



THEATRE STUDIES RESEARCH DAY

Friday 21st April 2017, 9.30am-4.00pm

Graduate Reading Room, AS5 #05-09

Panel 1: Practice, Text and Criticism, Dramaturgy (10am-11.30am)

- **In Hindsight: On Practice-as-Research and Originality – Felipe Cervera**
- **Props on Pages: Unmanageable Reality in Virginia Woolf's Theatre Fiction – Dr. Graham Wolfe**
- **Dramaturgs and Dramaturgy in Asia: Some Preliminary Observations – Dr. Robin Loon**

Panel 2: Film (11.40am-1.10pm)

- **Virtual Reality as Genre? – Barney Gopalakrishnen**
- **Desiring the Machine: The Codes of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction – Chan Mun Keet**
- **Re-framing Performance and Performing Alternatives in *Singapore Gaga* – Dr. Edna Lim**

Panel 3: Gender and Sexuality (2.30pm-4pm)

- **The Women and The Model Plays: A Comparative Analysis of *Mise-en-scene* – Jessica Lee Xin**
- **A Feminine Economy of Knowledge and Agency in *King Uru: A Fantasy of Life and Coexistence* – Roweena Yip**
- **Thai *Lakhon Nok* Performers' Queer Performativity in Kraithong – Sura Intamool**

Abstracts

PANEL 1

PRACTICE, TEXT AND CRITICISM, AND DRAMATURGY

Felipe Cervera

In Hindsight: On Practice-as-Research and Originality

This presentation will draw from a PaR project on intercultural theatre-making that I conducted between 2007 and 2012. By revisiting the project ten years after its commencement and five years after its conclusion, the presentation's central aim is to think aloud and freely about the imperative to "look back" in Practice-as-Research methodologies. In PaR, "looking back" is constitutive of the wish for academic rigour, and therefore the trigger for creative strategies to conduct and document research. Here, "looking back" is the way forward towards the pursuit of innovative scholarly and artistic work. In hindsight, there is much of my technical and theoretical knowledge of theatre and theatre-making that stems from the research I conducted between 2007 and 2012. Even when I started to make theatre professionally ten years before, that period is where my research into practice begins, and I still perceive ripples of that project now, even as I work on something else. However, can I perpetually claim that to be the origin of my practice-based research? How far behind does one look back to situate oneself vis-à-vis one's own work? When, then, and in respect to what, can Practice-as-Research be original?

Dr. Graham Wolfe

Props on Pages: Unmanageable Reality in Virginia Woolf's Theatre-Fiction

Pages are not stages. The novelistic medium, in Elaine Scarry's terms, consists of "monotonous small black marks on a white page" with "no acoustical features", and its discursive nature is incongruent with the kinds of perception involved in theatre, where numerous bodies, signifiers, and stimuli may present themselves simultaneously. Bert States goes so far as to say that reading, which lacks the "extraordinary perceptual satisfaction" of theatre's corporeal presence, reduces the eye to an "anesthetized organ". Judged by these standards, theatre-fiction—literary fiction *about* theatre—seems doomed to miss its mark, fundamentally divided from the medium it purports to present. My paper, however, examines the paradox that theatre-novelists have been far more eager than theatre's own most prominent theorists to engage with aspects of theatre's materiality. Take props, for instance. Andrew Sofer (2003), Alice Rayner (2006), and Jonathan Gil Harris (2008) all lament the infrequency with which theatre's props have been incorporated into critical studies, decrying the dematerializing tendencies of scholars who do acknowledge them. This nervousness about the materiality of theatre's components is not, however, to be found among theatre-novelists, whose work has frequently explored the complex, refractory dynamics of props in action. My paper will focus on Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), a novel more prop-heavy than Brecht's *Mother Courage* or Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire*, and which, in its treatment of props as sites of perceptual multistability, anticipates theatre theory by more than half a century.

Dr. Robin Loon

Dramaturgs and Dramaturgy in Asia: Some Preliminary Observations

While dramaturgy is acknowledged and generally accepted as the underlying operating system (to borrow an idea from David Pledger) of a text (written or performed), the role of the dramaturg, his/her relationship to the creatives, impact on the audience and indeed dramaturgy are very much under-examined. The practice and role of the dramaturg in Asia, specifically in SE Asia, is being brought to the fore due to this region's artistic engagements with the international festival circuits and cross continent collaborations. Drawing on participants' remarks and rapporteurs' reports from the 2nd Annual Asian Dramaturgs Network Symposium in Yokohama (February 2017), this paper will consider some of the issues raised and discussed during that symposium to construct possible pathways of development for dramaturgs and dramaturgy in Asia.

PANEL 2

FILM

Barney Gopalakrishnen

Virtual Reality As Genre?

The Matrix film franchise - while it is a combination of a few film genres – is also a combination of virtual reality and its resulting multiverse, owing to the fact that it is a film franchise that could not exist on its own. It is dependent on other mediums such as games, comics and anime amongst others, to carry the narrative. The combination of these mediums conforms to the virtual world and its multiverse theme of *The Matrix* franchise. Since ‘genre’ is the mode of presentation of an art form, virtual reality is as significant a mode of presentation for *The Matrix* franchise as it is being a ‘science fiction’ and an ‘action film’. Being a film franchise that co-exists with other mediums outside that of film, with ‘virtual reality’ playing a significant role across these mediums (in that virtual reality is the narrative that the characters and events deal with), this does take films closer to that of being post-classical even when each of its film installment conforms to classical narratives (such as ‘Beginning, Aristotle’s Middle and End with Resolution’ or to quote Kristen Thompson, “chain of events occurring in time and space and linked by cause and effect”).

Chan Mun Keet

Desiring the Machine: The Codes of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction

In today’s culture of what many recognize as an age of late capitalism, processes of technology are being represented in popular culture with increasing prominence, especially in the contemporary Hollywood action film. This paper seeks to interrogate mass culture through the lens of critical theory, using the example of the recent and massively popular film *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) as a paradigm of the current cinematic fascination with machines and posthumanism, and reading it through Gilles Deleuze’s concept of desiring-machines, together with Walter Benjamin’s comments on technologically-mediated art. In a parallel movement with the hyperindustrialization of the late capitalist era, the Frankfurt School critique of capital is also rejuvenated, where the material codes underlying the mass-culture product are unmasked, to reveal the inner machinations of the flows of desire in global popular culture – where both economy and culture mutually reify each other. In addition, the implications of the awe and terror by which man relates to the machine and its (un)representability will also be discussed, via brief speculations on the role of the (new) media today.

Dr. Edna Lim

Re-framing Performance and Performing Alternatives in *Singapore Gaga*

This paper examines Tan Pin Pin’s *Singapore Gaga* in the context of Singapore’s revival cinema as a national cinema that addresses the state’s version of the nation through counter-performance. *Singapore Gaga* is often perceived as a celebration of diversity and difference through a collage of performances that would otherwise be unnoticed, ignored or forgotten. However, the use of sound and visual editing in the film create an internal structural logic that problematizes how performance is considered, legitimised and ultimately celebrated in Singapore. In doing so, what the film produces is an alternative (performance of) Singapore.

PANEL 3

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Jessica Lee Xin

The Women and The Model Plays : A Comparative Analysis of *Mise-en-scene*

My research investigates how theatrical *mise-en-scene* informs and recreates China's cultural space, national history and identity in the Model Plays. By looking into the engagement of autobiographical memories and official accounts in the creation of the Cultural Revolution's narrative, I review this narrative and offer an alternative reading of it. I suggest that it is possible to draw links between the Cultural Revolution and the Model Plays through an analysis of *mise-en-scene*, both through an analysis of descriptive scenes mentioned in the autobiographical histories, and in the setting of the Model plays. This approach provides me with an introspective lens into the Model Plays, as I attempt to amalgamate the visual with the verbal to create a cohesive narrative of the Model Plays and its impacts on the Cultural Revolution beyond propaganda., I will examine the exploration of the female narratives during the Cultural Revolution, through a comparative analysis of two Model Ballet plays (*The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White Haired Girl*) and a female autobiographical accounts of the revolution (*Wild Swans* by Jun Chang). Taking into account the *mise-en-scene* of the staging space and political spaces in both texts, I draw relations between the supposed paradoxes in the presentation of the female narrative within the Model Ballets and in the actuality of the Revolution, and suggest an underlying correlation through their *mise-en-scene*.

Roweena Yip

A Feminine Economy of Knowledge and Agency in *King Uru: A Fantasy of Life and Coexistence*

I shall examine the narrative interventions of the myth of Bari in the plot of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in order to argue that this particular intercultural production facilitates a distinctively feminine economy of knowledge and agency that is shown to be relational to Shakespeare's text. Baridegi is the originary figure of the *mudang*, the Korean female shaman, and in this production, the knowledge and practice of shamanism is conveyed through her matrilineal ties with her mother, Lady Gildae. Janet Adelman notes that the absence of Lear's wife and mother to his three daughters manifests psychoanalytically in the figure of Lear himself. However, in this production, the presence of the mother is rendered materially present on stage through the Bari narrative, in order to offer spiritual knowledge, which in turn allows for feminine agency through shamanism that removes Bari from participating in the masculine martial economy of *King Lear* (where Cordelia returns with the French army). Ultimately, the spiritual knowledge and agency of the *mudang* finally manifests in Bari's transcendence of death itself – a fate prescribed by Shakespeare – as the Korean narrative of the *mudang* is shown to transcend that of Shakespeare even as it offers a way into accessing different paradigms of feminine subjectivity, feminine epistemology, and feminine agency.

Sura Intamool

Thai *Lakhon Nok* Performers' Queer Performativity in *Kraithong*

Thai traditional *Lakhon Nok* is an all-male-cast performance featuring male cross-dressing. The interplay of gender and sexuality within *Lakhon Nok* performances could be prospectively comprehended within the theoretical framework of Queer Theory, which posits that gender identities such as the hetero and the queer vary throughout diverse cultures. Observers from different socio-cultural contexts probably consider male cross-dressers in *Lakhon Nok* 'queer.' However, I would like to argue that, due to embedded theatrical traditions and social norms, *Lakhon Nok* performers enact queerness that can be acceptable in Thai society as seen from *Kraithong a Lakhon Nok* performance in 1993.