

Performance Studies International Conference 2004 (Singapore)

Dates: 15 to 18 June 2004

Perform: State: Interrogate [working title]

Given that this will be the first time that the Performance Studies International (PSi) Conference is taking place in an "Asian" country, an obvious choice of themes for the Conference would be along the lines of cultural location and difference. But it is precisely the intention of the organizers to engage the issue of a "PSi Conference in Asia" without being limited by identity politics. Certainly one of the agendas of PSi 2004 Singapore is to represent a diversity of "Asian" perspectives in performance studies, although the point is *not* to frame these perspectives as essentially representations of Otherness — as new local authenticities for consumption and appropriation by the global gaze of Theory with a capital "T".

Therefore, the first major concern underpinning the organization of the conference is to precipitate a high level of critical reflexivity about PSi 2004 itself. Which is to say that the very phenomenon of siting an international conference on performance studies in Asia (or elsewhere) needs to be theorized. However, what is more important than manifesting this self-reflexivity as an explicit conference topic in itself, is to ensure that this reflexivity informs and inflects the conference as a whole.

The second major concern addresses the present condition of performance discourse in "Asia": existing networks and associations within the region are underdeveloped. At stake in PSi 2004 is not only the production of increasingly sophisticated texts about performance. Beyond the parameters of a single conference, the organizers of PSi 2004 aim to mobilize individuals and organizations to dialogue with each other in order to develop the language and grounds upon which performance can be understood, examined and debated in Asia.

The third concern is the obvious one of engaging some of the diverse interests and perspectives from within Asia. These interests suggest a broad range of conference topics, and they include:

- * Epistemic themes, such as the history and historiography of performance and performance theory, and the study of tropes and metaphors in performance theory;
- * Praxis, for example, the social functions of performance, and theories of management, governance, and performance;
- * Themes invoking the tensions between theory and practice, such as translation and transit, transmission and dissemination, contemporarization and decolonization;
- * Identity and location, for example, the Asian city, ethnicity and community, and gender and sexuality;
- * Themes centering on the state, as in cultural policy, patronage, and arts administration;
- * Registers of reality: spirits, bodies, technologies of representation and simulation;
- * The creative process, including methodologies, pedagogies, traditions, and canons.

The working title for the PSi 2004 Conference, "Perform: State: Interrogate", comprises three verbs related to articulation. These words have, of course, multiple resonances. For instance,

the reflexivity demanded in the organizers' first concern is echoed by the word "interrogate." "Interrogate" implies the questioning *of* power, both in the sense of being directed *at* and originating *from* power — as in the power of theory, practitioners, the "people" or the state. Indeed the "state" figures in so much of performance in Asia — from patronage to engagement to resistance to complicity. Arguably the central "performance" that takes place in a nation like Singapore is that of *stating* the concerns of the "state". There is also the question of how theory "performs" — what are the ways in which it can be tested, evaluated? What are its effects? How does it contain, domesticate, obfuscate, and appropriate, or liberate, enable, and enlighten?