




QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

If the System Isn't Right, Why Can't We Change It? An Interview with Danny Yung

By Suzanne Carbonneau
Introduced by Bill Bissell



If the System Isn't Right, Why Can't We Change It?

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANNY YUNG
CONDUCTED BY SUZANNE CARBONNEAU AT
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INTRODUCTION BY BILL BISSELL, DIRECTOR, DANCE ADVANCE

The Introduction

As many of you already know, Dance Advance sponsors periodic conversations with artists—I call them ‘dance discursions.’ These discursions are part of our effort to offer opportunities for reflection on our field by its practitioners; a chance to consider ideas that animate our work and to share our thinking with each other.¹

Today's artist is Danny Yung, artistic director of Zuni Icosahedron, from Hong Kong. Joining him—and us—is writer and arts specialist Suzanne Carbonneau. She'll help to shepherd the conversation and tease out content that we might particularly want to consider.

Before continuing with my short introduction to today's program, I want to express my additional, and very present, gratitude to the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival & Philly Fringe for bringing our guest, and a small team of his associated artists, to our city as part of this year's Festival.

I am especially heartened by the commitment that this year's Festival has made to carving out platforms within the performance schedule, which allow artists and audiences to draw together and discuss the work that we are seeing.

I've been thinking about how fortunate we are to have an artist like Danny Yung here in Philadelphia. How remarkable it is that this Festival is programming a series of lecture presentations over the course of a week to introduce us to one of Asia's leading contemporary artists and cultural thinkers.

We are able to get a glimpse of Danny's creative work: to hear about his engagement with Kunqu Opera source material, and to learn about his process of working with traditional practices as they rub up against contemporary

¹ As an extension of these public discussions, we have published a series of “danceworkbooks” in DVD-ROM format. They are available at www.danceworkbook.org.

aesthetics and compositional strategies. In each of these sessions at the Roberts Theater—the last one is this afternoon at 3 p.m.—we are able to enter into Zuni’s world² and to think about Danny’s idea of “experimenting with tradition.”

I have to be candid, however. My first encounter with Danny Yung was not with him as an artist but as a thinker. I was introduced to him at a seminar session I attended during a conference in Tokyo in 2001 in the days surrounding the events of September 11. It was obviously a difficult moment—cultures were literally colliding, and I sat in Tokyo conferencing about art making as seen from an Asian context.

What truly stunned me about Danny’s presentation that day (as well as subsequent ones I have been fortunate enough to hear—one of them with Suzanne Carbonneau) was the way in which his ideas were linked, one to the other, as a method to critique a variety of systems: foundation funding or other forms of patronage, government ministry policy, or venues that serve as the gatekeepers for what audiences see. These systems converge in many ways, serving to both frame and predetermine the landscape for the treatment of the arts and heritage professions in the cultural sector.

It was liberating to hear a critique that was so honest, and yet one that did not identify the art practitioner as a victim in an anti-culture environment. Rather, our work—our responsibility really—was articulated by Danny as part of an effort to see how we could empower our sector; how to help practitioners envision alternative solutions to those systems that fail us; how to act as agents of change; and how to ask tough questions of those who make cultural policy.

The framework for that presentation was Danny’s notion of “experimenting with networks.” This concept advocates for cultural activity that results from artist-directed exchanges focusing on both the artistic product and the motivating ideas that inform them.

While bad things were happening elsewhere in the world, I felt—in that room in Tokyo—how much is possible within our individual work. Thus, years before Obama’s election campaign, my response was, “Yes, we can!” It was a feeling that we *do* live amidst fluid processes that are able to self-renew, where boundaries may become opportunities. Danny helped me to see that individual practice is also a system that we *own*; it is not reactive to outside forces or about the ‘other.’ It is critically about our own choices in moving our work forward.

Danny’s pro-active position in setting forth these ideas is illustrated in his own artistic output and in his direction of Zuni: working with neighborhood initiatives in the realm of arts education; making projects that join like-minded organizations across continents; developing practices of artistic method and experimentation in form that involve light, installation, projection, exhibition, performance, cultural heritage, and site—a vast range of options as his vision of what theater can mean to a society moves beyond reductive notions about venue or concert presentation.

I find parallels between Danny and the ideas of Mary Jane Jacob, the visual arts specialist and independent curator at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago who has recently worked with Dance Advance and with many of our constituents. Mary Jane has upended the stereotype of the exhibition/festival/art biennial as serving only as a container for objects. Like Mary Jane, Danny is constructing practice around the experiences of feeling, not about the object as a fixed thing.

² Zuni Icosahedron is Danny Yung’s experimental theater company.

And, in this way, Danny's work continually revolves, I feel, around the artist as social figure.

Here at last, I thought in September 2001, was an optimism founded in our own imaginative capacities, in our own intelligences as art workers.

It was this feeling of what we *can* do that I very much wanted to share with colleagues here in Philadelphia.

Danny has spoken this week about his desire to see "a festival for artists and directors where they can talk about their own work," a place that can stimulate critical thinking between artists about their work. I believe, in its way, this is what the Live Arts Festival has accomplished in this introductory series about the work of Danny Yung and Zuni Icosahedron.

It is inevitable that our ideas here in the U.S. of what is contemporary are framed through the lens of Euro-American bias. Yet this phenomenon of the contemporary is not limited to *our* culture. The dialectic of contemporary and traditional serves as a basic dynamic in all cultures, present everywhere, in each society.

In closing on this note, to acknowledge that knowing is about what we *don't* know, I want to comment on my encounter with Zuni's artistic work. It's very hard for me to speak concisely about this—and I confess that I would love to discuss at length Danny's recent trilogy of work, how each part exemplifies and moves forward a remarkable treatise on the artist as archetype.

However, Danny will forgive me if I describe a moment not from his work but from that of his partner, Mathias Woo. Mathias is co-artistic director of Zuni and he has generated a parallel body of work to that of Danny. He has created visual theater pieces on the architecture of Le Corbusier and Philadelphia's own Louis Kahn.

Last December Dance Advance sponsored a small group to attend a variety of events in Belgium and Germany. Suzanne participated in this trip as our resident conversationalist. The schedule included a visit to the huge exhibition *China @ Bozar*, mounted in a reclaimed early 20th-century building in the center of Brussels. Within this multi-discipline festival Zuni presented a work by Mathias entitled *Tang Xianzu's Dream on Dreams*.

Tang Xianzu is considered the most famous and prolific of Chinese playwrights—China's Shakespeare, as Danny referred to him this week. The collection of his plays called *The Four Dreams of Lin Chuan* formed a launching point for Mathias's work *Dream on Dreams*. Each of Xiansu's plays is standard text for Chinese opera settings. Mathias excerpted material from the four dream texts to create a story with the poet Xianzu as the central character. The artist himself was the guide through his own work, revealing his compulsive desires to follow his characters, to fall in love with them, to fall into his stories and, as a consequence, to fall out of his body.

In this dissolve between life and art, Xiansu's abandonment of self came together in a miraculous moment of theater. He approached the audience from upstage, on stage right, and stopped midway. He lifted his hand to shoulder level, holding his writing brush dipped in ink. His beloved is standing across from him, mid-stage, stage left. The balance, poise, and silence of this gesture signified the artist's choice between material love and the immaterial dream of his poetry.

I, of course, dissolved into tears during the intermission. Sebastienne Mundheim had to deal with me, I am sorry to say.³ I am not sure if she was totally clear about what had transpired with me. Those of us who attended this program listened to the Mandarin text recount stories penned by a 16th-century Ming Dynasty artist as re-visioned by a contemporary theater director who was working far from traditional Kun Opera staging practices.

We all viewed *Dream on Dreams* through various degrees of difficulty; we struggled over surtitles in German and French. We confronted what we did not know in languages that were beyond our reach.

Even so, I still fell in love with Xianzu's dream world as it affirmed the ever evolving possibilities of performance in any language.

Here then, after too many words but with great respect and gratitude for both of these cultural warriors, are Danny Yung and Suzanne Carbonneau.

³ Sebastienne Mundheim is a Philadelphia-based writer, director, designer, performer, educator, and filmmaker.

The Interview

Suzanne Carbonneau: I first heard Danny Yung give a presentation in Tokyo in 2003, and remember having a conversation with Bill Bissell afterwards in which we said we need Danny's vision in the United States. It was a very dim time for us in the United States, having watched our country's response to September 11, which was to become aggressive against the world. Many of us had a feeling that our voices didn't matter—that our [U.S.] government was going to do what it wanted to do despite anything we felt. And so I found Danny's uplift remarkably sustaining at that moment. His notion that cultural policy is not something that comes from the top down, but is something artists should be creating from the ground up was particularly relevant. He was seeing artists as agents for change.



Danny Yung Experimental Theatre—Flee by Night
Director/Text/Stage Designer: Danny Yung
Studio Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, 2010
Photo by Yvonne Chan

Flee by Night is one of the two remaining acts in the work *Legend of the Sword* by Li Kai-hsian, a master of Kunqu theater during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). *Flee by Night* has been reinterpreted and reinvented over hundreds of years, making it a perfect base for the exploration of relations between artists and the general public/audience. The lead character in this version, co-commissioned by the Hong Kong Arts Festival and Zuni Icosahedron, is a stagehand who has lived through 600 years of Chinese theater, witnessing everything that happened through the centuries.

We thought that today we'd start by having a discussion between the two of us, which we will then open up. Last night, watching the lecture demonstration about *Flee by Night*,⁴ I thought that even though we were looking at centuries' old material reconceived for the present, how remarkably resonant it felt. The story is about somebody who is pitting himself against a system that has failed him, and how he makes his way through that. I see artists doing this every day. So, I wanted to start with Danny going back and looking at his

⁴ *Danny Yung Experimental Theatre—Flee by Night* is a work by Danny Yung for his ensemble, Zuni Icosahedron. The initial version premiered in 2004; the second in 2010 which was co-commissioned by the Hong Kong Arts Festival and Zuni Icosahedron.

own journey towards the creation of the collective, Zuni Icosahedron,⁵ and why he opted for this idea of a collective creativity. Perhaps he could touch on what it means for artists to come together in that way.

Danny Yung:

First of all, I really want to thank the host for this opportunity to get together with you all. One of the reasons I'm here is to meet fellow artists. Audiences are audiences. But fellow artists are people who've been sharing the creative path. I treasure that. I have to confess that I don't know much about what's going on artistically in this region. That's one reason this exchange is so important for me—to learn more about what's going on in America, and what's going on in Philadelphia.

I started out as an architect. I got pretty fed up dealing with clients so I decided that if I saved enough money, I didn't want to do anything, just explore. I was in Hong Kong in the late 1970s. I was doing pretty much nothing. Actually, not quite nothing; I was observing people and documenting what I observed through comics. Doing comics is economically feasible because all you need is a pen and some paper. After a while, people asked me whether I could show the comics.

The first institution that approached me was the Hong Kong Art Centre. I had my first exhibition of comics there in 1979. That was a time when the Art Centre was just starting up. They kept asking me if

I wanted to do something more than just comics. I said sure, for opening night I would do something experimental. So I invited all my friends and gave them rules and regulations to follow. It became a happening. There were many people walking around speaking their own lines, and listening to other people's lines. They would walk in certain ways. These were the rules and regulations I had set up with them. That particular piece was called *The Broken Record*, and was my first performing arts work. It's called *The Broken Record* because I used a "broken record" recording that kept repeating.



Zuni Early Days
Toga International Arts Festival, Guyana, Japan, 1989
Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

Danny Yung: center, bottom row, with sunglasses;
Mathias Woo: second person to Danny's left.



Journey to the East Series 97
Artistic Director: Danny Yung
Directors: Edward Lam, Stanley Kwan, Hugh Lee, Li Liu Yi, Edward Yang, Danny Yung
Shouson Theatre, Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1997
Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

⁵ Zuni Icosahedron, founded in 1982, is a Hong Kong-based international experimental theatre company. Zuni has produced more than 160 original productions of alternative theatre and multimedia performances, and has been active in video, sound experimentation and installation arts, as well as in the areas of arts education, arts criticism, cultural policy research, and international cultural exchange. Over the years, Zuni has been invited to more than 30 cities in Europe, Asia, and North America for cultural exchange and performances (from [Zuni's Facebook page](#)). Zuni Icosahedron is supported financially by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Following that presentation, a group of young people came to me and said we should do more than just an event. I agreed and then I did a series of works in 1980 and 1981 called *Journey to the East* using Marco Polo and Antonioni⁶ as two characters to talk about how the West looks at the East and how we, from the East, look at how the West looks at the East. That series of work triggered more young people to approach me with the idea of continuing along these same lines. That was the beginning of the group Zuni Icosahedron. That was in 1982. It was sort of a self-evolved group—a network of young artists, young *people* actually. I didn't want to label it with the word "artists" because when we use the word "artist," it can be taken to mean a profession. We saw the practice of art as a commitment rather than a profession.

That particular group of young people (who are now of course in their 40s and 50s!) was so devoted. They chipped in money that their parents gave them or money they got from part-time work to rent a space and build an ensemble. Their main objective was just to explore and experiment, to do things they had not done before. One of the key notions we discussed during that period of time was "collective creativity," whether it is possible or not to create collectively.



One Hundred Years of Solitude v9.0

Artistic Director: Danny Yung

Director/Multi-media Stage Installation: Mathias Woo

Music Directors: Yu Yat-yiu, Chau Chin-tung

Guest performers: Sichuan Opera Institute Youth

Sichuan Opera Group, Zhou Long (Beijing), Makoto

Matsushima (Tokyo)

Digital images: Mono (London), John Wong, Pong Lam

Hong Kong Cultural Centre, 2002

Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

Our first work as a collective was called *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.⁷ In that particular work we didn't really follow Marquez's text. Rather, we discussed the spirit in his story. That piece became a staple in the repertoire of Zuni. Basically what happens is that a performer will appear from stage left. And then depart from stage right and run behind and show up

⁶ Michelangelo Antonioni was an Italian film director who made a controversial documentary on China, *Chung Kuo, Cina*, in 1972.

⁷ Inspired by the novel of the same name by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

again. You see a constant flow of performers. They will be changing their pace and changing their costumes. But the most important thing is that when you are on stage, someone is in front of you and many people are behind you, so a consciousness about leaders and followers becomes very important. The people in front of you set the pace and influence how you move; those behind you are following your pace. The people in front sometimes block your view and you become very aware that you may be blocking the view of people behind you. Within this route of movement—back and forth, back and forth, about a hundred times around this whole stage—we included all kinds of movement related to rituals like marriage, funerals, and birth. We also included references to various kinds of rituals related to social movements such as revolutions, demonstrations, and other public or communal activities. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been part of Zuni's core repertoire for the last 30 years.

What really triggered Zuni's development as an *organization* was an event in 1983. We did an experimental work and encountered censorship. This was in British-ruled Hong Kong. We were informed that the work led to a government decision to review all scripts (of any and all artists) prior to their performance. Government representatives came to me and asked me for the script and I told them that we create collectively, through a structure. You are welcome to look at the structure, but how are you going to censor a structure? That particular incident triggered a lot of discussion among the members of Zuni. It was a politicizing process that made the members become very much aware that experimentation does not mean that you are indulging in certain kinds of self-discovery, but rather, finding out where the boundaries are. They found the boundaries: they found the legal boundaries, and later on, the social and many other boundaries as well.

This led them to ponder the idea of why they wanted to do experimentation. What is the importance of exploration? And what is the relationship between each individual artist's experimentation, and the institutions around him or her, including the legal institutions, the social institutions, the political institutions? The members of Zuni organized about 20 other theater groups in Hong Kong to sit together with government representatives to discuss this censorship initiative. We sat and negotiated for two whole years and finally the government gave up. They just said forget it. They weren't going to continue this effort because each group pledged that it would send in 500 scripts a year for them to review. They would need many more staff members than they had to look at all the scripts. So, instead of setting up censorship laws, they decided to do this administratively. They gave the power to the venue managers, who would be responsible. Which means it moved to an at-arms'-length style of oversight, which is a healthier way of handling things. This is just one incident. From that point onward, there were many such incidents.

In 1992 Chris Patten came to Hong Kong as the last governor from the U.K.⁸ Because I'd been criticizing cultural policy ever since the censorship issue occurred, he came to me and asked if I would help establish the [Hong Kong Arts Development Council](#). I devoted two years of my time to that. I felt that if this is infrastructure-building, we should do it. Also, I

⁸ Patten wrote about the 1997 turnover of Hong Kong from Britain to China in his book, *East and West: The Last Governor of Hong Kong on Power, Freedom and the Future*, published by Pan MacMillan in 1998.

had a very clear idea that freedom of expression is important, and that establishing such a legal entity would create a platform for negotiation. It was finally formed in 1995.

After much negotiation during those two years we established that around 50 percent of the Council members would be nominated from the arts community. This was significant because the government appointed all or the majority of members to every other "council." Yet, the government still held the final right to approve appointments. But, with the whole process of nomination and election, it would ultimately be very difficult for the government to block an appointment.

That started a completely different game because artists are not really politicians. Artists are basically artists. I used to imagine that artists can do anything they want; learn anything they want; try anything they want. It became important for artists to be more politically astute than they had been.

People were learning about the responsibility of linking with each other, networking with each other, learning from each other and then collectively dealing with the larger environment for the arts. The Hong Kong Arts Development Council continues to struggle because the election and nomination processes still have to be refined. At least there's a mechanism through which we can comment and criticize. Otherwise, there'd be no way to talk to the government.

During those two years I did little theater work, but I felt that focusing on the Hong Kong Arts Development Council was like writing a script. It's like creating a theater work. Through watching the behavior of all the government people and other nominated people, I learned so much. I watched how the rules and regulations were set up. And as artists we questioned every single rule and regulation. We always asked why, why is this rule or regulation set up this way? And if it's not set up right, why can we not change it?

I asked similar questions about the issue of censorship. Censorship will never disappear from this world. But censorship will change; as societies become more liberal, the censorship changes. We need to pay attention to this.

I think that was an important learning process for me. I was like all the young people back in the 1980s who were eager to experiment because we had so much fun doing whatever we could. We had one rule: Do not kill each other. Other than that, we could do anything on stage. The space was full of possibilities. And it was filled with tension and all kinds of things that can reflect life offstage.

Zuni was a self-financed membership organization, so initially we never worried about money. But, when we began to do large-scale productions, we really needed financial support. Around that time we also started to negotiate with the government. Once we had a following, the government was more receptive. The government in fact came to me and said, now we will finance your organization. So don't criticize us anymore because we'll give you money. I responded that it is not you who gives us the money; it is the taxpayers who give you the money to be able to give us the money, and so we will of course continue to

comment on whatever it is that we want to comment on. Some of the work was quite direct in criticizing the government system. Of course, when you are too direct it is like writing an editorial or giving an editorial speech. It's not very creative. Politicians make their speeches in direct ways and they love to stay in the middle of the stage. They refuse to get off. So when we made a speech as part of a performance we'd be sitting on the side or sometimes in the audience, commenting on what's happening on the stage. We offered our critiques creatively.



East Wing West Wing 9: Sap Dai Kau Goon
Director/Scriptwriter/Stage Designer: Mathias Woo
Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, 2010
Photo by Keith Sin

One of the things that we did in the last ten years that pokes fun at politicians was a series developed by Mathias [Woo]. He was very much inspired by *The West Wing*, the American television series. Through *East Wing West Wing*,⁹ he wanted to talk about the Hong Kong government's operations. We just made the ninth installment of *East Wing West Wing* in September 2010. Several of these storylines were aimed directly at our chief executive. And the interesting thing is that our chief executive had to come to see the performances; if he didn't show up it would mean that he wasn't very in tune with the arts, especially considering the fact that the mega-scale arts and cultural hub project called the West Kowloon Cultural District has been under development.¹⁰ This meant he was in the audience watching the mockery of himself on stage. And everyone in the audience was watching him watching the mockery of himself on stage. We're talking about theater as a forum, theater as a political arena.

⁹ Mathias Woo is co-artistic director and executive director of Zuni Icosahedron. *East Wing West Wing* is his ongoing theater series that parodies Hong Kong politics. Select the link to "Social Theatre Series" under "Search Performance" on the [Zuni website](#) for video clips of *East Wing West Wing*.

¹⁰ The government of Hong Kong has invested in the West Kowloon Cultural District "to meet the long-term infrastructure needs of the arts and cultural sector." See the [District Authority's website](#).

Recently we've been very concerned that theater be an important educational platform for the youngsters. With *East Wing West Wing*, every time we have a performance that touches on government issues, we display a government organizational chart in the background so every single audience member will know how the government is organized. It's been no surprise that most of them don't know how the government is organized. Theater can become an advocacy platform for the public as they learn more about how they are related to the systems around them.

Back in 1997, because Hong Kong was being returned to China that year, I became concerned with the idea of intercultural exchange. It's so important for us to build networks. To reach out. And I truly believe that without exchange there is no development. If there's no dialogue, there's no development. We have to create institutions to encourage dialogue. So in 1997 I built a number of network institutions in Asia that triggered the creation of even more institutions. Some of them are still in existence. Some of them have become defunct.

One of the institutions that has survived many years is the City-to-City Cultural Exchange Conference in which I invite people from four cities in greater China to sit together every year to discuss cultural issues. We invite practitioners, critics, scholars, patrons, and administrators from the arts and cultural sectors from Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei and Shenzhen. One or two people from each cultural sector of each city attend, for a total of 10 people from each place. In the beginning we had no agenda. Eventually, we developed an agenda. And we compared notes. It was a very strategic gathering because each of the four cities is governed in a different political mode. Shenzhen is right next to Hong Kong, but it is overseen by the central government as a special administrative region, with a focus on economic growth. Citizens from other parts of China must obtain permission to go to Shenzhen. Hong Kong, conversely, has a high degree of autonomy from the central authorities. Shanghai is one of the fastest-growing cities. And Taipei, of course, is in Taiwan, overseen by a completely different government. So to have them all sitting together is quite remarkable. We are entering the 14th year of this dialogue right now. In fact, it is going on in Shanghai next week. That particular institution has inspired other cities to start re-examining their own cultural institutions. And because of that particular platform, Shenzhen and Shanghai have formed their own arts foundations, which is quite amazing. Even though the conditions are not ideal, they nonetheless have established institutions called the Arts Foundation of Shanghai and the Arts Foundation of Shenzhen.

Taipei is much more mature and much more parallel to Hong Kong. We both have a clear system of review and selection. And we all have very clear lobbying efforts to deal with the government to make sure there is a sufficient budget for the arts.

We bring this selection of people together so that the cultural sectors can learn how to talk to each other. Critics should talk to the artists. Artists should talk to artists in different disciplines. This is how critiques and creativity develop. This is how new energy evolves. I wish this would happen beyond urban centers as well.

In addition to this kind of exchange, I think cultural exchange, cross-cultural exchange, is important to explore. We all know that if we want to go to different countries to perform, funding is one thing, getting a visa is another. But we should also consider what kind of exchange we could do. The contents and the caliber are additional things to consider. All are of mutual concern to artists.

Back in the 1980s we were more eager to perform in our neighboring region. But then we thought that perhaps workshops were more important than performances. Later, we felt that maybe even workshops aren't as important as forums because we wanted to find out what is going on with arts communities in different countries. I founded a network called Asia Arts Net composed of members from 14 different Asian cities. I invited the artistic directors of contemporary arts institutions that had been in existence for at least five years to come together and talk about their respective five-year plans. By talking about each other's future plans we could see if there was any overlap that might lead to possibilities for collaboration. We also reviewed how we could develop cultural exchange policies as individual organizations or as a network.

In the year 2002 or 2003 the Ford Foundation approached me. They told me they had an idea to create the World Cultural Forum. They invited me to their "think tank" meeting. We had a brainstorming session in New York. I wasn't really impressed because it seemed so remote to talk about "world this" and "world that," like a politicians' game. What did it have to do with us? There were 60 people present, from all over the world, yet I was the only Asian. I thought I should share with them the way we did networking, how we share with each other, in Asia. I talked with them about the importance of sustainability, of empowerment. Finally, the World Cultural Forum focus sort of evolved from my suggestions. I put down eight different agenda items about how to empower artists. Artists need to know more. We're isolated. We have to know how we relate to the media, how we relate to the educational system. We have to comment on economic development and the political system. But we don't have models from the cultural and creative sector about how to comment on those systems.

Finally, the first World Cultural Forum was held in Brazil. It was huge, with about 5,000 people taking part. I hate big events. It's hard to get things done. It actually turned into a rally against the United States. All this anger and shouting throughout the event. So, when we brought up the agenda about ways in which can we empower ourselves, nobody heard our voice.

The second World Cultural Forum was held in Jordan. It didn't get much attention because, at that time, Jordan had a lot of bomb scares, so not many people attended. The next one will be held in India this coming April [2011]. I don't know how it will fare. I'm still pushing the agenda that I feel is so important: empowerment of the arts community. We must know more about what's going on around us so that we understand how our work is related to local social and cultural development.

Suzanne Carbonneau: In the U.S. we're an individualistic society; we tend to operate very individually. When attacks started on the arts about 20 years ago, I think the fact that artists tend not to organize hampered the artistic response. I wonder if you have any suggestions for ways that artists can come together—ways that allow them to continue being artists, but also to develop the kinds of institutions that serve them well. Institution-building in the U.S. doesn't come from the ground up the way you're describing it. It tends to be more top down.

Danny Yung: Let me start this way: I enjoy learning what I don't know. So when I look at a politician, I think, what don't I know about this person? Why is he behaving a certain way? As an artist, I can play him. I can play anyone. To politicians this is very threatening, because if you can play them, you can substitute for them in their role. This afternoon I will be talking about a work I created in 2009 called *Book of Ghosts*. I talk about artists being like ghosts. People are scared of ghosts because they can be anywhere. They can be totally invisible. They can be flexible. They can be scary, powerful, and mysterious. They can be so threatening to many people. Artists are not fixed in one role. We can cross boundaries. I think if we can keep up that spirit, people will pay us more respect, and they won't put us down. They won't say we are wasting our time indulging in our arts in our little cubbyholes, doing things that are not serving the community.

Suzanne Carbonneau: You had said to me earlier that you think it is important that artists have institutions.

Danny Yung: I think that institutions are inevitable. It's a part of social development. I think that networking whether as individuals or between institutions is important, too, because networking means that you talk to others, not just to yourself. How do you talk to others? How do you share certain views and concerns?



*Danny Yung Experimental Theatre—Book of Ghosts**

Artistic Director: Danny Yung

Collaborating Master Artists (Directors/Performers): Ke Jun (Kun Opera, Nanjing); Paravadi Mehudhon (Thai dance-drama, Bangkok); Sardono W. Kusumo (classical Javanese dance, Jakarta); Li Baochun (Beijing Opera, Taipei)

Collaborating Contemporary Artists (Directors/Performers): Park Hobin (Seoul); Manop Meejamrat (Bangkok); Huang Yulin (Taipei); David Yeung (Hong Kong)

Drama Theatre, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2009

Photo by Yu Yat Yin

A festival-in-festival concept realization, *Book of Ghosts* was a mini festival in the Hong Kong Arts Festival. Activities included a forum and workshop, as well as formal and informal exchanges between renowned masters, emerging artists, and scholars. It also featured theater performances by four masters, and by four contemporary artists whose performances responded to interactions with these traditional performing arts masters' works.

Apart from facilitating performances and creative exchange activities, *Book of Ghosts* is dedicated to generating discussions and critiques on contemporary Asia with a spirit of collective creativity. Topics under scrutiny included issues like cultural policies, cultural institutions and cultural organizations, as well as the preservation and development of intangible culture in these Asian cities.

*Co-produced and co-commissioned by the Hong Kong Arts Festival and Zuni Icosahedron

Along with networking is trust—commitment and trust. When I was working with the Kun Opera performers, the most important thing was that we first build trust between us. They trust me and I trust them. And then, based on that trust, we can explore. If we don't have trust within an artists' network, we might be played by the political system. When the Hong Kong Arts Development Council was formed, people's concerns shifted to how to cut the pie rather than how to enlarge the pie. The idea is to focus on the greater good, not the individual good.

Suzanne Carbonneau: You said censorship happens in a liberal society. You had obvious censorship going on in Hong Kong. But we think that's not an issue for us here. Yet...

Danny Yung: You mentioned Jesse Helms to me in a previous discussion. Perhaps what he did is something like institutional censorship. It's not written in the law. You go back to the constitution and ask, what is protecting freedom of speech and freedom of expression? Who will be protecting that?



The Trial
Director: Danny Yung
Studio Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, 1994
Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

Suzanne Carbonneau: Maybe it is a question of economic censorship. If you don't make work of a certain kind, you don't have an audience and you can't expect funding.

Danny Yung: Then we can talk about pluralism and targeted community support. You don't need 10 million people's support. You can have 10,000 people's support. You need to identify like-minded people... That's the beginning of a dialogue.

Suzanne Carbonneau: You and your colleagues at Zuni make work that is critical of the power structures that you depend on. How do you walk that tightrope?

Danny Yung: I created the work *The Trial* (1994) in a black box theater. I built a theater with mirrors on all four sides. The audience sat around looking at the mirrors. I invited politicians to sit in the middle and answer questions.

Suzanne Carbonneau: How did you get politicians to agree to do that?

Danny Yung: I just asked. Just kept asking. They are as human as anyone else. They also have curiosity. They will look at artists and consider how many votes they'll get from them. Probably just a handful. But they are also concerned about negative publicity. Try to think how they think and you will know how to handle it.

Suzanne Carbonneau: It seems to me that both in the way you're describing how you've built up structures that allow you to do your artwork *and* allow you to communicate with other artists, and in the work itself, you don't allow any assumptions whatsoever. Is that right?

Danny Yung: I don't know. When I asked the questions in *Flee by Night* I was thinking about the kinds of questions my collaborators would raise as much as about those I would raise... I was thinking about questions similar to those raised in Jerome Bel's autobiographical work that I saw a few days ago at the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival,¹¹ and how, at a certain point, we are talking about commonly shared concerns and issues. Raising questions is like preparing agendas for dialoguing.

When I was young, I was curious about everything. I would ask many many questions about why things are the way they are. As we get older, we become more cynical and we ask fewer questions. If we go back to when we were four or five or six we still have these fresh eyes. I think there's hope. I totally understand that when we are talking about survival, one has to deal with practicalities and routine. But if it is possible, I just want to have a short moment every morning to think and reflect on what I will be doing the rest of the day, and whether it will mean anything to me. Whether it will be truly a new day. This is how we are creative—by trying to continue to explore, to find out what we don't know.

At one point I began to wonder if the Kun Opera¹² performers, who are so devoted to this traditional art, have a space to ask why they perform this way and not that way. That's why I was asking the Kun performers to do their same work, but to forget about formulas and routines and singing structures. Do it in one minute, in three minutes, do anything. I wanted them to embody and re-create what is in the classics, in a new structure.



Danny Yung backstage at the Shanghai EXPO 2010, Japan Pavilion
Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

Danny Yung and Makoto Sato co-directed *The Tale of the Crested Ibis*, a 10-minute collaborative performance of Kun Opera and Noh theater performed by Kun Opera performers and child performers from Nanjing, China. It was shown 34 times a day for over 180 days during the entire run of the EXPO, and viewed by millions.

¹¹ French dancer and choreographer Jerome Bel has produced several works exploring individual artists' experiences, knowledge, and hopes. He himself features in some of these pieces. Yung attended a performance of *Cédric Andrieux*, in which Andrieux describes his modern dance career. [Bel's website](#).

¹² Kun Opera, also known as Kunqu, is a form of Chinese opera dating from the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th centuries). UNESCO recognized it as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001.

I said to the Kun Opera performers, let's do MTV. It was so much fun. I said, let's do a three-minute work. You can say so much in three minutes. What I haven't done yet is to do a 30-second commercial. That would be so much fun. You can say so much in 30 seconds. If you pay attention to how short commercials are structured and how they get concept and ideas out, you can see it as so inspiring. Why can't we do this in the theater? Why can't we do this in our laboratories? I think we can try. I've been talking to young Kun Opera performers about producing lots of MTV-type clips, and trying all different kinds of sound structures as well.

Suzanne Carbonneau: People here might say that making a 500-year-old tradition relevant to contemporary life seems very far removed from us. What frameworks are artists in this room who work in contemporary experimental traditions interrogating? The idea is that everyone somehow embodies a cultural heritage about which we can ask the same kinds of questions.



Danny Yung with child performer of *The Tale of the Crested Ibis* from Nanjing, backstage at the Shanghai EXPO 2010, Japan Pavilion. Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

Danny Yung:

I would ask the opera performers to go back to when they were 10 years old, when they first took a class. How were the vocal exercises being done? What were the basic movements? Let's talk about why it was that way. Different people relate to rules and regulations differently. When we communicate, we follow a certain grammar. Can we relax and make it fun and play with words, sounds and our mouths? For some, it is still very difficult. Others are more open to experimentation. Are we creating a new language? Are we challenging the language we are using? It's a tension we constantly encounter.

That's why sometimes when we do cross-cultural exchange and cross-disciplinary exchange, which artists here in the U.S. could do, it is so stimulating, because you are talking to other people with other languages. Then you will not be so bound by your own language. It does take a certain amount of guts to go into other people's arenas and to say

I want to talk to you—not about a collaboration as if I am using you to decorate my work or vice versa—but as equals. Let’s talk about why we want to do an artistic project together, and how the theme we want to address relates to our forms of creative expression.

Suzanne Carbonneau: Why do you still do performances? You’ve done so much around performance and you’ve said that actually doing the workshops and the forums are even more interesting in some ways, but you continue to do performance.

Danny Yung: The stage still has so much openness. If I am in the legislative council or in the boardroom or the courtroom, I cannot change the rules overnight. The stage is still filled with so many possibilities—anything can happen, immediately. There’s a certain amount of freedom there, and I still find that fascinating.

Suzanne Carbonneau: I’d love to get the artists in the room involved in the conversation.

Jun Qiao: I brought my professor to a Chinese restaurant here. He’s a well-known scholar. He said everyone loves Chinese food. He couldn’t believe me when I said that the food wasn’t real Chinese food and was adjusted to local tastes. From your perspective, should they serve real Chinese food or the food that the locals like?

Danny Yung: In the end we are all human. Chinese is just another label. This was a very hot discussion in 1997 (when Hong Kong reverted back to Chinese rule from British rule)—whether you are Chinese or Chinese Hong Kongese or Hong Kong Chinese or... Labels are for lazy people. Good food is good food. Good food with a Chinese origin. Good food with Chinese and French fusion, even better. Why not?

People used to say to me, “You are doing structuralist work.” I said, “What is structuralist work?” “You are doing postmodern work.” “Ah...postmodern.” And later on they would say, “You are doing de-construction,” or whatever. For critics and scholars, it’s easier to use those terms as clear references. People ask, are you really a political artist or an artist concerned with politics, or sort of an activist artist or not at all an artist because you seem to be more like an activist? They cannot place me. When you are a ghost, you cannot be placed.

When Zuni was formed I wasn’t even in Hong Kong. I was in San Francisco. Members of the collective wanted to have a name with a double-edged meaning (also not easily labeled) so they started from the back of the dictionary—Z—and found “Zuni.” Zuni is both a Native American tribe and also a color between blue and green. They thought this is great. And they looked for another word. They found “icosahedron” which is a 20-facet geological form as well as some sort of fast-growing virus. Nobody knows if it is a good or bad virus. It just grows rapidly.

Jun Qiao: What’s the point of asking the traditional artists to change the original way they perform if people buy tickets to see them do what they’ve been trained to do?

Danny Yung: You touch on a point that is very much discussed in China these days, and perhaps in America, too. It’s called the market. Are you working for the market or for yourself? Are you working for a minority market or the majority market? You cannot please 10 billion people in the world. Are

you pleasing one billion or one million or 10,000 or one person? It depends whom you want to address: I guess you'd want to address those about whom you are concerned. In this case we are very concerned about our fellow artists. You might say then that our work is addressing fellow artists. But survival and the market are both issues we all have to face. Can you survive based on your work? Why do we do this? We choose to be artists because we choose to be artists. Not because of the market. But we also want to be heard. The first people that should be heard are ourselves. We need to be clear about what we want to say to ourselves.



Danny Yung with Nanjing Kun Opera performer Zhao Yutao of *The Tale of the Crested Ibis*, backstage at the Shanghai EXPO 2010, Japan Pavilion. Photo courtesy of Zuni Icosahedron

In China all artists are talking about the market, because there's no third sector, there's only the government and the corporate sector. You need to do propaganda for the government or you serve the market. The strategy is to tell people that the commercial sector has a very pluralistic market so you can have small, big, women's, men's markets, etc. You can choose one aspect or one market and focus on that. One reason I got interested in Kun Opera is because Kun started out as part of the intellectuals' market and I saw that market as a potential driver of social advancement. Should we be dealing with this sector of society first? What is the responsibility of an intellectual for the overhaul of social and cultural issues? Should the arts community talk to the intellectual community first? Or, should the arts community just forget about the intellectuals and instead talk to the kids, to the next generation, as they are much more open-minded than the intellectuals? Or talk to the people who are retired? They often become more open than those still in the arena of trying to struggle. I don't know. I think it's a matter of understanding our community and our markets and our mutual concerns.

Ellen Gerdes: I'm wondering if you could talk about how the cultural politics of each of the four locations you mentioned—Shanghai, Taipei, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong—affect the training which in turn impacts not only the reception of experimental or improvisational work, but also the actual ability of each artist to enter into that kind of performance.

Danny Yung: From my observation I think that in the post-1989 period many of the artists in Taiwan got directly involved in party politics. This is very very interesting because they were involved in television programs, for example, and they helped the political parties with the creation of skits on the street. They also did puppetry and masks for the politicians. And they developed all kinds of creative concepts for the political parties. Not in Hong Kong. I think the artists are more cynical. They just want to be more detached. They don't want to be involved with political parties. And, of course, in Shenzhen and Shanghai there are no such things as political parties so you either work for the government or you go underground. There are underground activities going on everywhere. You can't see them, but they are there, and they try to find cracks in which to survive.

Many of the underground, experimental activities were linked in some ways with foreign arts institutions. I recall that when a European theater group was having an exchange with Beijing—I think it was in 2006—they really wanted to find out where the underground activities were happening. But when it is a formal exchange there's no way for you to find out because everything is so structured. So they detoured to Shanghai and asked me to be a go-between with people there to identify so-called underground groups. They weren't necessarily trying to find dissidents. But when outsiders support them, they become dissidents. And if they become dissidents, they will have to leave. And once they've left they no longer have an attachment to what's happening in China. So they become very isolated. Without the attachment to community in China they aren't the artists that the Europeans want to connect with. That's sort of the irony of so-called foreign intervention.

So I suggested to them that perhaps, instead of finding underground artists, what they should do is support curators. Let local people know about the curatorial system in the West so they can compare and develop their own curatorial system.

Nowadays China is going through a process of cultural institution reform. It was just a week ago that the *People's Daily* published an editorial saying that cultural institutions must go through reform. But that has a lot to do with government funding. The government is very rich and ready to pump in money. But they are concerned about how to pump in money. All arts institutions in China are state-run. And so it became a burden to the government because the government wanted the arts to become commercial. But there was a lot of argument. The arts will become mediocre, market-driven. Everyone will be doing popular kinds of art. What about high art? Should it still exist? What about classical arts? What about intangible cultural heritage? There's a lot of discussion right now about institutional reform. I think it's a very healthy thing.

In 2008 there was an important development in China's cultural sector. I was informed by people from Beijing that [President] Hu Jintao had just announced in the Central Politburo (of the Communist Party of China) that they want to create 400,000 arts centers in China. They were commissioning a university to do a prototype of what a cultural center should be. Every 40,000 people should have a center. The government officials were reacting to several developments: a lack of cultural identity because of rapid economic growth; a strengthening of religion (lessening, in the government's eyes, people's reliance on themselves); and the prevalence of drugs in the countryside. The government's strategy to combat all this is to build cultural centers. They pumped in lots of money, but were very worried about management. Who will manage these cultural centers? They came to ask me if they should build a school to nurture and supply future managers for these centers. This is out of my purview. Also, the more I knew, the more I understood that the discussion was just on this national level. When it is handed down to the provinces and the countryside it will be another story. After about a year of these discussions I finally told them to go ahead and do what they want: "I've given you all the advice I can." China is concerned about arts policy because they know that it is important for cultural development, which may affect political stability. So they are controlling it very carefully. They no longer have Maoism and they need something to substitute for that. Should it be intangible cultural heritage or some new cultural identity? If they don't take control of this, everything will go to the market and the next generation will be the Nike generation, or the McDonald's generation.

Whit MacLaughlin: You would be hard-pressed to locate a dissident in the U.S. It has been co-opted. There is no strong impulse toward collective action at all other than Facebook. I'm being really cynical here. Other than a kind of market-driven acceptance of a sort of bland liberalism that has no function in culture other than sort of complimenting itself in a cultural arena. There's no alternative to the soft liberalism in the American artistic scene because most American artists do not converse in their lives with someone who doesn't have the same opinion that they do about the political situation in the United States. My concern here is how in the U.S. might we get this conversation going about almost taboo subjects—religion, belief. What we feel now is an extremely polarized political situation which the arts seem almost incapable of addressing because we are so bored with our own political paradigm. We aren't finding anything new to say about it that won't be dismissed as boring or somehow inappropriate or politically incorrect. In the United States, how can we have dissidents?

Lois Welk: I disagree. There are artists who are speaking. It is definitely out there. It might not be in the mainstream. I also hold up artists in the music industry. It is not gone. We have dissident artists.

Whit MacLaughlin: Where do our artistic practices and explorations begin to get into the structures, not just comment on them?

Danny Yung: The question becomes how to institutionalize what you believe in. Because individual expression is always just individual expression. But when it becomes a collective expression, it is something else. I was thinking that this kind of expression and dialogue is very important among yourselves. How do you sustain it and institutionalize it so it will have some impact? It is so important to cross boundaries because if you don't make an effort, they won't make an effort. Should you talk to Jesse Helms? He's dead, but if he were still alive, would there be an organized effort to talk to him? I guess that would make a difference. But, if we are becoming very cynical, we would say it would make no difference and we would just sit back. Then I would suggest that if there were more exchange with other cultures that might be helpful in expanding sensitivity and re-examining some things of mutual concern.

Bill Bissell: Would you speak about Ai Weiwei and the curatorial network in the West?

Danny Yung: Ai Weiwei is still in China, but with a very clear label by the government that he is "that" kind of artist. The government allows him to stay but will be watching him. He's probably stuck. But it is his choice. Some artists state clearly that they are just going to fight. And he got knocked out. I don't know if any of you know Ai Weiwei. He's a visual artist from Beijing. He was involved in the earthquake incident in Sichuan.¹³ The Sichuan government first said that only 30 or 40 kids died in the collapse of a school. He helped the group that was doing the investigation and found out that there were 3,000 or 4,000 kids killed in the school because of poor construction. He visited family by family to document this. The government sued the lawyer coordinating the investigation. Ai Weiwei went to be on the witness stand, in support of the lawyer. On the morning he was supposed to appear in court, policemen came to his hotel room and knocked him down. He had severe injuries including blood clots in his brain and went immediately back to Beijing and then on to Germany to get medical attention. He wrote a strong statement that was very important to the arts community in China. Because he made a statement, he's watched carefully by the government. But, the memory span isn't long. Perhaps in a few years he will appear to be someone else.

Talking about curatorship... I was in Beijing about a month ago. I talked to some artists in their 40s. They said they don't really believe in the market because there are four people who dominate the world art market. Those four people bought the work of four different Chinese artists as a competition. Each one pumped a couple of million U.S. dollars into this competition. So they bought all the work. They boosted up the auction market and will release the pieces slowly. The visual artists who talked to me were very cynical about this. They said this was manipulated by the world art market. "They play with Chinese artists."

Many curators are biased and become "players" as well. There's a lot of discussion about this as a moral issue. The chaotic nature of the art market will continue for a few more years

¹³ According to the *New York Times*, the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province killed 70,000 people, including up to 10,000 school students, though the Chinese government didn't release official numbers. See [Ai's website](#) for some images of his work.

Suzanne Carbonneau: One of the things that strikes me as I listen to you and watch clips of your work is your insistence that artists have a place at the “political dialogue” table. Even in work that doesn’t on the surface seem political, you are addressing the world.

I think the discussion Danny began here about empowerment and sustainability—keeping creative work going and getting it seen—along with how to have a place at the table, is a really important dialogue to have in all our cities.

Danny Yung: I personally feel that institutions are very important. If institutions are more progressive and open and creative, they can really work hand-in-hand with artists to create open platforms, and to generate new creative energies. Because, after all, we still believe in institutions. We are not anarchists. Things should be structured in such a way that we can have a more solid base to further arts development as a whole.

*This interview transcribed and edited December 2010 – March 2011 by Toni Shapiro-Phim.
All questions and comments from audience members are used by permission.*

Biography of Danny Yung

Recipient of the Merit Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, Danny Yung was born in Shanghai, China, in 1943. At the age of five, he moved with his family to Hong Kong. After finishing secondary school, he went to the United States, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of California at Berkeley. He continued his studies at Columbia University, earning a master's degree in urban design. Returning to Hong Kong in the late 1970s, he began his life long devotion to all aspects of the arts, including experimental film, cartoons, conceptual art, installation, video, and performing arts. He is one of the founding members of the avant-garde arts collective Zuni Icosahedron (started in 1982), and has been its artistic director since 1985.

Creative Endeavors

Over the past 30 years, Yung has been involved in over 100 theater productions as director, scriptwriter, producer, and stage designer. His work has been seen in cities the world over, including Tokyo, Yokohama, Toga, Singapore, Taipei, Shanghai, Nanjing, Shenzhen, Brussels, Berlin, Munich, London, Lisbon, Rotterdam, and New York. At the 2010 Shanghai EXPO, in cooperation with the renowned Japanese director Makoto Sato, he presented *The Tale of the Crested Ibis*, which was shown over 6,000 times and had a total audience of several million from across the globe. As a cultural exchange project, it combined, for the first time, the elements of Noh and Kun Opera, as well as advanced technology.

Yung is among the first cohort of Hong Kong's experimental film and video makers. His installation work was selected in 1999 for *INSIDE/OUT: New Chinese Art* by the Asia Society in New York to be exhibited in museums across the United States, together with works by 55 other Chinese artists. His solo exhibition *Tree • Man* was held at the Hong Kong Cattle Depot Artist Village in November 2003. His *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*, featuring his conceptual cartoons, has been exhibited in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, and Singapore. In 2008, his commissioned sculpture, *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*, was erected at Novel Hall in Taipei.

Yung is currently an Honorary Member of the Music Theater Committee of the International Theatre Institute under UNESCO.

Cultural Exchange

Since 1997, Yung has initiated several important cultural and arts networks. Among them are the Asia Arts Net, Asia Performing Arts Network, the Hong Kong-Taipei-Shenzhen-Shanghai City-to-City Cultural Exchange Conference, and the World Cultural Forum. Yung is a former Chairperson of the International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD), and hosted the Shanghai biennial international conference in 2005. He is also an executive committee member and the Hong Kong regional chairperson of the Conference of Asian Foundations and Organizations, which promotes the third sector in 11 cities in Asia.

In 1997 Yung organized the Munich-Hong Kong Joint Cultural Conference, and in 2000, the Festival of Vision—an 11-week program of cross-cultural festivals and conferences held in Berlin and Hong Kong. The festivals involved 1,000 artists and cultural practitioners from 35 cities in Asia and Europe. In 2001, with the support of the Ford Foundation of New York, he directed the formation of the World Cultural Forum Alliance which meets every three years to plan a global cultural agenda.

Yung is currently an International Consultant of the UN Consultant System (UNCS) of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Chairperson of the Asia Pacific Alliance of the World Cultural Forum, Chairperson of the Hong Kong-Taipei-Shenzhen-Shanghai City-to-City Cultural Exchange Conference and the Vice President of the Asia Pacific Performing Arts Network.

Policy, Research, Planning, and Education

Maintaining a close watch on arts and cultural developments in Hong Kong as well as in the Asia Pacific region more broadly, Yung started a "Hong Kong Cultural Policy Study Group" in 1987 at Zuni Icosahedron, organizing a series of art and cultural policy discussions. The Group generated important independent research and in-depth reviews, delivered as a set of significant reports entitled, "In Search of Culture Policy." He is the Chair of the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture (HKICC), an NGO founded in 1996, which advocates for the inclusion of a cultural perspective on development issues through cultural exchanges, creative education and research programs, and arts projects in collaboration with organizations globally.

In 1993, Yung was appointed by the government as a founding member of the Hong Kong Arts and Development Council (HKADC), which was legally registered in 1995. Following Yung's proposal, HKADC established the practice of including 50 percent elected board members from the arts field. Yung chaired the Arts Education branch and was reappointed as a member of HKADC in 2000.

A former part-time member of the Central Policy Unit, a Hong Kong Government think tank, he currently sits on the board of various governmental cultural and creative policy-making and consultative entities, including the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority and the Hong Kong Design Centre.

He's also paying close attention to developments in the field of education, serving on the Board of the HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity, the Advisory Board of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Design, the Advisory Board of the Hong Kong Lingnan University, Department of Cultural Studies, as well as on the Advisory Board of the University of Hong Kong, Centre for Civil Society and Governance.

Zuni Icosahedron's 30th Anniversary

As a prelude to its 30th anniversary (in 2012), Zuni Icosahedron is presenting *One Hundred Years of Solitude 10.0—Cultural Revolution*, in the Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, in September, 2011. In this latest rendering of "One Hundred Years of Solitude"—Zuni premiered its first version a decade ago—Yung uses culture and revolution as starting points from which to examine recent large and small revolutions in North Africa, the Middle East, China, and Singapore. Collaborating with avant-garde artists from Singapore and Hong Kong and a Kun-Beijing Opera performer from Suzhou, Yung examines the interrelationships of individuals, the public as a whole, and government authorities.

International Awards and Honors

In 2008 Danny Yung was honored with the Music Theatre NOW Award by the UNESCO International Theatre Institute. In 2009, the German government bestowed the Merit Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany upon him for his achievements in and contributions to cultural exchanges between Germany and Hong Kong, China.

榮念曾

1943年生於上海，五歲時隨家人移居香港。17歲赴美，先後畢業於美國加州大學柏克萊分校建築系及紐約哥倫比亞大學研究所，分別獲建築學士及城市設計碩士。70年代後期開始在香港參加各類型藝術創作，包括電影、漫畫、裝置、錄像、舞台與概念藝術，並於1982年共同成立藝術團體「進念二十面體」及自1985年開始出任藝術總監。

推動實驗藝術

榮念曾是新類型藝術的倡導者，香港及鄰近地區最有影響力的藝術家之一。過去三十年，他曾在超過一百齣舞台製作中擔任導演、編劇和舞台設計。他編導的作品有：《中國旅程》系列、《二三事》系列、《百年孤寂》系列、《中國文化深層結構》系列及《實驗傳統》系列等，並在世界各地演出，包括東京、橫濱、新加坡、台北、上海、南京、深圳、布魯塞爾、柏林、慕尼黑、倫敦、里斯本、鹿特丹及紐約。2008年他藉由京劇四大名旦之一程硯秋西遊經歷的啟發，創作出以思考傳統藝術的創新及跨時代文化的《荒山淚》，此作品在同年榮獲國際戲劇學院(International Theatre Institute)頒發Music Theatre NOW的殊榮。2010年在上海世博會展期間，他跟「日本舞台劇第一人」佐藤信導演，聯合執導以融合中國崑劇及日本能劇的舞台作品《朱鶴的故事》，在日本館演出超過六千場次，有近三百萬名觀眾入場欣賞。

榮念曾的實驗電影作品和錄影藝術作品，在八零年代被邀在柏林、紐約、倫敦、鹿特丹、東京、香港多個電影節展出。1999年榮氏的裝置藝術作品被紐約亞洲協會選出，參與全球五十六名華人藝術家在全美博物館巡迴展覽的Inside/Out: New Chinese Art。2003年，他於香港1a藝術空間舉行了〈樹·人〉個人展覽。其概念漫畫〈天天向上〉亦曾於香港、上海、北京、新加坡及巴黎展出。2008年，他獲委託創作大型漫畫人像雕塑〈天天向上〉，矗立於台北「新舞台巷」上，作為台北新舞台的新地標。

策動文化交流

自1997年起，榮氏發起了多項重要文化藝術網路，包括亞洲藝術網路、亞太表現藝術網路、上海—香港—深圳—台北城市文化交流會議及世界文化論壇聯盟。此外，他是國際文化多樣性網路前任聯合主席，亞洲基金會及組織會董事，亦是香港地區組織的主席，大力推動亞洲地區的第三部門發展。

1997年他與歌德學院聯合策劃了於慕尼黑舉行的香港藝術節，舉辦了為期一個月的藝術活動。2000年策動了分別於柏林及香港舉行、為期11周的香港柏林當代文化節，邀請了近千位來自三十五個不同亞歐城市的藝術家及文化工作者參與。2001年，榮氏在紐約福特基金會資助下組成每三年一次的世界文化論壇(World Culture Forum)董事會，並身為七名董事之一，策劃了2003年12月所舉行第一屆全球五千文化界精英聚會的世界文化論壇。

榮氏現為聯合國教科文化組織顧問團國際顧問、世界文化論壇亞太區聯盟董事局主席、香港—台北—深圳—上海城市文化交流會議主席、亞洲藝術網路主席及亞太表演藝術網路副主席。

德國總理於2009年將象徵對德國有特殊貢獻的聯邦十字綵帶勳章頒贈予榮氏，以表揚其推動香港—德國兩地交流尤其是文化藝術方面的成就。

推動藝文政策發展

榮氏一向關注香港以及整個亞太地區的藝文發展，目前是西九文化區管理局董事局成員。自1987年始，其所策劃的香港文化政策研究小組，開始針對香港政府的文化藝術政策，進行系統討論及做出獨立研究，曾發表一系列具影響力的報告—《尋找文化政策》。這報告開創了本地的獨立文化藝術研究，推動了港府對本地藝術文化政策作出檢討。榮氏於1996年創立香港當代文化中心，積極主辦國際文化論壇及研討會及交流活動，榮氏現為該中心主席。

1993年，榮氏獲委任為香港藝術發展局創局成員（簡稱藝發局）。該局於1995年正式成為法定機構，在榮氏的倡議下，藝發局定立了一半委員需由藝術範疇推選的制度。榮氏是當時藝術教育小組創組主席，2000年再獲委任為該局委員。

榮氏曾經擔任政府中央政策組的非全職顧問，負責就創意教育、創意經濟、創意城市以及創意交流等事項向政府提供意見，亦是香港設計中心的董事。

榮氏是香港兆基創意書院的校董，亦是多間本地大學的顧問，包括香港理工大學設計學院、嶺南大學文化研究系，以及香港大學公民社會與治理研究中心。

Biography of Suzanne Carbonneau

Suzanne Carbonneau is a cultural essayist, critic, and historian whose writings have appeared in *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and other publications. She has served as Director of the NEA Arts Journalism Institute in Dance, and as Critic-in-Residence at the American Dance Festival and at the Joyce Theater in New York. Carbonneau is also Scholar-in-Residence at Jacob's Pillow Dance

Festival and the Bates Dance Festival. She holds a PhD from New York University and is Professor at George Mason University. Her critical biography of choreographer Paul Taylor will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Carbonneau is a MacDowell Fellow, a Yaddo Fellow, and the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship.



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If the System Isn't Right, Why Can't We Change It?

An interview with Danny Yung conducted by Suzanne Carbonneau