

Dear Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Secretary, Patrons, Trustees, and Committee Members,

Please find the enclosed report for my Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Award, entitled '*Choreographic Research Project: Japan 2015*'.

This two-week project took place in Tokyo (7th-19th June, 2015) and involved conducting a programme of independent professional development through intensive choreographic collaboration with Tokyo-based dancer, Minori Nagai. Our studio-led partnership was supplemented with first-hand research in the form of heritage site visits, which included university libraries, art galleries, traditional shrines, and museum archives. The primary focus of my investigation was geared towards cultural communication; looking for pertinent themes within Japanese architecture, personal testimony, art, literature, tradition, and movement practices. This opportunity was truly life-changing and provided me with incredible first-hand experiences of Japanese cultural behaviours and ideologies, and further helped to form the basis of my choreographic research process, leading towards a larger choreographic output in 2016.

To aid their professional and personal development, I would highly recommend that all independent choreographers in the UK apply to the LUTSF, and I very much aim to share the knowledge and choreographic practices derived from this project with my undergraduate students, community groups and professional dancers in the UK and abroad. Owing to this award, I have accrued a wealth of physical and cultural knowledge from which to draw upon creatively, and I believe that this experience will stay with me throughout my career.

Whilst the profundity of my time in Japan defies verbalisation, please do accept my heartfelt gratitude for facilitating my research project in this manner. Without the LUTSF award this international choreographic research would have been impossible to conduct. I am honoured to have been supported in this way, and I am humbled by the esteem of the committee which selected my project for development.

With highest regards,

Hakan Redjep

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Report: Hakan Redjep

Choreographic Research Project: Japan 2015

This report is based on a two-week dance project which took place in Tokyo, Japan, during June 2015, and aims to provide summative insight towards the overarching direction, approaches and outcomes of the project. Key examples will be provided in order to better expound the underpinning foundations of the venture and I hope that this document will provide some interesting or valuable information for readers.

The Outset: Making Contact and Arriving

As a London-based dance practitioner, I often find myself navigating the tricky terrain which exists between being a freelance choreographer, community artist and visiting lecturer at several dance institutions. In order to better supplement this cyclic, UK-centric work format, I regularly look to international projects to add momentum, substance and perspective to my broad-ranging research interests and studio-based practices. The process of travelling to a different country (or location), where communication is limited, where daily life is unfamiliar, or where a developed network or kinship structure is missing, immediately unsettles and liberates the traveller in equal measures. The absence of familiarity facilitates changes in established thinking patterns and physical habits, and ultimately, calls into question the infallibility of daily behaviours and working methods. By viewing one's life (and self) from a meta-perspective, it becomes possible to critically untangle and realign composite elements with a renewed sense of direction and focus. This transformative process is equally pertinent to choreography and education methodologies, which are reflexively scrutinised as a result of travelling abroad.



With this in mind, I first approached Minori Nagai in January 2015 and proposed an intensive international and intercultural project. Minori is a dancer and choreographer based in Kita-Senju, Tokyo, and we both hold undergraduate degrees in Dance from Middlesex University, London, where we first met in 2004. From a small studio in Kita-Senju, Minori and her husband, Ryuhei Uemoto, run an interdisciplinary arts company called **Away at Performing Arts (AAPA)**. The organisation's focus is primarily upon dance and movement but also includes materials or influences from other disciplines such as architecture, technology, biodiversity and conservation. Minori and Ryuhei regularly collaborate with martial artists, circus performers and audio-visual technicians in order to produce highly intelligent site-specific works, which they programme in unusual public spaces.

At a first look, the impressive breadth of the company's approaches seemed very familiar to my own, and this further reinforced my interest in collaboration. Once the project was established as viable, I made my way to Japan with generous support from the **Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund** and a small army of independent crowdfunders. My accommodations were located in Chūō-Ku; a central ward of Tokyo, referred to in English as 'Chūō City'. Being based near Ginza, a high-end shopping and business district in central Tokyo, allowed me to travel to different parts of the city with ease. Due to the reliable and efficient Tokyo Metro system it took only thirty minutes to reach the studio in Kita-Senju each day, and meant

that I could comfortably view several 'off-the-tourist-trail' sites of interest, and make the most of my time in Japan. I quickly settled into my new surroundings and awaited the commencement of the project.

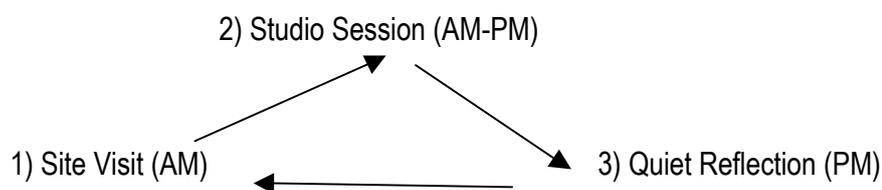
Methods for Intercultural Creativity

A typical day during this project can be divided into 3 sections:

- 1) **Site visit** (AM) [museum, gallery, theatre, public space]
- 2) **Studio-based exploration** with Minori & Ryuhei (AM-PM)
- 3) **Quiet reflection and reflective writing** [in public space] (PM)

These principal approaches to conducting choreographic research functioned in a cyclic manner; the morning site visit would raise questions relating to *nation, tradition, education, culture, art, power, history, family, uses of space, modernity, transnationalism, migration, gender, sexuality, ageism, disability and politics*, and these concerns would form the thematic basis of the studio session for that particular day. During the studio-based process, interview testimony from Minori and Ryuhei would either solidify or further obfuscate these questions, allowing the resultant ideas to be explored through a series of choreographic or improvisational tasks. Finally, in the evenings, I would return to central Tokyo and quietly reflect on the day's work in a public space (such as a park, square or market). Being present in a communal or municipal space allowed for further observations of 'naturally' occurring social interactions, uses of space, atmospheric factors, body language, and other tacit cultural behaviours. This time also allowed me to examine my notes from the morning site visit and studio session, and provided the opportunity for these ideas to deepen and develop through independent writing. Quiet consideration eventually presented a renewed or more complex lens through which to approach the following day's practices.

Figure 1



This method of working proved to be very useful in unearthing conceptual and physical concerns relating to Japan, and to facilitating an open and dialogical studio-based discourse, derived directly from the 'cultural architecture' and inhabitants of Tokyo. As a result, the movement explored within the studio arrived in an authentic and unforced manner, which was a positive and viable experience for myself and my collaborators. It was important to me that any perceived inequalities in authority or power be immediately neutralised at the start of the process. By utilising research based on 'cultural capital', 'exoticism' and 'Japanese tourism politics' I was able to mitigate such concerns rather swiftly. Although histories, folklore and national traditions are integral to this type of work, I tried to avoid the danger of exoticising or over-glorifying cultural differences between myself and the working location; it was imperative that the narratives drawn from this creative context be based on 'real' concerns, ideas and cultures of Japan, rather than a glossy lionized 'otherness'. [See **section 2** for further details].

In order to illustrate the inherent value and significance of conducting the investigation in this manner, a few examples from each abovementioned method have been presented below.

[Please note: the examples will adhere to the same numbering as **Figure 1** above].

1) Site Visits: Observations on Art, Architecture and Public Space

The morning site visits were intentionally chosen to be diverse in range and involved physically inhabiting different spaces and observing the architecture/objects/practices with a careful and critical eye, in order to unearth 'new' knowledge for the project. Each of these visits provided a different set of information, different cultural behaviours and different social issues, which proved to be a very rich platform for launching the subsequent movement exploration. These visits provided a more comprehensive understanding of the Japanese cultures which exist and are enacted within the physical structures of the city itself. Selected sites involved spaces of national heritage (Imperial Palace and Gardens), places of artistic or cultural expression (Mori Art Museum, Library Archive at the National Museum of Modern Art), spaces with traditional or historical value (Yasukuni Shrine, Yanaka Cemetery), areas with a prevalence or saturation of 'youth culture' (Harajuku, Takeshita-dori), and places geared towards (cyber-)technology or modernity and futurism (Akihabara, Shinjuku, Sony building). The aim here was to experience as many different forms of creativity, expression and cultural articulation as possible.

Three examples of these visits have been detailed below:

Yasukuni Jinja (Shinto Shrine)

Over the course of this project I visited several important Shinto shrines which provided first-hand experience of ritual acts and striking demarcations of 'sacred space'. The predominance of ornate towering archways and the traditional atmosphere created by central shrine buildings, which carry the signature steep-pitched roofing and raised platforms common to the architectural style *nagare-zukuri* was particularly impressive. As with Yasukuni Jinja, many of the shrines in Tokyo are arresting and magnificent; the forests which surround the central shrine complex are accented with horticultural landscaping, set alongside spiralling hand-made stone pathways. Some of the shrines are geared towards tourist visitors, whilst others are hidden away- where I was the only non-Japanese attendee. These types of visits raised many questions concerning tradition, the respect afforded to national heritage(s) and the roles that traditional aesthetics currently play in cultural expressions of Japanese art and society. These visits also indicated several issues of identity, emotional temperament and gender roles within the context of worship.

Kabukiza Theatre

On Friday 10th June my Tokyo-based colleague, Suzuko Tanoiri, accompanied me to a matinee production of *Tempo Yukyoroku [Record of an Unruly Life]* at the Kabukiza Theatre, Tokyo. This important theatre operates a 'single-act' booking system known as *Makumi* which allows visitors to experience a shorter section of a full performance (lasting only 2 hours approximately). Kabuki is a

traditional Japanese dance-drama, often presented in three acts, and this genre involves the use of highly elaborate makeup and a stylised approach to expressing historical narratives. The actors exploit their full vocal register in order to signify surprise or distress (upper register/higher pitch) or sincerity or intimacy (lower register/lower pitch). During my observation of *Tempo Yukyoroku*, the majority of the work appeared to be 'carried' by lead-actor, Nakamura Hashinosuke, who performed through the means of elaborately colourful and intentional melodrama. The theatre's use of translation (Japanese-to-English) was essential for non-Japanese visitors, however, audio translation was also utilised for Japanese theatregoers, since the linguistic content of the performance dated back to the early modern period and was therefore dissimilar to modern-day Japanese. This experience was deeply enriching to my research project and provided a clear window into traditional theatre narratives, the roots of militarism, societal politeness, and the burden of inherited or familial representation. It was rather poignant to locate connections between the narratives occurring on stage and the types of conversations that were being facilitated in our studio sessions through dance and discussion. This theatre experience helped to supply some context and societal placement to the values and tensions arising from our studio-based conceptualisation of national and inherited belief systems. The medium of theatre was particularly useful for conveying such rich information through its many overlapping symbolic layers.

Journey to Yokohama and Kamakura

On Monday 15th June Minori agreed to be my guide during a day trip to Kamakura; a coastal town which lies two hours from Tokyo by train. En route to this location, we also visited some districts of Yokohama, which is Minori's birthplace and childhood municipality. This observation day was extremely valuable owing to the personal nature of the locations visited and the deep-rooted memories, thoughts and physical history that Minori was able to access as a result. As we walked, we were able to discuss changes in her perspectives between childhood and adulthood, and to explore the physical and metaphorical pathways that she had walked as a child growing up in Japan, pre-globalisation.

One instance of these changes occurred at Meigetsuin Temple; a traditional site that Minori visited with her mother as a child. In the side of a hill overlooking the temple there is a hollow formation of rocks known as *Arhat Cave*. This alcove is responsible for housing the *Meigetsu-in Yagura*; here the term *Yagura* refers to cave tombs customary to medieval Kamakura. Minori had never noticed these structures during her visits as a child and it was as though she was seeing this part of the temple for the very first time. She wondered why her attention had never been drawn to such a pervasive and unusual structure before now. Certain other details were also different from her memories and we continued to compare these to the shrine of our current experience. Being present in this location helped to enrich our dialogue with much colour, expression and detail; certainly much more than an email exchange or conversation would have provided. Particular buildings, ceremonial practices and architectural elements of the temple all led to different threads of this conversation becoming more vivid. This experience gave impressive momentum to our subsequent studio practices and notably enhanced the outcomes of the project.

2) Working in the Dance Studio: An Intercultural Dialogue

The rewarding studio-based portion of this project was primarily focussed on exploring movement ideas in a collaborative manner, and unearthing dance vocabulary from within our cultural exchange. Whilst Minori and I share a common background in contemporary dance training, there are also distinct differences in our practices, socio-cultural backgrounds and preferences towards dance-making. Despite building our creative dialogue in Tokyo, we were also able to explore the intercultural aspects of sharing a studio space and the universality of our movements in order to begin mapping a new common territory. Since there was plenty of conceptual and physical material to draw inspiration from, I needed to find ways of distilling or funnelling ideas into smaller tasks or clearly refined stimuli. Different sections of these studio sessions involved elements of speech, body contact, improvisation, independent movement and observation. Our modes of working shifted between directing each other, working meditatively (internally), and constructing complex 'set' movement phrases. The breadth of these approaches and the opportunity for creative expression was greatly rewarding and exhilarating to undertake.



As previously mentioned, there were also some pitfalls which needed to be averted prior to our collaboration, such as the dynamics implicated by international politics or hegemony (the danger of a European visitor arriving in Tokyo to 'purchase' cultural capital as an act of dominance), or authorial bias or gender role variances. To avoid perceived imbalances of control or authorship, we ensured that 'independent decision-making' became a priority of the collaboration from the initiation. An example of how this worked can be seen through our execution of exercises (see below); instead of being solely responsible for deciding the thematic and physical direction of all exercises, I would regularly ask that Minori (or Ryuhei) make choices about how we would proceed and which ideas we would explore during a particular session. In return, the types of information which emerged would not be based on

my biases or preferences, but rather, from shared interests and with mutual respect. This helped to guide the material in unexpected and exciting directions, and prevented the sense of subjection or authorial control from manifesting.



Allowing for the freedom for verbal testimony or discussion to take place during the studio sessions helped to develop the personal content and legitimacy of the narratives emerging from our work. Anchoring the conceptual concerns into the authentic thoughts of Japanese individuals, ignited much of the exercises and kept the ideas from becoming stale, pastiche or 'exoticised'. The use of different language configurations was quite important to this process; I insisted that English would not be the dominant force of the studio tasks, although for obvious reasons we needed it to communicate. I asked for the use of Japanese and Turkish language in order to initiate certain exercises, and at times, to reduce the understanding of the ideas being expressed. Whilst this may appear odd, being unable to understand a speaker is sometimes quite liberating, and allows for the viewer to focus upon non-verbal features such as intonation, gesture, body language and facial expressions. It was interesting to build upon this as a creative concept through tasks which involved telling the story of a 'hectic or exciting trip' that we had each previously been involved with. We told our stories in a language that the others would not understand and gradually phased out the spoken elements until we were left with the movement alone. This gestural choreography maintained the timing of spoken language(s), but was subsequently stylised through a rigorous process of editing.

Another example of a studio task involved the use of imagery and improvisation; dealing with the 'architecture of the body' in comparison with the 'architecture of Shinto shrines'. This task dealt with permanence, structural arrangements of the body, posture, and symbolism of limbs. Moving through

space, we searched for light and shadows surrounding and located within the body- taking inspiration from Japanese author Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's essay *In Praise of Shadows* (1933). This task generated some valuable movement materials, as we faced the paradox of the 'modern' body versus traditional building structures. The conceptual and emblematic features of this task were quite complex but I believe left enough room for innovation, layered with personal expression.

Other studio tasks involved creating movement pathways from photographs, and dealing with modernity and westernisation as independent but parallel notions. I found this process of working in the studio in Tokyo deeply impactful towards my established practices as a choreographer. Devising in this context, with the freedom to explore different cultural avenues and build a movement vocabulary from authentic Japanese sources, was highly replenishing and gave me new and unexplored directions to pursue in the future.

Teaching Youth Class at Architanz

Whilst working in Japan, I was kindly invited to lead an open youth class by Miki Sato, a senior figure at a major dance studio called *Architanz*. The students who attended my class on the 13th June were aged between 11 and 16 years old and were mainly in pursuit of vocational training in ballet and modern dance. The process of introducing unfamiliar contemporary dance material to young Japanese students provided me with much insight into dance education, studio etiquette and youth culture in Japan. The pupils were very polite and focussed in class, and thus my primary objective was to present exercises that were perhaps more rhythmically dynamic or required a less formal or 'held' approach to performing than the students were accustomed to in ballet. By using music that the students were unfamiliar with – such as Aboriginal Australian percussion and didgeridoo, or British electronic, or traditional South African music, I was able to observe how they dealt with the 'foreign' sounds and rhythms. This class also provided the opportunity to test the translatability of my studio practices across a national and cultural divide, and illuminated the universal similarities between ballet-centric institutions worldwide.

3) Quiet Evening Reflection and Independent Writing

Most of my evenings in Toyko were spent in quiet reflection, often in a public space or setting used for informal gatherings. It has been well-established through humanities research protocols that there are different modes of thinking, of understanding and of processing information; whether through aural, physical or literature mechanisms. Writing can be understood as a separate form of thinking; central for solidifying abstract or complicated ideas into deliberate and measured points. For choreographers, writing is a useful tool for connecting with and (re)organising ideas, or for planning the next segment of a work or project. The choice to conduct the written aspect of my investigation in a public space was important for continuing to study the human behaviour around me. For instance, the handling, preparation and presentation of food, people's postural or spatial arrangements and forms of communication were still insightful to the process of reviewing the day's work. Sitting in stillness and allowing movements to emerge in my periphery, rather than actively 'looking for' this information, allowed me to absorb subtle ideas and inferred cultural patterns without searching for them. Stillness of the body was very important for this part of the investigation; converse to walking around or crouching or dodging people during the morning site visits, and this can be viewed as very much the difference

between 'hunting' or 'setting a trap'. The absence of movement allows for a different energy level and for passive observation to occur.

This writing activity was valuable for processing and considering the day's findings. It was a chance to let these ideas deepen in my consciousness and to aid them in developing into useful forms. This methodology was meditative and reflexive with regard to the types of information that emerged; interestingly, many of my realisations concerning Japanese cultural behaviours, simultaneously shed light on my own practices in the UK, both in the artistic and the social spheres. This process of reflective writing was greatly impactful and will definitely be factored into my future projects.

Invitation to Observe Youth Company Classes: Hiroaki Umeda (S20 Company)

One of my evening reflective writing sessions was happily substituted for the opportunity to watch dance artist Hiroaki Umeda's youth classes in *Minami-ku, Saitama Prefecture*. Being present at these classes illuminated Umeda's approach to working, his philosophies regarding the body and dance-making, and his methods for teaching younger people in Japan. His attention to detail and constant vocalisations were aimed at perfecting the innards of a movement or exercise. His teaching centred largely upon repetition and on lengthy improvisational tasks, and it was clear that whilst the students were gradually building their resilience towards the demanding length of each class, there was also a refining process in motion. Speaking to Hiroaki afterwards, it became clear that his unconventional approach for teaching others the 'accurate' way to perform his movement vocabulary is very much in its developmental stages. The evening's observations offered useful first-hand data regarding international youth dance approaches from a highly successful and sought-after dance artist- which further provided a clearer picture of the types of movement education available for younger dancers globally.

Summary: Outcomes, Significance and Future Implications

In retrospect, the independent choreographic research conducted during this project was highly productive indeed. The project delivered far beyond initial expectations, both in terms of the movement material developed during studio practice(s) and the cultural cognizances and narratives which emerged through my time spent in Japan. This project has laid clear foundations for further choreographic development in the future by offering valuable and legitimate movement materials, conceptual concerns, staging aesthetics and narratives from which to launch new work in 2016. Memories, ideas, rituals and traditions have been carefully woven into the physical dance material and derived from authentic and ethical first-hand sources. It was a privilege to work with Minori and Ryuhei in their dance studio, and to spend time exploring Shinto temples, library archives and museums, and to become aware of the spatial arrangements of the buildings, plant-life, and atmospheric elements maintained by the people of Tokyo. Inhabiting these spaces was pivotal in understanding the architectural arrangements of Japanese public and private venues, and led to experimenting with original movement aesthetics in an unrushed and careful manner.

This project has greatly influenced my approach towards lecturing by allowing the subject matter pertaining to Japan within my current teaching (Harakuju, J-pop, non-western popular discourses, rituals, traditional theatre) to become exponentially advanced; I am able to teach with greater authority

and clarity after having experienced these cultural phenomena first-hand. The community dance aspect of my teaching and my choreographic output in the UK has also been enhanced through observing different approaches to working with young people and by being able to teach youth classes directly. This experience has supplied vital pedagogic data regarding transnationalism and intercultural communication to my existing practices.

Overall, this opportunity has been a significant milestone and has generated much embodied knowledge and research data for my vocation. It has allowed me to access creative discourses and resources which would be otherwise impossible to attain. This project has been a life-changing experience and I am truly grateful for all the support I have received in order to make my choreographic research possible.