

WORKING GROUP

FEB 16, 10.30-1.30PM

Part I: Open Discussion | Dramaturgy as Collaborative Process

The opening session began with the place of the dramaturg within the creative process of a work. Peter Eckersall shared on “decentered dramaturgy” where the dramaturg actively transforms the creative process. Contrasted against a non-interventionist approach — which may further forestall the making of creative decisions — this opened up the discussion to understand the nature to which such an approach could potentially extend or facilitate the creative process. Noting that there is no formal dramaturgy in Singapore, Charlene Rajendran shared that the dramaturg needs to provide a listening presence and an active silence, while Alfian Sa’at questioned if selected experts from a field who offer sound advice on specialised knowledge could also be regarded as the dramaturg.

Given the prevalent discussions that dramaturgy as a practice seems to be organic and informal, Loh Kee Hong argued that for a young city like Hong Kong where the arts industry is just starting there needs to be a clear line regarding the formality of the term “dramaturg” to match the rigor of the works. To him, it is a formal process where the artist is at the centre of the piece. The dramaturg participates in the process rather than “collaborates” in the process. Responding to that, Anuradha Kapur highlighted that should the role of the dramaturg become formal, there may be a tendency to rebuild hierarchies, one that can have a distribution of the dramaturgical process. Peter Eckersall further elaborated that there is an ethic to working as a dramaturg. It is one kind of creative thinking, alongside others, that has a specific structure and process. How these structures and processes align in the larger creative process is deeply situated in the specific contexts.

Part II: Break-out Groups

Group I: Praxis | Continuing discussion of “Dramaturgy as Collaborative Process”

Continuing on from the discussion on dramaturgy as a collaborative process, the discussion first began by Peter Eckersall, helping to outline the critical terms indicated in the discussion questions about the rhizome and the concept of ‘flatness’, and how this idea of flatness can be observed in the phenomenon of the post-dramatic, in the moving away from the Aristotelian structure, but could also signal the risk of becoming homogenous. However, the flattening of the hierarchies in theatre can be observed via how specialised expertise that has been developed in the various areas of collaborations now involve an exchange and communication of different vocabularies (lights, sound, etc...)

The idea of dramaturgy of the collaborative process was also contrasted to how a singular artistic vision was previously used to push a collective group forward, and how current processes no longer have that kind of aspirations. This was further developed and crystallised as a crisis of leadership, not only within a creative process, but also within the artistic practice.

Finally, a peculiar issue that was raised by Alfian Sa'at drew from his own experience as 'festival dramaturg' which he likened to that of a literary manager, he found that younger/newer artists preferred to work with someone senior to them, in a way handing over their cultural authority/agency to them to mould and shape. This also caused a similar issue of younger artists deferring to older artists as something that is inevitable and difficult to negotiate when it comes to collaboration.

Group II: Conventions and Change | Between dramaturgy and curation, Between dramaturging & producing

In exploring the fine line between dramaturgy and curation, this group concluded that there was preference in the use of the word dramaturging a festival instead of the use of the word curation. According to David Pledger, this was a result of the natural progression of his own artistic career, where he suggested that an alternative way to look at a festival was to programme talks or a series of forums to generate discussion. Another response to the dramaturging of a festival that was raised by Ugoran Prasad was the idea of reconfiguring a space into a performance space which became the frame within which the festival operated within (the example which he was raised was that of a palace that was reconfigured to be a festival space). This group consolidated their discussions by raising valid questions on the dramaturgy of a festival like, what comes first in the conceptualisation of a festival – Cultural context? Theme? Artist?

Group III: Special Interest I | Japan Dramaturgical processes and the dramaturg in focus

Is dramaturgy becoming more commonplace in Japan? The simple answer shared was yes, although there appears to be a generational gap regarding the roles of the dramaturg. While the name "dramaturg" is a recent introduction - post 1997 with a symposium on dramaturgy-traditional forms including Noh and Kabuki, the Kyogen-sakusha or writer played the function of the dramaturg. Hence, there seemed to be more dramaturgs in the past. Acknowledging that there is a heavy need for translators and researchers in current times, it is ironic that there are fewer dramaturgs in Japan today. Sharing the Japanese performance making context that included many treatises on how to make theatre, they shared that it was mainly targeted at actors and performers. The pressing need today, is about how to allow audience to access the work. Perhaps current dramaturgs may need to look into spectatorship education as a gap to fill in Japan.

Group IV: Special Interest II | Dance Dramaturgy

The idea of the dance dramaturg, to Eisa Jocson, is one that expands from the larger umbrella of dramaturgy. It is a role that is highly dependent on exchange and feedback. Sharing his works, Takao Kawaguchi expressed how it is important for him to adapt a more organic approach to dramaturging a piece. For instance, with a piece that saw initial research and fieldwork rooted in LA's LGBT queer history, it was important to transform it for a work in Tokyo. Calibrating the amount information that the new audience in Tokyo would receive was a role he had to play. Arco Renz discussed the work of the dance dramaturg as one who is decoder of ideas while also encode the language when needed. He is also cautious when giving advice to younger artists without necessarily imposing. All the dance dramaturgs concluded that while the western concept of the dramaturg is not to intervene, their practices are not fixed on one specific role alone. It is almost like a production carer and it is important to legitimize that role.

Group V: Historicity

Spearheading the discussion by looking at classical forms from Malaysia including Makyong and Wayang Kulit, Marion D'Cruz highlighted that the role of the guru or dalang is one that hardly invites a collaborative approach. Addressing a similar approach in the revered Sanskrit theatre form Kuttiaattam, Anuradha Kapur further chimed that there is a growing understanding attached to a collaborative pedagogy model in institutionalized settings. While the guru is often seen as the uninterrupted channel of information, there are many who allow their senior students, what D'Cruz considers younger gurus, to teach the content at an institution setting. There hence appears to be a dramaturgical relationship in the teaching pedagogy, and it is one that is open to further discussion. Drawing on the term pendamping in relation to its Indonesian context, Shinta Febriany shared how the dramaturgical function is a compulsory contractual one where the dramaturg almost operates like an internal police. Natalie Hennedige discussed her take on a dramaturg as one who would be an active collaborator who would own some artistic ownership to the piece. Embracing that idea, Kapur further pushed for a multi-authorship that would allow decentralizing power in a collaborative work.

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