having found such a suitable case study for my enquiry of someone who was emerging as an explosive force in contemporary British performance, I realised that Khan's artistic trajectory was too complex and vast to merely support my own auto-ethnographic enquiries. Instead it deserved to become the primary focus of my doctoral study. I acknowledged that it was vital to theorise and document the trajectory of an artist whose South Asian identity-fuelled contributions to the field of contemporary performance practice, were altering its landscape in significant ways. Finally, I accepted that my own ability to straddle the multiple spaces between academia, South Asian dance training, physical theatre practice and the embodiment of diasporic identity positions, lent me a suitably multilayered lens through which I would be able to theorise Khan's practice in productive ways. This new vision for the thesis has enabled me to shift the perceptions surrounding his art beyond its limiting and exotic South Asianness, in order to examine it more appropriately as socio-political performance. In turn it has also unearthed for me the answers to the very questions that triggered this enquiry in the first place with regards to my own complex corporeality, and has led me to understand and theorise myself as an 'emancipated spectator'.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis theorises the practice of the performer and choreographer Akram Khan and examines the relationship between his identity and his art. It argues that Khan's meteoric rise to stardom within the contemporary British cultural milieu is worthy of academic scrutiny, and examines his performance aesthetic at the interstices between the politics of diasporic identity and the syncretic aesthetic of the genre of physical theatre. Using the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's seminal concept of the 'third space' as its theoretical grounding, the thesis explores this framework not just as a metaphoric space of diasporic identity formation as espoused by Bhabha, but also as an interstitial and fertile space of aesthetic and critical enunciation between the disciplines of theatre and dance. By extending the concept from its literary origins to a performative realm, the thesis thereby argues that Khan's performance of the third space emerges at the intersection between his complex identity positions as a diasporic subject, and his aesthetic negotiations between the disciplines of theatre and dance.

Khan is a second generation British man of Bangladeshi ancestry born and brought up in London, and is therefore part of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain.³ As a diasporic subject he is caught between multiple categories of identifications: Bengali

³ Over the years the term diaspora has shifted from being associated with a group of people who are dispersed from their homelands, to firstly a condition that permeates the experience of migrancy in a host culture, secondly a cultural (and maybe) artistic identification process through which these experiences are articulated, and finally to the field of study that enquires into this immigrant experience and its articulations. For an excellent overview of these multiple associations of the term, please see the article 'Theorising Diaspora: Perspectives on "Classical" and "Contemporary" Diaspora' by Michele Reis.

(linguistic), Bangladeshi (ethno-cultural), South Asian (political), British (national) and others. He does not subscribe to any of these labels and yet he straddles all of them simultaneously by embodying a hybridised identity that embraces multiple affiliations. Equally syncretic is his performance language. At a corporeal level Khan is popularly renowned for having generated ‘Contemporary Kathak’ (Sanders, Piccirillo), a movement lexicon of his own, borne of his bodily negotiations between *kathak* and western contemporary dance. By offering a critique of this limiting view of Khan’s aesthetic, this thesis suggests that the syncretism in his art goes beyond an exchange between *kathak* and contemporary dance. I argue that Khan’s aesthetic is characterised by provocative interpersonal and socio-political content that is articulated through rich, complex and processual set of exchanges between multiple disciplines, and is generated through collaborations with actors, musicians, sculptors, painters and writers, ranging from high art to popular culture.⁴ This multidisciplinary has enabled Khan to spawn a performance language that is syncretic and difficult to categorise through existing performance labels. While I acknowledge that Khan’s aesthetic is born out of collaborations between many disciplines, I have chosen to focus my investigation of this language specifically at the intersection between dance and theatre. This is because Khan’s performance language is concerned with creating a complex and layered legibility in movement (Lansdale 119), and capitalises on embodied physicality, emotive characterisations and text to communicate contemporaneous socio-political issues. In this, the thesis argues that this aesthetic may be suitably aligned to the expressionistic political spirit of the genre of physical theatre and its ‘double legacy in both avant-garde theatre and dance’ (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 21). It is

⁴ These eclectic collaborations are exemplified by Khan’s work with actress Juliette Binoche in *In-I*, musician Nitin Sawhney in *Kaash*, *zero degrees*, *Bahok* and *Vertical Road*, pop-icon Kylie Minogue in *Samsara*, sculptor Antony Gormley in *zero degrees*, painter Anish Kapoor in *Kaash* and *In-I*, writer Hanif Kureishi in *ma*, and his most recent choreography for Yves Saint Laurent’s perfume advertisement for *Belle d’Opium*.

important to note therefore that the syncretism in Khan's performance language provocatively mirrors the syncretism of his complex diasporic identity. Moreover, Khan's identity and art simultaneously demonstrate ethno-cultural, local, national and global affiliations through the choice of content he evokes in his works, which ultimately hint at his cosmopolitan outlook as a 'global soul' (P. Iyer). This thesis aims to interrogate the relationship between Khan's complex identity positions and his syncretic art, in an attempt to identify the key features that characterise his performance aesthetic.

In order to undertake such an identity-fuelled analysis of Khan's art, this introduction will start by identifying the areas under investigation in the thesis and the methodological approaches used in this study. It will then unpick the title to this thesis and examine what 'performing the third space' means in Khan's practice. Through extending the concept's allegiances in postcolonial theory to the realm of syncretic performance languages, this thesis will argue that Khan's performance of the third space emerges at the intersection between his diasporic identity positions and his aesthetic negotiations between the disciplines of theatre and dance. In order to posit this argument the introduction will offer a critique of the limiting binarism of the label 'Contemporary Kathak' that has been afforded to his work, by providing a critical context for contemporary South Asian dance in Britain. This will help locate the field as a valid but albeit limiting context in which to situate Khan's aesthetic. It will finally go on to provide a genealogy of the physical theatre genre, which I shall ultimately argue offers a more complex and open-ended space for Khan's aesthetic, and which in itself is being transformed by Khan's intercultural vision and South Asian aesthetic.

Areas of Study and Methodology

This thesis aims to investigate three interrelated areas pertaining to Khan's practice. The first examines the relationship between his complex identity positions and his art, thereby explicating the links between form and content in Khan's performance aesthetic. The second analyses this relationship through the theoretical lens of the third space. This in turn generates the third area of enquiry that interrogates the ways in which the concept of the third space is both embodied and challenged in Khan's performance aesthetic. Subsidiary to these are additional areas that are also examined in the thesis. These include identifying the characteristic features of Khan's performance aesthetic; finding a suitable way to position this aesthetic within the field of contemporary performance practice; and finally assessing Khan's contribution to and transformation of the physical theatre genre through an injection of his embodied knowledge of *abhinaya* and *rasa*, as acquired through his *kathak* training.

The interdisciplinary nature of these areas of study signals that Khan's syncretic aesthetic calls for a mode of analysis that draws upon equally interdisciplinary frameworks, in order to create a multilayered nexus that can suitably examine the relationship between his identity and art. I concur with dance scholar Lorna Sanders' view to move beyond formalist modes of analysis for examining Khan's practice, and agree that such an approach cannot capture the heterogeneity that permeates Khan's art, as it tends to presume that prescriptive and unitary results will emerge from Khan's eclecticism (Sanders, '*ma*' 58). Through the subsequent chapters in this thesis, I wish to build on Sanders' view by primarily conducting analyses of the themes he explores in his art, as I believe the relationship between Khan's identity and his art is crucially evoked in his choice of content. My analyses of Khan's art further intend to shift the

term identity from its fixed associations as an inherited entity, to a postmodern understanding of it as a fluid and processual condition of becoming. I acknowledge here dance scholar Ramsay Burt's call at the turn of the twenty-first century for a post-identitarian mode of performance analysis, arguing that identity-bound analysis can limit the reading of potential formal complexities that nuance choreography. He says instead that 'post-identitarianism is [...] a move beyond separatism toward new forms of hegemony and consensus' (Burt, 'Dance Theory' 126). Burt's view is captured in Wei-Chen Roger Liu's recent critique aimed at existent scholarship on Khan's practice that emphasise a diasporic identity-driven analysis of it by claiming, 'it is as if Khan's diasporic identity alone suffices to generate an interpretation of his entire repertoire' (Liu 308). However I am influenced by dance anthropologist Andrée Grau's counter-argument that within performance analysis, 'identity is not an obsolete concept' (Grau, 'Dance, Identity' 203) because:

Identitarian positions open and close doors, and identitarian issues can rarely be separated from those of power or economics. In our hyper capitalist world, it can be said that we are that for which others are willing to pay, and that the way in which artists present themselves and their work has repercussions on the funding they can obtain and on the places in which they are welcome to perform. (Grau, 'Dance, Identity' 201)

Grau's view is further consolidated by the producer to Akram Khan Company, Farooq Chaudhry's observations:

no matter how hard you try to ignore where you come from it will be evident in your choices, decisions and the way you express yourself and the way you are perceived by the outside world. This is certainly the case with Akram Khan. Though we have spent the last ten years avoiding any labels to do with ethnicity, the language and the choices in the work clearly reflect an aesthetic that has its roots in [...] kathak. (Chaudhry, 'Keynote' 1)

Grau raises crucial questions which she suggests should drive identitarian performance analysis and asks 'who creates the boundaries of identity, and how are these boundaries established from within and without?' (Grau, 'Dance, Identity' 201). These questions

are vital to understanding the relationship between Khan's identity and his art, and are evoked repeatedly through the choice of content in his performance aesthetic. This thesis extends these questions further to examine how these boundaries permeate Khan's creative vision, and perhaps most significantly, the ways in which these boundaries are challenged through the art he generates.

Through the analyses of four strategically selected performances, this thesis will aim to answer these interrelated questions by firstly examining their thematic content, and secondly exploring its depiction through the cultural and disciplinary hybridity that permeates Khan's art. These four productions are chosen as case studies and appear thematically in the structure of the thesis instead of chronologically. However in order to contextualise their chronology within his career trajectory, a brief overview of Khan's repertoire is vital. It can be broadly categorised into four distinct phases. These are his solo repertoire, his ensemble performances, his high-profile duet collaborations, and finally his role as Artistic Director within Akram Khan Company's (AKC) multinational ensemble productions. His solo repertoire consists of *Loose in Flight* (1995-1999), *Polaroid Feet* (2001) and *Gnosis* (2010). While *Loose in Flight* tested the parameters between his *kathak* and contemporary training in a dance-film commission by Channel 4, through *Polaroid Feet* Khan returned to his pure classical solo roots and deconstructed the key elements of *kathak* for his British audience. In *Gnosis*, a performance of two halves, the relationship between his classical and contemporary language is explored over the course of one evening. In the first half Khan revives his classical *kathak* repertoire through three solo recitals, while in the second Khan demonstrates how these classical roots inform his contemporary performance explorations in a striking duet with Japanese performer and drummer Yoshi Sunahata.

The publicity surrounding *Gnosis* as a solo production is therefore a contested notion. Khan's first ensemble performance *Kaash* (2002) marked AKC's first large-scale interdisciplinary collaboration with painter Anish Kapoor and musician Nitin Sawhney. He choreographed and performed in *Kaash* and used it as a medium to transpose his emerging hybridised performance language onto the bodies of fellow performers. In 2004, in collaboration with writer Hanif Kureishi and Nitin Sawhney, AKC created and toured *ma*, their second ensemble piece which was also choreographed and performed by Khan. *Ma* marked the company's first move towards a clear syncretic aesthetic between dance and theatre, with its strong emphasis on storytelling and exploration of socio-political themes. Between 2005 and 2008, AKC entered a series of three high-profile duet collaborations with the Belgian performer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in *zero degrees* (2005), the French ballerina Sylvie Guillem in *Sacred Monsters* (2006), and the Oscar-winning French actress Juliette Binoche in *In-I* (2008). Of the three, *zero degrees* received the highest critical acclaim. In 2008, AKC launched a new phase in the company's trajectory with *Bahok*, a multinational ensemble piece that Khan directed but did not perform in. Khan's role as an artistic director allowed his creative vision to manifest in bodies other than his own, and in some ways allowed him to reassess his own identity positions from this outsider perspective. This was followed by *Vertical Road* (2010), Khan's second directorial project which marked the company's tenth anniversary and demonstrated the journey undertaken by AKC over the last decade. The company is currently working on Khan's next project *Desh*, Bengali for motherland, which is due to tour in autumn 2011 and as suggested by the title will bring Khan closest yet to his complex relationship with Bangladesh, his parents' country of origin.

Out of this impressive repertoire that has developed over a decade, *Loose in Flight* marks for me Khan's very first collaboration, primarily with himself and secondarily with the discipline of film. It is an important starting point for the thesis as through it, Khan undertakes an auto-ethnographic enquiry about his multi-corporeal training as he starts to artistically negotiate between his *kathak* modality and his contemporary language. *Gnosis* embodies the intercultural spirit that permeates all of Khan's projects and structurally needed to be examined next in the thesis, in order to emphasise his engagement with interculturality at a fundamental level. Khan's evocations of third space in *zero degrees* with its exploration of border-identity politics between India and Bangladesh, is strategically positioned towards the middle of the thesis as a timely reminder of its title. Finally as Khan's first project as an artistic director, *Bahok* becomes a vital case study to appear at the end of the thesis, signalling a way the company might develop if and when Khan chooses to stop performing completely. These four pieces demonstrate Khan's desire to depict socio-political themes and embodied realities through his syncretic language that negotiates the borders between theatre and dance. In this, the performances can be aligned closely to the genre of physical theatre. But more importantly they evoke the symbiotic relationship between Khan's identity and his art and demonstrate how this fuels the development of his performance aesthetic. These four performances constitute the key primary sources in this study.⁵

These case studies are analysed through an interdisciplinary theoretical web of cultural studies and performance studies. By drawing on theorisations of diaspora, third

⁵ Of these four pieces, some have been watched live several times (*Gnosis*, *zero degrees* and *Bahok*), while others have been accessed through digital recordings available on the internet (*Loose in Flight*), commercially available DVDs (*zero degrees*) or recordings lent via AKC (*Gnosis* and *Bahok*).

space and hybridity through the works of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Floya Anthias and Nikos Papastergiadis, critiques on intercultural performance through the writings of Rustom Bharucha and Patrice Pavis, postulations on body-politics in postcolonial performance through the contributions of Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, and conjectures on home and mobility through the works of James Clifford and Tim Cresswell, this thesis examines the relationship between Khan's identity and art, and subsequently politicises him. The thesis also draws on further primary research conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with Akram Khan and Anwara Khan (mother to Akram Khan). Home Office reports available publically on the Runnymede Trust website have helped clarify the relationship between British multicultural policies and their contested impact upon and promotion of cultural diversity within the arts. Through these interwoven frameworks, the thesis therefore conducts an identitarian analysis of Khan's performance aesthetic and artistic trajectory as a twenty-first century British performer and performance-maker, who constantly negotiates the multiple layers to his complex identity positions in the public domain.

I acknowledge here the challenges of theorising an artist's practice whose aesthetic and vision is still on-going and in every sense incomplete. During the course of this thesis, Khan's performance trajectory has embraced relentless risks through entering into new collaborations, and each of these experiences has transformed his aesthetic significantly both in form and content. While it has been exciting to trace Khan's aesthetic as it has evolved, it would be naïve to suggest that this thesis captures the entirety of the vision that fuels Khan's performance trajectory. Therefore I am aware of the risks inherent in drawing conclusions about an aesthetic which is at a stage that

Farooq Chaudhry describes as ‘far from being established’ (Chaudhry, ‘Keynote’ 5). He continues to describe the unfinished nature of Khan’s experimentations:

I feel that we are still a new company, which has just only started. Perhaps we are at that teenager phase. A little sloppy but full of optimism. We are still finding out about ourselves. There is always the danger of the perception that success and failure can give you. Both able to send you off into a journey of disillusionment. I’m grateful that people are responding favourably to our work. That they are able to take something meaningful away. We have a lot to look forward to in the future and we are very excited about sharing them with you. (Chaudhry, ‘Keynote’ 5)

Chaudhry’s statement is a reminder that I must posit this thesis as a mere starting point in its attempt to fill the lacunae that exists in academia surrounding Khan’s practice.

Performing the Third Space

As indicated by its title, this thesis has chosen to ground its examination of Khan’s aesthetic through the influential framework of the third space as theorised by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha conceptualises the third space as a metaphoric space in which postcolonial identity formation in the diaspora is undertaken. Post-national and anti-essentialist in spirit, this metaphoric third space is situated figuratively and interstitially between one’s national identity and one’s cultural heritage, and is believed to undermine the privileging of either position in the formation of diasporic identity, such that ‘neither site, role, or representation holds sway’ (Routledge 400), and ‘one continually subverts the meaning of the other’ (Routledge 400). Bhabha comments on the intangibility of this space while he recognises the ways in which it challenges fixed and homogenous notions of culture:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. (Bhabha, *Location* 55)

He conjectures that this third space ‘properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People’ (Bhabha, *Location* 54). The third space transfers the ‘burden of the meaning of culture’ (Bhabha, *Location* 56) from ritualistic national traditions to the “‘inter” [...] *the in-between*’ (Bhabha, *Location* 56), which Bhabha suggests is where ‘the cutting edge of translation and negotiation’ (Bhabha, *Location* 56) occurs in diasporic identity formations. American cultural anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson concur that such innovative critical enunciations trigger the ‘deterritorialization of identity’ (Gupta and Ferguson 9), loosening the boundaries of nationalist identity politics and channelling the blurring and erasure of ‘familiar lines between “here” and “there”, center and periphery, colony and metropole’ (Gupta and Ferguson 10).

According to Bhabha diasporic subjects occupy this third space, harbouring dynamism and engendering new modes of political articulations. Moreover he proposes that the empowerment of the space brings ‘creative invention into existence’ (Bhabha, *Location* 12), which is characterised by an inherent hybridity that gives rise to new articulative opportunities:

The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. The third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford, ‘Third Space’ 211)

This third space and its hybridised articulations of identity ‘bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it’ (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford, ‘Third Space’ 211), while simultaneously generating a ‘new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford, ‘Third Space’ 211).

The equally influential postcolonial theorist Stuart Hall echoes Bhabha's notion of the third space in its ability to construct identity as a processual and fluid condition:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, "cultural identity", lays claim. (Hall, 'Cultural Identity' 222)

Hall's emphasis on identity as a 'matter of "becoming" as well as "being"' (Hall, 'Cultural Identity' 225), counters the idea of identity as static and inherited, 'eternally fixed in some essentialised past' (Hall, 'Cultural Identity' 225). Instead Hall suggests that identity formation is 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power' (Hall, 'Cultural Identity' 225) and is ever-evolving. Bhabha suggests that it is the empowered figurative third space that allows for such new identities to emerge, dismantling the need to adhere to older and fixed identity categories of the past.

In examining the relationship between Khan's identity and his art, Bhabha's notion of the third space and Hall's concept of identity as a process of 'becoming' are useful lenses through which to start theorising the influence of his diasporic identity positions on his performance aesthetic. Khan's identity rejects pre-existent labels by embracing multiple affiliations to local, national and global spaces simultaneously. It refuses to be tied down as it seeks endless growth and transformation. Similarly his performance aesthetic resists easy categorisation and straddles multiple genres with equal ease. For these reasons, the transient and empowering nature of the third space as a space of incessant 'becomings', is a fertile space in which to examine Khan's art. Existent scholarship on Khan by Ramsay Burt ('*Kaash*'), Lorna Sanders ('I Just Can't Wait', '*ma*'), Lucy Smith and Annalisa Piccirillo, has discussed the in-betweenness in

his art through referencing the third space and hybridity. In his analysis of *Kaash*, Burt argues that Khan's emerging aesthetic goes beyond contemporising *kathak* by instigating dialogue between his classical and his contemporary training, and is instead contributing to mainstream British culture through the new cultural meanings he generates through these artistic negotiations (Burt, '*Kaash*' 93). In her analysis of *zero degrees* and *ma*, Sanders views Khan's exchanges and transpositions between *kathak* and contemporary languages as occupying this in-between third space (Sanders, '*ma*'). Smith and Piccirillo read Khan's in-betweenness through the same third space, and identify a transposition of the traditional and historical information as embodied through his *kathak* training, into his contemporary language and existence (L. Smith, Piccirillo).

These discussions of Khan's aesthetic, in relation to the third space and hybridity, remain confined to either his diasporic identity as a second generation British man of Bangladeshi heritage, or the dialogue generated between his South Asian dance training in *kathak* and his western contemporary dance training. Even while they recognise in his art multidisciplinary facets, they tend to consider it as belonging primarily to the field of contemporary dance. While these discussions are valuable and pertinent to Khan's performance aesthetic, they present a limiting understanding of what is in reality a far more complex, layered and eclectic language. In an article that provides an evaluative overview of critics' responses to Khan's repertoire, Zoe Norridge presents a refreshing perspective in arguing for a multi-disciplinary mode of analysis of Khan's aesthetic. She also signals that while many critics emphasise signs of cultural harmony in Khan's work, it is just as ridden with signs of cultural collisions. In this, Norridge indicates a need to view his aesthetic as one that complicates the simplistic

melting-pot idea purported by multiculturalism, emphasising instead on its tensions and complexities (Norridge 1).

I propose that while Khan's performance aesthetic is deeply fuelled by his complex identity positions, this is only one half of the equation. This view is also partly shared by Wei-Chen Roger Liu, who believes that current scholarship on Khan does not pay 'adequate attention to the creative motif of his choreography' (Liu 308). However while Liu acknowledges the importance of scrutinising Khan's creative motifs, he does not locate this analysis at the juncture between the languages of theatre and dance. Moreover, I dispute Liu's claim that in Khan's choreography his 'diasporic body serves no more than a tool to communicate universal themes' (Liu 308), as I strongly believe the complexity of his identity positions fuel both the content and the form of the very choreographic motifs that Liu claims are worthy of analysis. I therefore propose that the other less examined half of his performance aesthetic is how his identity negotiations are being articulated through another third space, which emerges at the interstices between the disciplines of theatre and dance. Just as Paul Routledge convincingly transfers Bhabha's concept of the third space from the field of postcolonial studies to the study of enunciation between the fields of academia and political activism (Routledge 400), I wish to shift the identity bound associations of the third space to examine through it the syncretic field physical theatre, by positing it as a third space of aesthetic and 'critical engagement' (Routledge 405-406) between theatre and dance. If we consider the creative spaces between the disciplines of theatre and dance as a borderland zone, then working in this third space 'involves a simultaneous coming and going' (Routledge 406) between these disciplines:

A prerequisite for this is that we must believe that we can inhabit these different sites, making each a space of relative comfort. To do so will require inventing creative ways to cross perceived and real “borders”. (Routledge 406)

It is significant that Khan has chosen to articulate his diasporic border-crossings through creating a performance language that in itself crosses borders between theatre and dance. The interweaving of embodied realities, storytelling, theatricality, emotiveness, virtuoso physicality, demanding movement technique, use of quotidian and naturalistic gestures, strong sense of characterisations, socio-political content and an albeit fragmented narrative drive, situates Khan’s aesthetic in the interstices between theatre and dance. However applying Bhabha’s notion of the third space as a ‘split-space of enunciation’ (Bhabha, *Location* 56) to the borderzone genre of physical theatre reminds us that in this hybridised language, a fissure remains as a tangible marker from where its split double-vision can be delivered. I therefore propose that Khan’s performance aesthetic emerges at the interstices between two distinct but interconnected third spaces. The first concerns his diasporic identity negotiations, in keeping with postcolonial theory’s concept of the third space. The second is the space of critical enunciation between the disciplines of theatre and dance, with its emphasis on generating socio-political legibility in movement. For Khan then performing the third space constitutes creating an aesthetic that embodies the in-betweenness of performance disciplines through which he captures the in-betweenness of his diasporic identity. It is precisely this simultaneously operative doubling of the third space that has hitherto been ignored by most scholars who, while recognising Khan’s diasporic identity, have largely seen him as a contemporary dancer. I wish to dismantle this limited view in order to recognise him as a multidisciplinary artist.

Critiquing Contemporary Kathak

Arguing for this nuanced understanding of Khan's performance aesthetic requires an acknowledgment and a subsequent critique of the label 'Contemporary Kathak' that has been endorsed by scholars like Lorna Sanders (*Rush*) and Annalisa Piccirillo and critics alike. Although early on in his career Khan himself used it as a 'reference point for the audience' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, *Rush* 7), he admitted that he had not gone 'deep enough into the work yet to know what to call it' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, *Rush* 7). This is significant, as it marks Khan's conscious and strategic decision not to generate his own label. He did however reject the term fusion which to him implied the application of a forced devised 'formula on an intellectual level' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Burt, '*Kaash*' 104) to his creative process, denying its exploratory spirit of discovery. Khan spoke of his emergent language as a 'confusion' that was being generated in his body from the 'unintended consequences of learning two physical systems which became overwritten in his muscles' (Sanders, '*ma*' 60). Sanders suggests that this confusion manifests in Khan's language as 'the originary techniques and their associated value systems' (Sanders, '*ma*' 60) and are 'presented simultaneously in an *inseparable flux*' (Sanders, '*ma*' 60). This claim, that Khan's movement training consists of only 'two physical systems', *kathak* and contemporary, is limiting. In reality his training does not merely consist of 'two physical' dance systems, but is in fact more multilayered in its holistic references to both emotive theatrical skills and multiple movement vocabularies. Moreover Sanders seemed to suggest that both *kathak* and contemporary dance are homogenous systems of their own, thereby ignoring the hybridity that characterise each of these systems. In 2008 Sanders reconsidered the efficacy of the label to some extent and stated:

Contemporary Kathak [...] provides difficulties because its complexity is not explicable as *fusion*. Khan's own rejection of the term as inappropriate to his work can be supported in that it suggests an over-simplistic response. To understand Khan's embracing of what he calls the *confusion* [...] requires a shift in critical and historical perspectives. (Sanders, 'ma' 55)

She questioned the formalist spirit of the label by suggesting that 'Contemporary Kathak is not best served by concomitant notions that genres are homogenous, unitary practices' (Sanders, 'ma' 57). Sanders therefore acknowledged the hybridity inherent in both *kathak* as an amalgamation of Islamic and Hindu performance traditions, and the eclectic practices that come under the remit of western contemporary dance. While she undid the binary opposition implied in the label by pointing out that classical *kathak* and contemporary dance were in themselves conglomerate languages, in her call for a new system of analysis for Khan's work, she did not fully recognise his aesthetic as a syncretic language generated at the interstices between theatre and dance, with an emphasis on embodying socio-political themes by generating new cultural significations.

This latter view builds on Ramsay Burt's argument that Khan's aesthetic does not so much enter into dialogue between *kathak* and contemporary dance, as it requires an analysis of the 'subject of these dialogues and the new kinds of cultural meanings which they have enabled' (Burt, 'Kaash' 93). Burt asserts that these new cultural significations contribute to 'the richness and diversity of contemporary culture in Britain' (Burt, 'Kaash' 100). While he aims these views at his analysis of *Kaash*, I believe they are just as applicable to the holistic nature of Khan's performance aesthetic. By ultimately claiming that contrary to popular belief Khan is not necessarily contributing to the field of South Asian dance in Britain, but is in fact transforming the landscape of contemporary British performance as a whole, particularly in its

negotiations between the disciplines of theatre and dance, I wish to extend Burt's pertinent observation further in this thesis, and complicate the perception of Khan as a contemporary South Asian dancer.

The Field of South Asian dance in Britain

My view that Khan's performance aesthetic does not necessarily sit comfortably within the field of South Asian dance despite his initial training in *kathak*, is informed by a critical understanding of the field in Britain.⁶ Avanthi Meduri identifies an important moment in the establishment of the label South Asian dance within the British public domain. At her OBE ceremony Mira Kaushik, the Director of Akademi (a dominant institution that promotes South Asian dance in Britain), strategically reclaimed the label to counter the Cultural Secretary Tess Jowell's accidental slippage at awarding Kaushik the OBE for her promotion of Indian dance in Britain. Meduri asserts:

By re-inscribing Indian dance within the South Asian label, Kaushik did something quite provocative. She claimed that although Indian dance might look Indian, it is South Asian dance in the UK because it is performed not just by immigrant dancers from India but by "hundreds of South Asian dancers" belonging to the different nations of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Africa. (Meduri, 'Labels' 238)

Meduri recognises the post-national and pan-ethnic spirit within the neutrality of the label South Asian dance as some of the key reasons why, despite its problematic associations, it has acquired a currency and continues to circulate widely within Britain's cultural domain. Alessandra Lopez y Royo identifies the tensions generated by the label South Asian dance:

⁶ It is not in the remit of this thesis to discuss the plethora of academic debates that problematise the label South Asia and its adjectival identity category South Asian. However for excellent discussions on the subject please see Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, Colin Masica, S. Sayyid and Rifat A. Salam, amongst others.

In Britain, Indian dance praxes are referred to as South Asian dance by funders, academics, audiences, venue managers, social commentators, dance critics and the practitioners themselves [...]. South Asian dance is a very uncomfortable umbrella term, yet it continues to be used, often apologetically, because of a consensus on its “convenience”. (Lopez y Royo, ‘Dance’)

Andrée Grau admits that ‘whilst a generic term is useful, it is also problematic in that it overlooks the multiplicity of genres, which exists under the label, and simplifies the complexity of the situation’ (Grau, ‘South Asian Dance’ 7), by homogenising multifarious traditions and practices. However she notes the ‘convenience’ attached to this label by emphasising its post-nationalist spirit and claiming that within a diasporic context, it ‘irons out differences and foregrounds similarities’ (Grau, ‘South Asian Dance’ 40), and ‘also removes the dance from a notion of clear-cut lineage and a nostalgic notion of lost heritage, to find its place in a new setting’ (Grau, ‘South Asian Dance’ 40). From an artist’s perspective however, choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh states that the label South Asian dance is limiting and makes her feel uncomfortable and causes her to ‘wriggle’ (Jeyasingh qtd. in Pinto 4), as she wishes to be identified primarily as a choreographer because of her passion for dance, but not necessarily as a choreographer in South Asian dance (Jeyasingh qtd. in Nisbet) alone.⁷ Thus for artists like Jeyasingh and Khan, it is more important for their aesthetic to be acknowledged as deriving out of the ‘multiplicity of migrations and pathways that make up modern, urban life’ (O’Shea, ‘Unbalancing’ 39).

In the narrative of post-war immigration of South Asian people to Britain, the transmission of cultural practices and performance traditions from the homeland played

⁷ I have only cited the reaction of Jeyasingh to the label South Asian dance as a senior to Khan and an important choreographer in Britain. For a more comprehensive discussion of varied perspectives from other artists and a fuller discussion of the emergence and remit of the label please see Andrée Grau’s SADiB Report and Shiromi Pinto’s Symposium Report entitled ‘No Man’s Land – Exploring South Asianness’.

a vital role in creating a home away from home, and dance as a corporeal vehicle for its visible and tangible links to cultural heritage became its exemplary medium. Historically, dance in the South Asian diaspora in Britain began by paralleling and promulgating sentiments of the Indian nationalist project, and its close relationship to the classicisation of Indian dance.⁸ Lopez y Royo comments on this strategic relationship:

The re-making of Indian “classical dance” has been part of a wider project aimed at the re-making and re-shaping of Indian culture, which coincided with establishing the post-independence Indian nation and new ideas of Indianness. (Lopez y Royo, ‘Classicism’ 157)

Consequently first generation South Asian migrants in Britain facilitated the proliferation of this exoticised home culture through the medium of dance, in an attempt to preserve what they had left behind. By promoting South Asian dance as one of the indicators of conserved tradition and heritage, its practice in Britain was thus engendered and nurtured. In writing about South Asian dance practice in 1960s Britain, Naseem Khan observes that the qualities of purity, authenticity and uncontaminated continuity from the cultural heritage of the homeland were of paramount significance (N. Khan 27). From this period onwards the two classical dance forms that gained most public exposure within British culture were *bharatanatyam* from the south of India, and *kathak* from the north.⁹ Alessandra Lopez y Royo refers to this occurrence as the

⁸ Mandakranta Bose, Alessandra Lopez y Royo, Janet O’Shea, Ananya Chatterjea and others claim that the notion of Indian classical dance in itself is only as old as the nationalist project and directly linked to it. Since this thesis focuses on the South Asian diaspora in Britain, it does not reiterate in detail the excellent scholarship that exists on the role of dance within the nationalist project of India. For a very useful discussion of the classicisation project of Indian dance and its re-negotiation in the South Asian diaspora in Britain, please see Alessandra Lopez y Royo’s article ‘Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism’.

⁹ As the national dance of India, due to its intricate role in the Indian nationalist movement, *bharatanatyam*’s status as the primary embodiment of Indian national culture, both within and beyond the borders of Indian, is perceived as the Indian diasporic population’s preferred link to their home-culture. This is problematic of course as it restricts diasporas from other South and South East Asian nations, like Sri Lanka and Malaysia where *bharatanatyam* is also practised, from making a valid claim on its heritage. In contrast, within India, *kathak*’s status has

‘process of institutionalisation of South Asian dance genres, from *kathak* to *bharatanatyam*’ (Lopez y Royo, ‘Dance’), through the establishment of cultural institutions that were created to promote these dance forms on British soil.¹⁰ The 1970s saw the birth of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, with its emphasis on the preservation of cultural heritage of the homeland. In contrast, the 1980s saw the birth of National Academy of Indian Dance (NAID), focusing on nurturing a more contemporary expression within South Asian dance, as its founder Tara Rajkumar recognised ‘that Indian classical dance in Britain had to enter into a dialogue with local structures and voices’ (N. Khan 27). In the mid-1990s, Mira Kaushik took over from Rajkumar as the Director of NAID and took the provocative step to ‘localise and transnationalise’ (Meduri, ‘Labels’ 235) the philosophy of the institution by renaming it Akademi, and embracing the label South Asian dance. It is at Akademi that seven year old Khan started his *kathak* training under the tutelage of Sri Pratap Pawar.

Over the last two or three decades, while South Asian classical dance forms have gained visibility in the British cultural domain, some South Asian dancers and choreographers have interrogated the relevance of tradition and reconstructed the meaning of classicism in their diasporic existences. Alessandra Iyer observes the tension between these two ends of the spectrum:

historically been contested. This somehow loosens the nationalistic ties of the dance form to India itself, and thus, outside of India’s borders, *kathak* is more easily perceived as a trans-ethnic cultural form, not claimed by India alone. This has lent the form more malleability in being practiced by South Asians of Indian heritage (Sonia Sabri), Pakistani heritage (Nahid Siddiqui) and Bangladeshi heritage (Akram Khan).

¹⁰ See Stacey Prickett’s article entitled ‘Techniques and Institutions: The Transformation of British Dance Tradition through South Asian Dance’ which evaluates the gradual institutionalisation of the South Asian forms of *bharatanatyam* and *kathak* as part of the British dance landscape through creating a niche for these forms within British higher education.

There has been a surge of dance activity aimed at expanding and merging forms, rejecting traditional content and seeking to be more attuned to contemporary life while articulating the specificity of being British and working in Britain. And yet, in the background, there is also a call to adhere to traditional values, to preserve the authenticity of the traditions and most of all, to resist facile dilutions. The resulting landscape is composite. (A. Iyer 2)

Janet O'Shea makes a useful distinction between the concepts of tradition and classical, and observes that 'the term "traditional" suggests an unbroken, handed-down heritage while "classical" denotes an adherence to a set of defined principles' (O'Shea, 'Unbalancing' 41). Some South Asian dancers have been keen to observe this distinction by erasing notions of preserved tradition from their practice, in favour of a more contemporary negotiation of classicism in their art (Purkayastha 263-265).¹¹ Alessandra Lopez y Royo suggests that these dancers have been concerned with both postmodern hybridity and a western neoclassical spirit of innovation in their artistic approach, in order to 'reclaim their artistic freedom and integrity and actively participate as interlocutors in British dance discourse (Lopez y Royo, 'Dance'). She goes on to cite the works of Shobana Jeyasingh and Akram Khan as some of the exemplars of such 'new genre configurations' (Lopez y Royo, 'Dance'), and claims that their works have been 'influenced in part by comparisons and analogy with western dance models' (Lopez y Royo, 'Dance'). Grau suggests that these choreographers have equally responded to the 'requirements of funding bodies for the commissioning of new work' (Grau, 'South Asian Dance' 29), instead of performing pure classical recitals. Lopez y Royo proposes that this is because South Asian dancers in Britain are increasingly expected to engage with western dramaturgical models and dance

¹¹ In her unpublished thesis entitled 'Bodies Beyond Borders: Modern Dance in Colonial and Postcolonial India', Prarthana Purkayastha aligns the preserved-tradition route of South Asian dance in Britain to community institution like Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, while suggesting that artists like Jeyasingh and Khan are more aptly associated with the route of negotiated-tradition (Purkayastha 262-265).

aesthetics to create an aesthetic that reflects their contemporary British reality (Lopez y Royo, 'Dance').

It becomes tricky to untangle the complex web made up on one hand by Grau and Lopez y Royo's observations on the impact of funding policies upon South Asian dancers that expect them to contemporise these classical forms through western dramaturgical means, and on the other by the practitioners' own meditations on the need to create a language that is more relevant to their own diasporic lives. While in certain circumstances the cynicism generated from the association between hybridity and innovation within South Asian dance is valid, in the cases of artists like Jeyasingh and Khan a more nuanced judgment is vital. Despite the generational and aesthetic differences that characterise the creative philosophies of Jeyasingh and Khan, they both share a desire to make work for a contemporary milieu through engaging with western dramaturgical conventions of performance making. And I would argue that in Khan's case, the influence of these western dramaturgical conventions has been profound in shaping his performance aesthetic through its emphasis on collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and a fundamental need to create work that communicates socio-political content at the interstices between theatre and dance. This shifts Khan's performance aesthetic from the realm of formalist contemporary South Asian dance to the more complex, hybridised and dynamic genre of physical theatre. I believe its interstitial negotiations between the disciplines of theatre and dance and its fundamentally open-ended remit as a contemporary performance genre, provides for Khan a freer landscape within which to generate his eclectic and emergent performance aesthetic.

The Field of Physical Theatre

While I claim that it is precisely this open-ended remit of the genre that benefits Khan's exploratory and emerging aesthetic, I also admit that it subjects the physical theatre genre to a loaded discourse surrounding its genealogy. Franc Chamberlain identifies two primary lineages for the genre in the British context. The first is that of the mime tradition as embodied in the training of Copeau, Decroux and Lecoq (Chamberlain 119) and the second is the aesthetic embodied in the practice of the British company DV8 Physical Theatre and their challenge to contemporary dance (Chamberlain 119). He goes on to cite a third lineage to physical theatre in the avant-garde theatre practices of Meyerhold, Artaud and Grotowski, which he proposes was obscured and overshadowed by the practices identified by the label in the 1980s (Chamberlain 119). Simon Murray and John Keefe trace the label's multi-lineaged history from the practice of Grotowski in the late 1960s, to Steven Berkoff and his Lecoq inspired aesthetic in the 1970s, but recognise that it was DV8 Physical Theatre's endorsement of the label in its company name in 1986, that made it exploded into public consciousness (Murray and Keefe 14). In order not to demonstrate a preference towards a specific lineage, Murray and Keefe employ a pluralistic approach to the genre by claiming for physical theatres or the physical in theatres (Murray and Keefe 1). They identify a commonality amongst these varied lineages as practices 'rooted in certain through-lines of principles of theatre itself; of embedded ideas that are in a dialectical relationship to the spoken word' (Murray and Keefe 3). There is of course an inherent problem in embracing such a pluralistic position as it foregoes the opportunity to identify the philosophical and practical overlaps that characterise the genre. This is rectified by dance scholar Ana Sánchez-Colberg:

The term itself – “physical theatre” – denotes a hybrid character and is testimony to its double legacy in both avant-garde theatre and dance. It is precisely this double current of influences which needs to be taken into consideration in any attempt to delineate specific parameters of the new genre. [...] the process of contextualizing physical theatre needs to take into consideration its location in both avant-garde theatre, particularly that production considered to be “body-focused”, and also within the context of avant-garde dance and its particular parameters which set the body as the centralizing unit within the theatrical space. (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 21)

Sánchez-Colberg traces its avant-garde dance lineage back to German Ausdrucktanz and its principle to ‘squeeze out from the inner landscape of the artist’s body (and psyche) action that actualises the self in the world (the outer landscape)’ (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Annotated’ 4), as exemplified in the art of Mary Wigman, the *tanztheater* of Pina Bausch, and the volatile aesthetic of DV8 Physical Theatre. She traces its avant-garde theatre lineage to the experimentations of Bertolt Brecht and the genre of the Theatre of the Absurd (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Annotated’ 5). While Sánchez-Colberg ignores the third lineage of mime as acknowledged by Chamberlain and Murray and Keefe, she comes closest to charting the genealogy of physical theatre as a hybridised genre, emerging at the interstices between both avant-garde theatre and dance. It is for this reason that I find her approach the most useful when starting to understand the genre in order to rectify the vagueness that surrounds it.

Murray and Keefe, Sánchez-Colberg and Dymphna Callery all accurately identify the random and prolific use of the label to such a diverse range of contemporary performance practices that Callery claims the label ‘has become virtually undefinable’ (Callery 5). In this, the label has become a homogenising category (much like the label South Asian dance), that loosely signals all experimentations in contemporary performance practices that rely on a primarily visual and physical language of signification, without distinguishing the ways in which traditional modalities of

performances are actually challenged in these practices. It is precisely its homogenising quality that has made the term physical theatre lose its initial ‘charge’ (Murray and Keefe 2). To counteract its lack of specificity, Sánchez-Colberg’s approach to the genre as a double-legacy between avant-garde theatre and avant-garde dance becomes a valuable premise from which to examine the genre of physical theatre, and to ultimately understand why Khan’s performance aesthetic might be aligned with reason to it. However even her approach to the genre needs examining with regards to the way in which she approaches the role of the body within it.

Sánchez-Colberg notes that physical theatre’s hybrid identity between avant-garde theatre and avant-garde dance echoes the Artaudian philosophy of theatre making, where ‘the body is the centre of the *mise-en-scène*’ (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 23). She attempts to clarify the nature of this body that occupies the third space between dance and theatre by reminding us that:

whilst admitting to the significance of a “decoding” process of the body as a sign of discourse, it has also become significant to consider that the social body which is the focus of such structural analysis is also a spatial body, which, although subject to social discourse, also has its own “embodied” knowledge. (Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 25)

However she does not fully develop the relevance and significance of this socialised and spatial subject who occupies the heart of the physical theatre genre. I would like to extend Sánchez-Colberg’s observation that this body is not just a vessel through which the primary means of communication occurs, but the fundamental source and stimulus of interpersonal politics and socio-political relations with the world, and is inseparable from its embodied subject. Therefore I would first like to clarify this preoccupation with the ‘body’ in avant-garde performance practices, by identifying it as one and the same as its embodied subject. Consequently I propose that in physical theatre, it is not the

body that is at the centre of the mise-en-scène, but the embodied subject, whose central position in the mise-en-scène is what lends physical theatre its charge.

This conceptual shift from the body as a vessel of communication to the body as an embodied subject needs brief contextualising in embodiment theory. Over centuries French philosopher René Descartes' concept of dualism has ingrained into the human psyche the separation and incompatibility between the superior mind and the inferior body, generating philosophical debates that Elizabeth Grosz refers to as 'the heirs of Cartesianism' (Grosz, *Volatile* 8). Grosz suggests that these heirs have identified three kinds of bodies of which the third is most pertinent to this discussion. This body is 'commonly considered as a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression' (Grosz, *Volatile* 9):

It is through the body that the subject can express his or her interiority, and it is through the body that he or she can receive, code, and translate the inputs of the "external" world. Underlying this view [...] is a belief in the fundamental passivity and transparency of the body. Insofar as it is seen as a medium, a carrier or bearer of information that comes from elsewhere (either "deep" in the subject's incorporeal interior or from the "exterior" world), the specificity and concreteness of the body must be neutralized, tamed, made to serve other purpose. (Grosz, *Volatile* 9)

Thus Dymphna Callery's claim that physical theatre is theatre that is created 'through the body' (Callery 4), as though it were a passive medium of signification, perpetuates such passive notions of the body as distinct from its embodied subject. Dance scholar Sandra Horton Fraleigh rectifies such passive constructions of the body, by extending the embodiment debate through the notion of the 'lived body' that 'attempts to cut beneath the subject-object split' (Fraleigh 4), and critiques the concept of the 'body as an instrument, movement as medium, and mind or soul as the mover or motivational source' (Fraleigh 13) for such movement.

In order to remedy passive representations of the body in the genre of physical theatre, I rely on Fraleigh's notion of the lived body, by bringing to the centre of the debate the embodied subject whose lived history and subjectivity fuels the socio-political spirit of the genre. The body after all is not an isolated, singular and passive entity, but is fundamentally inseparable from the specific history and lived experiences of the subject who lives in and through it. Physical theatre as a genre is therefore an art form that 'is not merely about the body, but from the body' (Csordas xi), and examines both the embodied subject's shaping of the world and the impact the world has on shaping such subjectivities. In this it evokes dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster's concept of 'corporeality', as an examination of embodied subjectivities through their 'bodily reality, not as a natural or absolute given but as a tangible and substantial category of cultural experience' (Foster x). Physical Theatre recognises and theatricalises the embodied subject's 'role in the production of narrative, in the construction of collectivity, in the articulation of the unconscious, in the generation of postcoloniality' (Foster xiv) and examines how these subjects 'contour new relations between history and memory, the aesthetic and the political, the social and the individual' (Foster xiv). This shift from physical theatre being a 'body-focused' aesthetic to an 'embodied-subject-focused' aesthetic is a fundamentally different way of engaging with the genre. In physical theatre then, the conventional theatrical boundaries between fiction and reality and character and self collapse, as the performer's corporeality permeates the persona he/she represents on stage, thereby becoming an extension of one self.

While Callery, Murray and Keefe and Sánchez-Colberg identify that the term physical theatre is practically undefinable and has even lost the charge it once exerted, what they perhaps fail to recognise is the term's innate refusal to be conveniently

categorised and contained into a set of easily identifiable characteristics. Its slippery and illusive nature may inconvenience the academic spirit to afford labels, but it is also precisely these qualities that have lent the term its resilience in contemporary performance discourse. I propose that while owing its allegiances to both avant-garde theatre and dance, the term physical theatre and the performances that choose to be identified by it, are deliberately unfixed and perpetually in the process of being defined between the disciplines of theatre and dance. This is what makes the term both seductive and appealing to artists whose works explore the boundaries between theatre and dance, and who feel they will actively contribute to the definition of the genre, instead of having to fit into a prescribed set of characteristics that have already defined it. I further argue that if Khan's performance aesthetic is aligned to the genre of physical theatre, then it would be possible to analyse how it is contributing to the field of physical theatre, by injecting into its historic landscape a unique South Asian aesthetic. This in turn will transform our perception of physical theatre in ways that have not happened before, beyond Sánchez-Colberg's delineation of the genre between the legacies of avant-garde dance and avant-garde theatre, and into the discourse of interculturalism.

Negotiating Roots/Routes in Khan's Performance Aesthetic

Aligning Khan's aesthetic to the genre of physical theatre requires an acknowledgement that although on the surface it would seem that he resorts to only western dramaturgical conventions in his aesthetic, his inherent South Asianness permeates his art in integral and inseparable ways, making it a fundamentally intercultural language. It is therefore vital to realise that Khan's influence as a British performance-maker is owed precisely to his South Asian ancestry which is evoked in

form and content in his aesthetic. This suggests that the relationship between Khan's complex identity and his art are fundamentally entwined. His syncretic aesthetic is thus borne of relentless negotiations between, and simultaneously evocative of, his cultural and disciplinary roots that lend him a sense of past situatedness, and the creative routes he chooses to explore through his artistic articulations. It evokes James Clifford's observation that within the diaspora, while there is an expectation for one's roots to always precede routes (Clifford, *Routes* 3), the dialogue between the two are on-going and incessant. He notes:

Unresolved historical dialogue between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and differences [...] characterize diasporic articulations. (Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' 108)

Through his syncretic aesthetic, Khan continues to embody Clifford's assertion that travelling and intercultural dialogue are 'crucial sites for an unfinished modernity' (Clifford, *Routes* 2). In his post-nationalist resistance to seeking monolithic 'roots', Khan's aesthetic explores various 'routes', thereby exercising choice that reflects his own multiple affiliations and reference points. Moreover, in his inflection of interculturalism into the landscape of physical theatre, Khan also evokes Vijay Mishra's notion of the 'diasporic avant-garde' that permeates the literature of South Asian diasporic writers in the form of a socio-political aesthetic that is in itself a 'critique' (Mishra, 'Postcolonial' 15-16). Mishra claims that while it draws on the writing innovations of the European avant-garde, this aesthetic generates a unique intercultural language of its own that interrogates 'subject positions excluded or silenced by modernism by constructing allegorical or counter-hegemonic subaltern renditions of the geopolitical imaginary of South Asians in Britain' (Mishra, 'Postcolonial' 16). Through the subsequent chapters, this thesis will go on to demonstrate that Khan's intercultural negotiations and transformations of physical theatre similarly draws on the double

legacy of the genre in avant-garde theatre and dance but transforms it, in order to inject into it a voice and subjectivity that has been historically excluded from its remit. Khan's syncretic language of corporeal resistance and exchange is therefore both a response to and a critique of the European avant-garde dance and theatre aesthetic, by interrogating them through his South Asian identity and movement training.

Chapter 2 entitled 'Khan's Fertile Grounds', posits twelve interlacing biographical and socio-political factors that I believe have contributed to and fuelled Khan's meteoric rise to success within the last decade in mainstream British culture. These theoretical conjectures also set up the conceptual grounds necessary to undertake the identitarian analyses of the four selected performances that follow in the subsequent four chapters.

In Chapter 3 entitled 'Inexclusion, London's Docklands and Auto-ethnography in *Loose in Flight*', Khan's dance-film *Loose in Flight* (1999) is analysed as an auto-ethnographic enquiry into his multi-corporeal languages that are brought into dialogue with each other in the derelict landscape of London's Docklands. This chapter captures the articulations of Khan's identity as a British artist in its negotiations between the local and the global faces of the nation, through examining the interplay between his body, the symbolic Dockland's landscape, and its mediation through film.

An examination of Khan's inherent interculturalism forms the basis of Chapter 4 entitled 'Intercultural Aesthetic in *Gnosis*'. Through a comparative analysis between Khan's *Gnosis* and Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, seminal critiques of intercultural theatre practice are revisited and extended to argue that Khan's reliance on a corporeal

language as a medium of intercultural exchange lends his project more ambiguity and integrity over Brook's reliance on the medium of text as his primary means of cultural translation. Moreover the chapter observes that Khan's intercultural dramatisation of the Queen Gandhari-Prince Duryodhana relationship, which forms a very minute aspect of the Hindu epic, is driven by his personal meditations on contemporaneous mother-son relationships. This subjective nature of Khan's engagement with the epic undercuts the hardest line of critique that has been aimed at Brook's handling of the *Mahabharata*, in its claims of universality as the history of mankind.

In Chapter 5 entitled 'Evocations of Third Space in *zero degrees*', Khan's highly acclaimed performance of *zero degrees* is analysed through the conceptual framework of the third space, as the piece unfolds in the physical borderland between Bangladesh and India, and in the metaphorical interstices between life and death, belonging and non-belonging, and identity and the lack of. Khan's position at this liminal borderland allows him to examine with equal sensitivity, both British and Bangladeshi identity, and lends him a 'double vision' associated with migrant occupants of the emancipated third space. However through his 'double vision', Khan becomes aware of his outsider-identity within the Bangladeshi context, and through *zero degrees* demonstrates that the third space is only empowering for a diasporic subject from the outside of the margins, with the ultimate promise of a safe return to the centre. Moreover through *zero degrees*, Khan extends the third space of identity negotiations into the fertile space of creative enunciation between the disciplines theatre, dance and visual arts.

Chapter 6 entitled 'Embodiment of Relocated Subjectivities and Travelling Homes in *Bahok*' analyses Khan's vision not as a performer but as a performance-

maker, through an analysis of *Bahok*. Working with other transnational bodies and their multi-corporealities, Khan evokes in *Bahok* a symbolic embodiment of Marc Auge's 'non-place' for Steven Vertovec's concept of 'super-diversity' of contemporary Britain. In an airport lounge, travellers wait endlessly to board their flights as they struggle to find ways to communicate with each other. Through their awkward interactions they discover their own idiosyncrasies pertaining to their individual and competing cultural memories that impede them from finding a common ground, and gradually come to create a temporary 'community of circumstance'. The chapter examines notions of home and relocated subjectivities for a global generation perpetually on the move.

The Conclusion to this thesis firstly theorises Khan as a cosmopolitan artist. It then goes on to cement the argument that despite popularly held notions that Khan's performance language contemporises *kathak*, it would be far more productive to examine his aesthetic as a significant contribution to the field of physical theatre, due to its concern with socio-political and identity-driven content. Consequently it is not so much contemporising *kathak*, as it is actually changing the landscape of the physical theatre genre, by injecting into its remit the South Asian theatrical modality of *abhinaya* and an evocation of *rasa* theory. This is lending physical theatre a unique cultural syncretism.

Chapter 2

Khan's Fertile Grounds

This chapter identifies and contextualises vital biographical circumstances, strategic creative choices, and conducive socio-political conditions that have fuelled Khan's meteoric rise to stardom from a local artist to a global phenomenon in the field of contemporary performance. In doing so, the chapter validates the significance of examining the relationship between Khan's identity and art, and engages theoretically with the circumstances that have shaped Khan's success story, in order to contextualise the subsequent identity-driven analyses of the four selected performances that follow in the thesis. The chapter proposes that there are twelve contributory factors that have nurtured Khan's narrative of success:

1. Khan's parents' migration to Britain set against the normative narrative of South Asian migration to Britain, and its impact upon his early childhood.
2. Khan's ability to capitalise on his previous generation's established identity politics of 1980's 'black' Britishness.
3. Khan's childhood training in *kathak* and its related principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa*.
4. Khan's western movement training and his ability to negotiate a syncretic performance aesthetic.
5. Khan's development as an artist under the governance of Farooq Chaudhry.
6. Khan's status as a collaborative artist.
7. Khan's relationship to the cultural field of British South Asian arts.
8. Khan's intellectual and creative alignment with the privileged field of hybridity.
9. Khan's relationship to the cultural diversity project of British multiculturalism under the Labour government.

10. Khan's evocation of Graham Huggan's concept of the 'postcolonial exotic', whereby postcolonial subjects such as himself, channel and manage other people's perception of their exoticism.
11. Khan's making of his 'self-identity' in full view of the public domain, in keeping with key aspects of Anthony Giddens' articulations on the relationship between late modernity and post-traditional identity formations.
12. Khan's status as a male South Asian performer in Britain in a field that has been historically represented by women.

In tracing Khan's success story, it becomes apparent that these twelve factors have not functioned in isolation. Instead, it is their interlacing dialogues that have amplified Khan's ability to create a distinct aesthetic and niche within the field of contemporary performance. This chapter will now examine each of these conditions in detail to lend contextual clarity in understanding the significance of Khan's opus.

1. Khan's Parent's Migration to Britain and His Early Childhood¹²

Akram Khan was born in 1974 in London to Bangladeshi parents Mosharaf Hossain Khan and Anwara Khan. His father came to Britain in 1969 to study Cost and Management Accountancy, and his mother joined him in 1973 after finishing her MA in Bengali Literature in Dhaka, two years after Bangladesh gained independence as a nation in 1971. Bangladesh was once one and the same as Bengal, and a part of the land mass of eastern India. In 1905, the Partition of Bengal segregated a group of people bound by a common culture and language, on the premise of religion. From this, the geographical boundaries of West Bengal and East Bengal were born, becoming home to the Hindu and the Muslim population of Bengal respectively. This geographical

¹² Khan's biography is collated from the following key sources: 'An Artistic Journey' by Lorna Sanders available on the Akram Khan Company website and from interviews conducted by myself with Akram Khan and his mother Anwara Khan in July 2009. These are referenced as (Sanders, 'An Artistic Journey'), (Ak. Khan, 'Interview') and (An. Khan, 'Interview') respectively. Interviews of Khan available in the public domain in newspapers and video clips also inform this biographical narrative, and have been specifically referenced as such.

boundary became a political one when East Bengal became East Pakistan with the partition of India in 1947. The seat of power of the newly formed nation of Pakistan lay largely with West Pakistan (modern day nation of Pakistan), an area separated linguistically and geographically from East Pakistan by the nation of India in the middle. Over the next two decades East Pakistan was perceived to be exploited financially and its Bengali language and culture was seemingly marginalised by West Pakistani authorities. This gradually led to a political and cultural revolt in East Pakistan in 1971, as it declared itself as the independent state of Bangladesh. Eventually, following a war of independence in 1971, the nation of Bangladesh was born.¹³ The Khan family's arrival into Britain very shortly after Bangladesh gained independence meant they brought with them a strong sense of Bengali cultural identity that the newly found nation had been fighting for.

Khan's parents were therefore atypical of post Second World War South Asian immigrants on two counts. Firstly, as per the pervasive post-war narrative (Hesse and Sayyid 15), while most South Asian immigrants arrived in Britain due to a unique set of economic conditions that led to the 'migration of labour' (Brah, 'Asian in Britain' 36) from Britain's ex-colonies into 1950s post-war Britain, the Khans arrived in Britain approximately two decades later.¹⁴ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Khan's father came to Britain not as an economic migrant but as a student. These two factors,

¹³ For more on emergence of Bangladeshi national identity, please see *A History of Bangladesh* by Willem van Schendel and 'The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh' by Naila Kabeer.

¹⁴ It should be noted here that while the main influx of South Asian immigrants arrived in Britain in the 1950s, a more upwardly mobile class of South Asian intelligentsia had already started to travel between Britain and the subcontinent from the late nineteenth century onwards. Some of them had also made Britain their home. Amongst those who had an impact upon shaping British culture and imagination about Asia, dancers Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal are significant names who popularised South Asian dance traditions in Britain, before the arrival of the post-war South Asian settlers.

alongside Anwara Khan's postgraduate level education, were influential in lending the Khan family greater social mobility within their diasporic community. However even as Khan's parents were part of a slightly different social milieu to the immigrants of the post-war narrative, they arrived into a Britain that was rife with racial tension between the native British and the immigrant population. Subsequently, they would have encountered the power imbalances between the host culture and their immigrant selves as captured in Sayyid's critique of 'coloniality', a continued perpetuation of colonial ideology of white supremacy and non-white subordination, in postcolonial Britain (Sayyid 4). It is under these hostile circumstances that the Khans began their immigrant project of creating a home away from the homeland.

Early 70s Britain that Khan's parents arrived into, was thus wrought with the confusion generated within the native British psyche around notions of centre and margin and native and settler, heightened through two decades of South Asian migration. While this 'de-centring of the West' (Sayyid 4) had become a postcolonial reality, sentiments concerning race, ethnicity, nation and cultural identity were rife within the fast changing British landscape, and occupied the imaginations of the British native people and the immigrant population alike. Raminder Kaur and Alda Terracciano reiterate that ever since the arrival of South Asian immigrants into Britain, they had become 'the object of a gaze which exoticised them as different' (Kaur and Terracciano 344). The exclusion enforced upon and experienced by these first generation South Asians, ghettoised them into communities of their own. Anwara Khan retrospectively realises that her initial joy and naiveté of joining her husband in Britain were overshadowed by the difficulties she was to encounter in trying to make a home in a new environment, where the language barrier was what she found the most alien (An.

Khan, 'Interview'). Akram Khan recognises, that in order to counter the hostilities in their host country, his parents and their other Bengali friends 'formed their own community and then they locked themselves in it through memory [...] and then they held onto this memory defiantly' (Ak. Khan, 'Interview'). This particular aspect of the immigrant tendency of cultural reification (Ram 123), with an emphasis on retaining pure and uncontaminated links with the home culture (N. Khan 27), became a process of 'ghettoization and enclavization' (Anthias 628).

To compensate for their dislocation from the homeland, the Khan family home, the domestic sphere that was beyond the scrutiny of the British government and society, became the space where their home culture was preserved, in order to counteract the possibility that the children might lose sight of their cultural heritage. Therefore, as Akram and Anwara Khan testify, there was an insistence on speaking Bengali at home, eating their ethnic cuisine, and wearing traditional clothes at social functions, in order to keep the bonds with their homeland visibly and tangibly alive. This transmission of home culture became largely the project of the female immigrant, whose identification with the motherland and her traditions were vital to every migrant's reality (Werbner 905) and Anwara Khan was one of many such women.¹⁵ Having left Bangladesh very shortly after it gained independence, and long before the Bangladeshi nationalist project prioritised Islamic identity over Bengali customs, Khan's mother brought with her a Bengali culture that was a syncretic expression of Bengali social customs and Islamic

¹⁵ Pnina Werbner writes specifically about Muslim female migrants and their role within the domestic sphere to perpetuate the values and customs of the homeland, but this is also true of other South Asian religious and culture groups.

religious practices (Kabeer 38).¹⁶ It is this very syncretic Bengali identity that she transmitted to her British born children. According to Avtar Brah:

The early migrants were quite secure in their sense of selves, rooted as it was in the social milieu from which they originated. Social norms derived from this milieu were the main reference point. But as their children began to attend local schools, the parents became attuned to the possible influences of “*gore lok*” (whites) on their children. (Brah, ‘Asian in Britain’ 38-39)

Khan’s parents did not demonstrate these same sentiments however. They not only valued the idea of British education for their children, and realised the upward social mobility attached to it, but they also aspired for both Khan and his sister to receive private school education. While his sister did achieve this, Khan admits ‘I just never got in. I tried all of them. I didn’t get in’ (Ak. Khan qtd. in Patterson). Thus, from a young age, Khan’s complex cultural identity began to be nurtured on the one hand through his British education in the public domain, and on the other through his embodiment of Bengali culture as cultivated by his mother’s relentless efforts in the private sphere.

When Khan was three years old, his mother introduced him to Bengali folk dance to tame his hyperactive energy. In her interview Anwara Khan revealed that although she had practised folk and *rabindrik* dance back in Bangladesh, she had not been allowed to pursue it professionally. She explained that in Islam, dance is considered to be an act of excess, and therefore the practice of dance comes attached

¹⁶ Kabeer notes that post-independence, the Bengali cultural identity in the villages of Bangladesh have been born out of ‘a fusion of Hindu and Muslim traditions shared by cultivators and artisans’ (Kabeer 39), to the extent that ‘within this syncretic system, it was impossible to distangle the origins of various beliefs and customs [...] which were held by Hindu and Muslim peasants alike and were essentially Bengali beliefs’ (Kabeer 39). With time, in the urban city environments however, ‘foreign-born Islamic elite [...] strongly resisted assimilation into indigenous Bengali culture’ by ‘adhering to orthodox Islamic practices and speaking only Persian, Arabic and, later, Urdu’ (Kabeer 39). Leaving Bangladesh very soon after the nation achieved independence, Khan’s parents carried with them to Britain, this indigenous and syncretic Bengali culture that embraced Islamic beliefs alongside Bengali language and cultural practices in equal measure.

with religious dogma. In addition, because dance was not considered to be a respectable pursuit for middle class Bengali women, her father, a renowned mathematician, felt unable to jeopardise his public image by supporting his daughter's dance training due to its contentious associations. Therefore Anwara Khan was never able to fulfil her own dreams of becoming a professional dancer. However, in her role as a migrant mother, attempting to preserve and transmit her home culture to her children, she found legitimacy in practicing her art away from her home culture (An. Khan, 'Interview'). Thus through participation in London's Bengali community gatherings, Khan's love for performance and knowledge of his ancestral Bengali culture was nurtured.

This sealed domestic sphere, where the homeland was perpetuated through traditions, anecdotes and cultural practices, in some sense protected some South Asian immigrants from being forced to fully assimilate into the British society by rejecting their own cultural identities, as per the expectations of most British white natives (Ballard 5). However Khan's experiences of growing up in a racially turbulent London of the 70s counter these normative narratives of struggles over assimilation. Alongside acquiring skills in Bangladeshi folk dance, Khan began to cultivate an interest in western popular dance culture through television. He was particularly fascinated by the choreography of the late influential African-American pop-star Michael Jackson. In an obituary for *The Guardian* on the recent and untimely demise of Jackson, Khan reminisces:

If Michael Jackson hadn't been there, I don't know if I would have been a dancer. He was the first person I connected with. I remember when I saw *Thriller*, I was terrified. I'd never seen anything so frightening in my life, but it was also incredibly exciting. It had everything – music, storytelling, dance. (Ak. Khan qtd. in Saner)

Khan goes on to say that as a young boy he was bullied within his Bangladeshi community for his fascination with the effeminate discipline of dance. But once he began to render Jackson's *Thriller* routines at local discos and started winning competitions, he gained kudos. In retrospect, Khan acknowledges his admiration for Jackson's ability to marry popular culture and dance as he proposes this 'changed everything' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Saner), by removing the stigma attached to the male dancing body. He recognises that his mother was as encouraging of him learning Bangladeshi folk dance as she was of his obsession with Michael Jackson. At a time when his contemporaries were struggling to do so, Khan cites his mother's liberalism towards cultural dialogue and a willingness to transcend cultural differences as crucial reasons for the relative ease with which he was able to negotiate his own identity. Consciously diluting the politically constructed national differences between Bangladeshi Bengali identity and Indian Bengali identity, Anwara Khan transmitted to her children a Bengali identity that drew holistically upon the shared cultural history of these nations (An. Khan, 'Interview'). Moreover Khan experienced a sense of trans-ethnicity while growing up alongside Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and African children, which obscured 'discrete national belongings and even religious identities' (Werbner 900) within the diaspora. Floya Anthias furthers this argument by proposing that diasporic identity is as shaped by trans-ethnic dialogue within the host nation, as it is by the conventionally acknowledged dualism of nation of origin and nation of settlement (Anthias 632). Thus shaped by not just dual, but multiple layers of identity markers, Khan, like many second generation South Asians, became a 'skilled cultural navigator', 'with a sophisticated capacity to manoeuvre [...] both inside and outside the ethnic colony' (Ballard 31). However, these 'skilled cultural navigators' were also very aware of how this distinguished them from their parental generation (Ballard 34). While this

may hold true to some extent for Khan and his parents, the initial gap between them started off a lot narrower than the gap that existed between most first generation parents and second generation children. Khan attributes this to his mother's ability to search for the 'universal common denominator' (Ak. Khan, 'Interview') amongst people, which coloured the way he came to interact with the world around him. This curiosity for cultural dialogue was honed further in him when from 1985 to 1989 Khan performed as the Boy (in the theatre version) and Ekalavya (in the film version) in Peter Brook's production of the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*. Despite sustaining their tightly-knit Bengali community life in Britain, Khan's parents were thus unique in ensuring that alongside nurturing his appreciation and understanding of Bengali culture, Khan's childhood was also immersed in engendering a respect for intercultural dialogue, embracing every opportunity that came his way.

2. Khan and 1980's Black British Identity Politics

Khan and his generation's ability to maximise opportunities for cultural dialogue was however distinct from those available to his previous generation. Farooq Chaudhry observes:

In my opinion, though we were fascinated by the concept of the other we never really had the opportunity to live it. We engaged from a distance with a sense of curiosity and perhaps political correctness that both desired and respected the exotic, the foreign and the traditional. I don't think that happens as much any more. Particularly in cities such as London. The idea of multiple identities is more familiar and more accessible. The chances to engage with more depth with other cultures and disciplines is a lot easier now and less prejudiced by class, money, status [...]. We can customise our cultural interests in a way that was not available before and then change them again. Change seems to be the only constant. [...] Akram's generation could take from all kinds of new sources not because they wanted a fairer society but a richer one. (Chaudhry, 'Keynote' 1-2)

Chaudhry points to a crucial reality that distinguished his generation's identity negotiations within the diaspora from Khan's. By suggesting that Khan's generation

was not interested in a 'fairer society but a richer one', Chaudhry evokes the struggles of identity politics faced by his own generation of immigrant children, growing up in a racially turbulent 70s and 80s Britain, while seeking equal and fair representation within mainstream British culture. These decades thus marked the coming of age of the British-born generation of South Asians, who were born and educated in Britain as British citizens. Chaudhry clarifies that Khan was younger than this generation by about ten years, and was thus perhaps protected by their efforts to secure an identity of their own, so that future generations could maximise on a 'fairer society' in order to seek the luxury of 'richer' cultural dialogue. The multiple points of reference in their diasporic existences necessitated Chaudhry's generation of South Asians to 'move between a wide variety of social arenas' (Ballard 30), constantly negotiating 'radically contradictory, moral and cultural conventions' (Ballard 30).

According to Brah, as a result of being subjected to these circumstances, and believed to be caught between dual cultures, second generation South Asians were naively stereotyped by the British media and the popular imagination as victims of cultural conflict and psycho-social confusion. She critiques such limited understandings of diasporic identity formations and argues that this dualism wrongly infers that there is only one British and one Asian culture, and ignores the multiple layers of class, race, caste, religion and gender that intersect to create diasporic identity. Furthermore, Brah argues that the idea of a conflicting cultural duality does not consider the possibility of productive cultural dialogue that can allow the emergence of heterogeneous constructions of identity, free from the confines of national and cultural roots (Brah, 'Asian in Britain' 53). The 70s and 80s emergence of British grown identity politics, largely within the second generation working classes, grew out of this heterogeneous

identity and its need to gain mainstream visibility and political and cultural agency.

Brah elaborates:

The emergence of the youth groups marks the coming of age of a new form of Asian political and cultural agency. [...] They lay claim to the localities in which they live as their “home”. And however much they maybe constructed as “outsiders”, they contest these psychological and geographical spaces from the position of “insiders”. Even when they describe themselves as Asian, this is not a reaching back to some “primordial Asian identity”. What they speak of is a modality of “British Asianness”. (Brah, ‘Asian in Britain’ 58)

The particularities of this South Asian identity politics sat more generically within the remit of what came to be labelled as the negotiation of black Britishness:

The term “black” was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities, with, in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities. (Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’ 163)

Referring to immigrants and their children from both South Asian and Afro-Caribbean nations, black British identity politics aimed to critique ‘the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible “other” of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses’ (Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’ 164), in order to become emancipated subjects of representation within mainstream Britishness. The concerns of black British identity politics were threefold: firstly it wanted to gain equal access and rights of representation of the black experience within mainstream culture; secondly it wanted to challenge the simplified and stereotyped image of ‘blackness’ by attempting to promote more positive images of the black experience (Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’ 164); and finally it aimed to produce ‘counterhistories of modernity’ (Baker et al. 6), by narrating histories of migration and Britishness from a new perspective. This unified voice of blackness as a ‘single sign of alterity’ (Baker et al. 5) was however dismantled with the Muslim-led protests over Salman Rushdie’s controversial book *The Satanic Verses*. Baker et al. observe that these protests marked a dismantling of this ‘analytically useful but

ultimately untenable coherence of British “blackness” (Baker et al. 8), as the ‘heterogeneity of non-white experiences and values in Britain – and worldwide – was made blazingly clear’ (Baker et al. 8). This moment marked a divergence between South Asian identity politics and its Afro-Caribbean counterpart. Consequently the birth of the specificities of the former category came to gradually pose a threat to the more reified identity of first generation South Asians, just as much as it attempted to destabilise white-centric notions of Britishness. But perhaps most importantly it marked the start of a long and arduously political journey undertaken by South Asian identity, from the margins of society to the epicentre of mainstream Britain, over the decades that followed. As Chaudhry indicates, while Khan himself was not a participant in these political negotiations, he was able to benefit hugely from the challenges faced and overcome by his seniors so that in time, despite his own experiences of fragmentation and disenfranchisement, he would be able to ‘own the territory’ (Hall, ‘Minimal Selves’ 114).

Khan’s childhood and youth were therefore distinct in some ways to the normative experience of most second generation children in 70s and 80s Britain. Nuanced by his parents’ late arrival in the early 1970s armed with education and social mobility, his mother’s liberal transcendence of cultural difference, a balanced upbringing that encouraged a simultaneous engagement with British and Bengali cultural reference points, his encounter with multiple cultural identities at school and within his neighbourhood, and the opportunity to capitalise on a more secure diasporic identity through the efforts of his previous generation, Khan was fortunate to not have to dwell excessively upon his alterity at conscious levels. Despite these circumstances, he does admit his occasional experience of racism while working in his father’s

restaurant as a waiter, where they had to endure rowdy and abusive behaviour from customers. Khan put such behaviour down to alcohol and vowed never to drink in his life (Ak. Khan qtd. in Patterson). Thus he was somehow able to rationalise even such experiences of racism beyond superficial differences based on the colour of one's skin. Khan's ability to capitalise on his previous generations' efforts to establish South Asianness within mainstream British identity was fuelled further by his mother's trans-ethnic outlook and embodiment of multiculturalism. This is made evident in Anwara Khan's keenness for Khan to not only perform Bengali folk dance, but to formalise his dance training through enrolling him onto *kathak* classes. Consequently, at the age of seven, a Muslim Bangladeshi Khan enrolled at the National Academy of Indian Dance (NAID) in London to train in *kathak* under the tutelage of the Hindu Indian maestro Sri Pratap Pawaar. Thus in *kathak's* syncretic, chequered and trans-ethnic history that merges Hindu and Islamic performance traditions, Khan's own multi-ethnic identity and cultural perspectives were rather appropriately reflected.

3. Khan's Training in *Kathak*, *Abhinaya* and *Rasa*

Scholarship on *kathak* has been sparse in comparison to *bharatanatyam*, its southern Indian counterpart. However recent publications by Pallabi Chakravorty, Margaret Walker, Purnima Shah, Malini Ranganathan and Monique Loquet have attempted to fill this lacuna. Margaret Walker claims that the emergence of *kathak* as practiced today, points to a story that is 'as syncretic and multifaceted as the dance itself, and calls the widely accepted unilinear story of an ancient temple dance into question' (Walker 296). This complicates Sunil Kothari's claim that *kathak's* origins can be traced back to Hindu oral traditions in the north of India, based on the performance of stories from the two Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (Kothari

1). Reginald Massey also traces the origins of *kathak* back to this same oral tradition of the *kathakars* (storytellers), but acknowledges its syncretic nature by noting that the tradition's mimetic and religious nature were threatened under Islamic rule from the eight century onwards, as these qualities made the dance 'doubly sacrilegious' (Massey 17) to the Muslim faith. However once the Muslim rulers embraced cultural and religious tolerance, *kathak* began to be nurtured under the patronage of these rulers who encouraged the development of a wider repertoire that 'included imperial, social and contemporary themes' (Massey 22), and helped to develop the form 'along [...] secular lines' (Massey 22). While *kathak's* dual heritage in both Hindu and Islamic performance traditions has been acknowledged by scholars, its leading male Hindu dancers are still perceived to be its key authoritative figures (Walker 280). Despite this attempted Hinduisation of the form during the classicisation of Indian dance as part of India's nationalist project, Pallabi Chakravorty concurs with Massey, asserting that *kathak's* 'Persian influences [...] while often unacknowledged, are undeniable' (Chakravorty 26).

This cultural and formal syncretism lends *kathak* a language that is distinct from the other classical dance forms of India, and is perhaps partly responsible for its contested status as an Indian classical dance form. It is primarily danced as a solo in which 'the spinal column of the *kathak* dancer is upright and the use of the extended arms marks out a very clear personal space which is never invaded' (Mitra, 'Cerebrality' 170). The form engages in subtle interplay between stillness and speed, and is 'rendered through complex footwork of mathematical precision, extreme speed in motion and controlled and successive spins of the torso' (Mitra, 'Cerebrality' 170). Sunil Kothari elaborates:

The vertical stance, the pirouettes, the footwork, the complicated rhythms, spontaneous improvisation, perfect rapport with the percussionist, the open-ended quality of the performance, but strictly governed by the grammar, all are salient features of *kathak*. (Kothari 1-2)

Kathak is governed by the three components of Indian dramaturgy: *natya* (theatricality), *nritya* (technical virtuosity) and *nritya* (sentiments and mood evoked in movement). A typical recital of *kathak* always embodies all these three components in equally adept measure. Purnima Shah describes the complex nature of the nexus created by these three components within the language of *kathak*:

Kathak is classic in its comprehensive gestures and movement vocabulary and empowers the performer to mimetically present a metaphorical personification of the cultural nuances of a complex philosophical and spiritual ideology. (Shah 2)

Central to this complex movement language is an emotional expressivity and narrative drive of the *natya* and *nritya* component of the dance, delivered through the strictly codified corporeal system of signification known as *abhinaya*. This stylised and mimetic storytelling feature of *kathak* conveys characterisations, themes and narratives through a prescriptive corporeal lexicon that synthesises *mudras* (hand gestures) and facial expressions, in order to evoke the nine universal human emotions as laid out in the *Natyashastra*. They are *sringaram* (love), *hasyam* (laughter), *raudram* (fury), *karunyam* (compassion), *bibhatsam* (disgust), *bhayankaram* (horror), *viram* (heroism), *adbhutam* (wonder) and *shantam* (peace) (Schechner, 'Rasaesthetics' 31-32). These primary human emotions are abstracted, codified and articulated through strictly stylised physical gestures and facial expressions, to create the language of *abhinaya*, thus evoking a marriage between movement and theatricality. And it is the signification achieved through *abhinaya* between the performer and audience that evokes in *kathak* the ancient Indian philosophy and principle of *rasa* theory.

In the *Natyashastra*, *rasa* theory appears in chapter six as a conceptual framework for the relationship between art (across multiple disciplines) and its reception.¹⁷ The word *rasa* in Sanskrit means juice, or the flavourful extract derived from ingesting a fruit or any kind of cuisine. In using the term *rasa* in the context of the reception of art, a parallel is thus evoked in the *Natyashastra*, between the consumption of food and the consumption and reception of art. The physical and emotional satisfaction that can be derived from a flavourful meal is thus compared to the ‘aesthetic delight – a state of joy characterised by emotional plenitude’ (Meduri, ‘Bharatha Natyam’ 3) that can accompany an immersive encounter with a piece of art.

Eminent dance scholar Kapila Vatsyayan views *rasa* as a psycho-somatic system that channels the correspondence of emotional energy between the motor and the sensory systems of performer and audience.¹⁸ She reminds us that the relationship between the physical and the psycho-emotional is fundamentally interactive, as ‘the psychical manifests itself in the physical and the physical can evoke the psychical’ (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 19). In the physical codifications of *rasa* theory, the nine basic emotions are abstracted and stylised through *abhinaya* into ‘primary moods, sentiments,

¹⁷ The *Natyashastra* is believed to have been written over a long period of time between the sixth century BC and the second century AD. While its authorship is popularly attributed to Bharata, scholars have suggested that the name of Bharata has come to stand for an oral tradition generated over several centuries and by several authors (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 5-6), in keeping with a long tradition of anonymity of authors as evidenced by historical Indian texts, and a ‘self-conscious transcendence of self-identity’ (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 2).

¹⁸ Vatsyayan observes that while historically the collective aim of Indian artists from across the disciplines of literature, sculpture, painting, music and dance has been the evocation of *rasa* through their respective art forms, as part of the nationalist project’s endeavor to classicise Indian music and dance, ‘the continuity of this practice has been preserved’ (Vatsyayan, ‘Notes’ 33) primarily through these two disciplines. She suggests that this is because the practice of Indian dance in itself embraces other disciplines like poetry, literature, sculpture, music and drama and therefore looks upon the evocation of *rasa* in a holistic way. From this we can gather, that although the *rasa* theory was developed in relation to multiple artistic disciplines, more recent postulations on *rasa* suggest its monolithic grounding in Indian dance. But this monolithic understanding of *rasa* is a problematic notion, because of the way in which classical Indian dance has come to embrace a multidisciplinary approach.

primary emotive states' (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 64). Vatsyayan writes that while the performer is able to depict the nine basic human emotions through being skilled in rendering the stylised language of *abhinaya*, it is the audience's ability to recognise and identify these emotions that generates *rasa*, and through it an ideological transactional exchange transpires between the art, the artist and its receptor:

If the artist or poet has the inner force of the creative intuition, the spectator is the man of cultivated emotion in whom lie dormant the different states of being, and when he sees them manifested, revealed on the stage through movement, sound and décor, he is lifted to that ultimate state of bliss, known as *ananda*. (Abhinavagupta qtd. in Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 155)

According to *rasa* theory, this contemplative awareness that is evoked in the audience is also an impersonal state that prevents the audience from experiencing empathy with the performer, and creates the *sahrdaya* or the 'initiated spectator, one of attuned heart' (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 155):

The *sahrdaya* (sympathetic spectator) sympathises (*hrdayasamvada*) with the original character, and to a large degree he even identifies (*tanmayibhava*) with the situation depicted. But he does not identify completely; he retains a certain *aesthetic distance*, the name for which is *rasa*. (Masson and Patwardhan qtd. in Mason 76)

Rasa thus generates an emotional and spiritual state in which the audience is simultaneously critically distanced yet fundamentally connected to the performance they are experiencing. This split consciousness in the audience emphasises that *rasa* relies on channelling the emotive qualities of a performance between an art and its recipient, instead of focusing on formalist approaches to 'the structural and compositional aspects of art objects' (Jhanji qtd. in Nair 156).

Kathak's reliance on the modality of *abhinaya* therefore makes it a form that renders meaning in motion, evoking a stylised rendering of human reality on stage. Furthermore, this codified theatricality is only accessible to initiated audiences who are

versed in the stylised rendition of the nine human emotions, and are therefore able to experience *rasa* through it. In learning the language of *kathak*, Khan therefore trained in rendering *abhinaya* and its embodied marriage between theatricality and movement. Thus for Khan, pure dance and expressive dance were inseparable aspects of performance, and this smooth slippage between movement, theatre, dance and acting began to mature in Khan's performance practice from a very young age. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Khan experienced in training the philosophy of *rasa* as a critical and aesthetic distancing device, through which his audiences could attain a heightened state of contemplation, without fully empathising with the subject of their art. It is important to note here that Khan's early understanding and embodiment of both *abhinaya* and *rasa* were to become influential aesthetic strategies in the generation of his own future performance language in the years ahead.

4. Khan's Training in Western Movement Systems

Gradually Khan began to feel claustrophobic within his classical dance training. Keen to expand his knowledge and training of performance beyond the repertoire of *kathak*, and desperate to escape the claustrophobia of his Bengali community in London, Khan reveals his desire to grow on his own terms to Wendy Perron:

I needed change, I needed to evolve. I didn't want to become what they wanted me to become, I wanted to find out who I would become by my own consequences, not someone else's.' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Perron)

Suffocated by London and its ghettoised South Asian community, in 1994 Khan 'ran away' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Perron) and stepped into British higher education by enrolling onto a BA (Hons) in Performing Arts at De Montfort University in Leicester. He reveals that for the first time in his life, going away to university made him find his own voice which he 'wanted to explore [...] further' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Poulton and Tait), in order

to find out where it was ‘hidden all these years’ (Ak. Khan qtd. in Poulton and Tait). Excited by the prospect that his body could learn to express itself in languages beyond his comfort zone, Khan immersed himself in western movement training. Two years later he transferred to the NSCD in Leeds, from where he graduated with a first class honours degree in 1997.

During these three years, for the first time Khan encountered on one hand the extreme codification of ballet, and on the other the idiosyncrasies of movement systems based on individual expression and improvisation. Through the time spent on his degree programmes at both institutions, Khan expanded his movement repertoire beyond *kathak* to include ‘classical ballet, Graham, Cunningham, Alexander, release-based techniques, contact improvisation and physical theatre’ (Sanders, ‘An Artistic Journey’). In retrospect Khan realises that while his time at De Montfort allowed him to enter an exploratory marriage between his *kathak* training and the contemporary idioms, his two years at NSCD caused its divorce (Ak. Khan, ‘Interview’). At NSCD the emphasis on rigorous and virtuosic training placed extreme and varied demands on Khan, as each movement system, characterised by its own specificities, tensions and codified techniques, created muscular and skeletal tensions within him.

In classical ballet Khan encountered the ethereal and celestial uprootedness of the spine, the strict and graceful linearity of the limbs, and the lightest sense of contact with the floor through his toes, to make the dancer appear ‘fairy-like’ (Stoneley 18) and nimble. Peter Stoneley notes that ‘ballet [...] is an art of effect rather than substance’ (Stoneley 17) through perpetuating a certain ‘illusionism’ (Stoneley 18) that ‘jeopardises our sense of the difference between’ (Stoneley 18) the artificial and the

real. Stoneley summarises the ‘tricks’ that ballet uses to achieve this illusion as ‘pointe-work, jumps, turns, and musicality’ (Stoneley 18), to create a graceful athleticism that appears to defy gravity. In contrast in *kathak*, Khan’s body remained rooted to the ground through a constant pressured connection through flat feet that allowed his lower body to appear highly secure, while lending his upper body fluidity and grace. His relationship to gravity and balance as embodied in his *kathak* training was also altered as his centre of gravity shifted forward and upwards.

Through Graham technique, Khan’s body had to renegotiate its connection with gravity as his centre shifted once again, this time to the pelvis. Martha Graham’s contraction and release system mirrored the physical process of breathing (Foulkes 17), and located the centre of life’s impulse and energy within the pelvis. This system ‘hollowed out the stomach and rounded the back’ as it contracted and was followed by the release, which ‘freed the body again, straightening the spine’ (Foulkes 17). Khan’s engagement with this system changed his relationship to the floor completely as for the first time he could use the floor as a partner, not just to stand on, but to yield in and out of. His body began to experience dynamism in the angular and the grotesque, destabilising his preconceptions of movement having to be beautiful and sensual. However, similar to his *kathak* training but in a very different way, the Graham technique allowed his movement to render emotion and meaning. Martha Graham believed ‘bodies daily accumulate social tensions, triumphs, and woes’ (Graham ctd. in Foulkes 6-7), and in her anti-ballet rejection of illusion, she was keen to invest her movement vocabulary with these emotive qualities that were closer to human experience.

Cunningham's aesthetic was premised not on being anti-ballet but on wanting to somehow to create a language 'beyond ballet' (Greskovic 73). It amalgamated 'the flexible back and changing levels of modern dance, and the upright carriage and brilliant footwork of ballet' (Banes qtd in Preston-Dunlop 178), and aimed for a 'synthesis of the physical and spiritual energies' (Cunningham qtd. in Preston-Dunlop 179) of the human body. This anti-expressionistic language exposed Khan to experience movement as a visual, sensorial and spatial aesthetic, without the duress of having to communicate meaning. In principle this shared similarities with the segment of a *kathak* recital that renders *nritta* or pure technique. However the corporeal quality of the Cunningham technique demanded on Khan's body an ephemeral liteness with a similar uprightness to ballet that was at odds with his *kathak* training.

Khan learnt of his own ill habits and corporeal tensions through the corrective somatic practice of Alexander Technique, a system that aims to 'unlearn' (Brennan 10) and release 'unwanted muscular tension' (Brennan 10) that the body 'has accumulated over many years of stressful living' (Brennan 10). The technique restores balance, realigns the spine, and re-educates the body into healthier modes of function through appropriate use of muscular and skeletal effort. Through Alexander Technique, Khan learnt how to heal his body from daily stress and the weaknesses induced by his classical *kathak* training and his western contemporary training. This somatic philosophy supported Khan's training in release technique. Here he learnt to work with and emphasise the natural alignments of the body, by minimising muscular tension through working with gravity, momentum and breathe, creating effortless patterns of movement across the floor. By realising that 'release technique purports to assimilate

gravitational flows in the body's interior space to its exteriority' (Martin 172), Khan learnt to embrace gravity as a creative partner in his training.

This in turn eased him into the practice of contact improvisation and its exploration of points of intimate, bodily contact between two or more people who distribute weight between themselves and the floor, through an interplay between balance, counter-balance and momentum. Performed mostly as a duet, 'contact improvisation uses momentum to move in concert with a partner's weight, rolling, suspending, lurching together' in harmony (Novack 8). In contact improvisation, every part of the body is used as a point of initiating dialogue through physical impulse, and it is through these points of contact that the dialogue is kept on-going, as the points of impulse shift seamlessly. Both release technique and contact improvisation exposed Khan to unfamiliar territories, as his body began to encounter gravity and momentum beyond the verticality of *kathak* into the horizontal plane, by making the floor a close ally. Moreover Khan had to negotiate the socio-corporeal experience of intimate physical contact with another body having trained in a primarily solo performance tradition.

Through physical theatre Khan learnt to appreciate the emotive power of movement, in both its pedestrian and stylised forms. During his auditions at De Montfort University, Khan remembers watching video extracts from the works of Pina Bausch and DV8 Physical Theatre. He admits that these clips left him 'horrified' (Ak. Khan in qtd. Perron) yet transfixed, in their ability to depict social reality and poetic violence through physicality (Ak. Khan qtd. in Perron). Khan notes that at the time he 'didn't know you were allowed to be provocative in the arts' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Perron),

and was clearly taken by the expressionistic aesthetic of Bausch and Newson. In time, in Bausch's seminal contribution to the German expressionistic genre of *tanztheater*, Khan came to recognise a response 'against classical ballet which was then, as she saw it, stuck in provincialism and beauty as an end in itself' (Gradinger 25). This resonated with his own desire to renegotiate a *kathak* language that was more suited to his contemporary diasporic existence and equipped to express current concerns and socio-political realities. Khan, like Bausch, was therefore keen to create 'something new both in form and content' (Servos 36). He began to see the body in art, not just as a passive medium of expression, but in a capacity that evoked Johannes Birringer's view on the role of the body in Bausch's performances, as a 'borderline' (Birringer 86) between 'a body that has specific qualities and a personal history – but also a body that is written about and written into social [...]' (Birringer 86) inscriptions. Khan came to gradually trace the legacy of Bausch in DV8 Physical Theatre's work, where the personal and the political collapsed in provocative ways. Established by Lloyd Newson in London in 1986, DV8 wanted to evoke in dance socio-political legibility, by making it 'about something' (Newson qtd. in Murray and Keefe 81). In his own search for self-identity as distinct from his diasporic community in London, Khan was struck by these political dimensions of DV8's work and its strategic shift from Bausch's concern with the communal to the realm of the individual. He was also influenced by Newson's highly athletic and risky physicality that drew on both stylised movement and quotidian gestures, to depict frightening images of vulnerability and fragility of the human condition on stage.

Through physical theatre, particularly the aesthetic of Bausch and Newson, Khan came to examine how relationships emerged through corporeal exchanges and

studied how the body can become a transgressive medium to express socio-political themes. Thus, while through *kathak's* codified *abhinaya* modality Khan had learnt to narrate stories of Hindu epics and mythical characters of a historical time, through physical theatre Khan discovered the body as an embodied reality, capable of communicating contemporary issues and concerns by becoming a subversive tool of political power and the very source of narrative itself.

As Khan began to process these multiple layers of performance languages, the rigid stylisation of *kathak* began to clash with the improvisatory idioms of western movement training. Farooq Chaudhry summarises the nature of Khan's corporeal tensions:

So what was beginning to happen was a creative interplay between a deep understanding of a classical form and the immense skill that comes with it and the freedom and formlessness of contemporary expression. (Chaudhry, 'Keynote' 2)

At first these clashes were merely physiological, but gradually these manifested in creating sociological tensions within him, as his university experience often left him feeling more fragile than confident. One tutor told him that he did not have the body for contemporary dance because he was inflexible. He claims that from that moment on, he worked on making inflexibility his strength, and started to play with the speed and stillness his multiple training lent him (Ak. Khan qtd. in Kennedy). He remembers another incident at university that left him feeling vulnerable, when a visiting choreographer came in to advise students on the profession:

She was invited to come in and tell us about what it's like to work in the outside world. At the end of her visit she pointed to five of us, including myself, and said that we would never make it and we should change career now. It was at such a fragile stage, just about to leave college in the hope that you're going to get some work and somebody so important says something like that. I was very upset but then I thought my whole mission in life was going to prove that I could do it. (Ak. Khan qtd. in Kennedy)

True to his word, after graduating in 1997, Khan continued to experiment with his multiple corporeal languages through the solo *Loose in Flight* (1997), and the duet entitled *Duet* (1999), and cites this collaboration with Jonathan Burrows as an influential moment in his training period (Sanders, 'An Artistic Journey'). Working with Burrows offered Khan something unique and insightful about the nature of human interaction to add to his already complex performance training. Described as a 'considerable – yet quirky – choreographic talent' (A. Williams), Burrow's work has provocatively challenged normative expectations of what constitutes dance. Tim Etchells, the artistic director of British experimental theatre company Forced Entertainment, identifies an important interplay between simplicity and complexity in Burrows' choreography:

All of it messes with your senses of what's simple and what's complicated. Mostly it starts at a place you'd call simple, very simple, but then they pattern it zealously; repeating, overlaying, looping the sequences, moving in and out of phrase with each other and altering the time so that what maybe began as something you could teach to eight year olds, ends up more like Bach. (Etchells)

Burrows himself has claimed that 'choreography is about making a choice, including the choice to make no choice' (Burrows qtd. in Hawksley 4). This philosophy became fundamental to Khan in his formative years, when finding his idiosyncratic language meant rejecting the complex and codified choices of *kathak*, by generating a new language of simple-complexity through entirely new sets of artistic choices of his own. Khan himself cites the experience of working with Burrows as 'pivotal' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, 'An Artistic Journey') in understanding how he could start to generate a new language within his own body.

Khan also remembers the moment when the uniqueness of the language he was organically developing in his own body was recognised and commended by Gregory Nash and Vat Borne:

Do you know what you have? Do you recognize that you're creating a movement language? [...] You have something very specific. You've broken into something that people have been trying to do for years but have never done convincingly. (Nash and Borne qtd. in Perron)

In contrast to many other South Asian dance artists, who were creating fusion between difference dance forms, where differences continued to co-exist within intellectualised, premeditated and artificial configurations, Khan's body was creating an organic and syncretic language generated by his own corporeality.¹⁹

The birth of Khan's hybridised performance language coincided with a strategic era in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century British politics. Joanna Fomina observes that the initiatives fostered by the newly elected Labour government towards cultural diversification of Britain's work force included a 'well-developed anti-discrimination policy' (Fomina 414) which 'enabled some people with ethnic backgrounds to occupy high positions in the media [...], politics, business and arts' (Fomina 414). Khan was fortunate to graduate from university just as Labour regained power, circulating the vision of Britain as One Nation where 'every colour is a good colour [...] every member of every part of society is able to fulfil their potential [...] racism is unacceptable and counteracted [...] racial diversity is celebrated' (Home Office qtd. in Runnymede Trust Report). He was amongst Britain's young and ethnically diverse citizens, who were identified by Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport at the time, as subjects who would be nurtured and transformed into

¹⁹ Shobana Jeyasingh is an exception here. However as this chapter will go on to discuss in detail, Jeyasingh's hybridisation is concerned primarily with *nritya*, the technical virtuostic aspect of South Asian classical dance and does not necessarily create signification through movement. Khan's hybridisation however manages to achieve both.

the nation's assets. This coincided with approximately the same time when Khan revealed to his parents that dance was no longer a hobby for him but his future profession. Anwara Khan states that this was a difficult time for the family, as they had to face criticism from the community about letting their son pursue a profession in dance. However both his parents stood by him, despite communal pressures and their own fears over his unconventional career choice. In 2000 Khan received a scholarship to study at The Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S) in Belgium as part of the X-Group project, 'a prestigious choreographic platform for young choreographers to develop their own language' (Sanders, 'An Artistic Journey'). Founded in 1994 by the influential choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, artistic director to the renowned company Rosas, P.A.R.T.S continues to provide an artistic and pedagogic curriculum to aspiring and talented young choreographers and dancers. It promotes itself as a creative laboratory that is fuelled by critical thinking. The philosophy that drives this influential European institution claims:

dance is not an isolated art form; it is involved in a constant dialogue with the other performing arts – music and theatre. Both these disciplines figure prominently in the curriculum, as PARTS always works towards the actual performance, the moment when the artist engages in a dialogue with the audience – the dancer as a performer, but also as a thinking performer. (P.A.R.T.S Website)

Although Khan's stint at P.A.R.T.S was relatively short, it would be fair to say that the institution's pedagogic, aesthetic and artistic approach as described above, particularly in its spirit of collaboration, experimentation and critical thinking towards the development of contemporary dance in Europe, had a profound impact on Khan. In future years, this impact possibly drew him to work closely with artists like Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Eulalia Ayguade Farro who were themselves trained at P.A.R.T.S. However, perhaps even more importantly, the time he spent at the institution enabled

Khan to develop an aesthetic and an artistic vision of his own that was more in alignment with an European contemporary dance aesthetic and its emphasis on socio-political criticality, and that was in many ways distinct from other contemporaneous British choreographers who were more driven by the formalist spirit of American contemporary dance. In 2000, on his return from P.A.R.T.S in the same year, Khan and Farooq Chaudhry teamed up to establish Akram Khan Company. Thus began Khan's rise from a local dancer to a national artist to a global star in contemporary performance.

5. Khan and Farooq Chaudhry

If the start to Khan's success story is the consequence of the above set of uniquely fortunate and dynamic biographical circumstances, it has been fuelled further by the 'carefully conceived business, governance and organisational frame' (Tyndall) of Farooq Chaudhry's vision as producer to Akram Khan Company. To 'offer the optimum conditions for his development as an artist' (Tyndall), Chaudhry has created a vast and unique 'web of relationships and collaborations, spreading across continents, artforms, disciplines, and sources of support, that has made Akram's journey possible' (Tyndall). A British man of Pakistani heritage, Chaudhry was a professional contemporary dancer who completed his training at the London School of Contemporary Dance in 1986. In 1988 Chaudhry received the Asian Achievement Award and in 1999 he stopped dancing to become Khan's free-lance manager. Equipped with an MA in Arts Management from City University, in 2000 Khan and Chaudhry formalised their collaboration to create Akram Khan Company. Over the last decade, under Chaudhry's strategic vision and management, Khan has 'emerged as one of the world's outstanding performers and creators' (Tyndall), demonstrating that despite his own exceptional virtuoso talent,

‘Farooq’s collaboration with Akram has been fundamental to his success’ (Tyndall). The Arts Council of England has also recognised Chaudhry’s role in the success of the Akram Khan Company in making him a ‘project champion’ for their Cultural Leadership Programme.

Although Chaudhry claims that in his search for nurturing the success of AKC he is ‘a producer with no formula’ (Ak. Khan qtd. in Tyndall), it is clear that he understands the strategic relationship that must be forged between art and business:

Too often, there’s a feeling that art and business are not good bed partners, that they are like oil and water. But actually they can mix extremely well. You’re judged by the results, by the consumer, ultimately. And it’s about taking risks, being under pressure, knowing when to invest in the future, good timing for your decisions, developing your ideas, and reshaping them so they remain interesting for others, to keep yourself firmly in the market place. It’s about developing the brand, expanding the audience. (Chaudhry qtd. in Tyndall)

Chaudhry’s creation of a brand for AKC exercises an expansionist vision by learning ‘not to rely solely on the European market place’ (Chaudhry, ‘Keynote’ 3). He also asserts that creative opportunities for the expansion of the company must be sought relentlessly, in order to be doubled and tripled (Chaudhry qtd. in Tyndall). However he acknowledges that hard work, strategising and determination have been accompanied by an equal quantity of ‘luck’ of meeting the ‘right people at the right time’ (Chaudhry qtd. in Cultural Leadership Programme), and rejecting ‘the wrong people at the right time’ (Chaudhry qtd. in Cultural Leadership Programme). Finally, Chaudhry’s positive acceptance of change as the only constant in life has fuelled Khan and the company to seek collaborations as opportunities for transformation that continue to test the parameters of their vision. These philosophical and strategic positions adopted by Chaudhry’s management have collectively fuelled the company’s success.

6. Khan as a Collaborative Artist

Chaudhry's vision for the company has therefore been instrumental in promoting Khan as an artist who seeks creative opportunities and individual growth through persistent collaborations that constantly challenge and reshape his artistic vision. Khan's collaborative dialogues can be categorised into two interrelated camps. The first of these is his artist to artist collaborations, such that his productions are joint creations by himself and one or more artists from an array of disciplines. His creative exchanges with the painter Anish Kapoor, musician Nitin Sawhney, actor Juliette Binoche and sculptor Anthony Gormley exemplify just some of his multidisciplinary artist to artist endeavours. The second kind of collaboration exemplified in Khan's art is more significant in its potency, and evokes Thomas Jenson Hines' notion of collaboration as the aesthetic and language that emerges when multiple art forms synthesise to create a single piece of work (Hines 4). Hines acknowledges that while the arts themselves cannot be entirely separated from the artists, a composite and multidisciplinary piece of art does evoke 'the effects of the "collaborations of the arts" rather than the acts of collaboration of the artists' (Hines 4). Khan's performance aesthetic has been fuelled by this same distinction, and rests on an emphasis on the relation of the arts that inform his work at any given time, such that the relationship between the artists he works with almost acquires a subsidiary role (Hines 4).

Khan's artistic collaborations embody all three kinds of art collaborations as identified by Hines, beginning with the simplest model where, having mastered multiple movement languages, he first enters into collaboration with himself, in order to synthesise these disparate art forms that co-exist with him into a coherent hybridised language. This is exemplified in his solo *Loose in Flight* which marks the starting point

of Khan's collaboration with himself. He then enters into bi-disciplinary collaborations between his own syncretic movement language and another art form, such as film in *Loose in Flight* and fine arts in *Kaash*. Khan's art collaborations are at their most complex however when he enters into simultaneous dialogues with multiple disciplines in single projects. This is, for example, demonstrated in the new language that emerges at the interstices between his own syncretic aesthetic, storytelling, text and characterisation from theatre, music and visual arts in *zero degrees*. Consequently, it becomes impossible to pin down his performance aesthetic as every single art he collaborates with nuances, challenges and rewrites his artistic vision, and thus varies from project to project.

Khan and Chaudhry's relentless efforts to seek and enter into new collaborations with each new project challenges the recent trend of collaborative artists who are 'less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity' (Bishop 179) in their use of 'social situations to produce [...] politically engaged projects' (Bishop 179). By shifting the emphasis from the artists who enter into collaborations to the syncretic language of the art they produce, Khan's artistic vision focuses on the relational aesthetic generated by his collaborations, just as much as he uses this aesthetic to convey socio-political critique. Thus immersing themselves as a company in the fundamental spirit of collaboration, Khan and Chaudhry have endorsed the contemporary surge of collaborative arts practices (Crawford x), while simultaneously challenging what it has come to stand for in the contemporary arts world.

7. Khan and the Wider Field of South Asian Arts

In seeking dynamic and high-profile collaborations, Chaudhry has been strategic in forging creative dialogue between Akram Khan Company and the wider field of South Asian arts. Thus, making sense of Khan's meteoric rise as an artist in Britain warrants an awareness of the field of South Asian diaspora artists, whose works have long established an influential voice within Britain's multicultural milieu. Moreover Khan's art and aesthetic have been significantly shaped by these artists' contributions to the "black" British arts practices of the 1980s' (Mercer, 'Introduction' 7) and beyond, in their demand for not only 'a more inclusive narrative but a comprehensive re-conceptualisation of the analytical tools through which the objects and materials of art historical study are examined and interpreted' (Mercer, 'Introduction' 7). Kobena Mercer signals that these artists were therefore collectively undertaking an emancipatory and political act through their contributions to the field of British arts.

To understand the collective nature of such contributions, Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of 'the field' becomes a useful framework with which to examine Khan's contributions to the contemporary British cultural milieu, not as a 'substantialist' phenomenon that foregrounds him as an influential artist working in isolation, but as an agent, fundamentally working in a relational capacity with other similar agents in the field, past and present. With this in view, Khan and his seniors who constitute the field of South Asian arts in Britain can all be seen to be working in this relational capacity with each other. In a helpful summary of Bourdieu's concept of the field, dance scholar Gay Morris writes:

The field for Bourdieu is a dynamic space of objective relationships among positions, which can only be understood by viewing the agents occupying each position in relation to all the others. This network of relations is independent of individual control. The field is one of constant struggle in

which agents vie for status and domination. To compete they draw on various forms of capital they possess which include economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. [...] Change is most likely to occur through struggles within the field, as agents compete with one another. (Morris 54)

Bourdieu was therefore keen to locate cultural agents within a grid of network relations, reliant upon each other's historic specificities and locations. He reminds us that the agents working in a particular field, and the field itself, have specific histories and socio-political forces that constitute it. Agents in this field must respond to these histories in an effort to either conserve or change them (Bourdieu 32). Through his own art, Khan is located in and negotiates this relational field of South Asian artists and their works, fuelled by shared histories of migration, diasporic identity formations, black British identity politics and the desire to find a mainstream voice in Britain.

Khan's performance language can thus be seen to draw on the contributions made by his senior colleagues to the field of South Asian arts, while simultaneously negotiating his own voice within it. His syncretic movement aesthetic, nuanced by diasporic politics, can be read as an acknowledgement and a take on the postcolonial 'resistance literature' of writers such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, whose unique styles emphasise an interplay between the experience of assimilation into a host culture, and an innate resistance to the same (Ranasinha 10). His refusal to embrace monolithic identity categories as an artist, echoes Kureishi's rejection of the same:

You know, I want to feel free to not only be an Asian writer. I am going to be a writer who is also Asian. [...] And that we are, you know, artists too. And don't have to be put into that bag. (Kureishi qtd. in MacCabe 52)

The themes of ambiguity and multiple subject positions that haunt Khan's works, mirror Rushdie's tendency to ruminate on the relationship of 'an individual body with the subcontinent and a personal biography with its political history' (Kane and

Rushdie 95). Both Khan and Rushdie ‘allegorize national history through the metaphor of the body politic’ (Kane and Rushdie 95), while drawing heavily on their own experiences of relocations and multiple realities of their postcolonial conditions. However while autobiographical perspectives colour Khan’s art, it is ultimately transcended to move beyond the realm of the purely self-referential. Sculptor and painter Anish Kapoor expresses a similar view in stating that while art deriving out of autobiographical experiences is interesting, it is also a ‘rather minor art form’ (Kapoor qtd. in Dantas). Arguing in favour of art that communicates beyond auto/biographical levels, Kapoor asserts that ‘if art is to endure then it must have to do with more than that’. Khan evokes in his work Kapoor’s spirit of interculturalism which is built upon the notion of ‘building a kind of bridge [...] between one bank of a certain cultural reality and another bank of a different cultural reality’ (Kapoor qtd. in Dantas), enabling new and powerful crossings (Kapoor qtd. in Dantas). In Khan’s search for a performance language in which singular national and cultural borders collapse in favour of multiple subject positions, he echoes musician Nitin Sawhney’s claim that music is for him a ‘place without barriers and without boundaries’ (Sawhney qtd in Poulton and Tait). Khan and Sawhney both warn against cultural dialogue that is forced and inorganic and in this, evoke another musician Talvin Singh’s statement ‘This isn’t fusion. You can’t fuse yourself’ (Singh qtd. in Clayton 75). Khan’s aesthetic simultaneously acknowledges and diverges from the philosophy of his senior dance colleague Shobana Jeyasingh, and her pioneering movement experimentations between *bharatanatyam*, western ballet and contemporary dance. At first they seem to echo each other’s sentiments about the relevance of classicism in contemporary diasporic Britain. However Khan’s questioning of classicism in his diasporic reality is borne out through an emphasis on generating legibility through his movement experimentations, while

Jeyasingh's experimentations primarily focus on creating a hybridised formalist repertoire.²⁰ Both Khan and Jeyasingh are nevertheless keen to move their respective training in *kathak* and *bharatanatyam* beyond solo forms to more collaborative ensembles, exploring 'the acceptance of physical dependency and trust' (Jeyasingh 34) in their choreographies. While commencing their artistic journeys from within the same parameters of *kathak*, Khan's aesthetic deviates significantly from his contemporary Sonia Sabri's, whose philosophy is to counteract the tendency to present *kathak* 'in the same old way' (Sabri qtd. in Khalil, 'Sonia Sabri'), by bringing the form into 'new spaces and contexts [...] new audiences' and 'developing a distinctive, contemporary style which speaks to the here and now' (Sonia Sabri Company Website).²¹ Sabri suggests that this can be done by questioning 'the artistic decisions one makes within a creative *kathak* format' (Sabri qtd. in Khalil, 'Sonia Sabri'). When asked what distinguishes her experimentations from Khan's, Sabri emphasises the personal nature of Khan's aesthetic that does not transform the *kathak* idiom, but instead alters the language of British contemporary dance (Sabri qtd. in Khalil, 'Sonia Sabri'). She claims that what makes her own experimentation unique is its intentional intrusion into the 'rudimentary structures of *kathak*' (Khalil, 'British Space'), to deconstruct and interfere with its codifications. In this, Sabri's aesthetic is closer to Jeyasingh's in its desire to deconstruct and reconstruct the form of *bharatanatyam*, and operates primarily at the level of *nritta*, but does manage to simultaneously create a new set of signs through which signification can also be achieved.

²⁰ I acknowledge here that Janet O'Shea notes that Jeyasingh's work does generate a certain kind of signification through a newly negotiated nexus of signs and their interplay through the use of body, space and technology. However I would contend, that this level of signification is not narrative driven as in the case of Khan's aesthetic.

²¹ In a publication entitled 'Performing Cultural Heritage in "Weaving Paths" by Sonia Sabri', I have examined what Sabri means by taking *kathak* to new spaces, contexts and audiences, by analysing her site-specific project "Weaving Paths" which was created in response to and performed within Bantock House, an Edwardian Manor House in Wolverhampton.

Khan's location in the field of South Asian arts, in Bourdieu's terms, therefore evokes the wider social forces of migratory narratives and diasporic identity politics, as articulated in the works of his senior and contemporary artists. In his inheritance of this field, Khan references its relational dynamics and finds himself in dialogue with it. Seeking his own voice, but in response to his seniors' unique literary, visual and aural languages, Khan continues to contribute to the field. This relational dynamic is heightened further by Khan's close collaborations with Kureishi, Kapoor and Sawhney and positions him securely in this long established trajectory, colouring the way he has carved out his own space within it. More importantly he has been recognised by these senior colleagues as unique in his contributions to the field of diasporic arts. Kureishi recently proclaimed 'He is very, very talented, and I wouldn't say that about many people. He's the real thing' (Kureishi qtd. in 'On the Verge'). In a similar spirit of admiration, Nitin Sawhney shares what in his opinion makes Khan's explorations in the field distinct:

I think with Akram [...] it's not about the form so much it becomes about the feeling and it becomes about the ideas you are trying to put forward. So that for me is far more interesting. (Sawhney qtd. in Poulton and Tait)

Khan's close dialogues with these senior colleagues from the field is therefore central to his own foray within diasporic South Asian art, and his spirit of enquiry and innovation through collaboration is recognised by them in positive and celebratory terms, perhaps indicating that these artists have created a niche circle of their own.

8. Khan, Hybridity and South Asian Arts

As subjects of academic scrutiny, the works of Rushdie, Kureishi, Kapoor, Sawhney and Singh, to mention a few key examples from the South Asian arts field, have been as celebrated as they have come under critical attack. Bhabha's 'third space'

has lent such artists agency through the double-consciousness of their liminal diasporic identities. Bhabha suggests that:

This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (Bhabha, *Location* 5)

In a study dedicated to tracing the role of hybridity in contemporary art and culture, Nikos Papastergiadis provides a helpful overview of existing discourses on hybridity and points out its pitfalls:

Hybridity has been a much abused term. It has been both trapped in the stigmatic associations of biological essentialism and elevated to promote a form of cultural nomadology (Papastergiadis 39).

Postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have celebrated this latter incarnation of hybridity in its anti-essentialist critique of cultural identity. They have advocated hybridity as a powerful interventionist tool that harbours agency for a diasporic subject's identity formation. They further argue that hybridity lends its subjects self-critical distancing from a singular source of identity. This can enable them to reflect simultaneously upon their place of origin and their place(s) of settlement. The concept of 'hybridity' has also been criticised for becoming an elitist trope that empowers a small section of an already privileged and mobile global diaspora. Alberto Moreiras critiques hybridity as a 'conceptual reification' (Moreiras 377) of flattened identities. Floya Anthias proposes that while hybridity deconstructs homogenous associations of cultural identity, in part it ironically relies on an essentialist definition of cultures to define itself (Anthias 621-622). Robert Young recognises this problematic nature of the framework and suggests that 'hybridity is [...] itself a hybrid concept' (Young 21) and thereby likely to foster instability in its critical applications.

Despite such prolific and valid critiques of the concept, hybridity has remained the preoccupation of postcolonial studies, especially in its more recent manifestations in the current climate of global migration. In their ability to negotiate the interstices between margin and centre, ‘thereby travelling and eventually crossing – if not transforming – borders, gaps, and (different sorts of) oppositional spheres’ (Lossau 62), the works of above cited diasporic South Asian artists can be deemed hybrid in nature. However Annie E. Coombes and Avtar Brah raise issue with such celebrations of hybridity in diasporic arts, and observe that at times the concept has been responsible for ‘an uncritical celebration of the traces of cultural syncretism which assumes a symbiotic relationship without paying adequate attention to economic, political and social inequalities’ (Coombes and Brah 1). Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk and Ashwani Sharma afford the current proliferation of South Asian diasporic arts in Britain to the fact that ‘Ethnicity is in. Cultural difference is in. Marginality is in. Consumption of the Other is all the rage of late capitalism’ (Sharma et al. 1). This leads them to question whether ‘being hybrid is all there is to being subversive?’ (Sharma et al. 3). Alessandra Lopez y Royo similarly notes the association between hybridity and progressiveness in contemporary South Asian dance in Britain:

South Asian dancers are expected to engage with a western dance aesthetics – constantly pushing boundaries in terms of presentation, statecraft, music, the unfolding and development of the theme, and doing so in a fashion recognisably informed by western performance standards. The imposed goal is to create new, different, never-seen-before work, to experiment with hybridity, to break boundaries, bowing to western modernism and postmodernist aesthetics that seem to reign unchallenged. (Lopez y Royo, ‘Dance’)

There is a perception that the hybrid works of South Asian artists like Rushdie, Kureishi, Sawhney, Kapoor, Jeyasingh and Khan respond to these expectations, and strategically make use of their ethnicity ‘to tap into the socio-economic grids of power that supports the arts’ (Purkayastha 264). The condition of hybridity has been critiqued

as a position of elite privilege, accessible and empowering to only those sections of the diaspora who have the capital and mobility to physically manoeuvre through the ‘third space’. In this light, writers like Rushdie have been described as a ‘part of the Western literary intelligentsia’ (Sharma 598) and are believed to write ‘both in and for the West’ (Said qtd. in Sharma 598). A similar line of critique is aimed at the music of ‘Asian Kool’ artists like Talvin Singh and Nitin Sawhney, who are believed to create a ‘heavily sanitized version of a British-Asian “dissident diaspora”’ (Banerjea qtd. in Jazeel 234). Pnina Werbner furthers Banerjea’s sentiments by suggesting that the reason why the diasporic arts of South Asian intellectuals ultimately have no impact upon the larger South Asian diaspora is because:

Most high cultural works by South Asian intellectuals have been ultimately financed and consumed mainly by a mainstream English and a small secular South Asian elite audience. (Werbner 904)

In his bid to defend the music of ‘Asian Kool’ artists, Tariq Jazeel reminds us:

That this music may be produced and consumed by both a white and non-white suburban middle class resident in Britain does not mean that this middle class does not face its own identity struggles in Britain’s contemporary multicultural. (Jazeel 235)

Jazeel’s defence is important not only for its relevance in the field of diasporic South Asian music, but because it can be extended to the study of Khan’s contributions to the field of diasporic performance. While recognising the criticisms aimed at artists like Jeyasingh and Khan, Prarthana Purkayastha similarly defends the significance of their contributions to contemporary performance practices and claims, ‘to say that Khan or Jeyasingh do not engage seriously or sensitively with the politics of race or identity [...] and come up with startling innovations, would be erroneous’ (Purkayastha 264-265).

Nevertheless such prolific critiques of both the art and the artist of South Asian diaspora in Britain calls into question the inherent elitism that permeates Bhabha’s

construction of the 'third space' and the postcolonial subjects who occupy it. Khan is quick to recognise this argument of elitism and class in his own context, when asked by dance critic Wendy Perron if his community comes to watch his works:

The Bangladeshis here like entertainment like Bollywood. Once I moved into the circle of the Western audiences, they wouldn't come to my shows because they felt my venues were too bourgeois. But eventually my generation from the Bangladeshi/Indian/Asian communities started coming – from the sculpture world, from the visual arts, theatre, film. (Ak. Khan qtd in Perron)

Alongside admitting that his work does indeed cater to a largely western or South Asian elite audience, Khan also points to another important issue of generational differences in the South Asian communities that colours attendances at arts programmes. According to a study on culturally diverse groups' engagement with arts in the devolved context of Scotland, Gina Netto observes that most first generation migrants are interested in preserving the arts pertaining to their cultural heritage, as these become the only means of keeping their traditions alive and the medium through which their heritage is transmitted to the next generation. The first generation migrants rarely attend mainstream arts events and reflect a certain 'cultural retentiveness' (Netto 54). Netto goes on to state however that the younger second generation are more open to attending both kinds of arts events, suggesting they possess more culturally malleable identities that are able to negotiate between the centre and the margin.

Khan's own cultural malleability and code switching as a second generation hybrid South Asian in Britain has enabled him, and others like him, to realise that art generated through fluid identity:

if it is to be productive, can never be with some static and unchanging object. It is an interchange with self and structure, a transforming process. If the object remains static, ossified by tradition or isolated by a radically

changing world, [...] then its culture and politics lose their ability to innovate (Rutherford, 'A Place' 14).

He has thus acknowledged the need for a new kind of artistic language to be generated, which is able to challenge conventional perceptions of what constitutes arts within the South Asian diaspora. In this, Khan has answered the Arts Council's call for innovation by embracing the view that 'cultures are not fossilised and have the potential to adapt to new circumstances' (Fomina 421), through entering into mutable dialogue with each other.

9. Khan and British Multiculturalism

The institutionalised practice of British multiculturalism shares many similarities with the field of hybridity, and their overlapping conceptual frameworks have significantly impacted Khan's career trajectory which started in 1997, the same year as Labour's momentous victory in the national elections. Multicultural policy under the Labour Government (1997-2010) was driven by the same desire to protect Britain from the 'threat of political instability as the result of changing demographics' (Lo 159) that surfaced in 1970s British politics, to cope with the visible cultural diversity in Britain's landscape due to post-war immigration from South Asia and the Afro-Caribbean countries. While the new government identified the need to redefine British identity in the light of this diversity, they also realised that anxieties to do with the erasure of a pure (white) concept of Britishness had resurfaced in the public psyche, in response to more recent large scale immigration from beyond the ex-colonies (Coombes and Brah 4). Black and Keith et al. remind us that, 'in the immediate aftermath of its massive election victory in May 1997 New Labour was keen to present a commitment to modernising Britain, embracing diversity and valuing cultural mix' (Black and Keith et al. 2), while promoting Britain's young and ethnically diverse citizens as the nation's

assets. They continue to note that after Labour's second term victory in June 2001, their policies on multiculturalism changed tone somewhat. Home Secretary David Blunkett announced the introduction of a new citizenship test, the requirement for immigrants to learn English, the banning of female genital mutilation and forced marriages and a regulation that arranged marriages were permissible only between South Asian residents in Britain. Caught between its national commitment to respect cultural difference by enforcing antidiscrimination policies, and its transnational commitment to enforce human rights, Labour's knee jerk reaction impeded upon its implementation of cultural cohesion. According to Ali Rattansi:

Four broad forces – the pressures of globalisation; the process of devolution and regionalism within Britain; the development of a more militant Muslim presence; and the impact of “people flow” (refugees, asylum-seekers and new sorts of economic migrants) – have led to a revival of the project to create a *strong* national identity (Rattansi 1).

Rattansi suggests that these changing socio-political conditions compromised Labour's multicultural vision through integration, and made them turn to older right wing models of assimilation. Black and Keith et al. confirm that these contradictions within Labour's multicultural policies stemmed from an effort to reconcile between the oppositional forces of globalised corporate economic growth and the reinforcement of the nation state. Werner Menski identifies a further contradiction in the Labour government's multicultural promotion of visibility of ethnic identities and how this manifested itself within the public domain:

Members of an “ethnic minority” in Britain today who emphasize that fact too visibly, are going to face difficulties, because the pressures of assimilation remain so very strong. At the same time, making oneself invisible is not really a viable option for non-white immigrants and their descendants. (Menski 12)

Examining this issue of visibility in the context of contemporary British (and international) art world, Kobena Mercer concurs with Menski's concerns in noting that

‘although cultural difference is now more visible than ever before, the unspoken rule is that you would look a bit dumb if you made a big issue out of it (Mercer, ‘Ethnicity’ 193). Mercer suggests that this conflation of the spirits of cultural diversity and corporate internationalism has resulted in a sublation of the discourse of multiculturalism:

Cultural difference was acknowledged and made highly visible as the sign of a “progressive” disposition, but radical difference was gradually detached from the political or moral claims once made in its name, such as the demand for recognition at stake in Eighties debate on “black representation”. (Mercer, ‘Ethnicity’ 193)

Mercer’s and Menski’s observations about this oscillating nature of visibility of difference, in both the British and the international domain, raise interesting questions about what constitutes ‘too much visibility’ and what is ‘visible enough’, and indeed who judges this sliding scale. While Labour nurtured and encouraged culturally diverse British men and women to gain more visibility, it is the way in which this visibility was managed and circulated, that influenced how the public viewed them. Thus a cynical argument can propose that Khan’s image of an integrated second generation South Asian man has been carefully negotiated for public consumption, through strategic choices that make him visible enough to the public eye. These choices might include the venues he performs at, the collaborations he enters into, the costumes he performs in and the personal politics he espouses in public interviews.

Since 2005, Khan has performed largely in London at venues such as Sadler’s Wells Theatre and the National Theatre, which primarily attract white middle-class audiences. He has collaborated with artists such as the Belgian dancer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the French ballerina Sylvie Guillem, the French actress Juliette Binoche and the National Ballet of China. Each of these collaborations

draws upon a niche and elite audience of its own. Khan's consistent rejection of elaborate and classical paraphernalia in favour of a minimalist and contemporary scenographic approach, de-exoticises him and makes his ethnicity less austere. Finally in all interviews, Khan emphasises the vitality of occupying the present moment, thereby disassociating himself from exoticised perceptions of a tradition-bound past. These strategic choices might appear at first to disempower Khan's ability to negotiate his visibility in the public domain, but as Stuart Hall reminds us, 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific. What we say is always "in context", positioned' (Hall, 'Cultural Identity' 222). Therefore Khan and others like him are acutely aware of the thin line they must tread between attaining enough visibility, and attempting too much visibility, in order for their diasporic identity to be asserted and accepted in the public sphere.

This management of visibility in the public domain of British culture was implemented by the Labour government's strategic renaming of the Department of National Heritage as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport:

The renaming [...] intended [...] to signal a shift of focus away from support for the "traditional" high arts, with their association with the projection of the values of some golden age, towards the creatively new (often associated with young, trendy and "cool"). (Garnham 27)

Its cultural manifestation, the Arts Council England, exercised this philosophy of innovation in order to nurture arts that could reflect Britain's contemporary culturally diverse landscape. However, in having to reconcile between tradition and innovation, the Arts Council faced two problems vis-à-vis Britain's culturally diverse population, the very groups they were trying to include in its remit. The first was to find 'a way to preserve discrete ethnic identities' (Kivisto qtd. in Netto 48) and their culturally specific art forms from disappearing in the new landscape. The second was concerned with ways

of nurturing the growth of new art forms, that are born from dialogue between mainstream Britishness and ‘a countervailing identity that unites the disparate groups within a polity’ (Kivisto qtd. in Netto 48). The need to ensure preservation on the one hand and encourage innovation on the other, resulted in a mixed set of priorities that implemented itself differently at the local (margin) and national (centre) levels. At local community levels, traditional arts continued to thrive in museums and galleries, through their educational initiatives fostering cultural diversity (Lopez y Royo, ‘South Asian Dances’). However at national mainstream levels, innovation and experimentations gripped the public imagination. Despite these differences in manifestations of its priorities, the Arts Council’s endeavour under Labour was to recognise the arts as a field which ‘provides opportunities for creative expression and increasing recognition of diverse identities’ (Netto 48). Moreover the arts were acknowledged as a ‘prime site for studying the construction and mediation of identity in public space’ (Netto 48). Thus, drawing on the established field of diaspora art of his senior colleagues, entering into creative dialogue with them, and driven by the opportunities created by the Labour government to promote cultural diversity and talent in mainstream culture, Khan’s career trajectory has been fortified by an overlapping of all these fortuitous circumstances. These have collectively enabled him to successfully forge an integrated diasporic identity in the public eye, despite and through strong references to his South Asian heritage.

10. Khan and the Postcolonial Exotic

Postulating on the relationship between the field of contemporary art and Britain’s multicultural, Kobena Mercer observes that the art world necessarily ‘registers the impact’ (Mercer, ‘Introduction’ 7) of articulations of migrant experiences ‘through

the heightened attention now given to difference and diversity in the international art market and the official policies of public institutions' (Mercer, 'Introduction' 7). Khan's postcolonial identity-fuelled art evokes Graham Huggan's concept of the 'postcolonial exotic' and its 'global commodification of cultural difference' (Huggan vii). Asserting that postcolonial studies' resistive spirit for the voice of the marginal has since capitalised on its once 'perceived marginality' (Huggan viii), Huggan distinguishes between postcolonialism's critique of imperialist trends and postcoloniality's 'global condition of cross-cultural symbolic exchange' (Huggan ix). He continues to explain the dual function of exoticism within the field of postcoloniality:

Within this field, exoticism may be understood conventionally as an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar. Yet, in a postcolonial context, exoticism is effectively *repoliticised*, redeployed both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power. (Huggan ix-x)

Huggan thus intimates that the phenomenon of the postcolonial exotic capitalises on ethnicity's exotic value within the international market, while simultaneously critiquing it, thereby rewriting the way cultural difference is perceived by the centre. It can be argued that Khan's strategic artistic choices that make implicit reference to his *kathak* training in form, and explicit reference to his diasporic identity and his Bangladeshi heritage in content, are evocations of Huggan's concept of the 'postcolonial exotic'. Khan's deployment of 'strategic exoticism' (Huggan 32) that generates interplay between 'exoticist codes of representation' (Huggan 32) and familiar codes of western dramaturgical practices, manages to subvert both these sets of codes. Moreover it redeploys them 'for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power' (Huggan 32), thereby rewriting how his ethnicity and the arts generated by it, are perceived and read by mainstream British culture.

It would be wise to acknowledge here that Khan's strategic shaping of his postcolonial exotic identity in the public domain has been further accelerated by two popular cultural projects that have successfully circulated his image beyond the remits of British high culture. The first is Khan's choreography of *Samsara* for the Australian popular singer Kylie Minogue, in the Homecoming version of the *Showgirl* (2006) concert that marked her return to her illustrious career after her brief hiatus due to her breast cancer treatment.²² In *Samsara* Khan strategises the shift of his ethnicity from high art to popular culture, through visibly asserting his ethnic identity and authorship by appearing on massive projection screens and towering over the live body of Minogue. In doing so, Khan manipulates and negotiates the exoticisation of his body within popular culture on his own grounds. Khan's deliberate use of mass media to reach out to a new audience shifts his practice from the realm of high art to accessible popular culture, and gains currency at a global level.

The second and more recent project involves Khan's choreography for the televised advertisement of Yves Saint Laurent's (YSL) classic perfume *Belle D'Opium* (2010), which YSL promotes as 'a provocatively bewitching new oriental' (*Belle D'Opium* Website). The exquisitely filmed sequence directed by the French filmmaker Romain Gavras, is choreographed on and performed by the French actress Mélanie Thierry, and is accompanied by an original score composed by Nitin Sawhney. Through his earlier experience of working with film in *Loose in Flight*, Khan capitalises on his familiarity with using the televisual medium to translate his choreography on screen, in order for it to circulate at a mass scale. He choreographs on Thierry a sensual and

²² I have written about this project in an article entitled 'Akram Khan Re-writes Radha: The 'Hypervisible' Cultural Identity in Kylie Minogue's 'Showgirl'.

intimate language through which her body exoticises the form, and is simultaneously exoticised by it. Khan explains his vision for this choreography:

I wanted to explore a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the body that is dancing. The camera can be very close to the body, so you can almost smell the sweat [...]. I never explored this kind of relationship on stage; that is why it was very exciting for me. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Belle D'Opium* Website)

While in *Samsara* Khan becomes the subject of his own negotiation of the postcolonial exotic image, in the *Belle D'Opium* advertisement Khan transposes this negotiation onto the body of Thierry, granting her French body an allure of his own exotic ethnicity. Furthermore, he strategises the use of the televisual medium to negotiate and manipulate his image of the postcolonial exotic within the public domain, through channelling the qualities of sensuality and eroticism in a way his stage art has so far not captured. While neither of these two projects are key subjects of analyses in this thesis, their place in Khan's career trajectory are significant and therefore worthy of mention. Khan's strategic handling of his own postcolonial exotic image receives a more explicit treatment in these projects, while his high art projects which constitute this thesis' focus, carry more subtle evocations of his postcolonial exotic identity.

11. Khan and Post-Traditional 'Self-Identity'

Perhaps one of the most significant features about Khan's career trajectory has been its implicit negotiation of his own diasporic identity in the public domain. His multilayered identity can be usefully understood through two interlacing concepts: the first is Anthony Giddens's framework of 'post-traditional society' and the second is Richard Schechner's notion of 'culture of choice'. Anthony Giddens distinguishes between pre-modern and late modern relationship to the role of tradition in shaping social interactions and identity constructions (Giddens, 'Living'). He proposes that

while in the pre-modern era, a lack of choice meant conforming to tradition which led to a dominance of collective identity, in late modernity the focus shifted to individual identity construction through challenge to norms and traditions. Giddens refers to the latter form of sociality as a post-traditional society, where the individual is free to construct oneself as desired, without prescribing to formulaic norms and specificities. The breakdown of tradition has generated for individuals an abundance of choice, and the relative free will to exercise how they wish to construct their sense of self ‘amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities’ (Giddens, *Modernity* 3).

Richard Schechner acknowledges this significance of individual choice as he foresees a future where people are not restrained by the cultural specificities they are born into, but instead are able to voluntarily choose and adopt aspects of several cultures they feel drawn to:

People will wish to celebrate their cultural specificity but increasingly that will be a choice rather than something into which you are born automatically. The “culture of choice” [...] is increasingly coming to be. (Schechner, ‘Interculturalism’ 49)

Khan’s questioning of the formulaic codifications of *kathak*, his challenge to the guru-shishya relationship with Sri Pratap Pawar by carving out his own (and more successful) niche in contemporary performance, his borrowings from multiple cultural disciplines and movement languages and his references to multiple points of identity affiliations in his works, are all indicative of this ‘culture of choice’. However the post-traditional spirit of self-identity constructed through such a variety of choices, can become a permanently destabilising condition, because ‘the self becomes a *reflexive project*’ (Giddens, *Modernity* 32), that continues to seek stability. As per this new order of process-orientated identity constructions that Khan evokes in his art, the features of

doubt and uncertainty as identified by Giddens as pervasive feature of late modern identity prevail relentlessly. Khan's evocations of doubt, confusion and instability in his art can be read as symbolic of his own subjectivity and depicts a 'general existential dimension of the contemporary social world' (Giddens, *Modernity* 2-3) he lives in. This makes late modernity a 'risk culture' (Giddens, *Modernity* 3), where the concept of risk is fundamental to contemporary social choices and interactions.

Khan's negotiations of his identity through his art, becomes a public articulation of his self as a reflexively made project in keeping with the late modernist spirit. Moreover as 'the self, of course, is embodied' (Giddens, *Modernity* 56), Khan's negotiations of his identity are mediated through his body, which 'becomes itself reflexively mobilized' (Giddens, *Modernity* 7), and simultaneously destabilised through 'the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems' (Giddens, *Modernity* 5) of late modernity.

12. Khan as a Male Dancer

As a male dancer of Muslim and South Asian heritage working in the field of British contemporary dance, Khan's project of self-reflexivity has been made particularly complex by having to publically negotiate social biases towards the male dancer in both western and South Asian contexts simultaneously. I acknowledge here that throughout the thesis I will refer to Khan as a performer and not a dancer as I believe as an artist, his interdisciplinary language and his legibility driven aesthetic makes him complex and layered, beyond the technical and aesthetic driven focus of the discipline of dance. However in this section I acknowledge him specifically as a dancer, in order to identify and examine the complex set of gender politics that male dancers

have had to negotiate historically in both western and South Asian contexts. Because these gender politics are not necessarily ascribed onto male actors in both these aforementioned contexts, the identification of Khan as a male dancer in this particular context is vital here.

Historically, the status of the male South Asian dancer within the traditional *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) system has been one of authority, such that male gurus have traditionally imparted knowledge and skill to female students, ensuring that ‘the domain of the teachers, managers, patrons remained male bastions’ (Dutt and Sarkar Munsî 165). Mandakranta Bose concurs as she reminds us:

The dancers were women [...] while the dance teachers and theorists were men [...]. The balance of artistic autonomy and social agency was thereby tilted decisively away from the performers themselves to their male mentors and guides. (Bose, ‘Gender’ 251)

This hierarchical male dominance implied that the men in their positions of authority were therefore not objectified by the gaze of the audience, thereby negating exhibitionism of the male body within dance recitals. Their position of authority however was called into question during the Indian nationalist project when postcolonial values of a Victorian sensibility of morality and ‘proper’ gendered social roles, problematised the association of men with the profession of dance, even in positions of authority. Bishnupriya Dutt and Urmimala Sarkar Munsî explain that post-classicisation of the dance forms during the Indian nationalist project, the practice and development of ‘the classical dances essentially became a female domain as soon as they were formalized into the revitalized and restructured shape in the modern times’ (Dutt and Sarkar Munsî 165). Thus while female dancers gradually took centre stage and acquired authority as choreographers and subjects of their art, male dancers found themselves pushed more and more to the margins of acceptability. Renowned

bharatanatyam dancer V.P. Dhananjayan laments this perception of the male South Asian dancer as effeminate and a threat to masculinity:

Amidst all this renaissance of interest in Dance somehow a wrong notion has crept into the minds of our people that dancing is meant only for women. The historical and socio-cultural factors that led to this misconception are many. It is a fact that for many decades, dance has been a near monopoly of women, be it in the South or the North. Nowadays the male dancer is a rare phenomenon and it happens that a section of the public looks down upon him. Men may become dance teachers, they may provide nattuvangam and musical accompaniment and do everything else needed to make it possible for women to dance, but if they themselves don ankle bells and start to dance, they are put down as effeminate upstarts in an exclusively female domain. (Dhananjayan 23)

In the British diasporic context, the same gendered perception of dance practice has been perpetuated and the field of preserving the home culture has been largely perceived as a female project. In the influential South Asian Dance in Britain (SADIB) report, Andrée Grau notes that most South Asian dancers in Britain are female (Grau, 'South Asian Dance' 8) even though the rare male dancer does exist in the field. This gendered perception of dance is further complicated in Khan's case by his Islamic identity which condemns bodily expressions through dance and music. In the interview I conducted with his mother, Anwara Khan is honest to reveal the anxiety and distress Khan's career choice caused to the family, as pressures from the diasporic community made her question the appropriateness of allowing a Muslim man to pursue a feminised and condemned profession. As a South Asian man, Khan therefore not only had to negotiate the perception of entering a profession that was deemed as feminised, but as a Muslim man he also had the additional burden of negotiating his community's disapproval. Inspired by the role model of his male guru Sri Pratap Pawar, Khan defied community pressure to pursue his own aspirations. Grau's analysis of the British situation accommodates the shift brought about by the likes of Khan:

A shift, however, started to take place in the late twentieth century. The genre is still dominated by women but a number of men are making a very strong mark and providing role models for future generations of dancers. (Grau, 'South Asian Dance' 8)

Grau explains that despite the fact that fewer South Asian men undertake dance training, 'on the whole they seem to be doing better than women' (Grau, 'South Asian Dance' 65), and claiming the territory with more success. Khan and his career trajectory is clearly implicated in Grau's analysis, and although he is not alone in carving out a niche for male South Asian dancers (Mavin Khoo, Jayachandran Palazzhy, Darshan Singh Bhuller have also developed significant reputations in the field), his success and visibility has so far surpassed the contributions of his other male peers.

If Khan's career trajectory has been fuelled and cushioned by the series of fortunate biographical and socio-political circumstances as already identified above, there is one further condition that has perhaps been of utmost importance to his success, and that is the rising status of the male choreographer in contemporary Britain. This is a fairly recent phenomenon which in itself has had to historically struggle arduously against patriarchal perceptions of dance as a feminised profession, in order to shake off societal prejudices born from the 'association between male dancers and homosexuality' (Burt, *Male Dancer* 11). Furthermore, prejudices pertaining to homophobia towards male dancers still persist in contemporary society. Therefore, the recent visibility of male choreographers in mainstream dancer is testimony to the progress made by the profession in going some distance to dismantle such limiting perceptions of masculinity. Khan once again, finds himself arriving at a juncture when the battle has already been fought, and to some extent won for him and other male dancers.

Recently writing for *The Guardian*, Judith Mackrell identifies this unprecedented visibility of male choreographers in her aptly titled article *Vanishing Pointe: Where Are all the Great Female Choreographers*. She observes that ‘while the dance scene has never appeared healthier, it is also one that looks distinctly alpha male’ (Mackrell, ‘Vanishing Pointe’). Mackrell laments the once female dominated field of modern dance experimentations as she notes that ‘dance has always been seen as one of the art forms where women weren’t just more visible than men, but were also in charge’ (Mackrell, ‘Vanishing Pointe’). She observes:

Look at the top women in dance history: most seem to have been active when the art form was in some kind of transition. [...] Arguably, it's just at the point when dance starts to become glamorous, exciting, profitable and successful that the men step in. The UK is not alone in having an unnervingly male A-list of choreographers: the international scene also has only a few women, such as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, to rival the supremacy of Mark Morris, William Forsythe, Jiří Kylián, Christopher Wheeldon and Alexei Ratmansky. (Mackrell, ‘Vanishing Pointe’)

Postulating over why male choreographers are so much more visible at the moment Mackrell concludes that ‘paradoxically, the fact that fewer men enter the profession than women may be one of the reason why such a large proportion rise to the top’ (Mackrell, ‘Vanishing Pointe’), because ‘once a man has embarked on dance training, he quickly knows he is a precious commodity’ (Mackrell, ‘Vanishing Pointe’).

Grau’s observations of fewer male dancers entering South Asian dance training and Mackrell’s discussion of the same in western dance training coincide to suggest that because they are a rare breed, in what have historically been female dominated fields, male dancers are more likely to succeed than their female counterparts. Mackrell also concludes that men are far more able and willing to engage in aggressive marketing of their own image and work and this too contributes to their success over female choreographers.

Khan as a male dancer is a precious commodity in the British arts field for the following reasons: his South Asian heritage and his training in *kathak* lends him a postcolonial exotica that lends him a physicality that stands apart from the virtuosity and athleticism of his male peers; without being effeminate, the masculinity Khan embodies is distinct from the often hyper-masculine, high-risk athleticism or sexualised eroticism as visible in the works of his male peers like Lloyd Newson, Hofesh Schechter and Wim Vandekeybus; and his work is arduously marketed under the vision of Farooq Chaudhry who, as an ex-professional male dancer, is able to tap into the socio-economic grids of power structures strategically to re-invent the brand name of Khan as a unique force in the field of contemporary performance practice.

As a male dancer of South Asian heritage whose syncretic and complex identity positions have found artistic articulations within mainstream British culture and beyond through an equally hybridised performance aesthetic, Khan's position in contemporary arts is influential and unique. Strategically avoiding categorisation into convenient and pre-existent labels, Khan's aesthetic seamlessly straddles multiple disciplines and genres of performance, as it seeks an ambivalent position with contemporary arts. For this same reason, although he is mostly known for his status within high art, Khan's artistic engagement with popular culture lends him an idiosyncratic eclecticism and versatility as an artist. His ability to negotiate these wide parameters of mainstream western culture has been nuanced by strategic collaborations, British multiculturalism, global finance and the genius of Farooq Chaudhry's vision as the company's producer. While his South Asianness situates him in the larger relational socio-political field of South Asian arts, reminding us that Khan is not so much of an isolated creative genius but one of many agents within the field, as the following chapters will go on to

evidence, ultimately his work operates beyond this field. Instead, it seeks to influence and transform western performance genres through introducing into them intercultural inflections from his South Asian performance training. But most importantly, Khan's uniqueness lies in his ability to negotiate the confusion and instability that haunts his ever evolving identity, by depicting these struggles within his art in the public domain. In doing so he repeatedly makes an offering of himself through his art. Through strategically selected case studies that most appropriately embody Khan's complex identity negotiations in performance, the following four chapters will now examine the different layers at which his multiple identity positions have found artistic manifestations through an analyses of four seminal pieces, starting with an auto-ethnographic focus that shapes his earliest experimentation in contemporary performance.

Chapter 3

Inexclusion, London's Docklands and Auto-ethnography in *Loose in Flight*

Between 1995 and 1997, through the final years of his university education, Khan created *Loose in Flight*, a solo that began to negotiate the corporeal boundaries between his *kathak* and contemporary dance training. Performed in the public domain after his graduation, the piece received critical acclaim and signalled Khan's potential within the future of British contemporary dance. In 1999, British television producer Rosa Rogers of Channel 4 approached Khan to adapt this solo for the screen in collaboration with filmmaker Rachel Davies, as part of a series called *Per4mance*, designed to promote short collaborations between film-makers and performing artists. In its dance-film manifestation, *Loose in Flight* fully exploited the televisual medium in order to dismantle native British notions of South Asian performance, identity and culture at a time when mainstream British television had already started to witness significant shifts in representations of South Asian identity.

In this chapter the dance-film of *Loose in Flight* is analysed as an auto-ethnographic enquiry into Khan's own multi-layered diasporic corporeality and its relationship with the marginalised historiography of London's Docklands.²³ Employing Valerie Briginshaw's postulations on the inherent dialogue between body and space, the chapter investigates the implied significance of the relationship between Khan's

²³ I acknowledge here that as discussed in Chapter 2, Khan and his family do not represent the deprived Bangladeshi migrant population who are residents of east London, and whose lives were arguably marginalised by the regeneration of the Docklands region. I propose instead that Khan's relationship to and reclamation of this landscape becomes symbolic of an alternative kind of migrant reality that may not be deprived, but none-the-less seeking articulation and representation in mainstream culture.

turbulent diasporic body and the derelict cityscape of London's Docklands, as depicted through the dialogue between Davies' film and Khan's choreography. It further argues that in Khan's approach to his subject of enquiry, we witness a collapse of boundaries between the participant and the ethnographer, such that he embodies both the enquiry and the enquirer simultaneously. Through the filmic device, the mapping of Khan's diasporic corporeality onto this iconic east London landscape comments on his contested relationship with it. This lends *Loose in Flight* an ironic and emotional edge that shifts his aesthetic from the realm of formalist contemporary dance, towards the embodied and legible quarters of western performance practices like physical theatre.

Khan's Confusion and *Loose in Flight*

Loose in Flight marks Khan's initial explorations between *kathak* and multiple western movement systems and articulates the 'confusions' that began to emerge within his body. The verticality of his *kathak* physicality, accentuated by an agile upper torso and a grounded lower torso through unlocked knees, straight legs and flat feet, began to clash with the pro-gravity horizontality of his contemporary movement training. Equally jarring were the strict codifications of the *kathak* language on the one hand, and the improvisatory nature of contemporary dance on the other. Khan recognised these physical and aesthetic tensions as a consequence of these confusions. He gradually learnt to stop rationalising the changes that were taking place in his body, and instead placed trust in his body's own capacity to process information, until this sense of confusion gave way to its own language. Acknowledging his body as a 'sponge' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Ellis) that absorbs information endlessly and makes 'decisions for itself, not necessarily consciously' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Ellis), Khan learnt to trust his body's subconscious decision-making processes. This led to the emergence of a movement

language that drew from his multiple training systems, without sitting conveniently amongst any particular one. The syncretism in Khan's emergent movement language began to also closely mirror the syncretism in his diasporic identity, lending his aesthetic not just artistic, but also intellectual value, as his articulations of his diasporic identity appeared to be 'borne out in practice' (Norridge 5) in the spirit of auto-ethnography.

This complex and layered, fragmented and ruptured, dynamic and volatile syncretic aesthetic became the central charge of *Loose in Flight*, as identified by a British South Asian dance scholar Shezad Khalil in his unpublished conference paper on the piece:

Khan depicts no sense of clarity between the borders of Kathak and contemporary. They are blurred. They are indistinct. There is no point in the choreography that allows the observer to identify the transition between western and non-western movements. They are intertwined, mingled and combined. The gates of these boundaries are broken. (Khalil, 'Contemporary Kathak' 18)

It is precisely this seamless fluidity between multiple movement systems that makes the piece impossible to categorise and hence a seminal piece of work in Khan's choreographic trajectory. By becoming a point of physiological and emotional release for the various tensions that had accumulated in his body, *Loose in Flight* can be read as Khan's auto-ethnographic enquiry into his multi-layered diasporic identity. And in this, the film medium plays an indispensable role. Therefore Khan's choreographic experimentations alone do not make this auto-ethnography a seminal point of departure in his repertoire. *Loose in Flight* also marks Khan's first interdisciplinary collaboration between his own emergent movement language and the dynamic medium of film, as he strategically chooses to articulate his diasporic identity negotiations through the established genre of dance-films.

Dance-Film and *Loose in Flight*

Khan's melding of film technology and dance continues a line of experimentation that can be traced to early twentieth century, which saw the emergence of an entirely new language in the interstices between movement and screen. As the dialogue between choreographers and film directors went 'beyond the constraints of the body' (Mitoma xxxi), dance-films found fresh ways to 'capture human motion' (Mitoma xxxi). Judy Mitoma suggests that apart from documenting dance, this marriage between dance and film instigated the creation of choreographies specifically for the camera, such that they could only exist in the film medium. This gave birth to the genre of dance-films whose dissemination process through mediums such as television broadcasting, blurred the boundaries between their audiences' 'race, class, and geography' (Mitoma xxxi), and was thus 'critical to the development of the field' (Mitoma xxxi) of dance as a whole. Film producer Kelly Hargreaves, identifies in late twentieth century European dance experimentations a desire to relocate a narrative drive, and suggests that this drive coincided with the narrative drive embodied in film-making. She suggests further that the film medium's ability to allow 'our imaginations to travel to actual locations' (Hargreaves 163) lent these dance experimentations and their desire to achieve signification, the appropriate artistic language. The consequential meeting between these two similar needs to create meaning generated the powerful third language of dance-films.

Khan's adaptation of *Loose in Flight* into a dance-film followed the example of several live performances by DV8 Physical Theatre (*Enter Achilles*, *Strange Fish* and *The Cost of Living*) that have been sensitively adapted into dance-films and are recognised as distinct entities on their own. He exploited the film medium's capacity to

emphasise interactions between real social spaces and the performers who occupy them, such that it generated a heightened awareness of the social space itself and the performer's embodiment of that space. Khan used the dance-film medium to radically revise the architectural structures of the Docklands, in order to locate himself within it. It is this revisioning of the space that lent Khan 'a fleshly impact' (Billman 12), loading his movement with context, signification and political commentaries. Moreover by broadcasting this dance-film through national television, Khan exploited the capacity of the mass medium to dismantle notions of second generation South Asianness in the public domain, and ceased the moment that was already witnessing increased visibility of South Asian identity on British national television.

South Asian Visibility, British Television and *Loose in Flight*

Under Labour's new initiatives British television was circulating images of second and third generation South Asians who were negotiating the British environment 'on their own terms' (Ballard 34) as 'skilled cultural navigators':

This is a person who switches mid-sentence from English to Hindi, Urdu or Gujarati, and now to Somali and many other languages, and can also handle a wide variety of socio-cultural situations within a personally selected, more or less broad band. So a British Muslim may go to a pub with his or her colleagues, but will probably drink orange juice instead of beer. (Menski 11)

These positive images began to dismantle stereotypical ideas about the South Asian population for the native British, and also marked the arrival of this population at the heart of mainstream British culture. Commenting on the relationship between late twentieth century British multicultural policies and national television programming, film studies scholar Moya Luckett reminds us that amongst Britain's terrestrial television channels, Channel 4 prioritised representing the voice of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean diaspora and 'moved toward culturally specific minority programming'

(Luckett 409). The end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century thus witnessed a significant increase in the visibility of South Asian culture within mainstream Britain.

One key moment was the televising of the successful BBC Radio 4 (1996-1998) comedy sketch series *Goodness Gracious Me (GGM)* by BBC2 (1998-2001), written and performed by second generation South Asian actors Sanjeev Bhaskar, Meera Syal, Kulwinder Ghir and Nina Wadia. *GGM* marked the arrival of South Asian identity into mainstream popular culture via the televisual medium. The series became an influential exposé on both British and South Asian identity through using a culturally hybridised sense of humour that defused cultural stereotyping, and blurred the margin and the centre (Werbner 902). Thus, humour became the tool through which young South Asian artists were able to voice their cultural concerns and identity politics within multicultural Britain (Werbner 902). It would therefore be fair to observe that the significance of *GGM* moved beyond its seminal contributions to the tradition of British comedy as it came to:

occupy a central position in British popular culture as the series which broke boundaries in British “race” relations in terms of their relationship and representation of the Asian community in particular. (Gillespie 105)

Khan and Davies’ collaboration in *Loose in Flight* was thus strategic in capitalising on this rife moment in British television with its increased visibility of young South Asians and their diasporic lives.

This dance-film was created and broadcast on British terrestrial television as part of a programme called *Per4mance*, designed to promote the work of contemporary performing artists through three minute films, and was produced and relayed by

Channel 4 at approximately 19.55 hours between August and September 1999. *Loose in Flight* was broadcast on national television on the 9th of September 1999, programmed straight after the Channel 4 News and before the start of prime-time entertainment. It is important to note also that Rachel Davies, who created the film in collaboration with Khan, also made another dance-film for the *Per4mance* series called *Khooyile* in collaboration with another male South Asian dancer Mavin Khoo. This perhaps suggests the emphasis that was being laid on the promotion of contemporary South Asian culture within the public domain by the Labour government and its policies on multiculturalism. Beyond this national television broadcast, the dance-film of *Loose in Flight* was subsequently screened at the Purcell Room at the Royal Festival Hall as part of a programme called *No Male Egos* in September 1999 and then at the Dance Umbrella Festival in October 2000, at the Lilian Baylis Theatre in London. Under the sponsorship of the British Council, it was then taken on a world tour between 1999 and 2002 as part of the screening of a DVD entitled *One Hundred Years of British Dance on Screen*, before being shown on the *South Bank Show* in October 2002 and on *Imagine* on BBC1 in 2008.²⁴

While South Asian culture occupied a prime-time spot on national television through late twenty and early twenty-first century and generated new audiences, South Asian dance also gained visibility in mainstream community settings such as museums and heritage sites, fuelled by the multicultural policies of the Arts Council that transformed British museums from agents of preservation to agents of cultural production. British museums thus shifted from exhibiting white British heritage to promoting diverse public art, and generated new opportunities for diasporic South Asian

²⁴ This information on the making, broadcasting and exhibition contexts for the dance-film *Loose in Flight* has been obtained from the website of Rachel Davies and also the British Film Institute (BFI) website.

dancers to cultivate their own artistic presence in mainstream British community spaces

(Lopez y Royo, 'South Asian Dances' 2). Alessandra Lopez y Royo notes:

The end of the 20th century has seen a change in the way Western museums are perceived, as their role in society is being critically reviewed. [...] Curatorial practices have come under scrutiny and diasporic communities have challenged the lack of multivocality in museum displays. [...] As this interrogation of collecting, connoisseurship and ownership of cultural heritage takes place, South Asian dances have become enmeshed in the revolution of contemporary museum practice. (Lopez y Royo, 'South Asian Dances' 2)

However, while British national television was successful in dismantling stereotypical notions of South Asian identity, South Asian dance within museums and heritage sites continued to perpetuate Orientalist imagery (Lopez y Royo, 'South Asian Dances' 1).

It is therefore vital to realise that when the dance-film of *Loose in Flight* was broadcast in British homes, on the one hand *GGM* had already successfully reclaimed a positive, intelligent and contemporary image of diasporic South Asian identity. On the other hand however, community and museum practices of South Asian dance had in some ways reified the Orientalist stereotype of the art forms by, in some cases, constructing the dancers as exotic museum exhibits (Lopez y Royo, 'South Asian Dances' 1, 5-9). Through *Loose in Flight*, Khan managed to successfully de-exoticise this vision of South Asianness, in order to express a more contemporary reality of a diasporic artist. He also strategised the need to make South Asian culture more accessible to mainstream Britain in a similar manner to *GGM*, by bringing it into the nation's homes. The collaboration between Khan, Davies and Channel 4 thus manipulated an already fertile and equipped environment offered by the televisual mass medium. It represented on screen the social and physical reality of a diasporic South Asian artist, particularly emphasising the negotiations between his past and present, and his tradition and modernity, through corporeal and visual means. *Loose in Flight* used

the dance-film medium to comment on the complex relationship between Khan's corporeality and the east London cityscape, and provided a charged political commentary on the landscape's historical connection to migration and transitory identities. Symbolic of the lives and experiences of millions of diasporic South Asians who shared his circumstances, this televised performance of *Loose in Flight* captured the attention of mainstream British dance, and created a niche for Khan in Britain's late twentieth-century multicultural politics.

Khan's strategic use of the dance-film medium is commended by Bisakha Sarker, a South Asian dancer living in Britain, who suggests that South Asian dancers in the diaspora need to discover new contexts and aesthetics for their dance practices to mirror their contemporary diasporic realities. She suggests that film offers an appropriate means to capture the changing landscapes of South Asian dance practices in the UK:

This is because it can unambiguously place South Asian dance choreography physically against those very backdrops that are changing it [...]. (Sarker ctd. in Nasar)

Sarker refers to the dialogue between these spaces and the bodies that fill it as “new architectures” (Sarker ctd. in Nasar). Anita Nasar states that this is precisely what Khan achieved in his film collaboration of *Loose in Flight* with Rachael Davies. By allowing the camera to capture Khan's transient movement language unfold against the sparse vastness of the Dockland's landscape, his performance acquired a resonance and depth that mirrored the relationship between his identity, his art and this locale, that a live performance in a theatre could not capture with the same immediacy. The film medium further offered Rachael Davies the opportunity to make a considered choice about the location that would equally influence the reading of Khan's choreography:

I wanted somewhere with impact. Extremes of interior and exterior spaces I thought would evoke notions of tautness then release [...]. Culturally, the Docklands is recognisable as an area of London but also as a transient place in constant flux and rebuild. It creates a sense of looking to the future, encompassing 21st century multi-cultural Britain. I guess, subconsciously, I felt this fitted Akram's work and how he would want it to be understood out of a stage context by UK and overseas audiences [...]. (Khan and Davies)

Khan himself admits that one of the advantages of translating his movement experimentations into film was taking control over the audience's field of vision:

You can decide what you want to the audience to see [...]. In a live version you can have five dancers on one side and one of the other side of the stage and you want the audience to watch the one dancer, but it's not necessary that the audience are going to do that. (Khan and Davies).

Being able to manipulate what the audience sees and therefore interprets, is a vital part of re-contextualising South Asian dance practice in the diaspora. However perhaps most importantly, the televisual medium holds the key to reaching out to audiences en masse, without the trouble of generating new audiences for an art form that may on the surface seem inaccessible to most people. As Nasar argues:

Familiarising the unfamiliar and appearing on the ubiquitous TV screen, the film medium offers to de-mystify and de-exoticise South Asian dance. More importantly, it can take South Asian dance to the audience – an alternative to waiting for the audience to come to it. (Nasar)

Khan and Davies' considered approach to the making and dissemination of *Loose in Flight* managed to transform the image of South Asian dance with a fresh and current perspective. Furthermore, the fact that it was relayed to the home of television audiences meant that it had managed to generate new viewership within minutes of its transmission, and had brought home the multicultural reality of contemporary Britain.

Docklands and Diasporic Identity in *Loose in Flight*

Loose in Flight begins with an image of Khan's face pressed against a window screen, breathing onto the glass which creates condensation on the cold surface. His right hand is cupped gently around the edge of the right side of his face, narrowing his field of vision, as he looks out through the window to the empty and sparse landscape of London's Docklands. Khan's stare through the glass connects him to the cityscape beyond and starts to suggest how real and metaphoric spaces contribute to the shaping of identity positions (Briginshaw xiv) as his awareness of this cityscape's historic relationship to migrant bodies infiltrates his gaze. Through the 90s, this area of east London became '(in)famous for Canary Wharf, post-modern architecture, and gentrification' (Keith and Pile 16). However the three billion pound regeneration project of the Docklands became the cause of friction between the financiers, who were looking to convert Canary Wharf into 'an island of wealth' (Keith and Pile 11), and the local, largely migrant population, who had been denied a voice in this endeavour. Keith and Pile observe that 'the Tower (1 Canada Place) – now so much the symbol of Docklands, [...] stands "proud" amidst some of the most deprived estates in one of the most deprived boroughs not just in London but in the country' (Keith and Pile 11), and inevitably became the grounds for resentment for 'people who live in the shadow of the Tower – physically and metaphorically' (Keith and Pile 11). Thus gradually, alongside the wealthy splendour that it stood for, two other identities of the Docklands emerged: 'the Docklands belonging to the indigenous communities and the Docklands that cannot be sold for love nor money' (Keith and Pile 16).

Khan and Davies' filming of *Loose in Flight* within the heart of this conflicted cityscape was thus strategic, aiming to centralise Khan's diasporic identity within the

landscape of the Docklands that had historically ignored migrants. Additionally, if according to dance scholar Valerie Briginshaw space is a construct and ‘cannot be explored without reference to human subjects’ (Briginshaw 4), then the placement of Khan in the centre of this disputed landscape was deliberate, and commented on how the constructed nature of both the Docklands and Khan’s diasporic identity, mutually shaped each other (Briginshaw 48). Briginshaw postulates further on the symbiotic relationship between the constructed nature of space and the subjectivities produced by it, especially in movement:

How does the space in which the dance occurs affect perceptions of subjectivity? Different spaces for dance such as cities, and the building that constitute them, and wide open outdoor spaces [...] hold connotations and associations. They are not empty [...]. What happens when dance is set in such places? What effect does it have on the choreography?; on the spaces?; [...] How can investigations of body/space relations in dance contribute to rethinking notions of subjectivity, to opening up possibilities to previously excluded subjectivities. (Briginshaw 6-7)

The above passage is particularly relevant to the analysis of *Loose in Flight* in its depiction of Khan’s body and identity as strategically connected to this London locale. As Briginshaw suggests, it is vital to understand that the landscape of the Docklands is not an empty signifier as a site, but loaded with connotations that shape Khan’s diasporic body. And it is precisely the placement of this body in a site that has historically ignored its presence that enables us to perceive Khan’s identity within it in an empowered light. In this it evokes dance practitioner and scholar Carol Brown’s claim that ‘such a view [...] subverts historical legacies that situate the dancing body as the central organising force within a void-like space, as space itself is understood as an agent within the work’ (C. Brown 59). Brown continues to state that this allows for the emergence of a new ‘matrix of relationships shaped by states of flux between the body and the built [...], ephemerality and the seemingly permanent’ (C. Brown 58).

To begin with Khan's relationship to the Docklands is established through his outward gaze through the window pane. In yearning to escape the confines of the space that contains him, Khan peers out through the glass window and appears trapped, accentuated by a disturbing soundscape of long and sharp intakes of breath. The camera cuts to the derelict interiors of a dingy warehouse. Khan stands in the centre of this space, dressed in a black pair of loose trousers, a black fitted t-shirt and black socks or thin black jazz shoes.²⁵ His upper body is slumped over his unlocked knees. His arms hang loose without any tension in them and appear to almost touch the floor. His feet are in the starting position of *kathak*, nearly touching at the heels, creating the tip of an isosceles triangle with the two feet facing away from each other. Another sharp and long inhalation of breath follows in the soundscape which breathes life into Khan's slouched spine. He sharply unfurls it into an upright and centred position accompanied simultaneously by his arms, which take up the starting position of *kathak*. They are gently bent at the elbows and held close to his chest with the palms facing down. The tips of the middle fingers on both hands almost appear to touch. His eyes follow the momentary collapse of his right elbow into the right side of his body, and he uses his left hand to replace the right elbow into the correct starting position of *kathak*. This is immediately followed by a subtle collapse of the right side of his pelvis, which forces his upper body to slump again towards the floor. Allowing his body to rest a while, he gently unfurls his spine into the *kathak* position again. An impulse in his right shoulder

²⁵ The use of socks or shoes as a symbol for cultural and corporeal hybridity is a common motif in contemporary South Asian dance practices. It stands for a significant shift in performance philosophy and practice which the dancer embodies between his/her South Asian classical dance training which is performed barefeet, and their contemporary western dance training which is often danced in covered feet. The wearing of shoes/socks also often stand for an urbanisation, modernisation and secularisation of the dancer's identity who has long practised what is considered to be a spiritual and traditional art form. Sonia Sabri in *Parallels* (2008) also uses the motif of putting on trainers in one of the pieces that was inspired by her need to negotiate the place of *kathak* within her urban contemporary life in the UK.

raises it close to his right ear and moves his right arm to take up the starting *kathak* position again. This considered moment is punctuated by a shift in the soundscape. A haunting and monotonous tune starts to filter through the space, interspersed occasionally by the sharp intakes of breath.

The camera, which has until this point been filming Khan head on, shifts to the right and starts to capture Khan's body and his shadow from an angle. Khan and his shadow seem joined at his feet, and appear the same and yet two different bodies all at once. From the central starting positions of the arms to which Khan always returns as in a *kathak* recital, he raises his right arm diagonally across his chest and swivels his upper body to the left to follow his arms. He then returns his arms, body and gaze back to the centre again. However, this time the classical starting position is ruptured by the unexpected rising of his left foot and knee, which slightly collapses the left side of his body. His eyes follow this unruly burst of movement from his lower body towards the floor and back to the centre again. The same sequence is repeated twice, before he starts to open out his arms from the folded elbow position to a horizontal one, where both arms are fully opened out and held at the chest level with their palms facing upwards. Khan first opens out his right arm, pointing it to his diagonal right corner in front of him, and his left arm to his diagonal left corner behind him. He returns his arms to the centre starting position before going on to repeat the pattern on the other side of his body. When his arms move, his feet and legs remain still and appear forcibly immobile.

It therefore appears that unlike in *kathak* where the arms and the feet mostly move in unison, Khan's upper and lower body are moving separately, such that when his upper body and arms move in the modes of *kathak*, his lower body and feet remain

static. And when the lower body and legs move in contemporary language patterns, his upper body and arms appear uncomfortably still. It becomes evident that the different layers of the body are experiencing tensions and difficulty in coexisting within his corporeality. It also seems that different parts of Khan's body are aligning themselves to different modes of movement training. His arms are strongly embedded in the *kathak* idiom. His pelvis and knees and at times his legs, display principles of release technique, and his eyes move between the *kathak* gaze that follows his arms and the static neutral gaze of contemporary training. Shezad Khalil writes:

Each time Khan produces a small unit of movement, he seems to retreat to the standard arrangement, and each time a unit of movement is displayed another part of Khan's body moves and/or several parts move, until all of his body parts are moving. (Khalil, 'Contemporary Kathak' 20)

However this takes many attempts, and the choreography unfolds in a complex and layered manner to reflect Khan's own layered corporeal training. It seems to suggest that just as the tiniest of movement motifs grow into more complex patterns through endless repetition, Khan's own physiological and sociological struggle with his corporeality will require endless re-visitations and re-negotiations to attain eventual expressivity and impact.

Khan raises both arms above his head (similar to the stance of a Flamenco dancer), and allows his wrists to make gentle contact against each other, so his hands can swiftly and gracefully rotate on their point of contact. At first only his arms and wrists move, creating a quick and graceful circular motion above his head. Khan's eyes follow his actions, darting back and forth, leaving an aerial trace of the movement behind. Gradually he allows his upper body to become a part of the swivel such that it follows the spherical motion of his wrists, neck and shoulders, until it all falls into a rhythmic pattern. His feet start off remaining static, allowing his upper torso to trace a

fluid and circular motion. But as the upper body gains momentum, he pushes his right foot back to support his torso in its explorations of his body's spherical motion. Suddenly, as if his body is taken by surprise, the rigid formulaic structures of *kathak* disappear, and are replaced by a lyricism that consumes his entire body. His arms weave a spell with 'their snake-like, kathak, tension exploding into a liquid eloquence all his own' (Hale). As Khan's body starts to emanate a syncretic vocabulary of his western contemporary dance technique drawing particularly from release technique, the relationship between his spine, the floor and gravity dismantles his body's hitherto held verticality significantly.

In this opening sequence *Loose in Flight* uses *kathak* as the structural base to break out into lyrical passages of contemporary physicality. Khan uses *kathak* as a starting point to his corporeal explorations and returns to it by adopting the starting position periodically. As his contemporary movement sequence starts to get more complex, computer graphics generated images of Dockland's urban identifiers like a bridge, a crane and a water tower flutter on the screen. These function as reminders of what lies on the outside of the derelict interior that entraps him. As the images of the urban exterior build, Khan's corporeal agitations also gain momentum and start to move fluidly, sharply and unexpectedly, between the fragmentation of his contemporary corporeal language and the regal composure of *kathak*, until it reaches a point of tense and pregnant stillness. He scurries up a few steps forward to stand up upright and contracts his spine and upper body into his chest into a moment of stillness, as the anticipation of what is to follow heightens. This pregnant pause is full of possibilities such that the 'stillness becomes the resource for discovery' (Claid 133) for Khan's body to negotiate its expressivity from the point of not knowing what comes next, in

order to allow clarity and knowledge to re-emerge (Claid 133). Choreographer Emilyn Claid cites influential American contemporary dancer Steve Paxton's thoughts about the creative role of stillness in re-energising movement practices:

Standing still, we are focusing on a somatic body-mind attention to a myriad of sensations. Internally we experience a mapping of downward upward and crossing imaginary lines, towards the earth and the centre of gravity and upwards through the top of the head into space. A still balance in the body is an attention to multiple, rapid, skeletal and muscular adjustments [...]. (Paxton ctd. in Claid 135)

As Khan takes stock of his body through stillness, the moment is both fraught with tension and calm with anticipation. Finally he begins to trace the side of his right hand slowly and vertically down his chest with his fingers facing downwards. The use of hands in his choreography is significant, drawing on everyday quotidian gestures which are loaded with meaning. In this Khan's expressive hand motifs find a contemporary resonance of *kathak's* codified hand gestures. His slow and deliberate gesture points towards his pelvis repeatedly, as though it contains some secret force that is awaiting release. This is significant as one of the key distinctions between the verticality of his classical training and the horizontal axis of his contemporary training, is the release required of his body, from and through his pelvis to embrace gravity. The soundscape which has also built to a crescendo to accompany Khan's agile bodily expressions settles to a slow and tense tempo and nears silence. Finally Khan allows his hand to move beyond his pelvis to the floor, collapsing his upper body before rising back into the vertical in one sharp and swift movement. It is his relationship with the floor in an entirely re-evaluated capacity that is soon to become the focus of the following section. This time he does not assume his *kathak* starting position. Instead he goes into a sideways jump, where his left and right feet are touching each other and point beyond the right side of his body, high into the air. His arms are held in the *kathak*

starting position and his gaze is directed at the floor towards his feet. This is the first moment when all his body parts that have so far moved as separate units, start to move in unison. As his feet return to the floor the camera cuts to an outside location, where Khan is seen to be completing the very same jump which his body started inside the derelict warehouse. When he lands, it is impossible to ignore that his feet are now bare, and his body is as weightless, lithe and lyrical than ever before.

This move from the dark entrapment of the disused industrial warehouse to the airy and light outside location, with the unmistakable backdrop of the Docklands architecture framing his presence, also brings about a significant shift in Khan's bodily expressions. At first he launches straight into a pure *kathak* sequence, exemplified by his signature self-containment in space which is 'broken only by the heart-stopping speed of those, now legendary, spins that the mind can barely register' (Hale). The camera thus enables him to strategically locate his ethnic South Asian identity through its classical dance language, at the centre of the Docklands landscape. Deliberately juxtaposed against the 'metropolis; the postmodern, the constructed, the defined and the authoritative space' (Khalil, 'Contemporary Kathak' 18), Khan's body then explodes into a series of organic and lyrical movement passages that position his agile corporeality in the centre of London's Docklands. This juxtaposition reveals that there is much in common between the shifting identity of Khan and the unstable identity of the Docklands, shaped by its specific historicity and geographical locale. Moreover 'the Docklands as a choice of location, with its old trade links to India, is a nod to the history behind today's cultural melange in Britain' (Nasar), of which Khan is a vital remnant. Similarly Khalil argues that 'by placing himself at the centre of the composition, Khan is projecting that he is not an alien body wandering aimlessly and lost in the postmodern

metropolis. In fact, he is an active individual in the construction of this domain' (Khalil, 'Contemporary Kathak' 20).

In this sociological mapping of his body the significance of Khan's bare feet deserves analysis. At a simplistic level it can be read as a reverential allusion to the memorable moment in early modern dance, when seeking freedom for the dancing body from the captivity of ballet slippers and corsets, dancers like Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller took to the stage barefoot (Banes 74). In early twentieth century dancing without ballet shoes came to stand for freedom from physical restriction and aesthetic control. However to apply the same logic to Khan's barefeet in *Loose in Flight* would be a simplistic reading of his culturally specific and complex circumstances. Dancing barefoot for Khan cannot merely stand for physical freedom. In fact it is perhaps the very reverse of it as within his *kathak* training, Khan had to dance barefoot. Moreover the points in the piece where Khan dances barefoot bears little relation to the kind of movement idiom he is rendering through his body at the time. In other words, he demonstrates equal comfort at dancing contemporary movement *without* shoes as he does at dancing *kathak* sequences *with* shoes on. Performing barefoot for Khan then becomes a powerful metaphor for exercising creative choice and control over his own choreographic vision. It becomes symbolic of Khan's yearning to be recognised as both a performer and a performance-maker in equal measure.

As Khan continues to render lyrical passages of high 'muscular density' (Meisner) and interlaces it with *kathak* spins, the camera manipulates the viewer to follow Khan's own visual perspective. It languidly follows the length of his left arm and gaze along the landscape and arrives at another frame by the River Thames. Here Khan

completes an impressive spiral jump with his entire body and lands parallel to the ground, supported by his hands and feet on a white mat. He repeats a variation of leaps off the ground, seemingly drawing energy from the earth as he horizontally lifts himself up into impossibly high jumps, and then spirals his body in the air before returning to the ground with dynamism and grace. In this middle section of *Loose in Flight*, his relationship with the ground draws the viewer's attention to how his body changes its response to gravity, from the verticality and uprightness of *kathak* to the horizontality of release technique. He embraces the floor by yielding into it and gracefully rising out of it, playing with the boundaries of resisting gravity while graciously accepting its power for returning safely to the ground. Khan acknowledges the shifting nature of the land beneath him that he claims as his own, resonating the transient spirit of the title to Salman Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). This land is representative of London, the city that homes him in his country of birth with its history of migration and settlement. Equally, this land stands for his tenuous relationship with Bangladesh, his parents' country of origin and its strained link with the nation of India. Claiming ownership to multiple landscapes and localities thus characterises his transient diasporic identity in twentieth century Britain. It requires him to re-negotiate the space he occupies on these lands and acknowledge the impact that these lands have on his changing identity.

In the horizon the camera pans across the Docklands landscape, reminding the viewer that Khan's bodily negotiations cannot be separated from this site, and indicating an erasure of the border between his self and the city (Briginshaw 43). Glimpses of east London's council flats intersperse the landscape returning the viewer from the vast industrial character of the Docklands to its residential quarters that is home to many

migrants (Keith & Pile 181). The image of the council flats and the contained space they signify directly juxtaposes the vast expanse of liberated space in which Khan moves. This implied claustrophobia abruptly cuts short Khan's lyrical and free physical expressions. It acts as a harsh reminder of his own inability to exist in that one free space, endlessly haunted by his own multilayered tensions within.

His body collapses at the waist again as he lifts his upper torso into an upright position. His feet return to the starting position of *kathak* and his agile arms visibly struggle to negotiate smoothly between the classical patterns of *kathak* and the linear modes of contemporary dance. The once effortless transition between his varied modes of corporeal training gives way to an obvious bodily resistance. A swift and fleeting frame momentarily places Khan back in the derelict warehouse and returns him to the outside location again. However as his agitations build, he is unable to remain outdoors and we find him back in this entrapped space, caught up in a physical repetition of a sequence that he is unable to escape. In this pattern his feet are still again, almost unable to move. His upper body slumps over to the floor, and he sharpens his spine into the upright position to regain the *kathak* starting position. His right pelvis and right arm collapse from the starting position to the floor, and his left arm held in the *kathak* position, rectifies his unruly right hand side of the body, as if through cerebral intervention. Familiar movement patterns from the starting section of the film start to infiltrate his fragmented body in short bursts, and what once seemed to be exciting articulations of his corporeal experiments now appear as moments in which Khan finds himself incarcerated. In returning to the physical and metaphoric space where Khan's explorations begin inside the warehouse the film does not offer any solutions to his agitated existence. Instead it demonstrates the cyclical process that Khan's body endures

in seeking articulation, thereby implying that his transient condition is unlikely to find an obvious solution. And perhaps most importantly, the corporeal experimentations that at times seem to move Khan towards a confident articulation of his negotiations, at other times are retrograde in moving him backwards into moments of amplified confusions. In this Khan dismantles the often romanticised associations of freedom associated with western identity and contemporary bodily expressions as both mythical and inadequate, in his own body's search for its unique intelligibility.

This inside-outside placement of Khan's body in different physical locations within the landscape of the Docklands, as captured through Davies' strategic filming, editing and use of graphics, evokes Sanjoy Roy's notion of 'inexclusion'. Arguing that the 'double-consciousness' of diasporic subjectivities need to be re-evaluated as more than products of bicultural allegiances, Roy extends its meaning to include the 'paradoxical sense of being inside and outside at the same time' (Roy 72), and terms this simultaneous sense of belonging and non-belonging as 'inexclusion'. This experience of 'inexclusion' is embodied in Khan's corporeality as he negotiates his ambivalent liminality somewhere between the confines of the warehouse and the vast outdoor space by the Thames. It is not a simple negotiation however, as when inside the warehouse Khan yearns for the outdoors, and while in the liberated landscape of the Docklands framed by the city, he finds himself drawn to the interiors of the warehouse again. He experiences belonging just as much as he experiences non-belonging in both spaces equally. His Bangladeshi heritage and the lexicon of *kathak* are as familiar to him as they are alien, just as his British identity and his contemporary movement training are both comforting and destabilising. Such 'inexclusion' can create a kind of hybridity:

in which the hybrid is not seen as a compound of separable parts, but a new form that is incompatible with the division which defines them *as* separate parts. This is a more unsettling sense, for the hybrid cannot be placed on the map of prior knowledge. (Roy 81)

This hybridity generated by Khan's body and accentuated further by being mapped into and onto the Dockland's landscape by Rachael Davies' film, achieves an unsettling aesthetic. Khan, with Davies' help, succeeds in mapping his subjectivity into a site that has historically ignored his (and in turn other diasporic subjects') presence, and in doing so generates a contemporary reality that cannot be understood on the basis of prior knowledge and practices.

An Auto-Ethnographic Enquiry

Through *Loose in Flight* Khan raises questions that explore the complex relationships between his diasporic identity, his complex relationship to the Docklands landscape and his own multiple corporealities. This self-reflexivity places Khan at the centre of his own enquiry and lends *Loose in Flight* the status of an auto-ethnography, 'a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay ctd. in Holt 18).²⁶ Khan's intellectual and artistic enquiry evokes dance scholar Theresa Buckland's postulations on the impact of postmodernism on recent developments in dance ethnography:

Ethnographic perspectives began to emphasise the socio-cultural construction and movement of the 'body', shifting from the objective study of dance in a cultural context to the experiential consideration of the emergent performance of cultural identities that are non-essential, fluid and relational. (Buckland 337)

She continues to state that this recent turn has led to an increased reliance on the researcher's immersive and experiential role as 'body witness', as an extension to

²⁶ In *Loose in Flight*, although Khan does now write his findings in the conventional sense, he does so in corporeal terms onto the landscape of the Docklands.

his/her distanced and objective role as an ‘eye witness’ within ethnographic enquiry (Buckland 340). This implies, as we observe in *Loose in Flight*, a collapse between the role of the enquirer and the enquiry itself (Buckland 340), as Khan becomes the subject of his own enquiry, thereby confirming Annalisa Piccirillo’s view of his practice as a ‘rational form of research’ (Piccirillo 31). As the piece endeavours to raise and work through corporeal, aesthetic and cultural conditions that are unique to Khan’s specific circumstances, it is fitting that he starts to experiment with his performance aesthetic within solo choreographic vignettes. The solo form is something Khan is comfortable with because of his prolonged training in *kathak*. As Nadine Meisner observes:

Khan well understands how the solo form needs, like a short story, to seize its moment trenchantly and mark out a clearly defined logic. [...] Performed with his extraordinary blend of liquidity and precise geometry, blurring speed and muscular density, this is consummate choreography [...]. (Meisner)

However this ‘clearly defined logic’ that Nadine Meisner refers to moves beyond the mere choreographic merit of the piece. Instead and more importantly, *Loose in Flight*’s ‘clearly defined logic’ is situated in its ability to exploit the solo form as praxis, raising questions about Khan’s own complex identity and corporeality, through generating an artefact in the form of the dance-film that continues to circulate in the public domain. However the film is more than an artefact that documents Khan’s experimentations for future peer review and is in and of itself a cinematic artwork. Just as Khan’s choreography in *Loose in Flight* breaks down the geometrical lines and precise rhythms of *kathak*’s structures, Rachael Davies seeks in her art the chance to fragment the conventional structures of commercial film-making. She attempts to ‘explore and isolate some of the more formal qualities of film’ (Khan and Davies) in order to locate Khan’s politicised body within the landscape, and to ‘create metaphors of movement in space and time’ (Khan and Davies). The artefact is therefore an inseparable and a

visceral part of Khan's auto-ethnographic endeavour and is as much a process in itself as it is an end product.

Through the dance-film Khan's corporeal enquiries equally seek to illuminate the place of the body within the political, cultural and social conditions of the diaspora. By 'concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated' (Spry 708), *Loose in Flight* emphasises the value of 'the methodological praxis of reintegrating [...] body and mind' (Spry 708) as a legitimate form of research. Auto-ethnographer Tami Spry comments emphatically on the historical denial of the body as a significant and salient source of knowledge within research:

When the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable. Enfleshed knowledge is restricted by linguistic patterns of positivist dualism – mind/body, objective/subjective – that fix the body as an entity incapable of literacy. (Spry 724)

As an auto-ethnography *Loose in Flight* overturns this historic logocentrism, by privileging corporeally embodied knowledge. It further evaluates Khan's role beyond the immediate scope of a performer and in the capacity of a researcher, emphasising him as the very 'epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process' (Spry 711) is operational. As an ethnographer who is none other than a 'socially embedded storyteller' (M. Smith 508), through the piece Khan tells his own story, the 'story of the body told through the body' (Langellier qtd. in Spry 710). In doing so he significantly extends his classical training as a *kathakar*, a storyteller, adept at rendering tales of heroic adventures, mythical creatures, divine romances and human conditions, imposed upon him via the Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He does this by strategically selecting the story he wants to tell and shaping the stylistic ways in which he narrates this, instead of feeling limited by the

codified structures and conventions of the *kathak* lexicon, while still retaining its basic principles. At first however, *abhinaya*, or the expressive modalities of *kathak* seem missing from *Loose in Flight* with its surface emphasis on *nritta*, the formal and technical layers of the dance form. However, the cinematic interventions of layering digitised images of iconic sites of the Docklands, the ability to cut between different locations, and the privileging of camera angles to direct an audience's gaze and attention become its expressive storytelling devices. They come to replace the apparently missing elements of *abhinaya* in Khan's moving body and assist integrally in the storytelling process by providing context and meaning to Khan's *nritta* led language. More importantly, by juxtaposing his physical isolation in a man-made environment, completely devoid of habitation, Khan lends the primarily solo format of *kathak* and its storytelling heritage a politicised edge. His physical isolation can be interpreted as a strategic commentary on the pressure put upon migrant communities in Britain to assimilate into mainstream society without adequate support, infrastructure and cultural understanding of their diasporic conditions. Thus through *Loose in Flight*, Khan becomes a 'socially embedded storyteller', where the story he tells is his own. In acknowledging his own identity and body politics as fragmented, partial and incomplete, Khan extends and politicises his storytelling training to evoke his own volatile condition, 'not as a single, completed identity, but as multiple, incomplete and partial identities [...]' (M. Smith 501) that constitute his contemporary diasporic reality.

Chapter 4

Intercultural Aesthetic in *Gnosis*

This chapter examines Khan's philosophy and aesthetic as an intercultural storyteller through an analysis of *Gnosis* (2010), a physical theatre piece that explores a mother-son relationship between Queen Gandhari and Prince Duryodhana from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. Through *Gnosis* the chapter unpicks the characteristics that ostensibly lend Khan's approach to interculturalism greater integrity, when evaluated against the critiques of 'the taxonomic "masterpieces" of the late 20th century' (Hollidge and Tompkins 113-114), as exemplified by Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* (1985, 1989). If according to Una Chaudhuri, the recent turn in intercultural performance practice has been 'to dislodge, once and for all, the handful of works and artists that have occupied interculturalism's center stage for so long' (Chaudhuri 34), then Khan can be cited as one such promising alternative. In his attempt to complicate the one-way traffic that has historically characterised the borrowing of non-western sources and performance traditions by western practitioners (D. Williams, 'Theatre of Innocence' 25), Khan's negotiation of his own postcolonial diasporic identity within *Gnosis* becomes a significant catalyst.

To demonstrate what distinguishes Khan and Brook as intercultural performance makers, a comparative analysis between *Gnosis* and *The Mahabharata* ensues. This comparison is validated by several points of contact between the two productions, and also between Khan and Brook themselves. While the source text of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* fuels both the pieces, it influences them in very different ways. Where Brook perceived the epic in universal terms and wanted to narrate its entirety through

his English theatre and film renditions, claiming that ‘it belongs to the world, not only to India’ (Brook ctd. in D. Williams, ‘Theatre of Innocence’ 24), *Gnosis* demonstrates a more personal take on the epic by examining a tiny dimension of a mother-son relationship between Queen Gandhari and Prince Duryodhana.²⁷ However the connection between Brook and Khan goes beyond their engagement with the same source text. At the age of thirteen Khan toured the world in Brook’s theatre production of *The Mahabharata*, performing the role of the Boy.²⁸ In the subsequent film adaptation of the epic, deemed too old to revive his original role, Khan played the role of Ekalavya.²⁹ He has cited this early encounter with Brook as seminal in cultivating his own formative vision of performance making (Ak. Khan, ‘Interview’). Khan’s return to the *Mahabharata* twenty odd years later is therefore a significant moment in his career trajectory, and a sophisticated response to Brook’s interculturalism. Moreover Khan’s focus on this mother-son dynamic within the *Mahabharata* is nuanced by his personal meditations on the influential bond between South Asian mothers and sons (Trawick,

²⁷ *The Mahabharata* was created originally in French, premiering at the Avignon Festival in 1985. However this chapter will focus primarily on the English version.

²⁸ Through the character of the Boy Brook created a simple narrative device to convey the complex themes and structures of the epic to his western audiences. The Boy became symbolic of each audience member, and the history of his ancestors, as narrated to him by the sage Vyasa, became the history of human civilisation. In Brook’s theatre production, Khan’s role was thus pivotal for its universal symbolism and its accessibility within the narrative device. However it is important to note the inherent politics that were at play in two western actors (Robert Langdon Lloyd as Vyasa and Bruce Myers as Ganesha) narrating the story of his ancestors to the Boy played by the non-western Khan. The passive reception of the narrative by the Boy is a shocking reminder of Orientalist discourse in which, historically, non-western people have been incapable of writing their own histories. In this context, *Gnosis* is Khan’s reclamation of his own non-western history through his own non-western perspective, and signals a shift from the passivity of the Boy to an active and turbulent depiction of his non-western identity as Duryodhana.

²⁹ In the *Mahabharata* Ekalavya is a young, low caste prince who is denied the tutelage of Drona to train as a warrior. Ekalavya tutors himself in the presence of a clay-statue of Drona and believes he is still guided by Drona’s blessings. Years later when Drona encounters Ekalavya’s superior skills at warfare, he demands *gurudakshina* (tutor’s fee), by asking Ekalavya to cut off his right thumb. Ekalavya promptly does so, demonstrating his loyalty and respect for the devious Drona, whose intention is to taint Ekalavya’s skill and destroy his future chances of becoming a superior archer.

Mandelbaum, Haddad, Bhopal and others), fuelled by his own relationship with his mother. This personal take on a diminutive aspect of the epic achieves two things simultaneously: firstly it attempts to rectify the charges laid upon Brook's treatment of the epic as naïve in its claims of universalism, and secondly it brings to attention an aspect of the epic which historically has been ignored. Thus Khan's personal engagement with this minute aspect of the epic creates a more ambiguous interpretation of its themes, and challenges the universal fervour of Brook's treatment of the epic.

To validate these claims, the chapter begins with an evaluative summary of the critiques that have been aimed at Brook's *Mahabharata*. It then examines Khan's ambiguous 'outsider-insider' relationship to the source text of the *Mahabharata*, vis-à-vis his postcolonial diasporic identity as a British man of Bangladeshi heritage, and how this enables a sensitive and nuanced handling of the epic's themes. The chapter moves on to a detailed description and analysis of *Gnosis* with an emphasis on Khan's personal meditations on mother-son relationships in the South Asian culture, as captured in his depiction of the Gandhari and Duryodhana relationship. Finally, the chapter conducts an extensive comparative analysis between Khan's intercultural strategies in *Gnosis* set against Brook's intercultural vision in *The Mahabharata*, by examining the primary medium of communication in each performance. I propose that one of the astute ways in which Khan minimises the risk of being attacked by the same lines of critiques (by theatre scholars Rustom Bharucha, Gautam Dasgupta, Una Chaudhuri and others) that were aimed at Brook's production, is by relegating the need to tell the story of Gandhari and Duryodhana through a reliance on text. Instead Khan opts for an impressionistic, visual and physical medium where interactions between two bodies provide suggestive glimpses of the mother-son relationship, and the ambiguity generated through their

physicality refuses to concretise their stories. This inherent fluidity makes *Gnosis* a performance that is open for rich and subjective interpretations.

Brook's *Mahabharata* and its Critics

If *Gnosis* embodies Khan's approach to interculturalism as an artistic response to Brook's *The Mahabharata*, then an evaluative summary of the criticisms aimed at Brook's intercultural vision is vital to underpin the subsequent comparative analysis of these two productions. Moreover a summary of this critical literature will also help situate Khan's approach to intercultural performance making within what has remained a historically turbulent critical field.

Brook's quest for universalism in theatre has been the subject of relentless attacks by postcolonial critiques. While *The Mahabharata* has attracted the most critical attention in its 'blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years' (Bharucha 1642), David Williams observes that several postcolonial critics accuse Brook of being a 'self-appointed representative of a "universal culture"' (D. Williams, 'Theatre of Innocence' 24), in light of his similar-veined projects with mythologies from Iran, Africa and native America. Amongst them the voice of Rustom Bharucha remains a cornerstone. Bharucha's seminal essay on Brook's *The Mahabharata* counters celebratory claims by mostly western critics, and provides an Indian perspective on Brook's tactless borrowing of India's *itihasa*, her living 'history in all its detail and density' (Bharucha 1642).³⁰ He goes on to observe:

³⁰ Such celebratory reviews continue into more recent times. Even in 2006 Milly S. Barranger writes that '[Brook's] efforts to transform a Hindu myth into universalized art, accessible to any and all cultures, are triumphant' (Barranger 234). Barranger uses problematic and long challenged terminology like 'Eastern' theatre and 'Eastern' martial arts to commend Brook's use of traditional arts forms to depict a sense of universalism within *The Mahabharata*.

At one level, there is not much one can do about stopping such adaptations. After all, there is no copyright on the *Mahabharata* (does it belong to India alone? or is it an Indian text that belongs to the world?). I am not for a moment suggesting that westerners should be banned from touching our sacred texts. [...] All I wish to assert is that the *Mahabharata* must be seen on as many levels as possible within the Indian context, so that its meaning (or rather, multiple levels of meaning) can have some bearing on the lives of the Indian people for whom the *Mahabharata* was written, and who continue to derive their strength from it. (Bharucha 1642-1643)³¹

Bharucha's critique extends beyond the use of the source text itself and includes Brook's borrowings from Indian performance traditions and cultural artefacts, 'converting them into raw material for his own intellectual experiments' (Bharucha 1642). He concludes by noting that imbalanced levels of power and privilege between participating cultures in such exchanges can evoke in intercultural performances a prevailing spirit of neo-imperialism (Bharucha 1642). Theatre scholars Paul Allain and Jen Harvie warn about the power dynamics at play within intercultural projects and observe that 'because intercultural exchange often occurs between cultures with different levels of privilege and power, it can be exploitative, lacking respect or reciprocity or treating culture as commodity' (Allain and Harvey 164). In the light of the history between India and Britain, the positions of power within Brook's project were undoubtedly imbalanced and further exacerbated by the Indian government's cooperation in giving Brook unlimited access to the culture in 'playing the host' (Bharucha 1642) while simultaneously 'submitting to deference and exploitation' (Bharucha 1642).

³¹ In claiming that the *Mahabharata* is a primarily Indian text, Bharucha seems to not fully acknowledge those other South Asian and South East Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Indonesia, whose cultural histories have not just borrowed the Indian epic, but are just as intrinsically informed by it, and whose performance traditions continue to narrate stories from the epic in locally specific ways. Thus to regard the epic as primarily belonging to India, as a lot of scholars do when critiquing Brook's *Mahabharata*, is an idea that needs loosening. I clarify here therefore that while I continue to use India and Indian culture in my terminology when discussing the epic, because of referencing scholars whose analysis is located from within India, I acknowledge through these terms a wider reach of the epic and its impact on other South and South East Asian cultures.

While less inflammatory in tone, other scholars articulate similar points of concern with Brook's production. Gautam Dasgupta reiterates the complex significance that the epic holds in the lives of Indians as 'a revelatory injunction, ethical and theological in purpose, that determines and defines the social and personal interactions of millions of Indians' (G. Dasgupta 263). Brook's interpretation, in his desire to 'chisel free a viable narrative spine from this sprawling material' (D. Williams, 'Theatre of Innocence' 22), fails to capture these complex levels at which the epic operates in India. Acknowledging Brook as an important western performance maker who has experienced the inevitable challenges and pitfalls of intercultural dialogue, several western scholars like Robert Gordon, Marvin Carlson and Phillip Zarrilli however note that Brook's creolised version of the epic was 'a trendy western performance that consciously and unconsciously misses the point of the original, creating a palatable Asian culture acceptable to Western viewers' (Gordon 331). They question the problematic nature of the artistic licence that one exercises in such endeavours. Emphasising the importance of giving back to the contexts that Brook borrowed from, Probir Guha, director of The Living Theatre in West Bengal and the primary point of contact for Brook to the arts of the region concludes:

If Brook brings this *Mahabharata* to India and goes to the villages where he worked and shows people what he has done with their materials, then he is really being honest. And if he doesn't do it, then I would call it cultural piracy. (Guha qtd. in Zarrilli 98)

A more sympathetic view comes from Maria Shevtsova who endorses Brook's search for a universal human condition through theatre, and argues that artists possess the creative licence to exercise individual interpretations when creating art (Shevtsova 99-100). Una Chaudhuri identifies in Brook's work evocations, not of the universal, but of diasporic spaces of the global times and writes that in *Mahabharata*:

The goal of universality is confounded by the performance of difference. In working out of place, the cast works out a new place. [...] Whatever the magnificent philosophical vision behind [Brook's] play, for me its performance gave way to an altogether different vision, not universal and eternal but very much of our diasporic times and multicultural places. (Chaudhuri qtd. in D. Williams, 'Assembling' 242)

The most supportive view from India comes from the Bengali film-maker and film historian, Chidananda Dasgupta who critiques the spirit of 'nation-state chauvinism' (C. Dasgupta 1) that perpetuates the idea that cultural traditions and artefacts are born in and owned by a nation alone (C. Dasgupta 1). Referring to Brook's outsider identity to the Indian nation, he cynically questions whether cultures should be 'hermetically sealed off except where the outsider can become an insider through a lifelong effort?' (C. Dasgupta 1). He notes that in a fast 'shrinking world [...] hybridization has been, and remains, an essential part of the flow of cultures' (C. Dasgupta 1).

Central to the critiques above are the following issues: Brook's handling of the source text without adequate consideration of its significance to its people; his borrowing of performance traditions and cultural artefacts from India and their use out of context; the denial of the epic's cultural specificity in favour of presenting a palatable version of India to a primarily western audience; the inherent imbalance in the power-dynamic between the cultures involved in the exchange; and finally, and perhaps most importantly, Brook's 'outsider' relationship to the source text itself, which arguably triggered a lack of understanding and sensitivity towards the other issues in the first place. If the status of Brook as a white British outsider to the Indian culture underscores the criticisms of his intercultural treatment of the epic, then Khan's access to and handling of the epic begs analysis in the same vein. Any subsequent analysis of *Gnosis* needs, above all then, to be conducted in the light of Khan's simultaneous 'outsider-insider' relationship to the source text of the *Mahabharata*, vis-à-vis his postcolonial

diasporic identity as a British Muslim man of Bangladeshi heritage and deserves scrutiny.

Khan's 'Insider-Outsider' Relationship with the Source Text

Khan's suitability as a potential 'insider' interpreter of the epic can be questioned by Bharucha's suggestion that only an internalised understanding of the epic from within the Indian context can provide insight into its cultural specificities, in order to interpret the text with sensitivity and integrity (Bharucha 1643). Bharucha's Indian-centric view has in recent decades been complicated by the development of a Hindu nationalist spirit which claims the epic as a Hindu nationalist text and the cornerstone of Hindu philosophy and doctrines.³² This would by implication deny Indian Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis (like Bharucha himself), and other South and South East Asian Hindu cultures, a claim upon the epic as their shared cultural artefact. Sanjoy Majumdar explains this nationalist move that reifies the Hindu-ness of the nation:

Militant Hindu nationalists insist that the essence of being an Indian is being Hindu, which they call "Hindutva", a term coined in 1923 to construct an identification of the Hindu community within the Indian nation. (Majumdar 208)

As a second generation British Muslim of Bangladeshi ancestry Khan is neither Indian as per Bharucha's view, nor Hindu as per the Hindutva spirit, and on these grounds he would appear to be an 'outsider' to the source text. However his encounter with Indian culture through a combination of circumstances in the British diasporic context, could counter this claim to some extent. These include his tutelage under the Hindu Indian guru Pratap Pawar in *kathak* that would have required knowledge and dramatisation of

³² I must emphasise here that by pointing out Bharucha's Indian-centric discussions of the epic, I am not aligning him with the Hindutva philosophy.

stories from Hindu epics, his childhood interactions with other South Asians in London through a diasporic pan-ethnicity that helped foster a collective sense of South Asianness, his engagement with the *Mahabharata* under the directorial guidance of Brook, and most importantly the Bengali identity of his Bangladeshi parents who immigrated to Britain shortly after Bangladesh attained independence in 1971. The formation of Bangladeshi national identity has been a complex process of attempted syncretism between Bengali cultural identity and Islamic religious identity (Kabeer 38). Leaving Bangladesh very soon after the nation achieved independence, Khan's parents carried with them this indigenous and syncretic Bengali culture that embraced Islamic practices alongside Bengali language, literature and cultural practices in equal measure. In my interview with Anwara Khan it becomes evident that as she transmitted Bengali home-culture to Khan and his sister in the diasporic context, she introduced them to Bengali (and Indian) literature like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and the novels of Rabindranath Tagore, as well as Islamic religious and cultural texts. Therefore while at both Indian and Bangladeshi nationalist levels Khan maybe considered an 'outsider' to the epic, at a pan-ethnic, diasporic and cultural level, the complexity of his parents' syncretic Bengali Bangladeshi identity would have managed to counter such hegemonic perceptions by providing him access as an 'insider'.

I propose therefore while Brook's interpretation lacks depth and insight as an 'outsider' to the epic, Khan's complex 'insider-outsider' relationship to it lends his treatment of *Gnosis* more integrity. Moreover his own pan-ethnic South Asianness in the diasporic context nuances his depictions of South Asian mother-son relationships through referencing his relationship with his own mother. It also minimises the chances of an Orientalist representation of India, as evoked by Brook through exoticised use of

colours, fabrics, costumes and ritualistic gestures that collectively aimed to create the ‘flavour’ of India in *The Mahabharata*. In *Gnosis* Khan veers away from these sumptuous colours and fabrics of Brook’s scenography in *The Mahabharata*. In sharp contrast to Brook’s rich and vibrant costumes, Khan as Duryodhana is dressed in a black *sherwani*, an austere north Indian costume for men, comprised of a long and fitted tunic with fitted trousers. The use of an understated but ominous black undercuts the stereotypical western image of India as colourful and exotic. Alongside him Gandhari is dressed in a gathered, ankle-length black skirt, contrasted by a starkly white and fitted upper bodice. Lit in very cold steels and confined within squares and rectangles, Khan’s *Gnosis* is disturbingly tangible and as far from the Orientalist imagery of India that Brook evoked in his depictions of the culture.

Khan’s ‘insider-outsider’ identity and access to Indian culture and the epic is thus arguably fundamental to colouring his approach to interculturalism within *Gnosis*. Moreover Khan’s own culturally syncretised corporeality and identity lends him an embodied presence that is in itself fundamentally intercultural, depicting a body that is permeated by intercultural receptivity at organic levels. Such organic cultural syncretism shifts the notion of intercultural performance-making from the realms of a cerebral exercise to a more embodied articulation of interculturality. In this context Khan evokes Cheryl Stock’s writing about some specific examples of Australian intercultural choreographic practices where ‘interculturality already resides within the artists’ own body and practice’ (Stock 287). Khan’s intercultural body takes centre stage in *Gnosis* and its complex nuances are ‘played out in a multiplicity of ways’ (Stock 287).

***Gnosis*: An Evening of Distinct Halves?**

Gnosis is described by *The Telegraph* reviewer Sarah Crompton as a ‘programme of distinct halves’ (Crompton). While the thrust of this chapter is concerned with the second half of *Gnosis*, a brief holistic overview of the programme and an understanding of its interdependent layers are vital for the analysis that follows. Over the course of the evening Khan transforms from the classical *kathak* dancer of the first half (which sees him revive two earlier works of *Polaroid Feet* and *Tarana*), into the contemporary physical theatre performer of the second in its interpretation of the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship. As Khan moves from the classical to the contemporary vocabulary, he is keen to emphasise the ‘process of transformation that never entirely abandons its source’ (Jaggi). He notes the spirit of experimentation that is at the heart of the piece:

I was interested [...] to see how one can transform the form of Kathak, not only through the vocabulary of movement but also through the overall presentation of the piece. So, even though we begin the show in a classical set up, by the middle of the journey I begin to deconstruct the formal presentation and to transform it into an informal situation. (Ak. Khan, ‘*Gnosis* Programme Notes’)

The evening begins with a revival of *Polaroid Feet*. Accompanied by a Sanskrit hymn Khan offers salutations to the *ardhanarishwar* (half-man and half-woman) form of the Hindu God Shiva and his consort Goddess Parvati. The second piece *Tarana* opens with Khan sat in an Islamic prayer position reminiscent of the ritual of *namaz*, and offers salutations to Allah before breaking into a pure rendition of technical prowess. Through *abhinaya* in *Polaroid Feet* and *nritta* in *Tarana*, Khan brings together the syncretism in *kathak* between its Hindu and Islamic roots. An *Unplugged* section follows where Khan breaks the formal presentation mode of the evening thus far, and addresses the audience directly to explain the principles of *kathak*, while introducing his musicians from India, Pakistan, UK and Japan, whose dialogue with him are vital to *Gnosis*. This ‘classical

jam session' (Jennings) focuses on improvisatory exchanges between Khan and the musicians and between the musicians themselves. More importantly it educates the audience into the mathematical and artistic principles of *kathak*. Audience members and critics however react differently to Khan's mode of direct address. Neil Norman from *The Express* writes:

Khan's insistence on breaking the mood by addressing the audience and introducing his admittedly superb musicians is tiresome and unnecessary, however. Few have come to hear him speak and the result is invariably naff. (Norman)

The implication that people have come to watch him *just* dance is troubling as it suggests that they are not interested in learning about *kathak*. Moreover they seem to want to view Khan's art through the same dramaturgical lens with which one views western ballet, which sustains the proscenium arch fourth-wall experience without ever breaking its illusion. Perhaps Khan's deliberate breaking down of the fourth-wall unsettles them and reveals their insecurities about how to best understand a performance language they are unfamiliar with. As long as Khan continues to provide for them a sanitised access to his non-western aesthetic through *just* dancing, which is made palatable in the London intelligentsia venue of Sadler's Wells, these audience members feel satisfied. Khan's direct address to the audience attempts to undermine precisely this kind of exoticisation of himself and his art by those who do not want to hear him speak.³³ Other critics realise this and suggest that as Khan 'chats nonchalantly to the audience' (O'Donovan), he is humble, 'fragile and nervous within performance' (O'Donovan), and this helps de-exoticise the form itself. The first part of the evening thus ends with a rudimentary (but still valuable) exposition on *kathak*. It prepares the

³³ It is not just the critics I aim this argument at but also members of the audience. During the interval I heard some exchange about the classical half of the evening. It troubled me to realise that while they described Khan's movement as beautiful and dynamic, they also used the word exotic. These audience members seem not to want to read his movement beyond its inaccessible and codified form, even as Khan provided access to the very codifications that define *kathak*.

audience to attempt to locate how some of these principles are going to be deconstructed and transformed, as Khan enters the contemporary language of *Gnosis* after the interval.

Commenting on the evening of two halves, Sarah Crompton observes that ‘what unites the disparate parts, is the set – a black, crumpled cloth transformed by Fabiana Piccioli’s lighting into a cave, a cliff, or a wall of darkness – and the purity of Khan’s movement [...]’ (Crompton). She seems to disregard the significant repetition of the haunting image of a body whose electric presence centre stage, lit by a rectangular shaft of light, opens both the first and the second half of *Gnosis*. This body does not belong to Khan but to the Japanese Taiko drummer, singer and performer Yoshie Sunahata, who is an integral part of *Gnosis*’ extraordinary ensemble. In a programme publicised as Khan’s ‘new solo’ where Sunahata is listed as a musician, the emphatic presence of her body centre stage counters this claim. The second half of *Gnosis* is in every sense ‘a duet rather than a solo’ (Anderson) and to this end, the ambiguity of the publicity surrounding the programme is misleading. This deceptive accreditation in the programme for *Gnosis* works like a charm, as the audience get to experience Sunahata’s inspirational drumming through the first half of the evening, before gradually encountering her as a powerful performer and an evocative singer in the role of Gandhari during the second half. But it deserves a brief scrutiny.

Prior to *Gnosis* Khan had entered a triptych of high-profile duet collaborations with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in *zero degrees*, Sylvie Guillem in *Sacred Monsters* and Juliette Binoche in *In-I*. While *zero degrees* achieved the highest critical acclaim and won accolades of awards in the contemporary dance world, through *Sacred Monsters* and *In-I*, ‘Khan embarked on a journey of diminishing returns’ (Jennings) in their

explorations of ‘dispiriting layers of conceptual theory’ (Jennings) that often reeked of ‘self-indulgent eccentricity’ (Watts). In a television interview on the making of *In-I*, Khan and Binoche both acknowledged the tensions they had experienced in their creative process that had clearly strained their dialogue. These fraught collaborations would have coloured Khan’s approach to future duets. It may explain why Sunahata was initially brought in as a musician, but only gradually began to occupy a larger position within *Gnosis* as her multitudinous skills became apparent. Perhaps Khan did not want to curse the creative potential he could foresee in Sunahata as Gandhari by admitting he was entering into another duet. Perhaps he wanted Sunahata to be a revelation to the audience in the same way she had been to him. While Khan can be accused of not acknowledging the extent of Sunahata’s contributions to *Gnosis* in the programme, in the performance he put into place several clues that gave weight to the position she occupied in the piece. His special attention to detail during her introduction to the audience was one such aural clue. But the more significant visual clue was the haunting image of her charged and resilient body, centre stage, lit by the rectangular shaft of stark light, that opened the first and the second half of *Gnosis*.

The Gandhari-Duryodhana Dialogue

The second half of *Gnosis* demonstrates Khan’s ‘innovative intelligence’ (Frater) and is an austere reminder that he is equally proficient as a performer and a performance maker within the physical theatre genre. At the heart of this piece is the character of Queen Gandhari from the *Mahabharata*, who when forced to marry the blind king Dhritarashtra, chose to blindfold herself for the rest of her life. While this act is perpetuated in the Indian culture as an act of self-sacrifice, signalling subservience to her husband and the epitome of the obedient wife, Maya Jaggi suggests that ‘the act of

tying on a blindfold for life might be powerful self-determination rather than subservience. It could suggest pride, courage, strength and honour, in remaining faithful to a sacred vow, no matter the cost' (Jaggi). Khan admits that the image of Gandhari as a silent but resilient rebel (Alam 1517), the complexity of her character and her resolve to remain blindfolded throughout the births, marriages and deaths of her hundred children, despite having the choice to remove the cloth at any point, had always intrigued him (Ak. Khan, 'Gnosis Programme Notes'). His own affinity to the character of Duryodhana is also evocative of his tendency of being drawn to explore theatrical manifestations of complex and dark characters who are often deemed as anti-establishment, but require more nuanced readings (Ak. Khan, 'Interview'). Perhaps Gandhari's resolve and Duryodhana's complexity resonated at a personal level for Khan as he recognised the relentlessness with which his mother Anwara Khan, like many South Asian mothers in the diaspora, withstood the pressures of being 'pervaded by a profound tension, perhaps even a split [...] sundered in contests between "tradition" and "modernity"' (Jolly 1) in negotiating between herself and her children within the diaspora.³⁴ Despite all such adversities and pressures of assimilation these mothers continued to transmit vital aspects of home-culture to their British born children, and played an active role in their children's identity formation in the diaspora (Ramji 227). He implies such personal affiliations to the Gandhari-Duryodhana myth when he acknowledges that Gandhari's character merely opens up possibilities to explore themes, 'landscapes, images, sketches from which ideas spring, and are then transformed into a more personal interpretation of the story' (Ak. Khan, 'Gnosis Programme Notes'). Moreover just as Margaret Jolly suggests that in the colonial and

³⁴ While Margaret Jolly writes about motherhood in colonial and postcolonial contexts in South Asia itself, a lot of her material is equally applicable to the conditions that governed motherhood amongst the South Asian diaspora.

postcolonial South Asian context, ‘the mother has been marginalized in debates about maternity’ (Jolly 2), Khan acknowledges the historical marginalisation of mothers such as Gandhari from the epic and rectifies this imbalance by insisting ‘on her centrality’ (Jolly 2) in *Gnosis*.

While drawing on Gandhari’s extraordinary qualities but not wishing to dramatise her story, *Gnosis* successfully moves away from factual storytelling and dwells instead on imagery and ‘ideas of blindness, of vulnerability and strength’ (Anderson). Khan depicts the woman’s story through imagistic glimpses that are mere suggestions of the relationship between Gandhari, the mother and Duryodhana, her first born son. What makes these suggestions tangible is the ability to read the mother-son interactions beyond the myth, into the realm of contemporary diasporic South Asian mother-son exchanges, mediated through Khan’s relationship with his mother. However just as Khan does not dramatise the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship from the epic, he equally does not focus solely on the relationship between his mother and himself. These connections are instead insinuated and provide a richer reading of the piece in keeping with spirit of the genre of physical theatre and its placement of the self in the piece in a Grotowskian manner:

By confronting the everyday self [...] Grotowski hopes to produce revelation [...]. The actor uses the “role as if it were a surgeon’s scalpel, to dissect himself [...] in order to sacrifice it, expose it”. This act of self-exposure and sacrifice is an invitation to the spectator to do the same thing of a less extreme level, to discover and confront the truth about herself. (Grotowski ctd. in Auslander, ‘Just be Yourself’ 57)

In the light of the above passage, *Gnosis* becomes a way for audience members, particularly South Asian diasporic individuals, to reflect on their own relationships with their mothers and evaluate the cultural and political tensions that permeate first and second generation exchanges in the diasporic context. And Gandhari and Duryodhana

become symbolic vehicles through which Khan and Sunahata can enable the audience to undertake this journey with them. Constructing Gandhari as a rebel, Jayanti Alam notes that having restricted her own sight through choice Gandhari's 'inner eyes, behind the blindfolded ones, seemed to have developed special power of seeing that which normal eyesight could not detect' (Alam 1517). She used her inner wisdom and knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek) to warn her husband and king Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana of the impending disaster upon their clan, if they continued to conduct their political affairs on the basis of personal prejudices and ambitions, over justice and the welfare of the kingdom (Alam 1517). In his attempt to depict the complexities of Gandhari's character, Khan manages to capture her resilience, her valour and her internalised fiery power in Sunahata. Simultaneously his own agile, volatile and impulsive body embodies Duryodhana's restlessness and the conflicting dualism between his immense respect for his mother and his single-minded and ruthless ambition.³⁵

³⁵ It is worth noting that while my reading of *Gnosis* analyses Sunahata as Gandhari and Khan as Duryodhana, Judith Mackrell's review in *The Guardian* on the 27th of April 2010 provided an alternative reading where Sunahata played the blind king Dhritarashtra and Khan played the role of Gandhari. On the 28th of April, Mackrell wrote an official apology on *The Guardian* website for her own misreading of the characters. It is fair to say that to someone who is unfamiliar with the epic and who could not follow the accompanying lyrics in Hindi that supported the physical explorations between Sunahata and Khan, some ambiguity over the characterisations can arise. The reason why I would propose that Sunahata and Khan did not portray the king and queen is because within their physical interactions, no sign of marital intimacy was ever suggested. Instead images of obedience and subservience of Khan to Sunahata were depicted repeatedly through culturally coded gestures, symbolising South Asian mother-son interactions. In addition, the decision to use a white staff to symbolise Sunahata's blindness instead of a blindfold was in order to maximise the multiple symbolic and utilitarian possibilities presented by the staff, through which their relationship was subsequently explored. Finally, following the model of his ex-collaborator Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's use of languages which are deliberately unfamiliar to the audience (Uytterhoeven 11), Khan chose to create an alienating effect that the audience would have to work through, if they wished to understand the significance of the accompanying Hindi lyrics. At one point the lyrics explicitly expressed Duryodhana's imploring request to Gandhari to support his cause and ambition through the repeated use of the phrase '*sun meri Ma sun*' (translated to mean 'listen to me my mother') and accompanied Duryodhana's *abhinaya* before Gandhari.

The evocation of Gandhari and Duryodhana begins in darkness to the sound of static. Gradually a stark, steel, cold and vertically rectangular shaft of light illuminates the centre stage. Into this light, walking impossibly slowly appears the frame of Sunahata. Even as she appears calm and collected on the exterior, her internally heightened focus is palpable through the muscular tensions visible in her body. This image hauntingly mirrors Khan's appearance in the beginning of the first half, evoked by her powerful drumming. As Sunahata reaches the centre of the pool of light, she stops and holds forward a white staff horizontally in the palms of her extended hands, as though making an offering of it to the audience. After touching her forehead reverentially to the staff, she places it on the floor with great care and slowly returns to standing. This ritualistic reverence lends the staff an immediate significance and marks the beginning of the 'Ritual of Birth' sequence. Sunahata as Gandhari brings her arms to her chest and begins to slowly trace a wide circle with them, extending them first to the left, then over her head, to the right and back to the centre. As her arms reach above her head, her upper body shifts its focus to the left and her right leg extends behind her into a deep pli  . Then she returns to her starting position and begins the movement all over again. The slowness of the movement demonstrates her extreme bodily control and focus. At a mesmerizingly slow speed, this initial motif transforms into the next that mimes the beating of a drum with 'deep lunges in profile, sculptural and strong' (Anderson). Sunahata continues to repeat this movement endlessly as she shifts from side to side through an exhaustingly low centre of gravity. The motif builds in momentum, while still retaining its forceful and compelling precision, despite the frenzy. Her physical exhaustion colours her facial expressions as it screws up with tension and pain. Through the most evocatively choreographed abstraction, Sunahata embodies the prolonged and painful labour of childbirth, as experienced by Gandhari in

the epic where her pregnancy is believed to have lasted an unusually long time.³⁶ Through an evocation of Baudrillardian simulacrum, Sunahata's exhausting repetition of the motif builds to a crescendo, until out of the dark emerges Khan's body. He appears from behind her as though generated by her energy and her very being, and begins to echo her motif in perfect synchronicity. Duryodhana is born.

Their synchronisation is flawless and creates a beautiful image of the intimate and umbilical bond between mother and child until in fleeting and disturbing moments, Duryodhana falls out of rhythm to taste his own independence before returning to Gandhari's protective rhythm. The mother senses her son's restless attempts to break free and the faintest lines of worry crease her forehead. But she continues in her movement pattern, occasionally holding on to an imaginary sphere in between her hands, nurturing the ball of flesh for the birth of her remaining ninety-nine children. Duryodhana mirrors this image, taking protectoral charge of his siblings. Gradually the birthing process draws to an end, as Gandhari collapses slowly to the floor, exhausted and fragile. She is disturbingly controlled like a puppet by her son's hands before he breaks out into an ominous and fearless series of *chakkars*, occupying every inch of the space and marking his territory. She seems aware of the signs of his controlling nature and senses darker energies within Duryodhana's being, yet too weary to counter them. These tiny emotional significations from both Khan and Sunahata capture with subtlety the controversies surrounding Duryodhana's birth in the epic, the supposed omens that predicted he would bring devastation to his race, and Gandhari and Dhritarashtra's

³⁶ In frustration she is believed to have beaten her womb with a rod, from which emerged a hardened mass of grey coloured flesh. To console Gandhari from devastation, Vyasa, the sage and author of the epic, divided the ball of flesh into one hundred equal pieces, and put them in pots which were sealed and buried into the earth for one year. At the end of the year, the first pot was opened and Duryodhana emerged.

inability to abandon their first born despite being counselled to do so for the welfare of the family.

The 'Play of Innocence' begins with Gandhari scrambling around on the floor for her white staff to symbolise her lack of vision. She stands up supported by the stick, raises it vertically high into the air and brings it down to hit the floor in front of her. At this very same instant the lighting snaps into a yellow square, signalling a transition into the next phase. As Duryodhana lies collapsed in a heap in the back of the square having lost control of his spins, Gandhari tries to locate him by using the stick to feel the ground around her until it makes contact with his body. Duryodhana enters a stubborn and childish game with his mother, refusing to give her easy access to himself. He holds onto her stick, lets her pull him by the stick across the floor, and repeatedly stands up and falls into a heap again. Occasionally he is distracted by hearing someone whisper his name in an alluring manner, but he cannot locate its source. In absence of her vision Gandhari's staff not only signifies her chosen blindness, but also doubles up as a disciplinarian tool for Duryodhana, as she experiences him grow up through these tactile means. Moreover if as Margaret Trawick suggests, a mother's loving gaze upon her child is the most dangerous and tainted gaze of all (Trawick 42), then Gandhari's chosen blindness physically prevents her from gazing lovingly at Duryodhana, and thereby contains and limits her maternal love for him (Trawick 43).³⁷ They play games with each other. Duryodhana refuses to be entrapped by her embrace (and by implication her *dharma*), as his nimble body weaves in and out of the narrowest of spaces defined between Gandhari's body and her creative use of her staff. When his

³⁷ I note here that while Margaret Trawick's ethnographic study focuses on the different displays of love in a Tamil family from the south of India it is also relevant in most South Asian contexts, because the significance and valued status of a mother's love for her son is shared across most South Asian cultures (Mandelbaum, Haddad, Zaman, Bhopal and others).

behaviour gets too stubborn Gandhari's face expresses anxiety and despair, warranting Duryodhana to alternate between picking her up in an affectionate embrace, and asking for her forgiveness and blessings by placing her hands upon his head. As the playfulness continues to shift between affection and agitation, Duryodhana dodges the staff as it swings through the air while simultaneously escaping his mother's desire to touch his face. It is a remarkable feat of choreography, heightened by Khan's and Sunahata's emotional commitment to their characters. Finally Duryodhana goes too far, and manages to take the staff away from his mother's hands, leaving her to feel her way through the space with her arms stretched out and her face full of fear and apprehension. He knows he has overstepped the mark and returns the staff to her. As a final act of enforcing discipline, Gandhari positions her staff at the centre of his chest and pushes him to fully suspend his body weight at that singular point of contact, as she would an opponent in a game. The act appears both tender and cruel at once. As Trawick explains 'acts embodying the cruelty of love could also and simultaneously be acts hiding its tenderness' (Trawick 48). Thus physical affection for children is 'expressed not through caresses but roughly in the form of painful pinches, slaps and tweaks [...]' (Trawick 48).

Caught between his mother's love and discipline, and his obsessive ambition, 'Greed and Power' traces the turn of Duryodhana into the villain of the epic. The alluring whispers of his name become so frequent and compelling that he cannot resist falling prey to the darker intentions they stand for. In the epic Duryodhana is goaded by his uncle, Gandhari's brother Shakuni, into waging war against his cousins the Pandavas, and despite his mother's counsel he lets Shakuni lead him astray. In *Gnosis*, at first Duryodhana repeatedly kneels before Gandhari, head bowed in respect and

hands folded in a gesture of prayer, pleading for his mother's support and understanding. Soon realising that he has deeply upset her he observes penance by lying down horizontally before Gandhari's feet and guiding her right foot onto his chest so she can walk over him repeatedly. When this fails to appease her, through a beautifully performed *abhinaya* section, Duryodhana tries to assert his voice before his mother which appears in the form of accompanying live Hindi lyrics. The recital requests his mother to listen to him (*sun meri ma soon*) and pleads with Gandhari to pray that Krishna will help him in the war ahead (*Krishna meri madat kare*). Gandhari's sorrow and betrayal keeps her from accepting her son's attempts at reconciliation and demonstrates that 'the emotional power of the mother in any form is dangerous: it is intense and it can easily turn into rage' (Trawick 60). She turns her body repeatedly away from him and physically brushes off his attempts to make her bless him by placing her hands on his head. Spawned by Gandhari's endless rejection Duryodhana turns aggressive, and violently forces her to acknowledge him by grasping her body in his arms (reminiscent of their earlier affectionate play but this time with a more forceful intention) and swings her body around in the space before putting her down carelessly. In disobeying Gandhari's advice and his tactless handling of the 'closest and most enduring emotional relationship [...] between mother and son' (Zaman 48), Duryodhana puts his own interests before his mother's and fails to protect 'her from whatever disturbs her' (Haddad 66).³⁸ Gandhari's desperation reaches a crescendo as she wields her staff into the air and crumbles to the floor in anticipation of her son's self-destruction. In the ambiguous moment that follows, Duryodhana kneels down to support Gandhari's trembling body on his shoulders, as she surrenders her staff to him

³⁸ Shahaduz Zaman and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad both write extensively on the relationship between mother and son in Islamic South Asian contexts.

and leaves as though accepting defeat to the situation she cannot prevent from unfolding.³⁹

As Duryodhana transforms from ‘Man to Beast’ his mother’s white staff exerts upon him, both physically and metaphorically, the moralistic pressures of *dharma* and *karma*. The disciplinarian tool of his childhood transforms into a weapon that judges his lack of justice and righteousness. With his back to the audience Duryodhana places the staff horizontally across his neck and visibly caves under its force. He bends backwards, arms suspended in the air, precariously off-balance, as his body responds to the metaphoric pressure through erratic and sharp movements. Swathed in a dramatic red pool of light, Duryodhana is an image of terror and pity all at once. Realising that the staff will be a constant reminder of his mother and her path of *dharma* which he never followed, he flings it away from him and accepts he is alone in his ambitious self-destructive vision of conquering the world.

‘Mourning and Fire’ depicts the devastating and tragic death of Duryodhana experienced from Gandhari’s perspective, as she returns to lament his inevitable passing through the eerie sounds of a Japanese song that sounds like a haunting lullaby. What Gandhari cannot witness through her eyes is palpable within her body, intensified and magnified through her maternal instincts, and as Sunahata sings, her body creases up in sorrow, anger and helplessness. She appears onto the stage, arms stretched out, in a longing to cradle her child and protect him from his painful end. In the epic

³⁹ This exchanging of the staff between Gandhari and Duryodhana may have led some critics to believe that in the final section of the piece, it is Khan who performs the death of Gandhari’s in a forest fire (I. Brown); that in the passing of this symbolised matrix (Kirby) of blindness, the characters swap roles. I propose instead that the characters do not swap roles. Therefore I interpret the passing of the staff as not indicative of change of characters but of the reluctant transference of power from mother to son.

Duryodhana's death is long and painful, and the gradual disintegration of Khan's body over a period of about ten to twelve minutes depicts this in a very disturbing manner. His feet shuffle from side to side as 'his hands at first cradling his face, like a mother caressing a child [...] until the phenomenal happens, something almost supernatural, when his body suddenly seems to be consumed. He shakes and quivers in a horrendously vivid evocation of total physical breakdown' (I. Brown). During this prolonged depiction of his demise, Duryodhana's hands twitchingly revisit the same evocative gesture of holding a spherical ball of flesh as he did in his birth alongside his mother. 'In an extraordinary act of physical control, shaking and twitching [...] his body seems to disappear in a dark conflagration' (Crompton) that paints a truly horrific, disturbing and despairing image of death that draws *Gnosis* to an evocative end.⁴⁰

Gnosis and The Mahabharata: A Comparative Analysis

In their respective productions Brook and Khan were both dealing with the source text of *Mahabharata* and its status as the 'cultural memory' of the people of South and South East Asia. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor distinguishes between two modes of 'cultural memory' transmission. The first is 'archival memory', which includes factual memory, drawn from documents, maps, textual sources, archaeological finds and other such items that are associated with permanence (Taylor 19). As a textual source, despite existing in multiple renditions and linguistic translations all over the Indian nation and beyond, the epic is therefore an archive. This is what lends it magnitude and secures for it an aura of permanence and longevity. Thus

⁴⁰ The image of death is a central tenant in both Khan's *Gnosis* and Brook's *The Mahabharata*. However where Brook depicts the war and devastation at the end of the epic through a universal twentieth century lens of the potential of human annihilation through nuclear war, Khan's evocation of death is conducted at a much smaller scale through the complete disintegration of a human body, making it very intimate and personal and thereby far more unsettling to witness.

Brook's attempt to interpret such a seminal textual source for a western audience was deemed by Indian postcolonial critics as tampering with a vital archive of the Indian culture. In *Gnosis* however, Khan does not engage directly with the archive through using verbal language. Instead he relies upon the body as the primary medium of communication to create his interpretation of the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship. Taylor identifies a second kind of 'cultural memory' which she calls 'repertoire', and suggests that it is a form of memory which is embodied through non-verbal, gestural, oral and corporeal means. It does not rely on the written word and is thus ephemeral and non-reproducible, since it cannot be documented via conventional archival means. Taylor advocates the value of the 'repertoire' as an embodied system of knowledge to rectify the historical tendency that has valued memory in the form of the written word (Taylor 20). By drawing upon the epic as a point of departure, Khan engages with a corporeal language which does not override the archival status of the epic. Instead Khan creates a 'repertoire' that is ephemeral and impermanent in its interpretation of the epic. And it is precisely its impermanence that makes *Gnosis* less of a threat to the exalted status of the source text, and thereby a more sensitive and nuanced approach to the complex dynamics that govern intercultural exchanges.

In an insightful study on the problems inherent in translating source texts for intercultural performance practices, theatre scholar Patrice Pavis puts forward an important defence for Brook's treatment of the *Mahabharata*. He suggests that the scale of such translations function beyond 'the rather limited phenomenon of the *interlingual* translation of the dramatic text' (Pavis, 'Problems' 25). Citing the importance of preverbal modes of communication alongside interlingual translation in such exchanges Pavis writes:

This preverbal element does not [...] exclude speech; rather it contains it, but as *speech* uttered within a situation of enunciation, and as one of many elements in this global situation preceding the written text. Thus the preverbal is not limited to gesture, but encompasses all the elements of a situation of enunciation preceding the writing of the text: apart from gesture, this includes costume, the actor's manner, imagined speech, in short, all the sign systems that make up the theatrical situation of enunciation. (Pavis, 'Problems' 34)

Pavis argues that Brook successfully makes use of such preverbal modes of communication through the design of a unique *mise-en-scène* which emerges at the intersection of gesture and scenography.⁴¹ By drawing on cultural rituals and social gestures that are removed from where they originate, Pavis suggests that Brook's real translation of the epic occurs at an 'intergestural' (Pavis, 'Problems' 40) realm, and 'which alone is capable of conveying theatrically the myth contained in the Indian text' (Pavis, 'Problems' 40). Pavis concludes his observations by asserting that through *The Mahabharata*, 'Brook and Carriere tell a story that exceeds text and anecdote, and constitute itself as myth, by way of gestural discourse – a language of the body [...]' (Pavis, 'Problems' 40).

Pavis' claim needs to be contested for two reasons. Firstly, the gestural discourse that Pavis refers to uses physical motifs borrowed from culturally specific gestures that get removed from their own contexts. An example of this is the primarily, though not exclusively, Indian greeting by folding one's hands in a prayer position at the chest and bowing reverentially in acknowledgment of the divinity within every human being. Brook's use of this *namaskar* gesture to depict characters greeting each other through the course of the narrative is on the surface not problematic. It could even be deemed accurate. However it perpetuates a stereotypical image of Indian cultural gestures within

⁴¹ 'Mise-en-scène is a kind of *reglage* ("fine tuning") between different contexts and cultures; it is no longer only a question of intercultural exchange or of a dialectics between text and context; it is a mediation between different cultural backgrounds, traditions and methods of acting.' (Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads* 6)

the minds of western audiences, who immediately recognise it as part of an Orientalist representational matrix of India, without really grasping its philosophical significance. Moreover as Richard Schechner suggests, when a gesture such as the *namaskar* is etched onto bodies that it does not belong to it becomes once removed, and appears ‘foreign to their bodies’ (Schechner, ‘Interculturalism’ 44). Similarly Rustom Bharucha and Marvin Carlson are critical of the aural confusion that is generated by the gaps between the language of the script and the lingo phonic qualities of the performers delivering them. While Bharucha suggests that in having to speak in English the performers’ voices are ‘reduced to accents, almost incomprehensible at times [...]’ (Bharucha 1647), Carlson asserts that ‘a Japanese actor with a French accent, pronouncing an English translation of a Sanskrit name, may resemble less an instrument of pure culture-free expression, than a one-man Tower of Babel’ (Carlson 54).

Secondly, Pavis’ defence suggests that Brook’s production operates effectively without relying on the verbal dialogue between the characters that moves the narrative forward. This would be countered by the commercial availability of the Brook-Carriere script which has become a western archival version of the epic itself. While Brook’s *mise-en-scene* may have created a language where the visual and the aural interacted in unique ways, the narrative spine of the epic was still communicated through the scripted dialogue as its primary means of delivering the narrative. This is because Brook wanted to relay the entire epic to the western world. In contrast Khan was only interested in exploring imagistic glimpses of the mother-son interactions in the epic. By choosing the body as his primary medium of communication and relegating the text to a subsidiary position in the signification process, Khan creates a corporeal ambiguity surrounding

the characterisations that makes his interpretation more like an abstract painting rather than a definitive script.

As a postcolonial subject Khan and his body exist ‘in a complex representation matrix’ (Gilbert and Tompkins 12) which when placed in the centre of theatrical signification ‘can be a highly useful (and even essential) strategy for reconstructing postcolonial subjectivity’ (Gilbert and Tompkins 204). Khan recognises this and sees that as well as ‘being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus a site of *resistance*, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter-strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways’ (Grosz, ‘Inscriptions’ 64-65). Having experimented extensively with the interactions between the delivery of live text and movement in a range of his works (*zero degrees*, *Sacred Monsters*, *In-I*, *Bahok*) to varying degrees of success, Khan’s move away from the use of text as a means of storytelling in *Gnosis* is worthy of analysis. In wanting to create imagistic impressions of the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship, Khan realised that a reliance on text would fix meanings too easily and not allow space for ambiguity and multiple readings of his interpretations. Instead his choice to work primarily through physicality draws on the movement medium which embodies and articulates his own postcolonial identity more effectively. He understands however that to express his explorations of the Gandhari-Duryodhana myth effectually, he is ‘required to move beyond the confines of self’ (Fraleigh 23), while still retaining and evoking his own condition in his art (Fraleigh 23). Therefore without overtly expressing the parallels he draws between the mythical mother-son dynamic and the influential role of his mother in his diasporic existence (Ak. Khan, ‘Interview’), *Gnosis* becomes a meditation on Khan’s musings on South Asian mother-son relationships.

Khan understands the flaw in human logic that makes us ‘simple minded enough to believe that if we have something to say we would use words’ (Cage and Cunningham qtd. in Fraleigh 71), and resorts to the language of the body to make his art. The physical language that Khan and Sunahata convey their narrative through attempts to challenge the ‘continuing hegemony of a theatre defined by its literary and verbal dimensions’ (Murray and Keefe 6) by reversing the assumed ‘hierarchy of word over body’ (Murray and Keefe 6). By demoting the use of verbal language to a subsidiary and supportive role delivered live through accompanying lyrics by the exquisite vocalist Faheem Mazhar, ‘a direct sign-signifier relationship is broken’(Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 23) and ‘objects, characters, scenes and events acquire a multiple, fluctuating, fragmented identity’(Sánchez-Colberg, ‘Altered States’ 23).

There are two moments within *Gnosis* when signification through layered interaction between body and supporting lyrics is achieved at different levels for the audience. The first is aimed at the uninitiated audience member who is unfamiliar with the narrative of the epic and not privy to understanding Hindi lyrics. In the ‘Transformation of Man to Beast’ section, through *abhinaya*, Khan enacts the narrative that underscores the accompanying Hindi lyrics to the recital of Faheem Mazhar’s *sun meri ma sun* (listen to me my mother). For the audience member not able to understand the lyrics, even at a formalist level, Khan’s movement creates Pavis’ ‘intergestural dynamic’ through which Duryodhana’s emotional struggle is communicated via Khan’s dynamic and violent body. For the audience member who can follow the lyrics, the visual medium of Khan’s body is layered upon by the aural medium of the lyrics, and a closer association to the source text is attained. However it is in the final ‘Mourning and Fire’ sequence, when Sunahata’s haunting Japanese song accompanies Khan’s

disturbing embodiment of death, that the relationship between Khan's corporeality and Sunahata's Japanese lyrics creates a whole new nexus of signification. The artistic choice to not provide a translation of the Japanese song, limits the inter-textual signification to a very small proportion of the audience (outside of Japan) who might understand the language. It also evokes Khan's ex-collaborator Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's artistic strategy of non-translation to create an obscured dramaturgy within otherwise familiar semiotic frameworks (Uytterhoeven 11). Therefore those who do not understand the meaning of the Japanese lyrics that accompany Khan's evocation of death, respond instinctively to the aural qualities of the haunting lullaby-like song that communicate a mother's mourning of her son's passing, without any reliance on the lyrics. Through *Gnosis*, Khan's and Sunahata's respective corporeal depictions of Duryodhana and Gandhari and their mutual interactions become 'elusive and ephemeral' (Albright 5) in their refusal to be tied down to definitive significations. It is precisely this deliberate 'semiotic vacuum, outside of language and meaning' (Albright 5) of any singular cultural reference point, but simultaneously embracing multiple interpretative frameworks in which *Gnosis* exists, that makes its transmission of cultural memory of the epic through a 'repertoire' more sensitive to postcolonial critiques on the inherent problems that have historically marked intercultural exchanges in performance practices. However it is able to exist in this semiotic vacuum because it does not aim to become an exercise in dramatisation of the entire epic.

The function of a central narrative is therefore a significant point of departure between Brook and Khan's approaches to the archival text. Sanjoy Majumdar suggests that 'Brook attempts to present the epic as a cultural text that is able to stand independent of any one history or social reality, as a universal tale of "all humanity"'

(Majumdar 205). Brook is therefore keen to present the epic in its entirety to the western world, made accessible through western dramaturgical frameworks of storytelling, structure and characterisations, communicated through verbal language. Khan on the other hand moves away from the factual fidelities of storytelling and concentrates instead on exploring his personal responses to the mother-son relationship in the epic through visual and physical means. Khan therefore attempts to ask of himself the question that Bharucha feels is vital when borrowing from such a significant archive: ‘what does this epic mean to me?’ (Bharucha 1643)

In asking the question of himself, Khan signals a more personal and subjective interpretation of the epic’s musings on mother-son relationships, and creates an ambiguous, visual and physical language that initiates multiple readings of *Gnosis*, instead of anchoring a singular meaning to the epic. I would propose that this ambiguity is a deliberate ploy of Khan’s on two accounts: firstly, it becomes a postcolonial strategy that assumes a certain level of familiarity with the source epic, and that deliberately denies explanations of the epic itself to audiences who are less familiar with the text. This complicates the way in which different audience members receive and respond to *Gnosis*, and Khan is unapologetic about not offering a fuller explanation to those whose knowledge of the Gandhari-Duryodhana dynamic is limited. Secondly, and connected to the issue of postcolonial strategising, I would argue that this ambiguity heightens the responsibility of audience members in their reception of and contribution to the eventual writing of *Gnosis* itself, through a suggestive reference to Roland Barthes’ seminal framework of ‘the death of the author’ (Barthes, ‘Death’ 146-150).

In a poststructuralist turn to his literary analysis of texts, Barthes signalled through his 'death of the author' proclamation an end of the authoritative power and a dismantling of the hierarchy between the author and the reader. This led to the birth of the reader and with it an openness to interpretations and multiplicity of meaning making through a singular text. Barthes suggested that there are two kinds of texts: the readerly text through which readers are closely guided as passive consumers without being offered an entry point into the text, and the writerly text which viewed readers as active producers of textual meanings (Barthes, *S/Z* 4). Viewing the text as a 'galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds' (Barthes, *S/Z* 5), Barthes valued the writerly over the readerly text, as he believed that 'the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (Barthes, *S/Z* 4).

In examining the reading of an epic like the *Mahabharata* Rakesh Thakur suggests that:

The act of reading is an encounter. Yes, indeed, the encounter with the narrative moves across two plains: the mapping of its mythical historicity [...] and at a more sublime level, the trajectory of the reading mind, as it negotiates the various themes, the contested terrain of governance, family and society. (Thakur 58)

Following Thakur's discussions on the inherent nature of the epic as a 'writerly text', by virtue of its ability to interact with its consumers at multifarious levels, I propose that Brook's production aimed to map the epic's mythical historicity through a foreign lens. In doing so Brook created a 'readerly text' for his audience, who became 'passive consumers' of his meditations on the Indian culture, and were not given an entry point for any subjective contributions to these readings. In comparison, Khan and Sunahata's relegation of the verbal means of communication, their decision not to narrate the entire

epic and their imagistic exploration of the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship created a 'writerly text'. This writerly text became a postcolonial strategy that invited its readers to an 'active participation in the production of meanings that are infinite and inexhaustible' (Thakur 60), through a 'disciplined identification and dismantling of the sources of textual power' (Barry 66) that Brook fell victim to. Moreover, as per literary critic Wolfgang Iser's notion of 'gaps' that are deliberately woven into a text as opportunities 'to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections - for filling the gaps left by the text itself' (Iser 193), Khan's deliberate use of ambiguity and 'gaps' within *Gnosis* provided its audience an abundance of such entry points through which to access, interpret and write their own associations of mother-son relationships, and became a fundamental postcolonial strategy for referencing the Gandhari-Duryodhana dynamic without explaining it.

Through the readerly text of *The Mahabharata*, western audiences encountered a carefully manufactured and exoticised representational matrix of Brook's vision of the Indian culture. Instead through the writerly text of *Gnosis*, western audiences were provided with fleeting, abstract, imagistic glimpses of a tragic mother-son relationship that conjured up opportunities for audiences to make their own associations to the theme. Khan's intelligent scaling down of the scope of the project made his approach to interculturalism more personal and realistic. While Brook relied primarily on textual dialogue and narrative devices to conduct the storytelling of the epic, Khan, relying on a prior familiarity with the epic, created a corporeal language that operated beyond logocentric control to present expressionistic imagery of a tiny aspect of the epic and was not interested in narrating the entire story of the *Mahabharata*. In Brook's production the search for the universal theatre language managed to fetishise cultural

difference, while simultaneously homogenising the cultural specificities of his multinational cast. In *Gnosis*, Khan and Sunahata's equal and balanced exchange in corporeal languages and performance presence, created a syncretism that gave birth to a new, heterogeneous semantic altogether, while not erasing their own cultural identities and performance traditions. Christopher Balme suggests that:

Although the cultural texts in syncretic theatre [...] undergo 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 a Western dramaturgical framework. [...] In syncretic theatre [...] cultural texts retain their integrity as bearers of precisely defined cultural meaning. (Balme 5)

Khan and Sunahata dissipated this tension by using the ambiguous and slippery medium of the body over the definitive value afforded to text as their primary medium of translation. Balme suggests that because artists like Khan and Sunahata come from cultures that have previously been borrowed from by the west, they are likely to approach the creative dialogue with more sensitivity, and 'their processes of adaptation respect the semantics of the cultural text they use' (Balme 5) with more integrity than Brook's treatment of the *Mahabharata*. It is precisely the ambiguity generated by Khan and Sunahata's corporeal exchanges that made their audience work harder by questioning 'who or what is speaking through the body and in what language [...]' (Auslander qtd. in Balme 167) and opens up multiple readings of the piece from their own subjective perspectives.

In this light this chapter has tried to provide an analysis of *Gnosis* through one such possible reading nuanced by my own postcolonial diasporic identity in Britain and my own familiarity with the source text. The chapter has also implicated the value of focusing on the corporeal and gestural realms of intercultural exchange, over and beyond the importance that has been afforded to the 'narrative or theatrical plot, which

is generally the first exchange between western and eastern theatre' (Hollidge and Tompkins 15). By using the body as a primary means of exchange Khan has invested in and capitalised on its 'ability to move, cover up, reveal itself, and even "fracture" on stage' (Gilbert and Tompkins 204), recognising in it the 'many possible sites for decolonisation' (Gilbert and Tompkins 204) from the highly limiting exoticism afforded to his body and art by countless western critics. In this, Khan has used the body as a fundamental postcolonial strategy for interpreting the Gandhari-Duryodhana myth, mediated through his own experience of South Asian mother-son relationships and enabled by his privileged and reflexive position in the third space of influential enunciations.

Chapter 5

Evocations of ‘Third Space’ in *zero degrees*⁴²

This chapter examines multiple evocations of ‘third space’ within *zero degrees* (2005), Khan’s critically acclaimed collaboration with Moroccan-Flemish performer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, British sculptor Antony Gormley and British-Asian musician Nitin Sawhney. In *zero degrees* Khan refutes the ‘third space’ as erudite, abstract and non-representational by finding tangible manifestations of it, while simultaneously questioning it as a space of privilege and power. Through an intricate and complex storytelling ritual where once again Khan is the story he is telling, the piece raises important questions about borderzone identity and its swapping, blurring and erasure, played out between himself, Cherkaoui and two mannequins. This physical theatre fuelled storytelling in *zero degrees* is perhaps Khan’s most sophisticated attempt yet, in its rich intertextuality and interdisciplinary syncretism. The storytelling arises in the interstices between the theatricality of socialised pedestrian gestures, the technique driven virtuosity of dance movement, and the language of imbuing objects with signification from visual arts. In addition, *zero degrees* marks a departure in Khan’s own repertoire from his solo and group choreographic ventures, to his first high-profile duet partnership with a European artist. Lorna Sanders concurs that *zero degrees* marks the moment in Khan’s career ‘where the exchange of information is significant in artist-to-artist collaboration’ (Sanders, ‘I Just Can’t Wait’). This exchange of information between Khan and Cherkaoui creates both the narrative and aesthetic premise of the piece, through which the artists not only transform their distinctive performance

⁴² In this chapter I build significantly on a previous publication entitled, ‘Dancing Embodiment, Theorising Space: Exploring the ‘Third Space in Akram Khan’s *zero degrees*’.

training, but also translate complex cultural memories as diasporic subjects through each other's bodies.

Zero degrees narrates Khan's memory of a border-crossing between Bangladesh and India, and is thus located in a figurative, political and geographical borderland which makes him acutely aware of his own diasporic identity as a British man of Bangladeshi ancestry. This liminal space also evokes issues of citizenship, cultural heritage, belonging, exclusion and otherness, and forces him to reevaluate his sense of self. His identity is destabilised further when on the train to Calcutta, Khan encounters the body of a dead man and is advised not to offer any help to his wailing wife. *Zero degrees* becomes the cathartic vehicle through which Khan relives the traumatic memory of his border-crossing as he postulates on the liminal borders between life and death, belonging and non-belonging, while locating the other in oneself. The piece therefore evokes 'third space' not only in its obvious articulation of border-identity politics that drives the narrative, but also in its negotiations of liminality between text and movement on one hand, and between organic 'live' bodies and inorganic 'dead' objects on the other, which become the very tools through which Khan's multiple identity positions are expressed. *Zero degrees* further concretises Bhabha's abstract third space through an articulation of a new masculinity that emerges from Khan's corporeal negotiations between the stylised notions of gender codes that govern South Asian classical dance (Bose, 'Gender'), and the hyperbolic expressions of masculinity that have permeated recent European physical theatre practices (Burt, *The Male Dancer*). This chapter analyses Khan's tangible manifestations of the third space in *zero degrees* in the three following ways: his evocation of diasporic identity politics; his negotiation of an artistic language between the disciplines of theatre, dance and visual

arts; and finally in his articulation of a new masculinity negotiated between the gender codes that govern South Asian classicism on one hand and contemporary European physical theatre on the other. Therefore through this piece, Khan demonstrates that the productive liminality of Bhabha's third space as a metaphoric space of postcolonial identity formations, can find valuable and physical manifestations in fields beyond postcolonial and diaspora studies.

Diaspora, Third Space and Khan

As a diasporic subject Khan is not an individual who undertook the journey of dispersal from the homeland either by force or by choice through his own decision. His displaced condition is a consequence of his parents' choice to relocate from Bangladesh to Britain. Subsequently, Khan's diasporic identity and multiple affiliations to cultures need to be understood as distinct and more complex to his parents' sense of simultaneous belonging to both Bangladesh and Britain. The first generation South Asian diaspora in Britain often experienced a condition of collective nostalgia and a yearning for the homeland through a particular condition of displacement and a subsequent 'boundary-maintenance' (Brubaker 5). In contrast Khan's second generation diasporic identity and its negotiation between his ethnicity, cultural heritage and his nationality, cannot be understood through the use of the prefix 'dis', as it can become a logocentric trope for constructing diaspora as a retrograde condition. Instead Khan's diasporic identity is transient and belongs to the present moment, constantly renegotiating its relationship with his parents' homeland as inseparable from his own sense of self, and is more committed to 'boundary-erosion' (Brubaker 6). This erosion of national and cultural boundaries implies that diaspora is not a condition that is nostalgically, but organically linked to home, and that 'diaspora and home are not

separate identities and any line of division between them is artificial and thus permeable' (Grau, 'Political Activism' 9). In *zero degrees* Khan postulates on the complexity of this relationship between diaspora and home/homeland from the confines of a liminal borderland, and questions how his corporeality is shaped through these multiple affiliations to nations and cultures:

how is the body marked or inscribed by this journeying and how does the diasporic subject inscribe her/himself within/on the landscapes s/he traverses? (Grehan 229)

Even as Khan's own body did not undertake the initial journey of dispersal from Bangladesh to Britain, his inherited cultural identity continues to be marked by his parents' sojourn and through *zero degrees*, finds an artistic means of articulating the impact that his inherited journey of dispersal, and physical journey of border crossings, have had upon his own diasporic identity formation within the third space.

Through *zero degrees*, Khan recognises the post-national spirit of the third space that he occupies between his British national identity and his Bangladeshi cultural heritage. He questions its power to undermine the privileging of either position in the formation of his diasporic identity positions, such that 'neither site, role, or representation holds sway' (Routledge 400) and 'one continually subverts the meaning of the other' (Routledge 400). He exploits the interventionist potential of the third space as a 'contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 'Commitment' 21), which brings 'invention into existence' (Bhabha, *Location* 12). However for Khan the intangibility of the third space as conceptualised by Bhabha, finds a physical manifestation in the form of a borderland between Bangladesh and India. Gupta and Ferguson describe a borderland as a place of 'incommensurable contradictions' (Gupta and Ferguson 18). Lacking a 'fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales

(nations, societies, cultures)’ (Gupta and Ferguson 18), a borderland is instead an ‘interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization’ (Gupta and Ferguson 18) that shapes the experience of those who traverse it. The piece embodies Khan’s experience of traversing such an interstitial borderzone, and becomes his artistic articulation and confessional statement that illustrates the displacement and deterritorialization he felt towards his own identity positions while located within it.

Borderzone Identity Politics and Third Space

Zero degrees begins with a large and bleak stage set as a grey-white box, occupied by two white mannequins that lie horizontally on either end of the space facing the ceiling, with their heads directed towards centre stage. They are located at right angles to the stage walls, and while one is positioned back stage right, the other is positioned front stage left. As their austere image of inertness settles before the audience, Khan and Cherkaoui inject life into the space by appearing backstage from either end. They walk swiftly towards each other, meet at the centre and then turn to face the audience, before they continue to walk down the central axis of the stage, until they reach stage front and then sit down cross legged, a stance ‘both intimate and grounded, strangely static for a dialogue [...]’ (Norridge 10) that is to follow. They place their elbows on their knees, clasp their hands, rest their chins upon them and then finally shift their eye focus from the audience to the down stage right corner. The gaze and stance of looking down and to the right is one of pensive recollection, and suggests a recall of an experience and an emotional state (Catley), lasting about fifteen seconds. In this perfect stillness the audience become aware of Khan and Cherkaoui’s synchronised breathing, the tiniest rise and fall of their shoulders in response to their respiration, and the fluttering of eyelids. Finally after what seems like an eternity, they

break their meditative silence and with their focus still on the down stage right hand corner, they start to narrate in perfect synchronisation, a memory that begins halfway through a sentence:

And what I remember is there were these guards there,
Who were very, very powerful. (*zero degrees*)

As they enunciate the word ‘powerful’ they revert their eye focus back to the audience with a sharp turn of their neck. This moment signifies a clear shift from their soft internal gaze of memory recall to their sharp and caustic gaze of externalised presence before the audience, as they continue their narration. Through a carefully crafted language of ‘simultaneous spoken narrative and movement synchrony’ (Norridge 1) that interlaces everyday gestures, pauses, hesitations, shifts in eye focus and delivery of text, Khan and Cherkaoui relocate the audience to a border checkpoint between Bangladesh and India. The initial ambiguity of the blank canvas of the space transforms into the physical location of this borderland immigration control, through the mention of words like ‘guards’, ‘security’, ‘queue’ and ‘passports’. As they continue their impeccably synchronised delivery, the story turns to the unnerving moment of callous handling of passports as they are passed endlessly between several guards:

Suddenly I realised just how vulnerable I felt. Because if that passport disappears, where is my proof of identity? They could just say I’m a Bangladeshi, I’m a bandit. It’s amazing how much a passport holds, how much power a passport holds. A passport holds between a good life and a bad life. Between life and death. I mean it holds everything. It’s just a piece of paper. And it was incredible just how much I wanted to hold onto it. (*zero degrees*)

As the guards pile up passports before stamping them, Khan and Cherkaoui’s synchronised delivery reveal more about the inherent differences between the surface of passports and their implied power imbalances:

And my passport was different because it was red [...]. But the other passports were Bangladeshi, because predominantly... the predominant... erm... erm... nationality of the people who were congregated there were Bangladeshis, so they had green ones. (*zero degrees*)

The opening scene of *zero degrees* raises the following issues: the audience is not told whose memory is being recalled, but their prior knowledge of Khan's British-Bangladeshi identity and/or his visible South Asian ethnicity implies it probably belongs to Khan, and opens up 'an intriguing space to examine audience assumptions' (Norridge 10); this ambiguity of identity is further heightened through the process of doubling that is performed by Khan and Cherkaoui in synchrony; in contrast the explicit mention of identity, British passport and Bangladeshi nationality are direct references to the issues of citizenship, belonging, exclusion, self and other that permeate the opening of the piece. These issues collectively indicate that *zero degrees* confronts the challenges inherent in the embodiment and questioning of diasporic identity as experienced particularly at borderzones.

In an interview about the making of *zero degrees* Khan reveals what is arguably the fundamental premise of the piece:

I realise how Bangladeshi I am here and when I am in Bangladesh I realise how British I am. I am never complete in one place. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview)

Through *zero degrees* Khan confronts the very moment when, at the border of Bangladesh and India, travelling on his British passport, he feels like an alien amongst the people from the country of his cultural heritage. This leads him to address the incompleteness of his diasporic identity as it incessantly negotiates the layers between his British nationality on one hand and his Bangladeshi ethnicity and cultural heritage on the other. It is significant that it is in a borderland, where his passport is the only means of identification, that Khan becomes most aware of his non-belonging to his

parents' homeland, because his red (British) passport separates him visibly and legally from the people of his shared cultural heritage and their green (Bangladeshi) ones. This is communicated in the hesitant delivery of the word 'nationality' as he acknowledges that most people gathered at the checkpoint are Bangladeshis, suggesting that while he can claim Bangladeshi cultural heritage through his parents, he will always be excluded from a legal identity in his parents' homeland. Gupta and Ferguson remind us that:

If [...] it is acknowledged that cultural difference is produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world always already spatially interconnected, then the restriction of immigration becomes visible as one of the main means through which the disempowered are kept that way. (Gupta and Ferguson 17)

However his relationship to Bangladeshi identity is chequered. Just as quickly as Khan mourns his lack of legal identity as a Bangladeshi, he also acknowledges the power and privilege shared by particular nationalities over others. In a sea of people with green passports Khan admits that he is fearful of losing his red one due to the careless handling of the documents by the guards, as his lack of legal identification might make the guards identify him as a 'Bangladeshi' or a 'bandit'. So while on one hand he feels excluded from the sea of green passport because of his red one, on the other he does not want to lose the privileges attached to his British citizenship, and is fearful of the perceptions attached to owning a Bangladeshi passport. This makes Zoe Norridge question 'why is "Bangladeshi placed next to "bandit"? Which is the greater fear?' (Norridge 11).

This opening also implies a questioning of his British nationality as it prevents him from being a Bangladeshi citizen, while simultaneously fearing its loss and its associated privileges. *Zero degrees* then is as much about 'a discrete identity, symbolised by the passport' (Norridge 10), as it is about 'the precariousness of such an

identity, about the ways in which it may collapse and be appropriated by others' (Norridge 10). This constant shift between these two positions of Khan's identity and the simultaneous undermining of both, by both, is indicative of third space politics which 'displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives' (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford, 'Third Space' 211) that 'enables other positions to emerge' (Bhabha qtd. in Rutherford, 'Third Space' 211). However Khan is quick to point out that his 'other positions' are able to emerge in the first place because of the mobility attached to his British passport. In his corporeal articulation of third space politics, Khan thus critiques Bhabha's idealistic position which suggests that both histories that constitute diasporic identities are equally displaced. Instead he clarifies that his negotiation of the third space is only possible by slightly privileging his British nationality, and the mobility and power attached to it to negotiate new positions, which then in turn destabilise notions of Britishness.

In *zero degrees* Khan is not alone in his embodied diasporic status and is accompanied by Cherkaoui's identity as a Moroccan-Flemish Belgian national. Therefore the decision to perform in synchrony in the opening section not only creates a unique aesthetic, but also layers a political charge through the doubling of identities. According to Zoe Norridge:

A related disconnect is found between what appears to be a deeply personal, subjective account and its delivery – through two speakers, two "Is", two remembering subjects. (Norridge 10)

This theme of the doubling of identity resonates all the way through the piece where Khan and Cherkaoui perform a constant interplay between being themselves and each other. At times this is achieved through intricate mirroring of a complex set of fluid hand movements which seem to permeate into each other, while at other moments it is

signified through simple but effective interactions with each other's larger than life shadows on the cyclorama. This complicates the process by which the audience can read 'the presence of the subject from or about whom the discourse springs' (Norridge 13). Because there are constantly two human referents, the ambiguity created around the visibility of the subject deliberately heightens the issues pertaining to 'boundary-erosion' (Brubaker 6) in third space diasporic identity formations. Reflecting on the significance of the title *zero degrees*, Cherkaoui suggests that it is the 'point where one thing becomes another [...] when Akram becomes me and I become Akram. [...] For us zero degrees was the point of transformation' (Cherkaoui qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview).

Cherkaoui's description should not be taken to imply a one-way transformation as he seems to suggest, because in *zero degrees*, transformations (particularly between identities) are performed endlessly, back and forth, such that boundaries between self and other are erased and 'the politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 'Commitment' 22) are evaded in order to emerge anew as others of their own selves (Bhabha, 'Commitment' 22), in the dynamic third space of enunciation. It is important to realise that Khan and Cherkaoui do not ever become one and the same person, but are always seen to negotiate this contradictory and ambivalent position that encourages a 'split-space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 'Commitment' 22) to emerge, as they articulate their sense of selves. This splitting makes them conscious of simultaneously belonging and not-belonging to their cultural heritage, their nationalities and their ethnicities, in order to create a new sense of self. It also suggests that the act of boundary-erosion between their different identity-markers innately involves the recognition of those boundaries in the first place, in order to negotiate their erasure.

Khan and Cherkaoui intersperse their storytelling with fluid and symbolic corporeal exchanges that extend their identity doubling beyond the realm of concrete text, and into the field of abstract imagery. The energy of their movement exchanges range from mutuality, to fragility, to coercion, to control, to manipulation, to volatility, to acceptance, as they explode into the whole space. However every time they revert to the narrative, they signal this return through adopting their initial contained physicality of memory recall and occupy centre stage. As if the frustration of experiencing exclusion during immigration checks at border-control is not enough to destabilise his sense of identity in this borderzone, the story moves forward to its most disturbing moment. This time Cherkaoui lies on the floor facing the ceiling with his knees up, and Khan sits on these knees as they create a three-dimensional illusion of mirrored doubles. They continue to deliver their hand gestures and text in perfect synchronisation, reaching towards each other to sustain the illusion exactly as in a mirror reflection. However because Khan's position is deliberately prioritised in the visual, there is a heavier insinuation that the memory is his.

In the confessional that follows, Khan and Cherkaoui narrate the memory of witnessing a dead man on the train to Calcutta and his wailing wife who repeatedly asks for assistance in vain. Against his will Khan is advised by his cousin not to assist the helpless woman for fear of bureaucratic hassle and even accusations of murder. The memory of his own inhuman act of betrayal stays with him as he contemplates the cruelty of the world that he finds himself in in the borderland:

When you come to a country you submit or leave behind your world, your rules. Because it's their rules and you have to play by them. (*zero degrees*)

And as Khan tries to deal with the disturbing polarities he has experienced on his border-crossing, between life and death, belonging and non-belonging, exclusion and

inclusion, he cannot help but admit that to put all of this to rest, he ‘just can’t wait to get to the hotel’ (*zero degrees*) in Calcutta, where his ‘conveniences’ such as hot showers and MTV await him. In this instance, Calcutta, despite its complex relationship to the history of Bangladesh and the complexities of Bengali identity, becomes Khan’s physical third space of enunciation. As an interstitial city, it signals a move away from the borderland and into a national space that has no immediate impact upon Khan’s identity, and in which he is able to negotiate his British nationality and Bangladeshi cultural heritage simultaneously. However once again, he is able to articulate these alternative positions of diasporic identity only once he has gained access to the privileged ‘conveniences’ associated with his British identity. Khan’s evocations of the third space of border-identity politics in *zero degrees* is thus significant as he finds physical manifestations for Bhabha’s abstract concept, while simultaneously critiquing the notion that this space allows its subjects to discover new subject positions by privileging neither cultural histories that constitute it. On the contrary Khan’s identity negotiations in the third space in *zero degrees* suggests, that only through a slight privileging of his British identity is he able to marshal the power and mobility this lends him to then negotiate new subject positions for his diasporic identity.

Interdisciplinarity and Third Space

The aesthetic tools that enable Khan and Cherkaoui’s performative articulation of third space identity negotiations consist of text and pedestrian gestures from theatre, technique and stylised movement from dance, and interactions with life-size mannequins from visual arts. Khan and Cherkaoui exploit the possibilities of signification that lie dormant in the interstices between these three disciplines and create a syncretic language that blurs the boundaries between them. This challenges Bhabha’s

classic conceptualisation of the third space as a liminal space of enunciation between *two* points of reference by demonstrating that *multiple* points of reference can enter into dialogue to generate an aesthetic whose emancipation lies in in-betweenness. At the heart of *zero degrees* is the desire to narrate Khan's autobiographical embodiment of in-betweenness through aesthetic choices and strategies which are in and of themselves located in in-between spaces. Khan states that the starting point of this project is anchored in this very spirit, as Cherkaoui 'starts from theatre and moves towards dance' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, 'I Just Can't Wait'), while he starts 'from dance and move towards theatre' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, 'I Just Can't Wait'), in order to 'meet in the middle' (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sanders, 'I Just Can't Wait'). However he recognises that the interdisciplinarity in *zero degrees* also explores the points where visual arts ends and performance begins (Ak. Khan qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview). This he says, is captured in the moments where text is introduced because movement is no longer able to communicate adequately, and the mannequins are interacted with because text and movement fail to convey the desired significations (Ak. Khan qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview).

The creative process of *zero degrees* and the consequent aesthetic that emerged from it rested fundamentally on the principle of collaborative exchange, both between disciplines and between artists. Khan recognises that through their artistic choice to interlace text with movement in the opening section of *zero degrees*, he and Cherkaoui created a syncretic performance language where his autobiographical cultural memory was translated through Cherkaoui's gestural 'system of synchronisation' (Ak. Khan qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview). Therefore even though it is Khan's narrative that unfolds, it is Cherkaoui's corporeal placement in the splitting and sharing of this

narrative that emphasises the issues of difference, sameness, dichotomy and multiplicity that fuel the narrative itself. As the opening text is delivered in perfect synchrony by Khan and Cherkaoui, its pauses, hesitations and intonations experienced in the movement of the text, its rhythm and musicality, appear simultaneously same and different, just as the borderland they speak from which simultaneously joins and separates Bangladesh and India. A similar ambivalent split can be witnessed in the apparently perfect synchronicity of movement gestures that accompanies the text. Performed with impeccable timing the actual details in the gestures are invested with their respective corporeal individualities.⁴³ Cherkaoui speaks of the significance of our pedestrian gestures in everyday communication and reminds us of the subliminal messages they convey:

When we talk we don't pay attention to the way we gesture [...] we do a lot of gestures and there's a lot of positions with the hand at the mouth, at the eyes, at the ear, at the nose, at the skin, you go to your neck, sometimes you have to scratch. And all these things mean something, they mean something beyond the words. (Cherkaoui qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview)

Erving Goffman echoes Cherkaoui's view in suggesting that the study of human behaviour is at its richest when the materials examined are 'the glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not' (Goffman 1). These quotidian gestures act as sign posts and become the aesthetic tools through which signification is achieved in *zero degrees*, and reveals both literal and subliminal messages through its carefully crafted choreography and impeccable delivery.

⁴³ The use of quotidian gestures from everyday behaviour patterns of human interaction is a common stylistic feature of the physical theatre genre as evidenced in the practices of influential performance makers like Pina Bausch, Lloyd Newson and Jasmin Vardimon, whose artistic contributions continue to define the genre. Quotidian gestures act as entry points for the audience into zones of familiarity by relating these gestures to their own real life interactions. By acting as sign posts, these everyday gestures become fundamental aesthetic tools through which signification is achieved in physical theatre. Moreover it is the use of these everyday familiar gestures that allow the performers' corporealities to be represented on stage through a heightened sense of theatricality.

The use of everyday gestural behaviour in the opening scene in *zero degrees* also allows the audience to receive the memory of the border-crossing beyond its textual narration. At one level the hand gestures visually reinforce the aural storytelling; for example the movement of the passport between guards is demonstrated by repeatedly miming the passing of an invisible document from the left palm with their right hand and following the action with their eyes. On another level the use of detailed hand gestures reveal something beyond the words; for example their vocal hesitation over the word 'nationality' is captured physically, as they repeatedly appear to wipe clean their left palm facing up with their right hand, until they are able to articulate the word they are looking for. Similarly their mental frustration and nervousness at having their passport taken away and pass around endlessly between guards, is embodied in a subtle scratching of their upper right arm with their left index finger. And on a third level, because the gestures used in the performance are learnt and performed by Cherkaoui and Khan from replicating to exactitude the gestures Khan used when telling the story for the first time in their rehearsal process, the gestures are twice removed from Cherkaoui, in his replication of Khan's body language, and once removed from Khan himself, in his replication of his own body language as caught on film.

This replication or restoration of Khan's original and spontaneous gestures as captured on film into a heightened and stylised theatricality, where the gestures are embodied and performed by Khan and Cherkaoui simultaneously, evoke Richard Schechner's notion of restored behaviour or twice-behaved behaviour. Schechner conceptualises the 'habits, rituals, and routines of life' (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 28) as restored behaviour, when these regular behaviour patterns 'can be rearranged or reconstructed' (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 28) and performed by a body different

to the one where it originates from. He compares this performance of original behaviour patterns through other bodies to the splitting of a self into many selves, suggesting that the 'fact that there are multiple "me's" in every person is not a sign of derangement but the way things are' (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 28). In *zero degrees* the splitting of Khan's self into multiple selves is achieved through the doubling, replication and restoration of his original hand gestures through Cherkaoui's and his own body simultaneously, and becomes another channel through which Bhabha's third space as a non-representational space of split enunciation, finds physical manifestation. Furthermore, although they perform the same gestures and deliver the same text with perfect synchronisation, their individual inflections are retained through the synchronous delivery of text and gestures. This charges the performance with insinuated imagery on the politics of identity cloning, erasure and blurring and plays with the idea that they are both the same and different all the time.

The splitting of their identities is also mirrored in the splitting of the communication that takes place between text and movement. As Khan and Cherkaoui 'play with fertile spaces of ambiguity between language and movement' (Norridge 2), their language, created in the interstices between everyday quotidian gestures and text, is completely interdependent upon its constituent parts. The communication achieved through the text would not acquire its heightened impact without being accompanied by the intricately detailed hand gestures. Equally the web of quotidian gestures on their own, would fail to communicate with the same power in the absence of the synchronised delivery of text. This suggests that the signification achieved in the opening section of *zero degrees* is generated between the theatricality of text and everyday gestures, and the choreographic quality of the synchrony that governs their

impeccable delivery, suggesting that every day communication is conducted through a form of intricate choreography of body language that aims to generate meaning (Cherkaoui qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview). Zoe Norridge suggests that this blurring of boundaries between the disciplines of theatre and dance also challenges the understanding of the dancer as someone who has remained ‘conventionally mute’ (Norridge 7). By creating an interdependent language between movement and text, *zero degrees* thus assists in the ‘transgression of the dancer’s traditional role as physical conduit for unspoken communication’ (Norridge 7), and lends Khan and Cherkaoui the power to articulate through their voices and their bodies simultaneously by ‘dancing the conversation’ (Norridge 14).

If *zero degrees* emerges in the liminal spaces between theatre and dance, its ambivalent system of signification is further heightened by its creative tension and dialogue with the discipline of visual arts. To extend the piece’s central issues of identity splitting, erasure and blurring beyond their two live bodies, Khan and Cherkaoui work with and alongside two life-size mannequins who are sculpted clones of themselves. Created by the British visual artist Antony Gormley, Khan and Cherkaoui’s mannequin replicas explore the politics of borderland identity through interacting with their live counterparts.

In an interview on the making of *zero degrees*, Khan reveals that the mannequins are peculiarly diametric opposite to their live selves. Thus while the live Khan’s body is grounded and dynamic in his relationship to the floor through a supple and erect spine, his mannequin is spineless and incapable of standing on its own. On the other hand while Cherkaoui’s live movements are fluid, contorted and submissive in its

relationship to the floor, his mannequin stands erect on the ground, and exudes a silent power. The mannequins are therefore inanimate extensions of their identity splits through which they confront their own sense of selves. Moreover this dialectical alignment between Cherkaoui's mannequin and Khan's live self and Khan's mannequin and Cherkaoui's live self, opens up multitudinous opportunities for dialogue between self and other. Here the other is not an unfamiliar site external to oneself, but rather a dimension and an extension of oneself, as exemplified by Khan's simultaneous affiliation and rejection from Bangladesh by virtue of his red British passport, which separates him from the people of his shared cultural heritage and their green passports. In this moment Khan's identity-split generates a condition that makes him become his own other. Khan and Cherkaoui use these mannequins to evoke the other in themselves by extrapolating moments of confrontation with one's split self, where the self and the mannequins are intricately connected. Either this connection is demonstrated in the way in which Cherkaoui's mannequin appears to control him, when in reality it is Cherkaoui who stands face to face with his mannequin, and uses his hand to beat himself in a disturbingly abusive relationship with himself. Or it is demonstrated in the way in which Khan's body voluntarily replicates the actions his mannequin performs in response to being physically abused by Cherkaoui, such that Khan and his othered self are in harmonious existence in that moment of abuse from an external other. Self-abuse and disempowerment of self through such abuse in relation to both othered selves and external others, are repeatedly captured in the interactions between Khan and Cherkaoui and their mannequin selves. What is particularly disturbing about such imagery is the constant transformation and shift between the live selves and their mannequin counterparts, suggesting that the struggles of third space identity politics are prolifically turbulent within oneself in its search for stability.

This depiction of inner struggle and identity splitting through simultaneous interactions between the live bodies of Khan and Cherkaoui and their inanimate counterparts in the form of mannequins, is reminiscent of the works and philosophy of the Polish theatre director, painter and avant-garde stage designer Tadeusz Kantor. Like Khan, Kantor was interested in a language of art that evolved at the interstices between multidisciplinary exchanges. Through immersing himself in the visual arts, he developed a language for the theatre where live actors and inanimate mannequins created a syncretic aesthetic reliant upon each other, and through this he put forward his manifesto of the 'theatre of death'.⁴⁴ Kantor recognised in an inanimate object like a mannequin an ability to artificially imitate life, a latent power that made the mannequin 'more alive' (Kantor 108) because it 'submitted easily to the abstraction of space and time' (Kantor 109) within the theatrical *mise-en-scène*. He used mannequins as 'DOUBLES of live characters, somehow endowed with a higher CONSCIOUSNESS (Kantor 111), alongside their live companions and believed that they were 'already clearly stamped with the sign of DEATH' (Kantor 111).

In *zero degrees* Khan and Cherkaoui's mannequin replicas become intermediaries between life and death, and embody Kantor's belief that 'it is possible to express *life* in art only through the *absence of life*, through an appeal to DEATH, through APPEARANCES, through EMPTINESS' (Kantor 112). Their haunting presence, endowed with a charged stillness generated from the interactions they share with Khan and Cherkaoui, both at the opening and the closing of the performance,

⁴⁴ Kantor was inspired by Edward Gordon Craig's call for the replacement of the live actor by the 'über marionette'. However he believed that the solution was not to replace the live actor but to enhance his presence and inject 'life' into him, by juxtaposing him against an inanimate and 'dead' replica of him in the form of a mannequin. His piece *Dead Class* created in 1975, made use of live actors alongside mannequins in interaction with each other. The latter represented dead manifestations of students and through them the live students confronted their dead selves.

achieve a more profound impact on the audience than the movements of the live performers themselves. The live performers imbue their mannequin replicas with 'life', and in turn are charged by signification through the ways in which the mannequins come to interact with themselves. At times the mannequins symbolise Khan and Cherkaoui in a further suggested splitting of their selves. At others they take the place of people in their border-crossing narrative, both dead and living. However perhaps most significantly, through implied but not concretised imagery at the end of the piece when they occupy the space on their own, they are an evocative reminder of the innumerable people who lost their lives in the borderzone politics that accompanied the splitting and formation of India and Bangladesh as independent nations. In this final capacity, the mannequins evoke theatre scholar Joseph Roach's notion of 'surrogates', who come to represent through tangible physical manifestations of proxies, the very innocent subjects of violent geopolitical events (Roach 135) whose deaths gave birth to the imaginary border that separates two nations that were once the same.

While Kantor's notions of theatrical evocations of death through the use of mannequins finds powerful embodiment in *zero degrees*, Lorna Sanders aligns the thematic splitting and doubling of identity politics through use of the mannequins to the Baudrillardian concept of 'the death of the original and the end of representation' (Baudrillard 423). The interaction between the artists and the mannequin replicas of themselves, makes her question the essence of humanity in asking '[...] what is within us, or perhaps is there anything within us, that is authentic, essential unreproducible, our own?' (Sanders, 'I Just Can't Wait'). Using the mannequins to stand for self and other simultaneously, Khan aligns diasporic identity negotiations of in-betweenness with the erasure, transience and blurring of identity between the mannequins and themselves.

Moreover analysing the significance of the word “zero” or numeric “0” in the title in relation to such identity politics, Sanders concludes that it simultaneously suggests both the absence of any numeric value and the presence of a symbol to stand for this absence, thus embodying erasure and growth at the same moment. Similarly then, while diasporic identity formations may have historically been made to feel absent from the discourse of visibility and identity politics, the very acknowledgement of this absence as depicted through lifeless mannequins, makes the diasporic presence of Khan and Cherkaoui come alive. The immediacy of their corporeality is dialectically emphasised through their interactions with inert and lifeless replicas of themselves.

In placing their lived bodies and experiences at the heart of *zero degrees* and in making offerings of their corporealities, Khan and Cherkaoui uphold the ‘ontology of live performance’ (Mock 4) and its ‘potential *for* ideological resistance’ (Mock 4), by juxtaposing their liveness against the lifelessness of the mannequins. I acknowledge here that the discourse on liveness has been generated in recent decades to identify the characteristic features that distinguish live performances from mediated or televised ones. This debate has been fuelled by Philip Auslander’s seminal contributions that have suggested that these positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that contemporary live performances do in fact use mediatisation as part of their live aesthetic to create ambivalence between their live and mediated elements (Auslander, *Liveness* 25). While *zero degrees* does not use mediatisation as part of its aesthetic, I would argue that the use of the mannequins and their innate lifelessness creates a similar ambivalence. The interactions with the mannequins initially reemphasise the liveness of Khan and Cherkaoui’s bodies, before gradually reaching a point where the liveness of their bodies is challenged, as they transform into lifeless mannequin-like states and the

mannequins take on a live human quality by virtue of the interactions with them through the course of the piece. Colin Counsel and Laurie Wolf remind us that:

The body of live performance is unique in that, unlike the bodies represented by other media, it occupies the same time and space as the audience. Whereas mainstream film, say, presents only the fictional character, the live performer's emphatic physical presence has the capacity to remind viewers of the outside of the fiction, juxtaposing the body which is signified, performed, with the real, signifying body of the performer. (Counsel and Wolf 125)

In *zero degrees* fact and fiction are blurred and complicated as Khan and Cherkaoui simultaneously claim the memory of a border-crossing. As there is 'no external framing narrative' (Norridge 7) that drives the piece, Khan's performance body which signifies and performs the memory happens to coincide with his own lived body while Cherkaoui's performance body and his lived body are mediated through Khan's memory. The mannequins are used to extend the factual nature of Khan's memory into the realm of fiction, and their inert presence emphasises the liveness of Khan and Cherkaoui's bodies. Thus through the course of *zero degrees* and the interactions that take place between Khan and Cherkaoui and their replica selves, Khan transforms into a mannequin and his mannequin 'becomes human' (Ak. Khan qtd. in *zero degrees* DVD Interview), suggesting poignantly that his other becomes his self.

Khan and Cherkaoui's experimentations between theatre, dance and visual arts thus creates a syncretic performance language of ambivalence and impact. They exhaust the qualities of a particular medium, before calling upon additional media to intelligently layer the first medium with the nuances of others. What emerges in the interstitial creative spaces between these disciplines is a language that communicates at multidimensional levels. The liminality of this language resonates in and reinforces the precarious, fragile and volatile nature of diasporic identity negotiations at borderzones,

and thus becomes an efficacious aesthetic through which Khan's cultural memory of border-crossing becomes the premise for articulating the tensions of the diaspora.

Embodying Masculinity in the Third Space

Although evocations of cultural identity politics in the third space permeate *zero degrees* explicitly in its content and in the aesthetic language that communicates it, I would argue that there is an additional and more implicit identity negotiation that simultaneously occurs through the piece. Cultural identity negotiation in the diaspora has historically remained a largely gendered field that has usually been conducted in the realms of the domestic sphere, and has been associated with female immigrants and the significant role they have played in negotiating between host and home cultural positions (Werbner 905). In its distinct lack of female presence and in demonstrating the struggles of such identity negotiations outside of the domestic sphere, *zero degrees* is then unique in articulating the male South Asian diasporic experience, in the form of a confessional within the public domain. This amplified masculine presence challenges representations of masculinity in both South Asian classical dance and European physical theatre equally, and thereby charts out the territory for the emergence of an alternative masculinity in this fertile third space. As a male South Asian performer, through *zero degrees* Khan exploits this influential position by negotiating a new masculinity in European physical theatre, and challenges existent iconography of masculinity in the genre.

In the diasporic context, while South Asian women have historically trained in and performed classical dance, it has largely remained difficult for men to enter the profession, for fear of being perceived as not 'man' enough. Thus, even among second

or third generation South Asians in Britain, the male dancer is a rare phenomenon. And Khan is one such rarity in a largely female dominated field, triggered by his *kathak* training under the tutelage of a male guru Sri Pratap Pawar. So to examine the ways in which Khan rewrites performance of masculinity in *zero degrees*, we need to briefly examine the codified embodiment of gender within *kathak* itself. Purnima Shah observes that *kathak* performers, regardless of their sex, are able to shift seamlessly between corporeal depictions of masculinity and femininity by virtue of embodying strictly codified signifiers of gendered movement, without having to rely on ‘extraneous use of costumes, makeup, props, or technical effects’ (Shah 3):

Gender difference is expressed through the manipulation of body movements, expressions and gestures. For instance, broad shoulders and chest, uplifted face, straight spine, and a direct look in the eyes are some of the male physical characteristics; the female maybe depicted with relaxed shoulders, slightly drawn inwards, thigh closed together, eyes lowered within a slightly bent head [...]. (Shah 6)

In *zero degrees*, as Khan moves from narrating the harrowing tale of witnessing the dead body of a man next to his helpless wailing wife, to embodying her plight through pure *kathak abhinaya*, the intricate details of feminine movement as described in the above passage appear and crumble his hitherto erect, confident and grounded masculinity into a submissive, fragile, soft and contained physicality, where his spine bends into his chest causing his head to droop in compliance. His embodiment of femininity ‘is not overtly effeminate’ (Shah 6), but through subtle changes in his physicality ‘he creates feminine images of personality – the physical and emotional state of her being, behaviour, actions and reactions to the context in which “she” is portrayed’ (Shah 6). Shah concludes by noting that a *kathak* performer ‘emotes the feelings of a female character with the same intensity and depths as he would a male’ (Shah 6) through an embodiment of the codes of femininity and masculinity as required. As a skilled *kathak* performer, Khan is therefore used to the seamless stylisation of gender

codes through his own body's ability to shift between depictions of masculine and feminine energies. This skill requires the body of the *kathak* performer to acquire a state of gender neutrality upon which these specific stylised codes of gender can then be applied, and would appear to be in sharp contrast to the embodiment of masculinity within contemporary European physical theatre training.

The male dancer as a site of embodied masculinity is a long contested zone in western theatre dance. Prejudices that have linked male dancers to homosexuality for the last century continue to proliferate in contemporary western society. According to Ramsay Burt, patriarchal control and monitoring of male behaviour have historically denied men 'a secure autonomy' (Burt, *The Male Dancer* 12), requiring them to continually 'adjust and redefine the meanings attributed to sexual differences in order to maintain dominance in the face of changing social circumstances' (Burt, *The Male Dancer* 12). Historically, the male ballet dancer was not constructed as an exhibited body, but was utilised as the body that diverted the audience's gaze from himself onto the female ballerina, whose body he helped exhibit. Therefore through the first half of the twentieth century western theatre dance struggled against the problematised concept of 'the appearance of the dancing male body as spectacle' (Burt, *The Male Dancer* 12), as this destabilised historical patriarchal systems that denied audiences the permission to gaze at a male body on stage. Through the latter half of the twentieth century however, with emerging critical discourse on gender studies and a closer examination of masculinity in repressed crisis, male dancers have taken to the stage to deliberately and politically expose the male body as desirable, erotic and sexual, not just as an object of spectacle, but as a subject demanding expression and articulation of the male condition, in relation to both women and other men. Ramsay Burt discusses the emergence of this

new masculine order in the 80s and 90s and examines its aggressive, sexual and dynamic representations in the works of European artists like Pina Bausch, Lloyd Newson and others, summarising that suddenly masculinity in European physical theatre stage was taking centre stage in its most volatile, disturbing, sexual and abusive forms:

These recent works present a powerful and uncomfortable critique of prevalent norms of masculine social behaviour. Nevertheless, by critically dismantling mainstream dance conventions and problematizing technical virtuosity in male dance, all these artists have brought about a situation in which a new relationship has been defined between the dancer's body and the meaning of dance movement. The resulting work has had the potential to challenge the spectator to reassess aspects of masculine identity and experience that are generally denied or rendered invisible in mainstream cultural forms. (Burt, *The Male Dancer* 197)⁴⁵

What is interesting about Khan's representation of his male body and masculinity in *zero degrees*, is that it injects *kathak*'s codes of gender neutrality into the physical theatre Khan creates, by undercutting the latter's hyperbolic, sexualised and abusive depictions of masculinity. However while this gender-neutrality is only apparent on stage, it is important to remember that off-stage Khan is comfortable to be perceived by many South Asians as 'not man enough', and is feminised by sheer association with the profession of dance. He is simultaneously exoticised by the other segment of his white middle class British audience, who perceive his otherness in Orientalist terms, and subsequently feminises him and his art.

To undermine such feminine perceptions of himself and his art, it would be easy for Khan to assert his masculinity by drawing on the trajectory of his European physical theatre colleagues and their representation of sexualised hypermasculinity, but he quite

⁴⁵ This section does not appear in Burt's second edition to *The Male Dancer* (2007) and therefore I have turned to his first edition from 1995 for this quote, as I believe that Burt's observations are still relevant to the construction of Khan's masculinity as a statement against this hypermasculinity.

obviously rejects this. Instead he rewrites the male body within physical theatre in a way that does not adhere to pre-existent expectations, and goes a distance to undo its accepted norms by distinguishing between representations of masculinity and male sexuality. In *zero degrees* Khan constructs the visual impact of the male body on stage through structured and minimalist costumes that accentuate the contours and alignments of the male form. He and Cherkaoui appear in loose fitted linen trousers and tight fitted t-shirts. While this at first projects a sinewy and sensual masculine form, the fluidity and speed with which they move across the space and within the fabric, de-eroticises them almost immediately. One catches a tantalising glimpse of Lloyd Newson's men from *Enter Achilles or Strange Fish* before this alluring sensuality is replaced by virtuoso technique, and the minimalist structure of their clothes emphasises this beautifully. This liminal masculinity that Khan constructs in *zero degrees* is kinaesthetically present beneath the layer of fabrics within the torso itself. It rests on an analysis of his use of the spinal column, which is emphasised further when we are reminded of its culturally specific use in the traditionally solo form of *kathak*. Inherent within his *kathak* training, and therefore, almost unconsciously inscribed into his corporeal lexis, is the vertical alignment of his spine that 'marks out a very clear personal space which is never invaded' (Mitra, Cerebrality 170).

Embodying such a distinct sense of demarcated reality that negates touch or contact with other bodies in the space, Khan moves against Cherkaoui's elasticity and permeability and marks out clear boundaries of physical and metaphoric space between Cherkaoui's body and his own. These physical boundaries prevent their bodies from making intimate encounters. Even when they come close together, inches of empty space delineate their torsos from making full contact. In their moments of interactions

together, where they attempt to merge into the other's vocabulary, there is a clear and articulated use of the spine and the head. Khan's spine mostly remains vertical but fluid, except for allowing curvatures to make contact with the floor, from which he springs back into the vertical almost immediately. His head is always in control. The contact made between the performers is largely choreographic and rarely instinctual, leaving little room for ambiguities to arise in meaning. Khan's practice visibly engenders representation of a masculinity that is sensual yet uneroticised, vulnerable yet unfeminised, powerful yet unaggressive as it constructs itself in the ontology of live performance.

Khan's spinal articulation suggests to me that it has become the fulcrum at which the various tensions of his lived experience are played out and it becomes the tool that negotiates between the contrasting ideologies of culture, gender, identity and politics that shape him. Khan's and Cherkaoui's bodies therefore never fully unify into a singular entity and this helps amplify the multiplicity of diasporic identity. Instead they leave many openings and many unoccupied spaces that harbour a liminal masculinity that is in the process of being written, full of potency and crying out to be touched and nourished with new meanings. To me therefore the eroticism is in that space full of void that is the by-product of choreographic structures, charged with chemistry and caught up in negotiation between ideologies of body, culture, gender and corporeality in a third space. The eroticism I speak of is not necessarily of a sexual nature alone, but one that comes attached with the ability to move with an autonomous corporeality, released from the postcolonial conditionings surrounding spatial configurations of the South Asian classical dancer in general, and construction of masculinity, male sexuality and male identity in particular. And if and when the space

eventually does close in and the bodies actually do touch, and such release of the erotic is allowed to surface in the physicality, perhaps a more dynamic male dancer will emerge from Khan's practice. This male dancer could potentially embrace the sensation of touch and move it beyond a technical and clinical point of contact to an emotional and visceral experience, for both the dancer and his audience. Khan's negotiation of masculinity in *zero degrees* thus cannot be divorced from his complex diasporic identity. In fact as a male performer from the South Asian community in Britain who has carved out an influential niche in mainstream British culture, his gendered identity is at the core of his performative embodiment of the diasporic experience.

Through the extensive discussion above, this chapter has demonstrated the ways in which *zero degrees* evokes multiple and tangible manifestations of Bhabha's conceptual third space in the contexts of borderline identity politics, interdisciplinary experimentations and alternative masculinities. The piece has enabled Khan to rewrite his image of a virtuoso dancer by replacing this formalist spirit with an embodied narration of his lived self. This aligns his art to a 'maniacally charged present' (Phelan 148) that articulates the volatile unpredictability of the body that inhabits the European physical theatre genre. André Lepecki argues that it is 'within this reconfiguration of the boundaries of choreography, where choreography is recast as a theorization of embodiment, that one can start to understand the contours and aims of a radical innovation of contemporary theatrical dance' (Lepecki 130). Khan and Cherkaoui's explosive collaboration explores the volatility of the nuances of diasporic life in twenty-first century Europe. In this it is relevant to our times and self-referential, embodying the philosophy of performance making as laid down in the *Natyashastra* which requires performance 'to be grounded in the lives of performers and their audiences' (J. Brown

50). His postulations on his own embodiment of diaspora depicts the third space as tangible and physical, and shifts the perception of its interstitiality from being located between two opposing positions to multiple positions that must be negotiated to find a critical voice within it. In doing so, Khan starts to loosen the moorings on more conventional theorisations of the diasporic condition as a localised experience in a host country to a more globalised condition of nomadism, that permeates the complex reality of subjects who are constantly on the move between borders and nations and cultures, characterised by incessant travel as itinerants and their embodied homes.

Chapter 6

Embodiment of Relocated Subjectivities and Travelling Homes in *Bahok*⁴⁶

In *zero degrees*' dismantlings of the notion of the third space, one of the questions that is thrown up repeatedly is Khan's condition of uprootedness and its consequent multiple affiliations to people, places, cultures and nations, that inform his complex identity negotiations. This raises further questions about Khan's relationship to incessant relocations and its subsequent contestation of the notion of 'home'. In this chapter, Khan's conjectures on relocated subjectivities and the notion of home are examined and theorised through an analysis of *Bahok* (2008). Bengali for 'carrier' or 'one who carries', *Bahok* is a poignant title for a piece that explores the condition of uprootedness, while constantly being on the move and carrying home within one's body.⁴⁷ An artistic commentary on the postmodern condition of 'culture as travel' (Clifford, 'Traveling Cultures' 103) that has reconceptualised home as 'dwelling-in-travel' (Clifford, 'Traveling Cultures' 102), *Bahok* is an exposé on the experiences of eight multinational individuals who find themselves stuck in a 'non-place' (Augé) in the form of an unspecified global transit zone. Each of these individuals is a *bahok*, a carrier of their embodied histories, experiences and memories, and this liminal transit zone makes space for them to shed their literal and metaphoric load before, and instigated by, each other. *Bahok* exploits the emotional and physical space that opens up between the individuals' past rootedness and their present and shared uprootedness, and makes them

⁴⁶ In this chapter I build significantly on a previous publication entitled, 'Embodiment of Memory and the Diasporic Agent in Akram Khan's *Bahok*'.

⁴⁷ In a DVD on the making of *Bahok* entitled *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*, Khan reveals that the piece went through several working titles before settling on *Bahok*, which was suggested to him by his mother. He listed them chronologically as *Built to Destroy*, *Bridges* and *Nomads*.

confront their nomadic reality. It further demonstrates that for these eight individuals in search of belonging, their distinct and embodied cultural memories becomes irrelevant outside the borders of their national identities that range from Spain, Slovakia, India, South Korea, South Africa and China. In their place emerges a temporary shared community identity that is generated in and by the time and space they occupy together.

A collaboration between the multinational AKC and the National Ballet of China (NBC), *Bahok's* ensemble cast consists of five dancers from the former and three dancers from the latter.⁴⁸ The piece also marks an important departure point in AKC's repertoire because *Bahok* is Khan's choreographic and directorial debut within the company's trajectory as an outside eye. This allows Khan's artistic enquiries to continue to mature outside his own body, such that if *Loose in Flight* was an auto-ethnographic of his own identity negotiations in the diasporic context of the host nation, then *Bahok* becomes an ethnographic commentary on how others similar to himself, behave when entrapped in a global transit zone, beyond the limited borders of the diaspora as defined by home and host nations. Working with other bodies also enables Khan to exercise critical distance while ruminating over the significance of working with a multinational cast:

To bring together a Company of such diverse cultures, experiences and voices is a blessing for me and to the work. It is a reflection of what I am today, which is to be in a state of "confusion": where boundaries are broken, languages of origin are left behind and instead, individual experiences are pushed forward to create new boundaries. (Ak. Khan qtd. in AKC Website)

⁴⁸ National Ballet of China (NBC) was founded in 1959 and prides itself on being 'the only Chinese national ballet' (NBC website). Its artistic mission is twofold. Firstly it wants to promote western classical and contemporary ballet to Chinese audiences. And secondly it wants to explore the, 'unique fusion possible between classical ballet and Chinese culture' (NBC website). *Bahok* is proclaimed as NBC's first ever dialogue with the language of contemporary dance.

The spirit of this above passage permeates the central premise of *Bahok* in its critique of notions of origins and roots. Instead the piece emphasises the processual experience of global living that generates new identity formations which are fuelled by the distinct routes that characterise individual choice. The multiple nuances of this global existence can be theorised through the *bahok*, the nomadic ‘global soul’ (P. Iyer) whose body becomes the carrier of a travelling home. Since these eight multinational individuals share neither roots nor routes, but find themselves circumstantially stuck in a global transit zone, the piece suggests it would be counterproductive to homogenise the experience of being a *bahok*, as each individual in the piece is marked by distinct histories and embodied experiences. However it also suggests that through their circumstantial meeting and subsequent interactions, they are forced to generate a communal language with which to communicate with each other, based on their shared experience of a momentary entrapment. And in these shared moments they operate as a ‘community of circumstance’ (Fraser).

Multiple Relocated Subjectivities

Bahok opens onto an urban, cold and dark environment which is defined by nine utilitarian wooden chairs that face the audience; two of these are located frontstage right, while the rest are lined up backstage in twos and threes. A large, rectangular digital noticeboard, similar to those found at airport lounges and train stations, hangs centre stage. All these signifiers come together to strategically suggest an atmosphere of waiting and travel in a global transit zone. An electric drone starts to infiltrate the space as the light gradually dims into complete darkness. The sound continues to build to a crescendo through the darkness and creates an unsettling ambience that puts the audience on edge. It cuts out abruptly as the darkness snaps into a still image of seven

individuals who now occupy the formerly empty chairs, washed by a stark white light. The physicalities of these four women and three men, dressed in regular everyday urban clothes and clutching onto suitcases, rucksacks and bags, are reminiscent of travellers who are tired and bored of waiting in this unspecified departure lounge. There is one man who appears to be more active in his stillness as he stands downstage left, and faces downstage right with a suitcase in his hand, as though ready to move at the first given opportunity. The image is held still for what seems like ages, giving the audience time to examine tiny details about each individual, what they are carrying and exactly how their bodies etch into the space. Downstage left the man slowly puts down his suitcase leaving it upright, and then sits down on it before allowing the stillness to continue. He then gradually stands up, purposefully walks to the digital noticeboard with his back to the audience and stares at it in anticipation, as if willing it to change. Nothing happens for a long time and then suddenly the digital noticeboard shifts into action. It takes a long time for its letters to keep scrolling through before displaying the message 'PLEASE WAIT'. The new instruction on the noticeboard stirs life into the travellers as they reposition themselves in the space and respond despondently to their further prolonged wait.

A staggered conversation ensues between an East Asian woman and a European woman who sit downstage right in languages that the other cannot understand. One speaks in a Chinese dialect while the other responds in heavily-accented English, as they intersperse their verbal exchange with frantic physical gestures to find out where each person comes from. We find out that the English-speaker is twenty-eight year old Lali from Spain who claims 'everyone needs to know their origin' (*Bahok*). Obsessing over this notion of origin, Lali questions each individual about where they come from,

and we discover that her co-travellers hail from India, China, South Korea, Slovakia and South Africa. In order not to lose sight of her own origin Lali carries around with her fragmented details about her own identity, written onto scraps of paper which she tries to piece together as a jigsaw to derive from it some logical sense. She gets more and more agitated as the pieces of the jigsaw do not fit, and tries to share her anxiety with her fellow travellers who ignore her. Eventually Lali talks herself into frenzy before exclaiming ‘that’s my problem. I don’t know where is my home. Because people immigrate’ (*Bahok*). Lali and her anxiety are symbolic of a severely heightened version of the other travellers who have all clearly arrived from somewhere, but cannot seem to find a way out of this unspecified transit zone. They seem unsure of their destinations while simultaneously searching for their places of origin, and look both weary and agitated by the journeying they have undertaken. Through the use of dialogue, minimally sculpted quotidian gestures and emotive theatricality, this carefully crafted opening scene of *Bahok* brings to life eight tangible characters whose initial interactions signal three important issues: the first is each of their deeply ingrained condition of uprootedness as a consequence of their incessant relocations; the second is the group’s ‘super-diversity’ in the multiple nationalities they represent and the multiple languages they speak; and the third is the impact that this super-diversity has on their inability to communicate with each other.

The first issue, pertinent to relocations and nomadic globalised lives, constitutes the heart of the piece and requires theoretical attention. Extending the title of the piece from its etymological Bengali meaning of carrier to the realm of a conceptual framework, *bahok* becomes a useful construct through which two common conditions that permeate these distinct and multiple manifestations of relocated subjectivities can

be theorised. The first is their incessant feeling of uprootedness due to endless travels and relocations. Closely related to this is the second commonality, which is that their relocations are mobilised out of choice and privilege and not fuelled by political upheaval or violent uprootings from their roots. In *Bahok*, armed with mobile phones and state-of-the-art digital cameras, we witness such upwardly mobile and privileged travellers whose relocations are driven by choice and finance. A distinction between the experience of uprooting due to forced dislocation and the privilege attached to self-chosen relocation, is thus a vital lens through which to understand the mobility of these eight *bahoks* and mirrors Vijay Mishra's distinction between the 'Old Indian Diaspora'(authors like V. S. Naipaul) as a product of colonial and classic capitalism, and the 'New Indian Diaspora'(authors like Salman Rushdie) as a product of late twentieth century global capitalism (Mishra, *Literature* i). It is also this very privilege that grants the *bahok* the status of a social agent in a host country, if they wish to use this influential position in generating change. In other words, these subjects are new cosmopolitan elites, privileged, opportunity-seeking and upwardly mobile, who can become agents as citizens of the world if they so wish (Papastergiadis 55).

Khan reveals his own awareness of the difference between mobility derived from the privilege of relocation, and mobility experienced through enforced dislocation as he talks of his own mother's stories of repeated uprooting and settlement during the war of Bangladesh's independence:

She was telling me the story where she carried one of my cousins when the war was happening between Pakistan and Bangladesh, how she had to carry him for days through fields and rivers and forests. Each time they would settle and then they would have to be uprooted and have to move somewhere else. Each time they would carry less and less. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*)

He contextualises his mother's story of physically carrying his cousin from one place of settlement to another against the backdrop of Bangladesh's war on independence in which his uncle was a freedom fighter:

He was one of the Bangladeshi people who fought for independence against Pakistan [...] He has so many amazing stories about leaving his home and travelling with strangers who became his family because these strangers were fighting for the same cause. He has some incredibly horrific stories about when he got captured by the Pakistani army and was tortured. And somehow he managed to escape but his friend didn't. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*)

Khan describes the torture that was inflicted upon his uncle's friend who, on refusing to divulge information demanded by the army, had the skin removed from the soles of his feet. But his uncle reminisces that despite the pain inflicted upon his body, his friend continued to travel onwards in search of the next settlement. The final glimpse Khan provides of his very personal affiliations to the experience of travel, relocation and carrying physical and metaphoric load through such journeys, connects him directly to these themes:

My Mum was pregnant with me in Bangladesh – so in a way she carried me over to London where I was born. So if you like I am a product of a tradition of my family who are all carriers. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*)

As someone who acknowledges the privileges attached to relocating from choice, Khan's complex associations with travel, mobility and carrying permeates *Bahok*, and becomes an implicit homage to his ancestral history of often traumatic dislocations as evoked in Marianne Hirsch concept of 'postmemory':

Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their birth but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (Hirsch 103)

As a representative of the 'hinge generation' (Hoffman qtd. in Hirsch 103), Khan suggests in *Bahok* subtle remnants of his inherited ancestral stories 'without

appropriating them' (Hirsch 104), while ensuring that his own generation's stories are not 'displaced by them' (Hirsch 104). Thus in *Bahok*, Khan's postmemory is not 'mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (Hirsch 107) through eight *bahoks*, whose mobile cosmopolitans lives are marked by a starkly different kind of privileged mobility and interventionist agency when compared to his ancestors'.

Khan's evocation of these *bahoks* is reminiscent of British-American novelist Pico Iyer's notion of 'global souls' as 'the children of blurred boundaries and global mobility' (P. Iyer 24). Iyer suggests that these subjects of relocations who are not exiles (who have lost their homes), or expatriate (who work abroad), or nomads (whose movements are tied to rhythmic tides of the seasons) or refugees (whose dislocations are the result of violent uprootings), but themselves aware of the differences between these different subjectivities (like Khan), can be captured in this term as it evokes all categories of relocations simultaneously (P. Iyer 23). A 'global soul' is an international citizen:

made up of fusion (and confusions) [...] this creature could be a person who had grown up in many cultures all at once – and so lives in the cracks between them – or might be one who, though rooted in background, lived and worked on a globe that propelled him from tropic to snowstorm in three hours. (P. Iyer 18)

Iyer's 'global souls', like Khan's *bahoks*, have multiple affiliations to communities and homes which they carry around 'in the ties and talismans' (P. Iyer 19) that accompanies their relocations.

Despite these commonalities that permeate the lives of these *bahoks*, their responses to their self-chosen life of global nomadism are idiosyncratic. In one we

witness a complete loss of a sense of origin and a yearning for a state of settlement in a tangible home. In another we see a clear painful legacy of what was once home with all its contested emotions and a desire to escape from these memories through further relocations. In still others we see home being evoked through international telephone calls to their place of origin, to keep alive a sense of stability. The eight *bahoks* therefore demonstrate eight distinct manifestations of the impact of being ‘global souls’, and their distinct subjectivities add to the super-diversity they bring to their chance meeting place of the transit zone.

A Super-Diverse Non-Place

The second issue that the opening scene of *Bahok* brings to the fore is the condition of super-diversity as embodied in the eight *bahoks*, who represent five nations between them. At a micro level, Khan’s evocation of their super-diversity in the unspecified transit lounge, is symbolic of sociologist Steven Vertovec’s postulations on the super-diversity of contemporary Britain. Vertovec notes that the shift from the 1950s immigration patterns from Britain’s ex-colonies to more recent migratory patterns from a greater diversification of nations has created in Britain a ‘super-diversity’:

Britain can now be characterized by “super-diversity”, a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. (Vertovec 1024)

Through *Bahok* Khan offers a tiny glimpse of such super-diversification, where competing nationalities, cultural histories, languages and traditions find themselves contained in a singular space. Through this offering the piece also attempts to address

the ‘coexistence of multiple historical streams and the ways individuals in complex settings relate to each other from different vantage points’ (Vertovec 1026) in such places of super-diversity.

If *Bahok*’s unspecified transit zone and its multinational occupants are indicative of the super-diversity of contemporary Britain, then by implication contemporary Britain, particularly London, with its dense immigrant population from 179 nations, is an unspecified liminal ‘non-place’, a site ‘where particular histories and traditions are not (allegedly) relevant’ (Cresswell, *On the Move* 44) and are replaced by a network of multiple histories that must coexist. *Bahok* therefore contests the cultural anthropologist Marc Augé notion of non-places as spaces ‘which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity’ (Augé 63), and therefore are ‘not themselves anthropological places’ (Augé 63). As a symbolic representation of a super-diverse non-place, *Bahok* extends Augé’s postulations on non-places beyond the realms of ‘airport terminals, service stations, supermarkets, malls, hotelchains’ (Bosteels 119) to include in its remit, anthropological and relational places like London, where individual histories have had to mutate in order to accommodate the super-diverse histories of its vast immigrant population. At first *Bahok*’s location in an unspecified transit airport lounge might seem a direct reference to Augé’s notion of non-place. However through its implicit reference to the super-diversity of places like London, in its large-scale ‘capacity to import and export people, products, images and messages’ (Augé vii), *Bahok* simultaneously manages to construct these places themselves as global transit zones of ‘circulation, consumption and communication’ (Augé viii), that are having to renegotiate their relational history and identity in light of recent trends of mass immigration. This argument is further consolidated by the multinational identity of

AKC, whose spirit to work with performers from across the globe makes it a stakeholder in the importation, exportation, circulation and consumption of global souls, who find a temporary home in London while they work with the company, before moving on to other projects in other global cities. Thus *Bahok's* symbolic super-diverse non-place is fuelled by the autobiographical nomadic conditions of the eight multinational global souls who occupy it.

Complexities of Communication in the Diaspora-Space

The third issue signalled by *Bahok* in its opening sequence is the impact of a super-diverse environment in inhibiting individuals from communicating productively with each other. The problematic exchange between Lali and her Chinese co-traveller subtly captures the challenge that will be faced by these eight individuals in trying to communicate, in the absence of common points of reference and a common language. Even as English is resorted to for this purpose, it is far from the perfect medium of exchange as it is clearly a second language for all of them, apparent from Lali's heavily accented and grammatically inaccurate utterances. Lali's frantic chatter that expresses her anxiety about losing sight of her place of origin, brings to the fore that each traveller in *Bahok* comes from a notional place of origin and carries in their bodies, idiosyncratic histories and memories of these places. In this, *Bahok* signals cultural studies' recent postulations on the role of the body as an ideological apparatus through which ritualised social customs, shared histories and institutionalised cultural memories are transmitted through generations. Each *bahok's* body houses culturally specific memories pertaining to their own notional place of origin. However this body's security lies in its ability to activate and exercise its cultural memory only within the confines of the nation that lends it an identity. Therefore outside the borders of its own nation, having to live

alongside bodies with competing cultural memories, and unable to find other bodies sharing its own history, each *bahok*'s cultural memory becomes destabilised.

In time in the shared 'diaspora space' (Brah, *Cartographies* 16) of the global transit zone, these notional places of origin and their distinct cultural memories become diluted, as the *bahoks* are required to live in their present nomadic states amongst others whose places of origins are distinct from their own. By painting a picture of a society where dispersion and travel have overtaken 'staying put' (Brah, *Cartographies* 16), such that everyone has become a diasporean, *Bahok* creates a diaspora space where this dismantling is taken to its obvious conclusion, whereby it is impossible to ascertain who is indigenous and who is diasporic anymore. This is particularly true of a super-diverse non-place like contemporary Britain, in particular London. In this multilayered space, individual histories, languages and cultural memories are gradually dismantled in order to acknowledge and negotiate multiple histories and cultural memories that also infiltrate this shared space, such that a common language of communication may emerge. As the piece develops, it becomes apparent that the eight *bahoks* realise the importance of allowing such a common language of expression to materialise from their shared nomadic existence in the super-diverse diaspora space, in order to effectively communicate with each other. And from their circumstantial meeting and interactions, emerges a temporary community.

A Hybridised Community of Circumstance

In *Bahok* the community created through circumstantial needs as experienced by the eight travellers, evokes social scientist Heather Fraser's notion of a 'community of circumstance', which emerges from a situation that otherwise disparate individuals find

themselves a part of and connect through, as a result of these shared circumstances (Fraser 286-287).⁴⁹ However it takes time for the eight *bahoks* to realise that in order to communicate with each other and understand their shared nomadic reality, they must acknowledge themselves as a ‘community of circumstance’, and begin to function as a collective. Separated from each other by distinct histories, languages, cultural memories and national affiliations, initially these eight people retain their individualities. We witness volatile bodies, agile bodies, grounded bodies, tired bodies, frivolous bodies, playful bodies, fragmented bodies and distorted bodies, all in this one diasporic space that must negotiate with each other in order to successfully generate a common point of reference. Despite their shared sense of uprootedness, the eight *bahoks* find it impossible to communicate with each other as they hold on to their ‘archival memories’ (Taylor 19). Every attempt at interaction is a failure. As long as they remain confined within their own ‘archival memories’ and refuse to negotiate a collective understanding of their situation, the *bahoks* remain dysfunctional within the liminal space.

In a particular instance when two Chinese women perform a ballet routine on their own, they only manage to communicate with each other while the others look on in awe of their otherness. A physical interjection into the ballet sequence from the Keralite man with his *kalaripayattu* gestures causes a breakdown of communication and the bodies literally clash as tensions seem to rise within the group. This is heightened further when the Slovakian man expresses his annoyance at the Chinese man’s insistence on documenting every fleeting moment of this liminal space on his digital camera, through a beautifully crafted and highly energetic choreography of dodging being photographed. They almost get into a physical fight and are kept apart by the

⁴⁹ Fraser cites Graham Marsh’s formulation of the *community of circumstance* in her study of communities.

Korean man who attempts to ease the tension in the group. In his anxiety he freezes into a momentary fragmented gesture which he keeps repeating like a broken record. His spinal column leans slightly forward and then is jerked back into the centre, and his head and right arm follows this pattern endlessly. As his friend comforts him he finally blurts out 'I'm stuck'. This physical and verbal proclamation poignantly captures his claustrophobia experienced in a tense, shared space that has not been conducive to enabling communication between its inhabitants. Consequently he finds himself stuck linguistically, physically, spatially, temporally and emotionally, and appears frozen in time between his (and their) collective points of disjuncture.

The travellers acknowledge the growing tension borne of their dysfunctionality to communicate as a group and gradually come to realise the importance of generating a shared sense of mobility, to move beyond the condition of dwelling in their individual past cultural memories in order to enable their future and assimilated growth as a community, born out of circumstance. Khan reflects on the complex relationship between mobility, carrying and dwelling within the diaspora:

Concept of carrying means you have to keep moving, you have to shift. You get stopped if you dwell in the past. [...] if you're in the present then you are constantly moving and must keep moving. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*)

His views on the significance of mobility as 'socially produced motion' (Cresswell, *On the Move* 3) that prevents stagnation and assists assimilation, emphasises the transgressive quality latent in creating acts of 'displacement, the moving between in place and out of place' (Cresswell, *On the Move* ix). It also reminds us that in this global cosmopolitan context of incessant travel and multiple settlements, 'culture [...] no longer sits in places, but is hybrid, dynamic – more about routes than roots' (Cresswell, *On the Move* 1), and is therefore generated and transmitted through

mobility, which has come to stand for ‘an alternative to place, boundedness, foundations, and stability’ (Cresswell, *On the Move* 2). This interventionist power in mobility implies that there is more to it than just spatial displacement:

For global nomads [...] it is also a component of their economic strategies, as well as their modes of self-identity and subjectivity formation. In this case, practices of spatial displacement are entwined with experiences of auto-metamorphosis. (D’Andrea 23).

In *Bahok* the eight individuals undergo individual metamorphosis of diluting their own cultural memories to emerge as a ‘community of circumstance’ that can collectively capture and articulate their shared entrapment in the global transit zone. Through generating a communal ‘repertoire’ (Taylor 19), the *bahoks* create an ephemeral, temporary and non-reproducible physicality, that is borne of their shared circumstances and temporal and spatial interactions. This communal language that emerges is a fundamentally syncretic and hybridised language, unique only to these eight individuals and their shared reality as a ‘community of circumstance’, fuelled by the need to remain on the move.

Two instances exemplify how hybridised mobilities can be instrumental in shaking relocated subjectivities out of the condition of stagnation. The first is a dream sequence duet between a Chinese woman and a Slovakian man, in which the two bodies interact to create an illusion of a new entity altogether. And the second is the penultimate ensemble sequence delivered by all eight travellers, where a synchronised sequence ensues that simultaneously retains individual idiosyncrasies while generating a collective language of expression. Permeating both these sequences is the need to achieve and sustain a hybridised mobility as a fundamental feature of globalisation, generated by incessant relocations. The relationship between their mobility (their incessant need to move) and their hybridity (how they move) is intrinsic to

understanding ‘how mobility is embodied differentially’ (Cresswell, ‘Embodiment’ 176), and ‘how the act of moving is reflected in and constructed through different bodies’ (Cresswell, ‘Embodiment’ 176).

The first instance occurs halfway through the piece and demonstrates, through a dream sequence, the promise of a hybridised mobility that can arise in their existence if the travellers were to only move beyond their own cultural reference points, and consider entering into productive dialogue with each other. A beautiful Chinese woman is so tired of waiting in the departure lounge that she keeps falling asleep on her Slovakian co-traveller’s shoulder. At first the Slovakian man politely, gently, repeatedly and effortlessly pushes her back up into a sitting position. However her spine is completely limp, like that of a rag doll, such that even if he tries to pick her up and move with him, her body weight is entirely reliant upon his support. She clings onto his shirt as he manoeuvres her body weight around him and accidentally places her lips on his in a momentary kiss. He is clearly taken by her beauty which is exacerbated by her vulnerability and her unconscious sharing of intimacy, as she continues to rely on him for support. He picks her up into an embrace, so her arms and legs are locked around his neck and waist respectively. To cope with his circumstantial embarrassment, he fantasises a sensual encounter between them as the lights dim around the space to focus on the intimate corporeal dialogue that ensues. Swathed in purple light, she slowly releases her upper body from the hug and reaches backwards towards the floor, suspended at his waist, by latching her legs around him in a tight grip. Their limbs move out of their central axis horizontally and their hands meet in mid-air. At first their bodies create an illusion of a mirror image, moving in perfect synchronisation with each other. Their bodies entwine in such perfect synchronicity, that it becomes impossible to

identify one body as distinct from the other and are so in-tuned that they each control the other, and each give into the other with mutual trust and understanding. They become an extension of each other's limbs, such that as she holds up her left palm before her face to simulate holding up a mirror, he uses his right hand, as though it were her own, to comb her hair. This image is representative of the *abhinaya* element in *kathak* repertoire, where the image of the woman adorning herself in the mirror as she waits for her lover, is a popular motif and is performed solo. However in *Bahok*, this motif receives a curious treatment as the adorning and the reflection in the mirror imagery are carried out by two individual bodies that appear as one.

As this intimate moment builds to an emotive and musical crescendo the spotlight snaps out, leaving the space in total darkness. When the light returns gradually the Slovakian man is on the floor by himself and the Chinese woman is asleep, far away from him on a chair, emphasising that their intimate encounter occurred in his imagination. This dream metaphor insinuates something important about the nature of their nomadic mobility which we witness, suggesting the potential latent in their bodies, but emphasising it is not a part of their current reality yet. The syncretic mobility in this dream sequence also demonstrates that speed and relocation are not all that governs the life of the travellers, that the past and the future are not the only temporal and spatial reference points for diasporic living, that to live in the present locale is just as vital.

Here we see a hybrid entity emerge in totality, a newly forged creation through the body of two pre-existing relocated subjects. It is significant to note that this new forged entity embodies hope, calm, sensuality and presence. But equally vital to note is that it only exists in the traveller's imagination, perhaps indicative of the hope and calm

that every global soul desires within to home their ever transient bodies. The semantic of their language is entirely specific to their intimate and lyrical bodily encounter. It indicates the serenity and pleasure that lies dormant in these apparently agitated bodies. But most importantly it denotes that just in that moment of exchange between the two bodies, home is evoked as a space of familiar intimacy and is traced in the encounter that transpires between them. And in that present moment, their global souls and their bodies are homed and are 'at home' within themselves, with each other and in the world.

If this first instance of hybridised mobility signifies a promise of the potential of nomadic existence, the second instance which is the penultimate sequence of the piece, embodies a definitive attempt by the travellers towards embracing their global nomadic lives 'as a new home and reference' (D'Andrea 3), through a collectively generated corporeality as a 'community of circumstance'. In order to move beyond the remit of the unspecified global transit zone and permeate the frontiers that seemingly separate them, the individuals gradually assimilate into an ensemble group hug to recognise that, 'a frontier is not a wall, but a threshold' (Augé xiv). Their idealistic group hug stands not for 'a world without frontiers, but one where all frontiers are recognized, respected and permeable' (Augé xiv-xv). Lali's character tries to achieve this permeability by being the last person to join the hug. She launches herself into the centre of the mass clambering over her fellow travellers. As she reaches the centre the light snaps into a bright white wash as the group explodes into a mass movement sequence that starts small and grows bigger, indicating the beginning of their generation as a community. They walk two steps forward and two steps back until they have all embodied a common rhythm. At times they appear stuck to the floor through their left leg, while

their right leg and arms strive forward to release themselves from feeling rooted in the past. In considered and carefully crafted ways, they break into a collective and explosive expression of mutation and re-growth. The ensemble moves as one, taking time to achieve this vision of synchronicity that has grown from their liminal condition. Sometimes some individuals fall in and out of place as they break free of the routine while others continue, only to be drawn back into the power of the ensemble again. Their limbs slice through the air and the bodies symbolise transience and dynamism, as the rhythm and pace of the section builds to a crescendo. The speed of the bodies at times makes it difficult to distinguish between the eight bodies and their individual limbs, as the ensemble collapse into a communal mass. Despite the synchronised nature of their movement, individual traces and idiosyncrasies are left behind, suggesting the past is not erased but layered upon the present. In this penultimate sequence their bodies simultaneously occupy their shared present, look into their distinct futures and carry with them their individual pasts. However because they occupy the present, their bodies are ephemeral and non-archival. Based on their shared experience of liminality, the *bahoks* create their own repertoire and through it a system of knowledge of the present moment as generated through becoming a ‘community of circumstance’. As a consequence of only ever belonging to the present moment, each of the *bahoks* is forced to reconsider their relationship to their individual notions of home.

The Body as a Travelling Home

If incessant relocations, multiple departures and arrivals and endless resettlements characterise the lives of *bahoks*, then the only moment they can ever claim is the present in which they must constantly seek out their futures, while trying to bury their pasts. Consequently identity formations of such relocated subjectivities enter into

highly contested relationships with the notion of home. Avtar Brah describes this complexity beautifully:

Where is home? On the one hand, “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of “origin”. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall [...] all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations. In other words, the varying experiences of [...] everyday lived culture [...]. (Brah, *Cartographies* 188-189)

In *Bahok* we witness their initial mourning of the loss and intangibility of home as this ‘mythic place of desire’ that only exists in their imagination, and their eventual acknowledgment of home as an embodied and lived experience of whatever locale their bodies occupy at any given moment in time. It follows then that globalised nomadism challenges rooted notions of places of origin, while simultaneously harbouring in relocated subjects a ‘homing desire’ (Brah, *Cartographies* 16) in their place of settlement. This enables these *bahoks* to seek the embodied experience of ‘feeling at home’ (Brah, *Cartographies* 4) in multiple locations, instead of attaching their selves to a single physical place that is home (Brah 1996 194). In turn the *bahoks*’ relocations dismantle the classical notion of home as a tangible physical place that is ‘fixed, rooted, stable – the very antithesis of travel’ (George 2).

In *Bahok* home exists at multiple dimensions and is ‘simultaneously about roots and routes’ (Brah, *Cartographies* 189). Sometimes it is experienced as an imagined ‘desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure to the subjects’ (George 2), and at other times an experience and site of ‘dwelling-in-travel’ (Clifford, ‘Travelling Cultures’ 102), such that the bodies of the relocated subjects become ‘traveling homes’ (George 2). These multiple evocations of home suggest that it would be ‘be counter-

productive to insist on any one overarching formula for “home” (George 2), because its unique experience is dependent entirely on subjective circumstances of each *bahok*. In the piece we experience this pluralistic and subjective embodiment of home, as we witness each individual connecting with it in very distinctive ways.

For the Spanish Lali, the search for home, both as a place of origin and as her place of settlement, overrides her ability to settle in the present. She is a near psychotic woman whose highly volatile and restless body represents the extent to which her nomadic existence has permeated her corporeality. Lali’s condition of homelessness is initially depicted as a ‘serious threat to moral behaviour’ (Malkki qtd. in Creswell, *On the Move* 27), as her behaviour towards her fellow travellers becomes menacing and oppressive. While she contemplates and tries to piece together her past through the pieces of paper that she carries around with her, she is incapable of remaining still or contained in one place. The sharp angularity of her movements, her endless agitated floor work that consists of rolls, collapses and sharp rises, her simultaneous forward and upward leaps and her perpetually forward leaning spine suggest a body that occupies the future and is always relocating in search of a final destination. Lali does not know where she comes from or where she is heading, and has truly forgotten everything about herself. In some moments, she sits on her knees and rocks herself to procure inner stillness and calm. Unable to do so she falls forward onto her belly and continues to rock back and forth, until the frenzy of her movement takes over yet again. The only times her body manages to achieve some form of superficial stillness is when she returns to imagining her past, in the form of the pieces of paper in her hand. However as soon as she starts to focus on the jigsaw that does not fit, she gets agitated again and moves on. Her identity is enmeshed upon and into her body as she transposes her

emotional fragility into a highly volatile physicality that perpetually lacks calm. She is incapable of sharing any memory of the past as her body constantly occupies a temporality ahead of herself, and her present becomes ephemeral as soon it is played out.

As the piece moves on Lali attempts to phone home using her fellow travellers' mobile phone. Even though she is unable to contact her mother, the imagined connection to her place of origin appears to calm her agile body into stillness and slowly makes her realise that her connection to home is carried in her body. Towards the end of the piece Lali asserts control over the text that appears on the digital noticeboard by using the mobile phone as a remote control.⁵⁰ Every time she points it at the board and clicks the imagined remote control, the text that appears captures what the travellers have collectively come to realise during their time in the unspecified transit zone:

You sound lost.
Where are you going?
Is it in your papers?
What are you carrying?
Body.
Memories.
Home.
Hope.
Home. (*Bahok*)

This transformation in Lali's character, from the agitated and lost traveller to the one who matures into revealing to her fellow travellers that home is embodied in their nomadic existences, is a vital turning point in *Bahok*. It reminds us that the non-specified global transit zone that the travellers occupy is, at a micro level, a 'simulated metropolis [...] inhabited by a community of modern nomads' (Chambers 57) and a

⁵⁰ Through the course of the piece the digital noticeboard have shifted from displaying clinical instructions such as 'PLEASE WAIT', 'DELAYED' and 'RESCHEDULED' to being used as a translation medium for the story that the South Korean man recalls of home. In this final scene, the noticeboard takes on the role of a commentator that communicates directly with the travellers.

‘collective metaphor of cosmopolitan existence where the pleasure of travel is not only to arrive, but also not to be in any particular place’ (Chambers 57-58), such that dwelling is a condition that slowly manifests within one’s body and not outside it. Lali’s transformation also heightens the catalytic role she plays through *Bahok* in searching for not only her own self, but also the more seemingly grounded of the individuals into expressing distant and often painful memories of their homes.

One such individual is a South African woman who on the surface appears calm and collected. Recalling an interrogation scene at UK immigration where she helps out her South Korean friend as a translator, she suddenly gets defensive when asked what she carries in her hand baggage. Clutching onto her bag defensively she takes out a pair of shoes which are clearly not her own and says ‘only my father’s shoes’ (*Bahok*). The significance of carrying her father’s shoes into her present, and the act of stepping into the space his feet occupied in the past painfully evokes ‘the presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claim to it’ (Augé 61).

What follows is a sequence where we see her painfully putting on her father’s shoes and with them a weight of her past. She grudgingly steps into them and relives the memory of home in her father’s shoes as her upper body gently droops forward to evoke the image of an elderly spine. She tries to walk, slowly and painfully, and rests her right arm across her lower back and holds on to her left elbow. Her upper body shakes as though with age and tiredness as her right arm, and then her left, breaks out erratically to simulate actions of driving a car, shifting gears and combing her hair – all with shaking hands and the imprecision that accompanies age. However, gradually the person behind the steering wheel becomes less of her father and more of herself, as we

witness her driving away from home, from her father. She tries to take her left feet out of her father's shoes, and through a fractured and painful sequence of movements, where her upper body moves in contradiction to her lower body, her right leg remains rooted to her past while her upper torso and left leg attempts to move forward and beyond through jolted fragmented gestures. This sequence at once captures disjuncture and movement away from home and a simultaneous and painful connection to home which she carries deep in her sinews. The very act of putting on her father's shoes thus homes and destabilises her simultaneously. Rosemary Marangoly George suggests that the 'word "home" immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection' (George 1) as evoked in the body of the South African woman, who expresses a need for the comfort and shelter of home while trying to escape from its patriarchal clasps. The South African woman realises through her painful interaction with her father's shoes that she is just as fiercely rooted in and by them as she is committed to seeking her routes to escape from home. In this moment she acknowledges that although it is central to her 'socialization into the world' (Short ix), home for her is 'a place of loathing and longing' (Short ix) and thus 'a place to escape to and a place to escape from' (George 9).

Home is further evoked as less of a painful past and more of a technologically enhanced present in the interdependency between an Indian man and his mobile phone, through which he is in constant contact with his *amma* (mother) back in Kerala. His need to speak in Malayalam suggests that home for him is partially a memory that can be recalled through linguistic affiliations. Therefore while on the one hand, speaking in his mother tongue to his mother roots him to a particular place and culture, the mobile phone becomes a signifier of his globally mobile status, through which he can maintain

his transnational ties with ease due to advancement in technology and reduced telecommunication costs (Vertovec 1043). In him we see an attempt to trace his cultural memory through his language, a tool of communication that does not help him connect to his fellow *bahoks*, but one that keeps him rooted to his past and to people beyond his immediate present environment. The endless mobile phone calls eventually stop connecting as the performance continues, suggesting that holding on to his cultural memory will not move him forward in his transient state. His grounded physicality of *kalaripayattu*, a Keralite martial art form, may trick us into perceiving him as secure and rooted, but the act of calling home endlessly reveals a clear sense of uprootedness and a constant attempt to secure his roots through clinging on to the past. Salman Rushdie writes on the human need to secure connection to our birthplace:

we pretend that we are trees and speak of “roots.” Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (Rushdie qtd. in George, 199)

The three *bahoks* discussed above embody Rushdie’s words in completely different ways. Some are so uprooted that they are unable to occupy the present moment in favour of always dwelling in the future. Others root themselves to the past and the present simultaneously through painful negotiations and this makes their future difficult to negotiate. And still others are so linked to their past that they have no awareness of their present, let alone their future ahead. In each instance however, home becomes a politicised entity that the individual must negotiate as part of their relocated subjectivities. Rosemary Marangoly George suggests that beyond the geographical location that it evokes, home is a political concept that relies on patterns of inclusion and exclusion of different groups:

Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognized as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing, A place that is flexible,

that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. It is community. (George 9)

Home then, is an isolationist trope that engenders difference by creating affiliations of belonging for its subjects. In *Bahok* this becomes apparent in the linguistic trope of the Keralite man who excludes his fellow travellers from sharing his experience. George suggests that home is a community that is never neutral and a politically charged space where ideological control is exercised. The South African woman's fractured body suggests its urgency to break away from the ideological control of her home's patriarchal environment, while simultaneously being controlled by it. Spanish Lali embodies a nomadic existence in her inability to be homed at any given point, because her volatile and fragile body *is* her home.

These multiple physical narratives are carried in individual bodies that are not contained within the borders of singular nations and singular homes. Travelling through multiple borders and setting up multiple homes calls upon the individual's body to become the vehicle through which an individual is 'homed' at any given point. Thus the political act of imagining home is enmeshed with and shifted onto the corporeality of the individual's physical existence. The imaginary becomes the real and the tangible. Akram Khan comments upon the need to disassociate a singular physical location with the notion of home and to acknowledge the body's ability to home and become homed at any given point:

When I started my own place, the first thing I did was [...] to throw away, simplify, no memory. We start new and never collect anything. The memory's in the body. It doesn't have to be in material things. (Ak. Khan qtd. in *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*)

Home becomes a multiple register and embodiment of unique experiences exclusive to 'individual systems of DNA' (Chaudhry, 'Bahok Query'). In *Bahok* we thus encounter eight different evocations of home, to counter eight different experiences of homelessness. The need to find communal belonging through the act of collective imagination by communities is thrown into question. Instead, the body of the *bahok* becomes home and this conceptually intangible notion finds a bodily reality. And since each individual's lived experience is unique, the concept of home as a singular, geographical and homogeneous entity becomes redundant and is replaced by pluralistic corporeal expressions. Thus, as Chaudhry's words vividly capture, a generalised and flattened concept of 'home', despite the common uprootedness which we witness in our *bahoks*, is a myth in itself. It needs dismantling to acknowledge the significance of subjectivity in relocated identity construction and its relationship to belonging within transnational contexts.

Through these poignantly crafted sequences, *Bahok* redefines the concept of home by examining it through the interconnected conditions of dwelling-in-travel and mobility, generated by nomadic existences of incessantly relocating subjects. As an artistic commentary *Bahok* brings about an important shift in the ideological debates on home:

From the study of bounded and rooted cultures [...] to the study of routes – the ways in which identities are produced and performed through mobility, or more precisely, travel. As this travel increases, so cultures can no longer be said to be located. (Cresswell, *On the Move* 44)

The piece therefore questions the 'organic, naturalizing bias of the term culture – seen as a rooted body that grows, lives, died etc.' (Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' 101), and emphasises homes as multiple and mobile 'sites of displacement, interference, and interaction' (Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures' 101) which are increasingly experienced in

subjective and specific ways. *Bahok* also exemplifies how within globalised contexts, competing cultural memories embodied within individuals are gradually dismantled to be replaced by the emergence of a shared language that binds those who occupy the space temporarily, lending them the status of a 'community of circumstance'. This community is able to eventually communicate with each other through a new shared vocabulary, based on the communal experience of occupying the transitional diaspora space. This new language of the repertoire is non-archival, generated in the present and becomes a valuable system of embodied knowledge through which to understand the conditions of the global soul, the *bahok*. However beyond these symbolic levels of signification, *Bahok* becomes Khan's postulation on the city of London as a super-diverse non-place, occupied by innumerable *bahoks* - global souls, who must forgo their individual histories and cultural memories to temporarily generate an albeit large 'community of circumstance' for the brief time they make the city their home, before relocating to the next global city, only to repeat these processes all over again. This lends their relocated subjectivities the ability to 'see everywhere with a flexible eye' (P. Iyer 24), such that the very notion of home as a fixed place of settlement becomes unfamiliar, and the state of instability and unfamiliarity becomes the only home they will ever know.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Khan's emergent performance aesthetic and the socio-political content it contains, demonstrates and references 'a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of "openness" towards people, places, and experiences from different cultures' (Szerszynski and Urry 468), and he uses these encounters to rewrite his own identity positions.⁵¹ The productions analysed in the previous four chapters are indicative of this spirit of intercultural and worldly enquiry, firstly in marking the increasingly global nature of his collaborations with artists from China, Japan, France, Belgium, Pakistan, India, Korea, South Africa, Spain and secondly, in their evocative content that captures Khan's oscillating affiliations between the local, the national and the global layers of his existence.

In *Loose in Flight*, the backdrop of London's Docklands is simultaneously symbolic of Khan's complex relationship to this east London locale as a historically contested space of migrancy, and an acknowledgement of the corporate internationalism and global economy that it has come to stand for. The strategic use of this locale in the dance-film thus signifies Khan's global critique of it, by injecting his subjectivity into and onto its iconoclastic landscape. Through *Gnosis*, Khan's personal and local relationship with his own mother in London finds global resonances in mother-son relationships across the South Asian diaspora, through his subjective interpretation of the Gandhari-Duryodhana dynamic. In an undeniably globalised existence, travelling on

⁵¹ Szerszynski and Urry formulate their thoughts on the philosophy of cosmopolitanism by building on John Tomlinson's scholarship on the framework in his study entitled *Globalization and Culture*.

the privilege of his British passport, in *zero degrees* Khan's national and transnational ties are challenged and provocatively evoked within the borderzone politics of Bangladesh and India, as he comes to reconsider his identity positions in relation to citizenship and passports. Finally, *Bahok* articulates Khan's postulations on his local city of London as a super-diverse non-place while simultaneously evoking similar yet unidentified global non-places that are home to world travellers in their perpetual condition of transit. Thus, even as Khan's artistic journey has embraced an increasingly global outlook, his locale of London finds repeated evocations in his works. Khan acknowledges his debt to London and claims that his global journey would not have been possible without being immersed in the city's nomadic and cosmopolitan philosophy (Ak. Khan, 'Interview'). I propose that in its multiple evocations to local, national and global conditions of contemporary life that colour complex identity formations, Khan's performance aesthetic can be usefully theorised through the conceptual framework of cosmopolitanism. In this he may be considered similar to both his predecessors in the cultural field of South Asian arts and to more contemporary artists like his collaborators Nitin Sawhney and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, whose art-works 'articulate complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of their resident nationstate' (Vertovec and Cohen 2).

At its simplest the philosophy and framework of cosmopolitanism has been regarded by many scholars as 'a vision of global democracy and world citizenship' (Vertovec and Cohen 1), and demonstrates some or all of the following qualities as identified in bullet points by Bronislaw Szerszynski and John Urry:

- extensive *mobility* in which people have the right to “travel” corporeally, imaginatively and virtually and for significant numbers they also have the means to so travel
 - the capacity to *consume* many places and environments en route
 - a *curiosity* about many places, peoples and cultures and at least a rudimentary ability to locate such places and cultures historically, geographically and anthropologically
 - a willingness to take *risks* by virtue of encountering the “other”
 - an ability to *map* one’s own society and its culture in terms of a historical and geographical knowledge, to have some ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies
 - *semiotic* skill to be able to interpret images of various others, to see what they are meant to represent, and to know when they are ironic
 - an *openness* to other peoples and cultures and a willingness/ability to appreciate some elements of the language/culture of the “other”
- (Szerszynski and Urry 470)

In his choice of content, Khan’s aesthetic references an innate ability to embrace mobility through both physical and metaphorical travel, to consume people and cultures in order to articulate their particularities and to continuously take risks and rewrite his own subject positions through these encounters. These qualities are all driven by his openness towards people and cultures that his mother instilled in him during his liberal upbringing in the diaspora, and were enhanced further through his future liaisons with an international group of likeminded artists. Khan’s art echoes his fellow collaborator Cherkaoui’s postulations on the processes of self-identification that lies dormant in such a cosmopolitan approach:

You are never just one thing, one character, one function but rather each of us has the ability to perform many different functions, within a project but also in life. By recognizing this multiplicity in oneself, you realise that “the Other” (being the other performer, the new culture you discover, or the audience even) is often buried somewhere inside you too. [...] “The Other” is somewhere inside of you. It’s never really detached from you, and it is this bond that makes me keep looking for other links. It’s a never-ending search for interconnectedness, for common roots. (Cherkaoui qtd. in Uytterhoeven 10)

While his particular way of viewing and interacting with the world can be critiqued through a cosmopolitan’s privileged ability to ‘enter and exit politics and social

relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports, credit cards, membership in airline clubs [...]’ (Calhoun ctd. in Rao 26), Khan’s allegiances to his personal and local concerns and issues undercuts such criticism. In this he has echoed John Tomlinson’s approach to cosmopolitanism as a philosophy that embraces both a local and a global outlook simultaneously. Tomlinson proposes that this ‘glocalised’ strain of cosmopolitanism necessitates cosmopolitan subjects to be aware of their everyday life choices, such that they reflect through them ‘the wider world as touching their local lifeworld, and vice versa’ (Tomlinson 198). Szerszynski and Urry summarise Tomlinson’s view in the following way:

Such a cosmopolitanism involves comprehending the specificity of one’s local context, to connect to other locally specific contexts and to be open to a globalizing world. (Szerszynski and Urry 471)

Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo identify this recent turn in scholarship on cosmopolitanism to ‘dislodge the concept from its traditional associations with privilege and with impartiality to the demands of the local’ (Gilbert and Lo 4).⁵² Khan’s evocation of global and ‘transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal’ (Gilbert and Lo 4) can be seen to nuance his depiction of the eight *bahoks* and their embodiment of particular histories, cultural specificities and individual affiliations to homes, despite their shared condition of uprootedness.

In this light Wei-Chen Roger Liu’s observation that Khan’s aesthetic exists in a ‘fluctuation between particularism and universalism’ (Liu 307) deserves some scrutiny. In his analysis of Khan’s recent dance-film *If Not, Why Not?*, Liu claims that Khan’s aesthetic ultimately transcends his diasporic identity and body, and instead embraces a global universalism (Liu 308). To the extent that Khan’s aesthetic, in its spirit of

⁵² For more scholarship critiquing the classical perception of cosmopolitanism as a privileged and privileging philosophy please see Arjun Appadurai, Steven Vertovec and Robert Cohen, and Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider amongst others.

cosmopolitanism, does oscillate between the local and the global, Liu's claim is valid. However my contention with his claim that Khan's aesthetic ultimately forgoes his diasporic subjectivity altogether in favour of global universalism, is that Liu's view does not adequately acknowledge the recent turn of cosmopolitanism to embrace local issues and concerns. Khan's global affiliations do not operate in isolation to his local concerns, and his global exchanges invariably colour the way in which he rewrites his own complex identity positions within the diaspora. Thus Khan's aesthetic 'endeavours to locate cross-cultural encounters within relevant sociopolitical and historical contexts and reflexive interpretative frameworks' (Gilbert and Lo 10), and in being 'caught up in hybrid spaces, entangled histories and complex human corporeographies' (Gilbert and Lo 11), it moves freely between the local, the national, the global spaces of the diaspora. This desire to embrace such multiple affiliations simultaneously and to allow each layer to rewrite the other endlessly, has secured for Khan a strong position within the landscape of British multicultural arts. Moreover it has lent him:

The ability to stand outside of having one's life written and scripted by any one community, whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture – whatever it might be – and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings. (Hall, 'Political' 26)

The analyses of the four productions have demonstrated the nature of the socio-political issues that are raised in Khan's art which ultimately enable him to rewrite his complex identity positions in the public domain, through an aesthetic that is inseparably fuelled by his syncretic identity.

However, a holistic understanding of Khan's performance aesthetic requires an examination of the equally syncretic language through which these socio-political commentaries are articulated. In the Introduction to this thesis, I have already problematised the popularly held notion that his aesthetic is 'contemporising *kathak*',

and have instead stated that it is far more productive to examine his performance aesthetic in alignment with the field of physical theatre, due to its concern with socio-political legibility of movement, its interpersonal politics and its syncretic negotiations between the disciplines of dance and theatre. In order to validate this claim, I shall firstly identify the ways in which Khan's aesthetic has borrowed from the double legacy of avant-garde dance and theatre respectively, before going on to identify his debt to his predecessors in the physical theatre genre. I shall then go on to examine how his intercultural inflections of the South Asian principle of *abhinaya* and the philosophy of *rasa*, are contributing to and transforming the landscape of the genre in significant ways.

An Heir of Physical Theatre

From the field of avant-garde dance Khan has borrowed the use of everyday quotidian gestures that imbue his performance aesthetic with social reality. Alongside this pedestrian vocabulary, he also uses the technical prowess of formalist movement languages like release technique and contact improvisation, in order to communicate specific ideas through these abstract patterns of movement. Khan uses these formalist movement systems to generate signification through embodied subjectivities, and lays less emphasis on the structural, aesthetic and formal qualities of the movements themselves. Thus the technical precision of these formalist movement systems are chosen with artistic intention to achieve emotional expressivity and escalation. In Khan's performance aesthetic the interlacing of everyday gestures and stylised formalist technique creates a semantic where the pedestrian gestures act as familiar sign-posts for the audience. Through these sign posts the stylised movement patterns capture the more escalated, abstracted and heightened moments of the individual's journey through the

piece. Physical theatre thus becomes a brutal terrain through which the embodied subject's corporeality is etched out for artistic consumption. It is this sense of brutality that arises in Khan's art from the 'interplay of humans in these diverse and at times incongruent manifestations' (Preston-Dunlop and Sánchez-Colberg 9), that lends his aesthetic a rawness and a certain edge that communicates both interpersonal politics and socio-political commentaries on the world we live in.

From the field of avant-garde theatre experimentations Khan's aesthetic builds implicitly on the revolutionary visions and works of luminaries such as Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski. Khan and his performers create a complex web constituted by method acting principles of emotion recall on the one hand, and defamiliarising techniques on the other. Such a complex nexus of signs undermines 'the spectator's emphatic identification by presenting their role-playing as self-consciously theatrical [...]' (Broadhurst 18), such that the performance 'simultaneously distances and engages the spectator' (Broadhurst 18) by blurring the lines between reality and fiction.⁵³ Khan's borrowings from the theatre avant-garde nuances his aesthetic with the qualities of intention, emotive articulability, escalation, signification and a strong narrative drive, that is usually presented in fragmented and fractured forms. However Khan's embodied subjects are not characters in the conventional sense, but more like heightened versions of their own selves. He uses text in multiple ways: either as confessionals delivered to the audience in direct address, or as conventional dialogues exchanged between performers, or as voiceovers to represent the thoughts of individuals. Khan also uses text in the form of lyrics in accompanying soundscapes that provide the subtext for montages or emotional journeys in his aesthetic. His emphasis on the legibility of

⁵³ Dance scholar Susan Broadhurst refers specifically to Pina Bausch's *tanztheater* but I believe this is also applicable to the genre of physical theatre.

movement endows his artistic choices with intention, even if one of the aims of such legibility is to generate ambiguity through these choices. In tracing Khan's debt to the lineage of physical theatre's double legacy, his relationship to the genealogy of Pina Bausch, Lloyd Newson and Jonathan Burrows deserves special scrutiny, as he has clearly embodied their philosophies, choreographic strategies and politics of performance-making, while constantly adapting their languages to meet his own aesthetic vision.⁵⁴

Bausch's influence on a large proportion of contemporary European performance makers is undeniable, and Khan cites Bausch's legacy as significant to the development of his own performance language:

One of the first pieces I saw when beginning to explore contemporary dance was *Nelken*. I remember vividly how it shattered all the illusions I had built up from the classical world and opened my curiosity towards uncertainty. Bausch has a gift of stripping away all that is superficial, all excess baggage, all the illusions or ticks that are sometimes used to hide the imperfections or fragility of a piece or a performer; and, on the contrary, presents work in its most naked, fragile and honest form. When she reveals and celebrates her work's vulnerability, conversely she shows its power - the power of the relationship between complexity and simplicity, chaos and order, noise and silence. She grants us the realisation that the performers' stories are not so far away from our own stories; the smells, the sounds, scenery, and emotions offered to is not so far away from our own experiences. I believe the art of storytelling is not embedded in the stories we tell, but in the way we tell them and, to me, Pina Bausch is one of the most skilful storytellers of our times. (Ak. Khan qtd. in Sadler's Wells Website)

Like Bausch, Khan uses points of departures in his work which are instigated by 'authentic, subjective experiences' (Servos 39), drawing on his own diasporic identity

⁵⁴ I acknowledge here that out of Bausch, Newson and Burrows, it is only Newson's name that is firmly associated with the physical theatre genre, while Bausch is associated with the German aesthetic of *tanztheater* and Burrows with British contemporary dance. However Bausch's *tanztheater* legacy has had a profound impact on the development of the physical theatre genre and its aesthetic, and Burrow's focus on minimalist everyday gestures makes his aesthetic a useful reference point for Khan's borrowings from the genre of physical theatre. So, while I would not claim that Bausch and Burrows are physical theatre practitioners per se, their respective aesthetics have informed Khan's negotiation of physical theatre in significant ways.

in *Loose in Flight*, his traumatic experience of the border-crossing in *zero degrees*, his musings on the super-diversity of London's contemporary cultural milieu in *Bahok*, and reflections on his relationship with his mother in *Gnosis*. Inspired by Bausch's depiction of human bodies on stage, but extending such depictions to embrace embodied subjectivities, Khan depicts the body both as a culturally inscribed medium, and as a social agent capable of rewriting itself in performance. These bodies, as depicted in *zero degrees*, *Bahok* and *Gnosis*, are often caught up in violent and traumatic circumstances, and are reminiscent of the bodies in Bausch's works in the emotional and physical exhaustion that they endure through the performance, which is transmitted to and experienced by the audience, without offering any sense of resolution. While Khan works towards creating signification in his work, his flirtation with deliberate use of ambiguity in the meanings he generates is reminiscent of Bausch's incessant 'tension between the denial and the possibility of interpretation' (Manning 70). Drawing on both stylised movement systems and quotidian gestures from the everyday, Khan borrows Bausch's language of the pedestrian to capture social reality (Climenhaga 12). Like Bausch, Khan evokes this social reality on stage through the use of 'walking, running, falling, crawling, shuffling, dragging, chasing and embracing: an obsessive cyclicity of gestures in and out of context, gestures broken, fragmented and discontinued' (Murray and Keefe 78).

There are three choreographic strategies of Bausch that appear in Khan's aesthetic: the use of repetition to build emotional intensity; the use of the montage as a structural device; and the use of synchronised ensemble choreographies at heightened moments in his pieces. Dance scholar Malve Gradinger observes that 'all these choreographic novelties were iconoclastic in the 1970s and early 1980s, but have now

become common dance methods and strategies' (Gradinger 26). While this may be true, some of the strategies receive a slightly different treatment in Khan's aesthetic. Repetition of gestures not only achieves emotional intensity, but by returning endlessly to a familiar motif through the course of a performance, it can function as sign posting for the audience and a narrative device. Through the use of repetition audiences are able to experience the same gesture in multitudinous ways, sometimes for its literal meaning and sometimes for its symbolic layers of signification. Moreover through repetition of certain gestures, they can start to recognise the structural links in Khan's pieces by locating where and how these gestures appear in them. An example of this device is used in *zero degrees* where, through the course of the performance, Khan and Larbi return to their impeccably synchronised delivery of gestures and text from centre stage, every time they continue to narrate the story of Khan's border-crossing. The repetition and synchronised mirroring of gestures in *zero degrees* can also be used to distort and confuse the source of the gestures themselves, and thereby enable commentaries on doubling and erasure of identities in our contemporary world, as demonstrated in *zero degrees*. While Khan's use of synchronised ensemble choreography stands for the communal, it moves away from Bausch's depiction of ensembles as universally symbolic of humanity as a whole. Instead, Khan's ensembles are more nuanced in their historic and cultural specificity, and do not symbolise 'every man, every woman' (Servos 41). Moreover, while Bausch often used montages 'in free association, without the need for continuity of plot' (Servos 38), Khan at times tries to create continuity through the use of repetition of key motifs and gestures. Khan's debt to Bausch's legacy can therefore be traced in his borrowings from her choreographic strategies and her philosophical musings on a need to create a performance language that spoke to and of her times.

In Newson's musings on Bausch's *tanztheater* legacy, a shift is visible in the political dimensions of her work from the communal to the individual. This emphasis on individual identity politics resonates with Khan's search for his own identity on his own terms. It has manifested in his works in the form of an auto-ethnographic enquiry of location and identity in *Loose in Flight*, on his deemed transnationality and lack of dual citizenship in *zero degrees*, and on his own and other unhomed bodies in *Bahok*. Newson's athletic and risky physicality is evoked in Khan's work in its ambiguous rapport with the ground through his dependency on it, and his highly risky, dynamic and controlled leaps and collapses into it, as explored in *Loose in Flight*. Khan's depiction of physical endurance of humiliation and discipline for loved ones include images of bodies walking over bodies in *Gnosis*, and is reminiscent of both Bausch's and Newson's transformation of familiar, quotidian physicality 'into something extraordinary, awful and sometimes sublime through precision, repetition and exaggeration' (Murray and Keefe 78). Khan is also keen to explore in his works what individual performers bring with them to the creative process, and in this echoes Newson's sentiments:

What fascinates me is who the performers are, and the style of the company will vary depending on the amalgamation of those performers. None of move in the same way: I want to acknowledge the differences and what they mean, not eradicate them. It is this approach, I believe, that slows us to see and understand individuals over form. (Newson qtd. in Murray and Keefe 82)

In *Bahok* Khan capitalises on the idiosyncratic movement patterns of his performers and the unique narratives, articulated through their embodied realities, become fundamental to the language and signification of the piece.

There is a key difference between Khan and Newson's aesthetic that needs to be considered here however. While Newson has incessantly and provocatively engaged

with issues of gender and sexuality, Khan's exploration of identity has only explored these issues on rare occasions. When he has done so explicitly in *In-I* it has felt forced and dishonest, and when he has done so implicitly in *Samsara* the result has fortuitously re-written codes of masculinity and femininity within the remit of popular dance culture, when read through the lens of gender politics of American modern dance. In the company's most recent production of *Vertical Road* (2010), the obvious resonance of the breakdown of human relationships between men and women and its associated emotions of desire, intimacy, loss of faith, ownership and jealousy, are evoked with startling honesty but without Newson's sexual brutality. Khan's borrowings from Newson has therefore primarily fuelled his understanding on how to be provocative in the arts through exploring personal politics, by using honest and personal departure points, in an attempt to destabilise hegemonic perceptions of cultural identity.

If Bausch has shaped Khan's aesthetic through choreographic strategies and Newson has lent his aesthetic political charge, the work of Jonathan Burrows has lent Khan's performance aesthetic an understanding of the place of the everyday language of social interactions within the arts. Burrows' emphasis on the tiniest 'detail of movement' (Duerden 47) that occurs in a body in moments of stillness permeates the opening scene of *zero degrees*. Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui sit cross legged, side by side at the edge of the centre stage in complete silence and stare into the audience for what seems like an eternity. This stillness of their bodies makes the audience incredibly aware of their breathing and of the smallest detail of movement initiated by it. Finally, when they break the silence and start relating a story mid-sentence, Burrows' focus on the extraordinarily expressive use of hands and arms (A. Williams), resonate in Khan and Cherkaoui's synchronised delivery. This seamless shifting between stillness, speed,

energy and attack are characteristic of Burrow's aesthetic (Duerden 47), as is the seeming simplicity of Khan's and Cherkaoui's mirrored gestures that mask the incredibly complex process of delivering every tiny detail in synchronisation.

Burrow's aesthetic lends Khan a choreographic understanding of staging minimalism through incredibly complex layering of pedestrian gestures, and simultaneously achieves two things. Firstly, it provides simple building blocks by way of quotidian signs that assemble to create Khan's unique and complex nexus of signification. In doing so, secondly and more significantly, it has demonstrated to Khan that his classical understanding and practice of *abhinaya* and its stylised rendition of the nine basic human emotions can be extended to include in its remit everyday gestures from his current cultural milieu, which become useful signposts for communication with contemporary audiences.

Despite the significant differences in the idiosyncratic styles espoused by Bausch, Newson and Burrows, it is important to note that all of them are concerned with the depiction of embodied subjectivities in their art. And it is this same philosophical legacy that permeates Khan's aesthetic which is constantly nuanced by this dialectic interplay between his own corporeality and lived experience, and its artistic representations in his art. In his idiosyncratic negotiations of the physical theatre landscape, the embodied subject at the heart of *Loose in Flight*, *Gnosis* and *zero degrees* is Khan, articulating his own negotiations of diasporic identity positions within London in the first, examining his own relationship with his mother through the lens of the Gandhari-Duryodhana relationship from the *Mahabharata* in the second, and politicising his own feelings of simultaneous belonging and non-belonging in recalling

his own memory of a border crossing between India and Bangladesh, while travelling on a British passport in the third. Khan's theatrical persona is a heightened extension of himself, such that the distinction between fiction and reality is blurred beyond recognition, as his internal reality and subjectivity fuels his artistic representation of life as he embodies it. Replacing his body in these performances with another body would not create the same significations as the pieces generate, as it is Khan's individual corporeality that charges the way these pieces can be, and are, read.

In *Loose in Flight* the motif of not being able to maintain the erect verticality of *kathak's* opening posture by continuously collapsing at the spine, depicts Khan's own embodied struggle with having to negotiate between the vertical spine of *kathak* and the horizontal curvature of the spine belonging to his western contemporary dance training. Through endlessly repeating this motif, Khan's internal frustrations are articulated through this embodied physicality. In *Gnosis*, the image of Khan forcing Sunahata as Gandhari to walk over his body as penance for having overstepped the mark, evokes images of the strict nature of mother-son relationships with the South Asian culture, and carries traces of Khan's own embodied reality within the physicality. In *zero degrees*, Khan and Cherkaoui's impeccably performed synchronised opening through spoken words and everyday gestures is a stylised restoration of Khan's own hand gestures and verbal delivery as caught on video, while recalling in rehearsal his memory of the border crossing. Thus, through each of these pieces, Khan's own lived history, his multiple affiliations to nations, cultures and locales, and his incessant need to reconcile between tradition and modernity and past and present, find volatile and poignant articulations.

The emphasis on the depiction of his own embodied subjectivity, shifts to the representation of the lived realities of eight other individuals in *Bahok*. It is vital to note that he does not impose his own experiences on them, but instead seeks their embodied globalised realities and brings them to life.⁵⁵ The embodied subjects who occupy the global transit zone are the eight multinational artists themselves, articulating through the piece their distinctive lived histories and experiences of global living, mediated through Khan's own musings on complex identity positions. Their names, their clothes, their belongings, the way they move and especially the stories they tell of their notions of home, are all their own, communicated through heightened theatricality that Khan artistically crafts as an outside eye. These bodies are all significantly more than passive vehicles of communication. They are instead embodied subjectivities etching out their individual lived narratives in direct response and relation to the larger social world.⁵⁶

(Re)Defining Physical Theatre through *Abhinaya* and *Rasa*

Khan's unique take on physical theatre is then characterised by his poignant depiction of bodies, transformed from classical constructions as passive vessels of communications into volatile and embodied subjectivities with living histories and

⁵⁵ This is particularly apparent in the making of *Bahok* DVD entitled *Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont*, which demonstrates the ways in which Khan relies on the individual subjectivities, corporealities and lived histories of his eight performers for the crafting of the socio-political commentary in the piece. He asks each of them to first verbalise what 'home' means to them before asking them to physicalise their verbal material.

⁵⁶ In my own experience as a practitioner, the *kathak* performer, strictly codified by classicism is not an embodied subject whose lived reality is articulated through this stylised language. Instead, this performer's body does indeed become a passive vehicle of communication. Through relentless training the body becomes inscribed with the ideological complexities of the Indian nationalist project that through Indian classical dance, creates a clean, controlled and tamed state apparatus. This is in contrast to those non-classicised Indian somatic practices like yoga and *kalaripayattu* where the evocation of a psycho-physical embodied state of the performer is a vital goal. The philosophy of embodiment is therefore not a part of Khan's classical *kathak* legacy, but one he identifies and embraces from his western performance training.

socio-political sentiments that demand articulation. These embodied individuals draw not only upon western dramaturgical conventions of signification through a complex nexus created between pedestrian gestures and stylised technique, but they also embrace the South Asian performance principle of *abhinaya* to create a simultaneous and alternative mode of theatricality that is intercultural. *Abhinaya*, the highly codified and mimetic storytelling feature acquired from his *kathak* training, permeates Khan's performance aesthetic in two different ways and finds two distinct forms of manifestations within Khan's negotiations of the physical theatre landscape.

In the first instance, as witnessed in *Gnosis* and *zero degrees*, Khan integrates *abhinaya* in its pure form accompanied by Hindi lyrics, acting out each word of the song through *kathak*'s codified language. Khan does not translate either the aural Hindi soundscape or the strictly codified semantic of *kathak* in these moments, but allows the audience to access signification at whatever level they are privy to. This becomes a postcolonial strategy to inject into physical theatre a layer of signification that is deliberately denied from a large proportion of his western audiences. The Hindi lyrics are incredibly pertinent to the point in the narrative that Khan has set up beforehand, be it Khan's *abhinaya* rendition of the desperate emotional wreck that is Duryodhana, as he appeals to his mother Gandhari to understand his political motives against his cousins in *Gnosis*, or be it the mourning of her husband's passing on the train, as Khan's *abhinaya* enacts the widow's predicament in *zero degrees*. In *Gnosis* Khan's *abhinaya* rendition is a significant turning point for the piece as it demonstrates, to those who can access the language, Duryodhana's last appeal to his mother to support his desire for success at the cost of his cousins' lives. In *zero degrees*, having just used the synchronised choreography of every day gestures to recall the moment when Khan

witnessed a dead body of a man next to his helpless wailing wife, he transforms before us from himself into the traumatised woman through *abhinaya*, enacting her distress of screaming for help in vain. It is through calling upon the stylised codification of *abhinaya*, that Khan convincingly makes the shift between his masculine self and the feminine vulnerable woman who he depicts. Khan's storytelling takes on a heightened codified form in these instances. In both these examples, the departure from the quotidian modalities of signification in physical theatre to the South Asian aesthetic of *abhinaya* not only retains the role of the *kathakar* (storyteller) in his performance aesthetic, but also creates a complex connotative layer of meanings that communicate to different members of the audience at different levels. But this departure does not jolt with the physical theatre aesthetic; instead it enhances it, extending its ability to make meaning beyond hitherto largely western dramaturgical conventions of significations. Also, in both these examples, the nature of the *abhinaya* does not stray from its classical codifications and Khan transforms before our eyes into the *kathakar* he trained to be before encountering other western performance traditions.

If in this first instance the codifications and performance of *abhinaya* remain unchallenged, but extends Khan's negotiations of the physical theatre aesthetic in culturally syncretic ways, in the second instance Khan reconsiders the parameters of the language of *abhinaya* and begins to transform its codifications to suit his performance aesthetic. He questions the need to abide by the strict stylisations of the *abhinaya* language while still retaining its philosophical principles, as he searches for new ways to engage his contemporary audiences. Thus, while the codified *kathak* hand gestures and facial expressions are removed from the language, the mimetic nature of *abhinaya* and its quality of enacting every word through hand gestures are retained. By replacing

kathak's codified gestural language and stylised facial expressions with detailed hand gestures and naturalistic facial expressions from our everyday world, Khan translates and mutates *abhinaya* for his eclectic audiences. In Khan's loosening of the moorings of *abhinaya* from its Sanskritised associations, and in its deconstruction of its strict codified language, a new understanding of this South Asian performance principle finds contemporary manifestation. It further dismantles the idea of the *Natyashastra* as a monolithic and static statement on art by mutating *abhinaya* into a contemporary living tradition. Retaining its principle to represent the basic human emotions as recognisable in every day contexts, Khan turns to the expressions of these basic emotions through pedestrian gestures that are grounded in his contemporary reality, and heightens their impact through stylisation.

This is witnessed in the opening sequence of *Loose in Flight*, where Khan's face is pressed against the window looking out to the Docklands as he cups his hand to shield his vision, and moves his gaze slowly and introspectively across the derelict landscape outside. This slow, contained and heightened gesture, mediated through the camera, adds intense theatricality to this moment, where through hardly any movement he communicates a great deal. In *Gnosis* the simple act of repeatedly dodging Sunahata's stick in order to evade being caught by her into an embrace, becomes a stylised dance that dramatises Khan's desire to operate without any form of jurisdiction or accountability. This deconstructed manifestation of *abhinaya* is perhaps most sophisticated in *zero degrees'* delivery of the synchronised verbal and physical language, where every hand gesture literally enacts every word spoken by Khan and Cherkaoui, including those left unsaid. The dream sequence in *Bahok* transfers the traditional solo *abhinaya* modality onto two bodies that intertwine to create a hybridised

and composite image of a woman holding a mirror while applying make-up and adorning jewels. Also in *Bahok* every individual who occupies the transit zone is characterised by her distinct physical traits that derives out of an everyday gesture which has been heightened beyond recognition through theatricality.

These two distinct but linked treatments of *abhinaya* permeate Khan's performance aesthetic in different permutations through his pieces. Physical theatre's dual vision to depict reality on stage, while simultaneously heightening it to a stylised and exalted realm that generates a critical distance between an action and its reception, is therefore significantly altered through Khan's specific uses of *abhinaya* in these two different ways. In the first instance, as in Khan's use of pure *abhinaya* sequences in *zero degrees* and *Gnosis*, his audiences are split between those who understand the lyrics and the codes of classical *kathak abhinaya*, and those who do not. Here, a critical distance of two kinds is generated simultaneously. On the one hand, those who understand the aesthetic are momentarily distanced from the everyday realism that physical theatre conventionally depicts, by having to intellectualise Khan's layering of a South Asian aesthetic onto his more quotidian modalities of signification, and weave their way through the multilayered nexus this generates. This removes the danger of merely creating empathy within the audience. On the other hand, those who do not understand the aesthetic of *abhinaya* must look harder beyond the form of Khan's *kathak* language, to find in it intercultural resonances with the storytelling that has preceded it. This creates a distance that too removes the possibility of purely empathising with the action.

In the second instance, as in the opening scene to *zero degrees* that deconstructs *abhinaya* to suit a contemporary aesthetic, Khan's audiences are aurally and visually

bombarded with information that they must receive and process simultaneously in order to make sense of the narrative being relayed to them. This is made more difficult for the audience as the textual delivery is interspersed with swear words like ‘fuck’ or ‘screw that’, whose use jars the audience out of the impeccably stylised world of Khan’s and Cherkaoui’s magical synchronised storytelling, suddenly reminding them of the reality of the memory in only a way that physical theatre evokes. The blurring of fiction and reality as achieved through Khan’s deconstructed use of *abhinaya* also generates a critical distance through which the reception of his aesthetic is complicated. Khan’s performance aesthetic therefore does not just extend the landscape of physical theatre by injecting into its remit the codified modality of *abhinaya* which he also rewrites in the process, it also necessitates a discussion of the complex ways in which his aesthetic can be received and engaged with. In generating an aesthetic and critical distance, the *rasa* theory as embodied in his training as a *kathakar*, becomes a useful lens through which to theorise the reception of Khan’s complex, syncretic and intercultural performance aesthetic.

I acknowledge here that the practice of generating critical distance is not an unfamiliar concept to the physical theatre genre, which has historically used the principles of Brechtian alienation effect and defamiliarising techniques to draw its audiences in while simultaneously preventing them from empathising fully with the action (Broadhurst 18). However I propose, that Khan’s injection of the notion of aesthetic distance as theorised in *rasa* philosophy, is heightening the ways in which physical theatre can affect audiences through manipulating critical distancing in interculturally specific ways. Khan’s manipulation of the intersubjective experience that transpires between his art and his audience, evokes the principles of *rasa* as a psycho-

somatic system that can channel the transmission of intellectual and emotional energy between the motor and the sensory systems of performer and audience (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 19). Where physical theatre has historically exercised a subjectivity driven approach to depicting personal themes for audiences to engage with, Khan's aesthetic seeks more objective and abstracted ways to communicate these personal themes, and thus echoes *rasa* theory's call for a need to present abstracted emotions that audiences can identify and empathise with at different levels, without completely losing themselves in them. His very ability to split his audience members into those who are privy to the codes of *abhinaya* and other South Asian performance elements like Hindi lyrics or Sanskrit mythology, and those who cannot access them, generates different kinds of critical distance in the different members of his audience. And since every member in the audience is distinct in terms of their own embodied histories, lived realities and cultural reference points, they access *rasa* in distinct ways. By constantly providing multiple layers of intercultural information which are not broken down, translated or sewn together for the audience, Khan relies on his audience to complete the signification process by bringing to his art their own culturally embodied subjectivities, which become lenses through which Khan communicates with their interiorities.

In Khan's performance aesthetic and negotiation of the physical theatre genre, *rasa* is evoked through multifarious channels that emphasise the interconnectedness between his psycho-emotional layer and his kinaesthetic language and transmits this to his audience. In *Loose in Flight* the camera lens and its ability to hone in on the details of Khan's face, the awkwardness of his hand gestures and discomfort in his body, alongside placing his body in a historically and politically charged cityscape, heightens

the audience's ability to read his diasporic narrative in more intense ways than a live performance might allow. In *zero degrees* and *Gnosis*, as already discussed above, the complex and layered use of *abhinaya*, both in its classical rendition and in more deconstructed forms, generates a distance that requires the audience to exercise a critical eye over their experience, while simultaneously immersing them in the performance through everyday gestural sign-posting. In *Bahok* each performer creates his/her unique *abhinaya* modality, accentuated by gestures and signature habits that suit his/her own history and personal narrative. In *Lali* we see the forward leaning spine indicating a need to constantly locate the future, and in the South African woman we see a fracture between her upper body that wants to move on from her painful past, and her feet that remain stuck within it. These individual behaviour patterns are derived from the everyday but become stylised, abstracted and reified as part of these individuals' personas, just like the nine basic emotions or *rasas* of the *Natyashastra*.

In all these examples, Khan and his performers generate a level of empathy within the audience, but manage to create an aesthetic distance as theorised by *rasa* in order to allow for an incomplete form of catharsis that offers no resolution, despite taking the audience to an emotional and intellectual brink. It is the audience's ability to access Khan's art through their own lived experiences that heightens their senses towards a catharsis which is ultimately never realised. These strategies result in a culturally syncretic manipulation of the way Khan's performances can be experienced, where resolution is rarely offered despite depiction of the most disturbing and dark sides to the human psyche. In my experience of all the performances discussed in this thesis, Khan does not offer complete catharsis as he wishes his audiences to continue to dismantle their experiences beyond the duration of a performance, through a complex

web of sub-objectivity generated by the aesthetic distance of *rasa* his performances conjure.

Therefore Khan not only injects the principle and practice of *abhinaya* into his performance aesthetic that informs his unique language of physical theatre, but he simultaneously rewrites *abhinaya* and mutates it into a more productive and a less limiting framework. Equally Khan is opening up the remit of the *rasa* philosophy from its ancient Sanskritised context, and transforming it through his subjective interpretation of what it might mean to generate aesthetic distance through his own performance aesthetic, that is aimed at a contemporary and eclectic audience. In his negotiation of *rasa* through deconstructing and finding innovative ways to use *abhinaya*, he embodies Avanthi Meduri's observation about the status of *rasa* in the practice of the contemporary secular South Asian dancer who is seeking ways for 'the power of manipulation to rest with her, and she is willing to take this responsibility' (Meduri, 'Bharatha Natyam' 17). However, he is still managing to sustain the fundamental principle of *rasa* as 'an intersubjective experience between the spectator and artist' (Meduri, 'Bharatha Natyam' 17) despite rewriting it for a secular and contemporaneous contexts. His innovative experimentations with *abhinaya* and his channelling of *rasa* is thus an important reminder that the *Natyashastra* is by no means a static and permanent dictate, but one that needs constant reconsideration in light of our current social milieu, in its call to create art that mirrors and comments upon today's society. Through his performance aesthetic Khan is thus fundamentally interacting with and transforming dramaturgical principles as laid down in the *Natyashastra* to affect his audiences in distinct ways. This organic layering of the principles of *rasa* and *abhinaya* onto the

landscape of physical theatre is significantly changing its aesthetic and its reception, and bringing to it an intercultural fervour that it has never encountered before.

Khan's intercultural inflections upon physical theatre draw upon three interrelated qualities that distinguish his aesthetic from his predecessors. Firstly, the embodied subjectivities who find articulation in Khan's art are in and of themselves products of interculturality. Secondly, these embodied subjects create a complex nexus of signification that draws upon both western dramaturgical conventions in the form of everyday gestures, stylised technique and naturalistic modalities of delivering text, and South Asian principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa* to convey their embodied realities. Finally, and consequently, the European physical theatre genre's use of the Brechtian alienation technique to generate critical distance between performers and audience receives a particularly South Asian treatment through Khan's evocation of *rasa*, which splits his audiences into different camps, before heightening their reception of his art at different levels that they are privy to. This creates a physical theatre language both in performance and in its reception, that is borne of an intercultural dialogue between European and South Asian dramaturgical conventions. Its effectiveness is heightened because of Khan's simultaneous insider-outsider position to both sets of conventions, and the depth with which he is able to draw upon them with equal ease. In this intercultural endeavour Khan is more than a bridge which seems to 'connect and allow dialogue and exchange between two or more entities that nevertheless remain separated' (Murray and Keefe 186). Instead he enables these entities to permeate each other, in order to syncretise and emerge as a new hybridised intercultural language of its own.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Murray and Keefe cite the examples of Artaud and Meyerhold as visionaries and practitioners whose notions of performance practice borrowed significantly from other non-western cultural traditions (Murray and Keefe 193) to inject life back into what they felt had become a stagnating naturalism obsessed theatre tradition in Europe. Their significant influences on the development

On the surface this hybridised aesthetic might seem to sit comfortably in a singular third space of enunciation between theatre and dance. However, its incredibly complex constitution necessitates the thesis to revisit at this point, my original claim in the Introduction that Khan's performance aesthetic straddles two sets of third spaces that arises at the interstices between the third space of diasporic identity negotiations as postulated by Bhabha, and the third space of creative enunciation between the disciplines of theatre and dance.

Revisiting the Third Space and Khan's Performance aesthetic

My initial observation that the first third space occupied by Khan's performance aesthetic, the third space of diasporic identity negotiation, needs revisiting in the light of my thematic analysis of *Loose in Flight*, *zero degrees* and *Bahok*. It becomes clear that while Khan begins his art-making within the diasporic third space, at first located in the host nation of Britain itself (*Loose in Flight*) and then at the borderzone between his home nation of Bangladesh and its contested neighbour India (*zero degrees*), ultimately the articulation of his multiple identity positions move beyond the diaspora and its limited binary confines of host and home nations to a global non-space, where multiple nationalities and cultures must learn to coexist in their temporary and transitional time together (*Bahok*).

The second claim that Khan works in the interstitial third space of creative enunciation between the disciplines of theatre and dance, needs refining also. Khan's

of the physical theatre genre through the lineage of avant-garde theatre might therefore suggest that interculturality informed the genre from its inception. However Khan's intercultural negotiations with the genre must be distinguished from his predecessors, whose outsider status to the intercultural borrowing without due acknowledgement, problematises their attitude towards intercultural dialogue. Instead his position of authority within both sets of dramaturgical conventions makes his approach to such dialogue more insightful.

performance aesthetic integrates multiple disciplines as signalled through the thesis, even if these interactions are not examined in detail. In *Loose in Flight* Khan creates his art between the disciplines of theatre, dance, film and music. In *Gnosis* Khan's aesthetic emerges at the interstices between theatre, dance, music and mythology. In *zero degrees* Khan syncretises the disciplines of theatre, dance, music and visual arts and in *Bahok*, Khan creates a new language between the disciplines of theatre, dance and music. While I have focused on the interdisciplinary dialogue in Khan's aesthetic between theatre and dance because of my own expertise of working between these two disciplines, I recognise here that this is only part of the equation that constitutes Khan's multidisciplinary aesthetic. Thus I also dismantle the idea that a third space of creative enunciation relies on two points of reference, by extending it to embrace multiple points of reference within its remit.

Moreover by ultimately suggesting that Khan's aesthetic is changing the landscape of the physical theatre genre through injecting into its remit South Asian performance principles of *abhinaya* and *rasa*, I acknowledge the emergence of yet another third space in Khan's performance aesthetic. This is the third space that emerges between the European dramaturgical conventions of physical theatre (in itself a conglomerate multidisciplinary aesthetic), and the South Asian performance principles and philosophies of *abhinaya* and *rasa* respectively. This third space signals Khan as an intercultural performance maker, distinguished from his predecessors like Brook because of his complex insider-outsider relationship to multiple points of cultural and performance conventions.

Finally, I have argued that Khan's evocation of both the Brechtian alienation technique from the dramaturgical conventions of European physical theatre and the critical distancing of *rasa* from his South Asian performance training creates a performance aesthetic that is reliant on the audience's reading of his work. Khan urges his audience to contribute to the signification process of the piece itself through their reading of it by using them as the final piece of the jigsaw in his aesthetic. Because his audiences are able to access his work at multiple levels, Khan's aesthetic is not complete without the transaction that transpires between his art and his audience, who can generate multiple readings simultaneously. This implicates a final third space that nuances Khan's performance aesthetic, the space of enunciation that opens up between Khan's art and its recipients, who emerge as emancipated spectators in their ability to connect their own embodied subjectivities to what they witness before them.

My initial claim about Khan's performance aesthetic therefore must be refined to accommodate four simultaneous third spaces, which all signal multiple reference points and all find physical manifestations, thereby contesting Bhabha's notion of the third space as a non-representational metaphoric space of diasporic identity negotiations between the two reference points of home and host cultures. These are: the third space of global identity negotiations, the third space embodied in physical theatre, the third space of intercultural syncretism and finally the third space of the philosophy of reader as art. Through incessant dialogues between all these third spaces, Khan has held on to his preoccupation with storytelling, transforming his training of narrating stories of gods and goddesses as a *kathakar* into an aesthetic that is eclectic, dynamic, fragmented, syncretic, socio-politically-charged and fundamentally intercultural. This quality appears in its most ambiguous yet most potent manifestation in the company's tenth

anniversary piece *Vertical Road* (2010), which is also Khan's second piece as an artistic director since *Bahok*. It becomes an appropriate piece to reference briefly in my conclusive comments as it marks important departure points for Khan's aesthetic, just as it consolidates features that are now characteristic of Khan's performance language.

Vertical Road is an obvious departure point from the company's more recent works where narratives of embodied subjectivities have usually been conveyed through an interlacing of textual delivery and everyday gestural choreography. In the piece there is no text to guide the audience. Yet the propensity for Khan's need to communicate the bleak, dark, manipulative and devious aspects of the human psyche, resonate in imagery that need no words to achieve signification. Interestingly, because of the lack of a textual narrative spine, audiences not attuned to the idiosyncrasies of the physical theatre genre can mistake *Vertical Road* as Khan's return to a more formalist language that can be viewed comfortably through the lens of contemporary dance with its emphasis on structural, compositional and formal qualities of the movement. But such views would only read into half the equation of this content fuelled piece.

With *Vertical Road*, Khan has mastered the narration of lived realities through pure imagery, letting go of the need to say things through words. The storytelling is fragmented, fractured, often cyclical and does not go anywhere in the end, capturing the entrapment of a vicious circle experienced within the human psyche. It depicts with painful and relentless detail, the struggle of an individual between his interpersonal choices and politics and the responsibility he feels towards his community, who witnesses and silently judges his every move. This struggle translates into a breakdown and transformation of a heterosexual relationship that was once full of desire, intimacy

and trust, into a connection that laments its past, while fully knowing it needs to move on. There appears, time and again, the presence of a third man in this equation who is not necessarily intimated as the cause of the breakdown, but perhaps as its effect. The breakdown and chaotic condition of the personal life generates for the individual a breakdown in his faith in the community to which he was once committed. Rarely is this individual, his lover or the third man represented by the same performers, suggesting that although the stimulus comes from a personal place, in its artistic representation and to affect *rasa*, a more objective interpretation and embodiment of this individual's struggle is vital. These shifting personas distance the audience from being able to fully empathise with the individual's plight, making us critically engage with his condition, instead of just emotionally respond to it. No matter what configuration and which performer embodies which persona, the motifs are repeated relentlessly, heightening our awareness of this individual's struggle within himself, and its impact upon his intimate companions and the community at large. The conclusion, as per Khan's performance aesthetic, offers no resolution but leaves us with the image of the individual isolated from his community, contemplative in his solitude and trying to find ways in which to believe in order to start anew. It is a painful and heavy piece in its depiction of human inner turmoil with disturbing honesty. Yet, it still evokes a critical distance through which the audience can examine their own embodied realities.

Khan's performance aesthetic is then fundamentally an interlacing of the already identified four third spaces that create an interplay between the socio-political content it articulates and the syncretic language which becomes its medium of articulation. As I ascertain below what I feel are the key features of Khan's performance aesthetic, I acknowledge that this is an aesthetic in flux as embodied in *Vertical Road*, incessantly

evolving and re-defining itself as he continues to develop as a performer and a performance maker. The charged content that fuels Khan's aesthetic is characterised by:

- Expression of socio-political content, driven by themes of complex identity positions with regards to diaspora, globalisation and cosmopolitanism.
- Expressions of provocative personal politics, driven by themes of interpersonal relationships, breakdown of communication, social interactions and sexual intimacy.
- Interplay between mythology and the contemporary human condition.
- Relationship between one's multiple roots and how they inform the multiple routes people choose.

The syncretic language that Khan has generated in his aesthetic to communicate such content constitute:

- Interdisciplinary collaborations between theatre, dance art, music, literature and sculpture.
- Philosophical, aesthetic and somatic principles that govern *kathak*, particularly *rasa* theory and its affectation of interculturally inflected aesthetic distance.
- Classical *abhinaya* accompanied by Hindi lyrics and deconstructed innovative manifestations of *abhinaya* transformed through western dramaturgical conventions.
- Montage-like structuring offering glimpses of signification that often do not coalesce till the end.
- Repetition as a key choreographic strategy to create continuity in montages and as signposts for narrative device.
- Acute attention to detail to quotidian gestures as a means of evoking social reality on stage.

- Highly demanding physicality through eclectic movement technique that evokes visible exhaustion and technical prowess.
- Interplay between stillness, speed and attack.
- Use of synchronised ensemble work, not as a sign of the universal, but as depiction of specific locations, temporalities and people.
- Interplay of movement and text which creates in moments a hybridised nexus of communication.
- Use of lyrics in Hindi or languages other than English, to create a deliberate schism in the audience between those who understand the lyrics and those who do not, in order to facilitate simultaneously different levels of significations.
- An open-ended signification process offering no catharsis, as it relies on the audience to complete the meaning-making process through their own reading of the art.

By recognising and examining the complexities that nuance Khan's performance aesthetic it is vital to move beyond a naive understanding of his language as 'contemporising' *kathak*, as while it may be one way of examining his language, it is no doubt a limited view of what continues to be a far more complex and hybridised aesthetic, that is constantly trying to negotiate a way to articulate the relationship between his identity and his art. And it is in this placement of Khan's complex and evolving identity positions at the heart of his performance aesthetic, that this thesis has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of his art.

Through this extensive study of Khan as a significant artist and a cultural phenomenon, I have made the following interrelated claims to originality. Firstly,

despite the undeniably influential position Khan occupies in the contemporary British and international cultural milieu, limited scholarship exists on his work. My thesis attempts to fill this lacuna by theorising Khan's practice, not as an established monolithic aesthetic of the past but as an on-going and evolving aesthetic, through the lenses of postcolonial theory, cultural studies and performance studies. Written between January 2006 and May 2011, the gestation period of this thesis began with Khan's arrival into mainstream British cultural consciousness by being appointed Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells in 2005 and ends with the company's tenth anniversary piece *Vertical Road* in 2010. In its spirit it is therefore both retrospective in its analysis of *Loose in Flight* (1999) and contemporaneous in its discussions of *zero degrees* (2005), *Bahok* (2008) and *Gnosis* (2009). The second claim I make is conducting a detailed analysis of the relationship between Khan's identity and his art. Through four strategically selected performances, which I believe best represent his complex identity positions, as it fluctuates between the local, national and global layers of his cosmopolitan interactions with the world he inhabits, this thesis has argued for a fundamental link between Khan's identity and his performance aesthetic. To validate and contextualise this identitarian mode of analysis, I identified twelve interlacing biographical, creative and socio-political circumstances that I believe created a conducive relational field that has nurtured and fuelled his meteoric rise to success. This in turn has forced me to recognise Khan, not as an isolated phenomenon of individual genius, but as belonging to a field of favourable socio-political circumstances, occupied by like-minded souls who have collectively incentivised his journey from the periphery to the centre.

My third claim dismantles popular perceptions of Khan as a dancer by examining him instead as a multidisciplinary artist who relies on the fundamental principle of exchange arising from dialogues between the disciplines of theatre, dance, music, film, literature, sculpture, visual arts and many others. Khan's aesthetic is thus reliant not only on his own vision, but negotiates the creative visions of multidisciplinary artists who are all at the cutting edge of their professions. Despite his multidisciplinary approach to performance making, his interstitial negotiations between theatre and dance, for me, is the most intensified manifestation of his syncretic language of exchange. Consequently my fourth claim examines his aesthetic in alignment with the landscape of the European genre of physical theatre and its double legacy between avant-garde theatre and avant-garde dance. Driven more by content and less by form, Khan evokes embodied subjectivities in his art, communicating their lived realities in relation to the world at large. This dismantles formalist, simplistic and popular perceptions of his aesthetic as contemporising *kathak*, acknowledging the far more complex and hybridised layers that inform his language, driven by both powerful socio-political content and an innovative form created fundamentally to communicate such content. However Khan does not just locate his work within the physical theatre landscape, he also fundamentally transforms it by injecting into its remit an intercultural fervour it has never encountered before. My fifth claim identifies Khan as an intercultural performance maker whose complex insider-outsider relationship to multiple cultural and performance reference points lends him a certain emancipation. He transforms the western dramaturgical conventions of physical theatre through the South Asian performance principle of *abhinaya* and the South Asian philosophy of *rasa*, creating a hybridised, syncretic and complex nexus of intercultural significations.

My final claim to originality locates Khan's performance aesthetic at the interstices between four interrelated third spaces. These are: the third space of global identity negotiations, the third space of creative enunciation embodied in physical theatre, the third space of intercultural syncretism and finally the third space as evoked by the philosophy of reader as art. These four manifestations of third space rely on an interplay between the politically charged content that Khan explores in his pieces and the syncretic intercultural language that articulates such content. This recognition has enabled me to identify and list the key characteristics that permeate Khan's performance aesthetic.

While the thesis identifies Khan's transformation of the genre of physical theatre into an intercultural language through his own idiosyncratic dialogues with it, it does not examine in detail the future of the genre as an intercultural form of theatre. If Khan's contributions to the genre find longevity then the thesis signals a potential for further study of physical theatre as a global and intercultural language of performance practice, loosened from its European avant-garde moorings. Even though the thesis recognises Khan's performance language as a multidisciplinary aesthetic between literature, theatre, dance, music, sculpture, visual arts and others, it does primarily focus on the syncretism negotiated between theatre and dance. A valid area of further study would be to examine in detail the creative dialogues and exchanges that Khan and his multidisciplinary collaborators enter into to further investigate Khan as a multidisciplinary artist. Following on from this, a complete full length study of Khan's pieces that interlace naturalistic text and movement (*zero degrees*, *Sacred Monsters*, *In-I* and *Bahok*) could be undertaken with the remit of naturalistic theatre practice to examine how Khan's use of text not only provides the narrative spine in these pieces, but also provides a

soundscape to which the pedestrian behaviour traits are choreographed as manifestations of embodied subjectivities. Khan's near ethnographic and acute observation and depiction of human behaviour and social interaction on stage can also be studied from within the discipline of performance anthropology. Furthermore the thesis does not examine in detail Khan's strategic straddling of both high art and popular culture through a discussion of his choreographic commissions for the Australian popular musician Kylie Minogue (2006) or the French fashion brand Yves Saint Lauren's perfume *Belle D'Opium* (2010). A study of these two commissions would be an insightful way of distinguishing between his intercultural, syncretic and politically charged performance aesthetic as depicted in the high arts and his evocation of post-colonial exotica within the popular cultural contexts. Finally while the thesis identifies and locates Khan within a field of other like-minded artists, both seniors and contemporaries, because Khan's aesthetic and career is still young, on-going and therefore still evolving, it is too early for me to claim the impact Khan might have on future performance makers arising from the field. Therefore at this point in time, it becomes hard to measure Khan as a model for future generation of artists. However in a decade's time a valid area of further study might be to trace Khan's legacy in the artists of the future.

Although it is premature to consider Khan's legacy as a model for future generations in the arts, it is valuable in my conclusive comments to consider the impact his art has had on contemporaneous subjects like me, enhancing my ability to understand and interact with the world I occupy as a diasporic subject in a global domain. Khan's reliance on his audience to conclude the signification process of his art as the final pieces of the jigsaw, has allowed me to reassess my own embodied and

complex subjectivity in the world we both inhabit. This echoes Marsha Meskimmon's crucial observation about the role of cosmopolitan artists like Khan in engendering through their art an important shift from perceiving artworks as objects that reveal critical issues about the world they inhabit, to enabling audiences to consider ways in which they can participate in, and potentially transform the boundaries through which they interact with and negotiate this world (Meskimmon 6). As a first generation diasporic Indian living in Britain, but straddling national and cultural spaces between India, Britain and America, critical theory driven spaces between postcolonial studies, cultural studies and performance studies, disciplinary spaces between physical theatre and *kathak*, and articulative spaces between academia and performance practice, I share with Khan the same experience of multiple reference points and affiliations that inform my own identity positions. I now understand why watching Khan negotiate his multiple affiliations in *Polaroid Feet* had such an impact on me over a decade ago. Using the French philosopher Jacques Rancière's seminal framework of the 'emancipated spectator', I realise that by simply viewing the piece through my own embodied subjectivity nuanced lens, even in my apparent inactivity, I was emancipated that evening. Rancière calls for overcoming 'the gulf separating activity and passivity' (Rancière 12) in western theatre's recent constructions of the notion of the active spectator as 'active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs' (Rancière 4), by stating that 'emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting' (Rancière 13). By validating the apparently passive state of viewing as a vital activity Rancière suggests:

The spectator also acts [...]. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. (Rancière 13)

Watching *Polaroid Feet* through my embodied, complex, diasporic subjectivity as a former *kathak* dancer, I was able to compose a poem of my own existence through the poem that Khan painted so eloquently and poignantly of his own lived reality.

Over the years, as my own points of reference multiplied and my own lived reality developed more and more complexities, I continued to experience Khan's art through these multifarious access points. I came to recognise that I was amongst very few members of Khan's audience who were privy to the additional layers of signification in comparison to his largely western audiences, because of the number of commonalities I shared with his lived reality. These parallels enabled me to access, interpret and read the inherent intertextuality in Khan's performance aesthetic at multiple dimensions. In the spirit of *rasa* theory, Khan as an artist never instructs his spectators but simply produces 'a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action' (Rancière 14), that energises and brings into consciousness our own embodied realities. The more complex and aligned our subjectivities are to Khan's own, the closer we can come to his art. I have therefore come to realise that my greatest contribution to knowledge through this thesis is my ability to read Khan's art as an emancipated spectator, in ways and at levels that many western scholars may not be privy to. My thesis is the result of the ideological transactions that have transpired between Khan's art and my own embodied reality, and 'is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists' (Rancière 15) between Khan's knowledge, inspirations, lived reality, multiple affiliations and my own.

That Khan's presence in British contemporary culture has significantly challenged pre-existent frameworks, ideologies and perceptions of diasporic South Asianness, and has irrevocably changed the landscape of contemporary global performance practices, is now an undeniable reality. What is less considered is the emancipation his art can offer to both contemporaneous cosmopolites and future generations of artists, in their individual quests for articulating their own complex, syncretic, volatile and transient embodied subjectivities.

Bibliography

- Appadurai, Arjun. 'Grassroots Globalisation and the Research Imagination.' *Globalization*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. 1-21. Print.
- Akram Khan Company. *Akram: A Short Biography*. Akram Khan Company Website, 2010. Web. 5 April 2010. <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>.
- Alam, Jayanti. 'Gandhari, the Rebel'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 29.25 (1994): 1517-1519. Print.
- Allain, Paul, and Jen Harvie. *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Albright, Ann Cooper. *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997. Print.
- Anderson, Zoë. *Akram Khan, Sadler's Wells, London*. The Independent, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatredance/reviews/akramkhan-Sadler's-wells-london-1957195.html>>.
- Anthias, Floya. 'New Hybridities, Old Concepts: the Limits of "Culture".' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24.4 (2001): 619-641. Print.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. 2nd ed. London: Verso, 2008. Print.
- Auslander, Philip. "'Just Be Yourself": Logocentricism and Difference in Performance Theory'. *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*. 2nd ed. Ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli. London: Routledge, 2002. 53-61. Print.
- . *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Baker, Houston A., Stephen Best, and Ruth H. Lindeborg. 'Representing Blackness/Representing Britain: Cultural Studies and the Politics of Knowledge.' Introduction. *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 1-15. Print.
- Ballard, Roger. 'The Emergence of Desh Pardesh.' Introduction. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. Ed. Roger Ballard. London: C. Hurst & Company, 1994. 1-34. Print.
- Balme, Christopher. *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

- Banes, Sally. *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Barranger, Milly S. *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*. 6th ed. Belmont: Thomson Higher Education, 2006. Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995. Print
- Barthes, Roland. 'The Death of the Author.' *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. 146-150. Print.
- . *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Jonathan Cape, 1975. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 'Simulations.' *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism to Postmodernism, An Anthology*. Ed. Richard Kearney and David Rasmussen. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 411-430. Print.
- Beck, Ulrich and Natan Sznaider. 'Unpacking Cosmopolitanism for the Social Sciences: A Research Agenda.' *The British Journal of Sociology* 57.1 (2006): 1-23. Print.
- Belle D'Opium* by Yves Saint Lauren. *The Artists. Belle D'Opium* Website, 2011. Web. 7 March 2011. <http://belledopium.com/en_GB/artistes.html>.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 'The Commitment to Theory.' *New Formation* 5 (1988): 5-23. Print.
- . *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Bharucha, Rustom. 'Peter Brook's "Mahabharata": A View from India.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 23.32 (1988): 1642-1647. Print.
- Bhopal, Kalwant. 'South Asian Women in East London: Motherhood and Social Support.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 21.5 (1998): 485-492. Print.
- Billman, Larry. 'Music Video as Short Form Dance Film.' *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*. Ed. Judy Mitoma. New York: Routledge, 2002. 12-20. Print.
- Birringer, Johannes. 'Pina Bausch Dancing Across Borders.' *The Drama Review* 30.2 (1986): 85-97. Print.
- Bishop, Claire. 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents.' *Art Forum* (2006): 178-183. Print.
- Black, Les, Michael Keith, Azra Khan, Kalbir Shukra and John Solomos. 'Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour.' *Sociological Research Online* 7.2 (2002): n. pag. Web. 5 April 2010. <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/2/back.html>>.

- Bose, Mandakranta. 'Gender and Performance: Classical Indian Dancing.' *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. Ed. Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay. London: Routledge, 1998. 251-254. Print.
- . *Speaking of Dance: The Indian Critique*. New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2001. Print.
- Bose, Sugata, and Ayesha Jalal. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Bosteels, Bruno. 'Nonplaces: An Anecdoted Topography of Contemporary French Theory.' *Diacritics* 33.3/4 (2003): 117-139. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Bowman, Michael and Della Pollock. "'This Spectacular Visible Body": Politics and Postmodernism in Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater*. *Text and Performance Quarterly* 2 (1989): 113-118. Print.
- Brah, Avtar. 'The "Asian" in Britain.' *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. Ed. N.Ali, V.S. Kalra, and S. Sayyid. London: Hurst & Co, 2006. 35-61. Print.
- . *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Brennan, Richard. *The Alexander Technique Manual*. London: Connections Book, 2004. Print.
- Briginshaw, Valerie A. *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001. Print.
- British Film Institute. *Per4mance*. British Film Institute Website, 2011. 18 July 2011. <<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/series/32115>>.
- Broadhurst, Susan. 'The (Im)mediate Body: A Transvaluation of Corporeality.' *Body & Society* 5.1 (1999): 17-29. Print.
- Brown, Carol. 'Making Space, Speaking Spaces.' *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. 58-72. Print.
- Brown, Ismene. *Gnosis, Akram Khan, Sadler's Wells Theatre*. The Arts Desk, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <http://www.theartsdesk.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1403:gnosis-dance-review&Itemid=22>.
- Brown, John Russell. 'Voices for Reform in South Asian Theatre.' *New Theatre Quarterly* 17.1(2001): 45-53. Print.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.1 (2005): 1-19. Print.

- Buckland, Theresa Jill. 'Shifting Perspectives on Dance Ethnography'. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. 335-343. Print.
- Burt, Ramsay. 'Dance Theory, Sociology, and Aesthetics.' *Dance Research Journal* 32.1 (2000): 125-131. Print.
- . 'Kaash: Dance, Sculpture and the Visual.' *Visual Culture in Britain* 5.2 (2004): 93-108. Print.
- . *The Male Dancer*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- . *The Male Dancer*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Callery, Dymphna. *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*. London: Nick Hern, 2001. Print.
- Carlson, Marvin. 'Peter Brook's "The Mahabharata" and Arianna Mnouchkine's "L'Indiade" as Examples of Contemporary Cross-Cultural Theatre.' *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*. Ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley and Michael Gissenwehner. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1990. 49-56. Print.
- Catley, Michael. *Reading Body Language – Watching Eyes*. Suite 101, 2009. Web. 22 October 2010. <<http://www.suite101.com/content/reading-body-language-watching-eyes-a146002>>.
- Chakravorty, Pallabi. *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2008. Print.
- Chambers, Iain. *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Chamberlain, Franc. 'Gesturing Towards Post-Physical Performance.' *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader*. Ed. John Keefe and Simon Murray. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. 117-122. Print.
- Chatterjea, Ananya. *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through the Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004. Print.
- Chaudhuri, Una. 'Beyond a "Taxonomic Theater": Interculturalism after Postcolonialism and Globalization.' *Theatre* 32.1 (2002): 33-47. Print.
- Chaudhry, Farooq. 'Keynote Speech by Farooq Chaudhry.' *Commotie Website*, 2009. Web. 18 August 2010. 1-5. <www.commotie.nu/media/keynote-farooq-chaudhry.pdf>.
- . 'Bahok Query.' Message to the author. 15 Nov. 2008. E-mail.

- Claid, Emilyn. 'Still Curious.' *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. 133-143. Print.
- Clayton, Martin. "'You Can't Fuse Yourself': Contemporary British Asian Music and the Musical Expression of Identity." *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 5 (1998): 73-87. Print.
- Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. Print.
- . 'Traveling Cultures.' *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992. 96-116. Print.
- Climenhaga, Royd. *Pina Bausch*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Coombes, Annie E., and Avtar Brah. 'Introduction: The Conundrum of Mixing.' *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*. Ed. Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes. London: Routledge, 2000. 1-16. Print.
- Counsell, Colin, and Laurie Wolf. 'The Performing Body.' *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. Ed. Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Crawford, Holly. Introduction. *Artistic Bedfellows: Histories, Theories and Conversations in Collaborative Art Practices*. Ed. Holly Crawford. Lanham: University Press of America, 2008. ix-xv. Print.
- Cresswell, Tim. 'Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility: The Case of Female Tramps and Hobos.' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24.2 (1999): 175-192. Print.
- . *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Routledge: Abingdon, 2006. Print.
- Crompton, Sarah. *Akram Khan's Gnosis at Sadler's Wells, Review*. The Telegraph, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/dance/7657058/Akram-Khans-Gnosis-at-Sadlers-Wells-review.html>>.
- Csordas, Thomas J. Preface. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Ed. Thomas J Csordas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xi. Print.
- Cultural Leadership Programme. 'Farooq Chaudhry Interview'. *Cultural Leadership Programme*, 2010. Web. 18 August 2010. <<http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/farooq-chaudhry-interview/>>.
- D'Andrea, Anthony. *Global Nomads: Techno and New Age as Transnational Countercultures in Ibiza and Goa*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. Print.

- Dantas, Marcello. 'Conversation Between Curator Marcello Dantas and Anish Kapoor.' Anish Kapoor Website, 2006. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.anishkapoor.com/writing/brazilinterview.htm>>.
- Dasgupta, Chidananda. 'Cultural Nationalism and the Cross-Cultural Product.' *Blesok* 29 (2002): 1-2. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.blesok.com.mk/tekst.asp?lang=eng&tekst=483>>.
- Dasgupta, Gautam. 'Peter Brook's "Orientalism".' *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. David Williams. London: Routledge, 1991. 262-267. Print.
- Davies, Rachel. *Loose in Flight*. Rachel Davies Website, 2011. Web. 18 July 2011. <<http://www.racheldavies.com/tv/looseinflight.html>>.
- Dhananjayan, V.P. 'The Concept of the Male Dancer.' *A Dancer on Dance*. Michigan: Bharata Kalanjali, 1992. 23-31. Print.
- Duerden, Rachel Chamberlain. 'Jonathan Burrows.' *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*. Ed. Martha Bremser. London: Routledge, 1999. 47-51. Print.
- Dutt, Bishnupriya, and Urmimala Sarkar Munsii. *Engendering Performance: Indian Women Performers in Search of an Identity*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010. Print.
- Ellis, Samantha. *Dance was About Breaking All the Rules that were Set in My Body*. The Guardian, 2004. Web. 9 March 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2004/apr/22/samanthaellis.guesteditors>>.
- Etchells, Tim. *Both Sitting or Brecht Might have Liked It*. timetchells.com, 2007. Web. 28 July 2010. <<http://www.timetchells.com/notebook/may-2007/both-sitting-or-brecht-might-have-liked-it/>>.
- Fomina, Joanna. 'The Failure of British Multiculturalism: Lessons for Europe.' *Polish Sociological Review* 4.156 (2006): 409-424. Print.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. Introduction. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge Culture and Power*. Ed. Susan Leigh Foster. London: Routledge, 1996. ix-xvii. Print.
- Foulkes, Julia L. *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Print.
- Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987. Print.
- Fraser, Heather. 'Four Different Approaches to Community Participation.' *Community Development Journal* (2005): 286-300. 20 March 2011. <<http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/3/286.short>>.

- Frater, Sarah. *Akram Khan's Fractured Return to Kathak*. This is London, 2009. Web. 1 July 2010. < <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23770750-akram-khans-fractured-return-to-kathak.do>>.
- Garnham, Nicholas. 'From Cultural to Creative Industries: An Analysis of the Implications of the "Creative Industries" Approach to Arts and Media Policy Making in the United Kingdom.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11.1 (2005): 15-29. Print.
- George, Rosemary Marangoly. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Print.
- Giddens, Anthony. 'Living in a Post-Traditional Society.' *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Ed. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994. 56-109. Print.
- . *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Print.
- Gilbert, Helen, and Jacqueline Lo. *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Gilbert, Helen, and Joanne Tompkins. *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Gillespie, Marie. 'From Comic Asians to Asian Comics: *Goodness Gracious Me*, British Television Comedy and Representations of Ethnicity.' *Group Identities on French and British Television*. Ed. Michael Scriven and Emily Roberts. New York: Berghahn Books, 2003. 93-107. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* London: Verso Books, 1993. Print.
- Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005. Print.
- Gordon, Robert. *The Purpose of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006. Print.
- Gradinger, Malve. 'Pina Bausch.' *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*. Ed. Martha Bremser. London: Routledge, 1999. 25-29. Print.
- Grau, Andrée. 'Dance, Identity, and Identification Processes in the Postcolonial World.' *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research*. Ed. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. 189-207. Print.
- . 'Political Activism, Art, and the many Histories of Indian Classical Dance.' *SOAS Electronic Resources*, 2003. Web. 10 March. 2005. 9-12. <http://www.soas.ac.uk/ahrbmusicanddance/newsletter/musicanddance2.pdf>.

- . 'South Asian Dance in Britain: Negotiating Cultural Identity through Dance (SADiB).' *Leverhulme Trust Report (1999-2001)*, 2002. 1-85.
- Grau, Andrée and Stacey Prickett. 'South Asian Aesthetics Unwrapped'. *Akademi Website*, 2002. Web. 15 May 2010. <www.akademi.co.uk/download/unwrappedreport.doc>.
- Grehan, Helena. 'Rakini Devi: Diasporic Subject and Agent Provocateur.' *Theatre Research International* 28.3 (2003): 229-244. Print.
- Greskovic, Robert. 'Merce Cunningham.' *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*. Ed. Martha Bremser. London: Routledge, 1999. 72-77. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 'Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representation and the Corporeal.' *Feminine/Masculine and Representation*. Ed. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990. 62-74. Print.
- . *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1994. Print.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. 'Towards a Poor Theatre.' *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Ed. Eugenio Barba. London: Methuen and Co., 1969. 15-25. Print.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 'Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference.' *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (1992): 6-23. Print.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982. Print.
- Hale, Catherine. *Akram Khan: "Loose in Flight", "Rush", "Related Rocks"*. Ballet, 2002. Web. 15 March 2009. <http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_02/nov02/ch_rev_akram_khan_1002.htm>.
- Hall, Stuart. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora.' Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. 2nd ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998. 222-237. Print.
- . 'Minimal Selves.' *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 114-119. Print.
- . 'New Ethnicities.' *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 163-172. Print.
- . 'Political Belonging in a World of Multiple Identities.' *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 25-31. Print.

- Hargreaves, Kelly. 'Europeans Filming New Narrative Dance.' *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*. Ed. Judy Mitoma. London: Routledge, 2002. 163-167. Print.
- Hawksley, Sue. 'Re-membering(s): Being There and Then, and Here and Now.' Fandangodesign Website, Date Unknown. Web. 8 August 2010. <<http://www.fandangodesign.com/grs/remembering.pdf>>.
- Hesse, Barnor, and S. Sayyid. 'Narrating the Postcolonial Political and the Immigrant Imaginary.' *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. Ed. N.Ali, V.S. Kalra, and S. Sayyid. London: Hurst & Co, 2006. 13-31. Print.
- Hines, Thomas Jenson. *Collaborative Form: Studies in the Relations of the Arts*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1992. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 'The Generation of Postmemory'. *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103-128. Print.
- Holledge, Julie, and Joanne Tompkins. *Women's Intercultural Performance*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Holt, Nicholas L. 'Representation, Legitimation and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story.' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2.1 (2003): 18-28. Print.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Iser, Wolfgang. 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.' *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. 189-205. Print.
- Iyer, Alessandra. 'South Asian Dance: The British Experience.' *Choreography and Dance: An International Journal (South Asian Dance: The British Experience)* 4.2 (1997): 1-4. Print.
- Iyer, Pico. *Global Souls: Jetlag, Supermarkets and the Search for Home*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000. Print.
- Jaggi, Maya. 'The Transformation of Kathak.' *Akram Khan Gnosis Programme Notes*. 2010. Print.
- Jazeel, Tariq. 'The World is Sound?: Geography, Musicology and British-Asian Soundscapes.' *Area* 37.3 (2005): 233-241. Print.
- Jennings, Luke. *Gnosis*. The Guardian, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/may/02/gnosis-akram-khan-Sadler's-wells>>.
- Jeyasingh, Shobana. 'Text Context Dance.' *Choreography and Dance: An International Journal (South Asian Dance: The British Experience)* 4.2 (1997): 31-34. Print.

- Jolly, Margaret. 'Introduction: Colonial and Postcolonial Plots in Histories of Maternities and Modernities.' *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*. Ed. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 1-25. Print.
- Kabeer, Naila. 'The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh.' *Feminist Review* 37(1991): 38-58. Print.
- Kane, Jean M., and Salman Rushdie. 'The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children".' *Contemporary Literature* 37.1 (1996): 94-118. Print.
- Kantor, Tadeusz. *A Journey through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*. Trans. Michal Kobiak. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Print.
- Kaur, Raminder, and Alda Terracciano. 'South Asian/BrAsian Performing Arts.' *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. Ed. N.Ali, V.S. Kalra, and S. Sayyid. London: Hurst & Co, 2006. 343-357. Print.
- Keith, Michael and Steve Pile. 'Introduction Part 1: The Politics of Place.' *Place and the Politics of Identity*. Ed. Michael Keith and Steve Pile. London: Routledge, 1993. 1-21. Print.
- Kennedy, Philippa. *The Art of Movement*. The National, 2010. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.thenational.ae/featured-content/work-in-progress/to-publish/the-art-of-movement>>.
- Khalil, Shezad. *The British Space: An Examination of Sonia Sabri's Artistic Endeavours*. Sonia Sabri Dance Company Website, 2009. Web. 27 July 2010. <<http://www.ssko.org.uk/news/shezad2.html>>.
- . 'Contemporary Kathak and "Loosening the Bolts" of Performance.' 2008. Unpublished Paper.
- . *Sonia Sabri - in Discussion with Shezad Khalil*. Sonia Sabri Dance Company Website, 2009. Web. 27 July 2010. <<http://www.ssko.org.uk/news/articles.html>>.
- Khan, Akram. 'Akram Khan: Gnosis'. *Akram Khan Gnosis Programme Notes*. 2010. Print.
- Khan, Akram and Rachel Davies. 'Cutting Loose.' *Pulse*, Spring 2002. Web. 15 March 2009. <<http://www.pulseconnects.com/archives?film&dance02.pdf>>.
- Khan, Naseem. 'South Asian Dance in Britain 1960-95.' *Choreography and Dance: An International Journal (South Asian Dance: The British Experience)* 4.2 (1997): 25-30. Print.
- Kirby, Michael. 'On Acting and Not-Acting.' *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*. 2nd ed. Ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli. London: Routledge, 2002. 40-52. Print.

- Kothari, Sunil. 'Kathak – an Open-ended Classical Indian Dance Form.' *Akram Khan Website*, 2010. Web. 27 July 2010. <<http://www.akramkhancompany.net/>>.
- Lansdale, Janet. 'Ancestral and Authorial Voices in Lloyd Newson and DV8's Strange Fish.' *New Theatre Quarterly* 20.2 (2004): 117-126. Print.
- Lepecki, André. 'Skin, Body, and Presence in Contemporary European Choreography.' *The Drama Review (TDR)* 43.4 (1999). 129-140. Print.
- Liu, Wei-Chen Roger. 'Global Universalism or Diasporic Particularism?.' *Beyond Imagined Uniqueness: Nationalisms in Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Joan Burbick and William Glass. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 305-320. Print.
- Lo, Jacqueline. 'Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities.' *Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media, and Popular Culture*. Ed. Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law, and Mandy Thomas. Sydney: Pluto Press, 2000. 152-168. Print.
- Lopez y Royo, Alessandra. 'Classicism, Post-Classicism and Ranjabati Sircar's Work: Re-defining the Terms of Indian Contemporary Dance Discourses.' *South Asia Research* 23.2 (2003): 153-169. Print.
- . 'Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism.' *Postcolonial Text* [Online] 1.1 (2004). <<http://pkp.ubc.ca/pocol/viewarticle.php?id=138>>.
- . 'South Asian Dances in Museums: Culture, Education and Patronage in the Diaspora.' *Roehampton University Public Repository*, 2002. Web. 15 March 2009. 1-11. <<http://rrp.roehampton.ac.uk/artspapers/2>>
- Lossau, Julia. 'Pitfalls of (Third) Space: Rethinking the Ambivalent Logic of Spatial Semantics.' *Communicating in the Third Space*. Ed. Karin Ika and Gerhard Wagner. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009. 62-78. Print.
- Luckett, Moya. 'Postnational Television? Goodness Gracious Me and BritAsian Diaspora'. *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*. Ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar. New York: New York University Press, 2003. 402-422. Print.
- MacCabe, Colin. 'Hanif Kureishi on London.' *Critical Quarterly* 41.3 (1999): 37-56. Print.
- Mackrell, Judith. *Gnosis*. The Guardian, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/apr/27/gnosis-review-Sadler's-wells>>.
- . *Gnosis*. The Guardian, 2009. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/nov/17/gnosis-akram-khan-review>>.
- . *Vanishing Pointe: Where Are All the Great Female Choreographers?* The Guardian, 2009. Web. 22 December 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/oct/27/where-are-the-female-choreographers>>.

- Majumdar, Sanjoy. 'From Ritual Drama to National Prime Time: *Mahabharata*, India's Televisual Obsession.' *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*. Ed. Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. 204-215. Print.
- Mandelbaum, David G. *Society in India: Volume Two Change and Continuity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. Print.
- Manning, Susan Allene. 'An American Perspective on Tanztheater.' *The Drama Review (TDR)* 30.2 (1986): 57-79. Print.
- Martin, Randy. *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. Print.
- Masica, Colin P. *Defining a Linguistic Area: South Asia*. New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2005. Print.
- Mason, David. 'Rasa, "Rasaesthetics" and Dramatic Theory as Performance Packaging.' *Theatre Research International* 31.1 (2006): 69-83. Print.
- Massey, Reginald. *India's Kathak Dance: Past, Present, Future*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999. Print.
- Meisner, Nadine. *From First Class to Economy*. The Independent, 2001. Web. 15 March 2009. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/from-first-class-to-economy-683585.html>>.
- Meduri, Avanthi. 'Bharatha Natyam - What Are You?' *Asian Theatre Journal* 5.1 (1988): 1-22. Print.
- . 'Labels, Histories, Politics: Indian/South Asian Dance on the Global Stage.' *Dance Research* 26.2 (2008): 223-243. Print.
- Menski, Werner F. 'Immigration and Multiculturalism in Britain: New Issues in Research and Policy.' *KIAPS: Bulletin of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 2002. Web. 5 April. 2010 1-20. <<http://www.casas.org.uk/papers/pdfpapers/osakalecture.pdf>>.
- Mercer, Kobena. 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness.' *The Visual Culture Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 2002. 190-203. Print.
- . Introduction. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*. Ed. Kobena Mercer. London: Iniva & The MIT Press, 2008. 6-27. Print.
- Meskimmon, Marsha. *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011. Print.

- Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- . 'Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie.' *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 26.3 (1995): 7-45. Print.
- Mitoma, Judy. Introduction. *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*. Ed. Judy Mitoma. London: Routledge, 2002. xxxi-xxxii. Print.
- Mitra, Royona. 'Akram Khan Re-writes Radha: The "Hypervisible" Cultural Identity in Kylie Minogue's "Showgirl"'. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19.1 (2009): 23-34. Print.
- . 'Cerebrality: Rewriting the Corporeality of a Transcultural Dancer.' *Dance and Cognition*. Ed. Johannes Birringer and Josephine Fenger. Munster: Lit Verlag, 2005. 167-183. Print.
- . 'Dancing Embodiment, Theorising Space: Exploring the "Third Space" in Akram Khan's *zero degrees*.' *Planes of Composition: Dance, Theory and the Global*. Ed. André Lepecki and Jenn Joy. London: Seagull Books, 2010. 40-63. Print.
- . 'Embodiment of Memory and the Diasporic Agent in Akram Khan's *Bahok*.' *Performance Embodiment and Cultural Memory*. Ed. Colin Counsel and Roberta Mock. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009. 41-48. Print.
- . 'Performing Cultural Heritage in "Weaving Paths" by Sonia Sabri Dance Company.' *Performing Heritage: Research, Practice and Innovation in Museum and Live Interpretation*. Ed. Anthony Jackson, and Jennifer Kidd. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. 144-157. Print.
- Mock, Roberta. Introduction. *Performing Processes: Creating Live Performance*. Ed. Roberta Mock. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2000. 1-12. Print.
- Moreiras, Alberto. 'Hybridity and Double Consciousness.' *Cultural Studies* 13.3 (1999): 373-407. Print.
- Morris, Gay. 'Bourdieu, the Body, and Graham's Post-War Dance.' *Dance Research* 19.2 (2001): 52-82. Print.
- Murray, Simon, and John Keefe. *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Nair, Sreenath. 'Saundarya: The Concept of Beauty in Indian Aesthetics.' *The Future of Beauty in Theatre, Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005. 154-162. Print.
- National Ballet of China. *The National Ballet of China*. National Ballet of China Website, 2010. Web. 5 April 2010. < <http://www.ballet.org.cn/en/jutuanjieshao.htm>>.

- Nasar, Anita Dawood. 'Filming into the Mainstream'. *Pulse*, Spring 2002. Web. 15 March 2009. <<http://www.pulseconnects.com/archives?film&dance02.pdf>>.
- Netto, Gina. 'Multiculturalism in the Devolved Context: Minority Ethnic Negotiation of Identity through Engagement in the Arts in Scotland.' *Sociology* 42.1 (2008). 47-64. Print.
- Nisbet, Neil. *Shobana Jeyasingh*. Article 19 Website, 2008. Web. 15 July 2010. <http://www.article19.co.uk/06/interview/shobana_jeyasingh.php>.
- Norman, Neil. *Akram Khan – Gnosis: Sadler's Wells*. The Express, 2010. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/171797/Akram-Khan-Gnosis-Sadler-s-Wells>>.
- Norridge, Zoe. 'Dancing the Multicultural Conversation?: Critical Responses to Akram Khan's Work in the Context of Pluralist Poetics.' *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 10.1 (2010): 1-16. Print.
- Novack, Cynthia J. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1990. Print.
- O'Donovan, Terry. *Akram Khan – Gnosis*. The Stage, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/28022/akram-khan-gnosis>>.
- On the Verge. *The Observer*, 2003. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2003/nov/30/dance>>.
- O'Shea, Janet. 'Dancing through History and Ethnography: Indian Classical Dance and the Performance of the Past.' *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*. Ed. Theresa Jill Buckland. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. 123-152. Print.
- . *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007. Print.
- . 'Unbalancing the Authentic/Partnering Classicism: Shobana Jeyasingh's Choreography and the *Bharata Natyam* "Tradition".' *Decentring Dancing Texts: The Challenge of Interpreting Dance*. Ed. Janet Lansdale. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008. 38-54. Print.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 'Hybridity and Ambivalence: Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture.' *Theory, Culture Society* 22.4 (2005): 39-64. Print.
- P.A.R.T.S. *Presentation of the School*. P.A.R.T.S Website, 2011. Web. 18 July 2011. <<http://parts.rosas.foreach.be/en/presentation>>.
- Patterson, Christina. *Akram Khan: 'You Have Become a Warrior.'* The Independent, 2009. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/artsentertainment/interviews/akram-khan-you-have-to-become-a-warrior-1815314.html>>.

- Pavis, Patrice. 'Problems of Translation for the Stage: Interculturalism and Post-modern Theatre.' Trans. Loren Kruger. *The Play Out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*. Ed. Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 25-44. Print.
- . *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Pawar, Pratap. *Pratap Pawar: Triveni Dance Academy*. Pratap Pawar Website, 2009. Web. 20 June 2009. <<http://www.pratappawar.com/>>.
- Perron, Wendy. *East and West Meet in the Body of: Akram Khan*. Dance Magazine, 2008. Web. 10 July. 2010. <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_11_82/ai_n31021927/>.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Piccirillo, Annalisa. 'Hybrid Bodies in Transit: The "Third Language" of Contemporary Kathak.' *Anglistica* 12.2 (2008): 27-41. Print.
- Pinto, Shiromi. 'No Man's Land – Exploring South Asianness.' *Akademi Website*, 2004. Web. 15 May 2010. 1-16. <http://akademi.co.uk/download/NML_report.pdf>
- Poulton, Lindsay, and Michael Tait. *Dancer Akram Khan: My Body is my Voice*. The Guardian, 2009. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/video/2009/dec/09/akram-khan-dance>>.
- Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. *Dance Words*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995. Print.
- Preston-Dunlop, Valerie, and Ana Sánchez-Colberg. 'Core Concepts of a Choreological Perspective.' *Dance and the Performative: A Choreological Perspective – Laban and Beyond*. Ed. Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sánchez-Colberg. London: Verve Publishing, 2002. 7-37. Print.
- Prickett, Stacey. 'Techniques and Institutions: The Transformation of British Dance Tradition through South Asian Dance.' *Dance Research* 22. 1 (2004): 1-21. Print.
- Purkayastha, Prarthana. 'Bodies Beyond Borders: Modern Dance in Colonial and Postcolonial India.' Diss. U of Roehampton, 2008. Print.
- Ram, Kalpana. 'Phantom Limbs: South Asian Dance and Immigrant Reifications of the Female Body.' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26.1 (2005): 121-137. Print.
- Ramji, Hasmita. 'Engendering Diasporic Identities.' *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*. Ed. Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram. Oxford: Berg, 2003. 227-242. Print.

- Ranasinha, Rurani. *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2009. Print.
- Ranganathan, Malini and Monique Loquet. 'Teaching Kathak in France: The Interdisciplinary "Milieu".' *Dance Research Journal* 41.1 (2009): 69-81. Print.
- Rao, Rahul. 'Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism: Between Home and the World.' D.Phil. Diss.U of Oxford, 2007. Web. 14 July 2010. <<http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:6eb91e22-9563-49a2-be2b-402a4edd99b5>>.
- Rattansi, Ali. *New Labour, New Assimilation*. Open Democracy: Free Thinking for the World, 2004. Web.14 July 2010. 1-5. <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/2141.pdf>>.
- Reis, Michele. 'Theorising Diaspora: Perspectives on "Classical" and "Contemporary" Diaspora.' *International Migration* 42.2 (2004): 41-60. Print.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Print.
- Routledge, Paul. 'The Third Space as Critical Engagement.' *Antipode* 28.4 (1996): 399-419. Print.
- Roy, Sanjoy. 'Dirt, Noise, Traffic: Contemporary Indian Dance in the Western City; Modernity, Ethnicity and Hybridity'. *Dance in the City*. Ed. Helen Thomas. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997. 68-85. Print.
- Runnymede Trust. *The Report : Part One - A Vision for Britain*. Runnymede Trust, 2010. Web. 5 April 2010. <<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/reportPartOne.html>>.
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, London: Picador, 2000. Print.
- Rutherford, Jonathan. 'A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference.' *Identity: Community Culture Difference*. 2nd ed. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1998. 9-27. Print.
- . 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha.' *Identity: Community Culture Difference*. 2nd ed. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1998. 207-221. Print.
- Sabri, Sonia. *Sonia Sabri Company: Company*. Sonia Sabri Company Website, 2010. Web. 4 August 2010. <<http://www.ssco.org.uk/news/articles.html>>.
- Sadler's Wells. *On Pina*. Sadler's Wells Theatre Website, 2011. Web. 23 April 2011. <<http://www.sadlerswells.com/more/pina-bausch-quotes.asp>>.

- Salam Rifat. A. 'Am I a South Asian?: Personal, Organizational and Political Understandings of Second Generation South Asians' Ethnic Identity. ' *All Academic Website*, 2004. Web. 21 August 2009. <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_researchcitation/0/1/9/3/0/pages19309_php>.
- Saner, Emine. "My Thriller Routine Beat the Bullies". The Guardian, 2009. Web. 10 July 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/jun/26/akram-khan-michael-jackson-thriller>>.
- Sánchez-Colberg, Ana. 'Altered States and Subliminal Spaces: Charting the Road Towards a Physical Theatre.' *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader*. Ed. John Keefe and Simon Murray. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- . 'An(n)a Annotated: A Critical Journey'. *Theatre enCorps Website*, 2004. Web. 5 March 2011. <www.theatreencorps.com/resources/Anna%20Annotated.pdf>.
- Sanders, Lorna. 'Akram Khan's *ma* (2004): An Essay in Hybridisation and Productive Ambiguity.' *Decentring Dancing Texts: The Challenge of Interpreting Dance*. Ed. Janet Lansdale. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008. 55-72. Print.
- . *Akram Khan's Rush: Creative Insights*, Alton: Dance Books Ltd., 2004. Print.
- . *An Artistic Journey*. Akram Khan Company Website, 2010. Web. 5 April 2010. <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>.
- . "'I Just Can't Wait to Get to the Hotel": *zero degrees* (2005)'. Akram Khan Company Website, 2007. 3 September 2007. <<http://akramkhancompany.net/docs/zerodegrees.doc>>.
- Sayyid, S. 'Introduction: BrAsians: Postcolonial People, Ironic Citizens.' A *Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. Ed. N.Ali, V.S. Kalra, and S. Sayyid. London: Hurst & Co, 2006. 1-10. Print.
- Schechner, Richard. 'Interculturalism and the Culture of Choice: Richard Schechner Interviewed by Patrice Pavis.' *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. Ed. Patrice Pavis. London: Routledge, 1996. 41-50. Print.
- . *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- . 'Rasaesthetics.' *The Drama Review* 45.3 (2001): 27-50. Print.
- Schendel, William van. *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.
- Servos, Norbert. 'Pina Bausch: Dance and Emancipation.' *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 1st ed. Ed. Alexandra Carter. London: Routledge, 1998. 36-45. Print.
- Shah, Purnima. 'Transcending Gender in the Performance of Kathak.' *Dance Research Journal* 30.2 (1998): 2-17. Print.

- Sharma, Sanjay, John Hutnyk, and Ashwani Sharma. Introduction. *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*. Ed. Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, and Ashwani Sharma. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1996. 1-14. Print.
- Sharma, Shailja. 'Salman Rushdie: The Ambivalence of Migrancy.' *Twentieth Century Literature* 47.4 (2001): 596-618. Print.
- Shevtsova, Maria. 'Interculturalism, Aestheticism, Orientalism: Starting from Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*.' *Theatre Research International* 22.2 (1997): 98-104. Print.
- Short, John Rennie. Foreword. *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Ed. Irene Cieraad. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999. ix-x. Print.
- Smith, Lucy. 'In-between Spaces: An Investigation into the Embodiment of Culture in Contemporary Dance.' *Research in Dance Education* 9.1 (2008): 79-86. Print.
- Smith, Michael Peter. 'Postmodernism, Urban Ethnography and the New Social Space of Ethnic Identity.' *Theatre and Society* 21.4 (1992): 493-531. Print.
- Spry, Tami. 'Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis.' *Qualitative Enquiry* 7.6(2001): 706-732. Print.
- Stock, Cheryl. 'Beyond the Intercultural to the Accented Body: An Australian Perspective.' *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009. 281-297.
- Stoneley, Peter. *A Queer History of the Ballet*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007.
- Szerszynski, Bronislaw, and John Urry. 'Cultures of Cosmopolitanism.' *The Sociological Review* 50 (2002): 461-481. Print.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Thakur, Rakesh. 'Looking Glass Self: *Mahabharata* as a "Significant Other".' *Text and Inter-Textuality in the Mahabharata: Myth, Meaning and Metamorphoses*. Ed. Pradeep Trikha. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2006. 58-67. Print.
- Tomlinson, John. *Globalization and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999. Print.
- Trawick, Margaret. 'The Ideology of Love in a Tamil Family.' *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*. Ed. Owen M. Lynch. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 37-63. Print.
- Tyndall, Kate. *Farooq Chaudhry*. The Producers: Alchemists of the Impossible, 2006. Web. 18 August 2010. <<http://www.the-producers.org/FarooqChaudhry>>.
- Uytterhoeven, Lise. 'A Cosmopolite's Utopia: Limitations to the Generational Flemish Dance History Model.' *Platform* 4.2 (2009): 1-14. Print.

- Vatsyayan, Kapila. *Bharata: The Natyashastra*, New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1996. Print.
- . 'Notes on the Relationship of Music and Dance in India'. *Ethnomusicology* 7.1 (1963): 33-38. Print.
- Vertovec, Steven. 'Super-diversity and its Implications.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30.6 (2007): 1024-1054. Print.
- Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen. 'Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism.' *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*. Ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 1-24. Print.
- Walker, Margaret. 'Courtesans and Choreographers: The (Re)Placement of Women in the History of Kathak Dance.' *Dance Matters: Performing India on Local and Global Stages*. Ed. Pallabi Chakravorty and Nilanjana Gupta. New Delhi: Routledge, 2010. 279- 300. Print.
- Watts, Graham. *Akram Khan 'Gnosis'*. The Independent, 2010. Web. 1 July 2010. <http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_10/may10/gw_rev_akram_khan_gnosis_0410.htm> .
- Werbner, Pnina. 'Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30.5 (2004): 895-911. Print.
- Williams, Ann. 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: "Both Sitting Duet".' *Ballet Magazine*, 2003. Web. 28 July 2010. < http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_03/nov03/aw_rev_jonathan_burrows_fargion_1003.htm>.
- Williams, David. 'Assembling our Differences: Bridging Identities-in-Motion in Intercultural Performances.' *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader*. Ed. John Keefe and Simon Murray. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007. 239-248. Print.
- . 'Theatre of Innocence and of Experience: Peter Brook's International Centre – An Introduction.' *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. David Williams. London: Routledge, 1991. 3-28. Print.
- Young, Robert J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Zaman, Shahaduz. *Broken Limbs, Broken Lives: Ethnography of a Hospital Ward in Bangladesh*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuris, 2005. Print.
- Zarrilli, Phillip. 'The Aftermath: When Peter Brook Came to India'. *The Drama Review: TDR* 30.1 (1986): 92-99. Print.

Interviews:

Kaushik, Mira. Personal interview. 25 Aug. 2009.

Khan, Akram. Personal interview. 7 Aug. 2009.

Khan, Anwara. Personal interview. 25 Aug. 2009.

Live Performances:

Bahok. By Akram Khan Company. Dir. Akram Khan. Perf. Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Young Jin Kim, Meng Ning Ning, Andrej Petrovic, Saju, Shanell Winlock, Wang Yitong and Zhang Zhenxin. Birmingham Rep Theatre, Birmingham. 13-14 May. 2008. Performance.

Gnosis. By Akram Khan Company. Dir. Akram Khan. Perf. Akram Khan and Yoshie Sunahata. Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. 26-27 April. 2010. Performance.

Polaroid Feet. By Akram Khan Company. Dir. Akram Khan. Perf. Akram Khan. Royal Festival Hall, London. 8-10 April. 2001. Performance.

Vertical Road. By Akram Khan Company. Dir. Akram Khan. Perf. Salah El Brogy, Konstandina Efthymiadou, Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Ahmed Khemis, Young Jin Kim, Yen-Ching Lin, Andrej Petrovic and Paul Zvkovich. Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. 5-9 October. 2010. Performance.

zero degrees. By Akram Khan Company. Dir. Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Perf. Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Sadler's Wells Theatre, London. 8-16 July. 2005. Performance.

Multimedia Sources:

Bahok: Lettres sur le Pont. Dir. Gilles Delmas. Perf. Akram Khan Company and National Ballet of China. Lardux Films, 2008. DVD.

Belle d'Opium. By Akram Khan. Dir. Romain Gavras. Perf. Mélanie Thierry. 2010. Web. <http://belledopium.com/en_GB/home.html#/film/>.

Loose in Flight. By Akram Khan. Dir. Rachel Davies. Perf. Akram Khan. 1999. Web. <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_production.php?productionid=17>.

Samsara: Showgirl Homecoming. By Kylie Minogue. Dir. Akram Khan. Perf. Kylie Minogue, Akram Khan and Ensemble. EMI, 2007. DVD.

zero degrees. Dir. Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Perf. Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Axion Films, 2008. DVD.

Appendix

List of Performances by Akram Khan Company

- 1999 *Loose in Flight*. Directed by Akram Khan and Rachel Davies. Performed by Akram Khan. Broadcast by Channel 4 Television on 9 September 1999.
- 1999 *Duet*. Directed by Akram Khan and Jonathan Burrows. Performed by Akram Khan and Jonathan Burrows. Premiered on 14 July 1999 at Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.
- 2000 *Loose in Flight*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan. Premiered on 11 March 2000 at Tron Theatre, Glasgow.
- 2000 *Fix*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan. Premiered on 11 March 2000 at Tron Theatre, Glasgow.
- 2000 *Rush*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan, Moya Michael, Gwyn Emberton/Inn Pang Ooi. Premiered on 5 October 2000 at Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham.
- 2001 *Polaroid Feet*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan. Premiered on 8 April 2001 at Purcell Room, London.
- 2001 *Related Rocks*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan, Rachel Krische, Moya Michael, Inn Pang Ooi, Shannel Winlock. Premiered on 9 December 2001 at Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.
- 2002 *Kaash*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan, Rachel Krische, Rachel Krische, Moya Michael, Inn Pang Ooi, Shannel Winlock. Premiered on 28 March 2002 at Creteil, France.
- 2003 *Ronin*. Directed by Akram Khan and Gauri Sharma Tripathi. Performed by Akram Khan. Premiered on 11 April 2003 at Purcell Room, London.
- 2004 *ma*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan, Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Anton Lachky, Nikoleta Rafaelisova, Shanell Winlock. Premiered on 28 May 2004 at Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore.
- 2005 *zero degrees*. Directed by Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Performed by Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Premiered on 8 July 2005 at Sadler's Wells, London.
2006. *Sacred Monsters*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan and Sylvie Guillem. Premiered on 19 September 2006 at Sadler's Wells, London.

- 2008 *In-I*. Directed by Akram Khan and Juliette Binoche. Performed by Akram Khan and Juliette Binoche. Premiered on 18 September 2008 at Lyttleton, National Theatre, London.
- 2008 *Bahok*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Young Jin Kim, Meng Ning Ning, Andrej Petrovic, Saju, Shanell Winlock, Wang Yitong, Zhang Zhenxin. Premiered on 25 January 2008 at Tianqiao Theatre, Beijing, China.
- 2009 *Confluence*. Directed by Akram Khan and Nitin Sawhney. Performed by Akram Khan, Nitin Sawhney, Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Konstandina Efthymiadou, Young Jin Kim, Yen-Ching Lin, Andrej Petrovic. Premiered on 27 November 2009 at Sadler's Wells, London.
- 2010 *Gnosis*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan and Yoshie Sunahata/ Fang-Yi Sheu. Premiered on 26 April 2010 at Sadler's Wells, London.
- 2010 *Vertical Road*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Salah El Brogy, Konstandina Efthymiadou, Eulalia Ayguade Farro, Ahmed Khemis, Young Jin Kim, Yen-Ching Lin, Andrej Petrovic and Paul Zvkovich. Premiered on 16 September 2010 at Curve Theatre, Leicester.
- 2011 *Desh*. Directed by Akram Khan. Performed by Akram Khan. Premiered on 15 September 2011 at Curve Theatre, Leicester.