

Centre 42 presents
THE VAULT

PROJECT UNDERSTUDY



23 May 2016, 8pm
Centre 42 Black Box



23 MAY 2016

Dear Assessor,

RE: ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE OF “PROJECT UNDERSTUDY”

You have been specially selected to participate in a committee which will assess the future potentialities of the collaborative undertaking, **Project Understudy**.

Project Understudy is a joint commission of the Institute of Public Consensus and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and is produced by Centre 42.* The project involves seven writers working together to write a sequel to Tan Tarn How's 1994 play *Undercover*. The sequel is titled *Understudy*.

Six writers are from the arts interest group Thespis. They are led by a seventh writer, the Chief Consultant of the Centre, Dr. Robin Loon, who also functions as the Chief Editor of the project. The presentation you will be watching is managed by Olivia Vong, one of the writers, and directed by theatre practitioner Thong Pei Qin.

In the presentation, the writers will take you through the workings of **Project Understudy**, and read you selected excerpts from the script. You will also see recorded video statements from the writers.

In this assessment package, you have been provided with:

- Synopsis and methodology of the project;
- Statements from the Chief Editor, Director, and Project/Production Manager;
- Writer-character self-assessments; and
- Narrative arc of *Understudy*.

By accepting this assessment package, you hereby agree to willingly participate in the committee assessing **Project Understudy** and will provide an evaluation report of no less than 5,000 words** within 24 hours following the completion of the presentation.

We thank you for your willing participation in the committee and look forward to receiving your report.

THIS IS A COMPUTER-GENERATED FARCE. NO SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED.

SYNOPSIS

Project Understudy is a creative endeavour by a team of seven writers to imagine a fictional present set more than two decades after Tan Tarn How's play *Undercover*. Tonight's presentation shares the process the writers went through to create the new script.

The sequel, titled *Understudy*, follows the lives of three of the original characters – Jane, KK (formerly the Deputy), and Qiang. In 2016, Jane is now the Minister of Cultural Affairs. She wants to award artist-in-exile Qiang the prestigious Cultural Medallion. KK, now the Director for the Institute of Public Consensus, wants to stop this travesty.



In tow are their respective protégés, Albert, Sophie, and Vikram, characters newly created for *Understudy*. Derek from *The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate 'S' Machine* has reinvented himself as a media mogul and joins this motley crew. Together, this 'magnificent seven' chart a treacherous path towards art, politics and ceremonial jewellery.

UNDERCOVER by Tan Tarn How

Written in 1994, *Undercover* is a farce about the Internal Security Department of "an imaginary country". The play revolves around the Head of the department, his Deputy, and their first ever female recruit – a good-looking intelligence officer called Dolly Parton Ong who is promptly renamed "Jane" in a bid to appear plainer. Jane is tasked to infiltrate a charitable organisation called The Centre which is suspected of subversive activities. The focus of her covert mission is the Centre's suave leader, Qiang. Meanwhile, tension brews as the Deputy schemes to take over the department from his witless Head.

METHODOLOGY: COLLABORATIVE WRITING



The seven writers wrote *Understudy* through a collaborative writing methodology. Each writer assumed a character and wrote only the lines for that character. The writers wrote both individually and collectively.

On their own, each writer was tasked to prepare monologues for their character. This exercise helped the writers explore and understand their characters. Parts of the monologues were used in the first complete draft of *Understudy*.

Together, the writers met at Centre 42 periodically to craft scenes. In discussion with the writing team, Dr. Robin Loon, the Chief Editor, set a narrative arc for the sequel, outlining what was to happen in each scene. Each writing session had objectives for the scene which was to be written.

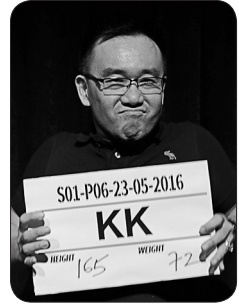
The writers sat together in a room at the Centre, each armed with a laptop computer. Collectively, they worked on the script on Google Docs. Similar to devised theatre, the writers improvised lines according to the objectives of the scene, their characters' histories and motivations, and how their characters would respond to other characters in the scene.

Some writers hastily scribbled notes before writing their characters' lines. Others typed and edited directly on the working document. Some writers preferred discussing their thoughts out loud with the team before typing. After the sessions, the scenes were collated and edited by Dr. Loon.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

NAME: ROBIN LOON

ROLE: CHIEF EDITOR



STATEMENT:

As a researcher and practitioner of Singapore theatre, I have been searching for a way to advance theatre in Singapore while rooting that developmental process in the foundations of the works that have come before. The present producing the future grounded in the past. Project Understudy is one way for me to generate new work built on the past – a sequel of a seminal canonical Singapore text.

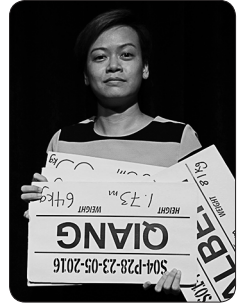
The methodology of team/collaborative writing helps me explore new ways of creation. I assembled a group of young emergent writers with a side pedagogical purpose in mind – to get them acquainted with Singapore theatre’s texts and its context.

Project Understudy completes Phase 1 of this larger creation process. My thanks to the team for their dedication to the project and I look forward to Phase 2 of the making of Understudy.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

NAME: THONG PEI QIN

ROLE: DIRECTOR



STATEMENT:

DEPUTY: Liberals like you forget that
we are a nation of prudes.

The line above sums up the dichotomy of Undercover so fittingly, at once revealing the sentiments of the altruistic artist contrasted alongside those of the pragmatic civil servant, uttered in the same breath. Such is the power of Tan Tarn How's incisive writing, so unflinchingly honest it induces laughter. Uneasy laughter.

And it is precisely this creeping sense of uneasiness as I laugh along each time I read Undercover, which intrigues yet disturbs me. This is no ordinary laughter. It is laced with painful cringes every time the satirical references strike so close to home. It actually makes me want to do something, to quell this fear. So what do I do? I confront it. I direct Project Understudy, the imagined sequel to Undercover, with the next generation of fresh bold voices from NUS Thespis and my former teacher, Dr. Robin Loon. Together, we discover what makes us laugh, candidly but not without trepidation.

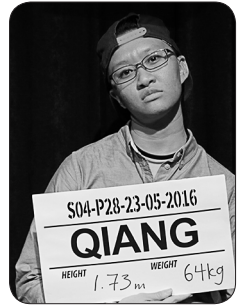
This process is by no means complete, or purporting to be the most effective. Tonight, we invite you to listen to our written excerpts, to let us know what you think about this journey of creation, and how we can move forward.

Meanwhile, the curious laughter grows.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

NAME: OLIVIA VONG

ROLE: PROJECT/PRODUCTION MANAGER



STATEMENT:

Picture this. Two tables, with laptops, wires, papers, and drinks strewn all over. Now imagine four to five writers hunched or slouching over their computers typing, slowly and hesitantly at first, then frantically and furiously. The room is largely silent, barring the dulcet hum of the computer fan that is accompanied by the scratching of pens scribbling in notebooks. Words are muttered under the breath as they are phrased and rephrased, before they are translated into text. The ambient silence is punctuated by the occasional cry of frustration, sleepy yawn, or raucous laughter – largely dependent on the words that appear on the screen of the laptops.

In as much as Project Understudy is about developing a sequel to Undercover, it is also about finetuning the experimental process of collaborative writing. It is as much about the process as it is about the end-product.

So while we are still some way away from a stage-able show, we would like to invite you to be a part of this process-oriented work, as you share in the eclectic mix of audio, video and screen recordings, written text, and almost-excessive use of Google Drive and Google Docs that this project has been conceived and created in.

WRITER-CHARACTER SELF-ASSESSMENT

WRITER: EUGENE KOH CHARACTER: VIKRAM

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

HEAD: The variations to which we subject life and ourselves to, the myriad and marvellous ways in which we can stray from the righteous path, and the way in which our destiny pulls us like an irresistible magnet towards the byways of wrong and the side streets of sin: that's what I find endlessly fascinating about this job, Jane.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

While both Eugene and his written character, Vikram, share similar traits in that they both constantly work towards better results and more recognition in their own respective lives, they could be said to be polar opposites in terms of humor and personality. Eugene is a lot more bubbly and bumbling in personality, certainly sporting an occasional mischievous grin that he does not imagine his character to ever have.

WRITER: GABRIELE GOH CHARACTER: ALBERT

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

QIANG: ...if the play is staged, it is meaningless because it does not reflect the truth, and if the play is not staged, it becomes useless as a play because a play must – by definition – be staged before it becomes a play.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

Unlike Albert Xavier Lim, who graduated from a joint degree programme and is a public servant, Gabriele graduated from NUS with a BA (Honours) in Theatre Studies and Literature. He went on to be a freelance theatre practitioner – acting, directing, writing and teaching – trying, in his own way, to make Singapore a better place to be in. While Albert might share Gabriele's goal, he would probably scoff at Gabriele's choice of vocation. Besides that, they are both f_____.

WRITER-CHARACTER SELF-ASSESSMENT

WRITER: FONG CHUN MIN CHARACTER: SOPHIE

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

HEAD: There will be no way of knowing what transpires behind the Ladies sign.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

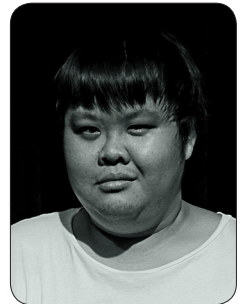
Sophie is pretty much the alter-ego I probably am too socially-conscious to be. I'm about as (dis)interested in politics as Sophie is and probably as passionate, if not more, about Art as Sophie is. Beyond her 'insensitivity' to implicit social decorum, I hope to make the point that her ignorance, as mine, is wilful. She is aware but chooses not to conform to anything that constraints her form, freedom or expression. Through her, I question the rules and roles I am implicitly bound to, and wonder how much of it is worth struggling against.

WRITER: ISAAC LIM CHARACTER: DEREK

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

QIANG: Prudes they may be, but they are not stupid.

DEPUTY: Ah, never underestimate the stupidity of the masses.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

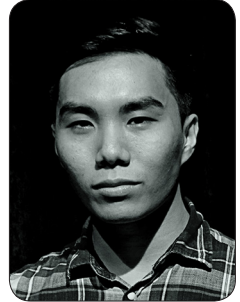
Isaac is a bilingual actor and writer. Like the media mogul Derek, Isaac can be considered a multi-hyphenate. He hosts, sings, designs, and is a social influencer. A Diploma in Chinese Media and Communications holder, and now a fresher from NUS Theatre Studies programme, Isaac is far from reaching Derek's height of success, but is always optimistic like the character he writes for. Isaac wishes he would be charming like Derek in the near future.

WRITER-CHARACTER SELF-ASSESSMENT

WRITER: MATTHEW FAM CHARACTER: JANE

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

JANE: If you only knew who I really am.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

Matthew is a multi-hyphenated artist who performs, writes, teaches drama-in-curriculum programs, and directs youth theatre groups. He has worked with The Necessary Stage, Wild Rice, Red Pill Productions, and Thespis.

While Matthew is not as ironclad as Jane, he shares her hardiness, fire, and ambition. The both of them believe in making the best play with the cards they get - and then some.

WRITER: OLIVIA VONG CHARACTER: QIANG

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

HEAD: We make everybody's business our business.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

As much as Olivia would like to be as free-spirited as Qiang, travelling the world, stirring up trouble, doing what he believes is right, and creating art; she is pretty much tied down in Singapore for the foreseeable future, doing all of the abovementioned in no particular order. Having recently graduated from the NUS Theatre Studies Programme, she intends to continue working hard both as a performance-maker and educator.

WRITER-CHARACTER SELF-ASSESSMENT

WRITER: ROBIN LOON CHARACTER: KK

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

JANE : Was it scary?

QIANG: It was hairy.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

Dr Robin Loon is a playwright, dramaturg, researcher and educator working in theatre specialising in Singapore theatre and popular culture. He is currently a Senior Lecturer of Theatre Studies at National University of Singapore and a founding member of Centre 42.

[I'm not like my character because he's fictional and I'm not – at least not entirely. :P]

DIRECTOR: THONG PEI QIN ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

FAVOURITE LINE FROM "UNDERCOVER":

DEPUTY: Liberals like you forget that we are a nation of prudes.



SELF-ASSESSMENT:

Thong Pei Qin holds two theatre degrees from the University of Essex (M.A. Distinctions in Theatre Directing) and the National University of Singapore (B.A. Honours in Theatre Studies). She most recently directed TheatreWorks' Between Consciousness (Feb-Mar 2016), Natalie Henneidge's Nothing, Esplanade The Studios: fifty's Family Relations in Singapore Theatre, David Schneider's London premiere of Making Stalin Laugh, and a fully devised site-specific work Re: Almost Left Behind in the Singapore Arts Festival 2011.

NARRATIVE ARC

SCENE 1 - JANE, ALBERT, KK, VIKRAM

Minister for Cultural Affairs (MCA) Jane has caused controversy awarding the Cultural Medallion to 'dissident artist' Qiang. KK Chan, Director of Institute of Public Consensus (IPC) challenges her decision. We discover that the Director and the Minister have crossed swords before - as have their deputies, Vikram and Albert.

SCENE 2 - JANE, DEREK, ALBERT

Minister Jane meets her old friend and media tycoon Derek. She convinces him to persuade Qiang to accept the award. Derek is acquainted with Albert and they come to an understanding.

SCENE 3 - KK, VIKRAM, SOPHIE

KK and Vikram 'hijack' Sophie, Qiang's representative, in an attempt to intimidate her, coercing her to influence Qiang against accepting the award. Sophie unwittingly thwarts all attempts to intimidate her. KK discovers Sophie's past. Vikram and Sophie reach an understanding.

SCENE 4 - DEREK, QIANG, JANE

Derek flies Qiang back - they understand each other and reconnect. Jane enters the picture and issues from their past surface - they clash but begrudgingly agree to negotiate further.

NARRATIVE ARC (Continued)

SCENE 5 - ALBERT, VIKRAM, SOPHIE

In what is supposed to be a Cultural Medallion negotiation, the three representatives – Vikram, Albert, and Sophie – are sent to negotiate in proxy. Vikram and Albert clash and Sophie mitigates. They create a small zone of understanding – Albert senses Vikram’s fondness for Sophie.

SCENE 6 - KK, VIKRAM, SOPHIE

KK reveals to Vikram that he intends to ‘blackmail’ Minister with the fact that Sophie is hers and Qiang’s child. Vikram objects and takes KK to task. They clash over a series of issues with Vikram coming up tops. KK insists on executing his plan. Sophie pays an unexpected visit to Vikram.

SCENE 7 - QIANG, SOPHIE, JANE

Qiang discusses his return with Sophie. Sophie is still baffled by the fuss but declares her allegiance to Qiang. Jane pays Qiang an unexpected visit. Jane and Sophie reach an understanding.

SCENE 8 - JANE, DEREK, ALBERT

Jane calls for a meeting with Derek to execute the larger master plan for the Cultural Medallion. Albert is commended for his contribution and is promised greater things.

SCENE 9 - KK, JANE, QIANG

KK confronts Jane with the blackmail only to be rebuffed. Qiang enters to fight off KK, leaving KK humiliated. Jane comes clean with Qiang and their secret is revealed.

SCENE 10 - ALBERT, DEREK, VIKRAM

Albert is devastated by the secret and seeks counsel from Derek. Derek commiserates as he too has been deceived and betrayed. Derek offers Albert a way out. Vikram has a counter-offer.

SCENE 11 - AWARD CEREMONY

Monologue – to be written by Sophie/Derek/Vikram/Jane/Albert.

ABOUT CENTRE 42

Centre 42 is a non-profit arts organisation with charity status that is committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of text-based works for the Singapore stage. The Centre incubates original writing for production development; provides space for artists and new work creation; and is developing a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

ABOUT THESPIS

Thespis is a non-profit arts interest group founded in 2008 by a group of National University of Singapore (NUS) Theatre Studies students. Thespis is a place for young artists to explore, and create theatre, by experimenting with different creative processes and methodologies. It is a platform especially for collaborative work (between students and alumni), with the interest to nurture and hone the craft of theatre-making among young aspiring artists. Their productions seek to interest and critically engage audiences by rethinking performance concepts.

UPCOMING AT CENTRE 42

**JUL 2-6 THE VAULT: DISTILLING THE DANCE
(by Kiran Kumar)**

**JUL 16 THE VAULT: LENG-GEH-MNG 龍牙門
(by Zelda Tatiana Ng)**

**AUG 17 CORRIE TAN IN THE LIVING ROOM
WITH ALFIAN SA'AT**

**More details coming soon! Updates at www.centre42.sg
or facebook.com/Centre42.**

*Any resemblance to the fictional characters or organisations in *Understudy* is entirely coincidental. Really.

**Yes, the evaluation report is a joke! But please do send us your comments and feedback to info@centre42.sg or drop us a message at facebook.com/Centre42.

Like What You Heard Tonight?

Thank you for being a part of **Project Understudy**. Tonight's presentation showcased Phase 1 of the project with the writers reading out excerpts from their first draft of *Understudy*.

There is more to come and the writing team seeks YOUR help to make *Understudy* happen! Script development is expected to continue in Phase 2 from September 2016 to March 2017.

The goal is to raise enough funds to support the writing team as they work towards a second draft and a reading in March 2017.

You can donate to **Project Understudy** by:

- Giving online at www.giving.sg/centre42/understudy.
- Dropping a cash contribution into the Centre 42 donation box.
- Making a cheque out to "Centre 42 Limited". (Please indicate on the reverse side "For Understudy".)

Please approach any of the Centre 42 staff if you have questions about making a donation to **Project Understudy**.

All donations received for **Project Understudy** will go towards the development of *Understudy*.



THE VAULT

THE VAULT revisits and remembers Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years, refreshes them through the responses of artists and collaborators, and retells them in a contemporary manner.

PRESENTED BY



CENTRE 42