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## “In Some Incarnation or Another” —Encountering the Presences of Krishen Jit

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One cannot discuss modern Malaysian theatre without encountering the presence of Krishen Jit in some incarnation or another.

- Kathy Rowland<sup>1</sup>

I first saw Krishen Jit in 2005 when he directed *Everything but the Brain*, written by Jean Tay and produced by ACTION Theatre in Singapore. Jit was sitting quietly by himself in ACTION Theatre’s former black box space on Waterloo Street. Perhaps I recognised him because of his headshot in the programme booklet of *The Visit of the Tai Tai*, a production jointly directed by Ivan Heng and Krishen and produced by Wild Rice. I had watched *The Visit* a year before but that brief encounter in 2005 was the first and only time I saw him before he passed away later that year.

However fleeting an impression can be, in some incarnation or another, archiving paradoxically captures a moment in time and implies its end. It is a fragment of time. Archiving sits alongside personal memory, but this is not always possible. Without a record or a physical remnant, an anecdote is the only reminder of the past that sits in one’s memory; this was also Marion D’Cruz’s point during the 2017 meeting of the Asian Dramaturgs’ Network in Yokohama, Japan.<sup>2</sup> She talked about the conversations between Krishen Jit and Singaporean theatre director, Ong Keng Sen. She listened as the two of them were discussing the direction of Malaysian playwright Leow Puay Tin’s *Three Children*. She wished she could have recorded those conversations because they would reveal the dramaturgical process before the production. Similarly, I do not have recordings of my encounters with Krishen’s theatre in Singapore. Instead I offer these anecdotes to you as an entry point to think about the importance of archiving.

My later impressions of Krishen were informed by his writings and stories from people who had known him personally. As an undergraduate I had also watched a recording of *Emily of Emerald Hill*, which he directed in 2000. Later, I watched five productions by Five Arts Centre that were directed by Krishen, after they were digitised and made viewable online. After watching those recordings, I could observe and compare how he varied his directorial approach for each production, and yet I saw that he was consistent in his attention to detail: the way pictures on stage were pieced together like tableaux, and how scenes were

neatly composed and interwoven, such that even fleeting moments left a lasting impression. Recalling the two productions of *The Visit* and *Everything but the Brain* also reminded me that they were different in scale and treatment. While *The Visit* demanded your attention with its larger than life design and Ivan Heng flamboyantly in drag as Claire Zachanassian, *Everything but the Brain* invited the audience into a more intimate space to contemplate time with Elaine, the main protagonist. Someone also told me that Krishen would often look like he was asleep during rehearsals, but when he gave directorial notes to his actors at the end of each day, he could tell them with great precision every detail he had noticed.

Speaking of fleeting impressions, ACTION Theatre’s performance venue in Singapore has since become Centre 42, a non-profit organisation and arts centre for Singapore-based artists to experiment and create new works. It also developed “The Repository”, an online archive that documents available materials from past theatre productions in Singapore, such as programme booklets and brochures. Centre 42 reminds me of theatre’s ephemerality as well as its impulse to perpetually create and evolve. It also suggests one way to archive Singapore’s theatre history. Moreover, Centre 42’s archiving practice led to asking myself this: are there other ways that archiving can be built into our theatre making processes? Having said that, there are limitations to archiving — what gets archived and what is left out?

The reality of creating theatre in a fast-paced country like Singapore, where the cost of living is increasing exponentially and venue rental charges are often in five figures, means that theatre companies have to carefully plan their schedules and hire theatre venues for a specific length of time. Older theatre productions tended to end their runs unrecorded or with low quality recordings, and materials produced during those theatre productions (such as reviews and programmes) are non-existent or lost. This is a pity and a loss to our history of theatre; when recordings are preserved, current and future generations can continue to watch, study and

learn about past works. In that respect, theatre can bridge the past with the present, tracing a theatre history that attends to the influence of an individual or a collective. Through an archive (of theatre), other cultural, societal and historical contexts can also be explored. This essay is thus my attempt to make sense of the loss and imprint of and in theatre.

A decade after I first saw Krishen, I attended the conference, *Unfinished Business: Conference on Krishen Jit’s Performance Practice and Contemporary Malaysian Theatre*. This time, I encountered Krishen through the people he had worked with and influenced. I was also representing Theatre Makers Asia (TMA), a digital archive that seeks to make available video recordings of key theatre makers in Asia.<sup>3</sup> There was, as the conference title suggested, unfinished business for many present at the conference. Interestingly, what struck me was how Krishen Jit was not only encountered as an iconic point of reference but, in a performative way, he was presented publicly as a mediated presence: a sketched portrait of him was printed on conference paraphernalia, still images of him were on screens and there was a video recording of a public interview he had done with Kathy Rowland (currently co-founder and Managing Editor at *ArtsEquator*).<sup>4</sup>

On the third and final day of the conference, Krishen Jit reappeared on stage during a session (“Practicing Intersections”) with theatre practitioners and researchers, Janet Pillai and



The play between Krishen’s absence and presence during the conference was a potent force, and discussions about it is raised more than once in this volume. It is not just the distinction between the corporeal vs. mediated corporeal, but also the disjuncture between being present in particular lives (when the memory of Krishen was being recounted by those who encountered him in the flesh, albeit in the past), and being an absent presence (Krishen’s digital presence was palpable but every representation of him onscreen merely underscored his absence in real life).

Was this presence more potent for those who were known to Krishen, making the stories and jokes shared more accessible and relevant to them? Were those who did not know Krishen excluded from this sense of Krishen, yet more at liberty to construct a ‘fresh’ version of Krishen through his absence?

What does the meeting of absences and presences provide for all who attended and participated in the ‘unfinished business’ of making sense of Krishen?

*Unfinished Business* - Ivan Heng performs excerpts from *Emily of Emerald Hill* (2015)  
Photo by Huneid Tyeb | ©Five Arts Centre



To elaborate on what Schneider means, I observed how the conference saw a combination of theatrical acts in the form of short performances, panel sessions, and invited speakers who told anecdotes of their experiences working with Krishen. Their combined performance represented Krishen in his different capacities as director, mentor, theatre historian, partner and peer. Workshops, keynote speeches and panel discussions offered traces of him. Krishen's presence persisted through the live theatrical acts of those speakers and performers who mediated him in some incarnation or another. *Then* and *now* punctuated each other, as Schneider argues,<sup>6</sup> and I became aware that certain memories faded while new connections emerged strongly. In my opinion, though, there was still a continuum, albeit in bits and pieces.

The conference explored notions of Krishen Jit as an ongoing process significant to contemporary theatre practice in the region. I am thus interested to look at what happens when we allow the past to take its place in the present through a conference. The 'remains' of a performance in the form of an archive can still provoke and affect response in the future. In that sense, performance archiving can provide a range of possibilities for academic conferencing.

### Performance Archiving and Conferencing

Archiving is more than the collection of records, or in the more contemporary sense, the digitisation of a collection of recordings. In both cases, a collection is understood as a recorded copy of a live performance.\* However, the process of performance archiving is itself a performative act. To render a live theatre performance into a digital copy is to extend the theatre medium onto a new medium. As Matthew Causey argues, "the material body and its subjectivity are extended, challenged and reconfigured through technology."<sup>7</sup> The human and the machine converge where the performed splits into another mediated presence.<sup>8</sup>

Causey's idea of a live presence splitting into another mediated presence is important here. Acts of archiving both extend and challenge presence. While streaming videos on a website can help new audiences to view old productions, they remain fragments of what we can know about Krishen Jit and his corpus of work. After all, each recording is only one performance out of a full production run.\* Each performance is always different from the next. As fragmentary as these recordings are, we can nevertheless pause, enlarge, project and digitally alter them in order to multiply our entry points into the past.



The archive of a live performance helps to extend the latter's lifetime beyond Krishen's generation of audiences, but it remains an archive of a finished product and not the archive of a process, which very often evades documentation. It is clear from the conference and this book that Krishen's presence is quite powerfully corporeal, and thus, cannot be captured or relayed through any digital means. The power of an archive is to sustain a presence for that which is absent but in Krishen's case, this power is ineffectively transmuted.

This relates to what the *Unfinished Business* conference tried to do. The conference format included theatrical performances, story dialogues and workshops alongside conventional keynote speeches and panel presentations, which were academic in nature. Through those different formats, Krishen became a common node that connected many other theatre makers in the region. At the same time, he was one node out of many key theatre makers in the region. The conference constantly engaged its participants in different approaches to retell Krishen's legacy and thus, as a whole, ultimately enlarged, challenged and extended our perceptions of him. During the session, "Collaborating with Krishen," for example, theatre veterans Joe Hasham, Faridah Merican, Kee Thuan Chye and Chin San Sooi told individual stories of their collaborations with Krishen. The audience got a glimpse into the personal relationships Krishen forged with them. We were also reminded of an era of theatre making long before the proliferation of new techniques and technologies, when the panelists told the story about how they had to build minimal sets for a poorly furnished theatre.



Is this really true though? Doesn't the editing and splicing of different recordings of the same performance, in order to produce the best copy for the archive, challenge this assumption?



*Unfinished Business* - Ivan Heng performs excerpts from *Emily of Emerald Hill* (2015)  
Photo by Huneid Tyeb | ©Five Arts Centre

Theatre now coexists with online archives. With the advent of digital archives such as the Routledge Performance Archive and the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive, theatre now has to rethink its relationship with digital archiving and mediation: what happens when live theatre is also produced for the Internet?

My focus here is to look specifically at the combination of theatre, digital archiving and academic conference, as exemplified by the *Unfinished Business* conference. Digital archiving can act as an impetus for preserving and expanding theatre practice by both capturing and fostering interactions between academics and practitioners, old and new audiences, and between artists who worked together. An archive thus extends an academic conference and brings together people and ideas, from past and present. To enrich the conference, the convenors and team from Five Arts Centre came together with core members from the National University of Singapore (NUS) to discuss the possibility of having a digital archive for conference delegates to watch video recordings of productions directed by Krishen. For that purpose, five recordings of Five Arts Centre productions directed by Krishen were converted into streaming videos (available at [tma-web.org](http://tma-web.org)).<sup>9</sup>

The TMA editors, Ken Takiguchi and I, developed a pilot edition of TMA to provide online viewing of those videos. We also organised a field trip for a group of nine undergraduates from NUS to join us and participate in the conference. Through my conversations with the students, I found that they were initially anxious, as they were unfamiliar with both Krishen and his practice. In varying degrees, they had either no entry point—recordings of his productions were rarely studied in their university curriculum—or their knowledge of him was from their readings on Singapore theatre, where his name often appears. As one undergraduate Olivia Vong writes, "I now realise why I felt so perturbed towards the end of the conference; the weekend had been nothing short of a distant, yet surreal encounter with a human soul, ostensibly deified, that has been mediated through the personalities of many who know/knew about him."<sup>10</sup>\*



Maybe the problem faced by the student has to do with the focus of the conference, which centred on Krishen Jit and his legacy and impact/influence but not on the works of Krishen Jit themselves. Perhaps if the plays were the foci, then the outcome would be different since we rarely accord plays with the status of a deity.





Vong articulates the anxiety of a small cohort of theatre students who were not aware of the specific ways in which Krishen and his works influenced the theatre scenes in Singapore and Malaysia. It was not possible for them to fully comprehend and participate in this historical trajectory. However, they could get a glimpse of his influence based on the critical reflection of the practitioners whose works have been shaped by him and have evolved since. What struck me the most in this conference were the shifts between anecdotes and academic language, archive and memory, and between honest storytelling and confessions of ignorance about Krishen. In between these dialogues, I became acutely aware of the lack of a collective archive to document the combined theatre history of Singapore and Malaysia. This is perhaps best exemplified by the short performance by Joint Artistic Directors of Checkpoint Theatre, Claire Wong and Huzir Sulaiman, on the first day of the conference. They performed a post-show dialogue of a performance called *Carrot/Pantun/Dance*, where they playfully discussed the latter as if it had just taken place.

They replayed scenes from the constantly mentioned ‘show’ and reminded the audience members of what text they said, what props they used (a carrot) and what they did in the show (shared a dance). In effect, I saw this as an allegory of how we would never know that a live performance existed without an archive (whether it is a programme booklet, a theatre review or a video recording).

Archives also provide a platform for critical distance. Without overemphasizing an individual, an archive can encourage comparative research, critical analysis, and perhaps trigger creative responses to existing theatre making practices. For example, apart from archiving theatre productions in East and Southeast Asia as recordings, TMA aims to profile regional theatre makers, providing information on their works, collaborations and publications by and about them. Archives, in this example, highlight their distance from past performances and performers while insisting on preserving knowledge about them for future reference. Hopefully, they can encourage new conversations about theatre as well.

Archives can also act as a conference. ‘Conference’ (or *conferre*) means to begin a conversation; in a more pertinent sense, its etymology also hints at the act of collecting in order to compare.<sup>11</sup> In other words, an archive can confer material traces of theatre makers, histories and performances so as to paint and point to a



It will be very interesting to see how 3D virtual reality (VR) technology can realize the possibilities of conferring such material traces in the near future, because theatre as a digital archive can be realized in a 3D space, enveloping the audience in a more tangible presence than on a 2D surface.

larger theatre landscape.\* A web archive working alongside a conference becomes a bridge between the past and the future, acting as a ‘conference’ between theatre makers, past productions, and contemporary practices. The ‘archive as conference’ also refers to a conference of places, where Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines and elsewhere are represented in the persons who have travelled to the conference to confer and compare perspectives.

In very direct ways, I see how this gathering, for example, worked for the undergraduate students who attended the conference. As mentioned earlier, they had never met Krishen and did not know many of his works. The archive gave them an entry point to Krishen as a director, but they still needed to seek further understanding of the contexts that informed and shaped those productions. The conference provided such a platform, where invited speakers could elaborate and contextualise the overall aesthetic principles, artistic processes and the thematic concerns in Krishen’s works. Beyond that, it also showcased the work of some of the past performers in those productions, all of whom were now established practitioners, speakers and participants. For example, when we viewed *Family* (1998) on TMA’s web archive, we saw Chee Sek Thim as the flamboyant and androgynous host. His double then appeared in front of the live audience as he interacted with the conference delegates in person and conducted a practical workshop as a director. This doubling of Chee, as a digital recording and as a workshop facilitator, demonstrated the convergence of the physical body and the

mediated body through a live encounter. The recorded Chee was juxtaposed against the living person, mutually informing and affecting our impressions of him. In a different way from Krishen’s reappearance on screen, the physical presence of Chee strengthened my perception of him as a director in an ongoing process of establishing his own performance practice. Those who watched Chee in the video as the host in *Family*<sup>12</sup> would recognise Chee’s unique ability to improvise and easily code switch (mixing Hokkien and English) as he led his audience in *tikam-tikam*, a game used to determine the sequence of modules or scenes in *Family*. Extending a viewer’s memory of the archived Chee to a workshop context, the former could again see how he fully embodied the role of a host, facilitating a workshop dialogue. In the workshop, he asked the participants—some of whom were the undergraduate students—to improvise and create scenes with text, body movement and speech. By encountering Chee in both contexts, we could see how Chee’s identity as a director and performer converged, enriching the current process of the workshop. Chee’s digital double sketches his trajectory from a performer to a director, who has honed the practice of incorporating improvisation in performance making.

Digital technology, in this case, shortens temporal distance and helps us to connect the mediated body with the physical body. At the same time, we are always aware of the difference in medium and how a recording is inevitably a retrospective view of the past.

### Performing Remains and The Body as Archive

What I am sketching out here, in the context of a conference, is the interwoven nature of theatre makers and discourse, when mediated through digital means. TMA currently provides a video player to playback recordings of productions. The performance script shows up as blocks of text below the video player, time-coded to match the performance. A viewer can pause, play, or stop the video and he or she is able to bookmark a clip, i.e. choose a start time and end time and store it on a user workspace. This creates a different kind of experience for the viewer—one that allows the viewer some agency to define the experience for himself or herself, such as skipping to another part of the video—as opposed to a spectator of a live performance. A digital archive thus supplements a live conference by providing recorded productions that can become a reference point for conference discussions and beyond. In both contexts, the figure of Krishen Jit becomes an intermediary, albeit reproduced in fragments, images and voices. Shaped by existing impressions, expectations, emotions and experiences (both live and recorded), the figure of Krishen highlights his physical absence and our temporal distance from him. Both mediums cannot be more different in mediating and presencing Krishen Jit due to the



varying degrees to which they confer and mediate physical bodies and memories. Nevertheless, the conference event and the digital archive are mutually important in enriching our varied encounters of him.\*

Since Krishen's passing, Five Arts Centre's work continues to express a legacy of critical conversation and artistic interaction. A combined digital and physical appearance of Krishen Jit's many incarnations and relations with others (and especially with Five Arts Centre) forces us to identify particular gaps brought about by the loss of a key figure. In retrospect, the persistence of Krishen Jit as a figure causes us to recognise that Krishen's theatre is not so much a prescriptive style to emulate, as it is a pulling force that draws on a diverse spectrum of geographies, people, theatrical contexts, styles, thematic concerns, lessons, and disappointments with our current theatre ecologies. Yet we can think of legacies as tangible. Legacies can produce an actual repository of productions that belong to specific periods, each with its own motivations and influences. Theatre makers may continue to draw from their predecessors so as to explore the meaning of experimentation, *tikam-tikam*, exploration, and even the rejection of certain values and styles.

Matthew Causey's reworking of the ontology of performance in relation to mediation could do with some specificity in the case of a conference. His concept of the "split subject"<sup>13</sup> can apply to how the spectre of Krishen Jit haunted the conference while simultaneously offering the space for screens and live performance to coexist. When Krishen was screened live in the "Practicing Intersections" session, mediation presented Krishen as a disembodied projection. It simultaneously enabled critical intersections to occur, where contexts crossed and mutually informed each other — onstage the conference participants heard Janet Pillai talk about Krishen as her mentor; Mark Teh opened up about joining Five Arts Centre when he was twenty years old in 2001; Kathy Rowland, who was looking at her recorded image, was seated with the audience members; and finally, Krishen Jit. On one level, we were witnesses to the conference session. But that moment poignantly showed how Krishen's influence shifted from one person to another, one position to another, or as Rowland puts it, "one incarnation to another" (as mentor, scholar, director, historian, theatre critic, etc.).

Considered together, a video recording takes a work or a performance out of its original context, and repurposes it for a conference. This act of repurposing calls our attention to how a context is shaped by mediation. A screened performance, when viewed, highlights the past as a recording. However, when the same screened performance is recontextualized in a live conference, it operates within that context to provide a reference point to trigger a variety of discussions.

There is an old comment made by Krishen, which I am now able to cite because his words are preserved as web text, in an article by Charlene Rajendran. Published in the online *Kyoto Review* (2007), Rajendran comments on Krishen's writings and quotes him at length:

"In discussing an unusual televised performance of Chinese Opera done in Malay, Krishen raised issues of authenticity and translation:

'There will be some who claim that something vital is lost in Chinese opera when it is done in another language. Purists of a similar stripe have bemoaned the loss to

art that has been accrued over the transformation of *wayang kulit* [shadow puppetry] performances from dialect to standard Bahasa Malaysia [Malay language]. No doubt language transfer in theatre or any other art does contain dangers and risks... You cannot play the fool with language. Any notion of instant language transfer in performance will surely end up with abuse of the art. But you cannot let yourself be defeated by the perils of language change. You can bet much hard thinking and work must have gone into the transformation of the Parsi theatre staged in Hindustani to the Malay *bangsawan* [Malay vaudeville] in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.'"<sup>14</sup>

My reading of this quote shifts from the issue of language translation to that of the "unusual televised performance". Though Krishen notes the claims of inauthenticity in translating Chinese opera into another language, he does not mention that it might also be unusual to watch a televised performance of Chinese opera instead of watching it live. We may have become more used to televised performances and so we do not question it as much. Nonetheless, Krishen's comments are equally pertinent here in relation to mediation. Without a doubt, digital mediation in theatre contains pitfalls and risks. Despite the "perils of language change" and digital mediation, however, Krishen's reading of this

televised performance was possible precisely because of its recording.

A translated work opens up possibilities of conversation, which includes having another language group watch the performance of the translated work. It encourages the group to appreciate a new cultural context or art form. Similarly, mediation and video archives provide the means to extend and expand dialogue, especially when translated scripts are provided, such as in TMA. Though we can no longer watch a past performance at its original performance venue, a recorded performance and its translated script allow an old production to reach new audiences, who might have been excluded due to language differences. Without travelling to, for example, Malaysia and Singapore, foreign audiences can also view video recordings on the online archive.

Further, when the body is considered as a medium, it taps into its kinaesthetic memory and archive to perform in the present. Ivan Heng, Artistic Director of W!ld Rice and a long-time collaborator of Krishen's, exemplified this process



If the conference is a space for conversation, then those who have access to, and avail themselves of more information are more equipped to participate in this dialogue. Whether through an archived, digital or personal live encounter, information can be gleaned and then processed to make sense of Krishen and his work. Yet, what are the perils of positioning these nuggets of knowledge as definitive? When they conflict with each other, and when opinions differ about what is true, how are decisions made to reckon with the multiple truths about Krishen? Does a recording have the capacity to put on record what really matters?

As time passes and those who witnessed and remember Krishen pass on as well, what will become of the theatre of Krishen? The man and his ideas will be remembered by those who read his writings, and encounter efforts like this book to re-member him. But his theatrical works will remain as grainy pixels on deteriorating digital recordings of shows witnessed by audiences who no longer exist.

Maybe this is why so few theatre luminaries are being written about: their only marks on history are their theatre works and these have faded away from the annals of history. Theatre makers whose fires continue to burn bright—Artaud, Boal, Brecht, Grotowski, among them—are those who rise above their theatre and who reach the echelon of the philosophy of ideas, those who inspire the ongoing work of dramaturgy, and those whose presence lives on in an ever-expanding community of future theatre makers.



UTH... Celebrating Krishen (2006)  
Photo by Kelab Shashin Fotografi | ©Five Arts Centre





Family (1998)  
Photos by SC Shekar | ©Five Arts Centre

when he performed a short piece in response to the themes of the conference. When Heng stepped onstage to perform *Emily of Emerald Hill* by Stella Kon, he asserted his identity, i.e. Heng as an actor and a director. His performance as Emily, the main female protagonist in the play, revealed traces of what his body and voice remembered from having been directed by Krishen. There was another layer of departure as Heng chose to dress in a suit while performing as a man who speaks Emily's words. This was a reference to previous performances where he cross-dressed, such as when he played Claire Zachanassian in *The Visit of the Tai Tai* (2004), a local adaptation of *The Visit* by Swiss playwright Friedrich Durrenmatt. Thus, when watching this live performance, Heng invited us to superimpose our knowledge, imagination, and memory of him onto our viewing of him onstage. Heng challenged the audience's assumptions by resisting being his well-known version of Emily in drag. Instead, he appeared on stage as a male character but hinted at his archive of drag performances by changing his shoes to female heels. In that sense, the archive and the live performance negotiated to present an intersection.\*

Here, liveness interceded with a mediated reproduction. In order to make sense of the various transformations onstage, the audience's understanding of Heng's live performance was dependent on Heng's body to embody the past. Given that the script had been performed in numerous renditions, and different actors had played the role of Emily, Heng's performance at the conference created its own context. As Peggy Phelan argues:

"Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as "different." The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present."<sup>15</sup>

An earlier chapter in her book carries a more poignant question:

"If presence is registered not through a visible body but through a voice, an invisible but audible consciousness, how are the models of identification between spectators and their screen surrogates challenged?"<sup>16</sup>

Mediation extends performance, relative to the new context it serves. The focus, I argue, should depart from emphasizing performance as documented, or the by-product of, reproduction. Instead, Phelan herself hints at watching and registering presence through an increased consciousness of its mediated difference, where a presence (such as Heng in male costume or Krishen on screen) requires its spectators to identify various points of reference. Whether it is in the comfort of our homes when we view a streaming video, or in a theatre space where we view a screened performance, our surroundings affect our experience. A conference such as *Unfinished Business* gathers a particular crowd, consisting of individuals and communities who are connected to Krishen Jit and Five Arts Centre in different ways. Some might remember his works differently, while some might have no direct relation to him or do not know him at all. But as soon as they participate in the conference, they assume a relation to this common point of

reference. A conference constructs a sense of a collective, albeit a temporary one. In short, mediation challenges our innate relations to the past, and extends and builds new relations for the future.

Archiving is thus performative when a body reproduces scenes and images from its archive, while maintaining a supposed live presence. There is thus much labour in performing the mediated transformation from the past to the present. Archiving then becomes a process of conferencing memories and bodies as well, even if a memory is facilitated through a recording. In my case, I watched a recording of Ivan Heng as Emily at the Jubilee Theatre in Singapore as a theatre student in 2005. Years later, I watched Heng reproduce and perform his version of *Emily* in 2011. My experience, however, differs from those of others. This complex layering of presences consists of people conferring where difference is already presupposed and further meaning can be derived from that conference.

### Conclusion

Performance archives cannot replace live performance. That said, a live performance is often informed by its archive. Often layered and diversely mediated over time in new spaces and through technology, a live performance can tap into an archive to gain new meanings or refer to older ones. In a similar manner, a performance archive extends the performance and includes new contexts for new audiences to emerge. In fact, it can bring us back to the past while keeping us rooted in the present; our screens and stages multiply the archive as we imagine new and renewed connections with the archive.

It is my hope that archives can act as an impetus for a performance repertoire, sparking new works and interpretations of old incarnations. By attending the conference and encountering Krishen's absence, I saw how others have stepped in to persist in their creative practice. Theatre remains a medium for creativity, even if, or perhaps because it is impossible to shed traces of its influences. Theatre conferences then also become a medium to expand and take stock of our creativity in a discursive environment that encourages retrospection, constructive feedback, and exploration of techniques, concerns, modes of storytelling, and performance expressions. A conference can physically situate us (perhaps in a venue with its own hauntings and legacies) while engaging in the memory work of archives. There is scope for digital archives to play a part in extending this ongoing process. Performance remains (as archives and conferences) so that we can learn new lessons and create legacies for our future generations to learn, reject, experiment with or extend.



Issues of how translation and mediation change meaning, value, and affect continue to percolate in performance making. When a work is transformed to speak a different language or transported to a different medium or space, this opens up several new options for the work, while also jeopardizing its initial ethos or focus.

Krishen's theatre is now only available as recorded performance, and his words available in print and screen, or when spoken by others. When the conference attempted to bring together these reconfigurations of Krishen and his theatre, what were the risks taken that may have distorted the meaning(s) of Krishen not even foreseen? Was this a purposeful peril in the process of conferencing Krishen?

Due to the ephemeral quality of theatre performance, what lives on is never the work itself but the memory of it. Unlike books or films that can exist without an audience to sustain the memory of the reading or viewing experience, theatre is fundamentally wired to the vicissitudes of time, memory and perspective. In this way, the memory of a theatrical event is ever present within us and ultimately, is a deeply human expression of ourselves.