Walking Rasic Space: A Critique of Schechner's "Rasaesthetics"

Scott Felluss

San Francisco's Theater Mundi assembles aesthetic traditions of South Asia, Indigenous cultures, and Western Avant Garde through a laboratory model that emphasizes research, training, and dramatic performance. This paper analyzes Theater Mundi's interpretation of The Maids *by Jean Genet, performed in 2017 as part of a three-month-long joint-intercultural Practice as Research (PaR) project with the Jarjara Laboratory for Experimental Performance, Mills College Literatures and Languages Department, Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, and subsequently, The University of Hawaii, Manoa. The aim was to critically read Bharata Muni's compendium on dance-theatre,* The Natya Shastra, *to devise a space of avant garde theater training and fashion an embodied subtext for Genet's play. Corporeality, space, rasa aesthetics, and theatricality combine in this study to further generate a critique of Richard Schechner's article, "*Rasaesthetics.*" My critique confronts for the Western performer the problematic tensions, differences, and connections within spatial relations of Schechner's theatrical system.*

In my preliminary research on *The Maids*, I observed inspiring performances by other small ensembles which revealed a particularly important dialog between the two maids: Claire and Solange. The lines which carry a pivotal story point (their attempted murder of Madame via tea poisoning) also carry a complex and emotionally-charged psychological exchange:

SOLANGE: Come here. Do you hear me? Come here.

Claire comes in untying her apron.

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CLAIRE: What do you want? Is it my fault? The "tay"—as she says—was ready. I put in the pills. She just wouldn't drink it! (Genet 80)

These three lines encompass a range of emotional undertones—demanding a psycho-physical transformation by the performers. I concluded that the subtext of my own production would also need to portray such an emotional range: Solange's desperation and longing for Claire's company, Claire's rage toward Solange for her lack of sympathy, and Claire's and Solange's revulsion toward Madame's obliviousness. In various productions I witnessed, the most frequent choice was for Claire to enter, stop dead in her tracks before Solange, and utter her lines, her body erect and stiff, arms by her sides, her words rushed with a tone of irritable frustration. As I explored this dramatic moment deeper, I found that developing *The Maids* would require the subtext to be more corporeally dynamic than static. We needed a training method to incorporate "emotion in transition." I researched ancient performance methodologies, dance practice, and the history of the avant garde for inspirations to eventually locate a theoretical and practical intersection to frame both process and product: the connection between a classical Indian aesthetic theory called "rasa" and space.

RAUDRA	BIBHASTA	BHAYANAKA
KARUNA	SHANTA (empty)	SRINGARA
HASYA	VIRA	ADBHUTA

Fig. 1: Richard Schechner's Rasaboxes. *The Drama Review*, 2001.

A hotly debated topic, *rasa* is both India's significant aesthetic foundation and a cultural phenomenon permeating India's social spaces at large. Rasa was first posited by Bharata Muni's seminal classical Indian theater treatise, *The Natya Shastra,* written approximately between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Rasa as a concept

aims to frame the human phenomenon of performative reciprocity and shared, embodied emotional experience. Rasa is a whole experience, not fragmented between performer and audience. Rasa also describes the embodied act of constructing emotions through a performative, physical exchange. The eight emotions that constitute the rasas map energy within physical spaces, emphasizing physical "stages" of the body as it does the emotions that this body/physical space can host and inspire in others. Chapter six of *The Natya Shastra* provides a thorough enumeration and description of the eight rasas, which include, Vīra (energy, rigor), Bhibhatsa (disgust), Bhayānaka (dread), Sringara (erotic, love), Hāsya (humour), Raudra (rage), Karuṇa (compassion, pity), and adbhuta (wonder, awe).

Before continuing to explain my deployment of rasa in *The Maids* with Theater Mundi and the resulting critique, it is necessary to introduce Richard Schechner's "Rasaesthetics"[1]—the text which precipitated my own rasic/Western Avant Garde intersection. First codified in 2001 and put into practice after an immersive period of laboratory theater research with Schechner's collaborative team, East Coast Artists, "Rasaesthetics" is both an analysis of the aesthetic theory and a description of the acting methodology. Rasa itself has two goals: (1) non-physical emotional transmission between party members (or between parts of the self) as a shared emotional experience and (2) refusal of binaristic thinking. Schechner found that rasic Indian theater (via Muni's *Natya Shastra*) had a unique way of approaching emotion and sensed an opportunity to create a working system bridging Indian theory/praxis with methods more recently developed in Europe and the United States. Rasaesthetics is that system. Below are the first steps of the Rasabox exercise from "Rasaesthetics," which I will analyze deeply throughout the rest of this article. The steps indicate what the actor does to engage Schechner's devised method. He directs:

1. Draw or tape a grid of nine rectangular boxes on the floor. All rectangles are the same and each ought to be about 6' × 3'. (See Fig. 1).
2. Very roughly "define" each rasa. For example, raudra means anger, rage, roaring; bībhatsa means disgust, spitting up/out, vomiting.
3. In variously colored chalk, write the name of one rasa inside each rectangle. Use chance methods to determine which rasa goes where. Write the names in Roman alphabetized Sanskrit. Leave the center or ninth box empty or clear. (Schechner 39)

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[1] Rasaesthetics functions as both an article/text as well Schechner's original performance methodology for inter-cultural research and praxis. In the foregoing work, I make this distinction between the two functions, marking the article strictly in quotations ("Rasaesthetics") and the methodology without.

East Coast Artists and Schechner had a similar mission to my own: to create a new "intercultural embodiment"—by which I mean a phenomenon situating a dynamic interplay of cultural behaviors within an actor's body who is portraying both character and emotion.

Here, I plan to break down the physical appropriation of space that Schechner's diagram engenders in his practical methodology, the intercultural dynamics his methodology puts into motion, and the "friction" I and my actors encountered in our own deployment of his methodology. In my own teaching of the Rasabox exercise through PaR, I described the spatiality of Rasaesthetics to my actors, and explained some implications of deploying rasa in intercultural performance studies: Schechner's abstract geometrical architecture in the rasaboxes is a different thing altogether from the body's passage through his architectural design—manifesting a key contrast. In other words, bodily behaviors can disrupt architectural structure. We came to find that abstract spatial arrangement paired with the embodied actor creates a problematic friction between rasa as it is theorized in Schechner's framework and rasa as it is physically articulated through "walking/doing" in Schechner's "space of practice." Furthermore, there is cultural friction to Schechner's model: The three action steps and correlating diagram in Figure 1 interpret and deploy a cultural "site"— India's classical theater production—onto East Coast's rehearsal and performance space. Rasaesthetics seems to perform interculturality as both a host entertaining the other culture and as the agent putting the other culture into theoretical and practical gear.

Despite Schechner's model being a potential space for dynamic intercultural exchange, instances of immobility and stasis—friction—continued to arise as I deployed Rasaesthetics for my own production. My actors found it increasingly difficult to epistemologically "grasp" various emotional areas assigned on the stage. They seemed to lose stage presence at the moment they used the assigned affects. That is, the lines between rasas *meant* something, for as actors crossed them a jarring lapse occurred between their conception of the prefigured space and how their bodies "worked." The environment Schechner's Rasabox diagram mapped, while pioneering, was altogether too abstract, causing an immobilizing friction for my actors. This friction lead us to diagram a new interpretation of *The Natya Shastra* and rasas.

Before explaining our new diagram, it is necessary to provide more background on our production of *The Maids* and how we came to modify Rasaesthetics to our own ends: Schechner's text enables a new surge of intercultural theater investigation in the model of PaR in that it provides space for Western practitioners and theorists to explore the corporeality of an array of cultural phenomena beyond mere intellectualization. In *The Maids,* the creators

were from America and Europe.[2] What drew our interest beyond Genet's riveting work was our fascination *before* we took up the text: a two-month intercultural group autoethnography that dealt with the processual way space could be appropriated and understood through training. This attention to appropriated space helped us to understand the necessity for "flow" in our intercultural deployment of Rasaesthetics' praxis on *The Maids*. I intend to explain in depth how a project like Rasaesthetics must try to avoid stasis at all costs. I argue that when the working rasic model in *The Natya Shastra* pauses itself between rasas — via what I have previously termed "friction" — Schechner's innovative logic collapses under the weight of its own practice. I contend that his conceptual diagramming of aesthetic meanings in contradistinction to the operations of their embodied signification "on stage" immobilizes the linking process between his own aesthetic as an American researcher vs. his Indian "subject."

My conceptualization of how uninterrupted rasic energy ought to be executed and experienced is informed by my own research and practice with the concept. In *The Natya Shastra*, rasic sensation necessitates that the emotional production be "enjoyably tasted — relished" by the audience (Bharata Muni 33).[3] The performer's emotional portrayal is assembled much as ingredients of a recipe might be and sensed much in the way taste buds experience a final product. This tasting practice is corporeal: rasa "enters the body" *by* the body; it is inseparable from embodied practice, or what amounts as "passage" across the stage. Rasa theorist and scholar on aesthetics, Sheldon Pollock, further interprets Bharata Muni's lesson, arguing that rasa is the sum of interwoven parts (i.e. stimulating ideas/events, involuntary and voluntary physical/emotional reactions) which form a sensation that is greater than its parts (13). Combining these perspectives, I posit that rasa entails a reaction to tasting an actor's final "recipe": the product of different single ingredients which make up an ultimate "feeling" of a wholly "cooked" emotion. For instance, when we performed *The Maids*, our intention was for the audience to be less "wrapped up" in the narrative but, rather, more attuned to the actors' corporeal versatility — their bodies' tastes. In other words, taste preceded text.

While Pollock innovatively makes theoretical division between rasa's components, I propose a further interpretation: I believe that rasa is the social encounter, corporeal reaction, and realization of a human "condition" *in an appropriated place.* That said, in order for rasa to truly incite human/inter-human encounters and for its meaning to arise in the form of perceived/embodied (tasted) emotions that an actor is "going through," both the performer's body, and the

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[2] I had come from New York, my actresses hailed from Denmark, Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

[3] For an analysis and fuller description of the concept of "taste," see Adya Rangacharya's *Introduction to Bharata's Natyasastra.*

stage upon which it theatricalizes itself before observers must be framed, perceived, and *spatially* systematized either through cultural convention, or through devised theatrical contexts.
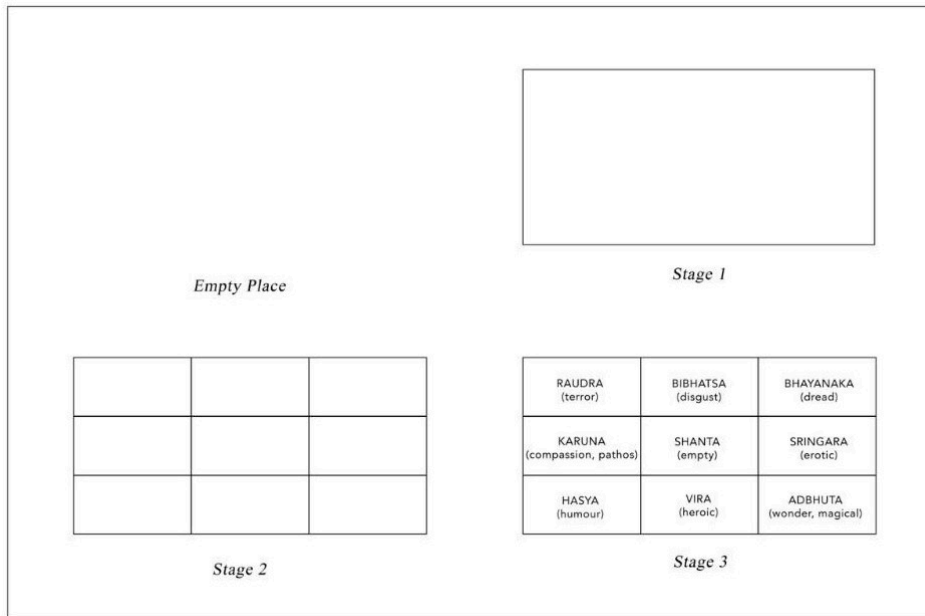

Fig. 2: Schechner's process of spatial appropriation in "Rasaesthetics."

I have thus far proposed that Schechner's practical plan backfires as the theatrical space devised for "Rasaesthetics" is taken up by actual bodies. Below, I break down Schechner's steps 1 through 3 wherein an "empty" place, which at first had no active designation, gets prepared to become what Michel de Certeau calls a "practiced place" (see Fig. 2). In other words, rasa necessitates a prepared space to "practice." I choose the adjective "empty" in reference to Peter Brook's seminal text, *The Empty Space.* Brook states, "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (9). In many respects, I agree with Brook's assessment. However, I choose to single out the rasaboxes in "Rasaesthetics" in order to contend how the process of theatricality emerges when the space for walking across the stage is systematized *prior* to action and spectatorship.[4]

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[4] I also substitute "place" for "space" citing de Certeau's argument that space is a "practiced place." Brook's definition of theatricality seems to put the cart before the horse:

Through the first three steps of the Rasabox Exercise, an "empty" place with no architectural parameters, is appropriated by drawing a "forethought" box on the floor. The first "stage" of architectonics is under way, as the empty place no longer has an *a*-social dimension but, rather, takes on a spatiality that may realize the possibilities—the immediacy—of social behavior. As grids are drawn (Stage 2), the horizons of the actor's capacity to express emotion expand to include cultural and theatrical units of Indian aesthetics (rasa) derived from *The Natya Shastra*. The meanings of the grids are implied here, for while these spaces are yet to be designated in the next stage, they are nevertheless part of Schechner's hermeneutical procedure. Finally, in Stage 3, rasa's spatiality gets articulated when each grid is assigned its corresponding rasa. The "empty place" becomes prepared for practice by this arbitrary-but-strategic architectural concept—it becomes a space (see Fig. 2).

Schechner's framework renders an initially foreign aesthetic legible within "Western" theoretical and practical action and intellection. More importantly, while Rasaesthetics gives rasa an "anywhere," it also gives rasa a "somewhere" beyond the contexts in which it normally finds expression—i.e. Rasaesthetics looks to sustain a locatable space. Becoming spatial, in theory, rasa can be read in the milieu of social activity and, ultimately, re-framed by the discourse of interculturality surrounding our production/representation of Indian craft and culture.

Rasaesthetics in Practice: Stasis and Mobility

Rasas are constructed as performers embody and react to the various ingredients that comprise their "taste"—a process that was inhibited by friction in Theater Mundi's deployment of Rasaesthetics. I theory, Schechner's plan spatializes this "taste" formation within a grid of equal proportions; each rasa grid is constructed with fixed boundaries that contain rasas in a static design. When I first embraced Schechner's spatial arrangement with my actors, the equidistance and precision of the grids enabled us to realize a clear division between rasas. However, throughout practice, their strategic equality disallowed the possibilities for my performers to expand or contract. Thus, the basic ontology of the actor's body as a moving creature was betrayed by a design structuring its opposition. Schechner's conceptually strategized architectural rasabox grid is "unstable" in the reverse fashion: its instability is due to the fact that it is built on stable ground.

In a subsequent step of the rasabox exercise, Step 9, transitions between one embodiment of an individual rasa to any of the other seven gain robustness, speed,

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a "'space'" is created *after* an "'empty'" place is "'practiced'"or walked (see analysis of Fig. 2).

and momentum—further problematizing the instability I and my actors experienced. Schechner writes:

> 9. Move more rapidly from one box to the next. Quick changes, no time for thinking it out in advance. (39)

Thus far I have critiqued the equidistance and uniformity among rasa grids built upon abstract formulations. My further contention here is that this universality of rasic space betrays the dynamic interplay, or syntax, created during a sequence of improvised postures as in step 9 above. In other words, assembling ingredients to form a "taste" becomes difficult or impossible when the task charged to the performers in "Rasaesthetics," and *The Maids,* is to leap processually from one emotion to the next with greater and greater cognizance.

   Although two members of Schechner's East Coast Artists, Michele Minnick and Paula Murray Cole, have conducted multiple PaR projects deploying Schechner's line of inquiry, my critique remains unaltered: practitioners similarly encounter stasis in their process—unable to remedy the shaky ground upon which Rasaesthetics rests, namely its abstract foundation. Minnick and Murray Cole's article "The Actor as Athlete of the Emotions" expands on the theme of embodied transitionality: the actor's passage across the abstract floor design attempts to embody the parallel between the athlete and the actor as cited in Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double*. Artaud makes a prophetic connection therein between emotion and location, between the the body's capacity for use and its spatial usage.[5] Minnick and Murray Cole tout "Rasaesthetics" as providing the necessary space and forum to build this interconnection as Artaud envisioned and which Schechner puts into motion in Step 9. In sum, the process all four practitioners summarize involves the deft knowledge of the differences between rasas— differences which are learned via the process of passage across the architectural configuration in Steps *7* and 9.[6] Embodying each rasa and developing a vocabulary of different bodily movements for each one results in a "grammar of theatricality." Essentially, the actor can form a syntax of rasas the same way one creates a syntax of words.

   One theoretical step that catapulted my own rasic praxis and started my generation of solutions to Rasaesthetics' problems of syntactical flow in producing *The Maids* was Minnick and Murray Cole's observation that the various rasas can

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[5] Artaud writes in *The Theater and Its Double*: We must recognize that the actor has a kind of emotional musculature which corresponds to certain physical localizations of feelings. The actor is like a real physical athlete, but with this surprising qualification, that he has an emotional organism which is analogous to the athlete's, which is parallel to it, which is like its double, although it does not operate on the same level. The actor is an athlete of the heart (259-260).

[6] Step *7* appears later in this paper.

be "mixed," with one rasa "masking" another core rasa underneath (e.g. Sringara (erotic) masks Raudra (rage), etc). They write: "One can work with a baseline, core, or primary rasa, over which other rasas are layered…The idea of a core rasa can imply several things: that there are mask rasas layered over it to hide or protect the core" (221). Their description of layering implies that in Rasaesthetics the actor becomes aware of both how rasas are unique and how rasas can be "seeds" for one another. In fact, their practice of superimposing rasas is derived from Bharata Muni's taxonomized categorization of rasas. Minnick and Murray Cole's practice evokes an improvisatory tone. However, when first discussing the dynamics of each rasa, Bharata Muni explains that out of the eight rasas, there are four "source" rasas (Vīra, Sringara, Raudra, and Bībhatsa), while the remaining others are derived from them. He states:

> The source (i.e. basic) rasas are four: vis., erotic (Sringara), heroic (Vīra), terror (Raudra), and disgust (Bībhatsa). Further, Hāsya (humour) is derived from Sringara (erotic), Karuna (compassion, pathos) from Raudra (terror), Adbhuta (wonder or magical) from Vīra (heroics) and Bhayānaka (dread) from Bibhatsa (disgust). (56)

Bharata Muni's comments signal that while the rasas are different, as the rasaboxes make clear in their boundaries, they are undoubtedly symbiotic. Therefore, rasas need to simultaneously stand apart and within, offering opportunities not for differentiation, but for derivation. That is to say, rasas are not divided, rather they are seeds, one born from within the next. Thus, while Artaud's vision for embodied emotional combinations is intuited, it fails: the rasas' mobile emergence is blocked by the system designed to produce them.

Architectonics: Walking Rasic Space

While actors must summon rasa from within, it is also fundamental to mark rasa's need for performer/audience interaction. The space of rasic experience must be shared in order to exist; it is systematically social. Furthermore, the performer's relationship to the space they create *with the audience* must be intentional—beginning with the way practiced spaces are configured and planned. By this logic, the design of rasaboxes is the "method to the madness" of the social interaction engendered by Rasaesthetics' praxis. The structure of Schechner's rasabox grid is, therefore, the root of the problematic split I encountered between a calm spatial "planner" and the wild practice of bodies which challenge and revise the spatial (architectural) concepts of social passage. Spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre introduces the term "architectonics" to illustrate such a process—i.e. how a space becomes coded for embodied social interaction, thereby enabling cultural and historical meaning to take shape. I find that Lefebvre's concept helps

to articulate Rasaesthetics as a systematization of the social interplay between actor and observer, rasa's raison d'etre. Lefebvre writes of "architectonics,"

> Space so conceived might be called "organic." In the *immediacy* of the links between groups, between members of groups, and between "society" and nature, occupied space gives direct expression—"on the ground," so to speak—to the relationships upon which social organization is founded. Abstraction has very little place in these relationships. (229, emphasis mine)

In other words, space is created as social interaction gains immediacy—when the transitions between, of, and within bodies *make the space*. Thus, a space of theatricality emerges when that place is given a "total"' social meaning—when performer and observer concur on their embodied "roles" and on the environment within which those roles are "played."

That is to say, architectonics is an apt necessity in rasa performance since it alludes to the science of social communication happening as rasic space is made through spatial appropriation.

De Certeau argues likewise that spaces reach their manifestation after calculating the dichotomy between a space as is conceived in abstraction vis-à-vis a place that is "practiced" on the horizontal plane among people—"at street level." De Certeau's now prominent spatial theory adage, that "a space is a practiced place," is apt to augment my discussion of how Rasaesthetics figuratively and literally "frames" rasa's spatiality by designating grids *in a place*—in abstraction— upon which actors will then walk, or occupy. Thus, Fig. 2 illustrates the manner in which both Lefebvre and de Certeau's theories are put into motion in Rasaesthetics. In the act of place appropriation, theatricality emerges; performers are given reign to devise their various postures by passing from grid to grid, a process which prepares a shared space for performative observation. Performers in action enunciate the architectural design pre-established to plan, control, monitor, and create space. This analytical synthesis helps to define and describe the space an actor "walks into" (i.e. the space they make) in deploying Rasaesthetics.

Walking in Rasic Space

In Rasaesthetics, actors are denied the option to make or access modifications to the space made by their bodies. Schechner's spatial dysfunction, built on the tension between spatial abstraction and spatial action, limits the productive aspects of *Rasaesethetics*. The process of cognition and learning, and the experiential awareness beyond the intercultural "status quo" is put into stasis at the moment of passage—the moment the space is *used*. To demonstrate the root of this stasis, below is step 7 of his Rasabox exercise which instructs the performer

to move into each grid and "come up" with an original pose. The operation is followed by removing oneself from the grid and reflecting upon the event of "occupying" the box.

> 7. Self-selecting, someone enters a box. The person takes/makes a pose of that rasa: for example, the pose of sringara or karuṇa...or whatever. The person can do as few as a single rasa or as many as all eight named rasas. (Remember the ninth or center box is "clear.") A person can move from box to box either along the edge or on the lines—in which case the movement is "neutral." But if a person steps into a box, he must take/make a rasic pose…. …there is no "thinking." Just take/make a pose…Whatever is "there" in association to the rasa. Move rather quickly from one Rasabox to the next. Don't worry how "pretty," "true," or "original" the pose/sound is. Just do it. But once outside the boxes, reflect on how you composed your rasa and what it felt like to be in a composed rasa. (39) [7]

Here the exercise moves beyond abstraction and into the realm of practice and spatial passage. The abstract rasabox diagram in Figures 1 and 2 creates a problematic effect upon the later passage by the actor as they walk into it and make their pose. Abstraction of realized spatial arrangement and attempted embodiment of "rasic" poses collide here. It is in this collision where the praxis of Rasaesthetics is immobilized. Architectural strategy based on a hermeneutics of textual aesthetic theory in *The Natya Shastra* collides with the process of tactical use.[8]

Following Lefebvre's analysis, spaces "gain their immediacy" as social activity occurs and relationships are formed between individuals and their organic environment "on the ground." In other words, human action within space actualizes space in reality, not in abstraction. That according to Lefebvre, "abstraction has very little place in these relationships," signals that there must be a deficiency in Schechner's program; while it does literally "place" dividing grid lines "on the ground," it does so in abstraction. His model thus stabilizes itself away from the grids' own humanization. What makes Rasaesthetics "abstract," in Figures 1 and 2 is that it is outside the realm of the concrete spatial interactions

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[7] A contention that arises in probes into Indian aesthetics like Schechner's step *7* is that it negates embodied praxes of Indian practitioners that have been codified and perfected throughout centuries of pedagogy. Indeed, in its quest for axioms, "Rasaesthetics" dismisses a score of movements, gestures and poses, that may have "come before" and are embedded in a UNESCO protected cultural heritage. See Phillip Zarrilli's *Kathakali Dance-Drama,* Rajiv Malhotra's analysis of mutual respect in *Being Different,* and Barba's chapter, "Words or Presence," in *Beyond the Floating Islands*.
[8] See De Certeau's chapter "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life.*

that later reshape the grids designed to enable and contain the human relationships that create those interactions (Step 7). The geometry of the diagram in Figures 1 and 2 which maps out the rasas betrays what may become the practice on the territory that that "map" depicts. His diagram is a geometric product: all boxes are the same, they are fixed in an even rectangle made of smaller holographic units, they are mathematically put into rows and columns, etc. Phenomenologist Christopher Tilley discusses such a construction as "the scientific conception of space...abstracted from human affairs." Tilley highlights is that abstract space is conceived as a container, whereas humanized space is a medium (8). By such logic, Schechner's scheme exists strictly as a model of mathematical precision, defying the corporeal, embodied dimensions of rasic action. Human action contradicts the plan for human behavior here, leaving the human alienated from the space it inhabits. Such a disjunction must inevitably lead to the collapsing of the theatrical enterprise, for the ground upon which theatrical behavior is to be staged is no longer able to exist in the "actual" *embodied* space used by the performer *in theatrical practice.* Thus, the intercultural space implodes as rasa's embodiment is enclosed within a Western architectural design.

Rasic Space as Container or Medium

Spatial strategy and that strategy's correlative modifier—spatial action— therefore, are in a circuitous contradiction that the Rasabox grid fails to adequately cope with. The conceptual system of embodied epistemology (diagramed in Figures 1 and 2) neglects the *a priori* potentiality of its instability in step 7. In an ideal rasic space, I argue, actors and their passages need to "lack a place" and be free to make never-ending alterations to the inner grids while still remaining contained within four fixed outer walls. To capitalize here on Tilley's definition of abstract space, where "space was universal, everywhere and anywhere the same," (9) the rasaboxes disallow the possibility for rasas to spatially expand or differ from one another in their physical sensation, performance, or observation. The actor in Rasaesthetics moves through a "rasic space" while at the same time being deprived of realizing the effects of their own passage. For example, after employing Rasaesthetics in the rehearsal of the pivotal scene in *The Maids,* my performers were incapable of expressing the full emotional range I had intuited from the scene's subtext. A new format of intercultural action needed to be devised.

Rather than transporting the performer from one rasa to the next, obeying their need for perpetual spatial re-articulation, the rasabox grid becomes a container. In my own experience, the spatial configuration of Schechner's architectural diagram made it functionally difficult to change rasaboxes with any great mobility—particularly because Schechner instructs that the performer avoid stepping into the center box, Shanta. To move from Karuna (compassion,

pity), to Sringara (erotic, love) requires a navigation across the lines through Vira and Hāsya (see Fig. 3). As shown in Figure 3, the emotional agility needed to properly express the contours or ingredients of emotional meaning encounters stasis; the time it takes to avoid the center rasa and change postures reduces the effect of the practice of transformation. In order to better "practice" the transition between rasas and better articulate a theatrical "grammar," rasa grids should be placed more strategically (i.e. next to their seed rasas) rather than be arbitrarily designated.[9] What matters most in such a design is that the performer can occupy rasic space as a mediator rather than inhabit it as a contained subject. A geometrically-divided rasic design must plant the seed for a performer's entrance into one space from another. Rasas in a grid lose their liminality; the postures which articulate their structure are "contained" in abstraction at the theoretical point of departure from one to another—always once-removed from their full embodied expression.
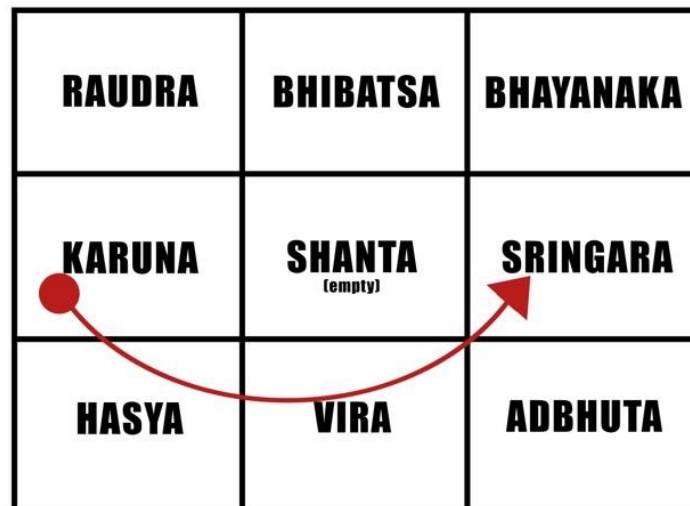

Fig. 3: The performer's passage in "Rasaesthetics"

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[9] See Jerzy Grotowski's discussion of the "time lapse" between inner impulse and outer reaction in *Towards a Poor Theater* as well as Eugenio Barba's discussion of the "sat" in *Paper Canoe*.

In order to address these limitations while still acknowledging the architectural necessity of an abstract "plan," I collaborated with behavioral archaeologist Yann-Pierre Montelle. I believe our revision to Rasaesthetics' spatial design better accommodates the dynamics of containment and mediation posited by *The Natya Shastra* (see Fig. 4). Our Rasawheel (Fig. 4) solves the immediate problem in Schechner's emphasis on geometrical abstraction and holography. While the Rasawheel has a square border, it is nevertheless fashioned after a circle of action and interaction. Circularity disrupts the linearity of the rectangle and its identity as an "even" mathematical container. Rather than enclosed in a box, the performer is now permitted to entertain the liminal notion of a rotating circle, a medium of theatrical transportation, not a fixed static position in space.
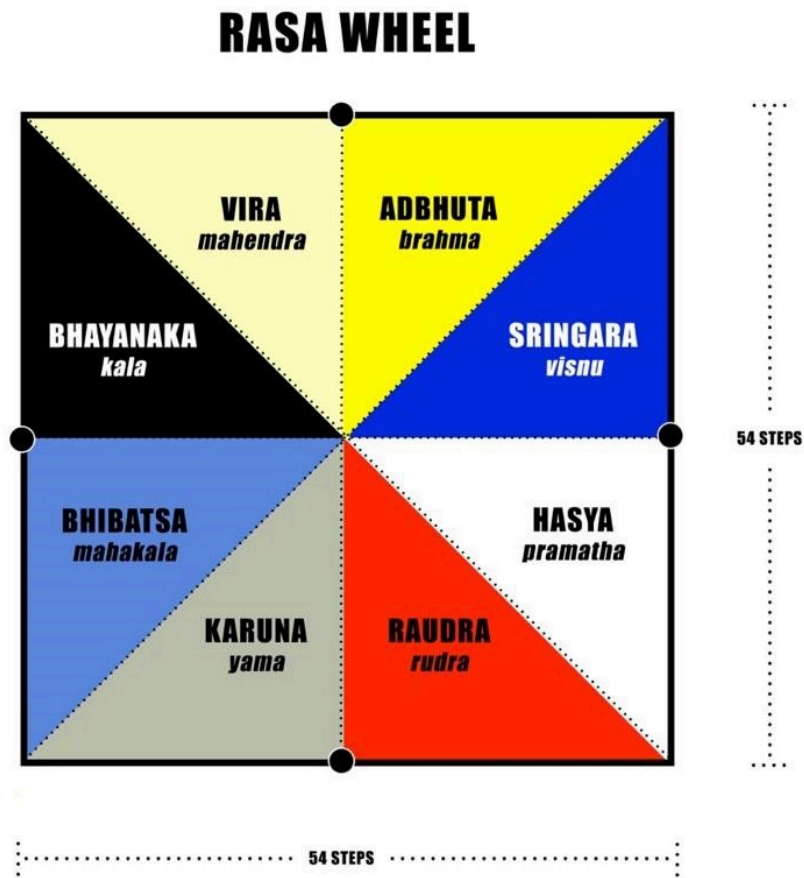
RASA WHEEL

Fig. 4: The Rasawheel, as developed by the author and Yann Montelle (personal communication)

A primary cause of stasis in Schechner's design that I detected in my practical research into Rasaesthetics was that as the performer moved through steps 7 and 9, they had to navigate passage *around* the center box, shanta. Here, in the Rasawheel, the center box is removed,[10] allowing the performer to enter into and out of each box rapidly and with no interruption (see Fig. 5). In the series of images in Figure 5, both actors move quickly into designated areas of the Rasawheel. In image 1, the far-left actor makes her pose inside the rasa. In image 2, she begins to travel into another rasa across the wheel. In image 3, she walks through the center of the wheel, creating a fluid and rapid movement into the subsequent pose depicted in image 4. In images 1 through 4, the opposite actor simultaneously moves counterclockwise around the wheel. In this demonstration, the Rasawheel successfully accounts for passage; the architectonic adequately accounts for the circuitous process wherein pedestrian action both articulates the architectonics' purpose and alters it seamlessly.[11]

Additionally, our Rasawheel turns deeper attention into Bharata Muni's taxonomy. According to the *Natya Shastra,* rasas can be further differentiated from one another than Schechner's "Rasaesthetics" indicates. In fact, rasas become more nuanced if they are arranged by their listed colors in the *Natya Shatra*. While this omission on Shechner's part reduces the total expressive capacity for rasas, it leaves us with the open possibility for revision, to see how embodied interaction with color can increase our knowledge of rasic space. The embodied praxis in our Rasawheel is enriched by an added subtext—a dynamic affect summoned from yet another sensory, imaginative, and symbolic quarter. The addition of the colors associated to each rasa follows *The Natya Shastra* word for word. Bharata Muni writes:

> The colours are:
> 1. Sringara – dark blue
> 2. Hāsya – white
> 3. Raudra – red
> 4. Karuṇa – pigeon colour
> 5. Vīra – yellowish
> 6. Adbhuta - yellow
> 7. Bībhatsa – blue
> 8. Bhayānaka – dark (56)

"Rasaesthetics" makes no mention of this important taxonomy. Instead, the Rasaesthetics actor arbitrarily chooses a color. I hold, however, that colors mark different "ingredients" through which to guide the imagination during embodied

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[10] Bharata Muni makes no mention of Shanta in *The Natya Shastra*. This "rasa" was a later addition by Anibhavagupta a full millennia later.

[11] For an in-depth look at Theater Mundi's PaR of the Rasawheel, see theatermundi.org

practice while simultaneously organizing space; rather than crossing lines, actors immerse into color that "fills the air" imaginatively. Color is both a marker/identifier of spatial regions internally and a medium via which to move and to act.
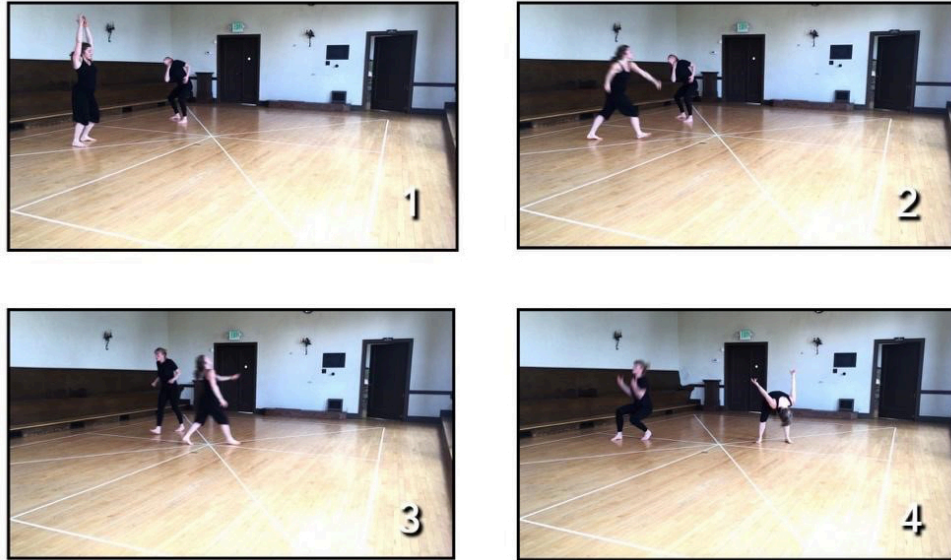

Fig. 5: Theater Mundi's actors utilizing the Rasawheel during training for *The Maid*s. © Theater Mundi, 2018.

In addition to color-coding, the positions of rasa areas in the Rasawheel are strategically placed in relation to the core rasas and their derivatives. Hāsya, Abhuta, Karuṇa, and Bhayānaka are given their own individual quadrants. Immediately to the counterclockwise direction are their derivative rasas: Sringara, Vira, Raudra, and Bibhatsa (respectively). By using the Rasawheel, my Theater Mundi group found that they could now enter and change rasas quickly in improvisatory fashion while also moving around the wheel following a codified theatrical procedure that respects the Indian aesthetic tradition. This observation demonstrated for me that the Rasawheel is mobile and improvisatory while at the same time ordered and in accordance with a diligent process of hermeneutics. In utilizing the Rasawheel, we honor *The Natya Shastra* while also maintaining a fluidity within an intercultural performance study.

Deriving our architectonic from *The Natya Shastra* sustains a working space of intercultural theatre practice and, consequently, opens up the intercultural study by enhancing the symbiotic relationship between rasa and space. To this end, further research into developing the Rasawheel must take up the intangible,

or more aptly, the invisible. Our Rasawheel design has taken great care in following Bharata Muni in assigning a taxonomized deity to each rasa, adding an important animism to rasa's demonic foundation.[12] According to *The Natya Shastra*, gods and demons "occupy" theatrical places perhaps even more intensely than their human counterparts. Therefore, any practical research into rasic passages, and the appropriation of the environments reserved for them (rasic spaces), must take into account the "taming of the demons." Taming of the demons is elemental to our laboratory study in order to not create further chaos out of the "order" needed to corporeally and epistemologically understand rasa. Bruce Kapferer's fieldwork study, *A Celebration of Demons,* would prove significantly insightful in its detailed analysis of animism in aesthetic practice and, more importantly, the need for a spatial "hierarchy" to accompany the process of appropriating places for theatrical illusion.[13] This field of activity is not taken up in Schechner's more secularized interpretation of the rasa phenomenon.

Did my performers in *The Maids* eventually transition dynamically between emotions as I intuited from other Genet adaptations? Only partially. What remains a distinct cause of stasis in both Schechner's model and my own reworking of it is the under-representation of the Indian conception of space. To follow this course of thought in further research into *The Maids,* or into another text with a loaded subtext, my critique would first take on another related, more "animistic" dimension, paying attention to if the "spatiality of emotions" in "Rasaesthetics" denies/omits rasa's demons. Furthermore, evidence gathered from future ethnography will point to ways forward—to what, I argue, is a more expansive re-articulation of what both Bharata Muni and Schechner intended when they explained rasa to their students.

This diffusion of intercultural performance should concern us as practitioners and theorists. Spaces designed for human action through the architectural process, on a fundamental level, are "containers" of human behavior. An architect plans for humanization by implementing their learned architectural technique and style. They strategize the space's potential use by the human bodies within. Yet, common sense also begs the following: in the case of the highly paid urban planner/architect, could they have fully detailed or accounted for the footsteps of emotive protesters such as Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, or March For Our Lives? Could the masters of infrastructure in North Dakota ever have adequately predicted the Native American men on horseback butting up against the barb-wired blockade on highway 1806 at Standing Rock? My

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[12] See Bharata Muni's discussion in *The Natya Shastra* on page 56.

[13] A valuable summary of phenomenology and the aesthetic dimension has been conducted by Bert States in his article "The Phenomenological Attitude." Merleau Ponty's theories on the incarnate cogito in *Primacy of Perception* also carry weight as impactful additions to the discourse on the connection between rasa, space, and phenomenology.

politically-driven digression here is to imply that "future" humanization is anything but predictable. Even basic pedestrian action—"walking" per de Certeau—renders that architectural strategy a reality while at the same time, in practice, removing what the resultant design was thought to be at its conceptual beginning. Planning an architectonic is a chicken-or-the-egg process: the architect must devise a concept which, at the moment of its implementation, forever alters the ground upon which that concept was made. As de Certeau remarks, "to walk is to lack a place" (103). That is to say, as pedestrian behavior subsumes the architectural system produced through a conceptual means of production, that behavior *a priori* renders the production of space unstable, or *un*-containable. Paradoxically, the end result (an actor's passage) has replaced the architect's beginning calculation of his architectural plan before his planning has begun. However, it is precisely the actor's passage that is needed in order for the plan to begin. If rasic space is to be fathomed conceptually and at once traversed physically, we must reconcile our desire for stability in an inherently uneven dimension. Only in this way can our clear plans for performance research reach a shared horizon of intercultural connection.

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