

Interview with Rustom Bharucha, by Felipe Cervera

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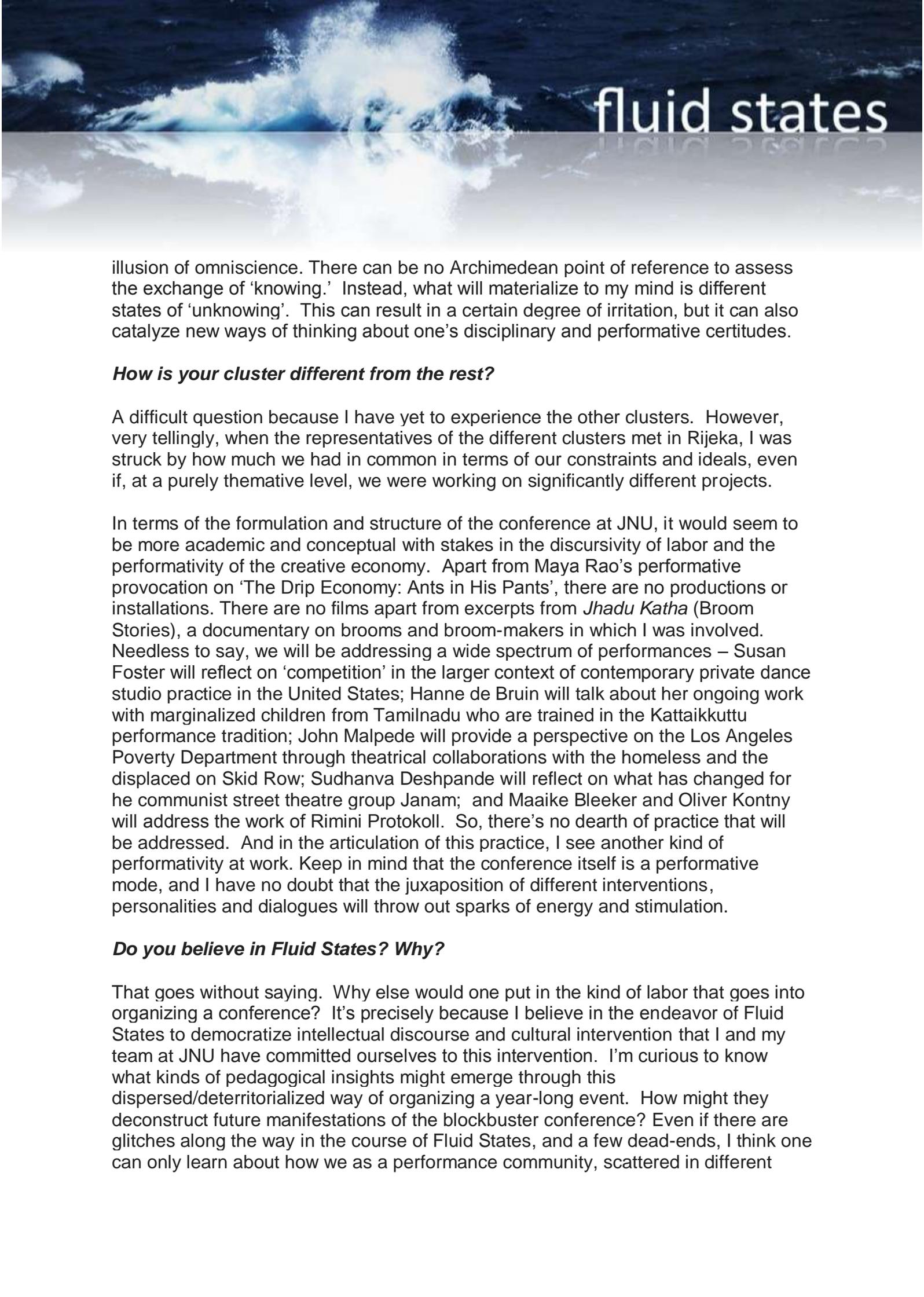
Why were you interested in hosting one of the regional clusters of Fluid States?

Fluid States is a breath of fresh air. Instead of reinventing the wheel by perpetuating the monolithic blockbuster conference model, it dares to think differently. Its dramaturgy is fluid in its own right. On the one hand, there's a grid which spells out certain tropes and implicit protocols, but, on the other hand, it's not trying to tell you what to do. It is not attempting to conceptualize the specific intervention that may be of burning concern in a particular context. So, at one level, there's a spatial dimension to Fluid States, but it's also attentive to the unknown possibilities of what can be sparked in specific locations. I like this combination of dramaturgical rigor and flexibility.

What are the conceptual/theoretical links that the topic of your cluster maintains with the larger issue of 'performances of unknowing'?

For me 'unknowing' translates as 'unlearning.' If you're not prepared to unlearn your imagined modes of expertise, you can never break new ground imaginatively, conceptually. Far too much of academic learning is about accumulating accretions around received wisdom. This can lead to complacency and arrogance. I think it's more productive, though infinitely harder, to subject one's axioms to critical scrutiny.

In my cluster, I believe that the process of 'unknowing/unlearning' is almost built into the methodology of bringing together diverse scholars, activists, students and practitioners who are from the social sciences and performance studies. Some of the social scientists being invited for the conference have no background in performance studies whatsoever, even as the idea of performance is beginning to haunt the lacunae in their disciplines. Likewise, many of the performance theorists may not be familiar with the dense ways in which caste has been theorized in the Indian context. In such a collision of discourses, I don't believe that there can be any



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illusion of omniscience. There can be no Archimedean point of reference to assess the exchange of 'knowing.' Instead, what will materialize to my mind is different states of 'unknowing'. This can result in a certain degree of irritation, but it can also catalyze new ways of thinking about one's disciplinary and performative certitudes.

How is your cluster different from the rest?

A difficult question because I have yet to experience the other clusters. However, very tellingly, when the representatives of the different clusters met in Rijeka, I was struck by how much we had in common in terms of our constraints and ideals, even if, at a purely thematic level, we were working on significantly different projects.

In terms of the formulation and structure of the conference at JNU, it would seem to be more academic and conceptual with stakes in the discursivity of labor and the performativity of the creative economy. Apart from Maya Rao's performative provocation on 'The Drip Economy: Ants in His Pants', there are no productions or installations. There are no films apart from excerpts from *Jhadu Katha* (Broom Stories), a documentary on brooms and broom-makers in which I was involved. Needless to say, we will be addressing a wide spectrum of performances – Susan Foster will reflect on 'competition' in the larger context of contemporary private dance studio practice in the United States; Hanne de Bruin will talk about her ongoing work with marginalized children from Tamilnadu who are trained in the Kattaikkuttu performance tradition; John Malpede will provide a perspective on the Los Angeles Poverty Department through theatrical collaborations with the homeless and the displaced on Skid Row; Sudhanva Deshpande will reflect on what has changed for the communist street theatre group Janam; and Maaïke Bleeker and Oliver Kontny will address the work of Rimini Protokoll. So, there's no dearth of practice that will be addressed. And in the articulation of this practice, I see another kind of performativity at work. Keep in mind that the conference itself is a performative mode, and I have no doubt that the juxtaposition of different interventions, personalities and dialogues will throw out sparks of energy and stimulation.

Do you believe in Fluid States? Why?

That goes without saying. Why else would one put in the kind of labor that goes into organizing a conference? It's precisely because I believe in the endeavor of Fluid States to democratize intellectual discourse and cultural intervention that I and my team at JNU have committed ourselves to this intervention. I'm curious to know what kinds of pedagogical insights might emerge through this dispersed/deterritorialized way of organizing a year-long event. How might they deconstruct future manifestations of the blockbuster conference? Even if there are glitches along the way in the course of Fluid States, and a few dead-ends, I think one can only learn about how we as a performance community, scattered in different



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parts of the world, can learn to tune into each other's contexts with a renewed understanding of our shared vulnerabilities and hopes.

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