

Unusual Business  
in Five Arts Centre:

‘LET’S  
CONFERENCE!’





## Unusual Business in Five Arts Centre: ‘Let’s Conference!’

Marion D’Cruz, Janet Pillai

Cover photo: Asian Youth Artsmall (2005)  
Photo by Gan Siong King | ©Five Arts Centre

In January 2015, as part of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Five Arts Centre (FAC) organized a practice-based conference titled *Unfinished Business: Conference on Krishen Jit’s Performance Practice and Contemporary Malaysian Theatre*. The conference explored the performance practice of pioneering Malaysian theatre director Krishen Jit (1939-2005), in relation to the ongoing work of experimental and interdisciplinary artists from Malaysia and abroad who collaborated with Krishen during his outstanding career. It brought together arts researchers, practitioners, academics and students whose work have been directly or indirectly influenced or inspired by the thinking and practice of Krishen, with the aim of deepening the understanding of his practice and extrapolating on its future application in culture and the arts, specifically theatre.

This article incorporates excerpts from two interviews done by Janet Pillai (theatre director, researcher and member of FAC) that articulate the rationale for FAC’s decision to produce this conference. Marion D’Cruz (founder member of FAC) speaks about the arts collective that is now 34 years old, how it was formed from an eclectic mix of artists, and the evolving circumstances leading up to the conference. Charlene Rajendran, the convenor of the conference, speaks about why and how she planned for an inclusive approach to theatre conferencing that provides an accommodating space for multidisciplinary and multimodal languages, academic discourse and personal memories.

**Janet Pillai (JP):** Marion, tell us about how the beginnings of FAC might have led to the making of this conference and what makes conferencing part of how FAC operates.

**Marion D’Cruz (MDC):** From the word go, when FAC was established in 1984, theory and practice have always been integrated. It was not necessarily a conscious decision at that time; rather it was by default, via the personalities who formed the company. Formed by Krishen Jit, Chin San Sooi and myself, the initial group also included Redza Piyadasa and K.S. Maniam. The company was formed as a collective of five people — two directors, two playwrights, a visual artist,

and a dancer. In 1984, the five disciplines were theatre, dance, visual arts, creative writing [matching the disciplines of the 5 members], and the fifth area was open-ended — anything we might want to do.

The four men were all engaged in academic and performance theory in different ways. Krishen was a lecturer, historian, director and critic. His practice was informed by the criss-crossings of these areas and many other areas as well: film, fiction, music, trivia...[Francois] Truffaut, Bollywood, Pramodya [Ananta Toer], Patricia Cornwall, Edith Piaf!! San Sooi was a literature teacher, playwright and director. His practice was fed by the history and politics of the past, and of the day. Piyadasa was a conceptual artist. In his seminal exhibition with fellow artist Sulaiman Esa in 1974 titled *Towards a Mystical Reality*, they “took the role of critic as well, by positioning their own propositions, ideas and concepts written in the manifesto published in conjunction with the exhibition.”<sup>1</sup> It shook the visual arts world. Maniam was a writer and lecturer, and was writing about the class struggle, placing working-class Malaysian Indians as his central focus. This was unusual. All four had a unique stance. All four had an intellectual rigour that fed into their practice. All four were involved in academia, as well as in practice. For them, the relationship between theory and practice was fluid and organic. There was no separation. Instead, there was integration.

I was much younger, and had started my own quest for Malaysian contemporary dance by looking at the collision/negotiation of tradition and modernity, east and west. I did not have the intellectual rigour of the four men. I was a teacher, but not involved in academia, as such. However, the work I was doing came from some conscious thinking. Many years later, people would call my work conceptual dance. So, in the coming together of the five of us, the path that FAC would take was established.

**JP:** So this starting point of the particular kinds of people who came together, and their interests, skills and curiosities, have led to a way of doing things that has continued for FAC?

**MDC:** Yes, it is this that has steered the company for over 30 years — this notion that the individuals involved would bring to the table their ideas and desires. These ideas would be discussed at length, questioned, re-questioned, clarified, probed. If the idea had the potential to be exciting, interesting, or to discover something new or to push the thinking about art making, or if it was experimental and ground-breaking and presented alternative images, then FAC would take it on and make it happen. Mind you, many experimental and groundbreaking projects end up as failures, and FAC faced many of these. But that was not the point. The point was to support the artist in her/his journey of discovery in art making. The point was also to make good art that was provocative and engaging. Often, the point was the process. And that was a conscious decision: that we would encourage and support artists and their ideas.

At the same time, the most conscious and potent decision of the company was the commitment to Malaysian creativity and Malaysian stories. In 1984, this was a bold and unique stance. Malay language theatre had been telling Malaysian stories from the 1960s. Plays by Usman Awang, Syed Alwi, Noordin Hassan and later Dinsman, Hatta Azad Khan and others, put the stories of Malaysia on stage, in the Malay language. In the English language however, this was not the case. There were very few Malaysian plays in English, by Lee Joo For, K. Das, Lloyd Fernando, which were done mostly by University groups. Professional stagings of English plays were still dominated by western ideology. Plays by Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, Ibsen and many others were what appeared on the professional stage.

**JP:** Was FAC different because it responded to a critical gap in the landscape and put something out there that was not yet happening?

**MDC:** Yes, definitely. We were, in a sense, fired by a postcolonial ideology. FAC was launched in 1984 with the staging of *The Cord* by K.S. Maniam. It was a bold and daring move. I mean, who wanted to see a play in English that presented the complexities of Malaysian estate Indians? It was bizarre. The event was hugely successful in terms of audience numbers, response, acting, professionalism. It created a buzz.

FAC’s second project, soon after the staging of *The Cord*, was a contemporary dance concert by Marion D’Cruz and Dancers titled *Sintesis ’84*. In the programme notes, I stated:

“*Sintesis ’84* is a dance programme of solo, duet and ensemble pieces. The items presented are a result of choreography over a period of two years with one basic concept in mind — the fusion of old and new dance vocabulary, to create what might become a contemporary dance idiom which is Malaysian. The dances, while firmly based on traditional Asian styles, Malay, Indonesian, Indian, draw on western techniques and choreography. This confrontation of both East and West is both conflicting and not, at the same time. I find the resultant vocabulary a very dynamic and exciting one—both modern and traditional—and hence possibly a contemporary Malaysian dance style. The dances are performed to a variety of aural sensations — music, both recorded and live, old and new, poetry, live sounds.”<sup>2</sup>

Another bold, unusual, pioneering stance: the commitment to process, [and] it took two years to make the show!! And the strategies employed to ‘find’ Malaysian contemporary dance were a critical part of the process. The show was not hugely successful. The work was uneven, although the intentions and processes were deep. But most audiences are not concerned with intention and process. They need a product that reaches them in some way. I cried much at the reviews. But I learnt. And I got sharper. And FAC critiqued and supported me.



With these beliefs and concepts in place, FAC moved on. Members left. New members joined. Many others collaborated regularly on projects and became the extended family of the company. Those who became members, and the collaborators, were attracted to the ethos of the company. The disciplines changed as well. It is interesting to trace how FAC membership has evolved over the years. And most of the time, it was through personal relationships.

**JP:** Yes, my own entry into FAC actually began through an informal mentorship with Krishen, and collaborations with you while I was exploring Children’s Theatre at Kompleks Budaya Negara<sup>3</sup> in Kuala Lumpur, between the years 1978 and 1981. I can’t remember exactly when I became an official member of FAC....

**MDC:** I think that it was in 1990 when you approached FAC with the idea of an integrated arts training programme for children. This germ of an idea led to long discussions of how and why. You had conceptualized the main ideas, which then crystallized via these discussions, and led to the *Teater Muda* training programme.<sup>4</sup> We did 11 phases of *Teater Muda* between 1992 and 2001, training about 300 children, and we presented 3 major productions: *Suara Rimba* (1994), *Rama & Sita: Generasi Baru* (1996) and *Ne Zha* (1999).

When visual artist Wong Hoy Cheong first returned from his studies in the US, I asked him to design a set for one of my dance concerts. I had known Hoy Cheong from 1978, when he was a student in Penang Free School, and I was doing my Masters at USM.<sup>5</sup> He designed a set for me which I used in several dance concerts. I think he became a member in 1994. When he was a member of FAC, we did many more visual arts projects. Wong Hoy Cheong was making work that was deeply engaged in the sociopolitical issues of the day. His work came from much research, was edgy and pushed the boundaries.

**JP:** How does FAC actually manage all these diverse projects that involve several disciplines? Do those intersections inevitably lead to interdisciplinary work?

**MDC:** Every project has a different story of how it came about. And the diverse projects are managed... with great difficulty! Baptism by fire in many cases! ✱ But every project was borne out of one or two or three or more members presenting an idea to the collective. The interdisciplinary nature of the work is both conscious and not. Sometimes, the person initiating the project has an idea to involve artists from other disciplines. In *Skin Trilogy* (1995), Krishen consciously wanted to work in tandem with visual artists, musicians and dancers to create an interdisciplinary event. The range of knowledge and ideas among members and collaborators also affects the work.

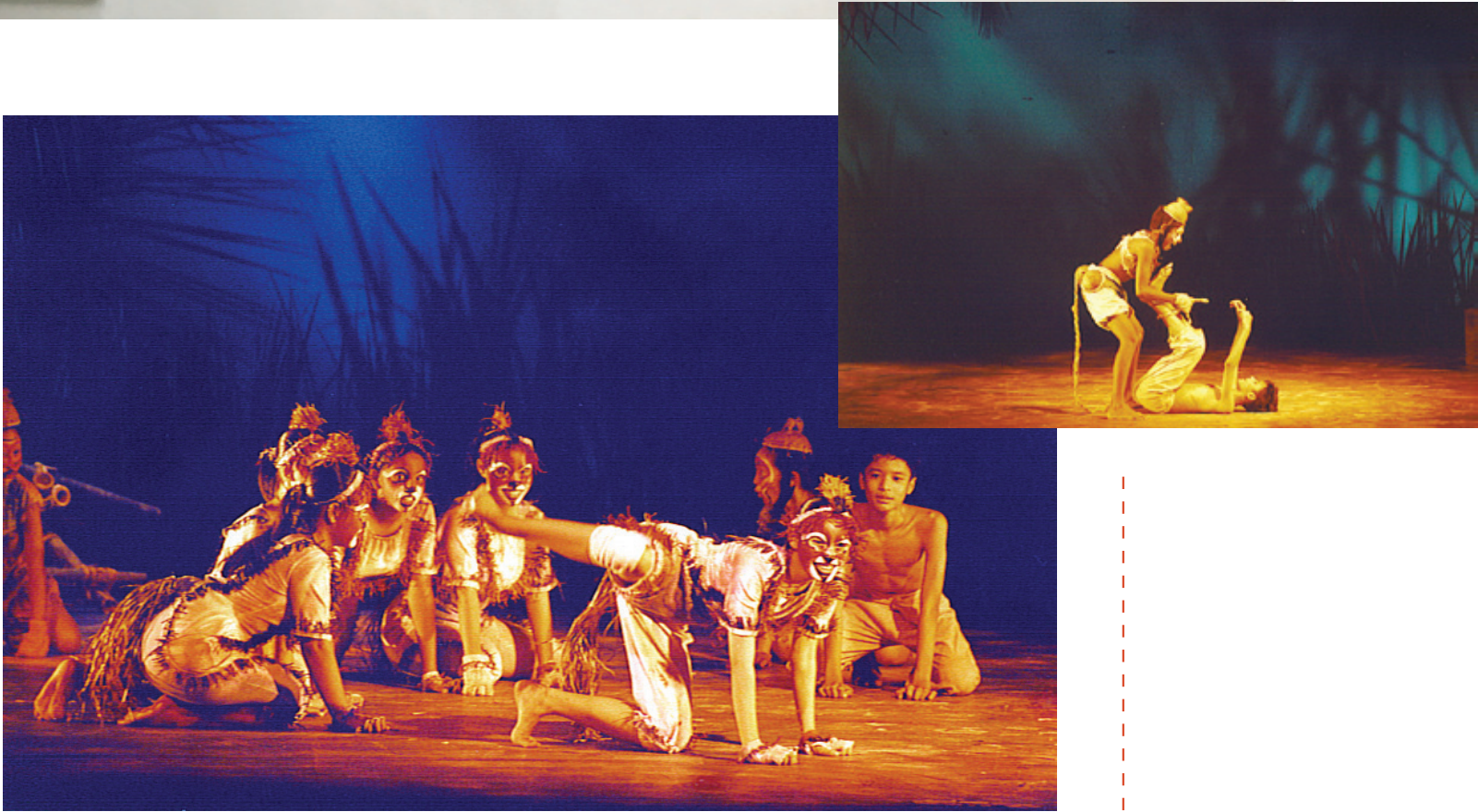


In art making, a sustained commitment to process and to supporting the journey of discovery requires a large capacity for risk-taking. The FAC appetite for asking questions and following them through in order to find new forms and make paradigm shifts has been crucial to its expansion of the arts. Difficult discussions about artistic direction and ethical engagement persist despite the pressures of time. Works are viewed and reviewed with a rigour and an intensity aimed at excavating artistic potential to its fullest. (Mark Teh and Bilqis Hijjas refer to these processes in their chapters.)

So what enables this group of individuals to sustain this process of being continually open and willing to try something new? How do they navigate the diverse personalities and opinions that emerge? Is it intellectual curiosity and artistic respect that fuel the ability to keep negotiating difference? If this is so, what do we lose when the process wavers?



Poster wall at Five Arts Centre office (2017)  
© Five Arts Centre



Middle and bottom: *Suara Rimba* (1994)  
Photos by SC Shekar | ©Five Arts Centre





**Top:** *Projek Angkat Rumah* (2010). Photo by Gan Siong King | ©Five Arts Centre **Bottom:** *Projek Angkat Rumah* on the front page of *Berita Minggu* (2010). ©The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad

More recently for example, Mark Teh has brought dynamic work into the company. Mark’s work started with his group ARTicle 19<sup>6</sup> in the late 1990s. Mark is interested in documentary theatre, which involves a great deal of research and he now works with a regular group of collaborators. His most recent work was *Baling* (2015), which was based on the 1955 peace talks held in Baling, Kedah between the Chief Minister of the Federation of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the leader of the Malayan Communist Party, Chin Peng. Using publicly available transcripts of the talks, the performance looks at questions of nation formation with performer-researchers who share similar and contrasting political views with the participants of the talks. In the process, the meaning of nation, loyalty, terrorism, reconciliation, sacrifice, surrender and independence are constantly modified and remediated, and the roles taken on by individual performers also vaguely slip in between. Baling has toured Kuala Lumpur and six cities in South Korea, Japan, Germany, India and the UAE. *Baling* is the most toured FAC project to date.

FAC is changing. And through all these changes, FAC has stayed committed to its basic principles. What is the current Malaysian story that needs to be told, that can be told? What does the individual artist and/or producer want to do? Why is this good? Why is this necessary? We talk and question. Purposefully, as well as unconsciously, we have injected theory into practice. It has become inbuilt into the way we work.

The fluidity of membership, and the personal trajectories of individual members, have led to the creation of a wide range of projects. In over 30 years, we have had workshops, training, performances, forums, exhibitions, conferences, and we have even published a book titled *Staging History: Selected Plays from Five Arts Centre Malaysia 1984 – 2014*. Much of this work has been interdisciplinary. The needs and the ideas came from members and from the growing FAC family.

**JP:** What are some significant or milestone projects in the history of FAC?

**MDC:** In the first ten years, between 1984 and 1994, we worked in quite an ad hoc manner, doing projects as they were surfaced by members. In 1993, Krishen gathered FAC members and other regular collaborators, invited people to join the company, and suggested we plan a 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programme and commit to it. It was an exciting and impossible proposition. Everyone had full time jobs. But we bit the bullet and worked towards a full year’s programme for 1994. It was the first time we moved away from the ad hoc style. This then became the new modus operandi. Better planning, more thinking, greater professionalism. This also led to deeper and alternative thinking about how to mark the major anniversaries.

For our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we outsourced and invited four different artists to create work that reflected on some of the principles of FAC. This led to the most unusual project we have ever done, *Project Angkat Rumah* initiated by filmmaker Liew Seng Tat, as preparation for a film that he was working on. On 26 June 2010, 250 people from diverse backgrounds carried a big Malay *kampung* house over a distance of 1.3km, from Jalan Ipoh to the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre. The parade was accompanied by a marching band, an all-Indian lion dance troupe, *kompanyang* [hand held drums] players and costumed characters. The idea for this project was partly inspired by a photograph that appeared in the *New Straits Times* in August 2007, the month celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malaysian independence. The photo caption told the story of how 150 villagers of a community organized a *gotong royong*<sup>7</sup> to help a farmer carry his timber house and relocate it closer to his ailing mother-in-law. While this act may seem unusual to young, urban Malaysians now, it was a fairly common exercise in the past, especially in rural areas and small towns. It was this very Malaysian spirit of cooperation, support and actual heavy lifting that Seng Tat was interested to explore with KL-ites, and he was able to realize it with *Project Angkat Rumah*.

Other landmark projects were: *Family* (1998), performed in an abandoned mansion in KL, with audiences moving from room to room and out into the garden; *Ne Zha* (1999), a drama for children using big puppets that was performed outdoors in a public square surrounded by apartment blocks; *2 minute solos* (2013) where audiences in groups of four persons only, were privy to intimate two-minute solos performed in FAC’s shoplot space, which comprised a staircase, offices, a kitchen, and toilets; and the publication of *Staging History: Selected Plays from Five Arts Centre 1984 – 2014*.

For our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we started planning two years in advance. This time, we invited an executive producer, Grey Yeoh, from outside the collective, to be in charge of the two-year programme titled *tenTenTEN!* The programme was as varied as the company had been over 30 years and involved forums, discussions, talks, exhibitions, workshops, performances, and this conference titled *Unfinished Business: Conference on Krishen Jit’s Performance Practice & Contemporary Malaysian Theatre*. Charlene [Rajendran] broached the topic of developing the conference in 2013, while the both of you were sitting in a café, someplace in Kyoto, watching the rain through the glass.

**JP:** Yes, from that snippet of a conversation Charlene went on to design this rather out-of-the box conference. Charlene, what were you leveraging on, to make possible a paradigm shift in the conferencing format?

**Charlene Rajendran (CR):** The creative capacity and artistic interest of individuals to participate in an event like this and experiment with us, was an important factor for success — particularly for those who negotiate the tensions of practice and theory, which should not really be separated but tend to be seen as possible to keep apart within institutions of learning.

I was also leveraging the FAC capacity and company history that bring these languages and individuals together. FAC has been intertwining theory and practice in the work of various individuals such as Krishen, Marion, you, Mark—and previously Wong Hoy Cheong, Leow Puay Tin, Redza Piyadasa, K.S. Maniam—such that this is not new to the ethos of FAC. Even if developing a whole conference on the work of one practitioner, namely Krishen, is new. The AYA<sup>8</sup> conference also sought to bring about a paradigm shift in conferencing format. As a co-curator in that process, together with you and Liew Kungyu, I had participated in a process of rethinking conferencing and knew that FAC had initiated and supported that process powerfully. So FAC has that history I was leveraging on with the team that worked on the conference.







The Five Arts approach, imbued with a pedagogical slant as a result of having several educators in their midst, often includes some form of research. Practice is invariably linked to cultural politics, art theory, socio-historical intervention or some other form of critical enquiry. Reading, observing, investigating and interrogating are built into the process, and the appetite for new knowledge is a requirement.

Hence the role of the artist is deeply linked with the responsibility of innovating artistic structures, political ideas, cultural frames and imaginative creations that are active with options for alternatives. Education is not merely school-based or formal; it is forged in social relationships, artistic experiments and platforms for play. Such that when Claire and Huzir reference a memory of Krishen cooking carrots and conversing with them after rehearsal (see *Carrot / Pantun / Dance* chapter), they draw on more than just a new recipe. They provoke us to rethink how we learn, what we learn, and why artists continue to tell stories as they learn.

Simply sharing stories, which was a key aspect of Krishen's methodologies, is recognised as a fundamental starting point for collaboration and creation. In his role as the agent provocateur for other artists—urging them to move beyond their comfort zones and make bold decisions—Krishen also acknowledged the desire to be pushed by other artists. This was part of art making, where personal connections led to critical and creative reactions.

Hence the stories we excavate tell us much about our purpose and our politics. What stories remain untold and why have they been silent thus far? Perhaps the conference was simply a platform for more stories to emerge.

**JP:** What inspired you to formulate a new approach to conferencing and how did you incorporate a range of formats into the conference?

**CR:** Having been an actor [as a child and an adult], director, writer, dramaturg, educator and researcher, I have gained all kinds of knowledge through doing and reading and writing and playing, and thus am frustrated by theatre conferences and institutions that insist upon the [academic] paper format as the main platform for knowledge building.

I was fatigued with the conventional conference that focuses on knowledge as primarily available through verbal reasoning, and leaves out many aspects of feeling and doing. Theatre inspires a desire to create space for embodied and performed reasoning, which does not separate the mind and body, and thus [the format] must be able to work through different ways of producing and critiquing knowledge, ideas and imaginative re-visioning.

I am also informed by the way that I approach teaching, where I operate by using different ways of thinking and questioning. For this reason, the conference draws from the pedagogies of play that I am interested in developing.

**MDC:** This is an important aspect within FAC as well. Several of us FAC members are educators, and this affects the way we think and the way we make art.✱

**CR:** Negotiating difference is another important motivation. I think theatre is highly suited to advancing and refining the skills we need, to deal with difference. Theatre allows for varied vocabularies, ideologies, politics, aesthetics and languages to come together, and for people to negotiate these differences by simply listening and talking to each other. It is not always easy to moderate or mediate, but it happens nonetheless.

The curatorial team worked around some critical questions when designing the conference. How can a conference make the multi-dimensionality of theatre more central to its function? How can we learn from theatre and produce a conference [experience] that is able to criss-cross multiplicity without anxiety or fear? I tried to incorporate a range of methods/modes, from keynote addresses to individual papers and panels, as well as dialogues and workshops with artists, and then rehearsals and performances that experiment with content and form.

I had the luxury of having an unconventional canvas to play with—in that I was not creating a conference for an institution that required people to submit applications, etc. I was free to curate and thus to create, rather than replicate. So drawing from the varied ways in which I'd encountered theatre making and theatre thinking, I went about trying to concoct ways of allowing these modes to be part of the conference. I don't think it was exhaustive. It was a start.

**MDC:** And this start leads to other things like this book, which is often how FAC works. Several projects have had many phases and many manifestations, with one thing leading on to the next.

**JP:** Of late I think several members of the FAC family have been rethinking the importance of documentation and research as instruments for both reflection and archival reference. Krishen's own practice of opening his work up for member feedback weeks before the premiere, and his prolific contribution to reviews, journals and encyclopedias underscored this aspect of FAC's characteristic integration of practice and theory, and desire for professional discourse. The conference format, as you mentioned, had conventional elements such as paper presentations and panel discussions, but also innovative elements such as performance and participatory events. Which elements or combination of elements do you think worked?

**CR:** I think they worked in combination with each other. To listen to a keynote and then go into a workshop, to think about a paper and then watch a performance, to talk about a memory and then listen to another memory—they all need to happen in relation to each other. Without forgetting or underestimating the time spent during meals and breaks to chill out, have a drink, take a walk in the park, and allow other thoughts and ideas to filter through.

The other aspect [of the conference] is that there were no parallel sessions. So people stayed together, and the sessions rolled into each other. Like an intense immersive experience, where many things happen at the same time, and you don't fully realise what has happened because some of it occurs corporeally and psychically.

This process generates a reflexive mode that operates like a dance between the formal or systematised aspects of documented legacy, and the non-formal or spontaneous aspects of being suddenly reminded of a particular moment or anecdote or movement or sound that triggers something. And through critical reflexivity, this interrogation can lead to something valuable that would otherwise remain dormant. It takes a generative capacity to play and improvise with memory, but also to respond to and question memory intelligently.

This mode of conferencing requires an attentiveness to details that are often glossed over. [Our] reliance on the details of experience, memory, action, philosophy, and of how things were done, actually says more than we realise.

One important element is that this was also an event to remember Krishen, whom most people at the conference knew. So it was motivated by a personal connection, which invariably meant it was a pretty closed community of sorts that was gathering.

This was not the usual conference starting point. This may have impacted the levels of criticality and the form of criticality as well. In a more conventional conference, there is a format that allows for distanced discussion. How to mediate and moderate the mix of distance and proximity is a big question.

**JP:** Catering to the known audience or subjecting audiences to new experiences is always a tough decision. When planning did you consider what participants wanted or needed?

**CR:** At a basic level I catered primarily to a known audience: people in FAC, people I imagined would be interested and would benefit from this conference, but not all participants—only those I already knew and anticipated. I was not intending the conference to please a large group or to meet the needs of people who were completely new to the nexus between theory and practice. If the new audiences were willing to be challenged, then the conference could work for them. But if they needed to be spoon-fed, then the conference would frustrate them. New experiences can be enjoyable for a critically mature audience, but not for an audience that wants to be hand-held. The conference required the linking up of a lot of dots on your own, and with those present. If you wanted all the dots joined, then it would have been annoying.

In hindsight, I think there may have been a need for some sessions to be breakout sessions, where people with different kinds of interests can meet up and talk with each other, separately. So those who want to talk about politics, and those who want to talk about practice, can do so. This is to allow for the varied ways of thinking to have a space to breathe on their own turf.

**MDC:** In planning *tenTenTEN!*, we looked at some of the gaps in the industry and one was the gap in critical discourse. So in 2014, in the lead-up to the conference, we had several discussions and forums. This continued





in 2015, after the conference — sessions to open up the sharing of knowledge and to ask the hard questions. I think this will also feed more into the next phase of FAC.

**JP:** In 2014, Mark Teh set up Para-sites, which functioned partly as a platform or parallel site for discussion, thinking, mapping out or connecting people. Among the several Para-sites events were talks and forums, which included sharing the concept and use of Cultural Mapping among stakeholders from different disciplines; the “*Dan Lain-Lain Lah*” 14-week study group with about 20 young people; *Unrealised*, where a writer, an architect and a choreographer talked about unrealised projects; and a talk by visual artist Chang Yoong Chia, called “Materiality & Magic”. The conference was, to an extent, preempted by these interdisciplinary sharing sessions. Charlene, tell us about the curatorial challenges of bringing together academics, artists-collaborators and audiences from different backgrounds and disciplines into the conference.

**CR:** This conference prioritised the director and actor, and thus the designer, visual artist, musician and choreographer did not have much space. The writer had some room for discourse, but often in multi-roles — as writers who were also directors/actors. The other area that received less focus was production and technical support. These aspects of theatre are less articulated and thus, more difficult to bring into the discourse as there is a reluctance to engage with theorised or intellectual talk. People involved in these areas of work are more keen to do the work. But these voices would be very valuable to the discourse. So I don’t think we brought out enough of a difference. I think we have some ways to go.

Having said that, I think the important thing when bringing different interests and disciplines together, is finding a common theme or issue that allows for the varied participants to feel they have a stake in what is being said and performed. It is important that their perspectives and views are understood and heard, despite the lesser and greater degrees of fluency or familiarity with the process of conferencing.

**JP:** What would you say were the major learning points for you, from devising and executing this new conference format?



Audience at *Unfinished Business* (2015)  
Photo by Huneid Tyeb | ©Five Arts Centre

**CR:** The importance of talking with presenters about the work, and taking time to curate with them — to see this as a collaborative process at several levels. Presenters who do not attend to the materials provided or who are unwilling to have such conversations may not be suited to this process. It is more time consuming, but I think it makes a difference to try to ensure that we are on a shared page. This applies to all the different kinds of sessions, from the keynotes to the performances, and everything in-between. Even for those who are working on design aspects, these pre-conversations can help to work through the different vocabularies and languages in the materials and preparation materials as well, so there are fewer assumptions made and more assumptions challenged. In particular we did not anticipate the gap in communication with the visual arts team who took on the installation component. As a result, that dimension was not fully incorporated into the larger programme during the conference, when it could and should have been.

[It is important] to collaborate with people who have different entry points and skills—as producers, advisors and co-curators/convenors—because this

really helps the thinking and planning to move beyond comfort zones and familiar terrains. It opens up what is possible, and enlarges the discourse into more critically diverse realms of doing and thinking. Bringing Ken Takiguchi into the team as assistant convenor was really helpful in broadening the scope [of the conference] and generating ideas on a whole new level that I had not even begun to consider. So curating the team who works on a conference is very, very important. Marion D’Cruz and Lim How Ngean as producers had very different skills and combining those made their inputs invaluable. And then having strong office support—e.g. Hoe Hui Ting and Grey Yeoh as administrative coordinators and runners—to sustain the daily work that needs doing. And so forth...

But above all, I think I learnt that with this kind of format, there is a need for this team to meet and talk regularly, in the lead-up to the conference and during the conference. It’s not ideal that we were stretched across two cities: Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. But even so, it makes a difference to make it a point to meet and talk — not just on Skype but in person. The kinds of ideas and the kinds of dreaming that can take place when we meet, is very unlike talking on Skype. We also need to think of how to document this process.

**MDC:** For FAC, the *Unfinished Business* conference was a big step into a new direction of deeper discussions, alongside the business of making art. This was not our first conference—AYA, in 2005 was—but I think the impact of this conference is different. Maybe it was [due to] the timing, the nature of the conference, the position we are in as individuals and as a company, and the state of the nation. FAC still sees the need to create opportunities for discussion, we see the need to create platforms for emerging practitioners, we see the great need for documentation and archiving. We are beginning to programme for our black box space called Kotak@Five Arts Centre. We will always be finding ways to make potent art.



Five Arts Centre receiving the *Most Inspiring Award* at the 12<sup>th</sup> BOH Cameronian Arts Awards (2015). ©Kakiseni