

Place, Time, and Conditions in the Art of Intercultural Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

How can mutual understanding and exchanges among people of different cultures and ethnicities be supported in a manner that recognizes the variety of their worldviews and spatial-temporal-kinesthetic knowledge and cultural and spiritual values? In my experience, a practice-based approach to the art of intercultural dialogue does not stem from a predetermined method but rather is an organic process that grows from the interactions of the people involved, which will evolve differently in each place depending on its historical and current conditions. One approach that I have greatly appreciated in Indonesia, which has given good results, is by taking into account the place, time and conditions. With this in mind, I will share some aspects one might consider in the fostering of a common field for dialogue.

Keywords: cultural diversity. intercultural dialogue, practice-based approach

I. Introduction

For those of us working in the field of education and the arts, it is reassuring to see that the UNESCO World Report No. 2: *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* (2009: 17) includes a section on participatory learning and intercultural competencies which asserts that, in multicultural societies, “sensitizing people to cultural diversity is more a matter of approaches, methods and attitudes. ... [and that] the teaching of arts helps to reconnect scientific and emotional processes with intuition – a key component for the cultivation of attitudes favouring intercultural openness”.

From that view, I would like to share some thoughts from my perspective as a dance-movement artist, teacher, and cultural program director who has had the good fortune to collaborate with artists from varied cultures and faiths in the Americas, Europe and Asia for over 35 years and since 2001 resided in the villages of Bedulu and Tejakula in Bali, Indonesia. Actually, since the mid-

1980s, I have been interested in how the language of art fosters a common field for people of varied cultures even when their art forms and spoken mother tongues differ and also how this is related to the *genius loci* or spirit of a place and the characteristics of an architectural setting.

One question is how can mutual understanding and exchanges among people of different cultures and ethnicities be supported in a manner that recognizes the variety of their worldviews and spatial-temporal-kinesthetic knowledge and cultural and spiritual values?

In my experience, a practice-based approach to the art of intercultural dialogue does not stem from a predetermined method but rather is an organic process that grows from the interactions of the people involved, which will evolve differently in each place depending on its historical and current conditions. One approach that I have greatly appreciated in Indonesia that has given good results, is by taking into account the place, time, and conditions, which in Balinese is termed the *desa, kala, patra*; while a common Javanese proverb is *desa, mawa, cara* (each village has its own ways). With this in mind, next let us look at some aspects one might consider in the fostering of a common field for dialogue.

I am particularly inspired by what Solonese movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo (1997) called a 'gardener approach' in which "the realm of the garden is a source for the creativity of art". Metaphorically and literally, the garden is an environment where all the diversity of cultures and, in particular, both traditional rural and modern urban peoples with their diverse perceptions, understandings and practices, can share and engage in creative dialogue based upon the value of unity in diversity. Cultivating the field for intercultural dialogue is thus like the work of a gardener – sensing the qualities of the ground, tilling, fertilizing, and watering the soil and so forth such that diverse seeds can blossom in their own place and time in the "freshness, joy and healing of the garden".

II. Discussion

In general, aspects one might consider in developing a practice-based approach to the art of intercultural dialogue have long been the questions of many artists. For example:

- Aspects related to place
 - Is there a place that is a culturally significant or heritage site where the *genius loci* evokes an atmosphere of dialogue or remembrance of socio-cultural values;
 - Would a natural environment be more suitable for dialogue or a semi-open or closed architectural setting with elements of nature within it such as plants, flowers and stones, moving or still water, sunlight or firelight, currents of fresh air, and open space;
 - What type of spatial layout would be conducive for dialogue: for instance a rectangular or square seating arrangement with participants on all four sides to stimulate discussion, or an oval arrangement to stimulate creativity, or a circular arrangement for a spiritual atmosphere; and
- Aspects related to time
 - What is the nuance of the era and its possible influence on the dialogue;
 - Is there a favorable day for dialogue or a date that marks an annual event of importance;
 - Would it be beneficial to engage in dialogue at dawn, or in the morning, or at noontime or in the afternoon, or at dusk or in the evening or the stillness of night;
 - Would sharing and dialogue in multiple places at the same time and/or circulating to several places over a period of time be of benefit;
 - What rhythms of movement, music, or words would support the dialogue;
 - When are the moments of silence for contemplation or receiving the 'speaking' of people's inner feelings; and
- Aspects related to conditions
 - What proximity to or distance from a place of cultural significance and what physical distance between the people involved will foster dialogue;
 - Would a shared public space setting such that participants and passersby can

see and hear each other or a porous semi-private setting such that participants and passersby can only see each other or a private setting for participants be more conducive for dialogue;

- Would dialogue in small groups followed by a gathering of all be of benefit;
- What would be a suitable use for high-level, mid-level, and lower-level areas;
- What orientation is conducive for dialogue (rather than a grid structure where participants are in a passive position facing speakers positioned in front);
- Will sitting on the ground or on chairs, standing, or moving be more conducive for dialogue; and
- What is the resonance of the environment and how are people tuning with each other and the situation.

III. Closing

To conclude this brief talk, I would like to reiterate that with the increasing contact between cultures in all regions of the world, the ability to engage in dialogue has become ever more vital. UNESCO has also hosted numerous conferences since its inception in 1946 that have led to guiding documents such as the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), in which Article 4 presents that: “interculturality refers to the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect.” On a concrete level, the creative process of art can contribute much to the fostering of a common field and taking into account the place, time, and conditions offers valuable guidance. Although the abovementioned list of aspects one might consider is not all-inclusive, it is my hope that it can serve as a source of inspiration for artists, teachers, staff and students, curriculum developers, and community members who wish to develop a practice-based approach to the art of intercultural dialogue. Let us try. Thank you, terima kasih.

Acknowledgment

This is a slightly revised abbreviated version of my keynote talk presented for the international seminar Enrichment of Career by Knowledge of Language

and Literature V themed Current Issues and Trends in the Cosmopolitan Era convened by Faculty of Letters Dr. Soetomo University in collaboration with Balai Bahasa Provinsi Jawa Timur in Surabaya, Indonesia on 23 August 2017. Original quotations in that paper from Bagus (2001), Bandem (2003), Dibia (quoted in Isworo Laksmi, 2002), and Patera (2002; 2004) in Indonesian were translated to English by this author. Subsequently, this abbreviated version was presented for the online the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS) Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada and the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) Wednesday Forum on 13 April 2022.

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