

The AGNI Methodology

Sandeep Bhagwati

The musicologist is at the same time a listener and a composer, since analyzing a piece of music leads to "rewriting" it. (Alain Bonardi, 2000)

One of the critical issues in Research/Creation, closely tied to its situation as a recently emerging type of research, is the absence of an established and widely accepted research/creation methodology. While the arts on the one hand, and musicology, art theory etc. on the other have, of course, developed their own coherent and rigorous methodologies, these are not easily compatible and have proven to be quite resilient towards attempts at transfer. Part of this resilience may be rooted in e.g. the obvious differences in the role of knowledge production (central in research, collateral in the arts), the different role of peer-audiences (again: central to research, peripheral to the arts), the almost antithetical role of originality and non-conformity (central to the arts, collateral to research), the importance of pragmatic problem solving (essential in the arts, dubious in research) etc.

In response to this problem, Sandeep Bhagwati in 2005 developed the iterative AGNI research/creation methodology, loosely based on the RSVP Cycle Theory of Collective Creativity outlined by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin in the late 1960s.[1] In his model, Halpern developed effective methods to integrate both the creator's and the „recipient's/user's“ perception of a work of public art. These methods, slightly adapted, are extremely useful for integrating both the researcher's (i.e. the „creators“ of the analysis) and the artist's/ art form's points of view into a coherent perspective.

AGNI was successfully tested in several research/creation projects since 2005[2] and comprises four separate steps:

- **A Analysis** Pierre Bourdieu suggests in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* that the practitioner "does more than s/he knows" (Bourdieu), Led by this assumption, we will question and observe practitioners of an existing or emerging art practice. They will demonstrate their work and discuss concepts, techniques and aesthetic ideas. Questioners will be from a range of different disciplinary backgrounds. Documentations of workshops will then be analysed in concert with practitioners. Their comments, integrated into the documentation, will provide salient insights into the practitioners' view of their own work.
- **G Grammar** The above insight, together with material and analyses about this art practice obtained otherwise, is subjected to further analysis in order to determine underlying (unspoken) rules governing the practice. The goal of this phase would be to understand which and to what extent cultural traditions and constraints or discipline-based axioms are

central or peripheral to this particular art practice.

- **N Notation** Both descriptions of the art practice from A and G will then be formalized to create a kind of notation adequate to the art form. This notation can use any format and any reliable medium. Adequate notations are central to any analysis and creative evolution of non-conventional performance art practices: they establish their exact relation between context-independent (notatable) and context-dependent (indirectly or not notatable) elements. Moreover, notations enable us to de-construct and re-combine an art practice and structurally create new relationships between different modes of artistic expression.
- **I Implementation** Working from the assumption that the experimental "acid test" for any notation is its practicability, artist researchers at BIRMA will implement works based on these notations - including grafting a model derived from one practice onto the material of another (e.g. a notation lifted from theatre on a sound work etc.). These instantiations will require practical adjustments (limits of performers/technology, needs of new context etc.). These modifications will then constitute the "raw" material (the new case study) for a new iterative cycle of Analysis, Notation, Grammar and Implementation.

[1] later adapted to collective theatre work by stage director Jacques Lessard in his Théâtre Repère at Quebec and also applied in the work of Lessard-associate Robert Lepage.

[2] Bhagwati's projects "atish-e-zaban" (2005/6), "PerSonAlia" (2006), "Rasalila 2.0"(2006/7), "Racines Ephémères" (2008), "Transience"(2008)