

Of Spirits and Sundry Other Phenomena in Intercultural Shakespeare: Text and Performance

The theatrical performance of Shakespeare has been conceived primarily as a live event where a production and its audiences share more or less the same horizon of expectations. This conception of Shakespeare in performance owes much to the global purchase of the notion of Shakespeare's universality for practitioners and audiences alike. So even as non-English productions from different parts of the globe are now increasingly seen in international venues, overlapping horizons, or even a shared core horizon, of expectations may be assumed by their audiences abroad. Parallel to this fast-growing mobility of productions, a different but related expansion of audiences is created by video-recordings of performances that are disseminated on DVD and the internet. Unlike the occasion of international arts festivals that offer a smorgasbord of cultural performance over a relatively short period of time, the video capture of performance brings with it the potential for detailed, repeated watching. This watching practice can span an undefined range of positionalities, which apply variable frames of reference to a production's reception, into the indefinite future. Realising such an extended audience itself constitutes a secondary production of the stage performance (where the prior production at live venues is primary). This secondary production that makes the video and other performance materials available is most visible when its agency and purpose are not co-extensive with that of the theatre company. For instance, in a web-based digital archive intended for research use, performance events that occurred at different times and places and in disparate contexts are re-presented as videos whose context is a database of information. Here a performance video is identified by its metadata that allow a viewer to both locate it and connect it to other videos that have keywords in common. These keywords would match (at least to begin with) the quick labels that identify a show for live audiences, such as 'Hamlet', or 'Korean'. But in the economy of the search mode, and especially if the data is more detailed, the video-recording's network of relationships may be only indirectly that of the communities who had an interest in the stage production, and more immediately a matrix of key terms, names and topics of interest that prompt a viewer to delve into the spectrum of diverse materials held together by any one of them.

Embodied participation in a live event is not merely opposed to retrieval or replication of it in a recording.¹ As Philip Auslander reminds us, the phenomenon of 'liveness' is itself a condition that came into being with mediatization, and is valued *by* being part of the economy of media.² So one might say that performance events acquire the additional state of media objects, receding into the past while remaining embedded within and circulating in another form in the present. Correlatively, the reading of a performance *video* is not a part of the event captured

¹ Doug Reside proposes provocatively that "theatre scholarship, and indeed theatre history research in general, can be accurately described as a subset of media studies" ("Last Modified January 1996: The Digital History of *Rent*", *Theatre Survey*, 52.2 (November 2011), 335).

² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 10-60.

in the video, whereas a live audience member's responses would be. Even where a reader recollects or is able to mentally re-create the theatre experience, 'as if' s/he had been part of its event, watching the video would rarely follow the linear time of the stage action. The practice of reading a recording interacts with interruptions to watching: to replay and isolate a particular detail, to search for additional information or to watch a similar scene in another production. Hyperlinks and navigation design that interconnect related materials in online video resources invite such interruptions, which re-contextualise the video, more than DVDs. So a reading of a video is shaped by its technological environment and capability. Depending on the user interface design, and the functions and resources that are accessible, particular aspects of the performance may be foregrounded or backgrounded. If a viewer does not follow the performance language and lacks an adequate pre-existing horizon of expectation within which to adopt the approach of 'as if one were there', the intersection of watching with background and comparative resources naturally grows in significance. These intersections can strengthen the definition and depth of an intercultural engagement with the performance, by routing that engagement through the intermedial one, both interculturality and mediatization being aspects of the globalization of performance. This paper is an exercise in the reading of two non-English Shakespeare performances through their video-recordings published in the online Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A) at a-s-i-a-web.org.³ My reading focuses on the roles of speech and language in the use of spirits, gods, and goddesses to adapt Shakespeare's plays. In relating the performance video to the translated script that is presented alongside it in the A|S|I|A video interface, this reading approaches the topic from an intercultural position of dual translations, at once back into the source language of English and into the digital medium.

The 2009 production of Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* does not open with the appearance of the Ghost of King Hamlet to the guards; instead the actors in modern western suits and gowns pass through the auditorium in King Hamlet's funeral procession onto a stage set modelled after the interior of the 5th-6th century giant tomb called the Cheonma-Chong (Tomb of the Heavenly Horse). The tomb takes its name from the drawing of a horse on a saddle-cloth that was recovered from it, and which is closely reproduced but many times magnified as the central image projected onto the backdrop. The actors lower the body into a grave inset downstage before cutting abruptly to Act 1 scene 2. This grave functions as an exit and entrance for the Ghost, Polonius, Ophelia, Hamlet, and finally all the characters except Horatio. Not only the Ghost, but Hamlet too emerges from it to speak his 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. So while the script remains ninety per cent a close translation of Shakespeare's play (with some re-ordering and cutting) and is acted with the intense style of naturalism that the Street Theatre is known for, its human action is contextualised and set at the edge of the world after death.

In productions such as this that adapt Shakespeare's plays by drawing upon non-naturalistic performance forms, the treatment of the other-worldly can be considered a metonymy for the intercultural meeting with another world – from

³ The Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A) and this paper are supported by research funding from the Singapore Ministry of Education under the project Relocating Intercultural Theatre (MOE2008-T2-1-110).

both sides. The interruption of ordinary human reality by a spectre, spirits, gods or goddesses forms a break or join where the systems of belief, cultural practices and performance conventions of a non-Christian culture interact with the dramatic purpose of these appearances in Shakespeare's play. This is not to say of course that a culture, or even the performance resources of that culture, can be equated with its means of staging the dead or the divine. As we know it, a 'culture' is a nebulous, heterogenous, constantly fluctuating collocation of practices and attitudes that is loosely gathered under an ethnic, regional or national name. The kind of metonymy I propose to outline is not of specific performance conventions and aesthetics representing a culture as a noun, but a metonymy of the intercultural as a verb. This distinction is important for re-thinking intercultural theatre practices, which have been open to critique for appropriating elements from Asian traditional performance, resulting in a merely 'aesthetic' or 'formal' interculturalism.⁴ Yet Asian performance practices not only present but also effect non-Christian understandings of how the human and non-human worlds relate; such encounters between the two worlds allow the vocabularies and aesthetics of these traditions to engage western/westernised principles of mimesis as the standard Shakespeare performance. In naturalistic performance, staging the 'supernatural' presents a question to be solved, since its codes do not encompass how ghosts, gods or spirits 'naturally' appear or behave. A developed performance system for presenting the other world – after death or in the skies – can alter the familiar modes of meaning in realistically conceived characters and action. These visitations thus constitute a key node of the intercultural performability of Shakespeare.

⁴ For instance, see Dennis Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 290-303; Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World* (London: Routledge, 1993).

I Three Scenes in between Life and the World after Death in the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet*

The account I gave above of the set and image of the horse in the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* raises the question of how to decode this usage of the Cheonma-Chong in relation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. But this question must be preceded by asking who would recognise the citation. The popular production of national culture and national heritage reinforces notions of intercultural performance in which nominal cultural zones such as 'Korean' and 'Shakespeare' are assumed to come together. Yet the fact that the monument is Korean does not therefore mean that it would be accessible in a standard way, if at all, to any Korean spectator of this production. My Korean colleague was surprised to discover, after watching the video recording carefully, that the set was designed to resemble the monument she had visited on a school excursion. On the other hand, this information on the stage design is documented in an essay published in English and Korean by Kim Dong-Wook, who worked closely with the director Lee Youn-Taek.⁵ These contrasting routes to recognising the referent are not simply related hierarchically, that is, as higher or lower levels of privileged access to the interpretive choices of a production, which may ironically offer a shorter route to understanding for a foreign

⁵ Dong-Wook Kim, "Glocalizing *Hamlet*: A Study of Yun-Taek Lee's Intercultural Productions of *Hamlet* from 1996 to 2005", *Shakespeare Review*, 44.4 (2008), 717-51. [In Korean.] In English in Hyon-u Lee *et al.*, eds., *Glocalizing Shakespeare in Korea and Beyond* (Seoul: Dongin Publishing, 2009), 91-123.

spectator. They also indicate different orders of local knowledge of the Cheonma-Chong that obtain for spectators of this production at different positions. From the standpoint of education in heritage, direct experience of an historic site within one's own national geography has no logical connection with a Korean production of *Hamlet*, and may have other narratives attached to it that are inhospitable to *Hamlet*. From the perspective of artistic usage of that heritage, first-hand documentation of the production made available internationally enables scholars to identify which, and perhaps why, specific elements were used to stage an originally foreign text. National heritage education and production documentation both provide forms of local knowledge about the Cheonma-Chong; but they orientate the spectator differently towards the replacement of Elsinore's court with the Cheonma-Chong. From the point of view of national heritage, using the mythical-historical past in the Silla dynasty – as it merges with the ideal, paradisaical after-life evoked by the horse that appears to be galloping in the skies – to set the action of *Hamlet*, ridden with Christian sin, could seem a forced juxtaposition. From the viewpoint of interpretation of Shakespeare performance, a spectator may see that the framing perspective of this after-world comments ironically on the corruption in the play. Or, turning the view around to Shakespeare's local relevance, this setting from a golden age in Korea can be seen to present *Hamlet* as a critical analogy to the crises in political leadership in modern-day South Korea.

Between the first staging of Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* in 1996 and its most recent one in 2010, the production went through several incarnations, toured to international capitals as well as playing repeatedly in its home country.⁶ Along the way, these among other possible routes to interpreting local reference would have criss-crossed with one another, and with the producers' own interpretation as it is embodied on-stage. The long arc travelled by a production, consisting of different iterations over many years, foregrounds the temporal dimension of intercultural performance that has largely been neglected in spatial conceptions of interculturality. Seen synchronically and diachronically, the mesh of production and reception positionalities that a particular performance chronotope actualizes as relative cultural locations is open to change within one production, and also determined by the moment of this whole production arc in the intercultural history of which it is a part. For example, an individuated approach to naturalistic acting such as the Street Theatre Troupe's training methods⁷ has arisen after a long practice of naturalism, which was introduced as modern drama into Korea in the early twentieth century by way of Japanese colonisation.⁸ So the contemporary use of naturalism in Shakespeare productions grows from and refers to the particular histories of Korea/South Korea's relationship to the West and Japan, of its modernisation and of its own changing international conception of its cultural identity in cosmopolitan arenas.⁹ This *Hamlet* interrupts and modifies naturalism by adapting the indigenous pre-modern performance of *Gut* (shamanism). The interactions it presents between naturalistic conventions and *Gut* can be understood as a conjoined intra-/inter-cultural negotiation with these trajectories from the past, and with the naturalised

⁶ The differences are detailed in D. W. Kim, "Glocalizing *Hamlet*". The Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* last played in Seoul in September 2010.

⁷ According to Kim Bang Ock, "[s]ince the early 1990s, Lee Youn-Taek has systematized the Korean way of teaching acting by embracing Korean sound and bodily techniques and also by returning to the way of breathing that can be found in Korean folk performances". [In Korean, author's translation.] (B.O. Kim, "The Search for and the Incorporation of the Indigenous Theatrical Elements of Acting in Modern Korean Theatre: From Mask Dance to 'Korean Way of Acting'", *Korean Drama*, 28 [2006], 53.)

⁸ Shingeki (i.e. 'new theatre') in Japan directly influenced the inception of modern Korean drama, also termed 'new drama', as well as the inception of Hua Ju (spoken drama) in China.

⁹ B. O. Kim assesses the new theatre movements that began in South Korea in the 1970s as "a paradigm shift that tried to make a break with westernized theatre styles, in general, and western realist acting techniques, in particular" (B.O. Kim, "Indigenous Theatrical Elements", 53).

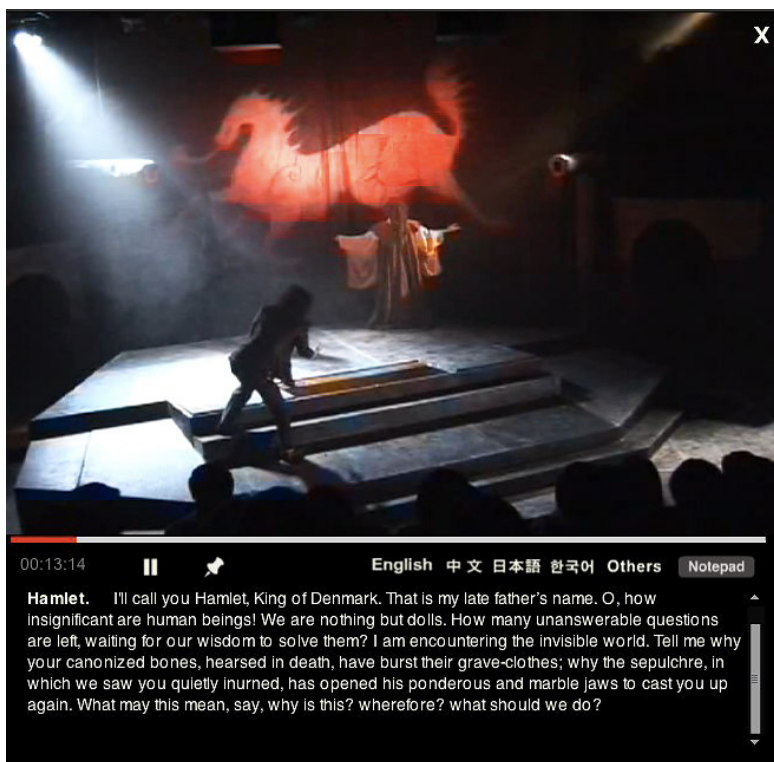


Fig. 1: "Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost of his father". Street Theatre Troupe, *Hamlet*, Seoul, 2009.¹⁰ Click on the image to watch video.

¹⁰ All video clips used in this paper are drawn from the performance videos kindly donated to the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A) by the theatre companies Street Theatre Troupe and The Actors Studio, and are hosted by A|S|I|A, <<http://a-s-i-a-web.org/>>. This performance played at the Nunbit Theatre in Seoul from 5 to 22 May 2009.

notions of Shakespeare performance that accrue from them.

This dynamic can be seen in Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost in the part to which the following image refers, from the 2009 production recording of Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet*.

In most performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the verbal action of this scene dominates the physical; what the Ghost tells Hamlet in words is the impetus for Hamlet's subsequent emotions and actions. By contrast, in this performance the Ghost does not speak aloud (his speeches are in parenthesis in the script), and only Hamlet's responses are voiced. Instead the bodily communication between them is the scene's primary focus. Without speech, the knowledge that the Ghost transmits to Hamlet excludes the audience, who witness it as a bodily affect. Whereas Shakespeare describes Hamlet's physical reactions subjunctively (*if* he heard

the lightest word about the Ghost's prison house), here we follow how his body reacts to the introjection of wordless knowing. Hamlet's reply to this silent communication becomes a verbal spill-over of the experience, allowing us to infer, one step behind him, what he has understood. The radical staging of this encounter suggests much greater porosity in the boundary between life and the after-life than in Shakespeare's play. Because Hamlet's discovery of what occurred in the realm of the living is communicated from the different realm after death, the knowledge carries with it or is carried by an experience of that other realm, and for this reason cannot be expressed in language.

At another level the translation that is at once necessary and incomplete between the two realms presents itself as an intercultural relationship of text and performance, where language and body repeatedly unite and separate with the rhythm of the exchange between Hamlet and the Ghost. The alternation presents a metonymy for a mutually translating relationship between Shakespeare's text and *Gut* ritual performances, where on each side the original has passed through usage by another purpose, and returned in an altered form.

In the online medium of the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A), this relationship is made more visible by the presentation of the script alongside the video-recording. The viewer can thereby match the Ghost's lines to his silent actions. By contrast, in the theatre these lines were not provided in sur-titles, and could only be inferred. With the provision of a Notepad in the A|S|I|A video

format, the viewer in the digital medium can pause the recording to make notes attached to a specific time-code. This detailed reading of the script in parallel with watching the video-recording enables new insight into not only the text-performance relationship, but also the relations between several scripts at work at once. The most common combination of multiple scripts in East Asian productions is a translation of Shakespeare's text in the dialogue, and an edited version of the original that is presented in sur-titles when the production tours (and increasingly at home as well). This can be seen in the multilingual text-box accompanying the video of this *Hamlet*: an edited version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that was translated into Korean appears as a back-translation, producing a double text of bilingual surtitles in Korean and Shakespeare's English (mostly).¹¹

On seeing the Ghost, Hamlet says:

I'll call you Hamlet, King of Denmark. That was my late father's name. *O, how insignificant are human beings! We are nothing but dolls. How many unanswerable questions are left, waiting for our wisdom to solve them? I am encountering the invisible world.* Tell me why your canonized bones, hearsed in death ... [italics mine]

The Korean lines (italicised above) introduced into Shakespeare's can be read from dual directions. As Hamlet's words, their key tenor is self-reflexive; simultaneously, they depict the first impersonal awareness of the other world by the incipient shaman who has been chosen by the *naerim* ("to come down into") of the spirits. Correlatively, *Gut* practices are figuratively translated into the plot purpose of this scene in *Hamlet*, by depicting the dream appearance of the god or spirit. This is considered a very private, strange experience, and the *Naerim-gut* ritual to induct a shaman thus chosen¹² takes place after such an occurrence, sometimes many years later. Unlike *Gut* rituals, this encounter is not noisy with music and chanting, nor communal, but choreographed in carefully staged images.

Three stages can be distinguished in the *naerim* encounter performed here. (a) The reaching of the Ghost and Hamlet to touch each other's hands, as over an intangible separation, ends in a 'miss' and blackout that may be read as a second break in Hamlet's consciousness (the first being sleep and dream). (b) The central sequence of possession parallels Shakespeare's lines on the Ghost's prison house. Hamlet's trembling dramatises the start of the illness known as *shinbyeong* ('spirit sickness'), also called 'self-loss', that is caused by the spirit or god's possession of the destined shaman. And (c) a mime of the murder is only shown after Hamlet has been prepared to receive it, and anticipates the dumb show. Hamlet's actual or pretended madness that begins in this scene in Shakespeare is displaced from being his subjective condition, and objectified as his possession by his father's spirit for whom he is the shaman. His anticipation before the Ghost's narration, "Alas, why should I endure such pain to hear your story?" applies simultaneously to Hamlet's fate, the re-playing of *Hamlet* and the incipient shaman who often experiences a period of struggle and resistance to becoming a shaman. This self-reflexive resistance thus brings together Hamlet's two impending roles of revenger and shaman.

¹¹ The Korean and English scripts are original scripts by Lee Youn-Taek, with supplementary transcription and translation of the dialogue in the video-recording by Lee Kangsun for A|S|I|A, <<http://a-s-i-a-web.org/>>, 27 September 2011. For a discussion of the sur-titling of non-Anglophone Shakespeare performance, see Li Lan Yong, "After Translation", *Shakespeare Survey*, 62 (2009), 283-95.

¹² As opposed to the shaman who becomes one by lineage and apprenticeship.

The merging of first and third person positions introduced by the shaman's intermediary role ambiguates and disrupts notions of subjectivity that intertwine humanist conceptions of individual consciousness with the naturalistic acting of character. Hamlet's dissociation from his role as revenger is intensified, but not as a character trait particular to him. Rather, that dissociation results from the absorption or displacement of his character by its functions as a communication channel with the spirit world, and vice versa. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet's identification or sympathy with the Ghost ("Alas, poor Ghost"; "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit") preserves a stable distinction between first and third person roles and pronouns. In the Street Theatre Troupe production, however, the shaman's position displaces this distinction in the surrogacy of mediumship, where Hamlet speaks and acts as a mediator. Likewise, the Ghost's figure is at once the father's spirit and the shaman who mediates the spirit; or, the father as shaman. Standing in the shaman's position behind Hamlet, he touches Hamlet's aura, raising him like a puppet; facing Hamlet, he shows him the murder. Hamlet's two roles co-present an uneasy duality in which one cannot fulfil the other: the revenger executes violent vengeance in a personal cause; the shaman harmonizes the worlds of the living and the after-life by shifting feelings of resentment towards forgiveness and acceptance, and practices healing rituals aimed at solving problems impersonally in a communal, not individual, capacity.¹³ Hamlet's subsequent behaviour then, that in naturalistic acting dramatises his emotional instability, is re-configured in this production as the volatility with

¹³ Although Hamlet briefly articulates a more detached view of his actions in "Heaven has pleased to punish me with this and this with me", this role as the scourge of God can be compared with one of the foremost Korean shaman, Kim Keum Hwa: "Revenge only results in further revenge".

which the incommensurable first and third person roles he occupies disrupt one another.

The reconfiguration of a naturalistic representation of the individual by *Gut* comes to the fore in the Mousetrap. In this scene the emotional expressiveness of the acting progresses from artificial gestures, through masked dance, to naturalistic behaviour. The progression suggests an increasing truthfulness being enacted by the performers, paradoxically, in direct proportion to the growing non-naturalistic representation of character as it splits into several speaking and acting parts. The complex third-person dynamic of *Gut* emerges when the Ghost's words are heard for the first time in this production. They are the "dozen or sixteen lines" written by Hamlet, and inserted after rather than into the Murder of Gonzago.

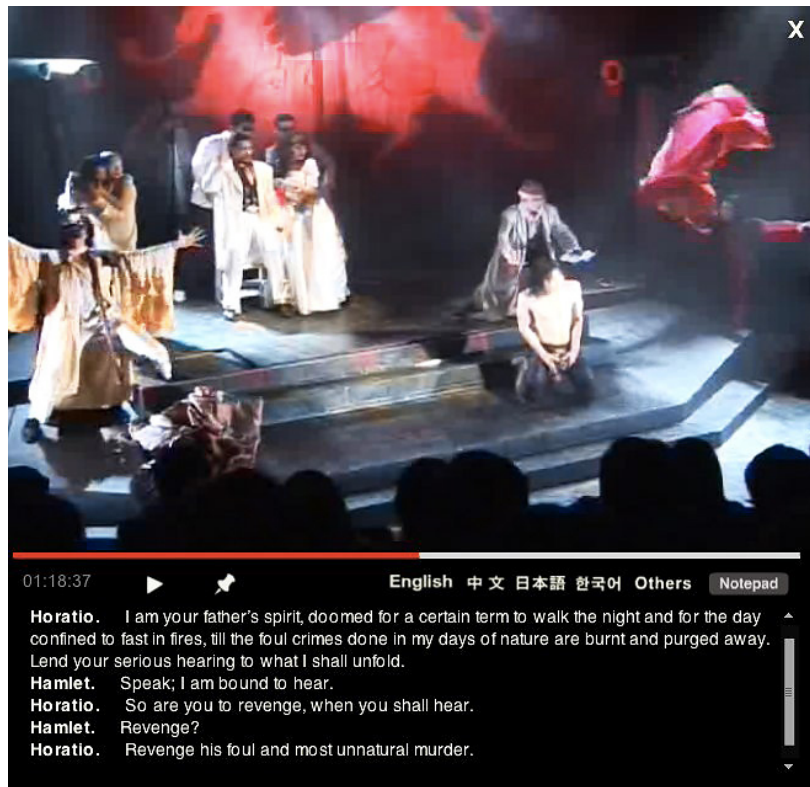


Fig. 2: "The extended Mousetrap", Street Theatre Troupe, *Hamlet*, Seoul, 2009. Click on the image to watch video.

The scene begins like a play and shifts into a *Naerim-gut* ritual by peeling off layers of formulaic presentation to expose more spontaneous reactions and greater emotional involvement by Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia. Based on the loose, ambiguous relationship between role and character set up by this point, the production treats the originally mirroring function of the Mousetrap more like a prism with multiple refractions that reflect upon one another. It is often noted¹⁴ that making Lucianus the nephew of the Player King incorporates Hamlet's own threat to Claudius within a replay of Claudius' crime, thus pointing to a parallel between the past and future murders by Claudius and Hamlet respectively. However, the distinction between the mirror and the reality it reflects is dissolved when Hamlet himself plays Lucianus, and engages in a highly sexual dance with the Player Queen (whose red cloth links her directly to Gertrude's red handkerchief), before killing the Player King. Here he embodies Claudius' role, which includes staging his own Oedipal relation to his mother; while Claudius, holding his hand against his ear in the same gesture as the Ghost had used to mime his murder, is instinctively prompted to feel the physical sensations of his brother. At this moment, when Hamlet/Lucianus poisons the Player King, the Mousetrap breaks into a *Naerim-gut*. The Ghost's words are employed to repeat at once Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost and the content of the Mousetrap itself, in a double climax: the exposure of and testimony against Claudius; and the ritual initiation of Hamlet as a shaman. Horatio is the shaman conducting the rite, and his reading of the Ghost's words is suggestive of Shakespeare's script, while it also delivers Hamlet's script of his encounter. The dead Player King performs the Ghost physically (we recognise the same gestures and stance), and Hamlet plays himself meeting the Ghost, again. In this climax, the immorality of individual actions is subsumed in the performativity of violent impulses. Their mesmerising force leaves no observer positions in the collectively heightened feeling (the character who screams is not captured in the video but the script identifies her as Ophelia), and creates a dual focus on Claudius and Hamlet, closely associating their emotions as both hear the voice from the other world.

The earlier *naerim* scene implies an intercultural encounter between naturalism and *Gut* performance that is defined by the reciprocal resistance of text and performance to scripting or embodying the other. Here the full disengagement of dramatic text from the condition of embodiment in naturalistic character allows it to surface out of first-person silence, as a voice in the third person, and to act on the characters in a displaced third-party relation – even in what would *naturally* be a first to second person relation, such as the Ghost's to Hamlet or to Claudius. Shakespeare's words act as the script of a *Gut* performance, or the utterance of a shaman. In an earlier version of the production, Hamlet speaks the Ghost's words "But that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison house" to Ophelia when he visits her closet. Conversely, the physical naturalism of characters goes beyond the limit of *Gut* performance, which does not contain appearances of the dead, spirits or gods, in two further scenes after death.

¹⁴ For instance by Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play, and Duel: A Study in Hamlet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 112-115; John Russell, *Hamlet and Narcissus* (Cranbury, NJ and London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 128-130.

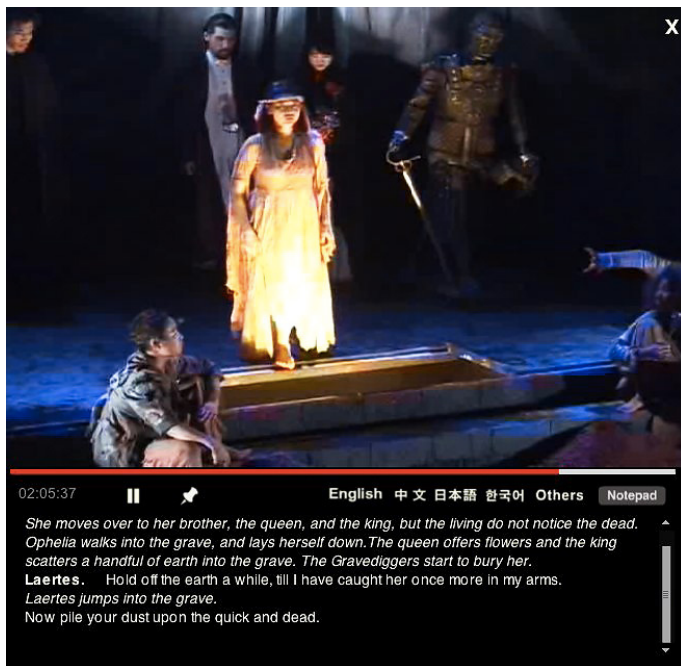


Fig. 3: “Ophelia at her burial”, Street Theatre Troupe, *Hamlet*, Seoul, 2009. Click on the image to watch video.

¹⁵ Lee Hyon-u points out that, in the programme notes for the first performance of his *Hamlet* (1996), Lee Youn-Taek explains: “I interpret Ophelia’s madness as *shinbyeong*, which she acquires as she loses her ego in the chaotic reality. Ophelia is not just a psychotic. She reveals everything of the secret world. This is why Ophelia’s song is expressed not by a mad woman’s mumblings, but in the rhythms of a shamanic chant” (Hyon-u Lee, “Shamanism in Korean *Hamlets* since 1990: Exorcising *Han*”, *Asian Theatre Journal*, 28.1 (Spring 2011), 113).

¹⁶ The original English translation by Alyssa Kim of the Korean script by Yang Jung-Ung was kindly donated to A|S|I|A by Yohangza Theatre Company. The production first played at the Myeongdong Theater in Seoul from 30 October to 8 November 2009. Both video and scripts are forthcoming in A|S|I|A.

In between Hamlet’s conversation with the Gravedigger and Laertes’ protest (“Hold off the earth a while”), this startling scene of Ophelia’s funeral inserts a silent space in which Ophelia’s subjective consciousness and emotions are dramatised as she gradually realises that she is dead, and has to walk into her grave. This dream-like scene asks the audience to relate to a character who is ‘dead/not dead’, in a strange extension of the standard spectatorial practice of identifying with naturalistically acted characters. Through most of the play Ophelia is compliant with her domination by the men. Then in her mad state, her disordered mind and feelings were put on display.¹⁵ This scene gives Ophelia a third state that contains shades of both but is neither. The impression is that we see her more directly because she is out of context, in an interstitial moment. Her realistic depiction in the context of a non-realist situation – how she feels as she recognises her own death – shifts her from an

object who represents the loss felt by the other characters to the subject of her own pathos.

Two aspects of the potential interaction between *Gut* and naturalism are illuminated by comparing this treatment of Ophelia’s burial scene with another production of *Hamlet*. Directed by Yang Jung-Ung in 2010 for the Yohangza Theatre Company, that production adapts the play more extensively to *Gut* practices, and re-formulates this scene as a *Sumang-gut* ritual (for redeeming the spirit of a drowned person from the water) performed for Ophelia. In this ritual she speaks through the shaman to her brother:

Why didn’t you stop me? I was so alone and lonely. The water was cold, dark, and scary. I couldn’t breathe. What kept you? Why didn’t you stop me?¹⁶

First, speech is used in Yohangza’s *Hamlet* as opposed to the silent body in Street Theatre’s production to depict the transition of Ophelia’s consciousness during the passage from life to death differently. In the Street Theatre Troupe’s production, the linear temporality of naturalism is scrambled by this passage. Our previous sight of Ophelia, distributing flowers, is conflated with this moment, as if her consciousness were continuous, between that moment and the moment when she falls into the stream and drowns. By contrast, while Ophelia does not physically appear in Yohangza’s *Hamlet*, her speech recollects and returns the audience to that past point of her “muddy death”: her feelings as she drowns, and the grief that needs to be addressed to her brother, who did not avert what is now irreversible. While Yohangza’s production of the scene preserves the sequentiality of realism

through the speech of Ophelia, as the logic of cause and effect by which we construct character in the world, Street Theatre Troupe's dissolution of historical time into mythical time collapses realism with the unreal in her physical behaviour. At the interstice between life and the afterlife, Ophelia kisses Hamlet when he leaps into the grave, while he remains oblivious of her embrace.

Second, the closure for Ophelia that Shakespeare leaves out is primarily accomplished as an awareness of the audience, who are represented by the Gravediggers, rather than an interaction between the characters, Ophelia and Laertes. Here in the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* as well as through the repetitions and divisions of roles in the extended Mousetrap, the scenes approach a fundamental component of *Gut* performance that differentiates it from tragedy: the distribution or dispersal of emotions from the individual to the community. In a performative context where *Gut* rites are regular social practice (they are in fact experiencing a revival in contemporary South Korea), their usage in stage performance blurs the distinction between staged fiction and real life for the audience. Extending from the characters and their on-stage audiences, the devolution of first person positions into the third person constitutes the audience's role as at once the involved community and detached observer. As the closing sequence places us in the participatory position of a *Ssitjim-gut* (to cleanse the spirit of the dead), the communal nature of the *Gut* rite expands to include the audience. Reviewing the performance in Craiova in May 2010 at the Shakespeare International Festival, which was titled "The Hamlet Constellation", Ludmila Patlanjoglu recounts:

... in the surprising end – a liturgy having as its actors the priests – [the characters] get out of the tombs, hangmen and victims alike, out of the earth into full light in order to be judged. Hamlet takes off his tattered clothes of sins, and, stark naked, follows the suit of the resurrected. "The rest is silence" denotes the peace of some divine order. Lee presented a therapeutic vision for the crisis that troubles our society.¹⁷

This description of the performance affect of the last scene suggests the collective emotional experience of *Gut* rites. According to another personal account,¹⁸ the audience joined in the prayer for Hamlet's spirit to pass in peace.

II Shakespeare/Malaysia from the Viewpoint of the Gods

Whereas the spirits interrupt the human world in the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet*, human beings intrude into a kind of performance traditionally peopled by gods and goddesses in *Mak Yong Titis Sakti* ("Mak Yong Drops of Magic", hereafter *Titis Sakti*), an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This production by The Actors Studio in Kuala Lumpur in 2009 was the first to adapt a Shakespeare play to the ancient form of *Mak Yong*, which has been performed for at least 800 years in the Malay archipelago. In 1991 public performances of *Mak Yong* plays were banned as anti-Islamic in one of its two homes, the northeastern state of Kelantan in Malaysia, by the Pan Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, the ruling party in

¹⁷ Ludmila Patlanjoglu, "The Hamlet Constellation Cuts to the Bone", *Critical Stages*, 3 (Autumn 2010), <<http://www.criticalstages.org/criticalstages3/entry/The-Hamlet-Constellation-Cuts-to-the-Bone?category=5>>, 30 September 2011.

¹⁸ Conversation with Manabu Noda, May 2010.

Kelantan), because of its animist rituals to invoke the spirits of nature for spiritual purposes as well as entertainment. Opposing the ban, arts activists and scholars champion *Mak Yong* as a national heritage art-form. This movement has gathered momentum since its successful submission to UNESCO in 2005 to classify *Mak Yong* as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The locus of this opposition in the metropolitan capital of Kuala Lumpur has shifted some *Mak Yong* troupes there; when I was growing up in Kuala Lumpur there were no *Mak Yong* performances. The ban in Kelantan against public performances of anti-Islamic forms also included *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppetry), which is less localized in Kelantan and more widespread (in Java and Bali as well), and led to a parallel reaction in a *Wayang Kulit* production of *Macbeth* titled *Macbeth in the Shadows*.¹⁹

¹⁹ This production by Pusaka in association with The British Council was planned by the Malaysian poet-translator Eddin Khoo with modern shadow puppets by the English novelist, playwright and illustrator, Edward Carey. It was to be staged in August 2005 at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, but was stopped short by the untimely passing of the Dalang (puppeteer), Pak Dollah Baju Merah (Dalang Abdullah Ibrahim).

An intercultural usage of Shakespeare arises from these intracultural tensions between fundamentalist religious beliefs and deeply rooted performance practices. Adapting Shakespeare at this time is an inoculation of *Mak Yong* by a western text against fears of its magic – “Mak Yong bukan khurafat” (“*Mak Yong* is not superstition”) is the title of an interview with one of the performers, who defends the beneficial release of emotions in *Mak Yong*.²⁰ Also, using Shakespeare underlines the transformation of local ritual performance into proscenium stage entertainment for a cosmopolitan audience. And, at the same time, the broader intercultural contrast between Shakespeare’s play and the indigenous Malay form both effects and masks the national appropriation of a regional practice (its UNESCO accreditation serving to enhance its national value).

²⁰ Faizal Saharuni, *Kosmol*, 26 May 2009, <http://www.kosmo.com.my/kosmo/content.asp?y=2009&dt=0526&pub=Kosmo&sec=Hibur&pg=hi_02.htm>, 30 September 2011.

The performance of *Titis Sakti* opens with the prescribed sequence of rituals to purify the stage. These include making offerings to the spirits and the “Salutation of the Rebab”, which is a song and slow dance. The opening scenes also follow the prescribed structure of *Mak Yong*. The Pak Yong (structurally the lead role) bids farewell to his wives for the day and summons the elder clown (Peran Tua), who prevaricates at length before appearing. The Pak Yong tells him to fetch the younger clown (Peran Muda) to help accomplish the task that the Pak Yong has for them, and the clown in turn has to circumvent his junior’s excuses for not being available. Only when both clowns present themselves before the Pak Yong does the story proper open, this point being termed *pecah cerita*, meaning ‘to break open the story’. At this point the Pak Yong assumes his fictional identity in the story by making a self-introduction, here as the Raja Dewa Kayangan (“God-King of Heaven”). *Titis Sakti* modifies this preparatory structure by inserting into it the quarrel of Seri Laksana (Helena) and Indera Putra (Demetrius) as the Pak Yong arrives in the forest; overhearing it, like Oberon in Shakespeare, he is prompted to summon the elder clown. In this way the script extends Shakespeare’s story far ahead of its normal boundary in *Mak Yong*. Shakespeare’s lovers offer the audience a fictional pretext for the fixed sequence, always enacted by the Pak Yong and the clowns – every night if the tale spans several nights – before the story begins. The intrusion of their problems into the non-fictional realm foreshadows a plot with human beings’ concerns, thus reducing the discomfort of a modern or superstitious spectator with the divine realm before them.

Similarly, *Titis Sakti* uses Shakespeare to filter the religious censorship of its rituals in the first utterance of a *Bangkitan* (an invocation addressed to the spirit of a sacred object or place) to bring on the magical Bunga (Flower).

The younger clown's impromptu joke – “So Your Highness wants me to squeeze the Flower, and then” – makes comic capital of animist personification.²¹ Further remarks on the pretty Bunga's gender prompt the Pak Yong to offer to make her a boy instead,²² or a transexual. In treating the personification rather literally, and playing in an irreverent fashion with its malleability, this first instance of raising the spirits gives the audience the natural outlet of uneasiness in laughter, defusing their potential anxieties about participating in magic.

Traditionally the dialogue of a *Mak Yong* performance has no script, but rather two types of language: the fixed text like the song lyrics, that are set in an idiom by now so archaic that some words and phrases are ambiguous, or the *Bangkitan*, which follow a prescribed formula.²³ The reverse of the fixed text is improvisation, mostly by the two divine clowns, which is expected and prized in *Mak Yong* performance. Idiomatically as well as by their references and topics, the clowns' spontaneous dialogue in *pasar* (market) Malay contrasts intentionally with the traditional formal Kelantanese of the Raja's fixed text, and serves to locate the performance in the audience's day-to-day reality. In *Titis Sakti* the reactions, objections and jokes of the younger clown in particular punctuate the flow of the narrative to expose and bring into play details of contemporary life in Kuala Lumpur. This contextualisation through comic exchange has an effect quite different from setting the staged scenes in Kuala Lumpur. When the two clowns meet, the younger proffers an elaborate and funny hand gesture by way of greeting the elder who asks, “What is that?” The younger clown explains, “This is Mak Yong Titis Sakti. A more modern Mak Yong”. But the elder clown is dubious: “I have not seen anything like that in a Mak Yong from Kelantan ... So this is Mak Yong Kuala Lumpur?”

In this moment the production acknowledges the current religious controversy in which it takes part by underlining its creation of “a more modern *Mak Yong* in Kuala Lumpur” as a comedic practice. At the same time, it employs the very sign of its difference from the tradition as part of the standard improvisatory humour of the form. The self-reflexivity of the laughter it provokes from the audience is thus persuasive. It not only appeases fears of the performance of magic by reminding the audience of their modernity, but also co-opts the Kuala Lumpur audience community's self-recognition into the humour, as an integral part of the performance and of their own enjoyment. In effect, this comic persuasion is

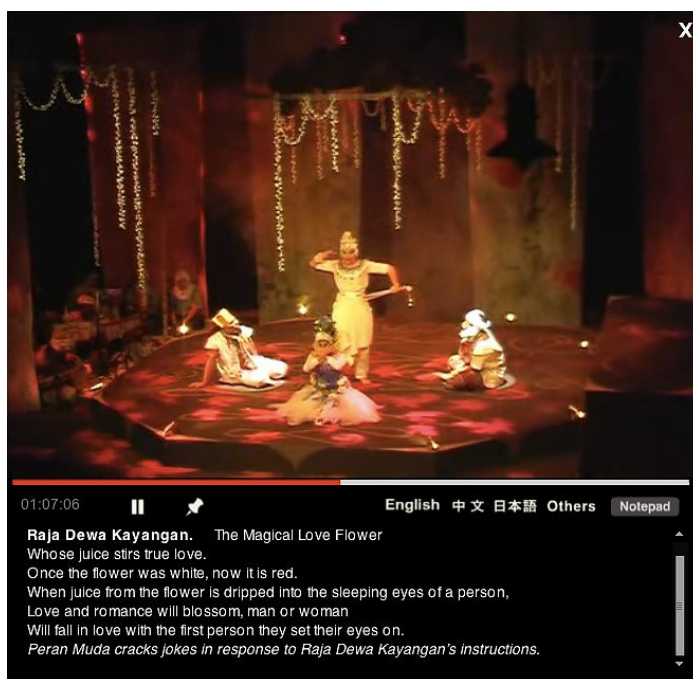


Fig. 4: “The raising of Bunga”, The Actors' Studio, *Titis Sakti*, Kuala Lumpur, 2009. Click on the image to watch video.

²¹ Transcript of the performance video-recording kindly donated to A|S|I|A by The Actors Studio, translated by Roselina Johari Binti Md Khir.

²² This could recall Sonnet 20 for a few in the audience.

²³ Ghulam Sarwar Yousoff, “The Kelantan Mak Yong Dance Theater: A Study of Performance Structure”, PhD thesis, University of Hawai'i, 1976.

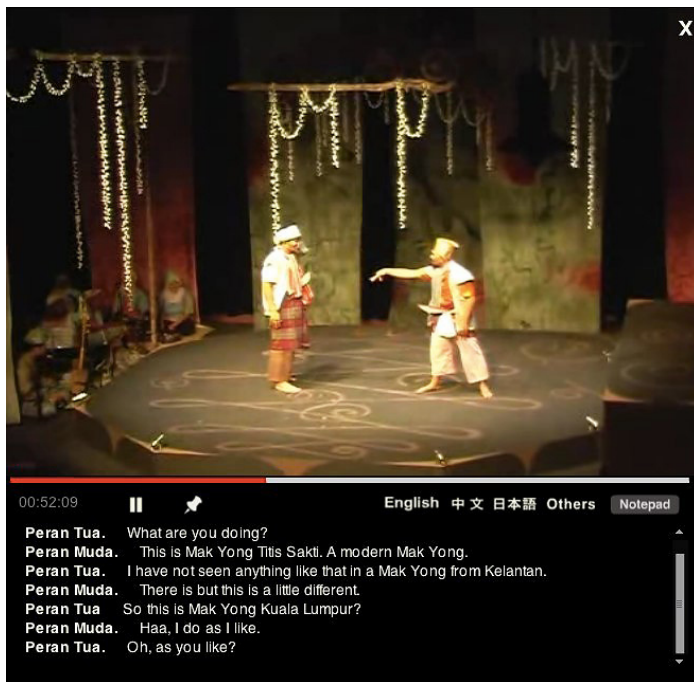


Fig. 5: “The two clowns”. The Actors’ Studio, *Titis Sakti*, Kuala Lumpur, 2009. Click on the image to watch video.

aimed at generating a new community for *Mak Yong* performance.

The self-recognition invoked, however, is not of a cohesive national or local identity, but of the in-between-ness that the audience recognizes as its own make-up: a matrix of differences between the cultural cradle (Kelantan) of Malaysia and the cosmopolitan capital (Kuala Lumpur); between Islamic identity and beliefs and an older Malay mythos embodied in ritual performance; between the aesthetic of *Mak Yong* and the international culture to which Shakespeare belongs. The younger clown’s occasional interjections in Malaysian English succinctly capture the scope of these intra-/inter-cultural negotiations brought into play. Questioned by the elder clown, “You’re not from Kelantan?” the younger replies, switching easily from Malay to English, “Aku orang Kuala Lumpur tapi campur-campur ... that’s why I speak English, you know” (“I am from Kuala Lumpur but I’m a mixture ...

that’s why I speak English”). English as the global language indexes the regional distinctions and political tensions within Malaysia; while the Malaysian idiom and intonation pattern of that English asserts the domestication of the colonial language. Later the clowns and Bunga discover Cempaka Sari (Hermia) at the point when she is struggling with the snake in her dream. She speaks Shakespeare’s lines translated into formal Malay, “Tolong Iskandar, tolong. Ular itu ingin membelitku” (“Help me Iskandar, help me! The snake is coiling up me”). And the younger clown comments in local English, “Snake, snake ... she bite the snake, the snake died”. We might say that one is a literary snake, the other a live snake in the tropics.

The two clowns’ centrality in *Titis Sakti* can be viewed in terms of both Shakespeare’s play and *Mak Yong*. Together they fuse the magical and comic functions of Shakespeare’s fairies and mechanicals as divine clowns. This radical alteration of the structure of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is enabled by the linguistic conventions of *Mak Yong*, where high and low registers are not strictly a function of social status and are determined by the speech event. By contrast, the actions of the nobility, fairies and commoners in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are distinguished and contrasted by their kinds of language. The elder clown especially shifts register depending on whether he is raising a spirit or joking with the younger clown. Reversing the social hierarchy of Shakespeare’s dramatic structure, where the mechanicals provide wedding entertainment for the court, the lovers’ complications are inset as a play-within-a-play for the amusement of the clowns and Bunga. At the same time, the clowns’ mismanagement of the lovers’ affairs displaces the conventional *Mak Yong* story about the gods, replacing the pre-Islamic mythology, to

which the form owes its traditional subject matter, with Shakespeare's mismatched lovers. The lovers' worldliness is marked by making Indera Putra (Demetrius) wealthy and Iskandar Muda (Lysander) relatively impoverished. In the absence of the god-king who has left them in charge, the clowns' comic action represents the effects of animist magic on human actions. It is then not the lovers' performance in the style of Malay melodrama, but the clowns' commentary upon the lovers and their own humorous interruptions while they are casting Bunga's spells that is the primary comedic focus and force in the latter half of the performance. (Incidentally, clowns play a crucial intercultural function in localising foreign myths in various forms of Wayang in Java and Bali. The five Panakawan, Semar and his four sons, introduced into local renditions of the *Mahabharata*, are part of the action, comment on it, and create comic action alongside the mythical characters. Descended from the gods, they represent the local people who, through the Panakawan, identify the originally Indian myth as a Javanese or Balinese one.)

So, while the motivation and production of *Titis Sakti* are located in the historical time of the controversy surrounding *Mak Yong*, the performance absorbs Shakespeare's play by centralising the role of the divine clowns who represent the interaction of spirits with human beings as neither fearful nor mysterious, but funny and *down-to-earth*. The fixed text and extemporisation together constitute an a-historical dialogue: at one pole timeless – the speech of the gods – and, at the other pole, extempore and topical – in the moment and place of performance. Eternity and the impromptu are two sides of non-linear temporality, and their incongruence is the basis for much humour throughout. When the elder clown tells the younger that he is wanted at court, the younger answers, "I'll see you in court then". Queried by the elder clown, "I said the King is calling for you, why do you want to see me in court?" the younger explains, "Nowadays people always sue the King ... There's a lot about it in *Malaysia Today*". The elder clown, always the more traditional one, replies stiffly, "Let people sue the King if they want. We live in a country that obeys the King's command". That country is Malaysia today from the viewpoint of the gods, as it were. Jokes like this on buzz topics ground the mythical realm in the audience's time and place during the prescribed introductory structure that occupies half the performance, in leisurely preparation for one of the well-known stories. Until the story opens, the roles are structural to *Mak Yong*, not yet fictional, and space is a kingdom whose time is only and always now.

The force of a metonymy is that it is evocative and incomplete. Several important dimensions of intercultural performance become more apparent in the approach I have taken to these two productions as metonymic of cultural interaction, rather than metaphoric of cultures. First, interactions such as those of *Gut* with a naturalistic performance of *Hamlet*, and *Mak Yong* with the structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, may be read in terms of their formal order. An analysis of the relationships between components drawn from disparate sources prioritises their performative logic, which is internal to a production, over their meta-theatrical referentiality.

Second, recognising the dynamic interactivity of these components draws attention to the intracultural negotiation at work that is inextricable from the intercultural, and which is necessarily selective, relational, interpretive and of its time. And third, the significance of the interaction need not be solely or even primarily defined as one between cultures. In the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet, Gut* performance refracts the individual's consciousness in a collective experience of the story, suggesting at once that that story flows past the bound of the individual, and the necessity to transcend tragedy through the intersection of historical with mythic time. *Titis Sakti*, on the other hand, subsumes and disarms the religious controversy of its own moment in time, as the clowns' improvisation, the songs, and the prescribed structure place that controversy within the long view of the performative moment.

These readings emphasize the vital roles of speech and translation in the performative interaction. The separation between speech and body in the Street Theatre Troupe's *Hamlet* is a fundamental premise of *Gut*. Setting this *Hamlet* alongside the code-switching and use of multilinguality in *Titis Sakti* indicates the range and diversity with which the treatment of Shakespeare in translation combines with the more spectacular aspects of performance. Close study of the scripts in conjunction with the video, that is now possible in an intermedial and multilingual interface like that of A|S|I|A, creates new discursive potential in intercultural productions. The realisation of this potential will be shaped by the interaction between the viewer's specific horizon of expectations and the historical as well as digital contexts of the production – as it was originally performed and as it is re-contextualised by the online medium. Thus an understanding of worlds beyond human life in these two productions runs parallel to the after-life they acquire in the virtual time-space of the internet.