

Tagore, Pedagogy and Contemporary Visual Cultures

Workshop 3 London

SATURDAY 15 MARCH 12-6pm:

Institute of International Visual Arts, Rivington Place, Rivington St, London EC2A

- 12:00: Introduction - Andrea Phillips
- 12:30: Grant Watson and Andrea Phillips in conversation: learning from Santiniketan
- 13:15: Anjalika Sagar - notes on The Otolith Group Tagore film project
- 14:00: lunch
- 15:00: Wendelien van Oldenborgh - ideas of pedagogy and colonialism in Indonesia
- 15:45: Anshuman Dasgupta - sound files from Santiniketan
- 16:30: Adrian Rifkin: Tagore in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*: a reading
- 17:00: tea and general discussion
- 18:00: ends

SUNDAY 16 MARCH 11-2pm:

Tagore Centre, Alexandra Park Library, Alexandra Park Road, London N22 7UJ

Discussion of NGBK Tagore exhibition and the next workshop:

- 11:00: Introduction by Grant Watson
- 11.30: Introduction to NGBK by Antje Weitzel and Elke Falat
- 12:00: Discussion of exhibition design with Andreas Mueller
- 13:00: Presentation of research for exhibition by Vivian Zihel (Landings)
- 13.30: general discussion
- 14:00: ends

<http://www.tagorecentre.org.uk/>

NOTES FROM SATURDAY

Tagore set up a small school in Santiniketan, West Bengal, in 1901. Description of the Santiniketan pedagogical approach from Kathleen M O'Connell, *The Poet as Educator* (Santiniketan: Visva Bharati, 2002), p. 214:

In accordance with his theory of a well-rounded education, Rabindranath placed great importance on practical and physical training. Early accounts of [Santiniketan] have mentioned training of the senses, which included training of one's ability to judge size, weight and distance, and to distinguish different sounds, colours and smells. This has been described in some of the layer syllabi, which state that sense training – being able to estimate proportion, quantity and quality – is the first requisite towards self-resilience. Practical training in the faculties of observation was encouraged through the keeping of journals and reports which detailed the trees, herbs, and animal life of the area. It included surveys of the villages, of the religious, economic, and cultural variations of the inhabitants. As well each student was required to learn the use of simple household tools, and to be acquainted with gardening, carpentry and weaving. Sports also provided important physical and practical training, and Santiniketan had a good reputation for cricket. Games, gymnastic, lathi play, ju jitsu, and dance all provided integrated learning situations.

Rabindranath also used to encourage the students to observe people on the roads, to listen to the singing of the cart men and the particular signs and sounds of the roadside on a market day. Sometimes, he writes, 'they would record detached isolated facts only, but to walk along the road on market day, when loaded bullock carts and women were streaming by, was an exercise for body and mind, an exercise in observation, with movement, in writing or sketching at the same time, while walking. By demanding this kind of coordination of the body and mind, eye and ear together, the exercise could become more and more complex and interesting.'

Description of Sriniketan (O'Connell, *ibid.*, p. 284-5):

The stated objectives [of the rural programme at Sriniketan] were to make the villages 'self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural traditions of their country and competent to make use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions.' There was also the unstated goal of engaging *bhadralok* students in constructive nation-building – as opposed to political agitation which Tagore considered a misdirected use of valuable energy – through the breaking down of upper caste biases regarding manual labour, working closely with the lower castes and performing such tasks as emptying latrine buckets. The 'Aims and Objectives' for the Sriniketean workers were stated as follows:

1. To win the friendship and affection of villagers and cultivators by taking a real interest in all that concerns their lives and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems.
2. To take the problems of the village and the field to the class room for study and discussion and to the experimental farm for solution.
3. To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the classroom and the experimental farm to the villagers, in the endeavor to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit; to help them to sell their produce and buy their requirements to the best advantage; to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping livestock; to encourage them to learn and practice arts and crafts; and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual aid and common endeavour.

Tagore, *The Centre of Indian Culture* (lecture delivered in Madras, February 1919, first published 1919)

Let us blame our own weakness in being obsessed with the idea that we must have some artificial wooden legs of an education of foreign-make simply because we imagine that we have no legs of our own to stand on. [...] those who, like our present Indian students, have to rely upon books, not truly for their mental sustenance, but for some external advantage, are sure to become anemic in their intellects, like babies solely fed with artificial food. They never have intellectual courage, because they never see the process and the environment of those thoughts which they are compelled to learn – and thus they lose the historical sense of all ideas, never knowing the perspective of their growth. They are hypnotized by the sharp black and white of the printed words, which hide their human genesis. They do not only borrow a foreign culture, but also a foreign standard of judgment; and thus, not only is the money not theirs, but not even the pocket.

In this lecture Tagore presents an argument for the replacement of the British-based university system with new Indian universities where teaching takes place in Hindu and develops from Indian culture – economically, spiritually, socially. Uses English destruction of Irish universities and suppression of Irish indigenous pedagogy as example.
Swadeshi Samaj – union of homeland

'We', in the 'non-West', constitute a 'No-Nation.'

Rustom Bharucha on Tagore's anti-Nationalism, in close reading of his anti-nationalistic lecture in Japan first published in 1917 (Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia*, Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 69.

1. Grant Watson and Andrea Phillips: Learning from Santiniketan:

How did our visit to Kolkata, Santiniketan, Sriniketan and the Santhal Museum develop the questions we initially proposed for this research, i.e., is there a continued relevance for Tagore's ideas on art, modernism and pedagogy within contemporary curatorial and artistic practices?

Our time in West Bengal was spent talking and walking, learning from teachers and students at Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan as well as gallerists and artists in Kolkata.

Some questions:

- Is there at Santiniketan an alternative pedagogical form?
- Do we understand better Tagore's ideas about the links between creativity, pedagogy and sociality?
- What are the stakes when something is understood as art? Hierarchies of legibility and the Santhal Museum.
- Santiniketan's internationalism in the 1920s – Tagore's idea of cosmopolitanism. Rustom Bharucha's discussion of universalism and the way in which Tagore understood this term as an anti-nationalistic imperative.
- No nation.
- Can we understand Tagore as someone who spent his time withdrawing from power? Was it that he could simply afford to? Relation to non violence, Gandhi.
- Other kinds of forms and affinities need to be produced: reassertion of institutional ethics / self organisation: commitment to focus on political affinities (non-alignment)
- No curriculum. Deconstructing institutional frameworks.
- How to build new institutions?
- How can we think about approaches to knowledge via Tagore - poet's history?
- How can this research be practically thought about in terms of our own institutions? How can they be transformed by this research?
- Institutional bravery. In our institutions there is little bravery
- Curating – organizing – moving beyond the discourse of aesthetics in order to find a poetic language that can alter the basis of institutional stasis and relentless neoliberalism. Santiniketan as example – Santhal Museum (arts centre).

2. Anjalika Sagar - notes on The Otolith Group and a potential Tagore film project

In reference to Home and the World (*Ghare Baire*), novel by Tagore published in 1916, made into a film by Satyajit Ray in 1984:

- The idea of home in the world more interesting than global and local, national and international.
- Re-enchantment with authenticity was produced by the market in relation to this idea of being international.
- New emerging art scenes, very problematic in relation to identity.
- Stuart Hall's ideas of belonging and culture. Forms of exclusion, questions of belonging that you have to co-exist with wherever you are located.
- Tagore's image abroad is not as interesting as his project to create Santiniketan. The self-exoticisation formed a self that he produced in order to raise money for the school.
- Santiniketan is quite unlike Dartington or any other Western experimental art schools. There are no forced performative progressing liberal attitudes going on. Santiniketan is a rather formal school and the goals were particular and contextual.
- Despite Tagore's differences with Gandhi over nationalism, what happened during the Gandhi era, is to chart what Leela Gandhi describes as *Ahimsaic historiography*. Ahimsaic = non-violence.
- Quoting Leela Gandhi from *Affective Communities* (Durham: Duke Uni Press, 2006):
 - o Ahimsaic historiography turns to the colonial encounter not for evidence of violence and conflict or exotic mistakes, but rather in search for small-subjugated narratives of cross-cultural collaboration between oppressors and oppressed. Concerned with a visionary commitment to the end of institutionalized suffering.

- Santiniketan campus feels under-threat. Santiniketan's sense of interiority despite Tagore's performances and international persona, how as a space did not require his ability, nor the production of authenticity when the way visibility now operates in the neoliberal contemporary India art scene, producing authentic gate keepers, who armed with acceptable global vocabularies produce similar banal artworks to impress Western curators, without any sense of social responsibility.
- The green idyllic home for the cultural exploration that employed a distinctly anti-western and decolonizing ideology now has to cope with the vulgarity of the Indian contemporary art scene.
- The context of decolonization and self-determination allowed for forms of decelerated attention to the relation between the temporal space and the rural and the temporal industrialized spaces of the city. There was an analysis of culture going on in culture itself. And there was a desire to reconstruct and revive culture following the departure of the British. This was a proud era of the 1940s, 50s and 60s in India and there were many examples of efforts such as the cottage industry movement to introduce the city to the villages and the other way around. These movements produced articulations of a cultural ethics determined by economic models for self-dependency, which have been vaporized by the accelerated culture of neoliberalism.
- Santiniketan as a space, even metaphorically was able to withstand and stand apart in its own temporal space and how this metaphor works in relation to different temporalities within India that coexist. Gaze back to India is part of a postcolonial intellectual project, but the further challenge involves looking at the neo-colonial processes, and its infections in South Asia.
- Neoliberal, neocolonial India. Franchising an idea of India within India.
- Era of decolonization produced this idea of how to decolonize oneself. Leela Gandhi, talks about, how to spiritually transform oneself. Involves a political responsibility to decolonize oneself from cast as an aesthetic and political challenge. Which does not exist in the contemporary Indian art.
- Tagore interest in libidinising people.
- Santiniketan was quite empty in the beginning. Photos are from 1920s? From Santiniketan's archive. The campus grew; the city of Bolpur now attaches itself to the campus.

Andrea: The gentrification of Santiniketan. The local students were asked to caretake Santiniketan holiday houses. Land rights.

Grant: Home and the world trope. Interiority of Santiniketan. The fact that it didn't need to have visibility in a way we now understand a certain internationalism and cosmopolitanism in terms of art. Tagore's model of cosmopolitanism and universalism was located in this kind of experiences like the ones Anjalika describes: looking through the window to the garden. The scale is completely different. How an artwork communicates that. Spirituality as a Foucauldian idea of self-transformation. Self Work.

Anjalika: Decolonisation. Learn about others in your country. Make that your political and aesthetic challenge.

Andrea: Leela Gandhi also talks in detail about the concept of imperial periphery. How can you work at the imperial periphery that is between the imperial and the decolonized self, or learning how to work that edge.

Using Spivak to look at way in which this figure Tagore moves around the world doing these lectures to fund Santiniketan. This kind of relation which is another home and the world relation; a strategic relation.

Anjalika: Gandhi as an anti-modernist. A lawyer in South Africa who has lived in Britain, studied, starts to wear a dhoti to get rural people enchanted with themselves, it was a performance that worked to destabilize the British... encouraged people to weave their own dhoti. Tagore was also performing.

Andrea: What is Tagore performing as he does his lecture-talks? What is the relationship between what Tagore was doing in his international lecture series, and what many of us do in the art world? Tagore is touring to raise money to sustain Santiniketan, which is in dire straights financially when Tagore's family money runs out. Similar to Spivak lecturing at the Whitechapel or Goldsmiths?

Adrian: Tagore's lecturing analogous with Josephine Baker performing to raise money for her orphanage.

Anjalika: *Ahimsaic Historiography*. Subjugated narratives of cross cultural collaboration between oppressors and oppressed ... my family had friendships with all kinds of people who wanted to see the end of colonial rule in India, people's cultural and political commitment to that, and a love of India, shared, desired ...

3. Wendelien van Oldenborgh - ideas of pedagogy and colonialism in Indonesia

Interested in the relationship between Santiniketan and Indonesia. Tagore toured Indonesia. There is a parallel history of becoming independent in the same epoch. Santiniketan and the school being founded and being there seemingly without any interruption from colonial authorities. Relates to my research in colonial education in Indonesia. There it was clearly interrupted.

In Indonesia, in the beginning of the twentieth century there were several independent movements. Wild Schools. Educating people. People from Indonesia wanted to increase schooling. Independent from the government. Self-financed.

My book (*A Well Respected Man, or Book of Echoes*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011)

Has as its main character Ki Hajar Dewantara (or Soewardi Soerjaningrat) who is ambiguous. I came across a text that he wrote called '*If I were a Dutchman*', a pamphlet written by a Javanese man who was part of the independent movement. He was exiled after writing this pamphlet to Holland. He studied pedagogy there (First world war). He went back to Java in the 1920s and changed his name to Ki Hajar Dewantara, which means: a well respected man. In 1922 Dewantara set up a school system called Taman Siswa ('a garden of students') intended to nurture in students new subjectivities for an independent Indonesia. The schools grew enormously alongside the wild schools. The idea is that the school is not paying attention only to lessons, but that daily life is all part of education, the schooling system. Participation of girls in the school was uneven. The system also included a lot of art, music and dance.

I'm also working with a novel called *Buiten het Gareel* ('*Out of Harness*') by a women writer, Soewarsih Djojopoespito, written in Sundanese, a language that is spoken in Java. The book was published in the Netherlands in Dutch, translated by her, in 1940. The story, autobiographical, set in the 1930s, is about intellectuals and nationalists who teaching in this school movement. The book documents the frictions that existed between ideologies from an autobiographical perspective. Struggling with feelings of solidarity, politics, change, etc. Relation to Sukarno; independence fighter and Indonesia's first president. Being in those schools brings a way of life she was not expecting.

Passage from Ki Hajar Dewantara, from his text

'Some Aspects of National Education and the Taman Siswa Institute of Jogjakarta':

Because of the great inferiority complex, which we derive from our particular governmental experience we were easily satisfied with anything that made us look a little bit Dutch. We had a feeling of satisfaction, or mild delight even, any time we had an opportunity to be amongst Europeans, to speak Dutch even to our own countrymen, to wear western clothes, to arrange our houses according to Western styles. We even went further in our imitations; a small party at home would be too common, too banal without Western food, without a jazz band, without a glass of Dutch Gin from Schiedam itself, so necessary to the "modern" sociability and "European" freedom usual in such occasions. ... even in the most perfect cases of imitation I think any Dutchman who is above chauvinism would probably not be able to keep from laughing if saw how much effort we make to maintain an European appearance. We may certainly sigh together with Rabindranath Tagore 'our life is a quotation from that of the Westerner, our voice an echo of that of Europe, instead of intellectuals we are nothing but a bag full of information. There exists such an emptiness in our mind that we are not in a position to absorb what is beautiful and worthy.'

Quotes from Soewarsih (Translated by Wendelien): *Ei, sighed Soelastri. (The main character of the book) what a journey. But what's this? She picks up a grinder, looking at it critically and noticed that has been used to make roedjak. How come that thing ended up here, on a desk of all places, shame on you Dar. (The scene is that she just arrives to the house on the campus of the school). He shrugged his shoulders and said without emotion. I didn't do that. Djamil made the roedjak. Which is understandable, our Buni tree is covered in fruits. What of it, if you make roedjak. in the kitchen or here the result stays the same. Soelastri said nothing she knew that tidiness was considered bourgeois. And would one dare to go against the current opinion? ...*

Quotes Ki Hajar Dewantara: *in the year 1921 the Taman Siswa School was set up in Jogjakarta. The school was immediately declared itself to be a national institute of education, something which of course remained to be proved. What is a national content, why is it necessary? Is there really a national system of education? These questions were both asked by sympathizers and opponents all of whom seemed to be alarmed by the new words. When Taman Siswa leaders ordered: "Return from Western to national principles", one of the consequences was the use of the native tongue as the medium of instruction and another the replacement of Dutch children's games and songs by national ones (we mention only some of the more terrifying innovations in the curriculum). Then judgement was immediately passed: Taman Siswa is lowering the education standards and setting us back decades!*

Image: Dewantara lecturing young students that will become teachers. He his lecturing about Tagore (see image on website @ <http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/mister-soerjoadipoetro-lecturing-on-tagore-in-java/>).

Vivian: Ambivalence of culture and cultural prestige. Translation... distributed a lot of Tagore. Very invested in a project of Javanese cultural campaigning, preserving a Javanese cultural position, but one that was very aristocratically enfranchised. It was very complicit with the colonial authority. Java institutes that were culturally invested in art but without the radical pedagogy that Wendelien was talking about.

Wendelien: (referring to the texts in her book) After independence it was a Javanese colonization. Brings back the no-nation idea. Groups start to dominate other groups in other areas.

Vivian: a struggle that emerges in a periphery within a periphery, an indigenous culture in an Islamic community.

Wendelien: In Bengal Santhal schools were teaching in both languages and were set up because the local kids do very poorly in the Bengal schools that were provided in the vicinity. Mainly because of their language. Wild schools also talk about the local languages, but also a hierarchy of languages.

Grant: How does colonization get work out, the woman in the house, the dirt, because tidiness being bourgeois. Leader manipulating and scheming the individuals that are useful to him. The politics of both those images.

Anjalika: Tribal people protecting themselves, their relation to education is very interesting. Margaret Dickinson's film, *Behind the lines* (1971) about the Frelimo in Mozambique.

Andrea: Anshuman Dasgupta research is about contemporary autonomised anarchic zones in Northern India.

Book: *Selected Subaltern Studies*, by Ranajit Guha.

Grant: he talks about this text by Tagore, the poet's history, and history of the day. Subaltern Studies guy, and Marxist, and takes the time to reflect on Tagore's notion of a poet's history.

4. Anshuman Dasgupta - sound files from Santiniketan

Workshop participants listened to sound files of Anshuman talking about murals in situ on Visva Bharati campus in Santiniketan. Sound recordings can be found on the website (<http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/anshuman-dasgupta-on-santiniketans-murals/>).

5. Adrian Rifkin: Tagore in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*: a reading

Tagore being enunciated in different situations. Reread *A Suitable Boy* (Vikram Seth, 1993). Highlighting every sentence in which the name Tagore occurs. Seth writing the panorama of post-partitioned India, making the name Tagore appearing in many different voices, and many different cultural milieus of the book.

Recording of reading at: <http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/adrian-rikkin-reads-a-suitable-boy/>

Seth. *A Suitable Boy*. Crosses cultural differences. Seth is very fine of cultural differences and similarities between the Indian and the Islamic cultures, and music. Tagore's nicknames in the book.

Shanay: the nicknames claim a sense of intimacy, familiarity.

Adrian: How much and how little he comes up in the book. Crisis in the enunciation. Being embedded in the British culture and the Indian culture.

Anjalika: in India people nickname everyone.

Adrian: the nicknames allow this name Tagore to breath.

Andrea: Colloquial use of Tagore. When you get to Bolpur station, it says Bolpur for Santiniketan with a big mural of Tagore, as when you get to Alnwick Castle, it says Alnwick castle for Harry Potter Theme Park. Anshuman reminded us (during the tour of the houses) of Tagore living in this mansion with one telephone, that was the direct telephone to Tagore. The major telephone company in India at the time, used that he was their first client, as a campaign. Hotline to the world. Home and the world.

Adrian: Photograph of Tagore sitting on something on the floor. Kristeva seminar, one commentator wrote a paper on Tagore and psychoanalysis. Tagore sitting in lotus position in the middle of the room of his translator, this different enunciations and representations are interlinked. Periphery of a periphery. We need something more fluid. The foreign thing is a periphery too, if you put it backwards. Psychoanalysis. Tagore met Freud, and they didn't get on. Photograph of the two looking alienated.

Grant: How can a school be wild, and be an institutions?

Christian: the murals reinforce an architecture.

Anjalika: Santiniketan is not a wild school.

Christian: Santiniketan as an alternative bush school, where you are allowed to climb trees...

Andrea: it is not rough, Santiniketan is pretty... thinking of the curricula with no curricula. What really happened at the school? Tagore, whilst he was anti-caste theoretically and pro-woman, when Santiniketan was set up, it was only for boys and caste was kept in place, in that sense it was not wild, or radical, as we might now use that term. Wild, in the sense of a bush school, wild as different from the mainstream...

Quote from Tagore: *Children need training in self-reliance and self-help from their early childhood. In our country this aspect of education is sadly neglected. Let the child never tire in his effort to give play to his creative joy by inventing things with the help of whatever material lies ... let him at the same time find the light in voluntarily performing tasks calculated to add to the health, happiness and comfort of the community. We are always ready to suppress any initiative on the part of the children to organize their own immediate environment for themselves, we look upon such sallies as self-determination as a nuisance and as an affront.*

It is very much in the Steiner tradition: the child finding in themselves the resources, but this is the resource for someone to add to a fairly conservative understanding of what community needs. They had strict lessons and strict times, they had to do certain tasks... etc. Only the things they did were different. They had to go on a walk everyday, they had to meditate. The older boys would punish the younger boys if they didn't do it. It was a kind of libertarian public school.

Grant: The schools in Germany are called Freischule. But they are not free, they are incredible dogmatic. Tagore: it was an alternative to the British system. It was not completely out of control, it had some kind of conservative values, but also some progressive values. In Santiniketan Shiv Kumar told us that the children voted to eradicate caste. They asked the children, they could decide if they wanted to sit in caste-segregated meals, and the children decided against it. Tagore, on the one hand very progressive, and on the other he married a 12 year old in an arranged marriage, and he arranged marriages for all his children.

Adrian: the edge-school. A school you can't see.

Vivian: wildness is located relationally. The wild seen within a context.

Andrea: But Tagore was a real admirer of European education.

Shanay: the connection to Bauhaus. Both developed in very different political social context, but there was a great correspondence, they look at each other. He was an admirer of certain kinds of education taking place in Europe. He visited it. He was attracted to the arts-and-crafts side of it. Learning through making, essential to Bauhaus. This was what the Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta was trying to demonstrate, the parallel in ideologies between the two institutions, and moments of correspondence that could be seen, the emphasis on arts-and-crafts, questions of form (<https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/bauhaus-in-calcutta.html>).

Grant: They were constituted in the same year 1919. It was not that one followed the other. They were created at the same time.

Andrea: Rurality, the edge, the forest, the jungle, the tree. Wild. Complex relationship between the city and the rural, a different set of connectedness between those zones (going back to Anjalika's presentation).

Anjalika: how to construct a culture while analyzing it at the same time. Decolonizing the self, working on the self, by engaging in a responsibility to what might be considered the other. Decolonization of the self in relation to caste and caste prejudice. Which can be underestimated in the Twentieth-first century.

Grant: Geeta Kapoor makes this point in her book When was Modernism?: modernism is normally associated with the urban, and what was odd with Santiniketan is that it was located in the rural. Modernists' fascination with the village. Repeated constantly in Indian art, the motif of the village. Even in the 90s with an artist like Sheela Gowda. Village references, mixing with the aesthetic of modernism.

Shanay: shifting ground, physically, of the rural and the city. A transition from being primarily agricultural to being a service based country.

Anjalika: the rise of the eco-socialist party, very conflicting paradigms in India, many different temporal spaces, from ancient to absolutely modern times, rural and the city, and many forms of activist who are dealing with this in many different ways. How they coexist in a modern country.

Shanay: The nation-state is colonizing itself.

Vivian: What does it mean to try to conceptualize a political position that could shrug off the military economic might of the colonial power without re-instantiating the secular materialist subject that in fact forms it, and where might that subject position stand? To put it in the rural, to try to rejuvenate and re-cultivate what that space is.

Grant: that is the kind of subject Tagore tried to produce in the school.

Anjalika: Tagore was responsible for cultivating these ideas around nature; I am more interesting in what is happening now.

Grant: Tagore experienced rural life, and it had a huge impact on him; he saw the poverty and the desperation.

Andrea: managing the estate was his first job.

Grant: neoliberal economy is a tiny drop in the ocean of the rural, which is unchanged; Spivak says the rural is in a kind of medieval state. Any kind of political discussion has to engage with the rural. The majority of people live in that condition.

Andrea: the secular subject of an anti-modernism need to be set up within the rural... not wanting to forsake the city (north Kolkata) for the rural.

Anjalika: the rural lives within the city ...

NOTES FROM SUNDAY

The Tagore Centre, London.

Discussion of NGBK Tagore exhibition and the next workshop:

1. Introduction by Grant Watson

When I first started the Tagore research it brought me here, to the Tagore Centre. At that time it was not possible to make an exhibition of Tagore's paintings, for practical and political reasons. (image of the room as it is published in the Santhal Family Catalogue).

The genesis of the Tagore's Universal Allegories project was a conversation with Rustom Bharucha about Tagore, and how he would like to make a museum, to look at Tagore's work and his legacy, and his environmental and ecology interests. The idea continued to another kind of structure that would contain research by various people. When the exhibition started we hadn't got the AHRC grant. So the initial idea couldn't be realized. Instead I commissioned the work by Anna Boghigian, and showed a piece by Goshka Macuga from the Santhal Family exhibition (at MUHKA). As the AHRC grant came, the idea of the research project was taken to NGBK in a smaller form. Andreas Mueller was invited to do the architecture of the exhibition that could contain the research.

2. Introduction to NGBK by Antje Weitzel and Elke Falat

NGBK is an art institution based in Berlin. Funded in 1989 as a grassroots association, a membership organization with a social political programme. In the organizational structure, the members do the programming and organize in working groups. There is a general assembly every year where the members propose projects and decide which to select. There is not a head, or a director. There is an organization office that does the administration, but independent groups organize the programme. It is situated in Kreuzberg. The groups, like Antje and Elke are working, are focused on bringing over shows from other institutions; to create relations to other institutions.

Artists apply a lot with projects. The formats of the shows are not necessarily art shows.

The members of NGBK are about 8000. There is alternative, political and academic people coming, but also, because it is on popular area of Berlin, you have passersby. It's free and you enter via a bookshop. A lot of non-artists come.

Tagore was very influential in Germany, so the relation is there already. The Bauhaus in Kolkata show was reinitiated at Dessau. Still, this will be quite a new issue.

3. Presentation of research for exhibition by Vivian Zihlerl (Landings)

Landings: together since the beginning of 2013, we have been re-surveying modernity through the lens of land histories, and the sedimentary grounds of the colonial struggle. Native and Nature. People and Land as cultivatable. Tagore's The Post Office arrived as a text that offers an allegorical construction of the rural subject, of the village subject, and one that might have an interesting relationship to the broader projects of Tagore, at Santiniketan as well as Sriniketan. And all that is enmeshed between that project and these figures who were inhabiting the world at the time. The Post Office (Dakghar), written in 1912, was first performed in 1913 in England by the Irish players in London. 1917, performed in India.

See Tagore website for pdf of the booklet published as part of Landings' contribution to the exhibition Tagore's Post Office (NGBK 2014) curated by Grant Watson: <http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/dakghar-notes-towards-isolation-and-recognition-2/>

Eona McCallum: (discussing interview conducted by Abner Preis with Swati Ghosh, Writer and Tagore Researcher, and her father in law Nani Gopal Ghosh, Ex Student and Teacher, Kala Bhavana): there was always an influx of students coming into Santiniketan and Sriniketan, from India, or Asia who were very quickly integrated and started to learn Bengali. They became accustomed to live the way the local people lived. Tagore introduced a policy in Sriniketan that only orphaned children would go there. Tagore was against this idea of producing artists or a career, but instead wanted to develop a way of understanding what beauty is.

Very difficult to access the archive. The protocols. The material is vulnerable.

Andrea: Tagore understood that Santiniketan was producing artists, Sriniketan is still run as a place where there are a number of workshops, and you produce material goods. But if you went in the 1920s, as an orphan or as a young person, where is the decision made whether you go to Santiniketan or Sriniketan?

Eona McCallum: She wasn't very clear about that. It was basically a group of boys and a store of tools, and they would go there each day and pick up what they wanted to pick up and start, and find someone who might be able to tell them how to do what they wanted to do that day. Tutors like Nandalal Bose when he wasn't teaching would go to Sriniketan to make work there, to learn the handicrafts that were being taught there, and it was so informal that children would teach him.

Grant: that's how Shiv Kumar describes the Santiniketan curriculum also. There weren't disciplines, people came and did what they wanted to do, and they would find teachers and workshops in order to do those things.

Vivian: (quoting Tagore inaugural address for an exhibition of Sriniketan's handicrafts in Kolkata): *To some of them I have pointed out that the drama of national self expression could not be real if rural India were banished to outer darkness behind the stage.*

Talks about more material for the exhibition. Photo documentation of 1917 performance where Tagore performs a number of roles in the play. Multi-character figure.

Grant: this performance reflects that the post office has always been taken up in different political contexts. Northeast, imbued with the energy of that particular struggle.

Vivian: Janusz Korczak, a pedagogue – play was performed in the Warsaw orphanage he ran in the Second world war just before all inhabitants were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp in 1942. Set of stills from the film of the polish director Andrzej Wajda (1990).

Adrian: does Wajda treat it as a specific Jewish theme? Was this ever picked up by the Yiddish theater in New York?

Vivian: The film has been criticized as being hagiographic.

Andrea: This was produced all over the place, was produced in schools, is a short play, easy to interpreted. Universal human rights play.

Vivian: more material. Letter about a performance of the play produced in Germany. The play was being depicted as fairy tale. Whereas for Tagore, *Amal represent the man whose souls has received the quality of open road, who seeks freedom... The advisers are conventional platitudes... freedom is unsafe and each care should be take to keep the sick man within the walls, and so the precaution is taken.. But there it is the post office... and Amal waits for the king's letter to come to him, bringing to him the message of emancipation. ...death to the world brings him a world of spiritual freedom.*

Independence within the Indian context, and whether Amal might not be allegorical for the condition of India as a nation?

Postcards by Muktinah Mondal, 2012. Rural scenes.

Grant: very interesting in relation to Anna Boghiguan's installation because she covers quite a lot of the same material, in a completely different way. She has images of the Warsaw ghetto performances of the play. She makes these drawings on photographs of Santiniketan, constantly alluding to the play in other places.

4. Discussion of exhibition design with Andreas Mueller

Andreas Mueller: Discussion of the architecture of the exhibition. Table. Vitrine where you look down to read things. Clarify the functions.

Does the research group want to appear as one group in the show?

Grant: it needs to be together. The exhibition is already quite complex and dispersed. It needs to be contained. Some kind of furniture that holds it together.

Andrea: There might be static element, and in addition that might be things that can be added during the workshop weekend.

Grant: Sanchayan Ghosh might make an addition.

Anjalika: Wallpaper design.

Andrea: music, talks, tables.

Adrian: Table, where things can be left, in a box. Something about Amal, Marx and the Indian Village, photographs original installation of the ethnographic museum in Paris.

Andrea: A talk on art institutions.

Wendelien: no idea, difficulty of working like this, exposing before the research is done. Confrontation of voices around education in Indonesia. How to show research?

Adrian: it is about traces, not definitive statements. We all leave traces. Should it be enigmatic or not, should it be captured? Distractions as well as concentrations.

Anjalika: Wallpaper does not need to take the whole wall. Could it be for everyone? The form of the display of research. Could everyone's material fit this format? Could contribution go on top of the wallpaper by Otolith?

Shanay: Victoria Ocampo, and the chair she gave to Tagore. *As Tagore and Elmhurst were about to sail homewards Victoria insisted that the easy-chair where the poet used to recline on the balcony of her Villa, should go back with him to India. The cabin door was too narrow for the chair to pass through. But nothing was impossible to Victoria. Carpenters were set to widen the passage and the chair was ultimately brought to Santiniketan, and remained the poet's favorite resting place and is still a prize exhibit in the Tagore museum. When the last fatal illness obliged the poet to take to bed the chair stood near him, its emptiness haunted him...*

Could the chair be made? Could it be incorporated in the Wallpaper?

Ansuman: Tagore's voice, the most perishable. Reverb. Negation of the act. Absence.

Wallpaper is the format for everyone. It does not have to be an overwhelming image. Collage with reduced graphic style. Singularity of each gesture. Can be black and white.