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Experiment • Viewpoint

Experimenting is about embracing failures.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Experiment • Viewpoint

Words / Huang Suhuai

In the final issue of the Practice Journal for this year, we will be consolidating the work of Practice Lab, The Theatre Practice's sub division. For a start, let's begin by looking at "viewpoints".

When the Practice Journal first began, I told myself, I need articles with a view. However, what exactly constitutes a view? Every time someone tries to answer a question, or explain something, he would inevitably be providing a view. At times, we are afraid of saying what we think – we are afraid of being rejected, or deemed as being superficial. And to explain or define something, as we know, sometimes might just kill the very thing we are trying to define. However, if you do indeed try, and realize that questions do not simply become crystal clear just because you answer them, or that clearly defined statements can still be disproved, then Whatever you are trying to define will still be "alive".

This is because in actual fact, every view, once proffered, will stand to be contested. To actually believe that a view can stand uncontested is to deceive oneself. That is because any

view is essentially only one view in the entire scheme of things. However, it is only with doubts that one questions; it is only because one wavers, therefore we can move forward. If there is no one view we hold, then we are constantly drifting, following the direction of the tides, ergo directionless. As such, having a view is only a moment of respite, for us to have an anchor at one instance. It will then help to orientate ourselves, so that we can find a direction to continue trudging on to further places – To ponder upon issues we have never even considered before.

Under the leadership of Liu Xiaoyi, director of the Practice Lab, the Lab participants, which included 9 actors and 2 playwrights, each went through different levels and methods of “training” over the course of one year. Instead of defining it as “training”, it would be better to define it as a big experiment that everyone went through. Whether it was testing the actors’ playwriting abilities, or the directing abilities of the playwrights, or the ability of the director to assume the role of an audience, there have been varying degrees of experimentation that each member of the Lab experienced.

There have been many questions posed and points discussed over the course of this one year. This process, actually, is the formulation of various viewpoints, and essentially a process of sharing and questioning. There are a lot of thoughts which, if you had never articulated them, or written them down, you would perhaps not comprehend what is it that you actually wanted to say. As such, I began to ask the actors and playwrights many questions – some of which we have discussed before. I also got them to write down what their answers to these questions were. Perhaps the Practice Journal is just a platform, or an excuse, to sort out and organize my thoughts. You need to constantly hone your thought process, and sorting out one’s thoughts is one such way of doing so. Just as what I have mentioned previously, once you have found your footing then can you trudge forward to more places.

As such, this issue of Practice Journal will present you with various viewpoints via a series of questions to the Lab participants. A play, an issue, a social event, or an individual... Only with the aid of various viewpoints then will we be closer to the reality of things.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, and discover new insights through the various viewpoints raised in this Journal.



SPOTLIGHT

The Theatre is Just a Space

Words / Liu Xiaoyi

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What exactly is a theatre experiment? I think an experiment in theatre starts from the process of finding a breakthrough in the genre itself. This breakthrough can manifest itself in discussions about narration, plot, reflection, body, voice, imageries, space, time etc, thereby creating a space for investigation and evaluation. How should one tell a story? How should one ask a question? How should we execute the motion? How should we project our voice? How should we choose from a series of actions? How should we go about re-evaluating? How should we plan a sequence? ... We are constantly bombarding ourselves with these questions.

5

As such, a play thus needs to reflect the life and beliefs of its creators. It should reflect the cultural influences and depth of analysis of its creators. If a play is simply about examining

the technical aspects, for example the design aesthetics, the acting skills, the riveting plotlines, then theatre merely remains at a rather technical level, and becomes a “craft”. Craft, no doubt, is important, but it is merely a tool and conduit for expression, and not what’s essentially at the core of it all. A technically brilliant actor, can be a mechanical tool with no heart or soul; a technically skilled director, can also be a factory supervisor who does not think nor exercise creativity. A technically brilliant show, can be merely a perfunctory window display.

1

In the rehearsal room, I would sometimes ask the members of the production team – Has rehearsing this show affected your life in any way? For example, while rehearsing Wanderer-Seeker: A Trek Around My Room, the actors would tell me, “Today, when I was bathing, it somehow seemed slower, and a lot more intimate,” or “Yesterday, I re-folded all my clothes at home” or that “Rehearsing this show has allowed me to train my body again” etc. I am often intrigued by these details, and would hence question further.

3

I think, regardless of the career we are pursuing, it would inadvertently influence our thought process, and hence affect our daily routines in life. Conversely, things happening in our lives would also influence aspects of our work. This sort of mutual influence would be of different extents for different people with different jobs leading different lives. However, we cannot deny that it does exist. The problem is, can we be more conscious of the interaction happening, so that our usual routine and habits are broken, therefore allowing ourselves to discover a brand new self?

6

A theatre practitioner should demand more than just being adequate with his technique. He should be courageous enough to experiment, and to be brave enough not to repeat himself. He should not be stuck in a mire, nor be restricted by rules of limitations, for he would then be oblivious of his surroundings; To move in any particular direction, you first have to take a step out into the unknown. It is only so that you can disrupt your own rules and leave your own comfort zone, thereby widening your horizons, and broaden your views. In the process, you will start to doubt your initial habits and experience, and the slightest doubt can be a small step to progress.

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How we choose to answer questions often reflect our choices about the way we lead our lives. Our choices on how we do theatre are a reflection of the choice we made in leading our lives outside of theatre. As such, when we discuss about how to challenge notions of theatre while being physically in a theatre space, it would also naturally affect our thoughts about the state of life beyond the confines of this theatre. In this way, essentially when we use theatre as a medium to discuss, it would lead to discussions beyond the theatre. Our discussion about the cultural norm would naturally extend to a discussion about culture itself. And as for a discussion on culture – its impact, on a small scale would include affecting one's attitude towards the world at large. On a larger scale, it could affect the development of a society.

2

In addition, I am very much interested in the perspectives and attitudes these actors hold towards life. I would then try to incorporate their emotions and opinions into the work as well. For example, when we were discussing about the term “Seeker”, we spent a lot of time talking about one another's travel habits and experiences. In this process, we start to know more about the views of others, and comprehend the similarities and differences we share. When there are conflicting opinions, a discussion ensues. And in this respect, the discussion helps fuel our curiosity towards others, and generate a process of self-reflection.

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Theatre shouldn't simply exist as a product or a result – it is a manifestation of life itself. It isn't the result of creativity, nor the product of a process – It should be a platform for engaging discussions, a space for experience, and a process of creation. We utilize theatre as an art form to engage in thinking, experimenting and creating, to help us search for the unknown, to have a breakthrough, to test boundaries and to challenge the status quo. However, it is not the only, nor the most influential platform; it is however, one amongst the many possible. At the end of the day, theatre is merely a space.

4

The theatre is one such space. In the space, we discuss about humanity, culture, life and society. These things are closely intertwined with the world outside of theatre. As such, as

compared to other jobs, we have more opportunities to share and to listen to various opinions. We also have more opportunities to influence others, or be influenced by others. These conversations may even have a life of its own in a play, and resurface in further discussions the audience, thereby influencing the audience members' opinions and their lives. As such, we often say, the theatre is a public space. And in this public space, we debate – and this would subsequently result in change.

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Sometimes, we have answers to these questions. Other times, we do not have the answers. Sometimes, we may even have more questions. However, all these are unimportant. To question, sometimes is not just merely to seek answers – sometimes, the emphasis is on the process of finding answers to these questions. This process could allow us to comprehend the problem further, and perhaps ourselves, and perhaps the environment that we are situated in, and the culture we are surrounded by.

Taken from *Why Not?*,
a publication of the NTU Chinese Studies Department student group,

SPOTLIGHT

What is an “Experiment”?

Words / Liu Xiaovi Translate / Wei Shimin & Chong Woon Yong

Now, let me ask a question, “What is an Experiment?”

Before you continue , perhaps you might want to stop and think about your own answer to this question.

In the study of sciences, experiments are done with the intention to test out a hypothesis, or to put an existing theory into test. The results are often released in the form of a lab report. In an experiment like this, normally, two outcomes exists– Success or failure. Of course, if we were to examine further, it could be further differentiated into “Success and knowing of why there is success”, “Success but I don't know why, probably it's due to some luck”, “Failure and I know why therefore my next attempt would be a success”, “Failure but I don't know why, and it's all fuzzy”, etc.

Then what about creating art? What then is an experiment in this aspect?

(Think about it. Is there any difference at all?)

An experiment in art is not to verify assumptions we already hold, but to question and challenge theories that have been established. This is where it is different from experiments conducted in the scientific sense. An experiment in the arts, I feel, it's about not repeating – Not repeating yourself, your predecessors, and to be brave enough to challenge yourself, the existing structures, processes, laws, rules... Since it is about not repeating, and is about challenging the existing, there will not be any prediction of failure or success.

As such, how then do we measure the success and failure of such an experiment?

In order to measure the success or failure of a play, I guess, there are about 49 different ways of doing it, maybe more.. For example, whether the audience enjoyed it, whether the ticket sales were good, how did the reviews go... If we were to look at it through the usual lens of a materialist, then we can consider in detail how many audience came, how many left halfway for the toilet, how many filled up the feedback form, within these forms, how many gave a positive or negative feedback, how many audiences mischievously doodled tortoises on these forms, how many eminent theatre critics wrote a review, what was the average rating given by these critics, how many awards or nominations it won at the end of the year, etc.

However, can these factors really quantify the “success” or “failure” of an artistic creation?

(You say, isn't it so? Is the whole purpose of putting up a play meant for entertaining the audience, or to get a raving review from the “experts”?)

We are used to having a judgment on anything now, set a conclusion on it, and set a standard in assessing it. If we look at things from a “market” point of view, then we might come to the conclusion that “commercial appeal equates to success”. But is this theory viable for everything? For example, if a performance has 30000 audience members, and all of them are enthralled, does it mean that it was a successful experiment? A show that could only seat 3 audience members a night, and got a rating of ★★☆, is it then a product of failure?

If so, then is there no difference between an artistic endeavour and grocery shopping? We go grocery shopping to buy things we want to eat. And if the audience goes to a theatre expecting what they had expected, then artistic creation simply becomes a product which we use to pander to market demands. In this regard, the issue of commercializing the arts

becomes more and more serious.

(You ask, isn't it good that the arts be commercialized? Wouldn't it be better if more people came to watch theatre productions?)

Commercialisation itself is not a problem. The real problem surfaces when the market is the deciding factor in producing part. If commercialization becomes the only standard, will art creation then, be simply pandering to the whims and fancy of the market, i.e. the audience?

At the start of the article, I mentioned that to an experiment in art should be one where one departs from what has been done and to open oneself up to new challenges. Such a criteria would allow for artists to reflect and challenge their creative process. The audience reflect about life through the work created, and therefore starts to question the status quo – This then is what an experiment truly is. And it is precisely because of this that the theatre does not degrade into a venue for entertainment, but instead, it is a space which promotes the advancement of the human race.

To let the audience enter the theatre and experience something which he/she has had not expected, it would confront his/her usual way of thinking or aesthetics, and challenge whatever he/she is accustomed to – be it in life or while watching a performance. It allows him/her to think, and maybe then, this will be considered a “successful” experiment – if there exists a concept of success and failure.

If there is indeed a concept of success or failure, then experimenting is about embracing failures. If you do something knowing that you would eventually succeed, then it is simply just a process of verification. Besides, we cannot simply evaluate an artistic experiment using concepts of success and failure, for that will run counter to the true nature of art.

Don't you think so?

(.....)

The original article was first published in Lianhe Zaobao



SPOTLIGHT

Lab Members: What is Experiment?

Edward: Anything you would not do normally. Must involve some degree of risk (not necessarily danger).

Haibin: Unbalancing oneself— The act of stepping out into the unknown is in itself experimental in nature.

Issy: "Experiment", according to Wikipedia, is an orderly procedure carried out with the goal of verifying, refuting or establishing the validity of a hypothesis. "Experiment", according to me, is to go crazy with all the different methods of doing things, "just to whack and see what happens". It is more about asking questions, than refuting or confirming a statement. "Experiment" to me, also means excitement, anxiety and a loss of control, as I am a person who loves to play safe and prefers not to challenge the status quo unless absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, in order for boundaries to be broken and discoveries to be made in anything and everything we do, we NEED experimentation. And in order to experiment, we need to be able to let go of what we think is "important" and "legitimate" and "right"

and just PLAY. However, this play is not without abandon. It also needs to come with the ability to dissect and understand why things happen as they did. These two things, experimentation and reflection, actually are key in our work as actors and creators and help us break new ground in terms of human experience, theatre forms, training methodologies etc. So I guess, "experiment" also means discovery through experience, and something I have to get used to. A lot.

Liansheng: Experiment, for me, is about doing something where the results do not determine the process. It's about telling yourself you can fail, that it's ok at the end of the day. However, this does not necessary mean that it is a wanton abandonment of the rules. There are still rules to follow, but these rules would pertain to the process of creation. Are you truthful to your process? Are you accountable to yourself, your audience or your collaborators in your process? For me, every work I do has to be an experiment. If not, why do it in the first place?

Suhuai: An experiment in theatre, expands the space, thus possibilities one has – be it on a technical or conceptual level, form or content wise. Before we deal with what an experiment is, I feel that there are two questions that should be clarified. Firstly, why should we experiment? If the reasons are merely for the rather empty purpose of striving a breakthrough, then the experiment could very well be a waste of resources. Theatre is a part of one's culture and life. It is also a part of our society and us. When we experiment in theatre, we are in fact conducting an examination into the society, and undoubtedly our culture and life. Secondly, what are we experimenting? When we first see a chair, we must first identify its structure and uses before we can examine what other purposes it can serve. If we were to place a flower or gun on top of it, then there would be a different connotation to it. If we completely ditch the original purpose of a chair, and treat it merely as a prop, then this experiment will be without any boundaries – Because it is not grounded in anything in its attempt. And if you were to realize at the end of this experiment that it is merely a chair, then you will return back to the first question – Why then did you do the experiment? Once we have clarified and answered these two questions, then we would perhaps be clearer about the definition of what an experiment is.

Rei: Experiment is to take action and test an idea. If one had an idea, having a platform to put those ideas into test was the aim and spirit of practice lab. the idea of experiment was to fail and fail, just like the the idea of being a human. As a Singaporean, I've always find it difficult to take risks, to make the first step, and theatre has given me this experiment. From my experiences in theatre of the

oppressed of taking actions, and then experimenting and testing in practice lab.

Ric: Experiment = Game + Imagination + Curiosity + Courage + Practice + Creation + Experience + Honesty + Openness + Accident + Acceptance + Pleasure. The core of an experiment is not about right or wrong, success or failure. It is about Discovery.



SPOTLIGHT

What is the Lab Experimenting?

Haibin : We experimented with the creativity of the actors, the trust between the actors, our openness towards new things, our curiosity, our values, our childlike playfulness, and life itself.

Fervyn : The Actor's Lab allow the actors to have abstract ideas and using all sorts of methods to present it, ending it off with a discussion to understand what is best for the audience, what can be improved and how to improve. From this, we are also experimenting ourselves as an actor with the tools we possess and testing our techniques of presentation.

Edward: We come into contact with a variety of different approaches to preparing for (training) and presenting (performing) works of theatre, and because we all come from varied backgrounds and experiences, the work created as a result can be very varied as well – even the most boring pieces have some quirk about them that the actors picked up along the way.

Wah: The laboratory is a place where one researches and conducts experiment. In a normal laboratory, the arrangement and facilities of the place would cater to the subject matter one is researching. The Actors' Lab, as its name suggests, is of course designed to experiment with actors! A group of actors with not only diverse backgrounds and training, but also different nationalities, resemble the different chemical elements within a laboratory. They are then placed together in the laboratory for a year, and they share with one another their training methods and the differences in their interpretation and analysis – thereby “colliding with one another”, challenging not only their body and soul, but their analytical processes, organizational skills etc as well. From there, the actors' own prejudices and rules are questioned, and they finally discover just how deep and broad the possibilities are for an actor.

Ric: Improvising using themes, words or characters, the actor had to come up with a short presentation every time, in order to explore potential towards possibilities in creativity, imagination, openness, collaborative ability, self-awareness, and experimentation. Actors were also given the chance to be a scriptwriter, director, lighting designer, costume designer or sound designer etc. This will give the actor a different and broader perspective towards expressing and presenting a show.

Rei: Experimentation of "Empathy", which is one of the core of humanity that makes us differ from others. Actually, the work of an actor is similar to learning to be a human, the act of blindfold to listen better, to mute so to engage the body, to close the theatre door and leave your heart open.

Suhuai: I think Playwrights' Lab does not cultivate playwrights via a normal “skills-based training program”. From reading classics, to presenting our works in the Playwrights' Boot Camp showcase, to creating texts for 11. Gao Xingjian Devised, every component we went through is a platform for us to present our own views and opinion. It is not a product-oriented process. Of course, we will hone our skills through the feedback provided by others, but what we eventually derive from it is still primarily one of personal choice. For me, having the opportunity to interact with many theatre practitioners has allowed me to think deeper about my perceptions towards theatre, thereby completing the experimenting and training of my very own thought processes.

Issy: I have come to believe that actors actually occupy quite a unique place in Singapore's cultural landscape. Our industry is constantly evolving, demanding higher quality of work

and standards, but actors in Singapore have always had the potential and space to be co-collaborators and producers of fresh, original and "uniquely Singaporean" content. And more so these days, as devised work walk alongside great classics, contemporary re-stagings and new writing from our own playwrights. So, the Actor's Lab is supposed to help actors hone their skills in these areas, namely performance and creation. The Actor's Lab is the space where we get to discover, through action and reflection, the artistic process and the methods/techniques used to present our ideas. We get to experiment with improvisation, performance, training methods and actor processes. It's a safe place for us to make mistakes and receive feedback on the work we have created. It forces us to clearly and simply articulate our ideas through our bodies as actors. It is also a place where we become more sensitive to the entire creation process, and hopefully help us to understand and be able to produce the kinds of materials needed to move the work forward.

Zach: For me it's basically been a process of dialogue – having a conversation with the rest of the ensemble, opening a conversation with yourself about who you are, what are your ideas and what you actually think about/ react to various ideas. The dialogue of course also include theatre as a form of expression, flirting with its ability to tell a story or convey complex emotions or even a state of mind. It's an evolving journey in itself, and having so many people in the lab means you find stimulation in many forms. But expressing is half a dialogue, listening is the other half. Even if the source is yourself you have to listen to what it gives you back. Otherwise there is no growth or journey. Sometimes I have also been surprised at how I respond to certain words or concepts. I realise some things affect me more than i care to admit and some i really feel nothing for.



SPOTLIGHT

What is Culture and Identity?

Zach : I think the 2 things feed each other. Culture informs and shapes who you are as a person. And who you are defines the kind of culture you eventually embrace. So both are constant in flux as well. Once you fixate on a certain culture it dies. Once you are able to fully define yourself, you are probably dead too. Culture has to be in flux because each of us are born in a different time and space. Likewise identity will constantly change. But change is usually uncomfortable, and growth hurts like hell.

Edward: Culture is something through which you can recognise which society or demographic group you belong to. Identity is something through which you can recognise yourself as a unique individual.

Fervyn : Culture is common every-day lifestyle habits, beliefs and behavior of the people, that are celebrated, taken pride in and positively recognized by the people in consensus. It is a way of life that differentiates a community from another. It builds on regularity, routines, habits, common behavioural trends, and distinct likings and dislikes of people living in a

common environment. Culture does not define identity, but it is strong enough to comfortably blanket every individuality. Identity, A long, perhaps lifelong, maybe tedious, sometimes boring, other times surprising, definitely rewarding search – for those who care, those who seek a place, those who dare to know, those who must understand their dreams, and ultimately those who are not afraid of being personal with themselves. But to those less existentially complicated, identity are labels.

Ric: "Culture" is the conversation and expression formed between Man and Habits and Customs and Environment. "Identity" is a label that Society tag on us. Society can use "Identity" for categorising or segregating.

Rei : Culture is the essence of our everyday life, it affects the choice we take. During my conversation with Bugis Artist Zai Kunning, while in search of Mat Yong. He once said that why does singaporeans often seek for culture and identity? Why do us chinese always in search of who we are. The act of taking a dump can also be culturally influenced. its not that we do not have culture, its just that we think our culture doesnt belong to us. We think the rich singapore malay history doesnt belong to us, the china chinese culture isnt ours, then what are we? To me, even Chinese new year is our culture, taking a walk at geylang serai during hari raya is our culture, singlish is our culture, Kopi-o is our culture. That being said, we determines what culture we take on? who told us not to speak our dialects? who told us not to speak singlish? Identity on the other hand, varies. To each of their own, if you need another's approval, that is also a kind of identity. It will always change, and is always like this. WE should not be afraid of not knowing our identity, but we should not ignore it. As long you are ok with who you are, that's identity.

Suhuai: Culture manifested via a group is a custom, and also forms a part of the cultural history of this group. It would become a signifier for that place or tribe, thereby enhancing the identity of this particular place or tribe. Culture as manifested through an individual could be multi-faceted – An individual can present characteristics typical of many places or culture. A long time ago, when someone says that you are cultured, it refers to the fact that you are literate. This highlights the emphasis the Chinese places on the literary aspect of culture. And it does look like culture has to depend on text and literature. If one does not encapsulate a place's lifestyle or culture in text or any sort of written record, then the culture of that place would remain amorphous and indescribable. Identity involves two aspects – Others identifying with you, and you identifying with yourself. How others identify with you could occur in the easiest of circumstances

– through categories of gender, race, nationality, etc, the other person would simply make a judgment call based on the stereotypical impressions he has from these existing categories. The mainstream crowd may enjoy this, as it could manifest your superiority through these labels. However, for those in the minority or oppressed groups, they would perhaps not be as happy. Because these judgments would often bring about discrimination and bias. As such, these minorities would rather hide their own traits. How then do you identify with yourself? It is a philosophical question that one would question for a lifetime – Profound, but nevertheless something that you have to confront with. You genetic makeup, race and gender predisposes your history and there is something worthwhile for you to discover in order to complete the journey of self-discovery. However, you must also understand, it is precisely because you are made up of so many different distinct traits, therefore you end up being unique.

Liansheng : Culture is what you can shape the society with, and also what the society produces to shape you with, at the same time.

Issy : Identity is something that helps you know who you are. It helps you locate yourself in the world, as part of a unit, a community, a society. It is something used to lock you down, but at the same time, free you. It is a never-ending quest to find out where exactly you belong, even as you are very sure of your roots and your purpose in life. Identity is something you can never escape; for as long humans obsess with the need to give everything a name, and so you must be "identified". It is also something very vague, especially in our era of anonymous personas, sub-cultures and globalization. It is something easily changed and redefined, if you wish it to be and are able to let go of everything before. It is also something to hold on to, especially in times where you find yourself questioning where you are necessary, or important. Basically, Identity is everything and nothing. It really depends on how much you feel your identity defines you, and whether it actually helps you or hinders you from becoming who you really are. You can embrace your identity and be happy in that knowledge, or refute your identity and in doing so, find a new one.

Haibin : This is a very important question for Singaporeans. In Gao's works, there are usually no characters, no identity. I often feel that Singaporeans are in a state of diaspora, drifting, unable to root themselves-- and hence unable to form an identity. Maybe the only identity that they can safely assume is "human"...? Well, perhaps that is an insight.



SPOTLIGHT

Why Theatre?

Zach: I'm doing theatre because it can be as simple as one person talking to another and yet it has the potential for complexities simply because we are dealing with one person to another. Theatre is evolving because the way we communicate is evolving and yet it reminds us constantly why we have that need, that urge to communicate and to express. I feel that in a world that's becoming used to soundbites and 15 sec videos, taking a moment to clarify our thoughts and figuring out how we want to express that thought is becoming increasingly important. Many things may have changed but the questions we ask are still the same so for me, art will always be relevant in that sense. Unless we make some leap in humanity, but then I also assume that art will also make that leap together with us. We are born expressive and emotional creatures, even though both words don't necessarily give enough scope or justice to "the human experience". Theatre is a medium that I would say is fluid enough to allow a lot of breadth in how an individual chooses to express. It incorporates words, sounds, lights, music, video, images, objects, and most importantly people. You can't call it theatre if there are no people involved. I am doing theatre because I am fascinated with life, and with people.

Edward : It's the most interesting thing I've ever done in my life. And still is.

Wah: I remembered a television series I have seen before, and there was a line which went like this: "Everyone would have a place that belongs to him. If you situate yourself within this place, you would shine in it." The theatre is ever-changing, mysterious and possesses infinite possibilities. I believe it is the place that belongs to me. All these years, I have not given up on it – and I have also come to realize that it is a very magnanimous place. Not only does it allow anyone to showcase their creativity, it also accepts different perspectives about issues. It also shares with others these perspectives, thereby infecting others with empathy. Instead of saying that I chose theatre, in fact, it had chosen me. It has allowed me to shine in its embrace. I have fallen in love with it, and this love is incurable – I don't think I can ditch it at all!

Ric: Life's a stage, everything is but a game, a story.

Working in theatre allows me to get in touch with stories. I can read them, play them, even create them! Compared to television and movies, I feel that theatre is the closest to Life. It is a performance based upon the moment, very spontaneous, and once it is gone it is gone, there is no "re-take". Theatre gave me the space to understand myself on a deeper level, and it makes me want to discover and understand my surrounding environment as well.

Rei : Other than that. I'm of no use for other things.

Suhuai: When I was still studying in the polytechnic, I would be a part time shop assistant outside school hours. In the day when there are no customers, I would be behind the counter reading the Collection of Qian Zhongshu, which I have borrowed from the library. When the boss returns and discovers that I am always hidden behind the counter, he would then take the chair away. This makes reading even more difficult. In the end, I stopped reading. Working in the theatre is like the chair that helps me to read. Of course, those who are able to read without sitting would even be more admirable.

Liansheng : To be honest, it's a question I don't ask myself often. Theatre's something I just do. I have asked myself why I write though. In this aspect, if I can quote from a feminist rally cry, I think it is best summed up in this sentence I have been hearing recently. Essentially, "the personal is political". In addition to the idea that a lot of problems the characters in my plays face can be systemic problems, I also believe that with the sharing of stories of

characters usually not talked about, this might add to the possibility of generating more empathy through sharing. It is about generating more possibilities – whether they are possibilities of dialogue, understanding, or conflict. To be honest, we can never really know what happens with all these works being created. That's why I don't ask why I am doing theatre often, because I don't know if the answers I get will be adequate for my questions.

Issy : I have concluded that I do theatre because it's in my nature. I am a "story-teller". I have always loved creating stories in my head and acting them out ever since I was a little girl. And as I grew older, I came into contact with as many formats of storytelling, as I did stories. For a period of time, I was really into using film to express all those ideas – it was a language I was fluent in and understood quite well. But weirdly enough, as I evolved, theatre became my medium of choice for retelling the stories that were collected and digested in my head. There is something about theatre that intrigues me. It combines the transient nature of photography, with the movement and excitement of film, and is so much more layered and complex than the other visual mediums. (No offence, each medium is an art unto itself) It's something I don't fully understand, which explains my fascination with it, I guess. Whatever it is, theatre has become a means for me to be myself – someone who loves telling and dreaming up stories. It is a somewhat romantic notion really; that I can hopefully become one of those "collectors" that catalogues human experiences through the process of telling them.

But one of the biggest reasons why I do theatre is because it challenges me, and frustrates me and makes me remember the important things in life. It constantly forces me to learn new things about myself, and is a driving force for me to live my life the way it should be; happy but not to the point of ignorance, with a confidence that comes from humility and empathy that comes from the struggle to be a good person. Also, it is a constant reminder to have fun!! Theatre is basically a kind, honest way to examine your own life and the world around you and also enjoy it for all its worth :)

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The Practice Journal is a quarterly electronic newsletter issued by The Theatre Practice. We welcome all suggestions, comments, queries and feedback. Contact us: suhuai@practice.org.sg

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