

## GENDERED/QUEER DRAMATURGIES

FEB 18, 12.30PM - 2.00PM

This panel explored the various methods and practices of the panellists in engaging and negotiating with queer bodies, queer representation in their artistic works, and their subsequent socio-political impact.

Gee Imaan Semmalar opened his presentation by questioning the idea of queer and gendered dramaturgy as existing on the periphery, apart from the mainstream dramaturgies, which are viewed as central and universal. To this end, he uses his recent work, a play titled *Colour of Trans*, as a case study in the investigation of the performance of gender. The structure of the work was episodic, lacking clear narrative structure but held together with the singular thread of exploring transgender identity. He used Butler's gender theory to outline how in this performance the boundary between the self and the performer collapses. Consequently, the self and the other also collapses. In this way, the narrative doesn't provide closure but always turns the question back to audience to continue the conversation. This is illustrated in how the performance continues to evolve — each iteration of the play incorporates audience feedback from previous stagings. The aim of the performance was to non-eroticise and humanise the trans person to the audience, so that trans people are not viewed as the other. Since the play was marketed as the first trans theatre group/play, they found it limiting as it still labelled them on the periphery. As much as they were exploring trans body and transition, it was also an exploration of power dynamics and contemporary portrayal of trans stereotypes in local consciousness, and through juxtaposing these stereotypes against their bodies. They used the grotesque body and satire, and mixed it with realism, so as not to alienate the audience and the subject matter. He closed this presentation by describing a scene from the play, and how through these stories of survival and courage, they not only are able to transform the audience but implicate the spectators as active perpetrators of oppression as well.

Alfian Sa'at began his presentation by providing the Singaporean context in which he made the decision to begin writing 'gay plays' in Singapore, and when he made the decision to stop writing these gay plays when these issues entered into the national conversation. He raised the motion to repeal 377A in 2007 and the Pink Dot movement beginning in 2009. He spoke specifically about how he used *Asian Boys Vol. 1* as a way to communicate and discuss these issues, while being cognisant about the barriers presented by the content regulation body, the Media Development Authority (MDA). The genesis of the play stemmed from adapting Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. Alfian also wanted to use elements of camp and melodrama to circumvent censorship in Singapore. The play surrounds the central figure of Agnes, the daughter of Indra and how she intends to save gay men from themselves. Embedded in this writing is a form of double-speak where the MDA would perceive it as upholding moral norms in Singapore society whereas gay men would

be able to identify otherwise. This was done in the way various aspects of the play was 'queered' — with Agnes as the 'Asian gay icon', and through the use of queer pageantry through which she is portrayed and the homophobic sentiments that she held. Through the 'queering' of myths and Singapore history, Alfian outlined how he re-appropriated familiar contexts to introduce queer elements to the narrative. He closed his presentation by highlighting how he intended for this to work towards an 'Asian' discourse in gay liberation, where he posits the authentic self versus the theatrical self. In this way, he also examines how being gay in Asia is different from being gay in the West. To this end, he views the process of 'coming out' as problematic, and raises the question if one is less of a gay man if he does not come out. and in doing so de-emphasises the moment of 'coming out'.

Takao Kawaguchi opened his presentation with a video introducing himself, which was prepared for TPAM in 2008. He then goes to describe briefly his corpus of works and how they explore the identity of a gay man in Japan, some of them autobiographical in nature. He highlights one production which was performed in January 2016 that drew from Laud Humphrey's sociological research titled *Tearoom Trade* that studied the man-on-man sex in public toilets. It was a show that was two hours long, and the first part of the performance drew from diagrams of the movement of men in the public toilet found in the book. The performance consisted of a reenactment of observations from the manuscript, and occasionally invited the audience to experience and participate in this reenactment. The second part of this performance went on to explore the construction of queer bodies in a wider social context in Japan. As such, the agenda of the performance was to question the 'conservativeness' of gay Japanese men, and how with the legalisation of same-sex partnership in some local governments in Japan, the gay community (and queer body) is being assimilated into society. Considering that the queer community were active in challenging heteronormative society, it's normalisation into the mainstream could be viewed as antithetical. Takao also talked about moving beyond just reaching out to gay community and to larger Japanese community. He set up archive materials in the foyer for audience members to peruse to better understand the context of the work. He concludes by saying that by inviting the audience to participate in this reenactment was a key point in this work.

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