

SCHOOL OF CULTURE AND CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS, AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY DELHI,  
PRESENTS

# MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICE (DANCE) ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

LABOUR, ECONOMY AND IDENTITY

## SCHEDULE

	Thursday 14 November	Friday 15 November	Saturday 16 November	Sunday 17 November
2.30-3.00pm	WELCOME NOTE Pro-Vice Chancellor Dean- SCCE			
3.00-4.30pm	TALK   The Body as a Resource   Manjima Bhattacharjya SCCE Dance Studio <b>Free Entry</b>	PERFORMANCE Body in the City By the students of MA Performance Practice (Dance), AUD <i>Kashmere Gate Campus, AUD **</i> <b>Free Entry</b>	TALK   The Dancing Funambulist   Claire Vionnet SCCE <i>Dance Studio</i> <b>Free Entry</b>	TALK   Fluidity and Yoga   Annapurna Garimella and Anuska Ilijic SCCE Dance Studio <b>Free Entry</b>
5.00-6.30pm			PERFORMANCE   Sheetal Sathe and Sanchin Mali with the Navayan Mahajalsa SCCE Dance Studio <b>Free Entry</b>	TALK   Lavani Queens   Savitri Medhatul, Bhushan Korgaonkar, Anil Hankare SCCE <i>Dance Studio</i> <b>Free Entry</b>
4.30-6.30pm	INSTALLATION   <i>The Stripper's Practice</i> by Daniel Kok SCCE Dance Studio <b>Entry by Registration. To reserve a seat, email mandeep@aud.ac.in</b>			
7.00-8.00pm				WORK IN PROGRESS SHARING   To by Surjit Nongmeikapam SCCE Dance Studio <b>Free Entry</b>

## VENUES

**SCCE Dance Studio**, Ambedkar University Delhi, S-17 Khirki Extension New Delhi 110017

**Kashmere Gate Campus**, Ambedkar University Delhi, Lothian Road, Kashmere Gate, Delhi 110006

**\*\*** The audience to gather in front of Dara Shikoh Library at the Kashmere Gate Campus at 3pm for a promenade of site-specific performances

# LABOUR, ECONOMY, AND IDENTITY

## The Precarity of Artistic Practice

What is at stake in the work we do as artists?<sup>1</sup>

What happens when we look at the work of the performer as labour? What is the relationship between the body and the economy of performance-making? How is this economy shaped by the politics of the state? How does the performing body situate itself in relation to institutional power? How does the body assert itself against the forces that shape, impact and control it?

What is the body 'disrupting'? We draw from Priya Srinivasan, with echoes of Raymond Williams, in our imagination of performance as labour, inextricable from its means of production, the performing body. As Srinivasan points out, "...the dancing body as labouring body disrupts traditional Marxist understandings of the act of labor, the means of production, and the product."<sup>2</sup> What does the performing body put at stake in this act of labour?

How do precarity and risk become central to the performing body's experience?

When Bombay Hinglish encounters the word 'risk', it nudges consonants about with a colloquial sweep of the arm, producing the word 'riks'. *Riks lena*, to take risks, is an earnest acceptance of precarity. It is a willingness to acknowledge and perform actions whose outcomes are uncertain or unknown. *Riks lena* gives an action conceivable form— and in doing so, renders it significant.

'Riks' makes itself evident at multiple levels. Over the past year, across South Asia, artists have raised their voices against constitutional crises. They have protested the failures of the judicial system, and called for an end to hatred and violence. This advocacy no longer sits outside of art-making; it is central to artistic practice. As singer-activist Sheetal Sathe reminds us, in these times, when the artist is interchangeably a criminal, what is society's responsibility to the artist, and how must society engage with the (criminal) artist?

What, then, are the 'riks' we take as artists? What do we put at stake? Our bodies? Our ideas? Our reputations? Our integrity? Our livelihoods? How and why do we put things at stake? What are the recalibrations of thought, practice, hierarchy and socio-political order that we effect to make space for this taking of risks? Is precarity the new normal?

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<sup>1</sup> A question posed by Anita Cherian during a lecture at Ambedkar University Delhi on Feb 5, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Srinivasan, Priya. *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*. Temple University Press, 2011, p. 11-12.

THURSDAY, NOV 14, 2019

## TALK | THE BODY AS A RESOURCE | MANJIMA BHATTACHARJYA

3:00 – 4.30 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO, KHIRKI

As India took a sharp turn towards globalization in 1990, and Indian women won the Miss World and Miss Universe mantles, the beauty pageant industry and the vocation of modelling became very popular through the 1990s and 2000s.

This talk explores what it means to “do modelling” – the labour involved, the social negotiations that are imminent, and the decision-making matrix models think through when deciding whether to do a particularly stigmatized project: a calendar, a KamaSutra ad, a lingerie shoot, i.e. one that involves “performing sexuality”. It also reflects on feminist responses to modelling, and the tensions around objectification and commodification of women that lie at the heart of the conflict between fashion and feminism.

**Manjima Bhattacharjya** is a feminist researcher, writer and activist. She has been part of the Indian women's movement for over two decades. She holds a PhD in sociology. Her areas of specialization include gender and sexuality, and labour and the body. Her first book, an edited volume *Sarpanch Sahib* was long-listed for the Crossword Best Non-Fiction Book of 2009. She has written for several publications including the *Times of India*, *ELLE* and *Info-change India*. She lives and works out of Mumbai. Her second book, *Mannequin: Working Women in India's Glamour Industry*, was published in 2018.

## INSTALLATION | THE STRIPPER'S PRACTICE | DANIEL KOK

4:30 – 6:30 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO, KHIRKI

**The Stripper's Practice** is a work of installation art, durational performance and a lecture of sorts. It looks at the figure of the stripper as an archetype to unpack performative labour, dance and spectatorship as economic exchange. The work is also an exercise in practising spectatorship as a collective and pluralist experience. In the work, the artist performs a pole dance that lasts for up to two hours. Spectators can freely come and go, take any seat and change seats. Spectators may also stand around in other parts of the space.

**Daniel Kok** is an independent choreographer, artistic researcher and curator. He studied Fine Art & Critical Theory at Goldsmiths College (London, 1997-2001), *Solo/Dance/Authorship* (SODA, HZT, Berlin, 2012) and *Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies* (APASS, Brussels, 2014). In 2008, he received the Young Artist Award from National Arts Council (Singapore).

Exploring the relational politics in spectatorship and audienceship, Daniel has worked with pole dance, cheerleading, bondage and other 'figures of performance'. His performances have been presented across Asia, Europe, Australia and North America. Daniel is the artistic director of *Dance Nucleus* (Singapore), a space for artistic research, creative development and critical discourse for contemporary performance. He curates the annual artist meeting, *da:ns Lab* at the Esplanade (Singapore).

## SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE | BODY IN THE CITY

3 PM, starting at Dara Shikoh Library, Kashmere Gate Campus, Ambedkar University Delhi

The students of Ambedkar University Delhi's MA Performance Practice (Dance) programme share works-in-progress made over a four-week process of creating site-specific work. Their works unfold across the historically significant Kashmere Gate campus of Ambedkar University. In this process, the students are mentored by the choreographer Rajyashree Ramamurthi.

SATURDAY, NOV 16, 2019

## TALK | THE DANCING FUNAMBULIST | CLAIRE VIONNET

3 PM – 4:30 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO, KHIRKI

Artists all share the dream of artistic creation as an act of freedom. But artistic creation emerges within a social, economical and political context that imposes constraints on creativity. Based on ten years of fieldwork in the independent contemporary dance scene (Switzerland, Scotland and Quebec), Claire Vionnet explores the question of vulnerability in dancers/choreographers' lives.

Risks shape ordinary life as well as aesthetic activity. A production process is a fragile adventure which involves financial, relational, artistic and physical risks: financially when money is invested; relationally, as a company is a human venture (dancers who do not necessarily know each other must intimately collaborate together); artistically, as the choreographer copes with the pressure of providing an outcome at the end of the production process. Finally, risks of injuries haunt daily training. As a working tool, the dancing body also becomes vulnerable. This fragile act of creation is exacerbated by a precarious context in which dancers/choreographers struggle to find financial (and consequently emotional) security. In the talk these various risks are explored through the dance gesture of the fall. The act of creation is similar to a fall towards the ground: an act of falling into emptiness. With practice, dancers not only learn to fall without injuries, but also to stand up. It considers the idea of being a dancer in our contemporary world as an act of funambulism. A dancer/choreographer learns to find balance on a thread, to navigate between all these layers of risks and to use vulnerability as a creative impulse.

*Claire Vionnet studied Social Sciences at the University of Lausanne (specialization in Anthropology). With a scholarship of the Swiss National Science Foundation (2013- 2017), she wrote a PhD on the gesture in contemporary dance, combining Dance Studies, Anthropology and Dance Practice. She conducted fieldwork among professional dance companies in Switzerland, taking part in the production of dance plays. To expand her theoretical framework, she collaborated with the Institute of Theater and Dance Studies in Bern (CH) and the Institute of Anthropology in Aberdeen (UK). She has also worked for/with the dance scene, as an outside eye in plays production, as a social researcher and as a meeting assistant. Her writing is on the Swiss dance scene (2015), working conditions of companies (2016), collaboration between art and anthropology (2016), interpretation of plays (2017), gesture in production processes (2018).*

## PERFORMANCE | SHEETAL SATHE AND SACHIN MALI WITH NAVAYAN MAHAJALSA

5 – 6:30 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO, KHIRKI

Responding to the frameworks of the symposium, Sheetal Sathe and Sachin Mali perform with their group, Navayan Mahajalsa. The group uses music as a means of creating awareness about people's struggles (जनसंघर्ष).

**Performers:** Sheetal Sathe, Sachin Mali, Vishal Pardhe, Aniket Mohita, Babasaheb Atkhile.

*Navayan Mahajalsa is a group set up by Shital Mali and Sachin Mali. The artists are cultural activists, writing and performing songs against religious, ideological, caste-based oppression and violence, and patriarchy. They have performed extensively through the state of Maharashtra and also connect with audiences through social media.*

SUN, NOV 17, 2019

## TALK | FLUIDITY IN YOGA | DR. ANNAPURNA GARIMELLA AND ANUSKA ILIJIC

3 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO

Yoga has become the premier method for sustained and formalized engagement with the body in recent times. Teachers evoke a tradition that is more than 2,000 years-old and evoke Patanjali and his Yogasutras as their foundational text. They often jump over at least 1800 years of thinking and practise yoga, in addition to theorizing it. Teachers and students immediately jump to the beginning of the 20th century and make a direct connection between their modern teacher and Patanjali. What does this way of transmitting a tradition do to the body? What does it mean for the teacher-student relationship of today? What is the connection between the yogashala and the yoga studio? Ultimately, what does this do to yoga?

These questions will be addressed through a lecture and the demonstration of yoga through asana. These asana will come from the prevalent schools of yoga: Ashtanga, Iyengar, vinyasa, and yin. The talk also thinks about the discourse of purity of yoga lineages and teachers' preferences for a specific lineage of yoga and how it shapes the way a multiplicity of bodies is engaged with.

*Anuska Ilijic has been teaching hatha and yin yoga for the past 12 years in New Delhi at The Yoga Studio. For the past 2 years, she has been training yoga teachers and preparing them for prenatal yoga. She works with corporates, children and various other groups and individuals from all walks of life. Ilijic believes that yoga is for everyone who is open to new learning and change. She also has been researching the history of modern yoga. For 15 years, Ilijic also has specialised in early child education and has been associated with different educational institutions. Ilijic was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the last 20 years, she has been living in New Delhi.*

Dr. Annapurna Garimella is a Delhi-based designer and an art historian. Her research focuses on late medieval Indic architecture and the history and practices of vernacular art forms in India after

Independence. She heads Jackfruit Research and Design, an organization with a specialized portfolio of design, research and curation. Jackfruit's recent curatorial projects include Vernacular, in the Contemporary (Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi) and Faith: Manu Parekh in Benaras 1980-2012 (Art Alive, New Delhi) and Drawing 2014 (Gallery Espace, New Delhi), Mutable: Ceramic and Clay Art in India Since 1947 (Piramal Museum of Art, 2017) and Barefoot College of Craft in Goa (Serendipity Arts Festival, 2017-18). Her newest book is an edited Marg volume titled The Contemporary Hindu Temple: Fragments for a History (2019). In 2017, she was awarded the India Today Emerging Curator of the Year Award. Garimella is also the Founder and Managing Trustee of Art, Resources and Teaching Trust, a not-for-profit organization that runs a public art library, conducts independent research projects and does teaching and advisement for college and university students and the general public. She is also a director in the Exotic Heritage Group, a leader in boutique tourism and hospitality.

## LECTURE PERFORMANCE | LAVANI QUEENS

5 – 6:30 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO

### **Savitri Medhatul in conversation with Akka (Anil Hankare), the Lavani Queen.**

Lavani has been part of Maharashtra's cultural milieu for several centuries. It is a performance that breaks the fourth wall and entertains, engages and interacts with the audience making them an integral part of the experience. Traditionally, it is performed in two formats, the intimate and personalised Sangeet Bari and Tamasha, which is part of folk theatre. In the late 1990s, dance productions based on lavani, colloquially known as 'banner shows', rose in popularity. Like Sangeet Bari, the banner shows mostly featured women. Tamasha originally had an all-male cast, where men would dress up as women and perform lavani. This ended after women started performing in Tamasha a century ago.

In 2001, Bharatnatyam artist Anil Vasudevan conceptualised and produced a new banner show titled 'Bin Baykancha Tamasha' (tamasha without women). This was his attempt to revive the old tradition while offering male performers the opportunity to explore their own femininity through lavani. These performances are attended by working-class men, who are the staple audience for banner shows. That people equally enjoy the performance of male artists challenges stereotypical notions about lavani and adds different layers to the performance. Here, Savitri Medhatul and Akka (Anil Hankare) have a conversation about the latter's journey, complemented by excerpts of screened work that showcases the lives of lavani artists on and off stage. They will be joined by their collaborator Bhushan Korgaonkar for the Q and A.

*Anil Hankare is one of the pioneering dancers of Bin Baykancha Tamasha. He has won several awards for his lavani performances and has a huge fan following. He has also been featured on various dance-based reality shows on television.*

*Bhushan Korgaonkar and Savitri Medhatul have been researching and collaborating with lavani artists for past 14 years. Their efforts have brought the nuances of performing Lavani and understanding socio-economic structure of the communities who perform lavani to the table. Kali Billi Productions founded by Savitri and Bhushan, has produced a documentary film 'Natale Tumchyasaathi – behind the adorned veil' and also produced a theatre*

*production 'Sangeet Bari' which has run across the country to packed houses. Both these take a close look at lives of lavani artists.*

## TO| SURJIT NONGMEIKAPAM | WORK IN PROGRESS PERFORMANCE

7 PM, SCCE DANCE STUDIO KHIRKI

Does an address define who we are? A dress that we simply wear? The way we move, eat, talk or shout? The tool of identity serves more than a few purposes, but isn't it limiting to expect a certain behaviour, accent, style or look? An individual has distinct experiences. The food one ate, the people one met, the places one travelled, the events one witnessed, and memories one created. All these factors would surely add up to the experiences of an individual. So, isn't one's true identity the embodiment of the experiences that one has lived through? We are always expected to walk, talk, eat and move in typical ways but even those expectations come from experiences. One may be born into a culture but one's identity should not be limited by it. The idea is to explore and imbibe one's experiences and express what one truly desires. The artist won't be his true self if certain expected cultural behaviours or looks are imposed or forced upon his expression.

**Surjit Nongmeikapam (Bonbon)** is an Imphal, Manipur-based choreographer and performing artist. He started his professional dance career when he was 24 years old. He was trained in traditional Indian forms before developing an interest in interdisciplinary arts and experimental works. He is one of the few dancers and choreographers in Manipur to engage with contemporary dance forms and seeks to promote its development. He is an award-winning choreographer: his works *Nerves* and *Folktale* won the Prakriti Excellence in Contemporary Dance Awards (PECDA) in 2014 and 2016. Surjit is the artistic director of Nachom Arts Foundation, Manipur, which has been developing different projects to enliven the local contemporary dance scene.