

## IMPOSSIBLE PROPERTIES: LANGUAGE AND LEGITIMACY IN ONG KENG SEN'S *LEAR*

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores a landmark production in the history of Asian intercultural theatre, Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen and Japanese playwright Kishida Rio's *Lear* (1997/1999). A lavish production underwritten by the Japan Foundation Asia Center, *Lear* helped establish Ong's "fiercely intercultural" aesthetic as an internationally recognisable brand (Peterson 2003: 81). It also drew critique as a symbolic apologia for neoliberal globalisation. The critical literature on *Lear* has yielded trenchant insights into the global political significance of intercultural performance. At the same time, however, it has tended to overshadow questions of the work's aesthetic specificity and local significance. This paper seeks to recuperate *Lear*'s local meanings both as a text and as a uniquely Singaporean political allegory. In the paper's first section, I will outline the play and its critique as late capitalist spectacle. In the following section, I will bracket this critique and return to the texts at hand. Finally, I will move back outward by tracing a Brechtian tension between Kishida's text, Ong's realisation, and the Singaporean state's "choreography" of racial, cultural and linguistic difference.*

**Keywords:** Aesthetics and politics, interculturalism, cultural and racial policy, Ong Keng Sen, *Lear*

### INTERCULTURALISM AS ALLEGORY AND SPECTACLE

Both critics of intercultural performance and scholars of international law commonly frame the debate over interculturalism as a clash between a universalist conception of cultural works as "components of a common human culture" ("cultural internationalism") and a particularist conception of cultural works as "part of a national cultural heritage" ("cultural nationalism") (Merryman 1986: 831–832). This clash achieved international visibility largely as a result of developing states' struggles to repatriate "cultural treasures" looted during the age of High Colonialism (ibid.: 836–

843). Behind it we find centuries of political and economic strife. We also find the familiar opposition of exchange-based and non-exchange-based systems of value. Cultural nationalism is distinguished by its insistence that the "true value" of a given cultural property is fundamentally non-exchangeable: it "can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding its origin, history and traditional setting" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 1970: 135). In its radical form, cultural nationalism proposes that cultural property can only be truly understood or appreciated by members of the ethnic-cultural community, and should not be removed from the ethnic-cultural homeland<sup>1</sup> (Merryman 1986: 846). These issues are arguably less urgent where intangible, non-expendable cultural properties such as performing arts and languages are concerned. Nevertheless, the appropriation of intangible cultural properties by non-tradition-bearers almost inevitably provokes controversy (cf. Ziff 1997; Young 2010).

Intercultural appropriation is most often thought of in connection with Western modernism and postmodernism. The appropriation and reinterpretation of Shakespeare, however, is a longstanding tradition in Asian theatre history.<sup>2</sup> James R. Brandon identifies three styles of Asian Shakespeare: canonical productions, which attempt to reproduce an "authentically" English Shakespeare; localised productions, which transpose Shakespearean narratives into local performance idioms; and modern "intercultural" productions (1997: 3–17). Ong and Kishida's *Lear*, which juxtaposes elements of Chinese opera, Indonesian *gamelan* and *pencak silat*, Japanese *nō* and Thai courtly dance within a self-reflexively postmodernist framework, exemplifies this third type.

Kishida's script differs notably from its mythic and literary predecessors.<sup>3</sup> She retains the central protagonists, King Lear (the Old Man) and Cordelia (the Younger Daughter), however, she replaces Albany, Gloucester, Kent/Caius, Edgar/Tom, and Lear's Fool with two abstracted supporting protagonists, the Fool and the Loyal Attendant. Similarly, she replaces Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund and Oswald with an Older Daughter (accompanied by three Shadows), her Retainer and a host of Warriors. She adds a ghostly Mother and her retinue of silent attendants ("Earth Mothers"), representing both King Lear's absent wife and Edmund's absent mother. Finally, she darkens the play's conclusion by having the Older Daughter murder and successfully usurps the Old Man.

Ong's staging also defies convention. The Old Man and the Mother are played by Umekawa Naohiko, a Kanze school *nō* performer and scholar; the Older Daughter by Jiang Qihu, a performer in the China National Beijing Opera Company; the Younger Daughter by Thai dancer Peeramon

Chomdhavat; the Fool by Japanese film star Katagiri Hairi; the Attendant, Retainer, and Earth Mothers by Singaporean and Malaysian performers; and the Warriors by Indonesian *pencak silat* artists. On top of this, the production is multilingual, with each performer speaking their national language(s). The result is a semiotically fragmented mise-en-scène imparted with surface-level unity through sweeping musical and choreographic gestures.

In their program notes for the 1999 Singapore production, both Ong and producer Hata Yuki implicitly ask the audience to interpret *Lear* allegorically as an interrogation of Asian patriarchy.<sup>4</sup> This theme is particularly relevant in Singapore, where for decades the reigning People's Action Party (PAP) has portrayed itself as a benevolent father to the nation (Chew 2004: 6). Notably, the relationship between the PAP and the nation is popularly represented as the relationship between a father and his daughter<sup>5</sup> (Heng and Devan 1995: 209). Moreover, the PAP has embraced policies which mandate or incentivise the reproduction of patrilineal social structures<sup>6</sup> (cf. Chua 1996; Heng and Devan 1995; Clammer 1997; Teo 2010; etc.). The most blatant of these is the registration of Singaporean children under their father's racial group: Chinese, Malay, Indian or Other (CMIO). In accordance with the CMIO system, every Singaporean is inscribed with a patrilineal "race-culture" and imputed with racial interests through interventionist policies on cultural, political and economic levels<sup>7</sup> (Chua 2007: 924). Ong's hyper-exoticised characters closely parallel the institutional division of Singaporeans into clearly demarcated racial-cultural blocs.

Beyond the metanarratives of patriarchy and patrilineality, certain specific aspects of Ong's staging and Kishida's reworked script invite closer political-allegorical interpretation. As prior scholars have noted, the Japanese Old Man and the Chinese Older Daughter clearly represent Asia's aspiring prewar and postwar hegemons (cf. Bharucha 2001). Conversely, the disempowered Thai Cordelia and Malay-speaking servant characters allude to the core-periphery relationship between East Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as the economic status of Malays in Singaporean society.<sup>8</sup> The Mother is portrayed as a seamstress, a paradigmatic invocation of subalternity which situates the plot within the historical narrative of global capitalism.<sup>9</sup> The Older Daughter's attempt to distance herself from the lowborn Mother ("Not a drop of your blood / But only father's blood runs in me / Only the blood of a king" [Scene 4]) resonates with the Asian Newly Industrialized Countries' postwar economic self-transformations, effected in part by outsourcing class differentials to guest labourers and neighbouring states (cf. Yeoh 2006; Razaque and Chang 2002). It further recalls

postcolonial states' fraught claim to the cultural inheritances of their deposed colonial patriarchs.<sup>10</sup>

In the program notes to the 1999 production of *Lear*, producer Hata appraises the 1997 production as an aesthetically effective and socially relevant work of art: "[the] intention to have the Older Daughter's patricide interpreted as a transcendence of the old order was well received by audiences... In short, we achieved our aim of sparking debate" (1999). Success with audiences aside, *Lear* has certainly provoked debate among critics and scholars. Ong's detractors impugn his work as mere late capitalist spectacle<sup>11</sup> (cf. Bharucha 2001, 2004; Peterson 2003; Wee 2004; Thompkins 2005; Yong 2005). In a series of influential articles, for example, Rustom Bharucha observes that Ong's technique of intercultural montage rests upon the "separation of the director's right to conceptualize from the relatively unformulated embodied knowledge of the performers" (2004: 10). Bharucha argues that this technique "disdains any sustained engagement with the emotional content and inner logic of the theatrical forms themselves" (2001: 125). Moreover, it replicates the control exercised by Singaporean and East Asian capital over South and Southeast Asian labour and resources<sup>12</sup> (2004: 3). Closely following Debord, Bharucha maintains that even when such allegorical spectacles are outwardly critical, they tacitly work to legitimise structural injustice by marking it as ubiquitous and irresistible. In Debord's terms, Ong's intercultural *mise-en-scène* provides a "visual reflection of the ruling economic order" which functions as its own apology, fatally combining "the false despair of non-dialectical critique and the false optimism of pure advertising of the system" (Debord 2000: 10, 196).

### **"FINE WORD—LEGITIMATE!"**

Rather than jumping immediately into the debate over cultural property and identity politics, I would like to detour through the previously neglected topic of the language of the texts at hand. The thematic centre of both Shakespeare's and Kishida's texts is the aporetic relationship between language, property and authority. From a political historical perspective, the core tragedy of *King Lear* unfolds in the first act. Lear unwittingly authors his own downfall by asking his daughters to trade "words of love" for land, and seals it by dividing his kingdom and stripping Cordelia of her "propinquity and property of blood" (I.i.48–53, 198, 119). This threatens to supplant the feudal logic of non-exchangeable hereditary title with the liberal logic of persuasion and contractual exchange.<sup>13</sup> Among Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* is not alone in pitting feudal-aristocratic

protagonists against possessive individualist antagonists. Borrowing Machiavelli's turn of phrase, Wyndham Lewis describes this as a contest between "the lion and the fox" (1927: 11). Shakespeare's "foxes"—in this case, Goneril, Regan and particularly Edmund—do not recognise the legitimacy of the hierarchies which limit their ambitions. By exploiting their superiors' belief that "good effects may spring from words of love," they open the door to social mobility, at the cost of fracturing the community<sup>14</sup> (I.i.198). The result is a "war of every one against every one ... [waged] by force or wiles" (Hobbes 1651: XIII).

Ong and Kishida's *Lear* transposes the themes of language, property and authority into a contemporary political historical context. Like King Lear, Kishida's script is pointedly aware of its own linguistic provenance. As if proceeding directly out of Shakespeare's "exeunt with a dead march" (V.iii), the production opens with a musical evocation of the voices of the dead, "their lives cut short before their spirits or bodies had faded, buried clasping the seeds of enduring bitterness in their hands"<sup>15</sup> (Scene 1). The ghost of King Lear then enters and rhetorically asks the nature of his own identity. The Older Daughter enters and answers, "you are the father who made me, the king who made this country"; the Fool then runs onstage to flurry of gamelan music, declaring that "a king is a person who rests upon peoples' sacrificial offerings, the moans of sacrificial offerings... Ah! The infant crying in hunger; the weeping mother has no milk, and you have no ear to lend to this." Throughout the play, Kishida develops this motif of singing and crying voices punctuating a vicious circle of suffering and betrayal.

The Older Daughter is Kishida's primary mouthpiece. She realises Hobbes' equation of force and wiles, boasting to the Younger Daughter that "words are weapons" and promises "disappear like smoke" (Scene 2). The Older Daughter articulates this attitude most pointedly in a dressing-down which she gives to the Old Man after having claimed his throne:

"I came to know both good and evil words from you. While you sat me on your knee and taught me the meaning of love, you ordered the beheading of traitors. While you laid me to sleep and bid me dream pleasant dreams, you commanded the seizure of your enemies' lands. So now, I return these words to you. Teaching this daughter of yours was like throwing seeds to the wind—it did you no good. The moment I first sat on the throne, the law of blood binding father to daughter was torn to pieces" (Scene 5).

The figure of the Older Daughter turning the Old Man's own words against him is highly Shakespearean. As A. C. Bradley writes, "The idea of the tragic hero as a being destroyed simply and solely by external forces is quite alien [to Shakespeare]; and not less so is the idea of the hero as contributing to his destruction only by acts in which we see no flaw" (1919: 21–22). In Kishida's script, as in Shakespeare's, Lear himself sets the precedent for his own displacement. Beneath a façade of legitimate authority, he employs the same Machiavellian tactics which his daughter later uses to justify her coup.

In Marxian terms, the Older Daughter's monologue can be understood as an indictment of primitive accumulation<sup>16</sup> (Marx 1975: 704–723). This was a relevant subject in early modern England (707). The Tudor and Stuart periods saw an increase in the practice of enclosure—the privatisation of common lands—which often entailed the transformation of tenants and freeholders into wage-labourers and peons (Boyle 2003: 35). The various acts of dispossession and banishment in *King Lear* analogise this "forcible expropriation of the people from the soil" (cf. Marx 1975: 723). Likewise, Edgar's transformation into the vagrant Tom O'Bedlam vividly recalls the rural masses displaced through enclosure<sup>17</sup> (cf. Blomley 2007: 2). It is reasonable to assume that Kishida, a socially committed playwright, was aware of these historical resonances while writing *Lear*. Through the Older Daughter, she revisits Shakespeare's veiled critique of the contradictions generated during periods of intensive social change. Unlike Shakespeare, however, who only addresses these contradictions on an allegorical register, Kishida explicitly discloses the "force and fraud" upon which the Old Man has constructed his paper-thin claim to legitimate ownership and authority (cf. Rose 1998: 624).

These various revisions evince a distinctly modern understanding of tragedy which distinguishes *Lear* from its Shakespearean precedent. The tragedy of *King Lear* is the result of specific speech-acts: Lear's "seduction by loving words" and division of his kingdom<sup>18</sup> (cf. Haigh 1988: 98). In Aristotelian fashion, these actions' unravelling and their agents' deaths indicate that the kingdom's life can begin anew. By the end of the fifth act, the audience can rest in their knowledge that, as Edmund says, "The wheel has come full circle" (V.iii.205). In Kishida's reinterpretation, on the other hand, there is no single motive instance and no final dénouement. Rather than abdicating, the Old Man allows the Older Daughter to steward the kingdom while he travels (Scene 2). She then simply refuses to return the throne (Scene 5). Even the Old Man's Fool eventually betrays him, stating that he will "find a king who knows how to play with words" (Scene 9). Likewise, the Older Daughter's Retainer plots to betray her, announcing to

his Warriors that "a new king will arise from among those who know starvation"<sup>19</sup> (Scene 11). The Older Daughter discovers his plot and kills him during their lovemaking, but this brings her sorrow rather than catharsis (Scene 15). In the play's final scene, the Older Daughter, having murdered or banished all of the other characters, mutters "who is behind me?" while haunted by the phantom of the Mother (Scene 17). The implication, of course, is that she will eventually be betrayed and usurped in turn.

Kishida's reworked narrative evokes a Brechtian conception of tragedy as systematic and cyclical rather than character-driven and linear. In late capitalist society, Brecht writes, "Catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but cyclical crises; the 'heroes' change with the different phases, are interchangeable, etc.; the graph of people's actions is complicated by abortive actions; fate is no longer a single coherent power; rather, there are fields of force which can be seen radiating in opposite directions; the power groups themselves comprise movements not only against one another but within themselves, etc., etc." (1964: 30).

Here, Brecht tracks a key difference between early modern and contemporary understandings of authority, agency and tragedy. As King Lear spirals to a close, Shakespeare admits that the symbolism of authority is often misused: "through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear; robes and furr'd gowns hide all" (IV.iv.180–181). In the final instance, however, he upholds the distinction between legitimate, blood-borne authority and mere force (V.iii.358–360). Kishida radicalises the critique of authority by portraying all claims to legitimacy as riddled with systemic contradictions. The Old Man need not overreach or contradict his own authority in order to incept the Hobbesian bellum omnium contra omnes, because all authority is merely violence deferred. Taking her cue from Edmund's bitter first monologue, Kishida unmaskes "legitimacy" as no more than a "fine word" (I.ii.18).

## **EVERY CREED AND EVERY RACE**

This re-reading of Kishida's text enables a productive re-reading of Ong's dramaturgy and the socially-embedded "text" of the performance event. The most striking feature of Ong's aesthetic is his "predilection for dissolving characters into kinetic principles... abstractions and archetypes" (Bharucha 2001: 114). In *Lear*, costume, gesture, music and language are employed to bind each character-archetype to a normative ethnic-national identity. It is possible to interpret this as a simple exercise in stereotyping, or an uncritical doubling of state-sponsored ethnic-racial nationalisms (cf. Peterson 2001;

Wee 2004). It is equally possible, however, to interpret it in Brechtian terms as a form of oblique critical intervention. This would be in keeping with Kishida's approach to Shakespeare, which mirrors Brecht's own interpretive focus on the violence and social contradiction in early modern English drama (see, for example, Brecht's discussion of his adaptation of *Edward II* [1964: 116]).

In his well-known essay "On Commitment," Theodor Adorno analyses Brecht's "elimination of the traditional concept of dramatic character" as a politically committed form of "didactic poetics":

"[Brecht] realized that the surface of social life, the sphere of consumption, which includes the psychologically motivated actions of individuals, occludes the essence of society—which, as the law of exchange, is abstract... He therefore sought to translate the true hideousness of society into theatrical appearance, by dragging it straight out from its camouflage. The people on his stage shrink before our eyes into the agents of social processes and functions, which indirectly and unknowingly they are in empirical reality" (1978: 9).

While Ong's methodology is less rigorous and systematic than Brecht's, I believe that his aesthetic is too studied and ambivalent to be dismissed as simple stereotyping or cosmopolitan triumphalism. Rather, it evinces an acute anxiety of the "social processes and functions" through which Singaporeans are interpellated as political subjects. Much as Brecht's reduction of characters to class archetypes sought to reveal the economic determinacy of late capitalist society in general, Ong's reduction of characters to ethnic-racial archetypes parallels the enforced multilingualism and multiracialism of Singaporean society.

In both Ong's production and PAP's ideology, we find careful dramaturgies of race and divisions of linguistic labour. As a number of Singaporean scholars have observed, the PAP government inherited colonial structures of knowledge and administration bound to a racialised hierarchy of languages (Purushotam 1998: 9–10; cf. Chua 2007). The government has reinscribed these structures by mandating that children study both English and their ethnic-racial "mother tongue"<sup>20</sup> (Mandarin, Malaysian or Tamil). Needless to say, "mother tongue" education has worked to reify the CMIO taxonomy by gradually flattening intra-racial linguistic difference.<sup>21</sup> It has also generated a clear racial-linguistic division of discursive labour. English is marked as the language of business and governance, while "expression in



any of the other three official Asian languages is immediately read as 'signifying' and 'representing' the interests of the respective 'races'" (Chua 2007: 923).

This division exemplifies the PAP government's ethnic corporatist approach to the management of collective identity (Brown 2004). In its classical formulation, corporatism involves redefining sub-national social groups (such as ethnicities, guilds, kinship groups, etc.) as "true and proper organs of the state" which function to "direct and coordinate labour and capital in matters of common interest" (Freiburg theses of 1884, cited in Brown 2004: 37). In order for these "organs" to be reliably managed, however, sub- and extra-national loyalties must be either assimilated to national loyalties or suppressed (52). One effective way to manage ethnic loyalties is by actively promoting socialisation along ethnic lines within a prescribed, state-mediated institutional framework (54). This allows the state to supervise intra-ethnic social activity, and to regulate it when needed. Ideally, it also allows the state to guide emergent ethnic practices and solidarities.

Singaporean multiracialism does precisely this. As previously mentioned, the state has institutionalised the CMIO system politically, culturally and economically. On the political and cultural levels, this is accomplished through the Group Representation Constituency system, "mother tongue" education, and the promotion of racial-cultural traditions and events.<sup>22</sup> On the economic level, it is accomplished through the cultivation of intra-racial dependency networks. Because the PAP is ideologically opposed to the "welfare state," it delegates social welfare responsibilities to three semi-autonomous racial "self-help organisations": the Malay-Singaporean organisation Yayasan Majlis Pendidikan Anak-anak Islam (Mendaki), the Singapore Indian Development Agency (SINDA) and the Chinese Development Assistance Council<sup>23</sup> (CDAC). This structure is reproduced on the local level by community associations, which serve social and "quasi-kinship" functions (language promotion, funerary services, etc.) (Clammer 1997: 259). These interlocking institutions promote assimilation to racialised behavioural norms, which the state then represents as evidence of racial-cultural "essence" (Chua 2007: 924–925). At the same time, they reinforce a joint image of racial and national identity, as expressed in the figure of the "hyphenated Singaporean" (1996).

As Chua observes, racialisation also expedites the manipulation of popular anxieties to ideological ends (2007: 925). Despite its neoliberal economics, the PAP commonly portrays social liberalisation as a threat to "Asian Values" and racial-cultural survival (2003: 61). This mobilises fears of deracination among conservative factions within the racial communities,

thus aiding the legitimisation of illiberal political practices. Similarly, while multiracialism is officially represented as integral to Singaporean identity, the state-affiliated media habitually plays up racial difference and stokes fears of interracial strife. This allows the "racially neutral" state to represent itself as a necessary mediator, and authorises the suppression of sub-national politics. It also helps dissemble the uneven costs and benefits of development by re-mapping class and status inequality as racial-cultural difference (2007: 917). Accordingly, maldistributive institutions can be written off as "cultural preferences" or even "cultural rights," and the government's refusal to address maldistribution can be justified as deference to the autonomy of the racial communities.

These ideological manoeuvres disclose the reciprocal relationship between universalism and particularism in modern society. Immanuel Wallerstein provides the classic exposition of this paradoxical relationship (1991). Because non-market-based value systems restrict the flow of commodities, they are hypothetically inimical to capitalism (31). In an ideal-type capitalist economy, "meritocracy" would entail the self-regulating commodification of labour and human capacities. In actual economies, however, elites manipulate and circumvent the market's hypothetical self-regulatory processes. The simplest means of doing this is by transmitting capital and commodifiable capacities to one's descendants (150–151). A related, more complex means is the "ethnicisation of the work force," i.e., the recoding of cultural or genetic attributes as socioeconomic merits and shortcomings, and vice versa (33). Singaporean multilingualism exemplifies this. Hypothetically, because English is not an Asian "mother tongue," mandated bilingualism offers a "level playing field." In actuality, because privileged children tend to receive superior English educations, it serves to reproduce privilege. The racial self-help system also fits this mold. The economic primacy of the Chinese-Singaporean community allows the CDAC to accumulate more capital than Mendaki and SINDA; this capital is then recirculated within the racial community. By restricting wealth redistribution and educational assistance along racial lines, the self-help system helps reify the correlation between race and status. While more data is needed, Chua suggests that this has actually intensified racial inequality rather than helping to ameliorate it (2007: 920).

Over the past few centuries, we have come to realise that particularist institutions such as ethnic-racial divisions of labour and hereditary plutocracy are perfectly capable of surviving within states which formally guarantee universal equality (cf. Wallerstein 1991). The Singaporean case helps explain such survivals. In corporatist terms, both the family and the racial community can be thought of as distinct but heteronomous "organs"

which assist in the life of the state. Singapore offers a paradigmatic example of how such "organs" can ease the burden of governance by regulating the transmission of capital and ensuring the reproduction of norms in ways that are favourable to elites. Delegating community-level politics to racial and kinship groups has the added benefit of enabling the PAP to portray itself as immune to "identity politics" and "special interests" (Brown 2004: 70). This expedites its "technocratic"—one could say directorial—approach to governance.

The Singaporean state's complex choreography of racial and linguistic difference finds its theatrical counterpart in *Lear*. In both, racial and linguistic differences appear as calculated effects of totalising structural forces. This parallels the more substratal tension between the ostensibly autonomous individual and the heteronomy of market-based society (Wallerstein 1991). Brecht's alienation or distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) offers a strategy for concretising this tension. By defamiliarising the *mise-en-scène* and alienating the spectator, Brecht sought to divulge the contradiction between the subjective experience of "aesthetic individuation" and the empirical fact of economic determination (Adorno 1978). Similarly, Ong's fragmented and alienating dramaturgy allegorises the aporetic yet functional relationship between the epiphenomenon of ethnic-racial particularism and the universalising logic of the "technocratic" globalist state. The Singaporean propaganda song "One People, One Nation, One Singapore" depicts this division-of-labour approach to social difference with surprising frankness: "Every creed and every race, has its role and has its place."

In *Lear*, the shock of alienation is most tangible in Ong's treatment of language. His textual basis is Kishida's assertion that language is violently affecting ("words are weapons"), yet frustratingly ephemeral (they "disappear like smoke") (Scene 2). In the opening few scenes of *Lear*, the tension between languages and cultural markers is naively alluring. It is not long, however, before this tension erupts into naked aggression. This drives at the unique anxiety of witnessing harsh words exchanged in foreign tongues. In addition to its semiotic function, speech bears an implicit socialising function and an almost physical capacity to convey force (Brecht and Heinrich Müller referred to this as *Gestus* [cf. Diamond 1988]). One need not necessarily understand words to sense whether they are being spoken from a position of mastery or submission, or to gauge their weight as summons, threats, rebukes, petitions or pleas. Such words demand a response: as Brecht puts it, "the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote" (1977: 39). Constrained by a lack of communicative competence, however, the spectator feels

divested of the ability to respond in good faith. In Brechtian fashion, this replicates the consensual domination and complicity in systemic violence which characterise modern social life.

## IMPOSSIBLE PROPERTIES

Singaporean ethnic-racial corporatism can be described as "an attempt to reconcile two apparently antithetical ideas: the image of society and the state as comprising a natural, authentic, *gemeinschaft* community; and the image of society as an unintegrated aggregation of disparate groups" (Brown 2004: 48–49). In this paper, I have argued that this begs a reappraisal of Kishida and Ong's adaptation of *King Lear*, a play commonly described by Shakespeare scholars as an allegory for "the shift of Western culture from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from organic community to atomistic state" (Delany 1977: 431). I have sought to demonstrate how Ong's fragmented yet strictly controlled intercultural aesthetic mimes the PAP state's carefully orchestrated attempt to manage "organic" ethnic-racial solidarities. I have further suggested that because this mimesis conveys a shock of alienation rather than a sense of familiarity or catharsis, it can be read as a type of critical intervention, geared to reveal contradictions between everyday social experiences and deeper structural processes.

Of course, reading *Lear* as a critical intervention inevitably raises the question of Ong's own alleged complicity in the "New Asian" statist-capitalist project (cf. Bharucha 2001; Peterson 2001; etc.). It is no secret that *Lear* was "made possible" by the Japan Foundation, the National Arts Council of Singapore and a variety of festivals and advertisers.<sup>24</sup> Given its lavish production value, one must wonder whether it would have seen the stage if not for Japan's "Southeast Asia pivot" and Singaporean Prime Minister (PM) Goh Chok Tong's campaign to turn his city into a "cultural centre in the globalised world"<sup>25</sup> (Chong 2003: 6). In a recent interview, Ong partially addresses this critique, acknowledging that the Japan Foundation's activities "could be seen as a continued postwar effort in Southeast Asia and East Asia using culture as a remedial action" (2007: 62). Interestingly, he goes on to distance himself from the production, suggesting that "it was always seen as the Japan Foundation's *Lear*" and dismissing it as "a romantic first flush of the 'joys' of interculturalism."

While Ong's displacement of ownership to the Japan Foundation may be justified, his dismissal evokes an ironic cliché: the sophisticate who, in the throes of a "romantic first flush," creates a thing he later comes to regret. This, of course, is the conceit behind *King Lear*'s Edmund, conceived "in

the lusty stealth of nature" and then discounted as illegitimate at Gloucester's convenience—"an admirable evasion of whoremaster man" (I.ii.11, 133–134). Ong and Gloucester's parallel evasions recall Derrida's deconstruction of the metonymic links between patrimonial and authorial claims (1981: 80). This deconstruction hinges on the fundamental ambivalence of theories of property and authority (cf. Heller 1998). Derrida proposes that we can envision language itself as an "impossible property"—which is to say, a limit-point of the concept of property (1998: 63). We commonly think of our speech and writing as intimately our own, yet at their place of articulation or inscription, they quite literally become mere sequences of mechanical effects. What was most "subjective" is suddenly something we have cast away (*obicere*) and then find put before us (*objectum*) as part of our environing world. Through misunderstanding and misappropriation, our speech and writing affect others and the world in ways we cannot predict. We thus become authors of events which we did not necessarily authorise, and to which we ourselves are vulnerable. In this, it is possible to compare the writer to the patricide and the regicide. All three authorise the production of difference (a new text, lineage, regime) by violating the totalising claims of their forebears. In doing so, they invite violation in turn. This "appropriative madness" shatters the myth of legitimacy (1998: 24). As both King Lear and Lear demonstrate, "the father's death opens the reign of violence. In choosing violence... the son—or patricidal writing—cannot fail to expose himself, too"<sup>26</sup> (1981: 146).

These insights open new perspectives on the question of cultural property. As previously mentioned, we often imagine cultural studies as caught between "the Scylla of [globalist] cultural relativism and the Charybdis of nativist culturalism" (Spivak 1999: 6). It is an undisputed fact that "nativist culturalism" has played a powerful role in anticolonial and postcolonial struggles worldwide. This fact sometimes leads us to assume that it offers a kind of transposable site of resistance to neocolonialism and the marketisation of culture (209). The historical credits of culturalism, however, have no necessary bearing on its role in contemporary Singapore. Indeed, the Singaporean case demonstrates how culturalist ideologies and institutions can be integrated quite easily into the framework of an aggressively globalist state. This reconciliation is symbolised by the ubiquitous figure of the hyphenated "racial-Singaporean" (Chua 1996: 51).

One could argue that Singapore's multiracial and multilingual policies offer a prototypical example of "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism," i.e., the carefully regulated, socially productive relation between "[the] particular ethnic Thing (patriotism, pro patria mori and so forth) and the (potentially) universal function of the market" (Zizek 1997:

42). The Singaporean case also divulges the potential shortcomings of this logic. Far from acting as a barrier to alienation and the commodification of everyday life, Singaporean ethnic-racial corporatism enables elites to mark off "the everyday practices that are part and parcel of modern capitalism as not integral to the cultures of racialised Singaporeans" (Chua 2003: 67). Furthermore, it mandates the suppression of intra-"racial" difference, whether ethnic, sexual, religious or merely personal. A number of contemporary Singaporean writers and performing artists have focused on the spectral presence of this social collateral, portraying the "racial-Singaporean" as the sum of a history of exclusions, myths and anxieties—as Chua puts it, an "absence after the hyphen" (1996: 62). State multiracialism may successfully dissemble the outward symptoms of this pathological history, but only by deferring confrontation with the pathogen itself. In the end, "the silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture" (Derrida 1998: 12).

I will conclude by proposing that rather than taking a partisan globalist or culturalist position, Ong and Kishida's *Lear* seeks merely to break the "silence of the hyphen." It does so at the price of violating the ostensible self-sufficiency and authenticity of its artistic forebears. Ong is well aware of the symbolic links between authenticity and authority on the one hand, and hybridity and "bastardy" on the other. Like Shakespeare's Edmund, he casts his lot with bastardy, claiming that "the rigid meaning of tradition has little significance in the world of the twenty-first century, where walls are breaking down" (1999). From a stable cultural nationalist position, this can rightly be criticised as a surrender to "atomised alienation" (Bharucha 2001: 124). From a position of unwilled and inescapable hybridity, however, it is possible to see how this could comprise a sincere attempt to work through the political complexities of identity-formation in a "state without a nation" (Chua 2003: 66). Particularly within the context of late-1990s Singaporean ethnic corporatism, Kishida's deconstruction of the concept of legitimacy and Ong's refusal of the false opposition between universalism and particularism can be interpreted as inherently critical. The result may be politically "tentative," but it is not socially insignificant (Bharucha 2001: 122). After all, as producer Hata reminds us, the "task of transcending our fathers—not only the father named Lear but also various other fathers with us—has only just begun" (1999).

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<sup>1</sup> This attitude is manifest most clearly in the cultural nationalist tendency toward "hoarding cultural objects," a practice which, in Merryman's opinion, "serves no discernible domestic purpose other than asserting the right to keep them" and "fail[s] to exploit such objects as a valuable resource for trade and... contribute[s] to the cultural impoverishment of people in other parts of the world" (1986: 847).

<sup>2</sup> Brandon identifies Utpat Dutt's 1951 Bengali *Macbeth*, which synthesises elements of the Western realist tradition with music and dance in the local *jatra* style, as perhaps the first modern intercultural Asian Shakespeare production (1997: 20). More recent well-known examples include Ninagawa Yukio's *Ninagawa Macbeth* (1980), Wu Hsing Kuo's *Beijing Opera Macbeth* (1986), the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Company's *Kunqu Macbeth* (1987), the New Delhi International Kathakali Centre's *Kathakali King Lear* (1989), Nomura Mansaku's *Kyōgen Falstaff* (1994) and Ong's *Desdemona* (2000), *Search: Hamlet* (2002) and *Lear Dreaming* (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare's *King Lear* is based on the myth of Leir of Briton, popularised by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannia*. The history of this myth has been "a history of narrative and textual instability, with the story cast into many generic moulds and adapted into many different forms of cultural production"—often for explicitly political purposes (Holderness and Carter 1996: 6). In Geoffrey's narrative, Leir reclaims the throne and is succeeded by Cordelia. Shakespeare's revised plot, in which Lear and Cordelia die and Albany (or Edgar) presumably assumes the throne, doubles the single most important political event of its time, the decline of the childless Tudor house and the foundation of a new royal line (the Stuarts). Assessing Shakespeare's narrative revisions vis-à-vis his social position and aspirations, it is difficult not to brand him an ideologue (cf. Halpern 1991; Dodd 1999). Indeed, Halpern suspects that Shakespeare composed *King Lear* specifically to win James I Stuart's favour, perhaps hoping for an official court performance (1991: 219).

<sup>4</sup> Any allegorical interpretation of postcolonial cultural production should mention Frederic Jameson's controversial model of "Third World" literature as "national allegory," in which "the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the [political] experience of the collectivity itself" (1986: 85–86). Much ink has been spilled in protest and defence of Jameson's formulation. With reference to the texts at hand, this article will acknowledge Jameson's basic premise, which is that "the psychological points to the political and the

- trauma of subalternity finds itself 'projected outwards' (allegorically) into the 'cultural'" (Szeman 2001: 809–810). As a form of interventionist political practice, postcolonial literary criticism aims "to produce an authentic and sovereign subjectivity and collectivity by undoing the set of habits called subalternity," i.e., to decolonise the psyche by first decolonising culture (810).
- <sup>5</sup> According to Heng and Devan, "The trope of father and daughter is so commonly invoked in Singapore to express the relationship between the governing political party [PAP]... and the nation itself, as to be fully naturalized, passing unremarked. Singapore is never imagined, by its government or citizens, as a 'motherland' or 'mother country' (identifications reserved exclusively for the ancestral countries of origin of Singapore's various racial groups – India, China, etc.), but rather as a female child, or at best, an adolescent girl or 'young lady.' A letter to a national newspaper, entitled 'Dear PAPA... ,' and signed by 'Singapore, A Young Lady,' in the persona of a respectful growing daughter petitioning for greater freedom from her stern father captures the tenor of the relationship perfectly (*The Straits Times* [Singapore] 5 January 1985) (An answering letter, fictitiously from 'PAPA,' subsequently appeared in the same newspaper)" (1995: 209).
- <sup>6</sup> The state grounds patrilineality in sociobiological discourse by assigning children their father's race, a practice which implies that "while formally a child naturally inherits genetic material from each parent equally, in reality it is the male genes that somehow predominate" (Clammer 1997: 263). Three-tiered patrilineal families are incentivised through preferential access to public housing, cash grants for couples who buy housing within two kilometres of their parents, regulations obliging working children to support their retired parents, and baby bonuses and tax relief for parents of up to four children (Teo 2010: 340). The state also mandates sixteen weeks of maternity leave for employed married women, with the cost split between the state and the employer (as opposed to three days of optional paternity leave for working fathers). In addition, working mothers can claim additional tax relief for privately procured child care ("foreign maid levy relief" or "grandparent care-giver relief") (347). As a result of these incentives, many middle-class couples have come to perceive a certain sequence of institutionally-mediated experiences as normatively Singaporean: for example, planning one's Registration of Marriage ("ROM-ing") and filing with the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in order to secure a desirable flat (343).
- <sup>7</sup> Examples include the education of children in their "racial mother tongue," the promotion of holidays and events which reflect "racial-cultural traditions," the managed racialisation of the electoral system via Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), and the racialisation of social welfare through "self-help organisations" (Chua 2007).
- <sup>8</sup> The 2010 Census indicates that the average/median monthly household income from work by race was \$7,236/5,100 (Singapore Dollar) for Chinese (up from \$5,258/3,800 in 2000), \$4,575/3,844 for Malays (up from \$3,151/2,709), \$7,664/5,370 for Indians (up from \$4,623/3,438), and \$11,518/7,432 for Others (up from \$7,446/4,870). The average household size hovered around 3.4–3.7 for Chinese, Indians and Others, and at 4.2 for Malays. Regarding housing, despite their larger average family size, Malays were twice as likely to live in one or two-room HDB flats (8.7 percent as compared with 4.1 percent of Chinese, 4.9 percent of Indians and 2.1 percent of Others), while only 2.8 percent of Malays lived in private flats or landed properties (compared with 18 percent of Chinese, 16.3 percent of Indians and 36.5 percent of Others). The 2007/08 Household Expenditure Survey identifies private flat or landed property ownership as a reliable indicator of consumer ability (average monthly household expenditure of \$7,311 as opposed to \$3,138 for HDB households).
- <sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that the protagonist of Kishida's most well-known play, *Ito jigoku* (Thread Hell), is also a seamstress working at an interwar period Japanese silk mill which is a front for a brothel. As a low-technology, labour-intensive industry, textile production has often served as a vanguard to further industrial development, including in Shakespearean England (cf. Sharpe 1998), interwar Japan (cf. Tsurumi 1984), and contemporary South and Southeast Asia (cf. Robert 1983). The textile industry exemplifies the role of developing economies within the modern world-system, and the female textile worker has been trapped at the bottom of the world-economic hierarchy for centuries. In a sense, the female textile worker exemplifies Gayatri Spivak's ideal-typical category of "the poorest woman of the South" (1999: 6).
- <sup>10</sup> This is also clearly relevant to Singapore, an English-speaking Commonwealth state which proudly maintains certain colonial traditions and institutions, yet which has also sought to shape an endogenous Asian alternative to Western modernity. Paradoxically, for example, the British foreign secretary once called Singaporean elder statesman and outspoken critic of Western liberalism Lee Kuan Yew "the best

- bloody Englishman east of the Suez" (Zakaria 1994: 125). In a sense, Lee's ambivalent relationship to his Western intellectual heritage mirrors Singapore's own ambivalent relationship to the West.
- <sup>11</sup> The term "spectacle" is massively overdetermined, and I feel the need to clarify its use. Rustom Bharucha sets off the critique of postmodern interculturalism as spectacle in his article "Consumed in Singapore: The intercultural spectacle of *Lear*," which adopts Debord's definition of spectacle as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by... signs of the dominant form of production" (1967/1994: 5–6, 10; cited in Bharucha 2001: 109, 118). Bharucha does not problematise or amend Debord's usage. Peterson (2003) and Tompkins (2005) both cite Bharucha throughout their appraisals of *Lear*. Wee does not cite Bharucha verbatim, but does assert that Ong's "management of spectacle highlights the parameters of statist and capitalist modernity" (2004: 784). Similarly, Yong identifies spectacle with "the enabling fiction of a comfortable cultural positionality," and argues that while Ong brings this fiction into question, he does so "as an intercultural strategy marketed along the global theatre festival trade route" (2005: 538). All of these uses conform to Debord's concept of spectacle as a uniquely late capitalist mode of ideological production—in Debord's words, the "materialization of ideology... which is precipitated by the concrete success of an autonomous economic system of production... [which] manages to remold the whole of the real to its own specifications" (1994: 212).
- <sup>12</sup> A number of scholars have echoed Bharucha's opinions. Peterson, for example, concurs that Ong's work follows Peter Brook in "appropriating context-free bits and pieces of Asian traditions into narrative-driven, essentially Western dramaturgical structures," thereby demonstrating that "Asians are just as capable of contextless cultural appropriation as Westerners" (2003: 92). Wee argues that *Lear* is "unsuccessful in breaking out of older national modernist uses of cultural memory so as to combine high cultures into a regional identity" (2004: 792). Similarly, Tompkins contends that Ong's "re-reading of Shakespeare through the constituent cultures of Singapore that may be said to describe 'New Asia' overlooks the effects of specific and local politics on its own representation" (2005: 622). Finally, Yong questions the meaningfulness of Ong's postmodern aesthetic, likening its effect to "television surfing between Asian channels" (2005: 536).
- <sup>13</sup> In 1603, when *King Lear* was written, the political implications of this were radical. The former logic bound property and authority to the crown and its feudatories on an ontic level, while the latter sought to subject property and authority to an autonomous code of law representative of the "common interest." This clash of logics is evident in conflicts between the recently crowned James I and parliament. The liberal position was exemplified by progressive jurists such as Thomas Craig and Edward Coke, who describes the institutions of Parliament as "declaratories of the ancient common laws of England, to the observation, and keeping whereof, the king was bound and sworn" (Coke 1797 vol. 2: 5). James I asserted the absolutist position in his own political treatises, declaring, for example, that "kings were the authors and makers of the laws, and not the laws of the kings" (*The True Law of Free Monarchies*).
- <sup>14</sup> A number of scholars have followed Lewis in reading this as an allegory for the seventeenth century growth pangs of political and economic "modernity"—the shift "from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from organic community to atomistic state" (Delany 1977: 431; cf. Burke 1959; Danby 1961; Tillyard 1962; Colie 1972; Halpern 1991; Holbrook 2000). Delany suggests that we can see this tension most clearly in Shakespeare's treatment of the trope of social bonds. Cordelia is distinguished by her honest exhortation of her filial bond (I.i.96). Likewise, Kent declares himself bound by honour to give honest council to Lear despite his displeasure (I.i.155). Edmund, on the other hand, announces that he is bound to the law of nature alone, and disparages "idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny" (I.ii.1, 50). Misled by Edmund, Gloucester proceeds to predict the onset of social crisis: "in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked betwixt son and father" (I.ii.110–113). Later, when Lear begins to awaken to Regan's treachery, he implores her to recall "the offices of nature, bond of childhood," to no avail (II.iv.192).
- <sup>15</sup> Citations and analysis are based on the 1997 Tokyo production, which was broadcast with Japanese subtitles on the television program "Geijutsu gekijō." All translations are my own.
- <sup>16</sup> Marx defines primitive accumulation as "the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production" (1975: 705). This comprised "a change in the form of servitude."
- <sup>17</sup> After expropriating former freeholders' land, elites found themselves confronted with rising numbers of dispossessed and dislocated former agriculturalists. Rather than adequately curbing enclosure and monopolies, the state responded by criminalising unemployment as "vagabondage": Elizabeth I, for example, mandated that "Unlicensed beggars above 14 years of age are to be severely flogged and

branded on the left ear unless someone will take them into service for two years," while James I declared that "Any one wandering about and begging is declared a rogue and a vagabond... Whilst in prison they are to be whipped as much and as often as the justices of the peace think fit" (Marx 1975: 723–731).

- <sup>18</sup> Richard Halpern and William Dodd identify this plot device as a reference to the conflict between James I and parliament over the unification of the kingdoms of England and Scotland. In his speeches to in favour of unification, James I "repeatedly invoked the misfortunes that had befallen early Britain as the result of [the apocryphal] Brutus' division of his kingdom into three parts" (Halpern 1991: 219). To a period audience, King Lear's repetition of the Brutus' error would have established him as James' "antitype" (Dodd 1999: 485). Dodd further identifies the trope of "political seduction by loving words" as a reference to Elizabeth I, who had a weakness for emotive politics. As Dodd observes, "The task that Lear's daughters are obliged to perform [during the first scene's so-called love test] not only resembles the one Elizabeth set herself; it also resembles the task she set her courtiers and councillors to speak 'the rhetoric and ritual of devotion'" (1999: 483). Lear's subsequent manipulation by his daughters hyperbolises Elizabeth's manipulation by courtiers who "[took] advantage of her oft-expressed desire to rule with the love of the people" (Haigh 1988: 95, 114); to Dodd, both King Lear and his daughters "would have surely been seen by a Globe audience as exploiting [Elizabeth's] now-threadbare mode of government" (1999: 482).
- <sup>19</sup> It is possible to hear this as an allusion to Suharto's colonial ambitions in East Timor, Kalimantan, Papua and Aceh, a bitter turn of events given Indonesia's role in the nominally anti-imperialist Non-Aligned Movement. In 1996, one year before *Lear* was premiered, the East Timor conflict was finally thrust under the international spotlight as a result of Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize (CAVR 2005: 121).
- <sup>20</sup> Purushotam cites Chiew Seen Kong as representative of Singaporean sociological doxa on multilingualism and ethnicity-race: "Bilingualism in Singapore serves three functions. First, it serves to break down ethnic boundaries by destroying the previously perfect overlap between ethnicity and language. Second, it serves to break down ethnic boundaries by providing the linguistic resources for inter-ethnic communication and understanding through shared meanings of the linguistic resource. Third, it serves to reduce the previous stark inequalities in occupational opportunities and incomes between the English-educated and the vernacular-educated" (1983: 47). While the second two observations are defensible, the first is a remarkable inversion of historical realities. Comparing census data suggests that prior to the institutionalisation of race-languages, there was more language heterogeneity within the races, ergo less overlap between race and language.
- <sup>21</sup> According to the 2010 Census of 2,928,178 Singaporeans, the languages most frequently spoken at home are Mandarin (1,064,157 [up from 1,010,539 in 2000]), English (871,374 [up from 665,087]), Malay (349,121 [down from 406,549]), Hokkien (237,147 [down from 329,583]), Cantonese (119,143 [down from 163,703]), Tamil (94,487 [up from 91,015]), Teochew (93,811 [down from 141,569]), other Indian languages (34,293 [up from 19,862]), other Chinese languages (32,449 [down from 52,418]) and "others" (32,196 [up from 7,228]).
- <sup>22</sup> Group Representation Constituencies were implemented in 1988, and currently outnumber Single Member Constituencies (SMCs). A GRC ticket consists of three to six candidates, at least one of whom must be Malay, Indian or Other. The PAP has defended the GRC system as a means of ensuring some minority representation in parliament, while critics have impugned it as a form of suppressing opposition parties, who may not have enough recognised candidates to fill out a competitive GRC (Tan 2005: 418). In addition, some scholars argue that GRCs "institutionalize and rigidify divisions that have no substantive purpose other than formalizing consciousness of 'difference'" (Hassall 1997: 16). This keeps low-level fears of interracial tension alive and helps the government justify interventionist social policies in advance (Chua 2007: 925). According to the opposition, these fears are largely ungrounded in reality. Notably, during the 1991 elections, both PM Goh and the Singaporean mainstream press attributed the PAP's reduced margin of victory to antagonistic racially-driven voting, while members of the opposition attributed their wins to economic frustrations (Purushotam 1998: 224).
- <sup>23</sup> Yayasan Mendaki was established in the early 1980s by Malay Member of Parliaments (MPs) and business leaders with financial assistance from the government (<http://www.mendaki.org.sg/>); SINDA was established in 1991 through collaboration between the Action Committee on Indian Education (ACIE) and the government (<http://www.sinda.org.sg/>); and CDAC was established in 1992 by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) and the Singapore Federation of

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Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) (<http://www.cdac.org.sg/>). Each month, the state deducts a small amount from each working Singaporean's Central Provident Fund (CPF) account and routes it to "their" racial organisation. Although it is possible to opt out, this scheme "admits of no 'hybrid' spaces and individuals" (Chua 2007: 919).

- <sup>24</sup> Needless to say, the state-capital-culture nexus is hardly novel. Indeed, Singaporean elites' pairing of statist and capitalist rhetoric and the exhortation of a celebratory public culture recalls Wyndham Lewis' sarcastic indictment of the "public-minded" merchants and statesmen of Shakespeare's day: "It is usual for the economist-historian to insist on the high sense of 'patriotic' duty of the early merchant, his high sense of being engaged on a sacred national work, delightfully identical with personal enrichment... 'Wool, sugar, turpentine and pepper / pepper, sugar, turpentine and wool' can, of course, be sung to the tune of the national anthem" (1927: 33–34).
- <sup>25</sup> Whereas PM Lee unapologetically repressed heterogenous creative activity within the arts, PM Goh asked Singaporeans to complement economic development by cultivating an "outstanding, refreshing cosmopolitan society" (*Straits Times* 21 December 1996). In 1991, the state created the National Arts Council to further this objective, and in 1992 it announced a "Global City for the Arts" campaign administered by the Economic Development Board and Singapore Tourism Board (Chong 2003: 6). Former Minister for Information and the Arts B. G. Yeo made clear the economic motivations of this campaign in a speech given at the opening of a Japanese retail complex which included arts and performance spaces: "With science and mathematics, we can produce accurately and efficiently. But to create high value, we must also produce artistically" (*Straits Times* 9 October 1993; cited 31). The state was particularly interested in developing cultural resources which would make Singapore more attractive to multinational corporations and wealthy expatriates, the so-called "transnational capitalist class" (cf. Robinson 2005).
- <sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Derrida follows Marx in asserting that Shakespeare understood the aporias of property and authority more clearly than most modern sociologists (1994: 51).