

**DRAMATURGY & TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOP 1**  
**By Martyn Coutts**  
**24 May 2019, 12.00PM – 4.00PM**  
**Practice Space (The Theatre Practice), 54 Waterloo Street**

**Rapporteur's Report prepared by Dominic Nah**

**ABOUT MARTYN COUTTS**

Martyn Coutts creates public artworks which challenge an audiences understanding of space and place. He uses a multi-platform approach to work - using performance, technology and interactivity - to create specialised dramaturgy that engages and enlightens. Martyn is a founding member of Field Theory, a nine-year-old artist collective which was named Cultural Leaders in Live Art by the Australia Council in 2012. He was co-project lead for the works *The Stadium Broadcast*, *9000 Minutes* and *Final Visions: Bunker*. He is a key member of The Unconformity festival's Artistic Directorate, programming the 2016 and 2018 festivals. He also delivered the two large scale opening events for both festivals *The Rumble* (2016) and *Tectonica* (2018) with Ian Pidd. With Sam Routledge he has created 3 works, one of which, *I Think I Can*, toured to 20 different locations across Australia, UK, USA, Canada, Netherlands and Taiwan. Martyn co-directed *SAC35* for Salamanca Arts Centre, created *Wayfarer* with Kate Richards, and *20 Questions* for Wheeler Centre with Ian Pidd. In 2019 he will launch the expansive audio app *Against The Tide* for the Parramatta River in Sydney. Martyn has also worked extensively as a dramaturg, video artist, producer, university lecturer and consultant. Find out more at [martyncoutts.com](http://martyncoutts.com).

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

- 1. Rachel Nip** (Dancer/Choreographer)
- 2. Chew Peishan** (Choreographer)
- 3. Mok Cui Yin** (Producer)
- 4. Estella Ng** (Producer)
- 5. Ashley Fong** (Student, NAFA)
- 6. Pat Toh** (Theatre/Dance Artist)
- 7. Chan Sze Wei** (Choreographer/Filmmaker)
- 8. Lina Yu** (Theatre Practitioner)
- 9. Henrik Cheng** (Theatre Practitioner)
- 10. Loo Zihan** (Theatre Practitioner)
- 11. Janice Poon** (ADN Conference Speaker)
- 12. Gee Imaan Semmalar** (ADN Conference Speaker)

Workshop facilitated by **Lim How Ngean**.

## SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

Time	Activity	Summary/Observation
1205hrs	Introduction of Workshop Participants and Their Current Perspectives on Dramaturgy & Technology	<p>Most participants introduced themselves as being concerned and curious about how to integrate technology and performance meaningfully, in ways which are “organic” rather than being merely a “nice-to-have”. Some were keen on how negotiating how technology in performance can connect with the physical human body, others extended it to realms of social media.</p> <p>A helpful caveat by How Ngean and Martyn reminded us of how technology does not only have to be digital in form and aesthetic, citing the example of Jompert’s use of carpentry. One participant concurred with the idea of old-world technology and the intimacy of crafting, and was concerned about the relationship between such deployment of technology in performance against the primacy of text.</p>
1230hrs	“We Are Just Going To Try Things Out”: Martyn Performs “Body Politic”	<p>Martyn’s key entry point of exploration in the workshop focuses on the relationship between the body and media, and how it creates meaning for an audience. To this end, he performed “Body Politic”, which is a performance that begins with Martyn’s inert but increasingly alert body coming to life, before it begins to interact with a looping projection with a single camera and projection screen.</p>
1245hrs	A Discussion and Commentary on “Body Politic”	<p>In the post-performance discussion, participants commented on the orientation of the audience in relation to the performer’s body and media, prompting Martyn to explain the genesis of the work during an Artist Residency in Taipei Artist Village. Commentary focused on the technological integration and synchronization of the work, which led to a brief expounding on the form of video art and live feed, as well as working with different digital inputs. This led to a discussion on how “Body Politic” was not afraid to wait out an extended duration to observe the development and disintegration of visuals and meaning in the performance. Did Martyn consciously resist and challenge the media itself? That was the next question, to which Martyn pointed out the core question of the “role of dramaturgy and technology – it is about what pushes what?” Consequently, Martyn shared about his preference and encouragement to bring technology into the creative process as early as possible, rather than as an add-on later in the process, as well as being willing to edit out technology in the work’s development, to exhaust its possibilities and understand its necessity to the work being created. Next, Martyn also highlighted how central but easily overlooked the lighting and set designers are to the process of dramaturgy and dramaturging technology, in response to Cui and How Ngean’s pointers about how technical support and practitioners are often left to “deal with other people’s stuff”.</p>

		This discussion then concluded with Martyn sharing about how he prefers to reveal rather than conceal the technology at work in his performance, in terms of what drives his creative decision-making in considering the audience's relationship to the media and the work.
<b>1315hrs</b>	BREAK	-
<b>1325hrs</b>	A Brief History of 3 Key Video Artists	
<b>1340hrs</b>	<b>Activity:</b> Camera, Projector, Play.	<p>The main workshop activity consisted of participants breaking out into groups of 3 where they are tasked to jam and create a short production with 1 camera, 1 projector and 1 body (with the option of adding multiple bodies later). Scale, focus and imagery were encouraged. Martyn also offered three guiding questions centering around:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How can you unify performance and media?</li> <li>2) How can this performance and media act counter mass media?</li> <li>3) Just investigate and play with the form.</li> </ol> <p>In Group 1 (Zihan, Cui and Pat), the participants explored the relation of the camera and a performer, together with the use of a smartphone and its offering of face filters. They explored the "geometry of viewing", and also the composition of how one watches another. The second component of their final performance product included a "Hand of God" like sequence, which participants remarked that they felt like at points they were being swallowed up by technology. Ideas of the manipulator and the manipulated arose as well.</p> <p>In Group 2 (Gee, Peishan, Sze), the participants first discussed about exploring expectations about the body and to frustrate them. Later discussions moved towards focusing on the "looked-at", the "looker" and the "looked-back", where reversals of power can be enacted between the audience and the eye of the camera. Their eventual presentation comprising a focus on the lighting rig, as well as turning the camera back onto the projector and the audience elicited a strong sense of the watcher and the watched, of lenses and framing.</p> <p>In Group 3 (Janice, Estella, Lina), the participants began by discussing examples of how the camera manipulates or confines one's perspective in the realm of social media and news. The starting point centered around setting up a scenario where the audience would be able to observe two levels of perspective: a limited one on the screen but also a fuller picture of relations between performers and media when experiencing it live. Their</p>
<b>1500hrs</b>	Presentation of Group Explorations	

		<p>presentation featured Estella as the camerawoman carefully projecting a moving image of Janice onto the back of Lina, creating an almost ghostly effect while also being able to observe the live body of Janice. This simultaneous toggling between viewing the live and mediated bodies side by side took on motifs of intimacy and separation in movement, which culminated in what was observed by Martyn as “theatre, with an entire beginning, middle and end” in its sequence of images. A key response and takeaway was of the multiplicity of narratives and the return to the live body from the mediated body in the final hugging sequence.</p> <p>In Group 4 (Henrik, Rachel, Ashley), the participants first began discussing about the relationship between performers and media, on how to unify these elements, bringing together how the performer introduces an image and stimulus and the meaning created behind it. In their presentation, Ashley manipulated a piece of plastic which created a blue filter effect (and later with a ten-dollar note) directly in front of the projector, while this was captured in extreme close-up. This exploration played around heavily with colour, texture and material in close-up, as well as refraction. Little discussion was generated by the workshop group from this presentation.</p> <p>Perhaps one key difficulty in this particular activity was finding ways of capturing and making room for extended, expanded responses to the various presentations. Early on in the task, most groups had spent a considerable amount of time discussing concepts and ideas, based off Martyn’s first 2 prompts. This may have led to an inclination towards the theoretical and conceptual, rather than it being experimentally-driven. A good balance of the conceptual and imagistic was present throughout the activity, but a lack of time prevented richer discussions and reflections after the various presentations to raise questions of dramaturging technology.</p>
<b>1515hrs</b>	Discussion on “Flower” Static Projection and Stage Images, Dumb Type as Seminal Practitioners	
<b>1535hrs</b>	Open Q&A with Martyn	<p>There were 5 main points that underpinned the final Q&amp;A with Martyn. The first question raised by Miguel Escobar concerned how to begin a performance in terms of framing the relation between performer and projection. Martyn responded with his creative decisions made with his “Pink Slide” for Nicola Gunn’s <i>Working With Children</i> as a form of a block colour censor. The</p>

		<p>general consensus surrounded the drive to subvert the first image presented in a performance while making room for possibilities of taking more naïve stances as well. Secondly, Cui asked about strategies for rehearsal and devising processes for artists working with technology. She was concerned about unproductive jamming, to which Martyn replied that he felt it was crucial to jam with technology as early as possible, that an equal weightage on development time with technology, as with other aspects of performance (e.g. text and performers' bodies) are in place. Ultimately, for this point, the crucial question of "why do you think you need a particular technology in this particular show" is of importance to be addressed through the strategies. A point on creating productive disunity was raised and agreed upon, but Martyn noted that the trying and experimenting was going to remain paramount.</p> <p>Shifting gears, Zihan openly mused about how in a production's creative process, there could be better distribution of responsibility in terms of making creative decisions of including technology in a production. He found that in his practice, few (if any at all) had invited him to rehearsals to share about media's limitations. Why not include more persons to take initiative and charge of the use of technology? A tangent point then arose about how some directors could articulate their concepts clearly and early, which would lead to a very straightforward, top-down approach to being a media artist taking instructions and fulfilling a vision. Subsequently, Miguel returned to questioning the use of projection screens, to which Martyn emphasized the need to break out of the "boring rectangle" frame, which is really boring. Lastly, Zihan picked out a point he hoped to unpack further about using technology to explore the relationship between space and time, together with compression and expansion, about stretching the axis of time. Martyn responded with Wen-Chi's work where she makes use of live feed, recording and loop projections of her body in a particular work to create the effect of a distinct physical trace.</p>
1600hrs	Workshop Closes	

### Rapporteur's Comments/Observations

1. It was a shame we did not manage to witness the planned second activity for the workshop: even though Martyn allowed the participants to jam well, I did feel that establishing a clear timeframe at the outset might have been helpful. Participants seemed to be slightly uncertain about how long they were expected to jam during the process even though they looked to enjoy it. Perhaps Singaporean artists/artists in Singapore sense the need to cover everything as much as possible that is offered in order to feel that a workshop experience was valuable and worthwhile, and that dwelling and extending a task could be seen as dallying? Perhaps Martyn made a good

call in not rushing to the second exercise as well.

2. Also, the extended process of jamming resulted in a rather truncated time of presentation and moving on, and unfortunately after the presentation, I felt that the reflections on the decisions were very superficial because of an unconscious understanding that time was running up and people did not wish to hold up the workshop with too many comments and questions. This felt like a missed opportunity to expand on the reflections and discussions of dramaturging technology.
3. The workshop structure was effective in beginning with the introduction of Martyn's work as a basis for discussing considerations of dramaturgy and technology. It was very thought-provoking as an exercise in the openness of the short piece, and it allowed for many key areas of investigation to be tangibly opened up, especially the relations between the physical body, the projection/technology and the liveness of the performance. The group activities that followed was helpful in decentralizing the authority of discussions in the room.
4. The emphasis on "play" and "jamming" was very encouraging as a generative exercise to provoke not only questions but also vivid and active moments of discussion and discourse. It allowed for the session to focus on the tangible use of technology in its basic forms.

## 12.05PM: Introduction to Dramaturgy & Technology Workshop

### Preface: A Taster, A Door

Workshop Facilitator Lim **How Ngean** thanked NAC and SIFA for hosting the workshop, noted that the participants come from different fields, and clarified that the workshop structure will be handed over to Martyn. Both Martyn and How Ngean share that there will be “a lot of experiential learning and doing, with discussions and questions”. Martyn also welcomed any burning questions in the field, offered a preface: for a 4-hour workshop, it will be a taster, a door, of how we can look into technology as an integral part of dramaturgy, not about filling up a performance.

### Background of Martyn's Work

**Martyn** shared that he will be presenting on the panel on “Dramaturgy and Technology” at the ADN Conference on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019 where will present about how technology has been present in the work, and how technology affects the dramaturgy of a performance.

**Martyn** shared that he began in the theatre, moved into work that was outside the theatre, now even into public and online spaces where very often technology is used. His work also centers around video and interactive technology, as well as dramaturgy. He identifies as his practice as “very broad” as a “maker, dramaturg, video artist and lecturer at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne”.

### Martyn's Practical Principles in Dramaturgy

As a dramaturg, **Martyn** shared that “quite often [he's] inside processes: should there be video in this work, or technology?” He also quipped that often works do not need videos, in that sense, he is also “talking [himself] out of a job as well”. Crucially, as a dramaturg, he observes that “it is about trying to find the trajectory of the work – the energy from start to end” such that there is “that line for that audience, to travel along and have a journey through the work”. In factoring other media/mediums, he noted that “the text just functions as one aspect alongside the media”.

#### MARTYN

Quite often the phrase I abide by as a dramaturg – if everything else has been stripped out, even choreography maybe – all we got left is you and me, performer and audience in space, over time. That is the core thing I keep coming back to. How do I make a temporal work that relates the site/place for you and me? Sometimes that can be broken apart: if I make a work where I am transmitting over a screen, continents – you and me is different – we cannot touch or feel each other and the place is online – that is very different. That is where I am coming from.

### Martyn Sets the Tone and Some Overview Questions for the Workshop

**Martyn** reiterated that he would be happy to take questions, and that the workshop “should feel like it is really relaxed”. One of the core thrusts of the workshop he put forth, was simply to “play” with the technology in the room, together with several questions:

#### MARTYN

How can we make something that is integrated with performance? How do we make something with technology and a body in it? How can those start at the same time – when you have the scriptwriting process that can go for years, it can start way back, but the video gets brought in later, then the show shortly after. How can we connect this script that has been constantly edited and re-edited, and this video? It gets almost tacked on, but I am interested in how those two things can come together.

**Martyn** observed that “not everyone will work the same way” in this workshop. He polled for scriptwriters in the room and 2 hands were raised. He shared generally that there is a need to ensure that the technology and the performance/script are integrated, integral to each other such that if you took one element away, the show could not possibly carry on.

*A round of introductions was called for. Participants were asked to introduce themselves and how they identified in their practice on dramaturgy and technology.*

**Rachel** began introducing herself as someone “at the beginning stages of how to integrate technology with performance”.

**Peishan** shared how she is “interested in the use of integrating technology in performance works, looking at how else [she] can approach it in a different manner – to get exposed to different processes”.

**Janice** shared that she is exploring “how script and technology works together”.

**Gee** shared that he “would like to explore a more organic way of bringing the two together”.

*How Ngean shared that Gee and Janice will speak on various panels during the ADN Conference during the weekend.*

**Cui** shared that she is currently working on 2 different projects and that she is more interested in how humans encounter technology in everyday life and the potentiality for propaganda. She observes that “involving technology in performance is inevitable”, and “in the course of developing the projects [she’d] like to have that perspective of how to integrate them meaningfully”, instead of being merely a nice-to-have.

**Estella** shared that she is not firstly an artist, that when she was a student she worked with technological instruments and she is interested to see how technology can be worked into performance.

**Ashley** has worked with technology in performance art pieces and is curious on “how both can be co-created with each other” such that “they can be connected to the audience”.

**Pat** works in the theatre and is often “working with the corporeal body”, but that part of it is also inspired by the “relationship between the corporeal body and technology”.

### **Martyn’s segue about the generational perspective about technology and body**

Martyn noted that as an older practitioner that grew up and worked in pre-Internet ages, there is a notable distinction and “split between technology and person, and body”. He observed that some of the workshop participants are “young enough that you are digital natives”, just growing up surrounded by technology. He related how his daughter is adept with using smartphones as an example. He goes on to further articulate this distinction and integration of technology and human person/body:

MARTYN

When we talk about technology in this class, and talking about a split between technology and this other thing. For a lot of us now, technology and body are integrated. We are



cyborgs, in this symbiotic relationship, and so it is very easy to go technology bad human good. We need a more nuanced and complex relationship.

**Martyn** further pointed out that while he used video in his work, technology could refer to many other things, ranging from 3D sound to an interactive device or an open-source software.

**How Ngean** added that the 3 speakers for the panel on Dramaturgy and Technology on Sunday come from very diverse backgrounds – with Martyn working with video technologies and video art, Wen-Chi working in choreography and Jompet who makes his own technology to integrate and supplement his own artwork. Jompet's technology is like "carpentry". In this sense, How Ngean urged the consideration of technology as "not just far flung digital, but also machinery as part of the aesthetics of technology".

**Martyn proposed the Pandora's Box question of "What is Technology?" but the workshop group agreed it was best not to enter that rabbit hole now. Introductions resumed.**

**Sze** shared that she creates dance documentaries, short films, video installations. For stage work, she works with live feed, and finds that it is "kind of addictive". She is "working on how to layer screen time and body time in [her] own somatic dance practice, how to look at the layering of screen space and live body space".

**Martyn** noted "there is a lot of live feed in this workshop". More to come.

**Lina** is "interested to find about the human condition in the current climate being bombarded social media and media influencers". In terms of returning to performance, for her it is about "body in space, which also includes body and form in media" and wondered how "is it possible that live feeds can be in turn interactive with the physical body in that space".

**Henrik** shared that he works and deals with old-world technology such as crafting, baking and the sciences behind them – how to integrate the intimacy of crafting with the physical action and the text (through feed, whether or not choreography is dictated by what is aesthetically pleasing via video or the necessity of craft is also another consideration). He takes the example of dark room painting, asking how much of the process is necessary to be shown and demonstrated to an audience, and how much can just be told: in essence, "how much is tacked on, how much is integrated, and what is its relationship with the text".

**Zihan** agreed with Pat and Sze in their curiosities and explorations of "negotiating relationships with the live body and screen, how close in proximity with each other they are, how far can we pull that distance, what sort of tension is created when we pull them closer, push them further".

## 12.30PM “We Are Just Going To Try Things Out” / Martyn Performs “Body Politic”

### Core Elements of Body and Projection in Space

**Martyn** shared that in this workshop we would be “just trying things out”. It would be about the “core elements of body and projection in space”. For example: “if body is here, and screen is here, then what does it mean?” It is about the relationship between body and media and how it creates meaning for an audience.

### A Brief Interlude about New Media and Dramaturgy

**Martyn** shared that he has a friend who works as a sound designer, technologist and with new media who argued “why does everyone call it new media? It’s not new anymore.” **Martyn** contested this perspective and argued that we still have “a long way to go in understanding new media in an art context”. He offered that a projector against a piece of charcoal is surely new media, that we have had film projectors for a hundred years and digital projectors for maybe 30 years, that YouTube started in 2005.

While we have been able to work with scripts since humans could put pen to paper, **Martyn** noted that we have yet to amass a huge amount of knowledge or time to understand a body in space in relation to something like 3D sound, how that would affect the core of a performance. Considering how dramaturgy is a core part of the discussion in the workshop where it is a lot about an audience and how an audience reads these things, the attitude in this workshop he is offering is one of “just going to try things out”.

**At this juncture, Yanling introduces the rest of the support team from ArtFactory (Andy Lim and Steve Kwek) and the C42 team (Daniel).**

### Martyn performs “Body Politic”

A description of the performance is as follows:

*Martyn is lying on ground in front of live feed video. He is facing the screen. There is atmospheric music playing. Workshop participants face Martyn. Slow movement of body: hips rising, flop. Repeat. Once more, but now left hand rises, torso turns over to his right. Entire body turns over. Almost like a zombie lift. Enters into rounded turtle like position with legs bent, arms under torso, head facing floor. Now enters into squat with back of wrists on floor. Slowly standing up. Like a body roll. Martyn’s upper torso is now out of view. He is facing the screen. The screen has live feed, also his shadow and his body.*

*There are 3 bodies visible: live feed, shadow and real body.*

*He walks to camera. Pans the camera up to face. Full close-up into camera. Zooms out a little. Pans the shot to see the simultaneous live feed. Now multiple images get created. [See image]*



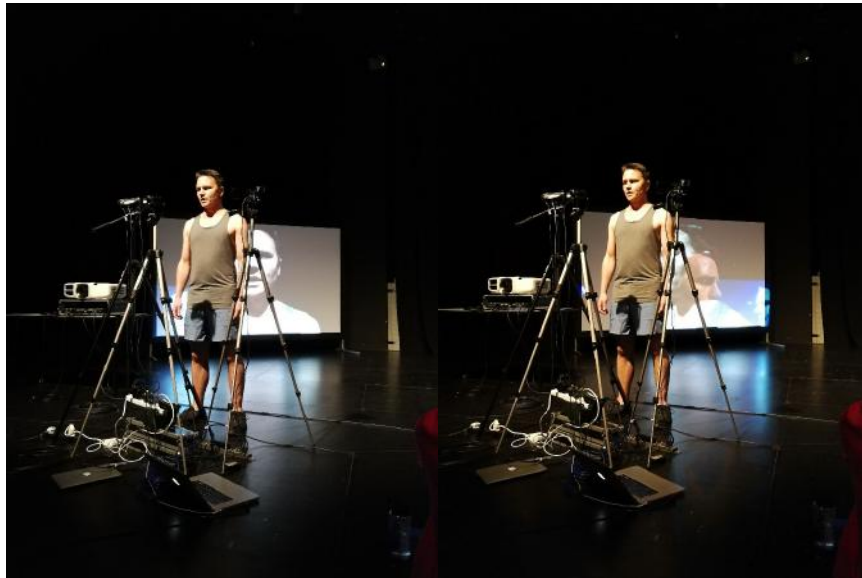
*Martyn steps back, now faces the live feed. There is a noticeable delay. Full body. Shot.*

*Changes music to upbeat track ["Cut Copy – 'We Are Explorers'"]. Begins hopping on the spot on two feet, the other Martyns also jump but with noticeable delay. There are 4 visible Martyns (3 mediated, 1 live body). Outstretched hands across and up. Exertion noticeable. The other Martyns are facing slightly at an alternate angle. [See Image]*



*Head turns to look at himself in the live feed. The diagonal is maintained. Palms open. Palms open in a progressive star shape.. Shadows are created as a result of the effect. Multiple shadows created even in the mediated images. Back to standard standing position. Song is 3:50. Stops hopping at the end of song. Breathing is observed. Centers his breath. The other Martyns are breathing as well, but slightly delayed.*

*Martyn turns to camera once more. Now the feed constantly switches to different angles of Martyn of his 3 camera set-up. New track. Martyn is following the changes in the camera live feeds. [See Images]*



*We see the delayed turning ever so slightly. He stops. The cameras continue switching on the live feed. He continues turning to each camera. There is a steady beat in the music he follows. Now he pans asynchronously. Head is not always in alignment with the camera shown on live feed. He stops on one camera. He continues panning his head to each camera in a sequence that occasionally converges with the live feed changes. In 2 of the shots, the background projection can be seen. He now pans his head side to side in fast quick motion and the changes in the camera move quickly as well, it becomes almost hallucinatory. He stops panning his head and now the changes of the feed are incredibly fast. [End of sequence]*

## 12.45PM: A Discussion and Commentary on “Body Politic”

**Applause.** Martyn opens the floor to questions, comments and conducts a discussion of the piece with the workshop participants.

### Question/Comment 1: Orientation of Audience in Relation to the Performer’s Body and Media

**HENRIK**

How did you decide on the orientation of the audience, the body and the media for this piece?

**MARTYN**

I began the process of making this at an art residency in Taipei Artist Village. I had a studio that was also the room I was staying in, I had a very small space. This is the same kind of set-up. I had a wall, a projector, so I just put these in a position where I could catch the projection, but also shoot into nothing. The orientation was set by that small cube space I was in. I think because my relationship to the screen is very important, so the audience needs to be behind the projection. I need to be inside the image.

### Question/Comment 2: On Realising the Technological Integration/Synchronization of the Piece

**Sze** commented on how the audience comes to understand and realise the piece had an incremental technological integration, based on how Martyn used the theatrical convention of head-on presentation, together with the frequent change in camera angles.

**Rachel** shared that that when Martyn’s movements were fast (e.g. when he was jumping on the spot) the images were not synchronized, as compared to when his movements were slower (e.g. when he was breathing/catching his breath), where the images were more synchronized.

**MARTYN**

This is just classic video feedback. It’s been around for 40-50 years. What happens is that this camera is taking that image of me, it’s spitting that image back out, it goes in there, into that mixer and then gets shot out again. There is a lag when that happens, the next version of me is lagged. That’s why when I jump up it’s a tenth of the second later, it’s also shooting the second version of me, then it’s going out again. Then again there is another lag, going all the way down the line. Sharp actions will create that difference, there is still that delay. It’s not the same.

### Question/Comment 3: On Working with Different Digital Inputs

**Henrik** asked whether Martyn had ever played with other digital inputs in his programme when producing the work, and if so, what effects/results had he found. **Henrik** also asked whether Martyn had played with different camera spots, and how the image gets manipulated.

**Martyn** responded that it is not a very technical set-up, but noted that “the more boxes you put between camera and projector, the more lag there is.” He shared that it is just one camera and one projector, but with very little latency (i.e. the gap between when something is captured and

processed and projected). **Martyn** added that the cameras are his, that they are low-end and he is working with what he can afford.

**Question/Comment 4: On Sticking with the Technology Over an Extended Duration to Observe Development/Disintegration**

**ZIHAN**

I appreciate you had us stick with the technology longer than we normally allow. We don't stick with one cool thing long enough to see it disintegrate or develop a longer time. Initially I looked at the gaze, then I started looking at you performing to the camera, then your ear. I don't think I've arrived at the third part. That's the tendency for us to use technology - it is almost like magic, smoke and mirrors, but going beyond that requires more calibration and you have to persevere more.

**MARTYN**

That's a great observation. It is something I relate to other work with the body. I'm the kind of person that will stick with the repetitive pattern. It is challenging to the audience: *you're looking into some cameras, okay, let's move on*. You build the audience into that state, that first phase, that's a cool trick, but then what else does it mean if you keep going, don't just skate along to the next thing. That's not everyone's cup of tea. Sometimes when I'm watching a durational performance I get impatient, *just get a move along*. But I'm interested in that, here is this audience, how can you push their limits of watching and viewing and experiencing.

The next thing I want to talk about is where all this early video art came along. The challenge to an audience but also the challenge to the media as well.

**Question/Comment 5: On Manipulating the Body to Respond VS Go Against the Media**

**Ashley** observed that while Martyn was making a point about going deeper with the duration, she noted there were moments where he manipulated his body to go against the frequency of the camera's changing frames. She asked "when do you decide when the element of video is not the supportive role, that you are responding with the media?"

**MARTYN**

That goes with the role of dramaturgy and technology - it is about what pushes what? Here I am also programming and performing: do I cheat it in here [i.e. computer]? Or am I going to make some mistakes, and this work actually it feels tired, and it is super sloppy, I have no control and my knees could give way. It is playing between control and chaos inside some of those actions.

I think for me, so in this particular work, I try to build the show *without* thinking about what the show was. Some people have a clear understanding of what the show is, I am going to make a show for example about bullying in high school, you write the show and present the show.

When I was in Taipei, I got a projector, a camera, and some space. What if I could do this for a period of time, and then I go try it, there is something sinister about it, there is something that I am in control of these cameras, some thematic. The impetus for this piece came from news anchors turning across camera angles, "*in other news*", then it kind of took on a life of

its own. In this particular thing, I tried to keep myself in it longer than I'm in it. I've done all my tricks, I got to find my own interesting side of it. Sometimes I have to edit back, sometimes I have to make myself do it. That pop song is a long time. I need to be exhausted by the time I come out of that. In the actual show, I come out eating a hotdog in front of the camera actually. It becomes what the show needs as well.

**Question/Comment 6: On What Stages of the Creative/Performance Process is Technology Integrated**

**Henrik** shared that he reimagined how a computer uses AI to figure out how to walk, noting that it struck a chord with his curiosity about "how much of the integration of the technology of the process that is at hand, or the manipulation of technology in creating the piece".

**MARTYN**

One of the things I want to talk about is that I don't think we get enough time in a rehearsal room with technology. If you are an actor, you are working with props in space, you will hold it work with it, rehearse with that object a lot. When you get your costume, you want to know what you can do with it and how it makes you feel. Sometimes performers are just asked to "play with the projection". *I don't know how to do that, it just arrived.* You need to work with it as a prop or a costume at the same level.

I have this simple set-up. 3 cameras and a switcher and a projector. I work with it a lot which makes it look like it feels very integrated. Preferably you can work it early in the rehearsal process. Let's say, I just want still images. Throw it on the wall, understand how the body works in relation with it. Work with it along with as you do props and costumes, that is just super important. Sounds really obvious, but often it does not happen.

I say you should be talking with them way back. The way media works is super problematic. Sometimes I am asked in the middle of rehearsal "*Can you make changes?*" I say, *sure but I need 3 hours to render it.* But then it gets cut! With video it takes a lot longer amount of time.

Whenever I do video design, block colour across a space – I did a really simple space. I literally got a block colour of pink then it swaps over and that's yellow, and then it's purple. She's like *it's amazing.* Video is also lighting design and it becomes shadow. The body and projection, the colour in the space, extra light, there are so many dimensions.

What is the dramaturgy of the video, the dramaturgy of pink and body, yellow and body? It is just huge amounts of relationships.

Early, early, early. Get it in early.

**Question/Comment 7: On Knowing When To Edit Out Technology in the Work**

**HOW NGEAN**

I was just listening: we are thinking about dramaturging the body and technology. One of the fundamental conditions and rules is of shaping, directing, forming. But there is the other part we don't talk about, which is editing, synthesizing, taking out, *via negativa*. If you work with technology early on, it can also mean you can take it out, you exhaust it then you realise it's no longer needed. Suddenly to me that's important. We haven't worked with it long enough to render it exhausted and understand when it is obsolete.

MARTYN

When you work with a video designer for a long time, you feel obligated to it to put it in the show, but to have the bravery to cut that, to kill your darlings as we say in theatre, you need to have the capacity to kill your darlings, you don't want to prop up your show with video that doesn't make any sense.

**Question/Comment 8: On Intersecting Technological Work with Media Design – Visual Design – Lighting Design**

Sze shared that she struggles most with media design that is together with visual design and lighting design. She noted Andy Lim's presence as one of the most qualified practitioners in Singapore to comment on this, as someone who is asked to "deal with a lot of other people's stuff".

HOW NGEAN

Most of the time a lot of the artists in Singapore depend a lot on technical support, but it is not the support that we are relying, a lot of the time we are relying on a technical dramaturgical support: they have the technical knowledge to help enhance the dramaturgy of the show. The last few years, with the explosion of fields of lighting dramaturgy, architectural dramaturgy, technical dramaturgy – of lighting strobe sound, they have supported a lot of content creation. It points back to me, the invisibility of the dramaturg.

MARTYN

If you have a good understanding of how lighting and media in the space work, you are engaging in the dramaturgy of how an audience receives a work in space. Technical artists play a really big role in that they are very undervalued – when you get a good lighting designer they can really shape a piece for you but you may not even realise it: a person has thought about how your experience is shaped. That isn't really talked about. Very good designers will be doing dramaturgy for you without you even realizing.

I teach a video unit at the university, and the 2 relationships I teach are:

- 1) Lighting – when you are putting more light into the space, the lighting designer needs to understand your colour palette etc.
- 2) Set Designer – if you have nowhere to shoot projection then what am I doing? That relationship is also key, so these 2 apart from the relationship with the director are really important.

**Question/Comment 9: On When Does One Make Technological/Video Considerations in the Creative Process of the Work**

HENRIK

We are talking about how an audience interacts with their own sense of media, and how technological dramaturgy and media dramaturgy makes sense of it. So in your practice, how early do you consider the image impact and associate it with the audience's relationship with that, seeing a projection in a film sort of experience – how early in your practice do you consider these things even before making or configuring these shots?

MARTYN:

I like my work to reveal the technology – I'm not interested in hiding it up. Most of my



designs have the projector that is on the ground. I'm interested in the idea that these are just objects that are part of the show I'm not going to hide them away, it's not all whizbang *oh how did that happen*. You can see the magic.

Having the audience really close to me is really good. Having object in the space is very good. The projection needs to be a particular size, normally it goes right to the ground. It comes naturally as part of the show I think. If I was doing something else, it might be a bigger or smaller space. I am thinking from image, from video, it comes right at the start. A lot of you who are writing scripts, who are using scripts, basically working with video comes right at the start, it is totally married from the start.

### 13.25PM: A Brief History of 3 Key Video Artists

**Martyn** shared that the work he just performed is called “Body Politic” – that a lot of his work is “interested in movements of people, of action in politic”. He began with investigating “our relationship with the camera”, something that he noted has changed a lot in the last 40-50 years for various reasons.

He went on to historicize the use of the camera: from the ubiquitous smartphone today, back to the video camera where one had to film and play it back to oneself, to earlier versions of video cameras where one used hi-8s and tapes, and even before that where a camera needed to be plugged into a monitor like a TV broadcast. The earliest version would have to be the film camera and the film projector casting the frames onto a wall.

**Martyn** noted that the relationship with the camera is also the relationship with playback, because presently it can be instantaneous. In this short presentation, he will share the work of 3 pioneers of video art in the 1970s and 80s, and that they are regrettably all men.

#### #1: VITO ACCONCI



Screengrab from “vito acconci theme song 1973 – part 1” on Youtube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAf6zKRb1wI&gl=SG&hl=en-GB>

**Martyn** introduced Vito Acconci, regarded as a “very controversial performance artist” in his edginess. Excerpts of his speech from ‘theme song’:

*I can see your face in my mind  
 I don't know if there is anybody there.  
 You can be anybody out there. There's got to me watching me somebody who wants to come close.*

**Martyn** plays clip from link above for ‘theme song’.

**Martyn** explained that Acconci's work is very intimate and is "a precursor to what we are doing now". He pointed out how it is simply a man looking at a camera, knowing there is an audience, and he is manipulating the "geometry of how you are facing it". Notice the legs laid out, the composition of the frame, how he is talking to his audience. When he says "*Come in here*" in 1973, "no one had really interacted with a camera like that."

Acconci's works like these are 20 minutes long, fooling into the camera, very pedestrian and banal things. **Martyn** noted how Acconci is cutting against the media of the time – when Hollywood was really huge, but he was pushing against that, finding out "how can we interrogate this form of video, this form of film and video and make it boring, make it durational". **Martyn** cited Marshall McLuhan's 1964 phrase "the medium is the message" to point out how Acconci is kicking against the mass media form of the time.

**Martyn** related these principles back to the kind of work done in *Body Politic*: boring, banal and durational.

## #2: NAM JUNE PAIK BUDDAH



Photo: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Nam-June-Paiks-TV-Buddha-1974-Photo-C-Cahier-De-Seoul-8\\_fig8\\_320312083](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Nam-June-Paiks-TV-Buddha-1974-Photo-C-Cahier-De-Seoul-8_fig8_320312083)

**Martyn** plays short clip of "Nam June Paik Buddha" from YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8s6imG7Uj1Q>

**Martyn** shared that Nam June Paik was the godfather of video art, starting in the 1960s.

### MARTYN

He [Nam June Paik] is the progenitor of a lot of video art. This is a very simple work, but where it's come from and where it is put together is very groundbreaking. This work is called "Buddha". It is such a simple gesture, a simple work. It speaks of surveillance, it is kind of unpacking it.

He was Korean-American, so he was unpacking his own relation to religion, the mediatized version of religion, then placing those objects in a gallery space then asking you to make those connections. In 1974 that was so groundbreaking. But now it is ubiquitous.

### #3: BRUCE NAUMAN – LIVE-TAPED VIDEO CORRIDOR (1970)



Photo: <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3153>

**Martyn** plays short clip of “Live-Taped Video Corridor (1970) by Bruce Nauman” from YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ujlefWcY-w>

**Martyn** shared how in this work, repetition is key: Tape up the floor walk along tape lines. That would last for 20-30minutes, then videotape it and put in the gallery. It is done with some very narrow walls, so it is just a corridor with some video cameras and TVs at the end. Again, a super simple set-up but very groundbreaking for its time.

**Martyn** identified the key connection between these 3 video artists and his work is the use of “a very simple gesture, going back to just the very core elements of what the technologies are”. There is a keen sense of reacting to the mass media occurring at the time, using video art to challenge the big budget Hollywood films. He went on to pose a series of questions:

So how can we as artists do something that is not *that*? We can hire a filmmaker to make a beautiful film. But in the theatre we can do it lo-fi, that is poor, that is something we can do better than big-budget films. So how can you make it simpler, dumber?

### **Workshop Participant Responses**

**Martyn** shared a point in time recently when he was tired of his smartphone and then bought a dumbphone, only for it to last 2 weeks. Yet it was the turn to the basics that pulled him.

**Martyn** asked the workshop group:

“How can you be very simple, super simple to build an image, to build a basic narrative, how to do that with a camera and a projector? That’s the very first task I am going to set you.”

But before we moved into the activity, **Martyn** called for responses and commentaries on the 3 video art pioneers.

#### **ZIHAN**

Just to highlight the gendered element of it, it reminds me of the previous work I just worked on was race and colonialism and the impact and legacy of it (“Miss British”, performed April 2019). I am thinking about the gendered relationship to the camera, the race relationship to the camera, class relationship to the camera: Who can afford it? What sort of skin tone goes well? Who can be comfortable? What does it mean for a male person to be performing gestures of invitations? How do we resist these tropes and baggage and bodies on screen the way we can critique in our productions?

#### **MARTYN**

In Australia, the time for the straight white man to make theatre is not a great time. This show (“Body Politic”) has a lot of white guy in the show, I would say that – that’s really interesting because the investigation has come from what are these camera elements, but it has come at a very interesting time culturally in the West, with the people we put on our stages and in our films. There is a huge movement for diversity on stages, and key directing roles in the big theatres in Australia. It is very important and it is a long time coming – I think about it a lot – and I’ve kind of given up on this piece because I can’t get it up. It becomes a piece I pull out at parties and it’s never going to be performed. Gender, race, yes absolutely plays a big part in it.

#### **SZE**

Just a response to that, I’m not sure if it was the same time in the 1970s, Lisa Nelson’s work – she was working with camera – the eye as camera, the eye as technological perception. She’s a dancer.

#### **MARTYN**

I haven’t heard of her yet. There’s an amazing work where a really amazing choreographer – she strapped a film camera to her back, and it’s entirely swinging. People were laughing. Yes, there are female artists but I don’t know about her.

#### **SZE**

Trisha Brown. Another thing I really like about these 3 examples is that it’s so much more about what is on the screen. The space expands the screen it is taking our experience outside.

#### **MARTYN**

I’ve chosen these 3 examples because of the use of live feed. It’s not everything. But it unifies the media and the body. Sometimes when we get into trouble in the theatre: there is this

body, then there is picture of a flower, in that kind of relationship I am doing a roundabout thing, and people have said *"I was interested in what was happening on the screen because the screen dragged my eye over there"*. So, in a way I'm trying to unify things. Also, is it unifying or just splitting it apart again, and continuing to mediatize as well?

## 1.40PM: Activity – Camera, Projector, Play

**Martyn** breaks up the workshop participants into 4 groups. Yanling and How Ngean assist with randomly numbering people into “1”s, “2”s, “3”s and “4”s. **Martyn** thanks Yanling for assisting with securing the technologies in the room.

### Instructions

**Make something with 1 camera, 1 projector, 1 body.** It can be multiple bodies later but do your own thing. Think about scale: it can be a body part. Be simple. Spend time investigating ideas. Don’t think about words, just think about imagery.

### 3 main guiding questions:

1. How can you bring performance and media together? How can you unify that on stage?
2. How can this performance and media act as a counter to the mass media? Is it non-narrative? Repetitive? Slower? How can we push against the dominant paradigm that exists in film and video?
3. Investigate the form: be curious. Basically, just play.

## Excerpts of GROUP 1’s Experimentation: Zihan, Cui, Pat

### -Start Rapporteur’s Observation-

***Cui** is playing with smartphone and filter. **Zihan** is playing with focus and zoom of the screen. They are front-facing.*

**Pat:** the word is blink – it works for me.

***Cui** registers her own shadow. **Pat** says it is very interesting to watch **Cui** from the front, with the camera directly behind.*

**Pat:** I see you seeing yourself, I see him seeing you. The meta of the you-you-you, I see him! I think this triangulation is interesting but we are talking about? The geometry of viewing?

**Cui:** There is a composition --

**Pat:** There is this different geometry here that is interesting. Temporal and space is quite obvious. What I enjoy watching is the effort to focus on that [*referring to Zihan*] so I think the effort is interesting.

**Cui:** So what do you think?

**Zihan:** I’m okay, it can just be this lor. You have to make your screen a bit brighter.

**Pat:** what are some questions that you are working with when it comes to the rehearsal thing and how to bring media into the performance.

***Zihan** creates more lighting with another smartphone.*

### -End of Rapporteur’s Observation-



**Excerpts of GROUP 2's Discussion: Gee, Peishan, Sze**



**-Start Rapporteur's Observation-**

**Gee:** Maybe the difference between the self and the other, how to bring them closer? That speaks to my work as a trans-activist.

**Sze:** Expectations about body. As dancers we have a lot of that. In dance we don't see not beautiful bodies. You look at contemporary companies on stage: what are they putting up?

**Peishan:** There is a stereotype, maybe that itself is a stereotype (the fat body)

**Gee:** Maybe something that it's you just used to that body, and that is normal.

**Sze:** I'm hearing something about frustration, or the satisfaction of a reveal, or pleasurable to the eye.

**Gee:** Usually what my group does is leading up to the moment then the reveal, creating a shock effect. So whatever the audience gets is disruptive?

**Peishan:** From state to state?

**-End of Rapporteur's Observation-**

Rapporteur went to observe other groups in the meantime.

**-Start Rapporteur's Observation-**

**Gee:** How do you change from looked-at to looked-back? So maybe just the eye.

**Sze:** Implying a reversal of power.

**Gee:** The audience doesn't just have the comfort of being passive voyeurs. It also speaks to surveillance that cameras do.

**Peishan:** Big Brother is watching.

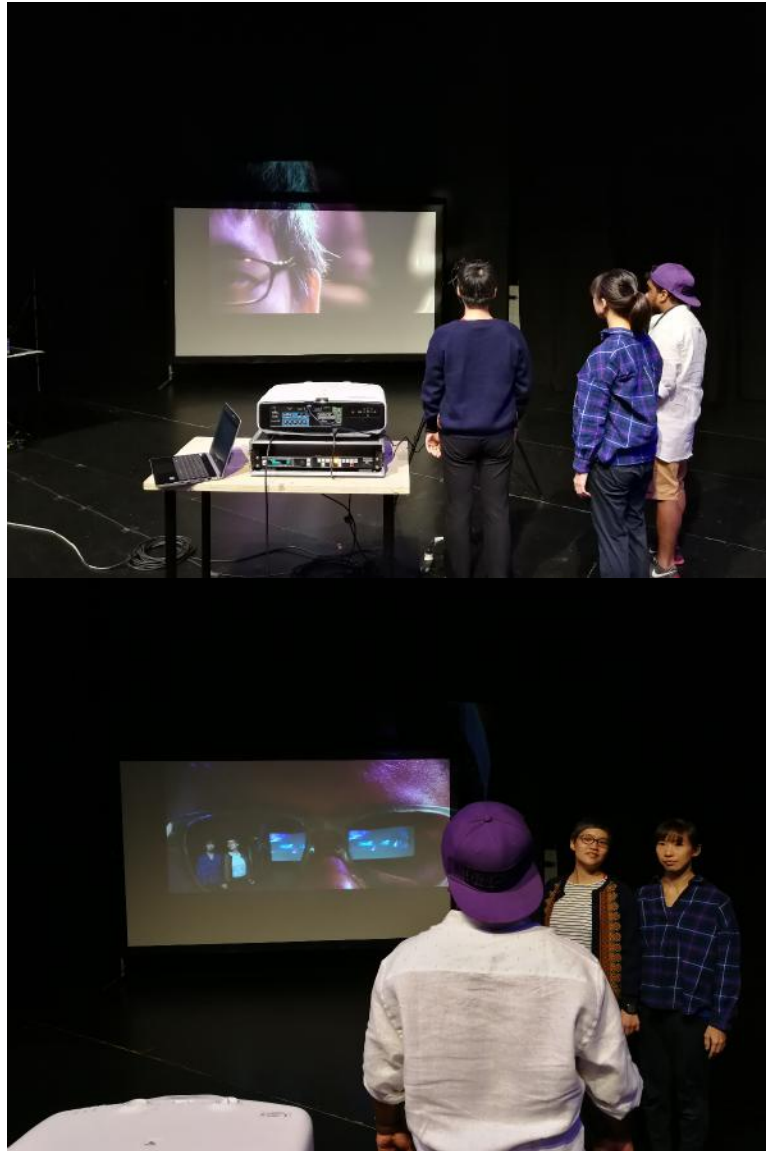
**Sze:** But it is who has access to that image, who has placed that camera. The audience saw a live feed of them but it got dismissed very quickly.

**Peishan:** Why was it dismissed so quickly? Was it because it was not true?

**Sze:** I did it in London, it was my MA piece. The audience was looking at herself, I wanted to talk about the depth of audience.

**Gee:** Maybe we can pan the camera then to the audience then the eye.

**-End of Rapporteur's Observation-**



**Excerpts of GROUP 3's Discussion: Janice, Estella, Lina**

(This group was unable to have projection for some time, changes were made to swap Daniel's video camera over eventually.)

**-Start Rapporteur's Observation-**

**Janice:** When they film it – the camera the perspective of the audience – you can choose but in theatre you can't. They need to have perspective. I remember when I saw "Skylight". It's 2 characters in the actual theatre: one in the theatre, one in the kitchen. They just focus on one person and you only hear the other person's thoughts when the camera is focusing on one person. This kind of how the camera manipulates or confines, or decides your perspective is also discussed in social media and news: What you see in the news is not necessarily the whole picture, could that be something we go into as a start point?

**Estella:** But then the note given is to push against – to what I'm thinking of showing what angle, if that is shaping perception, then going against what media and film does, to go against that, to have the audience perceive and pick out what you want?

**Lina:** I think that's exactly the problem. That the audience we have here – we are already seeing the entire picture. Let's say you see the hand, but the physical of the performer body is doing something in relation to the hand, but whatever that is being captured is just the hand, that seems to be telling the message that the media is only focused on this picture. Or we can just choose to look at the screen.

**Janice:** Or even if you are doing movement on upper body, but camera is focused on one part like the feet. For example, this kind of feet you need sports shoes, but then the video is on the upper body.

**Estella:** I can see that take a scenario and just try and take what we want.

**-End of Rapporteur's Observation-**





**Excerpts of GROUP 4: Henrik, Rachel, Ashley**

**-Start Rapporteur's Observation-**

**Rachel:** [...] the actors are backstage – where this is the idea of surveillance in “1984” – the audience is reacting to image but you can’t see the physical body on stage. It’s two things to react to – it’s more thinking about it.

**Henrik:** If you’re saying, “here are the possibilities”, then it could be everything. I’m asking if you’re seeing this, then the way you are experiencing you would like to share, I can ask “why do you see this?”, then I can engage it? As you’re sharing that allows me to get a sense.

**Rachel:** Maybe my question is ‘Whose body?’ Does it mean that it is not the person who is initiating the image, let’s say if we go with just shaking a hand, thinking that movement on stage, a body on stage that is not mine, is that not unifying? To me that is still unifying?

**Henrik:** I’m not sure you are unifying

**Rachel:** What does it mean to unify these things, maybe even questioning the idea of whose body in this space?

**Henrik:** I think to a body itself then we have to unify the actual performance – body is object – media that we are projecting, it’s not just the object and action to it, but also the performance itself: how do we go action, movement to create the media and these things?

**Rachel:** By using it as a background -

**Ashley:** So you have double images – one in the physical space, one in the media, 2 people, 2 bodies, stimulating in the space and what’s on the screen, what unifies both people in both images is hair/movement of the hair, in conversation with the screen, despite the difference in space, which creates a sort of relationship.

**Rachel:** The hair is not just the stimulus.

**Henrik:** From the audience perspective, It can be a sound but you start with image, but now when performer comes in, they are part of the image, now they are responding to the image they see, the performer is also introduced to the stimulus. For audience to see what they are seeing, if I walk on because they know what the playspace is, we can as creators we are sitting and watching, and then we see the image they go *oh*, when the performer recognizes it, we are storytelling the way it moves: the performer has recognized the image. If the performer is walking and ignores the image -

**Rachel:** Even if it is ignored, I still think it's part – I don't think it's a stimulus if they ignore it.

**-End of Rapporteur's Observation-**



**Martyn's Comment During Experimentation Play Period:**

I see people playing with colour, with texture, it's great. If you feel you have something, try something different. Change of tempo. Change of scale. Do some close-ups or do some wide shots.

### 3.00PM: Presentation of Group Explorations

#### GROUP 1's Presentation: Zihan, Cui, Pat

*Cui on face filter. Template filter. Pikachu filter. Cyborg no face filter. Blink filter with angry bird. Close-up of Cui's phone.*

*Cui's body faces projector screen, back to projector. Zihan follows the phone to the hand, to the face, Cui covers the camera, Cui takes over the camera. Pat is now in front of the projector screen.*

*Pat on left of projector. Zihan on right of projector. Pat's hand and Zihan's hand intersect on the screen in an abyss of hands, Cui captures Pat and the screen and creates a projection loop. Zihan's hand is now open, as if ready to grasp Pat entirely. Then it recedes. It begins to look more normal. Pat watches the projection, the hand is sheltering it almost, Pat reclines on ground. Hand recedes.*

#### MARTYN:

How did that make you feel? What could that have been about?

#### Response 1:

Felt like people getting swallowed by technology

#### MARTYN:

The opening sequence of playing with friends, touch and hold, single person just playing with phone.

#### HOW NGEAN:

The moment for me was the Hand of God. The idea of manipulator and manipulated. Seeing and playing with the camera, that was interesting, the idea of who is the puppeteer who is the puppeted.

#### GROUP 2's Presentation: Gee, Peishan (PS), Sze

*Camera facing stage lights that rigged on ceiling. PS' fingers begin to cover the lens. Fingers and stage light. Camera pans down, focuses on projector as a close-up, image sharpens. Gee waves sunglasses over the lens, increasingly faster. Another pair of spectacles appears in front of the projector, reflecting light. PS' fingers and hands now wave in front of the projector.*

*Camera now faces PS and has audience in background who now see themselves on screen. Camera focuses on 2 audience members. Focuses on hair of another. Focuses on Martyn. Passes Yanling. Zihan photobombs. Daniel is in. Music goes off. Peishan's eyes is now focused on. Music new track is on. Sze replace PS. Super close-up of eyes, a bit of nose and forehead. Sze puts on spectacles. They look directly at the camera. Gee now replaces the position, wearing sunglasses. In the sunglass lens you can see Sze and PS with the camera looking at him. Sze switches off the camera.*

#### MARTYN:

What do people feel about that?

#### Response 1:

The sense of lens is very good.

Response 2:

Very strong sense of one watching, one being watched, what it reflects the whole process.

**MARTYN:**

Their projector was not quite focused at the start. They started focusing on the frame, this small frame. You started to play with frame.

**GROUP 3's Presentation: Janice, Estella, Lina**

*Estella as camerawoman. Lina enters frame. Exit sign is projected onto her back by reflection. Camera catches her trying to scratch her back and reach the reflection of the Exit sign. There is some laughter. A shadow is created. She arches her back, and she unfolds it into a concave alternately. Janice enters into the frame but is now covered by the shadow that Lina's body creates on the projection screen, thereby obscuring her. Janice's body is now projected onto Lina's back and can be seen on her t-shirt in body, and on the screen. Janice waves. Lina waves. Lina tries to hug and capture the image of Janice by wrapping her hands around her back. Janice makes a move with her hands and Lina repeats. Janice turns slowly, Lina keeps Janice in the shadow. Now Janice's profile is projected entirely onto Lina's body, including her face. The camera begins to pull out and we see the 2 bodies and Lina's shadow. The two performers are looking at the screen in a loop, right hand raised, Janice's arm reaches out to Lina's left shoulder, it hovers over, tentative fingers, then clenches into a fist, a beckoning movement. In response, Lina's shadow mimics and now there is a movement with the index finger as if scratching. The camera was brought closer to them, but now pulls back out. Janice begins to exit the frame. The exit sign now returns onto Lina's back and now we see Janice and Lina embrace in embodied form, the camera focuses on them.*

**MARTYN:**

That was theatre, with an entire beginning, middle and end. Some of the images were so stunning, when you were looking that way and you were inside. What else did other people see in that?

I was going to say that was a true trio. The geometry to put her in there.

Response 1:

The idea of multiplicity of narratives, not just the visual imagery, everything is multiplied – narrative and visual and sensation and the affect that was coming out.

**MARTYN:**

The return to the body at the end, when they hugged each other that was beautiful.

**GROUP 4's Presentation: Henrik, Rachel, Ashley**

*Plastic wrapper in front of projector. Top-down super close-up of finger and wrapper. Additional plastic. Blue lighting largely observed. Think extreme close-up. It is almost crystal-like. The plastic wrapper is almost entirely split. Another piece of plastic is in between the camera and the original plastic. Zoom out and you can see Ashley's face and body. 10-dollar note produced. Plastic cup used to refract further. Sometimes circling on Ashley's face. Hyper focus now on the finger and the wrapper. It looks like two lungs.*



**MARTYN:**

Just quickly, anything from that? Thoughts? Feelings? Nothing?

### 3.15PM: Discussion on “Flower” Static Projection and Stage Images, Dumb Type as Seminal Practitioners

**Martyn** shared that he does not have time to give the second exercise planned for the workshop. **How Ngean and Martyn** introduce **Miguel Escobar Varela** to the group, who will be moderating the Dramaturgy and Technology ADN panel.

#### Discussion on “Flower” Static Projection

**Martyn** returned to the earlier discussion about the generic flower as a stage projection, and wanted to discuss how placing a body in front of on stage, in relation to the generic static image, creates meaning.

***Martyn** calls for a volunteer. **Rachel** goes. **Martyn** positions her downstage.*

#### **MARTYN**

If this was on stage, what does this mean? We were talking about the usual projection on the back of the stage there. What could this show be? How could this actually work? We know what the problems are, but how can it work as her?



*Position #1: Body and Static Image (Downstage Right)*

**Henrik** commented on the possibility of reading the depth of the flowers. So Rachel is the 3<sup>rd</sup> flower, and the audience is likely the 4<sup>th</sup> flower. He maintained that meaning would depend on the movement of the performer, it can be about growth, transformation.

**Sze** mentioned the possibility of reading it as simply a kids' show, giving her a bee costume and how it would start to make sense.

**Martyn** suggested that another approach is that of the performance-lecture, with the explicit use of slides. It could be a presentation about “the first flower I was given in my young adult life and I remember it fondly”. **Martyn** maintained that this set-up would be disruptive in a normal show. The core question is:

“What is the body’s relationship with this image?”

**Gee** suggested she could wear boxing gloves and beat up the flower.

*Rachel goes further upstage, now she blocks the flower and casts a clear shadow.*



*Position #2: Body and Static Image (Centre-stage)*

**CUI**

In this case, it's like *"Get out of the way!"*

**MARTYN**

During the 1990s, there was a lot of *"Let's project onto a body because ooh that's cool!"*



*Position #3: Body and Static Image (Upstage-Left)*

**CUI**

Now it looks less like a blocking mistake.

**MARTYN**

Composition yes.

**SZE**

She looks inside the picture.



*Position #4: Body and Static Image (Upstage-Left, not overlapping with image)*



*Position #3: Body and Static Image (Centre Stage Left)*

### **MARTYN**

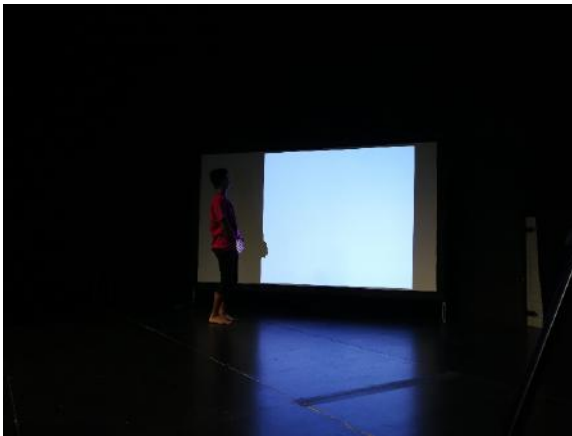
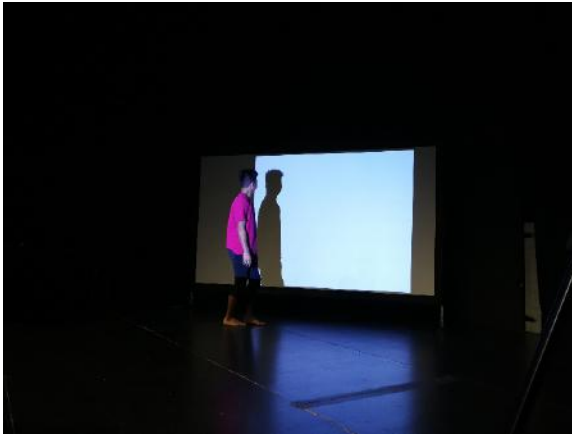
What if you threw out a whole bunch of non-sequiturs?

### **CUI**

But that depends, each scenario was a still image rather than a series of images. It's different when there's someone moving.

### **"Pink Swipe"**

**Martyn** shows "Pink Swipe" and plays it. **Zihan** features as the test subject body.



*"Pink Swipe" as it is animated and swipes across the screen and covers Zihan in black.*

### **MARTYN**

This is different from the flower because it's moving. It's literally just moving light more than anything else. The reason why it's working because it's not doing much. I'm not saying this is a solution for everything. It is a minimal design, but it is something. It also disappears which is really fun.

### **Discussion on Dumb Type as Seminal Practitioners**

**Martyn** introduced the example of "Dumb Type": how they had particular zones on stage, how in workshops they work in this way and speak about your relationship to the image [referencing Rachel in Positions 1 to 5]. He cited their use of "particular zones they had on stage", such that in their workshops they would speak about these respective zones.

For example, in Rachel's Position 1, she was very far downstage, and hence her relationship to the image is quite distant with a clear separation. In Position 2, she would be inside the image but not silhouetted. In Position 3, she would be directly inside the image, but also silhouetted by the light from the projection. There would be another zone from behind the screen [not a position Rachel took up] where there would be a black space in the projection, a spotlight coming from the top-down with the performer placed behind the projection screen. **Martyn** characterized that as a "body through gauze but so far away", yet they "are connected to you (the audience) but very close to the screen".

*At this juncture, How Ngean sensed the need to interject and contextualise the importance of Dumb Type as a seminal practitioner in the world of artmaking for the largely young group of performance makers in the workshop group.*

**How Ngean** began by highlighting the need to contextualise the reference to Dumb Type the performance collective: a Japanese-based collective of visual artists, performers, architects et cetera, who came together to form this collective where technology was a heavy feature in their work, but also very much dramaturgically integrated.

**How Ngean** conferred with **Martyn** on this production “Memorandum” in which it was a particular show where they looked at qualities of memory. He noted that one of the questions they went into this show was “*How do you manifest memory then?*”

He pointed out that a lot of their shows (later ones) were structured around very specific ways of staging that helped the dramaturgy, as **Martyn** said the zones, which always lent a certain kind of visual imagery that was “highly theatrical, performatively driven”, yet still with the “central focus on performers, these performing bodies on stage”.

**How Ngean** noted that for many in his generation of performers and performance makers (him being 50 now), “it was an eye-opener because it was what can technology do *for* your performance, and *with* your performance, because it became an integral part, and a lot of us who dabbled in technology still reference Dumb Type.” He noted that it was crucial to experience it live, that the crux of Dumb Type’s performances was really “live, liveness, visceral. It literally subsumed, enveloped us, took us somewhere else, without actually disrespecting live performing bodies on stage.”

**Martyn** agreed that they have been an “amazing company, being really influential on a whole generation of makers.”

**How Ngean** added a further example that in the mid-2000s, Dumb Type was working with Panasonic where they created an entire piece of work with them. He noted that while Dumb Type no longer exists as a company, many of the artists are still engaged in their own practice. To this, **Martyn** cited Ryoji Ikeda, and **How Ngean** recalled that Ong Keng Sen was working with Toru Yamanaka, who was the other musician working with a lot of performers.

**Martyn** characterized some of their performances as slow-moving, where the dancers are not doing much, but the technology was lifting them up, supporting the movement.

### 3.35PM: Open Q&A with Martyn

At this juncture, **Martyn** signaled his desire to open the floor to everyone to ask questions, to comment on things that have happened, to argued with anything he has said.

#### **Question 1: How Do You Start A Performance: Relations between Performer and Projection**

**Miguel** opened the Q&A by noting it was curious to have the discussion on the flower and performer's relation to each other. Yet he noted that it would be "super hard to start a show this way" and that "you need to somehow subvert the image". In reference to "Pink Slide", he noted the strong element of humour involved which remained regardless of how the corresponding performer moved. **Miguel's question** focused on "How do you start?", but he admitted he was not sure how to formulate his question. Would a performer be placed in a really difficult position with a very clear image at the outset?

#### **Response 1: Martyn's "Pink Slide" as Censor in Nicola Gunn's "Working With Children"**

**Martyn** responded by citing the example of Nicola Gunn, a theatremaker from Australia, whom he has worked with on a piece that she has toured. This show is called "Working With Children", and she had come to hate it, after making it, and now sought to remake it. **Martyn** shared that there is this "trope in theatre, that it's great to have kids on stage because you don't know what they're going to do. It's unpredictable, they're the most interesting thing on stage."

In this show, Gunn used some lubricant, rubbed her body down, then did a slip and slide but she did not use it eventually in the original show. **Martyn** noted that the show is about whether "Are young people and teenagers enough of an adult to cope with difficult material?" such as a lubricating body, or someone nude. As a result, his creation of the "Pink Swipe" was to be "about covering up and revealing". **Martyn** had started with a black line across, and Gunn would be seen lubing herself up, before the black line shut it down, and **Martyn** described that "it is almost I am the censor for the child, then I added colour".

#### **Follow-up on Question 1: How Do You Start A Performance: Relations between Performer and Projection**

Subsequently, **Miguel** rephrased his question as

"What would you do with the first frame? What would you possibly do to make it work? What would you get somebody to think about?"

**Martyn** responded by saying that "you almost need to subvert it". Considerations for every subsequent frame are important, which included: "How can you flip that first image? Or is it a performance-lecture?" He cited the possibilities of shifting the image, or taking a naïve stance to the image.

#### **Question 2: On Strategies for Rehearsal/Devising Processes for Artists Working with Technology**

**CUI**

I have some questions about whether you might have strategies or exercises you can suggest for rehearsal and devising processes for artists working with technology. This exercise [referring to the workshop activity earlier] can be quite productive, but it can lead

to unproductive jamming, but dramaturgically speaking in terms of honing narratives and creating relationships between performers and whatever manifestation of technology there is, or is it just the physical handling of the technology?

The question is coming from working with artists who want to work with technology but don't know how to, but there aren't many dramaturgs or technologists that are willing and able to come and jam with you? What else is there other than just jamming?

## **Response 2: Equal Weightage on Development Time on Technology with Other Processes**

### **MARTYN**

This is just jamming, but I think this is a good tool to look at what is possible on this space. But we don't jam with technology so much, I would encourage you to try that. I think that as much time as you put into the script development and the tasks of performers on the floor and the sound. We are talking so much about video now, but video needs to be thought about as much, if not more, because we are so image-literate, because you have to push the boundaries to make it interesting.

Developing a visual design is as important, same processes as directing a rehearsal room, same as visual design. I spend a lot of time looking at on paper – what are the associations – pull out the images and start to expand on what that could be? Think about what is an overarching way of producing the material as well. I had one show where all the footage I did was in black and white, a noir piece, and that colours everything you see. It's pretty much the same process as the other processes, plus pen and paper time is important.

### **HOW NGEAN**

I think it's a very good question because mostly working as a dramaturg: someone comes to you and I [the dramaturg] don't know enough. I will start at a very naïve point: *Why do you think you need technology in this particular show?* Is that too naïve, would that probe, push, provoke the creator into seriously considering the need for it?

### **MARTYN**

In the 3 examples of shows I am presenting on Sunday [as part of Martyn's presentation], the technology is so integral to the show, but if you have the script, the question of whether you need technology needs to be asked. The question of lighting and sound needs to be asked as well.

## **Follow-up on Question 2: Questions on Creating Productive Disunity**

### **CUI**

My question is not about production, but my question is about creation. For example, non-verbal production with the language that media offers and the language that visual offers and how that sits with how live improvisation and how that is mediated through technology. What is productive and what is unproductive? The first question you asked earlier [in the activity] is about unifying, but what about *productive disunity*, the conflict between these two things being a provocative one for the audience, rather than a wallpaper and a misplaced actor?

**Martyn** responded by highlighting that "I am a very big believer in trying stuff, throwing them in the middle of rehearsal. I'm just throwing and seeing what sticks." What he believes is crucial is that



“you literally need the person in the room in the creation process, or if it’s you then you need to try it: Improvisation with video and improvisation with actors, it’s the same”.

**Question 3: On Distributing the Responsibility of the Creative Decision(s) of Including Technology in a Production**

**ZIHAN**

Just thinking through today: so far nobody has invited me into a rehearsal room, and to tell them about the limitations of the media. I was wondering “*Is there a way to distribute the responsibility?*” I did it for “Manifesto” with The Necessary Stage where the filming and gathering of content was distributed to the performance and actors, so everybody has the ability to capture, the ability to perform the role of video designer, as opposed to where the multimedia designer and artist is in-charge of projecting, collecting, editing the video design. To take charge in a way to manipulate to shape the space.

**MARTYN**

I have been in shows where the director is very clear and you just go “*Okay*”.

**HENRIK**

The most successful ones [directors] – they are able to articulate it early on, what is introduced into the devising process is completely different. The needs of being able to see the content and the actual projector – *I need to see the camera* – being and having that sharing that need to share that kind of *what exactly are we using in the description* in the room – it’s really helpful. Sometimes you just say technology, but *what is it you want to play with?* It is difficult for some creators to adjust their bodies with. Then it is subsumed and now it’s your [the technologist’s/media artist’s] responsibility to deal with.

**MARTYN**

A video is a text, it is carrying text, you have to be careful with that. Film culture, narrative film culture is so known now, you have to be very careful with what you are putting into that space.

**Question 4: On the Use of Projection Screens**

**MIGUEL**

What are your thoughts about the screens? It is interesting to project on the other surfaces too – I am just annoyed by the screen. What do you do about that?

**Response 4: Breaking the Boring Rectangle**

**MARTYN**

In my work as a lecturer, I am always talking to my students about breaking the rectangle: can you make a circle? I once shot a monkey onto a waste paper basket and that was the only projection in the space. It is about continuing to challenge the massive rectangular frame, that is really important. The rectangle is really boring.

**ASHLEY**

I think it also ties in with the question on *Is it just decorative or more purposeful?* If it is just decorative then it doesn’t need to send the message, rather if it is more purposeful then it reaches the audience, so maybe breaking out of the rectangle can be a move where you show your purpose.

**MARTYN**

In Lucy Guerin's "Motion Picture" she had a rectangle in the place, and the show that is a performance-lecture can be a show. It is about fitting the technology that fits your show. If it is set in the 1930s, you won't have multimedia projection. You won't have it, or will you? So it's about site, context, space.

**Question 5: On the Relationship between Technology, Space and Durational Time**

**Zihan** highlighted a separate point he wished to unpack further. He noted that the exercises in the workshop thus far had dealt with managing how "space is demarcated, with compression and expansion", but he wanted to focus more on how the multimedia relates to the axis of time, with latency. This, he felt, was another aspect he would come back to, of the relationship between these live bodies over time.

**Martyn** sought to clarify if **Zihan** meant "time inside the rehearsal room or in a given period or era".

**Zihan** clarified that he meant it in terms of the "rehearsal space, the world of the performance". He shared his interest in "documenting it, projecting it at the end, the stretching of the axis of time, paying attention to that."

**Response 5: Wen-Chi's Use of Recording Loops**

**Martyn** shared the example of Wen-Chi's work – a fellow panel member on Sunday, whom he regards as an "amazing choreographer". He found a smaller piece of her work really influential, which included the recording of her body, and a "sending back out of those recordings, these loops of her", such that at one point, she leaves the stage entirely approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  the way into the show. At this point, **Martyn** pointed out that "the media takes over with all these loops, that plays with time, you've just seen her do it live then it gets played back, then it gets glitched and so on". As such, the play with liveness and recording in relation to time is emphasized.

**MARTYN**

Thank you so much, that's all the time we have for. I'm sorry we weren't able to get to everything I want to get to. Thanks to ADN and Centre 42, it's been such a gift, thank you for bringing me so thank you so much.