

SEVENTEEN STORIES ABOUT INTERCULTURALISM AND TADASHI SUZUKI

Michael Cohen

Forgetting is also the great problem of politics. When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of organised forgetting...A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self. And so the political situation has brutally illuminated the ordinary metaphysical problem of forgetting that we have all the time, every day, without paying any attention. Politics unmask the metaphysics of private life, private life unmask the metaphysics of politics. (Afterword in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Kundera 1980, 234)

Summer, 1991 and I was sitting on the balcony of the assembly hall building at the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT). Sitting back after a lunch of fried fish and rice, feet up on the rail (still throbbing from the morning's training), I remember reading aloud this excerpt of Kundera's book to a colleague of mine from Playbox Theatre in Melbourne. The assembly hall commands a magnificent view of the thatched farmhouses down in the village. Sitting there, I remember remarking to myself upon my situation: after five months of quite intense cultural isolation, training and working in Japan, here I was surrounded by other foreign performing artists (many of whom I knew from Australia) - debating world cultural politics in the glorious sunshine!

Creatively dissatisfied after only three years working in theatre, I had left Australia in 1991 to go and live in Japan. I had wanted fresh stimulus in my surroundings and more importantly, a new approach to performance. Captivated by the driven intensity and focus of Suzuki Method and *butoh* training, I committed myself to following and experiencing as much tuition in these fields as possible. A further attraction I had had to Japan was the desire to be immersed in a confirmed capitalistic Asian culture. The power dynamics of cultural (and financial) exchange, it seems to me, are very clear in Japan. I lived in Japan permanently for two years studying and working as a performer, and I still have an ongoing professional relationship, touring there about twice a year.

Now living in Australia, I deliberate the relevance of my time in Japan. I want to investigate how these trainings and experiences have informed me as a contemporary theatre practitioner. In a broader, political sense, I am interested in how intercultural theatrical experiences inform the cultural identity of the nations involved. What are