

THE INTERCULTURAL & THE INTERDISCIPLINARY

FEB 17, 4.30PM-6.30PM

In this panel, the four presenters drew from their respective practices in discussing issues that dealt either with the interventions of the intercultural and/or the interdisciplinary via the conception/ construction of the work they created, or in their artistic practice.

Ness Roque kicked things off by talking about her experiences working in her collective as a dramaturg in two shows *Battalia Royale* and *Gobyerno*. These two shows were both rooted in the basis on wanting to push for greater audience participation and agency within the theatre space. In the first work, *Battalia Royale*, she outlined the interventions that took place on the level of the artists (having to negotiate working across different times and spaces) and on the level of the audience. Apart from giving audience members the opportunity to construct their own experience of the play, the use of Facebook as a tool in engaging the audience helped to develop a sort of 'otaku' following, where some of them were heavily invested in the lives of the characters. In wanting to push for a great level of audience agency, an intervention was introduced into the structure of the play where audience members could vote midway through the show to decide whether they would like to stop the show because it was too violent, or carry on with it. Although they never managed to secure the necessary votes, this intervention underpinned the efforts of the company to grant the audience more agency.

Subsequently, Roque talked about a piece titled *Gobyerno* which was aimed at pushing audience agency even further. Audience members became the performers who took part in a 'rehearsal as revolution' event and perform citizenship. This show had the audience members form mock governments with the aim to find the most ideal government. The process was facilitated by the actors, and was documented via video-recording. In the last act, the audience members watched the documentaries they had created. This show was conceived as part of a six-year project to go into communities to carry out this performance and collect all the footage of ideal governments. Therefore, the show had to be adapted/negotiated in order to fit the social and cultural contexts of the various communities it toured to.

David Pledger began first by outlining his intention of applying the term "dramaturgy" not only within an artistic space, but also in a social and cultural space. In doing so, he views dramaturgy as an adaptive notion that embraces the idea of an operating system, where underneath a work of art lies a series of random non-deterministic algorithms that are randomly extracted by human agency. In doing so, he attempts to widen the field of artistic intervention in society by having artists work outside of conventional frames, to work cross-sectionally and transversely so that society may benefit from the progressive discourse embedded in the artistic, through reframing the use of certain

words like 'protagonist' in a broader discourse of society. He cites his experience in two works that were developed specifically for the Gold Coast, in order to revive the local culture there. The first event he describes, *2970°*, was a curatorial project that aimed to involve the local community in the reflection and generation of local culture. He operates based on three principles: context, structure, and process. The context of this was that it was an event in Gold Coast area. In terms of structure, there were four levels of audiences that the speakers/provocateurs aimed to reach out to: non-arts audience, respondents who were local artists, moderators who were academics leading smaller discussions with local audience members and will later consolidate their responses. Through this process he notes how dramaturgy was a lot like alchemy – there is always thinking involved in the rational and in the concrete, but there was also an element of the intuitive that one has to rely on in order to negotiate the constantly evolving posture and shifts. His second work *Hotelling* operated along similar lines, where instead of the larger Gold Coast, it was confined within the context of a hotel in Gold Coast, and looking at it as a liminal space. It was structured based off the interior architecture of the hotel, and the process of this involved an ensemble of local artists coming together to respond to the architecture, in a way that would offer a new way forward in looking at an old space.

Both Charlene Rajendran and Ken Takiguchi's presentation revolved around the central idea of the practice of the dramaturg negotiating the "in-betweenness" and the gaps that surface through a creative process. However, both go on to describe in slightly different ways.

Rajendran advocated for a listening dramaturg where skilled listening was required to open ways of communication especially amongst the audience members. Citing her process on *Both Sides Now*, which was about confronting issues about death and dying in Singapore, she talked about a listening aesthetic that governed the work. The work aimed to give audiences the time and space to pause, and it was in this pause that the work was able to create articulation and allow for the creation of productive dialogue. She goes on to say that this process of listening was not confined to the audience but operated on the level of the artists/creators, the space and context, and the stakeholders of the work, where communication is key. She suggests that it is in these pauses occurring in-between that prodding space and potentiality can be found in a type of affective resonance that could lead to political action.

Takiguchi's presentation on filling in the gaps was grounded in his prior experiences in theatrical collaborations between Japan and Southeast Asia as a translator and dramaturg. He outlines three main gaps that he had encountered, that required the necessary negotiation and mediation in the creation of an intercultural work. The first gap was in the difference in the understanding of theatre-making and collaboration between a Japanese director and Malaysia actors, and it was through a difficult and painful process that revealed that both parties had differing perceptions of what it meant for theatre collaboration, which had to be communicated and negotiated. The

second gap he observed was in translation — not only in language but in cultural translation and mediation. He cites Bakhtin's heteroglossia, and extends this frame to look at culture as a whole. In describing this, he examined a process of translation between a Singaporean-based playwright whose work was to be translated and performed by a Japanese company, and the different levels of translation in terms of language, culture, and context, and how he had to mediate and intervene in the communication between the director and playwright to facilitate communication. Finally, he outlines the third gap, which was a more literal gap of research, and how he functioned as a researcher, using his expertise in the subject area in order to share articles but again working as a facilitator and mediator to communicate across inter-generational actors and creatives. In short, he concluded that the multifarious ways of mediating between cultures were not necessarily exclusive, but entangled, and this included having to negotiate your position within and amongst the artists creating the work.

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