

From the Speech to the Act: Performativity on the Margins

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The Second Postgraduate Conference organized by the Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies (CCLPS) at SOAS was held on the 13th of June 2014 and was titled 'From the Speech to the Act: Performativity on the Margins.' As reflected in the title, the aim of the conference was to assert and explore performativity - in all its diverse manifestations and possibilities - as a matter of theory and action, as related to speech and acts, and as the potential trigger for alternative narratives within the globalized scenario.

Linguistic utterances and acts can create social realities; they have transformative power and speak directly to both individual and collective identities. With this in mind, the conference was intended to be a platform for practitioners, theorists, and academics to share their understandings of how the word and the body, sound and movement, can shape realities on the margins of neoliberal homogenizing discourses.

As organizers, we wanted to understand and present this conference as a 'happening,' as a collaborative performance that would be built throughout the day through the contributions of the speakers, the chairs, the keynote speaker, and the audience. The range of papers was comprehensive, touching on areas as varied as architecture and animation, theatre and film, literature and music, and politics and sociology.

Within this multidisciplinary range, each paper selected for this present issue of the Journal keeps an eye on the human element, whether manifested in the human body, facilitated by it, or conceptualized through it. Deborah Newton looks at the transformative power of theory through the dissolution of such dualities as the performer-audience relationship to redefine the possibilities of performance as an event. Newton's contribution is complemented by a look at Playback Theatre in Palestine from Irene Fernández Ramos's personal experiences with the Freedom Bus, a non-scripted, interactive, and community-based initiative of the Freedom Theatre, which travels throughout the West Bank to create performances built around personal stories from members of its audiences. Geetha Creffield's paper looks at the South Asian migrant in Singapore to further elucidate the breaking down of binaries without the benefit of a theatre setting. She portrays this diasporic community acting out performative roles against a backdrop of official and society-based oppression, and the reactions elicited

from their performative roles as migrants. Katja Janssen also focuses on diaspora, but in this case on Palestinian poets living in the United States who choose a position of resistance on the margins by identifying as Palestinian, and who further enacts their position through the dynamic of poetry in homage to, and interaction with, their homeland. Ying Cheng looks at the Bàrìgà Boys street artists in the Bàrìgà slum of Lagos, Nigeria to interrogate how uneven geographic mobility affects the dynamics of theatre and performance, emphasizing class and urbanization as key components of mobility. Alexandria Milton further emphasizes literature as performance by looking at a legacy of oral storytelling within the short story manifested through the lens of “experiential rhythm:” textual, language-based rhythms that both reflect and create the rhythms of human experience in the world.

Together, these papers brush the surface of the important work being done to highlight the ways in which performance - through the body, the mind, and their innumerable forms of expression - can contribute to the evolution of understanding concerning the human experience, both on the margins, and at the centre; and also how multidisciplinary approaches like those emphasized and practiced by the CCLPS can elucidate connections and methods with which to approach the fast-evolving worlds of art, culture, and history.

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