

Speaker #1: Elisabeth Arti Wulandari

Talk title: “Where are we headed?”: The Cultural Activism of Teater Garasi

Abstract: Many important Indonesian plays and performances written between the 1970s and 1990s direct their criticism toward the repressive state of Soeharto’s. W.S. Rendra’s *Perjuangan Suku Naga* and N. Riantiarno’s *Opera Kecoa*, for example, depict the suffering of the poor and dispossessed at the hands of corrupt government officials, placing the blame squarely on repressive state that oppresses its people. The repressive state is identified as a common enemy of the people, a depiction that looms large in Indonesian theater during the New Order regime. Following the fall of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998, theater critics and observers wrote of the “confusion” and “floundering, directionless” quality of contemporary performances in Indonesia. What happens when the common enemy disappears, when the primary target or political threat is no longer easy to identify or agree upon? How have Indonesian theater practitioners transformed their performative practices since 1998, and to what extent do the forms and themes of pre-1998 theater still speak to a post-1998 society and its attending problems?

The year 1998 is important for discussing contemporary theater in Indonesia, not only because 1998 saw revolutionary political reformation, but also because it ushered in a social and cultural revolution. The post-1998 years were an important turning point for the Yogyakarta-based theater troupe Teater Garasi. Teater Garasi, along with a host of other activist, social and cultural organizations, saw a rapidly changing society and felt the need to respond in a way that would take advantage of the cultural moment and to ensure that theater remained relevant to the new social and political reality around them. My presentation will situate Teater Garasi’s cultural activism in post-1998 Indonesia, examining how their understanding of what theater should look like after 1998 shaped their performative practices. It will specifically discuss Teater Garasi’s 2008 performance *Je.Ja.Lan*, and examine the ways in which it exemplifies post-authoritarianism theater in Indonesia.

Speaker bio: Elisabeth Arti Wulandari is an assistant professor of humanities at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York. Her articles and book reviews have appeared in *Antipodes*, *The Global Journal of Australian/ New Zealand Literature*; *International Journal of Diaspora and Cultural Criticism*; and *International Journal of Asian Studies*. Her teaching and research interests include theater, postcolonial studies, world literature, and graphic novels. In her free time she loves gardening, birding, and wildlife photography.

Speaker #2: Joanne Leow

Talk Title: “Tear Down the House”: Tania De Rozario’s Queer Literary Circumventions in Singapore’s State

Abstract: In this paper, I explore how it might be possible to imaginatively circumvent the dominant modes of capital, circulation, globalization, and citizenship from within Singapore’s material borders. Through memoir and creative non-fiction, the queer Eurasian writer Tania de Rozario’s *And the Walls Come Crumbling Down* spatializes queer desire --- giving us a lens through which to view the material, symbolic, and textual spaces of Singapore that are wholly unplanned, not profit-driven or planned for. In a state where queer communities and families are unable to access public housing in an equitable way, de Rozario contemplates notions of home and desire. Her work operates in a context where homosexual sex between men is still criminalized by a colonial era law and queer women are doubly effaced: their relationships viewed as transgressive but not even visible enough to warrant a mention in the legal code. In terms of collateral cultural effects, however, one of the law’s effects is a distinct lack of positive cultural representations of queer women’s bodies. The production of queer spaces in art and everyday life for women, girls and gender non-conforming bodies is particularly urgent. By directly engaging with the ordinary and everyday lived environment and its effects on queerness, De Rozario’s work seeks to circumvent Singapore’s disciplined and regulated, heteronormative spaces.

Bio: Joanne Leow lives as a guest on Treaty Six Territory and the homeland of the Métis. She is Assistant Professor of decolonizing, diasporic, and transnational literatures at the University of Saskatchewan. Her most recent research is in *positions: asia critique*, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, and *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Her first book manuscript theorizes the relationship between cultural dissidence and urban planning in Singapore. Her essays, fiction, and poetry have been published in *Brick*, *Catapult*, *The Goose*, *Isle*, *The Kindling*, *The Town Crier*, *QLRS*, and *Ricepaper Magazine*. Her ecocritical SSHRC-funded project “Intertidal Polyphonies” is archived at intertidal.usask.ca.

Speaker #3: Weihsin Gui

Talk title: Art and Cities as Speculative Space in the *Liquid City* Comics Anthology

Abstract: My talk is about the first volume of the *Liquid City* comics anthology (2008) published by Image Comics and edited by Sonny Liew. It features short comics mostly by creators from Southeast Asian countries and their diasporas, and many of them represent different aspects of and responses to city spaces and urban life in contemporary Southeast Asia. However, they often do so in a speculative manner by invoking science fictional or fantasy tropes without explicitly naming a specific Southeast Asian city. I discuss select comics from *Liquid City* in the context of scholarly conversations about Asian urban studies. On one level, these comics do express what Robbie Goh and Brenda Yeoh in *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text* (2003) observe as a key theme in cultural studies of Southeast Asian cities: “the hegemony over the city on the part of the dominant political power or discourse is illusory from the point of view of urbanism-as-experience or as hermeneutical contest” (6). But I also follow Jini Kim Watson’s lead in *The New Asian City* (2011) and examine how these comics “invoke and rearrange images and ideologies of space [...] into a state of temporary turmoil” and thus explore the possibility of a “reconciliation” and perhaps a “surpassing” of “such images” (20). To wit, the speculative impulse in the *Liquid City* comics offers a cultural critique of authoritarian governance in Southeast Asia through aesthetic and emotional representations of urban spaces and experiences.

Speaker bio: Weihsin Gui is Associate Professor of English at the University of California-Riverside. He is the author of *National Consciousness and Literary Cosmopolitics* (2013) and the editor of *Common Lines and City Spaces* (2014), an essay collection about Singaporean poet Arthur Yap. He also co-edited a 2016 special issue of the journal *Interventions* about Singapore and a 2021 special issue of the journal *Antipodes* about Southeast Asia and Australia. His essays have been published or are forthcoming in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, *Interventions*, *Postcolonial Text*, *The Global South*, *Moving Worlds: Journal of Transcultural Writings*, and *Textual Practice*. His essay about “Contemporary Literature From Singapore” appeared in the online *Oxford Research Encyclopedia for Literature* (2017) and his chapter on “Narrating the Global South East Asian Diaspora” was published in Volume 10 of the *Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2019).