

focas

Forum On Contemporary Art & Society



Precious Little Difference
Gender. Sexuality. Art.

Protest, Provocation, Process
Cultural Activism in South East Asia

Colonialism or Collaboration?
*Intercultural Practice and
International Arts Organisations*

Redeeming Qualities: State, Sexuality and *Asian Boys* Venka Purushothaman

Introduction

The politicisation of what is permissible in theatre is an old debate. However, the debate constantly reinvents itself to befit the social mores of society, at different points in time, and varnishes or corrodes the gridlock between the state and the arts. Times change and the perennial issues take new form and shade. In recent times, theatre in Singapore has opted for a greater degree of frivolity, which has been criticised for being self-indulgent. Be it Theatreworks' *Desdemona*, Action Theatre's *Swimming Instructor*, Glass Theatre's *Crystal Boys*, Wild Rice's *Emily of Emerald Hill*, or Singapore Repertory Theatre's *R & J* there is, what I would consider, a quiet corruption of heterosexual discourse through the employ of frivolity. This corruption, an altered state of presence rather than dishonesty, is prompted primarily by the need to develop new avenues of theatre practice that provide windows of opportunities to address and narrate the importance of investing in understanding one's sense of identity and selfhood in Singapore. Frivolity masks the larger umbrella of sex and sexuality as an overriding theme and there is a shift, I allege, from dramatic transvestism to gay representation in theatre.

This paper speculates on the pronounced presence of gay representation in Singaporean theatre and how theatre has employed Camp aesthetics as a critical trope for corrupting heterosexual discourse through parody, pastiche and exaggeration. This paper asserts that Camp aesthetics in itself is a structural feature of the heterosexual discourse, which provides for resistive and inversionary possibilities; and as such, it does not destabilise the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology pushes the gay agenda to be inventive in order to assert its own stabilisation. The recent staging of *Asian Boys Vol. 1* by The Necessary Stage (December 2001) is a case in point. This paper looks closely at how this play engages Camp aesthetics to question and destabilise heterosexual discourse, and how the latter responds with redemptive attributes for its survival when faced with discursive erosion. In the end, both the state and the play enact a cultural charade of sorts.



A Magic Carpet Ride.
Hossan Leong and Nora Samosir in
Asian Boys Vol. 1

The Possibility of Permissibility

The year 1992 was a turning point for Singapore theatre as the Censorship Review Committee Report¹ was issued outlining a modicum of what was permissible in Singapore productions. Race, politics, religion and sex remained taboo. However, sexuality became the tug, as it is an area of human socialisation that is considerably driven by libidinal desire unlike race, politics or religion. While theatre may embrace sex and sexuality as dramatic tropes for performative expression of the social and political, sex and sexuality in fact are ridden with their own internal fractures and clashes. As anthropologist Gayle Rubin argues:

“...the realm of sexuality has its own internal politics, inequalities and modes of oppression. As with other aspects of human behaviour, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbued with conflicts of interest and political manoeuvring, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense, sex is always political. But there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more overtly politicised. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated.”²

The highly publicised Gung Ho Theatre's *Too Glam One* immediately tested this possibility with a “prude awakening”³ of not only policy but also of individual versus social morality. The play, written by J. A. Tessensohn, was not allowed in its original version but was later passed with amendments. The play retained its irreverent campy language, sexuality and hedonism. The script was reworked and later staged in 1993 about the same time as Tan Tarn How/TheatreWorks' *Lady of Soul and her Ultimate 'S' Machine*. Leaving aside the inherent political satire, sex overrode *Lady of Soul* where the serious was traded for the trivial.

If artists are also custodians of public morality, then *Lady of Soul* definitely triggered critics Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan to take to task Singapore theatre's obsession with things sexual. In a *Straits Times* article, they lamented the “fascination with sexual matters [that] often takes the form of mere garden-variety luridness” in Singapore theatre, which, they claim, is a by-product of relaxed censorship controls.⁴ They argued that the obsession with things sexual was to break taboo in a conservative society where any form of overt discussion or show of sex would be equated with rebellion and therefore considered political. Attention to sexuality could be a form of self-censorship, that is, the

Attention to sexuality could be a form of self-censorship, that is, the inability to deal with things political.



A Goddess Descends.
Full Cast in *Asian Boys Vol. 1*

inability to deal with things political. While sexuality in itself was what patriarchy sought to suppress, they added that the danger of letting this obsession proceed further maligned and endangered the emergence of genuine talent and ideas. There is value to this argument and it would not be flippant to assert that some confusion looms between liberalism and permissiveness in Singapore theatre.

Counter-arguments to Heng and Devan abound, ranging from calls for freedom of expression to accusations of encouraging criminalisation of theatre. Critics agree that both sex and politics had come to share a taboo status in Singapore. Writer Philip Jeyaretnam argued that, "...when an artist forces an audience to re-examine any taboo subject, the possibility is always there that at least some members of the audience will re-examine others of their own accord. The true subject in Singapore is fear (of being thought different, of our true selves, of our neighbours, of those in power—many facets of the same fear) that has disabled so many of us from self-expression."⁵

Deliberate or incidental, political manoeuvring or not, Singapore's short theatre history is remarkably and fondly remembered for its transvestism, generally employed as a means to renegotiate social and personal space. Transvestism—Ivan Heng's *Hot Dogs and Eternal Triangles*, Theatreworks' *Lest the Demons Get To Me* and Toy Factory Ensemble's *Purple*—remains a disposition that mainstream culture flirts with constantly making it culturally agreeable, but not socially or legally since it revels in the world of the unnatural and unbelievable. It may mock bourgeois virtues of sexual respectability but it does not overthrow them. Richard Sennett calls this cautious balance as 'disobedience dependence' where the transgressor disobeys, but the authority states the terms. As such, these acts of renegotiation have little to do with genuine rebellion or change.⁶ For the transvestite, femininity functions as a primary signifier of sexuality; that is, to be more woman than woman. This is often misperceived to be the signifier of homosexuality. While effeminacy may factor as a cultural signifier in both categories, it is not a given.

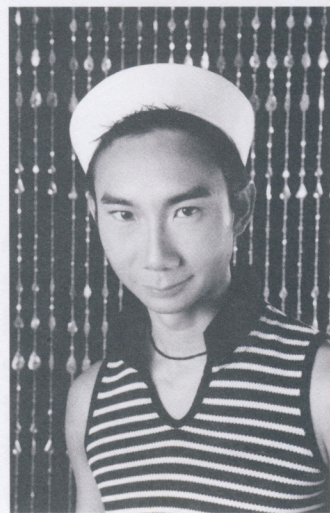
In the last decade or so, masculinity has been appropriated from the heterosexual discourse, in a *coup d'etat*, to invert the social construction of effeminacy as a signifier of homosexuality. While gym-fit athletic bodies may give Michelangelo's statue of David a run for its money, this appropriation of masculinity remains at a discursive level. The degree and complexity of engagement with masculinity remains, and is pre-determined to date, by the

market economy through its everyday cultural resources such as fashion and music and not by the gay agenda, which is about expressing a sense of being in a heterosexual world; identifying non-criminalising private and public spaces; and communicating the ability of gay people to contribute towards a common social goal. This reinforces Michel Foucault's powerful claim, in his *History of Sexuality*, that homosexuality is a social construct of a set of behaviour patterns that do not cohere with the general order of things, which in itself a construct.⁷ This social construction happens through the regular practice of cultural activities e.g., gestures, dressing, speech-patterns etc., which become representative of homosexuality and theatre, which addresses the gay agenda, is partisan to this construction.

In the last few years, while there is still a continued presence of transvestism, it can be speculated that Singapore theatre has also shifted to exploring and staging gay representations. The mere injection of the representation has been, by and large, a tease, e.g., Othello's final kiss in *Desdemona*, Emily's son's suggestion for leaving her in *Emily of Emerald Hill* and Romeo's deep-seated love for a male Juliet in *R & J* to name a few. Exceptionally, Glass Theatre's *Crystal Boys*, TNS' *Asian Boys* and SRT's *Rent* dealt wholly with gay issues.

Historically—perhaps driven by a Darwinian notion of survival—gay representation in the social and political arena, by and large, has been criminalised as deviant. There is limited space for conciliatory conversations. In a *Straits Times* article, journalist Irene Ng noted: "Don't ask, don't tell. And Don't Promote...this has been the unwritten code guiding how the homosexual community relates—or should relate—to mainstream society in Singapore. Homosexuals do not have to tell and, as long as they do not promote their lifestyle, they can enjoy their pockets of freedom."⁸ On the other hand, the arena of counter-cultural production has been a champion of all things worthy and unworthy of discussion including homosexuality. It champions itself as embracing all oppositional and propositional views, and developing social critique. Risking oversimplification, I would like to posit several reasons for this pronounced shift to gay representation in general which is leading to evident presence in theatre.

Firstly, for decades the counter-cultural front has been a centre for critical practice. Unlike politics, which is legitimated by policy, counter-cultural production, to a large extent, legitimates itself by allowing a range of voices, opinions and practices to co-exist within a constantly evolving framework even



Anchor!
Hossan Leong in publicity photo of
Asian Boys Vol. 1

Absolut Vodka, American Express, IKEA, to name a few, are some of the mainstream brands in Europe and America to have identified the gay market as one of its target segments ... Armed with financial self-sufficiency, the gay citizen is renegotiating sexuality as a right of citizenry.

though it does have its own style of vigilance and policing of truths, dogmas and conventions. The arts, in this instance, make visible what the Law makes invisible. Theatre, in particular, has liberally started to push the boundaries of Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's edict, "...there is no policy too sensitive to question, and no subject so taboo that you cannot even mention it."⁹

Secondly, material culture has provided gay men and women the opportunity to become self-governing consumers. Previously in Singapore, the promotion of accumulation of wealth, as Philip Jeyaretnam purports, was seen a bribe for political conformity.¹⁰ However, now the same accumulated wealth seems to allow the individual the freedom to express and claim a stake in the pecking order of society. Pubs, clubs, fashion, housing, furniture, film and arts festivals and events, hotels and resorts, travel agents, etc. target, segment and service this new market, which has enviably deep pockets. Absolut Vodka, American Express, IKEA to name a few, are some of the mainstream brands in Europe and America to have identified the gay market as one of its target segments.¹¹ Armed with financial self-sufficiency, the gay citizen is renegotiating sexuality as a right of citizenry. Citizenry is premised on the duty to abide and swear allegiance to heterosexual discourse in which sexuality is the domain of family: "privatised, de-radicalised, de-eroticised and confined in all sense of the word: kept in place, policed, limited".¹² With globalisation, this notion has become a shaky premise as people swear allegiances to materiality and social movement. Individuals front themselves with their sexuality, be it in the manner in which they dress, or what they practice in the privacy of the home. Gay men and women use sexuality as a plausible alternative to expressing their identity and "claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public, but the going public is, in a necessary but nevertheless paradoxical move, about protecting the possibilities of private life and private choice in a more inclusive society."¹³ The ultimate agenda is to gain a secure private space for them and not be criminalised and made invisible in their own space.

The third point is closely linked to the second. The global capitalist system has developed phantasmatic congregational and consumption meccas. The highly theatrical gay Mardi Gras' held in major western cities, the introduction of the Internet and the club and pub scenes have brought about greater sexual liberalism as a means for gay men and women to communicate, consolidate and prioritise their needs. The development of these public/private spaces relegates the notion of the "closet" to being a mere ontological tool. Of course,

many have argued the malicious intent of the market in developing, cajoling and maintaining this new 'pink economy', which encourages its citizens to voice their politics through their spending and assert their rights as consumers.¹⁴ The market shifts the 'truths' of sexuality from biology to economics. The former provides little 'choice', the latter purported aplenty. The late capitalist idea of 'choice' has become one of perception. The perception that consumers have a choice in a free market is fast evaporating, as mergers and acquisitions of major media, lifestyle and F & B conglomerates is the order of the day. The challenge is to make a monopoly look like an oligopoly that portrays free market sentiments. The consumer floats through a hypermarket of ideas, more so than the actual products, shopping for lifestyle choices. There is less of 'life' and more of 'style' choices, which infect and shape personal identity through a signification process of creating a 'yearn' to develop a self. Self-identity is intrinsically intertwined with market forces. In this instance, the gay person relinquishes the need for social sympathy and support since the market provides the scope for developing and creating a gay lifestyle. The quiet support of governments worldwide of these congregational spaces tips the balance from one of morality to one of economics.

Amidst the capitalist schizophrenia, the idea of 'camp'—meaning exaggeration—surfaces as an aesthetic veil of the pink economy. Susan Sontag's groundbreaking 1964 essay, "Notes on Camp",¹⁵ positions Camp as an apolitical, aestheticised, and frivolous sensibility that bordered on the anti-serious, unnatural and exaggerated. Camp aesthetics is tolerable only because it inversely debunks itself when it separates legality from morality and morality from sexuality. At best, it reveals cultural power and political impotence. Because of its frivolity and posturing, Camp is tolerable to the state. Two plays, The Necessary Stage's *Asian Boys Vol 1* and Toy Factory Ensemble's *Shopping and F**king* are acceptable in Singapore only because of their blazoned unnaturalness as compared to a production like Singapore Repertory Theatre's musical, *Rent* which congenially allows for an aesthetic that liberalises public perceptions into accepting gay lifestyle as something no different from a heterosexual one. In another scenario in Sydney, Australia, Joe Calarco's *R & J*, which was staged by Singapore Repertory Theatre in Singapore, drew barbed criticism from worried parents for its portrayal of two heterosexual schoolboys in school uniform kissing.¹⁶ The irony of this Australian situation is that Sydney organised and celebrated the largest gay and lesbian Mardi Gras in the southern hemisphere a month before this outcry. This reinforces the notion I propositioned earlier, that economic viability and exaggerated social behaviours



Pining.
Peter Sau in publicity photo of
Asian Boys Vol. 1

are acceptable within the structures of control to a point that when it is naturalised, it becomes problematic for the mainstream ideology.

However, with the appropriation of Camp as a liberal aesthetic and the realisation that materiality and lifestyle choice is suspect, gay culture has refashioned Camp, into an activist strategy for individuals and organisations. In taking this strategy, contemporary theorists have debunked Sontag's reading of Camp, "*en-queered*" it and granted it political and critical status making it solely a queer discourse that embodies a specifically queer cultural critique. In its cultural critique, Camp culture substitutes a heterosexual discourse of order and abiding citizenry with a discourse of the performative, improvisational and style.¹⁷ In this instance, the mode of production of identity shifts from the personal being political to the personal, in its political manifestation, becoming promiscuous. In becoming promiscuous, the concealed gay man/woman is brought to the limelight.

Redeeming the Asian Boys

"There are three kinds of gay people. The first kind decides to live with his real self, but in a false world. The second kind decides to live with his false self, but in the real world. The true gay man is born in the third kind: the one who is ready to show his real self to the real world. It is this third kind we must stop."

Asian Boys

Frivolity and gay sensibility overrides the theming of *Asian Boys*. The play, invites the audience to a fairy-tale "ride through glorious holes to experience style, phallic monsters, stardust, and macho goddesses...[playing] out your fantasies under the showers, at the pubs, on the net, and in the bushes..."¹⁸ It is live Internet surfing, unclothed by anonymity, with scenes that cruise from site to site of superficial content. Similarly, the play recounts the journey of Agnes, daughter of the God Indra, (played by the actress Nora Samosir) who is sent to earth to provide happiness by saving gay people from their deviances. Her journey is guided by Boy (Hossan Leong) who, though crowned a queen, is characterised into an epic *bildungsroman*, as he ages from 18 to 60 in a short span of time. For him, it is a search not just for happiness but also the elixir of youth—the *prima facie* feature of the gay community.

Agnes, a Don Quixote in drag, encounters a motley crew of gay men who throughout history seem to be the unhappiest. Invariably, Agnes floats along searching, longing, cruising, eyeing to inflict happiness through historically-situated scenes from nineteenth century migrant history to Japanese Occupation to police interrogative persona in the 1980s, from 1990s gay club culture to twenty-first century IRC chat rooms. In these situations, confessions are abundant where Agnes scrutinises desires, emotions and fears throughout history. Agnes listens to the confessions and as the anointed authority figure, interprets the confessions and frames the truth: gay men throughout history are unhappy. Her framing enforces dominant ideological beliefs. Boy questions her reproduction of truth from these confessions and her conclusive assumption that all gay people are unhappy highlighting the clash between discovering the truth and inventing the truth.

Agnes' search leads to another assumption: the strategic redemption of the gay as the low, the despised, the imperfect, and the "trashy". This strategic redemption of the marginal is a common leitmotif sufficiently echoed throughout the late twentieth century cultural theory, particularly in Camp aesthetics, which has taken its cue from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival. *Asian Boys* presents a cultural practice of 'redeeming filth' characterised by laughter, excess, bad taste, immersion, inversion, transgression and the elimination of distance between subject and object; high and low. It collides, in a healthy fashion, the validated language of the heterosexual with the vernacular language of the homosexual. In this collision, the carnivalesque is born, outside the prescribed world of power, where the 'low' insists on its rights to a place in culture. In carnival, the temporary inhibition from prevailing truths and from the established order is celebrated by suspending all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions to inject liberation from the prevailing point of view of the world.¹⁹

In the vein of the carnivalesque, *Asian Boys* plays on exaggerating and weakening prescribed expectations of theatre in a community club.²⁰ Normal audience/actor relationships are inverted as the actors mock the audience by playing practical jokes, farting, 'mooning' and putting the passive audience on the spot. Adding to this, excessive physicality preys on stereotypical gay behaviour. There is a strong emphasis on body polity—hair, back, eyes, hands, anus, penis and their referentiality to the play are vile and political. The heterosexual uneasiness is further emphasised with less than perfect or grotesque bodies in G-strings and lacy leggings making a spectacle of themselves. Carnival involves the 'pleasure of looking' and *Asian Boys*

The heterosexual uneasiness is further emphasised with less than perfect or grotesque bodies in G-strings and lacy leggings making a spectacle of themselves. Carnival involves the 'pleasure of looking' and *Asian Boys* exaggerates the visible and magnifies and foregrounds superficial appearances.

exaggerates the visible and magnifies and foregrounds superficial appearances. These superficial appearances are evidently deficient in meaning but there is redemption in laughing away the scenarios, the excesses and the inversions.

Inversion is characteristic of Camp. Inversion of the dominant ideology prevails and in *Asian Boys*, there is a double inversion in operation. Starting with the inversion of acceptability of the decorum, the play throws out any possibility for redemption for the gay person in a pliant heterosexual world. However, there is the inversion of the gay sensibility in itself. For example, the use of French homoerotic photographers, *Pierre & Gilles*—styled images of the male body for promoting the production is overturned by the less the perfect bodies on stage. As Bakhtin would put it, it is a grotesque realism at play, which opposes the aesthetic of the beautiful and provides for oppositional and contradictory readings of masculinity. On one level, it relieves the viewer from the tyranny of the unattainable body; on another, it defies the pressures of the pink economy and its insistence on a 'look'. Boy's constant bantering on Agnes' satisfied bag-lady look—"Look, I have to appear in public with a woman wearing a red satin gown and a bad perm. Compensation is required"—is compounded by the gay man's traumatic need for change: "I must get a tan. That I should start working out. That I will become a gym-rat disco bunny with a snake in my pants...my one desire is to walk here one day with a tight pink T-shirt with the word 'Gorgeous' on it in glitter."

One of the main critiques in *Asian Boys* is the belief that happiness is ordained in a heterosexual possibility of marriage and family. Agnes' agenda is to correct the uncorrectable: "you can change. With love, anything can change...unnatural desire will lead to unnatural suffering." She takes a religious presence of mind to "straighten" people out to show them "the way to true happiness" and "save the planet from extinction". Agnes gets entangled with the obsolete notion of rehabilitating the homosexual dis-ease, and provides short-term, Agony Aunt-style, relief e.g. marriage and family. Until the end, the audience is left guessing as to the way to true happiness and the *Asian Boys* are left waiting in the wings. Some preliminary answers are raised in an IRC room where Agnes draws conclusion that unhappiness is not due to homosexual desire but rather, universal problems in love.

Concluding a Cultural Charade

Whenever we try to narrate ourselves, we appear as dislocations in discourse

Edward Said

If *en-queering* Camp is critical to the success of inversion, then *Asian Boys* falls short. Its over-emphasis on trashiness, poor production values and circulating negative stereotypes undermines the aesthetic discourse of Camp and gives little space for greater engagement. Being 'in-your-face' and assertive about gay-ness is far from adequate since it skirts the critical issues of the gay agenda. Relying upon shifting perspectives from within or without the closet as a determinant of identity reduces the gay agenda merely to one of personal choice. *Asian Boys*, as Foucault would put it, creates powerful cultural myths rather than truths and propels a hegemonic containment of difference. Furthermore, *Asian Boys* fortifies a western construction of gay culture designed around cruising, eyeing and exaggerating a sexual being. The play offers little insight to social, political or psychological ethos of contemporary Asia, even though it rejects the claim of heterosexual discourse to morality, politics and aesthetics. Instead, it propositions a heterosexual discourse that realigns morality to a lifestyle choice. In doing so, it remains a pale mimicry of a western cultural polity.

Jonathan Dollimore, in his book *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* propositions several theories of containment in which mainstream culture counters the antics of counter-cultural productions, which we may wish to consider vis-a-vis the function of *Asian Boys* to any form of social consciousness.²¹ According to Dollimore, anthropological studies allege that transgressive practices such as carnival do not disturb or invert dominant values but rather function as their guarantor—"a licensed release of social tension, a kind of safety-valve effect, which far from undermining the existing order, actually contributes to its survival."

Dollimore adds that contemporary counter-culture has come to think of sex and sexuality as an anarchic and hence, potentially subversive energy, which the state wants to control and cultural and social activists want to liberate. Any act of dissidence may not only be coercively or ideologically repressed by the dominant discourse, "but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges." As Foucault notes, sexuality far from being an energy which 'power' is afraid of, is actually a discursive construct which power works through. As Raymond Williams succinctly puts it, "...nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture."²² At best, the dominant discourse



An Aspiring Goddess.
Nora Samosir in *Asian Boys* Vol. 1

manufactures dissent only to use suppression as a strategy of control leading to a cultural charade. This explains, in part, why homosexuality may be culturally marginal but symbolically central to the energy and maintenance of heterosexual discourse. Finally, any form of 'liberal nonchalance' on the part of the state to gay representation in theatre is part of the critical management of the minority: redeeming it from a century-old tragic realm of hatred, hysteria, paranoia, disease and fear and placing it indubitably in the comic realm of excess, frivolity, fun and entertainment. The shift is from a demonic behaviour to a comic identity.

Of course, the idea of containment is not without problems since it begs the question whether any form of transgressive act should only lead to a utopic social transformation, personal liberation/redemption or merely educates the public as to the possibilities of alternative discourses. In the instance of *Asian Boys*, it does neither. The play could have shifted the focus of homosexuality from an essentialist position of frivolity, flamboyance and excess to one that is provisional and dependent on the context of its existence. Homosexuality could have been read across cultures, beliefs, desires, aspirations and issues rather than dealing only with social and history-specific constructions. *Asian Boys* does not disturb anything, change anything and limits itself to the predictability of its opposing binary.

Leaving aside its dangerous venture into the realm of bad art, *Asian Boys* is definitely for the elite: not the theatre specialist but the gay elite who is well-versed in the subcultural antics of the gay commune both on the Internet and the physical world. The community, which is fetishistic about its 'look', is portrayed to be ideologically vacuous. The lingo and posturing provides and services the subcultural economy of Asian gay culture especially by imparting a misleading dissonance by sitting alongside the Asian boys erotica/pornographic market on the Internet. There is no discussion of AIDS, which has preoccupied much gay discourse in the west and hallmarked by The Necessary Stage's reality monologue, *Completely With/Out Character*. Commendably, the play, by its omission draws attention to the viability that the disease is inherently separate from lifestyle choices or for that matter biology. For the non-elite, the play features stereotypical cultural tropes i.e., drag queens, pretty boys, dildos and artificial vernacular language to communicate and remain religiously accessible and draw the entertaining laugh. It falls within an essentialised ontology of heterosexuality. It is sexual

deviance displayed as spectacle for heterosexual consumption and any semblance of homoerotic threat or corruption is neutralised.

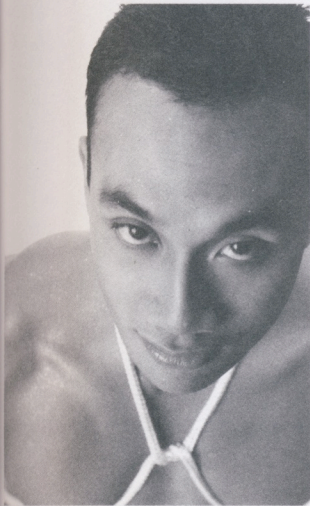
The quest for a 'gay self' in *Asian Boys* can be said to be most wanting since any stake at expressing a sense of self has been reduced to nothing more than a postmodern dialectic of centre/margin, homo/hetero, assimilation/disruption, dominant/subordinate, conformity/deviance. Perhaps the want is symptomatic of the criminalised dislocation of gay culture in political discourse. However, in social discourse, it remains an essential thorn in an unseemly fabric of sexualities. In economic discourse, it is a new economy, a new segmentation for cultivation. The community's dislocated weakness is the consolidated strength of the status quo. As such, *Asian Boys* proposes that the gay community's ultimate redemption is in remaining different. The play's contribution to Singapore theatre remains not in its aesthetic or technical precision, but in its ability to suggest and prod the possibilities that the boundary as to what is permissible on stage is broadening and that the state is acknowledging the broader definitions of sexual mores. Call it naïvete or transgressive, but this discursive contribution, while serving as a release valve between the state and Singaporean counter-culture, remains *Asian Boys'* key redeeming quality, in an otherwise spent idea.

Endnotes.

1. Report of *The Censorship Review Committee*. Singapore: MITA, 1992.
2. Gayle Rubin's quote adapted from *Foucault and Queer Theory* by Tasmin Spargo. Reading: Icon Books, 1999. p. 6.
3. Tessensohn J.A. *Too Glam One! The Authorized and Original Versions*. Singapore: Gung Ho Propaganda Publication, 1993.
4. Heng, Geraldine; Devan, Janadas. "Sex and Singapore Theatre" in *The Straits Times*. April 1, 1993.
5. Jeyaretnam, Philip. "Sex, Art and Singapore" in *Commentary*. Singapore: NUSS Publication. Vol. 11, No. 1, 1993, p. 43.
6. Sennett, Richard. *Authority*. London: Secker, 1980, p. 3.

FOCAS

7. Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality. Vol.1.* New York: Vintage Books. 1999. p. 15-36.
8. Ng, Irene. "Do Gays Have a Place in Singapore?" in *The Straits Times*. Singapore. May 27, 2000.
9. *ibid.*
10. Jeyaretnam, Philip. "Sex, Art and Singapore" in *Commentary*. Singapore: NUSS Publication. Vol. 11, No. 1, 1993, p. 43.
11. *Adworld.ie*. "Special Report: Reaching the Gay Consumer" 10 May 2001.
12. Weeks, Jeffrey. "The Sexual Citizen" in *Love and Eroticism*. Ed Mike Featherstone. London: Sage Books, 1999, p. 37.
13. *ibid.*
14. Meyer, Moe. Ed. "Introduction" in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. New York: Routledge. 1994, p. 6.
15. Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp" in *A Susan Sontag Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 1964, pp. 105-119.
16. Associated Press. "Kissing Schoolboys in Aussie Play Raises Hackles" in *Project Eyeball*, April 16, 2001. In a pre-publicity article in *The Straits Times*, The Singapore Repertory Theatre said that the kissing scenes in the Singapore version of Joe Calarco's *R & J* would be simulated.
17. Meyer, Moe. Ed. "Introduction" in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 3.
18. The Necessary Stage. *The Programme*. Singapore: 2000. Issue No.1. p. 2.
19. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. p. 10.
20. *Asian Boys* was enacted in a suburban community centre, the Marine Parade Community Centre, which happens to be the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's ward. The Necessary Stage is a resident of the Community Centre along side a public library and sports amenities.



All tied up and nowhere to go.
Shaffiq Idris in publicity photo
Asian Boys Vol. 1

21. Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 28, 32, 82-85.

22. Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 114. Quoted in Dollimore.