

HL2090:

Contemporary Theatre in Singapore and Southeast Asia

2024

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| Lecturer: | Dr Charlene Rajendran (charlene.r@nie.edu.sg) |
| Day/Time: | Monday 13.30-16.30 |
| Venue: | The Nanyang Playhouse: Performance Space (NIE3A-B2-03) |
| Dates: | 12 Aug – 11 Nov 2024 |

Course Description:

The course will examine socio-political and aesthetic issues that stem from making Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatre, with particular emphasis on plays developed in Singapore, as well as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. It will consider questions of identity, history, social and cultural change and the emergent trends that characterize theatre in the region. The course will also consider the work of theatre makers, focused primarily on playwrights and practitioners who have worked with scripted plays from across the region. Based on a selection of plays that reflect the contemporary as a combination of varied approaches that examine society, history, community and nation as the basis for themes and stories, the course explores the fusion of theatre styles and forms that indicate a wide range of influence. This will include engaging with theatre in relation to Southeast Asia as a region, the influence of traditional theatre on contemporary work, and the importance of socio-political contexts in relation to theatre performance. Students will be required to attend at least one Southeast Asian contemporary theatre performance in Singapore.

Students will be involved in theatre improvisations as part of an embodied learning process. No prior experience in theatre is required, but a willingness to participate and collaborate closely with fellow students is essential.

Course Structure

This unit will be taught in a practical mode including lecture/workshops that introduce frameworks for exploring theatre and examining issues that arise in the region, with particular reference to the plays selected. It will also draw on the ideas and experiences of the students towards culling a vocabulary of theatre making that feeds off the ideas and images that arise in discussion and improvisation. Theory will be taught as an integral part of the group practical theatre workshops. Students are required to engage with and reflect on the plays and readings, which extend and amplify the understandings gained in the lecture/workshops.

Topics will include:

1. Southeast Asian Theatre as Critical Response to Nation, History and Society

2. Juxtapositions of Tradition and Modernity in the Contemporary
3. Theatre Making Approaches in Urban Southeast Asia
4. Engaging Social Issues through the Dynamics of Theatre
5. Critical Perspectives on Identity and Art Making in Southeast Asia

Learning Outcomes: Students will learn to:

1. develop an understanding of some issues and concerns in contemporary theatre in Southeast Asia
2. explore and examine a selection of theatre scripts that characterize relevant aspects of theatre processes in Southeast Asian nations
3. identify a few theatre forms that have grown out of the Southeast Asian context
4. apply contemporary ideas of theatre in the region to their own theatre making interests and capacities

Assessment:

There will be three components to the assessment: (details of assessments and rubrics provided separately). **For Group/Pair Assessments, students will get an individual grade.**

- I) **Seminar Presentation (10%)** – Week 9-11 – Students will work in pairs or groups to research and present ideas on a contemporary theatre company in Singapore. This will focus on the company's history, key practitioners and primary approaches to theatre making.
- II) **Creative Project (40%)** – Week 12-13 – Students will work in pairs or groups to develop a framework and related ideas for staging a performance of a Southeast Asian play examined in the course, and how it can be adapted to a local event.
- III) **Essay (40%)** – Week 10 – a list of topics will be provided in Week 3, from which students will choose one to write on.
- IV) **Participation (10%)** – Students will be assessed on their continued contribution to discussions and improvisations conducted in class.

Assessment Deadlines:

- Please observe all stipulated deadlines. If there is a non-submission and no exemption has been sought or approved prior, the assignment will receive no mark.
- If you require an extension, please contact me at the given email address. All requests for extension must be made at least 3 days before the deadline.
- The Written Assignments must be uploaded via Turnitin, found in GeNIEus or NTULearn; All other written assignments must be uploaded in the respective 'Assignment' folders in GeNIEus or NTULearn.
- Note that there will be a 5-mark penalty for every day that an assignment is late (i.e. after it is logged by Turnitin as a 'late' submission).
- Note also that any assignment, even with given extension, will not be accepted after 5 days (including weekends and public holidays).

Attendance:

Students should note that NIE takes a serious view to attendance. Attendance is a strict requirement for theatre modules and absences not covered by valid documentary evidence will be taken into account in the final assessment, as this will impact the student's capacity to execute the assessment tasks due to process-oriented learning and group work assessments.

In modules which involve group work/collaboration, students are also expected to be present for group rehearsals or discussions when necessary. Should there be issues arising such as, but not limited to, absence from rehearsals, or lack of collaborative effort, the individual student's performance will be affected and the student will be assessed accordingly. As poor attendance affects the individual student's learning as well as the capacity for group work to be executed effectively, this is done to ensure that all students act responsibly and do not negatively impact the learning and assessment process for their peers.

Students are also expected to be punctual for classes. Extreme lateness (i.e. more than 30 minutes) without prior arrangement or valid explanation can be regarded as absence from class. The lecturer is also to be informed prior to the class should you not be able to attend.

Plagiarism Warning:

Note that that the University takes a serious view to plagiarism. Any quotations, lines or material taken from any source (web-based material included) that is not properly cited or referenced is considered an attempt at plagiarism. Such essays will be immediately failed and the student may be subjected to a Disciplinary Committee hearing.

Trigger Warning:

As part of the drama process, there will be physical improvisations and explorations of material that relate to various issues. Discussions on a wide range of topics will be conducted as part of the dialogic approach to theatre-making. If a student is uneasy about the discussion or improvisation, this discomfort needs to be made known to the course instructor and negotiated accordingly. As adult-learners, students are also expected to negotiate collaboratively during group discussions and listen attentively to expressions of discomfort and disagreement when they arise. Respect and restraint, with a sense of critical responsibility are expected of all students

Course Schedule: (all compulsory reading material is made available on NTU Learn)

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| Week 1 12 Aug | INTRODUCTION I: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatre: Stories and Histories Plays: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Recalling Mother</i> by Claire Wong and Noorlinah Mohamed Readings: | F2F |
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Diamond, Catherine (2012) 'Introduction'. In *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres* by Catherine Diamond. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press. Pp. 1-23

Kezia, Rebecca. (2019) 'Introduction and About the Plays'. In *New Indonesia Plays* edited by Cheryl Robson. Twickenham: Aurora Metro Publications. Pp. 10-22.

Week 2
19 Aug

INTRODUCTION II: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatre: Forms and Traditions

F2F

Plays:

- *Three Children* by Leow Puay Tin

Readings:

Jit, Krishen. (2003). 'A Survey of Modern Southeast Asian Drama'. In *Krishen Jit : An Uncommon Position* edited by Kathy Rowland. Singapore: Contemporary Asian Arts Centre. Pp. 26-49.

Cohen, Matthew Isaac and Laura Noszlopy (2010) 'Introduction: The Transnational Dynamic in Southeast Asian Performance'. In *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance: Transnational Perspectives* edited by Laura Noszlopy and Matthew Isaac Cohen. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Pp. 1-21

Week 3
26 Aug

Stagings of Nation and Society

F2F

Plays:

- *A Country in Search of a Hero* by Malou Jacob
- *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* by Kuo Pao Kun

Readings:

Tan, Marcus Cheng-Chye and Charlene Rajendran. (2019) 'Politics, Performance, the Contemporary and Southeast Asia'. In *Performing Southeast Asia: Performance, Politics and the Contemporary*, edited by Marcus Cheng-Chye Tan and Charlene Rajendran. Palgrave Macmillan: Switzerland. Pp. 1-34.

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| <p>Wee, C. J. W.-L. and Lee Chee Keng (2003). 'Introduction: Breaking Through Walls and Visioning Beyond - Kuo Pao Kun Beyond the Margins'. In C. J. W.-L. L. Wee, Chee Keng. (Ed.), <i>Two Plays by Kuo Pao Kun</i>. Singapore: SNP Editions.</p> | | |
| <p>Week 4 2 Sept</p> | <p>Questions of Community and Tradition</p> <p>Plays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Cord</i> by K.S.Maniam • <i>Fugitives</i> by Alfian Sa'at <p>Readings:</p> <p>Wee, C.J. W.-L.. (2010) 'Introduction'. In <i>Alfian Sa'at Collected Plays One</i>. Ethos Books and Wild Rice: Singapore. Pp. 10-28.</p> <p>Rajendran, Charlene and Wee, C.J. W.-L (2007) 'The Theatre of Krishen Jit: The Politics of Staging Difference in Multicultural Malaysia. <i>Asian Theatre Journal</i> Vol 51, No 2. Pp. 11-23.</p> | <p>F2F</p> |
| <p>Week 5 9 Sept</p> | <p>Performing the Margins of Identity</p> <p>Plays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Model Citizens</i> by Haresh Sharma • <i>Break In</i> by Agnes Christina <p>Readings:</p> <p>Tan, Alvin (2012) 'Introduction to Model Citizens: Celebrating Difference'. In <i>Model Citizens</i> by Haresh Sharma. Epigram Books: Singapore. Pp.ix-xii</p> <p>Tiatco, Anril Pineda. (2013) 'The Silenced Body of The Silent Soprano: The Overseas Filipino Worker as Silence and Erased in a Global City' in <i>Asian Theatre Journal</i> Vol 30, No 2. Pp. 415-444</p> | <p>F2F</p> |
| <p>Week 6 16 Sept</p> | <p>Revisiting History and Memory</p> | <p>F2F</p> |

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| | <p>Plays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Mataram Signal Gong</i> by Kotot Sukardi • <i>Death of a Warrior</i> by Usman Awang <p>Readings:</p> <p>Cohen, Matthew Isaac. (2010) 'Introduction'. In <i>The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama 1: Plays for the Popular Stage</i>, edited by Matthew Isaac Cohen. Lontar: Jakarta. Pp. vii-xvii.</p> <p>Varela, Miguel Escobar (2014) 'Wayang Hip Hop: Java's Oldest Performance Tradition Meets Global Youth Culture'. In <i>Asian Theatre Journal</i> Vol 31 No 2. Special Issue. Pp 481-504.</p> |
| Week 7 23 Sept | <p>Art, Class and Economy</p> <p>Plays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An Evening at the Opera</i> by Floy Quintos • <i>Notes on Life, Love and Painting</i> by Huzir Sulaiman <p>Readings:</p> <p>Rowland, Kathy. (2013) 'Introduction'. In <i>Huzir Sulaiman: Collected Plays 1998-2012</i>, edited by Kathy Rowland. Checkpoint Theatre: Singapore. Pp. 18-43.</p> <p>Cadiz, Gibbs. (2014) 'Introduction'. In <i>Floy Quintos Collected Plays: Volume 1</i>. Ateneo de Manila University Press: Quezon City. Pp.ix-xvi.</p> <p>Wong, Melissa Wansin (2012) 'Negotiating Class, Taste and Culture via the Arts Scene in Singapore: Postcolonial or Cosmopolitan Global?' In <i>Asian Theatre Journal</i> Vol 29 Number 1 Spring 2012. Pp. 233-254.</p> |
| 30 Sept | BREAK WEEK |
| Week 8 7 Oct | Singapore Theatre – What Makes Theatre 'Singaporean' in the Contemporary? |
| Week 9 14 Oct | Seminar Presentation – The Theatre Practice / The Necessary Stage / Drama Box |

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| Week 10 21 Oct | Seminar Presentation – T:>Works (TheatreWorks) / CAKE Theatre / The Finger Players |
| Week 11 28 Oct | Seminar Presentation – Wild Rice / Checkpoint Theatre / Nine Years Theatre |
| Week 12 4 Nov | Group Performance Project – Rehearsal and Dialogue |
| Week 13 11 Nov | Group Performance Project – FINAL PRESENTATION AND DIALOGUE |

References for Plays:

Awang, Usman. (1988) *Death of a Warrior*. Translated by Rahmah Bujang. *Asian Theatre Journal*. Vol 5. No 2. Pp. 175-197.

Christina, Agnes. (2019) *Break In*. In *New Indonesia Plays* edited by Cheryl Robson. Twickenham: Aurora Metro Publications. Pp. 123-144.

Jacob, Malou. (2009) *A Country in Search of a Hero*. In *XXth Century: 2 Plays* (Bilingual Edition). University of the Philippines Press: Quezon City. Pp. 1-40.

Kuo, Pao Kun. (2003) *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*. In C. J. W.-L. L. Wee, Chee Keng. (Eds.), *Two Plays by Kuo Pao Kun*. Singapore: SNP Editions. Pp. 37-68.

Leow Puay Tin. (1992) *3 Children*. Singapore: NUS Theatre – Southeast Asian Play Series

Maniam, K.S. (1994) *The Cord*. In *Sensuous Horizons: The Stories and the Plays*. SKOOB Books Publishing: London. Pp.25-94

Quintos, Floy. (2014) *An Evening at the Opera*. In *Southeast Asian Plays* edited by Cheryl Robson and Aubrey Mellor. Croydon, UK.: Aurora Metro. Pp. 58-81.

Sa'at, Alfian. (2010) *Fugitives*. In *Alfian Sa'at Collected Plays One*. Ethos Books and Wild Rice: Singapore. Pp. 83-154.

Sharma, Haresh. (2012) *Model Citizens*. Epigram Books: Singapore.

Sukardi, Kotot. (2010) *The Mataram Signal Gong*. In *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama 1: Plays for the Popular Stage*, edited by Matthew Isaac Cohen. Lontar: Jakarta. Pp. 131-146.

Sulaiman, Huzir. (2013) **Notes of Life, Love and Painting**. In *Huzir Sulaiman: Collected Plays 1998-2012*, edited by Kathy Rowland. Checkpoint Theatre: Singapore. Pp. 90-145.

Wong, Claire and Noorlinah Mohamed. (2014) **Recalling Mother**. In *This Is My Family: New Singapore Plays Volume 2*, edited by Lucas Ho. Checkpoint Theatre: Singapore. Pp. 253 -279.

Further Reading:

- Birch, D. (2007) *Haresh Sharma: The Cultural Politics of Playwriting in Contemporary Singapore*. Singapore. Ethos Books
- Brandon, J. (Ed.) (1993) *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Chong, T. (2011) *The Theatre and the State in Singapore: Orthodoxy and Resistance*. London. Routledge.
- Diamond, C. (2012) *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatre*. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press.
- Fernandez, D.G. (1996). *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater History*. Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press
- Jit, K. (1990). 'Introduction: Kuo Pao Kun - The Man of The Future In Singapore Theatre'. In *Kuo Pao Kun: The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole and other plays* (pp. 7-28). Singapore: Times Books International.
- Kahn, J. S. (Ed.). (1998). *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Lo, J. (2003). *Staging Nation: English Language Theatre in Malaysia and Singapore*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Loh, K. W. F. O., Joakim (Ed.). (2005). *Southeast Asian Responses to Globalization: Restructuring Governance and Deepening Democracy*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).
- Ong, K. S. (2001). Encounters. *The Drama Review*, 45, no 3, 126-133.
- Peterson, W. (2001). *Theatre and the Politics of Culture in Contemporary Singapore*. Middletown, USA: Wesleyan University Press.
- Rowland, K. (Ed.). (2003). *Krishen Jit : An Uncommon Position*. Kuala Lumpur: Contemporary Asian Art Centre, Singapore.
- Sasitharan, T. (2000). Kuo Pao Kun and the Theatre of Tensions'. In *Images at the Margins: A Collection of Kuo Pao Kun's Plays* (pp. 10-16). Singapore: Times Media Pte. Ltd.
- Tan, Marcus Cheng-Chye and Charlene Rajendran (eds.) (2019) *Performing Southeast Asia: Performance, Politics and the Contemporary*. Palgrave Macmillan: Switzerland.
- Wee, C. J. W.-L. (2003). Creating High Culture in the Globalised 'Cultural Dessert' of Singapore. *The Drama Review*, 47, 4, 84-97.