THINK TANK

2020

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theatre practises

CONTENTS

THINK TANK 2020

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2020

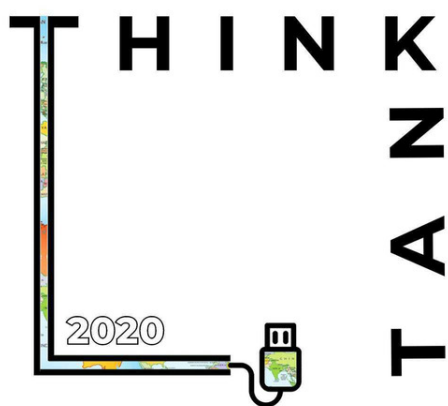investigating and
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introduction

As the whole world shut down, in an attempt to adapt to Covid times, a whole of theatre went online. This in turn set in motion debates about whether online performance even counted as 'theatre', what 'live' implied in the context of an online performance, how the relationship between performers and audience members was getting redefined, etc. Several statements were made about how the online space was where the future of performance lay. All in all, one thing was clear. One had to acknowledge how the online space had lent itself to be used safely, flexibly and often innovatively by performance artists and theatre-makers. It had allowed for possibilities and hope in an otherwise bleak time. Whether these new forms were simply crutches to get the theatre community over Corona or whether artists would discover some new models to stay remained to be seen. This is what Think Tank 1 attempted to discover. It brought together artists and practitioners who shared their experiences of having made/viewed online performances. Participants presented their ideas around aspects of online performances such as

- representation and power
- transnational challenges (time zones, languages, internet bandwidth)
- rehearsals (the practical 'how')
- music and dance synchronicity (technological challenges)
- engagement of audience beyond watching on screen
- other forms of representation than video
- dramaturgies

The Think Tank was a space to share what had worked for the participants, what hadn't and what some important realizations/ epiphanies had been. Each participant made their presentations some of which followed with some clarifications and questions. The larger group was then divided into smaller groups where some provocations and insights were discussed and by the end of Think Tank 1, a list of common concerns and questions was arrived at that each participant felt drawn to focusing their investigation on for **Think Tank 2**.

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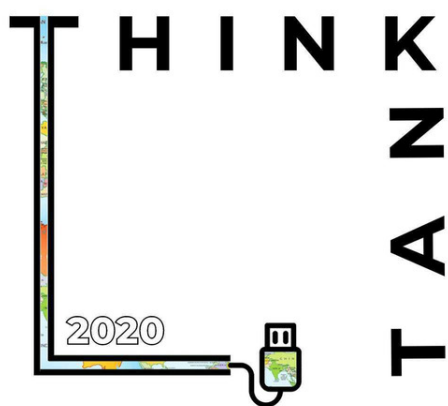
Think Tank 2 was conducted on 1st December 2020, three weeks after its first counterpart. It sought to delve into overarching questions on post-pandemic practices and processes that emerged by the end of the first Think Tank. Each of the participants was asked to create a five-minute researched presentation based on one key question (that arose from a selection of topics), which could reference practical examples of work being done in related avenues by companies with similar preoccupations. The conversation was to build and find solutions keeping in mind post-pandemic realities, and not just the present circumstances. The topics/questions to choose from were:

BODIES: How can bodies experience physicality and breath in a digital space?
ACCESS: How can we overcome the digital divide and engender access to technologies of creation and distribution?
CONNECTION: How can performers and audiences loiter, hang out and feel connected in isolation?
TRANSFORMATION: Can we use our capacity and skills to reinvent our roles as artists/performers?
COLLABORATION: How can we create intense transnational performances without meeting in physical spaces?

The sessions were designed thus:

Three-four people were assigned to one theme and grouped together into one breakout room with a core team member from Flinn Works to share their presentations. This Breakout Session #1 was 80 minutes long, and there was time between and after presentations for the small groups to collectively mull over questions, solutions, and ways forward, and also distil key takeaways. These conversations were followed by Flinn Works and its collaborators sharing insights from their most recent production 'Learning Feminism from Rwanda'.After a short break, the participants were shuffled up and redistributed into larger rooms for Breakout Session #2, where four-five participants each presented takeaways from their focused thematic sessions.
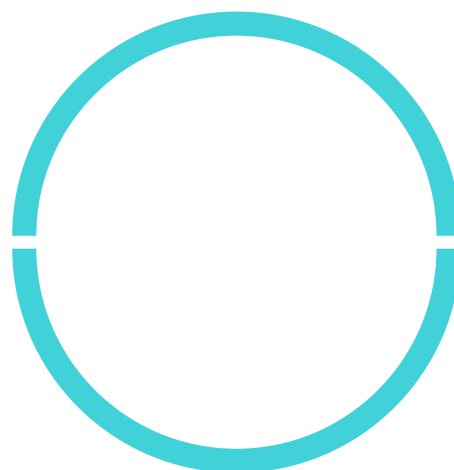
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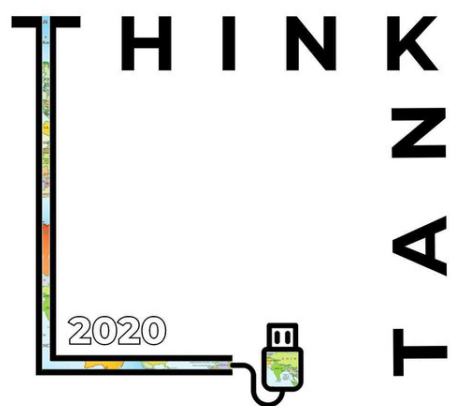
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The two Breakout Sessions were followed by a collective recap and a way forward by the whole group, as a culmination of the two-part Think Tank.

At the end of Think Tank 2, the group left with – predictably – more questions than answers. However, there was a definite sense of reassurance and strength due to the commonality of experience – across practices and locations – shared by the theatre makers over the past year. Reflections and feedback included that the Think Tank came at a brilliant time to invite the rethinking of the structures and ways in which we produce performances. It was also seen as a useful resource – of past and future collaborators, of a variety of practices – and a platform for learning and sharing. It reminded some folks that there are ways of creating remotely without technology. It reassured others to see people attacking problems in diverse ways and sharing their problem-solving tools. Some decided that there are many ways of struggling through a crisis, but that the answer isn't always in finding solutions, but instead in knowing what to reflect on. Some others believed that a lot of the ideas discussed dealt with realities – privilege, lack of access – that have always existed, but that the pandemic invited space for reflection on them. Some re-examined the rupture between the parts of them that create and the parts of them that live, and spoke of how the collective conversations helped them reconcile to the humanness of their creative selves. There also was a sense of possibility, of opportunities opening up, of new connections waiting to be made, of dots on the verge of being joined. While we must wait for the in-person reunion, the group may have a check-in to look forward to in four months, to relook at strategies employed in creating new work and see if anything has shifted.

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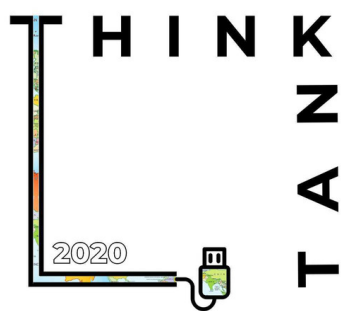
THE TEAM

GUSTAVO FIJALKOW

creative producer and curator
Leipzig, Germany

LISA STEPF

musician, performer and curator
Aarau/Berlin, Germany

KONRADIN KUNZE

actor, director, writer and filmmaker
Berlin, Germany

SOPHIA STEPF

theatre director, dramaturg and curator
Berlin, Germany

keynote speaker
MARTINE DENNEWALD

artistic director, curator
Luxemburg

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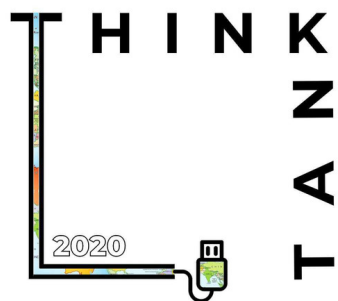
THE PARTICIPANTS

ABHISHEK THAPAR

ANUJA GHOSALKAR

BENJAMIN KRIEG

IRAWATI KARNIK

LEA DIETRICH

MARK CONIGLIO

NIMI RAVINDRAN

SHABARI RAO

SHARON PAZ

SRIVIDYA SRINIVAS

TANVI SHAH

VENURI PERERA

VIVEK MADAN

WESLEY RUZIBIZA

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Zoom Meeting

● Recording...

Vivek Madan — gustavofijalkow — Nimi — Benjamin Krieg — venuri perera
Konradin Kunze — abhishekthapar — Srividya Srinivas (She/her) — leadietrich@gmx.de — Sophia
Anuja Ghosalkar — Sharon Paz — Shabari Rao — Mark Coniglio — Lisa Stepf
Ira — Wesley Ruzibiza — Tanvi Shah
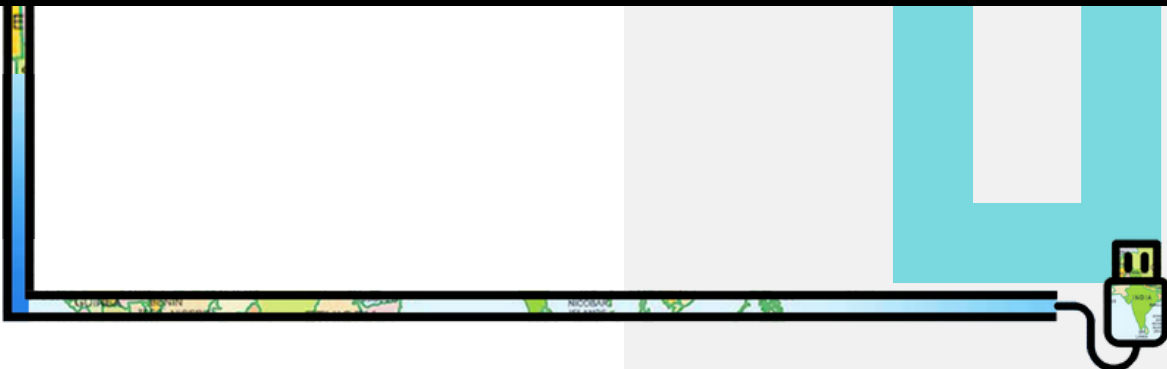
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OUT LINE

Keynote address:

MARTINE DENNEWALD

"Curation comes from obsessions!"

The Think Tank began with Martine Dennewald discussing Theaterformen Festival (Brunswick/Hanover) that she has been curating for the last 6 years. Talking about how it played out during the time of the pandemic, she cited certain examples of works from the same; the programme can be found here. To the group putting the festival together, it was about grappling with themselves as the global north and thinking about how they could integrate decolonial practices into their work. The leading question for the festival in 2020 was 'can we imagine a world with no center and no periphery?'. As a possible answer, they decided to do a festival dedicated to the islands of the world as opposed to big cities thought of as cultural hubs. The festival was titled 'Turn Of The Tide' and focused on the idea that change was necessary and that it was inevitable.

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OUT LINE

PARTICIPANTS & THEIR PRESENTATIONS:

1. ABHISHEK THAPAR

"A resilient body is a body in resistance. One step at a time."

In May 2020, as India went into lockdown and various essential services including transport were shut, several migrant labourers were left stranded in cities. Most of these were daily wage labourers. Their means of income had disappeared, landlords were demanding rent and they realized it had suddenly become impossible to survive in cities. However, the government took no cognizance of their plight and eventually they were left with no choice but to walk back to their villages thousands of kilometres away. For the next several days, thousands of them walked. Old men, children, pregnant women… Many lost their lives. Abhishek found himself confronted by images of this all over the news as well as social media. Abhishek decided to walk. It was not meant to an athletic exercise or a social media event or even a piece of performance art. It was about 'feeling with the other'. 'An experience of bodily solidarity'. An attempt to deeply connect with one's own empathy. His presentation is a short film he made about this walk.

2. ANUJA GHOSALKAR

"As a performance-maker, I'd rather engage with social media than push it away."

Anuja shared two projects, quite varied in their approach and intention. As an artist, she likes to focus on undocumented narratives, gender, technology, site-specific work and she is deeply interested in processes and form as well as breaking the hierarchical relationship between audience and performer. The two projects were:

1. The Lonely Hearts Club was an idea that unfolded on Instagram (as a curated account) and attempts to bring intimacy back into people's lives while they were distanced and isolated by the pandemic. It also tries to see if Instagram, an essentially image-based medium could be made aural.
2. Along the Lines was a project that took place with children in an Islamic school in Darul Shifa in Hyderabad. They worked with a story called 'The Magic Mango' on a piece about the history of telegraphy. The big challenge was that this had to be worked on remotely. This project also brought to the fore issues of access in the Indian context since the internet is not something these children can take for granted.

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OUT LINE

3. BENJAMIN KRIEG

"I find it interesting to think about if there is a way of getting a strong link into online theatre and link it back to the real world somehow?"

Benjamin works closely with a political group called Die Vielen – The Association of the Many, founded in June 2017 in Germany. The group works towards promoting an 'international' mindset that is about tolerance in all areas concerning culture and public education. The project he discussed asks the question 'how can you demonstrate in public spaces while under lockdown?' The idea involved projecting slogans across buildings and other imposing structures through moving vehicles. The music was created by a DJ and the event was live-streamed on the internet. The event could also be witnessed live by those who turned up at the site of the projection. Benjamin wanted to use this idea to ask questions about whether theatre performances can be conceived keeping similar principles in mind.

4. IRAWATI KARNIK

"It's not about creating a substitute for the theatrical experience online. It is about exploring what this space can be."

In 2008, Irawati co-wrote a play (with Shanta Gokhale, directed by Sunil Shanbag) called Sex, Morality and Censorship. It was a unique piece of theatre in its form as well as what it tried to do. It tried to look at the idea of censorship through the lens of a play from the seventies called Sakharam Binder (written by Vijay Tendulkar), the court case that the team of Sakharam Binder fought against the state and won and the socio-political as well as cultural scene in the 70s. During the lockdown, Sunil Shanbag and Irawati hosted a 'guided viewing' of this play on Zoom. Irawati's presentation was about what constituted this guided viewing. As part of it, they introduced 'process' and 'play-making' as an integral part of play-viewing. Irawati felt that the medium lent itself very well to building an 'informed audience'. They also played with the idea of hanging out backstage after the show!

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5. LEA DIETRICH

"We talked a lot about whether we wanted to make the perfect thing – the perfect film or whether we wanted to dance live. Being theatre artists, we tried keeping the live element as much as possible."

The project Lea discussed was called 'Cellar and Secrets – Beyond Reason', a dance performance. It deals with the trauma experienced by victims of imprisonment, violence and torture. It involved participants from Germany, France as well as Spain. When faced with a choice between letting it go and making a digital version of it, they opted for the latter. However, they felt quite out of their depth since it was their first time making something of the kind. Lea discussed the intricacies of the choices involved in the making of this piece that ended up involving four dancers, eight cameras and five live streams.

6. MARK CONIGLIO

"What is remote performance? It is not television and it is not theatre. I believe that remote performances have to embrace improvisation. And we must find ways to make audiences feel that they are not alone in their living rooms."

Mark spoke as a media artist, as a formally trained composer and as a software programmer. Mark has always strived to understand technology deeply and in the context he looks at it from the points of view of creating, rehearsing and performing. His focus has been on helping performers to use technology to alter the timing and dynamics of an online performance, live. Mark believes that we need to push ourselves to understand the inherent nature of what this new form (remote/virtual performance) is as remote theatre can be compelling in its own right. Mark's presentation discussed the general philosophy of his software Isadora in how friendly it is for creators and artists, the new features that have been added to support remote performance as well as the need to embrace remote performance as an independent aesthetic construct.

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OUT LINE

7. NIMI RAVINDRAN

"I am good with working with actors in the physical space...when it comes to technology, I can barely make a phone call."

Nimi discussed her project titled 'Before We Forget To Remember', a performance about memory, loss and death. She described it not as a project that failed, but one that failed to take off! Nimi says that she is slow when it comes to making work. For her, an idea marinates for a long time before coming to fruition. Similarly, this project had also been on the backburner and then suddenly, while working on a different project, the forms for this piece came to her. She had put a team in place when the first lockdown was announced. But from this point on, it was one obstacle after another.... And unfortunately, the challenges were far too many for the project to see the light of day.

8. SHABARI RAO

"Performance in incidental to what I am interested in – which is the body".

Shabari spoke of her lack of desire to make or watch any performances during the pandemic. When the lockdown hit, Shabari was 10 days away from a once-in-a-lifetime kind of international performance tour. Once the lockdown began, she felt completely overwhelmed with her responsibilities as a mother of two children and felt paralyzed about making work. She believes that the thing that saved her was her lack of attachment to a sense of identity as a performer, theatre-maker or artist. She found herself asking what her role was in the given situation and thinking that perhaps it was doing nothing. However, she did end up making something as a gift for someone that was later shared by many. In it, she addressed the disconnect with the body during the pandemic.

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OUT LINE

9. SHARON PAZ

"I like to give the audience choices about how much to see and where to go. I like to break the formal interaction between the audience and the performer."

Sharon discussed three performances as part of her presentation: 'We Forgot' (2015), 'Remember' (2018) and 'Dare To Dream' (2020) about how we remember, forgetting and the process of creating memories. The last one is an interactive video that can be viewed online. Sharon likes to dissolve the fourth wall and to involve her audience in the performance. In the last piece, for example, the audience is used almost like performers. They also face choices at every stage of the narrative and chose its direction based on the choice they click on. Sharon asserts the importance of 'active watching' when it comes to performances online and believes that it is the primary way audiences can be made to engage deeply with work performed remotely.

10. SRIVIDYA SRINIVAS

"Nobody seems to have a sense of what goes on in drama classrooms. That is why when it comes to budget cuts, we're the first to go!"

Theatre Professionals Education has its roots in the Intensive German Methods of Theatre Pedagogy Workshop that was conducted many years ago by Sophia Stepf and Edda Holl in 2012. It has evolved over time and has been adapted to the urban Indian context. What started as a 'Drama In Schools' program and then became the 'Young People's Theatre Program', has grown into what is now called Theatre Professionals Education. Even though the work is about children, it focuses primarily on working with educators as the aim is to integrate drama pedagogy into the school culture itself. Srividya discussed in detail 'The School Library Project', a collaborative initiative with 5 'librarians' across different cities, started by Theatre Professionals Education.

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OUT LINE

11. TANVI SHAH

"I think we simultaneously elevate theatre and shun it and I don't want that to happen. Theatre conversations should be made a part of living room conversations. Watching a play should be more of a routine and less of an event or a novelty item."

Tanvi spoke from the position of primarily being a theatre practitioner who had been exploring her role as a mediator and curator over the months of the pandemic. She discussed a fledgeling pet project she embarked on May 18th 2020 – an irregular theatre broadcast shared via WhatsApp that shared recommendations for upcoming theatre pieces with a wide and diverse audience. The project had certain specific objectives. Among them were: to retain and build theatre audience during the pandemic when live theatre had halted, to start conversations around theatre-watching, to understand if watching more theatre can have any bearing on audiences seeing themselves as patrons and not just viewers, to see if the OTT platform addicts could be co-opted as enthusiastic watchers of theatre, etc. Using the data generated from this broadcast list, Tanvi conducted a quantitative study of theatre-viewing habits and shared her findings.

12. VENURI PERERA

"The medium of going online allowed for a large cross-section of people to see the work, which was in one way super scary and exposing but in another incredibly satisfying!"

In 2018, Venuri began collaborating with Zwoisy Mears-Clarke, a Jamaican choreographer. They tried to interrogate their proximity to whiteness, their inherited privileges of being from the English-speaking middle class from post-British colonies and the complicity of their shifting positioning. They also tried to address equal collaboration and what that means with transnational projects. Conversations and interviewing each other had been a part of the main dramaturgical framework and they decided to bring them back in while working on a remote version of the performance titled 'Porcelain White'. Soon, writer and filmmaker Arun Walandawe-Prematilleke, as well as filmmaker Florence Foidart, joined the team and they ended up making a film instead. Venuri described the process of making this piece, the creative choices involved and the learnings and takeaways the team had.

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OUTLINE

13. VIVEK MADAN

"Everyone was on mute. And I could only hear myself. It was really weird!"

The last play that Vivek performed in before the pandemic hit was the solo interactive piece 'Every Brilliant Thing' written by Duncan McMillan and Johny Donahoe and directed by Quasar Padamsee. The play opened in March 2019 to live audiences of course and very quickly became an experience that was much appreciated by a wide variety of viewers. The play discussed mental health issues with a certain gentleness and transparency that was not only new but also liberating to a lot of Indian audiences. But then the lockdown was imposed. A month or so in, the team decided to take the play online. In his presentation, Vivek discussed not only the challenges he faced while making this transition - both technological and performative but he also spoke about how it changed his relationship with the play and his understanding of himself as an actor.

14. WESLEY RUZIBIZA

"Dance comes easily to me. It was my first time working on a theatre piece. So rehearsing on Zoom was a hectic and complicated experience but really interesting in terms of discovery!"

Wesley focused on the transnational aspect of collaborations during the pandemic, about audience outreach, research and rehearsal processes and using technology in the making of work. He discussed a project that he was to be a part of that involved choreographers from around the world meeting together in Paris to collaborate on a dance piece. But then the pandemic happened. As a result, they ended up collaborating on making an interlinking video about prominent sounds of each city. He also discussed the play 'Learning Feminism From Rwanda', a piece that he collaborated with Flinn Works on and the challenge of rehearsing and incorporating feedback via Zoom and connecting recorded and live performance.

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BREAKOUT ROOM 1: ACCESS ≫

How can we overcome the digital divide and engender access to technologies of creation and distribution?

Sharon Paz, Srividya Srinivasan and Vivek Madan in conversation

Key questions put to the floor during the discussion:

- Community radio needs to be harnessed for the arts, not just as a functional service.
- Children exposed to too much screen time for schoolwork find that drama online just compounds screen fatigue.
- Just as online communities are addicted to social media, how can creators get people addicted to art?

1. SRIVIDYA SRINIVASAN

Srividya is an educator who works with students and teachers to facilitate drama encounters across the country, along with Theatre Professionals.

Srividya spoke of The School Library Project she is conducting online, and how a large part of the audience is from Mumbai since the content is mostly in English, with some Hindi and Marathi thrown in. Unless more Indian languages are adopted, they cannot expect a much wider reach. She also spoke of how the digital divide cuts off rural Maharashtra, and led the team through a thought experiment which dealt with some stark statistics – only 35% of all Indians have access to smartphones, and that rural children with some means may be given access to phones for education but conditional to gender and other specifications. This cuts off a large number of children from having any manner of access to digital performances and storytelling.

She spoke of a success story with a not-profit-driven digital performance of their piece 'When Ali Became Bajrangbali' for one hundred children from lower income backgrounds. For many of the children, it was their first performance, digital or otherwise. They may never have had access to such pieces, and the democratization of the digital space made it possible. They were engaged, and full of questions.

This isn't always the case, however, with children who are subjected to online learning. Srividya spoke of the fatigue students faced due to looking at a screen, and how drama workshops online were made that much harder when trying to engage with burnt out children. She also spoke about the difficulty of making adequate space and provisions for students with learning disabilities in a fast-moving online world. Moreover, access also meant a grim reality – the ability to violently disrupt the online space anonymously, and with no consequences, as had been experienced in one of Srividya's classes when a child hacked into the server and took control of the narrative.

2. VIVEK MADAN

"I have a fundamental problem with artists who say 'we aren't making work for audiences; we're making work for ourselves and the art. We don't care if people watch or not.'"

Vivek shared observations about community radio, which he said has picked up over the last fifteen years in India. He noted that India has countless language – the popular adage goes that dialects change in India every 12 kilometers! – and that community radio is able to solve the language barrier since both the creators and the target audiences are from the community.

He brought up two notable examples –
'Alfaz-e-Mewat' ('Rural Voices of Mewat'), a successful community-led radio station located in a village in Haryana, that shares not only news but also slots into its schedule children's voices, music, and storytelling.

New Voices of Nepal, which marries social work and education, and excites him because the community itself curates and programs what is presented. Because of this, in spite of the low accessibility, it belongs to the community.

Vivek suggests that it is hard – even with the internet and ready availability of opportunities – to buy into arts programmes "because it's just something else to do with our day". However, community radios – by virtue of having been led by the community – can be seen making a difference.

3. SHARON PAZ

Sharon speaks about social media networks, and what it means to be in touch with online communities of artists and audiences. She shares the Instagram Holocaust durational performance of 'Eva.Stories' – the format had a strong effect on younger people and followed her deportation and included period videos from the time, with also the Instagram aesthetic which used filters and stickers. She speaks about the dilemma of using social media to promote work, while also knowing that the platform uses the creator.

She wonders what the ready availability of free content means for artists who are working in the digital space and not getting paid. She speaks of the relationships Rimini Protokol builds with its audiences, who have access to each other, the city, and sometimes the digital space, and wonders how one can create content that can activate people in their own spaces. Can it be done with instructions? Can it be done by giving the audience the ability to control their own gaze and direct it, like one does in the theatre, instead of looking at a static frame?

When talking of how social media is addictive, Sharon also shares her preoccupation with understanding how the psychology of media studies and existing users of social media can be harnessed to create strategies to make people "addicted to art".

With regards to her questions on audience agency, Vivek offers a recent site-specific promenade digital performance by The Shakespeare Ensemble called 'What You Will', which allowed audiences to explore a map and thus pick on the strands and character journeys they wanted to follow. This gave the audience a feeling of control – and also complete freedom since each character's monologue had no defined beginning or end – and a sense that they were privy to a private performance of someone reacting specifically to them. He suggests that interactive Zoom performances can have audiences following the plotline they're most interested into breakout rooms and that it would be the creator's responsibility to tie together the loose strands to make up a cohesive narrative by the end.

Srividya offers 'Twinery', an open-source interactive non-linear way of telling stories online, that also offers listeners some sense of control.

Vivek also referenced Mumbai-based AKvarious's digital piece 'Bubble', which used Facebook comment threads, private messengers, group chats, and audience comments to malign a professor who verbally abuses a college student.

The group also spoke about the challenges of being familiar with one's general audience demographic, and not extending our boundaries to create access and work for audiences who aren't currently able to engage with one's work. How can different artists address their responsibility to seek to engage with people without access to the internet? How can we create without using the internet at all?

Vivek proposed using public telephones to create three-minute-long audio plays framed as conversations – with performers calling into public phonebooths, giving audiences the option to either replenish the call with coins every three minutes or stop when they wish to. He also suggested newspapers as cheap, ubiquitous, language-specific, and able to encompass scripts or plot points or choices, giving readers the option to finish the stories on their own in a cheap way.

Sharon first suggested low-tech options like walkie talkies as a medium to conduct performances in, and then spoke of how to be truly democratic and not involve technology at all, one could reclaim public spaces – from government buildings to post offices – as spaces for the community.

Main points

- First, think clearly about who your audience is.
- Think of technology you want to use to ensure access for this group
- Use no technology at all?
- Use low tech - phone booths, community radios, walkie talkies?use
- Social media to reach young audiences for 'hard content'?

How can we use the addiction to social media to get people addicted to art?

BREAKOUT ROOM 2: BODIES ≫

"How can bodies experience physicality and breath and touch in a physical space?"

Mark Coniglio, Nimi Ravindran, Gustavo Fijalkow and Wesley Ruzibiza in conversation

Key questions put to the floor during the discussion:

- How can theatre-makers recreate the physical anticipation of waiting for the figurative curtain to rise, for digital audiences?
- How can a digital body in rehearsal be given the space to dwell, navigate conflict, debrief, and experience a journey that isn't entirely a means to an end?
- How can audiences be integrated into performances to create a sense of improvisation, liveliness, and the tantalising possibility of human error?
- Our response to the absence of live theatre in the pandemic has yielded technological inventiveness, which takes for granted a certain amount of access and privilege. How can artists not allow inequalities and socio-economic differences to get further cemented by new crises and crisis-responses?

1. NIMI RAVINDRAN

"If you take the live bodies out of performance, are theatre makers recording or presenting on Zoom supposed to compete with filmmakers and their skills? Or do we need to equip ourselves with these skills that take years to master, or with other people who have these skills?"

Nimi opened by talking about feeling a certain pressure to compete with filmmakers and videographers, and having to remind herself that creation for the digital space in the pandemic is a new way of making performance, and not a replacement for theatre.

Peter Brook said that when Yoshi Oida points to the moon, you see the moon. She hasn't yet had that experience digitally.

She spoke of the physical quality of space for audiences, and not just the performers – of brushing into fellow audience members, and collectively waiting in a dimmed room. She also spoke of the physical reaction of the performers to the third bell, to stepping into the darkness, and to their silent brushes into cast and crew in the wings. In the absence of this flow of embodied energy what does one call such a performance, she wondered. She also put forth a question on how such feelings and energies can be transmitted and collectively felt in different ways.

2. WESLEY RUZIBIZA

Wesley spoke of the digital body in rehearsal, with regards to his experiences performing in 'Learning Feminism from Rwanda', a Flinn Works production made in and designed for the pandemic, from Rwanda.

Some insights he shared include:

- Rehearsing in the digital space didn't mean taking direction in real time, for often they were given instructions and prompts and told to come back with scenes. Wesley often felt that something was missing in terms of collective journeys with the body and the breath.
- Since the creative process was happening in stages, and the end result was an ensemble piece, often the Rwandan performers were producing and recording scenes without realising how or whether they would fit into the final performance. The sense of urgency to create within a short time meant a high level of focus and efficiency, and a conviction that it would all add up by the end. At times this felt like a positive thing, while at other times it felt like they were meeting a deadline.
- Conflicts were interesting to figure out since they didn't have the time to discuss and smooth out tensions. Conflicts had to be managed on email or call, and the team didn't have time to identify and collectively arrive at a system to talk about challenges. The human contact was absent.
- Mistakes were covered up with reshoots, which begged the question – was this theatre?

Wesley said that 'Learning Feminism from Rwanda' was the hardest production he had ever worked on, but also that it made him feel good that Covid couldn't beat them into not performing.

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3. MARK CONIGLIO

"The elements you say are missing, are missing. We have to start from scratch with this form."

Mark spoke about liveness and the sense of improvisation that was crucial to theatre. He spoke of the need to shock and startle and make mistakes and jolt everyone back into remembering that this was happening, right now.

He said that the difficult part was imparting that experience to the audience and that it was possible to have a profound experience as long as the viewer feels present.

Mark shared the names of some theatre pieces he thought had done significant work with regards to creating a sense of liveliness – instead of, or complementary to, liveness – for and with audiences.

Notably –
Paul Sermon's famous piece ['Telematic Dreaming'](#) for having audiences interact with bodies projected onto beds in ways they would never have with live bodies, creating something truly designed for the medium.

Sarah Gancher's ['Russian Troll Farm'](#) which used improvisation and actors making flubs live, and telling a great story with great actors effectively.

Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz's projects ['The Electronic Café](#)and ['Hole-In-Space'](#)which "created telepresence as we know it".

A 'Sleep No More'-Esque adaptation with a community he is involved in, which used the new Zoom feature of being able to pick which breakout room to enter to give 125 people an immersive digital performance while exercising agency.

Mark ended by talking about how he memorably remembers "seeing a space energised" by [Robert Wilson and Philip Glass](#)'s 12-minute performance of an aria, in which the ensemble's only physical journey is gradually pointing from one place to another. Mark suggested that perhaps modes of experiences are relevant for audiences, and perhaps phones and laptops cannot encompass such experiences because they require scale. Perhaps performances of a heightened nature – like opera – could be projected from phones onto walls, if there is that privilege, to be able to control and play with scale and space as a viewer.

4. GUSTAVO FIJALKOW

Gustavo spoke about his preoccupations with dissecting how not to enable prevailing inequalities (beyond just money and affluence, but also access and reach and networks) by only supporting performances that rely on specific devices and technological innovations. He spoke of how power is distributed and cemented by developments that emerge as responses to crises. Interactive technologies also pave the way for reproducing power and inequalities due to manipulations by creators onto audiences who give up control in different ways.

This provocation invited several responses. Mark spoke of trying to imagine a "call centre performance" where people get audio performances on their telephones since most people have a non-smartphone, but there too there was the guilt of some privilege and access. Wesley said that this boom in digital theatre during the pandemic hasn't always made sense to him, since he wonders who one is creating for.
"If I want to create for Rwanda, why would I go digital? There will be 10 – 20 people from the EU watching and not the Rwandans in Rwanda."

Mark offered an example of a low tech "performance" – [Remi Charlip's 'Air Mail Dances'](#) which had instructions for dance moves inscribed onto postcards – as an example of a remote performance that wasn't reliant on fancy technology and therefore accessible to only a few.

Gustavo also raised two more preoccupations. Firstly, being able to replicate errors online and feel excitement at not completely being in control – "When things go wrong these days on Zoom, it's not the same as an error in live theatre. The expectations from high tech performances are different from live human performances."

Secondly, about trying to create kinesthetic empathy in the spectator. Is it possible to feel physical empathy from a distance – be it a response to a dancing body, or to an emotion, or a heightened moment? Does theatre have anything to learn from the porn industry when it comes to touch or physical stimulation?

Mark responded to the former by talking about a chamber music piece he worked on, in which the cello player's string broke in her opening solo. The audience of 2000 people laughed. "If the computer had crashed, people would have been furious. This technology is new, and there is a baggage of perfection." Nimi chimed in, suggesting that there was a sense of "If you didn't get it right, you didn't try hard enough", which wasn't the case.

On Gustavo's latter point, Mark suggested that **the non-verbal cues emerging on Zoom – the silent claps, the hand-placed-on-the-heart to respond to something emotional – all indicate that the medium is growing.**

He also suggested that several attempts have been made to elicit physical responses in people in different fields – from the 1981 "teledildonics" notion to Bluetooth controlled sex toys – but that he didn't know of anyone trying to give physical impulses back to performers.

Nimi offered Choy Ka Fai's work in Berlin, and "The Dance Clinic" that manipulated audiences so that they didn't have to learn iconic dances anymore to do them. Wesley offered his experience receiving electrical impulses by a creator as a performer and feeling like a manipulated puppet since there was no autonomy as a maker. Gustavo responded by saying that these instances of touch involved manipulation and being manipulated, and that creators could imagine other ways for audiences to physically empathise and interact with performances.

Main points

- **A 'mistake' or small accident in the real world stage is considered as an exciting live moment whereas in technology (also tech used in live performance) audiences demand perfection.**

- **Digital or online performances lack kinesthetic empathy - can porn be a teacher?**

- **The power equation between spectator and creator needs to be carefully considered as to understand who manipulates whom and who has access to whom.**

- **The uniqueness of a powerful performer or performance 'energising' a room full of people has no equivalent yet in the digital world.**

BREAKOUT ROOM 3: COLLABORATION

How can we create intense transnational performances without meeting in physical space?

Anuja Ghosalkar, Konradin Kunze and Venuri Perera in conversation

Before the presentations began, the moderator, Konradin, reminded the participants that while addressing the question, they were to keep in mind that it was not only about addressing and discussing the present situation of the pandemic but also taking the conversation to the future. Since we as theatre practitioners do not know what it is going to be like post-Covid, it is important to think about moving forward and not about returning to how it used to be. It was important to look beyond current frustrations and struggles towards possibilities.

1. ANUJA GHOSALKAR

Since 2013, Anuja Ghosalkar and German theatre director Kai Tuchmann have been creative partners on several projects. The current work they are building started 2 years ago. They have taken these 2 years to build momentum, audiences as well as friendship in order to have a fruitful collaboration. The piece is called ['Look, Here Is Your Machine, Get in!'](#) and it is a part of the Serendipity Arts Festival that happens online in December 2020. The project will unfold on a platform called Mozilla Hubs and involves 6 artists who will respond to Bertolt Brecht's ['The Lindbergh Flight'](#). The idea is not to replicate realistic architectures but to punctuate the online space for all its artifice. The name is a provocation to the audience to get into the world of Mozilla Hubs and explore the 9 environments created for them. The creators believe that this platform as potential for the future but at the moment they are not clear as to exactly what that might be.

As another outcome of this collaboration, the writers involved have also put together a half-serious, half irreverent Manifesto For Collaboration that includes advice like :

- Become symbiotic rather than parasitic.
- Allow for solitude and for exchange.
- Work towards a movement and not an idea.

And last but not the least...

- Be open to changing your mind and try your darndest to change your collaborator's mind"!

Q: Did the artists share their ideas and present to each other? Was there any opportunity for the 9 individual artists to connect? Where are they from?
ANS: There are 8 artists from India and 1 from China. Kai and Anuja are the curators working on connections and on articulating ideas with each artist. However, there has been a meeting in which all the artists presented their ideas for the larger group. Zoom is the medium across which all the collaboration is taking place.
Q: How long will this be available for viewing?
ANS: It will have 4 shows across the 16th and 17th of December 2020. And then it will be tried once in every 3 months next year (2021).
Q: Do you think this will be something that people will be interested in even after the theatres open?
ANS: The piece is not designed for gamers. It is simple and designed for the everyday audience. The creators hope that the accessibility of the performers will continue to attract audiences. What works for it is that it does not attempt to replace the theatrical experience but has its own idiom.

2. VENURI PERERA

Venuri discussed a project she was involved in titled ['Multitude Of Peer Gynts'.](#) Teater Garasi director Yudi Ahmad Tajudin and the dramaturg Ugaron Prasad invited artists to come together and respond to Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt'. The idea was to get Asian perspectives on concepts of mobility, immobility, fear and anxiety... and in the pandemic, these very key words suddenly became extremely relevant. The online performance was designed like a game that invited the audience to make choices like what costumes certain characters could wear, what rituals could be performed. Other aspects included the players rolling dice and determining key moments in the narrative. The audience could also choose from one of 6 viewpoints in terms of the camera angle that they wanted to view the performance from.

The collaboration had to be not just between the artists involved and the director and dramaturg but also the IT person and the web person.

Q: Since the group was meant to come together and collaborate but then had to do it individually from different places, did that feel conducive to the project or was it a challenge?
ANS: Collaboration is meant to be a community experience and this was isolating but there were conversations with the dramaturg, some brainstorming as well as some back and forth over scripts but the primary reason it seemed to work was that the artists shared a connection from before and hadn't only met remotely.

RESPONSE FROM MODERATOR: One of the methods mentioned for collaborating remotely was a 'modular method' that seems to be more than a makeshift solution – a situation where the number of people travelling is limited and the process is broken down into a combination of remote work and actual physical presence. Everyone seems to have more of a stake in the larger idea of the performance and this concept of a decentralized process seems very interesting and promising. It might be worth thinking about how it can be used to suit the post-pandemic times.

RESPONSE FROM ANUJA: Perhaps another thing to think about is: if transnational travel is going to become harder and harder, is it time to 'return' to one's neighbourhood and explore your local community?
One thing one must acknowledge however is that the online space seems to allow for more irreverence and can shape work to be more questioning and challenging.
Q: An important thing to think about is beyond production and performances, how do you form deep connections that are an inherent aspect of collaborations?
ANS: Ways of being together have to be found. For example, shared studying shared research. The notion of time in already undergoing a change. The time given to different aspects of process needs to change. Getting to know collaborators must be a priority in the process.
RESPONSE FROM VENURI: One thing the online space has surely created the possibility for is multiple renditions of the same material. It is now possible to look at the material one has and to work on multiple manifestations like a radio piece, a photo exhibit, an installation that can result from the same. It is an opportunity to look at various facets of the idea one is working on.

PROJECTS MENTIONED

ACTS OF TRANSMISSION led by Vicky Shahjahan from Cairo. These Acts of Transmission are collaborations that manifest themselves in two different places and contexts in parallel. The local collaborators are physically present at PARTOUT and mediate the joint project. The Acts of Transmission are understood as an extension of one context into another and vice versa. It is about the specific encounters, their translation and an awareness of the in-between as well as of the two different bodies and realities.

TIME ZONE RESEARCH LAB started by Nadia Chaney. It is a community based research lab that uses art-based practices to investigate the nature of Time and Temporality. It takes place in-person in Montreal and online anywhere in the universe.

Main points

- Collaborations online need more time.
- Trust building processes are even more time intensive if online.
- Decentralised and modular projects seem to evolve.
- It is still worth it to know each other live and physical before
- Advantage: projects can be shown all over the world or to a larger audience.
- Disadvantage: isolation of creators
- Possibility: if collaborations are online but performance local, then the artist's local audiences are more connected to the project (no 'festival audiences')

BREAKOUT ROOM 4: CONNECTION ≫

How can performers and audiences loiter, hangout and feel connected through online performance?

Benjamin Krieg, Irawati Karnik, Lea Dietrich and Sophia Stepf in conversation

1. IRAWATI KARNIK

Irawati chose to look at 'connection' through the prism of three examples of online performances that used three different mediums, namely :

1. 'Corona Variations'; produced by Convergence Theatre and conceived, written and directed by Julie Tepperman.
2. 'Every Brilliant Thing'; produced by QTP and written by Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe and directed by Quasar Thakore Padamsee.
3. 'Meridian', (a work in progress) written and directed by Neel Chaudhuri. Irawati is the dramaturg on the piece.

'Corona Variations' occurs via phone calls. 'Every Brilliant Thing' is performed on Zoom and 'Meridian' is performed on an Interactive Voice Recognition System. Irawati discussed the various methods each of these pieces use to create a unique connection with the audience giving them an opportunity to feel heard, responded to and even just allowed to be among other audience members as a community in spite of being isolated. She also brought up some of the challenges she has been facing with her director in trying to further this connection with the audience with regard to the third piece as well as one possible solution.

In 'Every brilliant Thing' the audience became part of the show on zoom by speaking some lines. Also, a counsellor was present after the show to address depression and suicide with the audience who wanted to linger. 'Meridian' is planning to create a hang out room/chat group for all participants of Meridian, so that they can interact and connect with each other after the experience.

2. LEA DIETRICH

As a base for her presentation, Lea had conducted a preliminary research with some of her friends to understand what kind of performances they had watched, what they had enjoyed and the nature of connection that had worked for them. She found that just like her most of them had not been watching online performances and what they had tried, they had not liked very much. Lea then used two examples to talk about when a strong connection had been established with the audience :

1. Swan Lake from Nitehotel
2. Homecoming by Machina Ex

Both had been very different from one another. While the first found a technological solution to creating a feeling of community, the second used the idea of a crisis to bring viewers together. Lea drew attention to the possibility that creating a substitute for the ritual of getting ready and going to the theatre may be needed. For example, Machina Ex had sent a letter to each participant with some talks to fulfil before entering the online space. The physical presence of an object that she could touch and smell made the performance much stronger for her and connected her whole self (through all the senses) to the performance. Also while purchasing a ticket one had to interact with an AI kind of bot, which seemed to have been fun. Also knowing that the performance would only move forward if all participants actively participated, made the connection stronger for Lea.

3.BENJAMIN KRIEG

Benjamin addressed the issue of connection via one example of a performance and one book. The performance was an online adaptation of the play 'Kanon' by the company She She Pop. They essentially use the duration of the performance to create a 'canon' of memorable theatre performances and theatrical moments via their actors selected guests from the independent art scene and audience members. She She Pop changed the stage performance of 'Kanon' to a 1 on 1 telephone call performance, where a member of the audience could call one member of She She Pop and hear about a most memorable theatre experience of the cast member and tell one that they have had which would be added to the Kanon on the website. The personal conversation between performer and audience member created intimate connection.

His book recommendation is an anthology called ['Netztheatre'](#) which loosely translates to 'Web Theatre' or 'Network Theatre' and discusses groundbreaking new ideas in work happening online as well as a combination of diverse online and offline formats. It also discusses how emerging social media platforms like TikTok, Twitter, etc are affecting how content is made as well as consumed.

During the following conversation, Lea expressed her frustration with continual discussions on form and the changed medium instead of a theme or context that she might like to work on/ explore/understand.

- The phenomenon of the British TV show ['Gogglebox'](#) and the subsequent show ['Vlogglebox'](#) was mentioned because it centres on audience reactions in private homes while viewing content as the meat of the show. This also led to a conversation about 'live-tweeting' as a form of community viewing. Irawati spoke about live-tweeting as an almost alternative commentary performance, where people watch online theatre (mostly streaming) simultaneously tweet about what they see, interacting with each other on Twitter. This is a form of connection that some audiences found if they are not in the same physical space but watch a performance simultaneously.

- A reference was also made to Stelarc's performance piece ['Ping Body](#). 'Pinging,' a computer networking term for a signal sent by one computer to determine the presence of another, is made corporeal in Stelarc's Ping Body. A remote audience could access, view and actuate the body of the artist via the Internet. A website provided an interface to a computer-based muscle-stimulation system that permitted those logged on to 'ping' various limbs with an electric signal, causing involuntary movements in the artist's body.

- TRANSFORMATION came up as one decisive factor for establishing connection. The following performances were remembered as illustrative examples of the same :

1. Dancing on balconies during lockdown was brought up as an example of a combination of performance and community experience. A music system would be hired to play music for the whole building complex and residents would appear on their balconies, visible to the other residents but safely distanced and dance together to the music.
2. A performance from pre-Covid times that was referenced to was the project called ['Haircuts By Children'](#) by the company Mammalian Diving Reflex as an example of something that established immediate connection, made audiences invested, introduced a palpable factor of risk and therefore unpredictability and had a heightened relational dynamic.

Main points

- **New rituals for online viewing are needed for the audience to enter the online performance through an artificial threshold that replaces the ritual of physically getting to the theatre, buying tickets, queueing etc. There should be an activity and an investment of energy to give value to the experience. The same can be said for ending of a performance where an artificial place for 'hanging out' and 'loitering' or chatting with other people should be created. This can be on twitter, open zoom rooms, chat groups, Facebook walls etc.**

- **People want to connect to other people, this is an anthropological constant. In the classical theatre set up, the connection is made by the physical sharing of time and space and reacting simultaneously to the same content. The online space demands more interactivity to create that connection.**

BREAKOUT ROOM 5: TRANSFORMATION ≫

Can we use our capacity and skills to reinvent our roles as artists and performers?

Abhishek Thapar, Lisa Stepf, Shabari Rao and Tanvi Shah in conversation

Key questions put to the floor during the discussion:

- Can we expand on our concepts of what it means to be an artist, and make what we may not have once considered "art"?
- Can art be treated as a means to an end – with the end being anything from community engagement to healing to being more embedded in our own realities – and not just the end?
- Historically, we see how ritual becomes drama. Can we create rituals to heal disrupted relations with ourselves, each other, and the natural world? Instead of making drama in the future *about* the pandemic, can we create healing rituals in the present for the pandemic?
- In what ways can creators privilege the process over the product even when sharing an experience with audiences, and bring them into processes and include them in the creation of a safe space and a collective vocabulary and room culture?
- How can we devise ways to make participatory theatre pleasant on audiences, and not scary or stressful?
- How can we see our role as that of historians, so that we may look into the past to look into the future?

1. ABHISHEK THAPAR

"It's quite a responsibility trying to think through this. What is the role and function of an artist – with a specific community, and not just with a pure act of creation – in times of crisis and beyond?"

Abhishek opened his presentation by sharing key words that resonated with him when thinking of transformation. Some included:
"Doers. Home workers. Providers. Activists. Researchers. Interpreters. Janitors. Manual labourers. Welders. Technicians. Caregivers. Fighters. Repairpersons. Bookkeepers. Mediators."
He wondered about integrating roles and entering into them and embodying them in non-theatrical time and space so that we may re-articulate who we are and our roles as artist-citizens.
Abhishek referred to a collective that focused on similar questions and approaches – Amsterdam based Moha, who work with specific communities, the day-to-day realities of people, and the different dynamics of the city and its various locales. "They believe that art needs to make connections in order to take more active roles in the way society functions, we build our cities, and how we build futures. They use art as a tool to design encounters."

Abhishek posed the question – how can we redefine our identities and reach out more into our communities in ways that are real, and not fictions that take us away from our own realities? How can we create long term relations with our communities instead of short bursts of intervention as theatre-makers peddling shows?

He also referenced the work of Canadian company Mammalian Diving Reflex – named for the survival reflex of mammals when plunged into cold water – which creates work that appeals to intuition over intellect and relies on generosity and trust. Their touring production of 'Haircuts by Children' is literally what it sounds like, and so much more. It explores risk, playfulness, fragility, and tension. It demands a literal transformation from its audiences since it is only participatory, and not designed for spectators.

Abhishek spoke about the need for reworking civic engagement and practice. He believes that makers need to inhabit public spaces – space for encounters, observation, and engagement – outside of rehearsal rooms and black boxes. Makers need to imagine audiences as evolving with them and conceive longer engagements. They need to not engage only with artistically inclined folks but also with laypersons, and not only for specific projects.

Finally, he maintains that "in order for transformation to happen, there needs to be redistribution of wealth on a global level."

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2. SHABARI RAO

Shabari opened her presentation by talking about how she was growing less and less wedded to the identity of an artist, and to thinking of a certain kind of output as art. She posed the question, "What does a piece of work need to do to qualify as art?"

She then posed the group four questions as provocations to answer collectively, asking everyone to look inward instead of outward –
First – what is my role in my world now?
Second – what is my world?
Third – what are the needs outside of myself I perceive most strongly?
Fourth – what can I offer in response?

These questions were posed to the group so that they could – like Abhishek suggested: re-articulate who they are as more than solely artists. She created a distinction between "the close-by world" of family and accessible people and "the faraway world" of people around the world and suggested that theatre nowadays – with the pandemic and the onslaught of digital performances – seems to be created largely for the faraway world, whereas we could also create for our neighbourhoods.

Shabari also spoke of the breakdown of relationships over the year – with ourselves, with each other, and with the natural world – and a reckoning. If you're not doing the things you used to do that made you an artist, who are you?

In response to her last points, Lisa shared how the first lockdown had resulted in a burst of immediate creative energy because there was an urgency to respond and reach out after the rupture in contact and connection. She spoke of how charged she felt when projecting dance videos every evening onto their truck for people to dance "together" in their own balconies, much like she does when creating plays. She also shared how, now that this new inspiring situation – borne of collective shock – has become normal, it feels stale and isolated.

3. TANVI SHAH

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." Tanvi opened her presentation with an Isabel Allende quote, bewildering in its current connotations given how we spend our days now.

To explore how artists can reinvent their roles retransformation, she listed out some skills and capacities that artists have which seem more necessary than ever –

'The Artist as Memory Keeper and Historian of Their Time' – as people who have a sense of history and are able to place themselves within their cultural context. Tanvi referenced 'Plague and the Athenian Imagination' by Robin Mitchell-Boyask, and how it struck her that the meaning-making that happened after the plague was done by artists who had to find metaphors for their collective condition and ask – "How will we remember this?"

As an example of the artist as historian, she quoted Bombay-based theatre maker Sunil Shanbag's digital sharing titled 'Playing To Bombay', where he traced the theatre practice in the city through anecdotes and spaces. She asked – in the current absence of geographical and historical precedents since theatre has moved online, how do we talk about theatre's evolution? Which timelines and theatre-making contexts do we now place ourselves in?

She then spoke of 'The Artist as Re-animator', as someone who unearths the dramatic potential within material, and now more than ever asks not only what material is to be reanimated as theatre, but why. She referenced the archives of the past, and also – given the information building on the internet during the pandemic – the archive of the present, tying back to the question of how we will remember this time and taking it a step further – "Which stories will we choose to tell of such a time, and at such a time?"

There were also explorations of 'The Artist as Cultural Curator', to discuss how art is currently seen largely as a distraction by laypeople and ask how we need to embed art into our lives in more meaningful ways. Moreover, with regards to transformation, there was a question about how the online space can be transformed by artists into spaces for shared vulnerabilities, such that audiences are part of the process and not just the "show".

The core idea that Tanvi focused on, given her interest in history, was looking back to look forward. It worked with the notion of not only creating work for and during the pandemic but thinking beyond the pandemic to a time where our days more optimistically reflect our lives.

Main points

- **The role of the theatre artist can change to become more community oriented and involved with the audience.**
- **Theatre artists can become curators of online content and mediators between a massive amount of online theatre content on offer and a group of audiences.**
- **The artist can become a historian and memory archiver of untold histories.**

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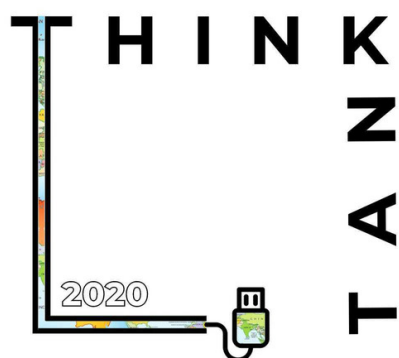
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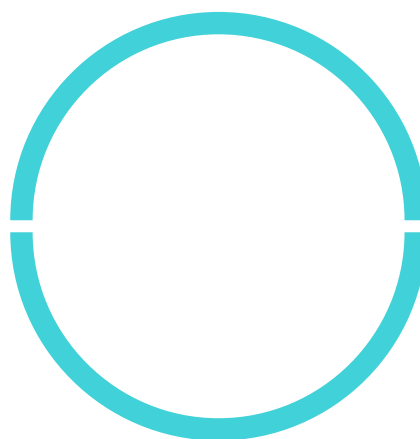
in conclusion

In the five themes that emerged in Think Tank 2, the participants made the following key points.

Bodies and the digital space is a complicated matter, as the energy of a live performer and the energising of a space and an audience has yet to find its equivalent form in the digital space. There is no kinaesthetic empathy that audiences extend to the performer's bodies, so the relationship between spectator and performing body must be carefully negotiated.

The connection between audiences and online performances and audiences amongst themselves in the isolated digital viewing space demands new rituals that create connection. This can be achieved through higher interactivity - people become participant-audiences rather than passive observers. New rituals of entering and leaving a performance have to be created to substitute entering and leaving the theatre space. And informal loitering spaces have to be created online after the performance for people to share their viewing experience.

The digital space comes with a very unequal distribution of access to it among different classes of people. The need to clearly define who the audience is, which technology they have access to - or if there is a way to not use technology at all - all these matters should be considered. Radio shows and phone interactions are possibilities to reach more people of a certain age or language group or socio-economic classes. Social media can also be a potent playground, for example, to reach young people and make difficult or hard content available to them. As social media is highly addictive, perhaps one puzzle to solve is how to use people's addiction to social media to get them addicted to art.

As performing artists are forced to work in unknown media, their roles can and maybe must change. What are these new roles? Performing artists can become living memories and archivers of unwritten (local) histories, curators of online theatre and dance content to new audiences. They can become more involved in their communities, looking at what is a necessary and useful form of art to a particular community instead of making their art for arts' sake (or for the global market).

International collaborations of artists in pandemic times need more time in general, but especially more time to build trust. Having to work decentralised and digitally opens up many possibilities of performing global content to local audiences beyond the international festival market and creating a performance where authorship is more evenly distributed as content is being created in different localities. It has become clear, that in these uncertain times of the past year and the years to come, relationships - between collaborating artists and their audiences - and processes must be kept alive and valued more than products and public showings. Only by creating and sustaining supportive networks will the performing artists get through this crisis and prepare themselves for post-pandemic realities.

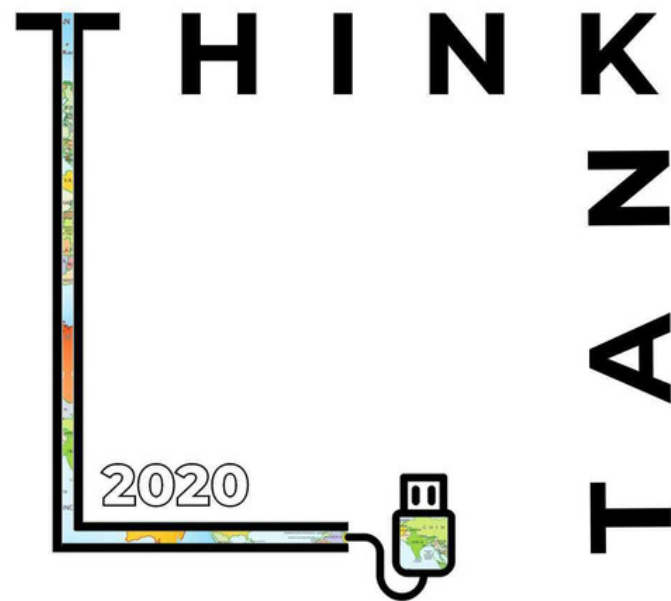Flinn Works would like to thank all participants, collaborators and contributors of this Think Tank.

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CREATIVE PRODUCER, CURATOR, ACADEMIC AND A PRACTITIONER
LEIPZIG, GERMANY

Gustavo Fijalkow is an academic and a practitioner. He was born into a migrant family in Buenos Aires and is currently based in Germany. Primarily trained as a dancer, he received his education in Argentina, Germany and The Netherlands. He has performed professionally, exploring pure dance forms and youth theatre, as well as site-specific and experimental, interdisciplinary formats. He was the creative producer and production director of a mixed-abled dance company based in Germany, a position in which he carried out international co-productions with several African, South American and Asian artists. He has conceived and curated numerous international and interdisciplinary festivals and academic conferences. He was awarded his M.A. in International Arts Management with the thesis *Bloodbath-Bloodbond: A historical snapshot of the Work of the Goethe-Institut Tel Aviv* (Germany, 2010) and his PhD with the thesis *National Dance Platforms: A comparative study of the cases in Germany, Israel, the UK and Sri Lanka* (the UK, 2020).

He was a British Council Fellow at the Venice Biennale (2018), where he developed the audio-piece *Suggeritori*. He is regularly invited to conferences, has taught widely, and has developed and moderated several formats to discuss performing arts and their contexts. Currently, he is artistic project director of the Forward Dance Company and manager of Flinn Works.

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MUSICIAN, PERFORMER AND CURATOR
AARAU, SWITZERLAND/BERLIN, GERMANY

Lisa Stepf was born in Kassel, Germany, and studied cultural studies and aesthetic practice in Hildesheim, Lüneburg, and Aix-en-Provence. She is an actor and performer, working on numerous productions including those of Flinntheater (1999 to date), at Stadttheater Aachen (Municipal Theater Aachen), and Stadttheater Hildesheim (Municipal Theater Hildesheim). She has worked at the Goethe-Institut; and at the performing arts centre Radialsystem V (2006 to 2009) where she was a project curator and managed the 10-day festival, Hybrid Arts Fest – Australia, during Asia-Pacific-Week in 2009. Lisa is also a cellist and founded the interdisciplinary string ensemble Quartett PLUS 1 in 2005 for which she creates and directs an annual production. In addition, she has recorded CDs with Apparat and Ellen Allien. As a member of the band, Goja Mars, she is among the award winners of the Creole World Music Contest 2009 (Hamburg / Schleswig-Holstein). In 2010/11 she received fellowships from the Körber-Foundation (Masterclass in Music Education) and from the EU pilot project SPACE for young curators. She curated the series 'Offbeat' for the ensemble Resonanz in Hamburg for their 2013/14 season. Lisa has been based in Berlin since 2006, and has also been teaching yoga since 2009 and is now shifting to Switzerland, where she works as a freelance curator for new concert formats and teaches at the HKB Bern in the programme 'music in context'.

FLINN WORKS

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KONRADIN KUNZE

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**ACTOR, DIRECTOR, WRITER, AND FILMMAKER
BERLIN, GERMANY**

Konradin Kunze holds a diploma in acting from the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media. He acted for several years at Theater Bremen/Moks and Junges Schauspielhaus Hamburg and has been directing plays since 2006. He also writes plays (Paradise Now, Hacking Luleå, foreign angst, Weißes Papier/Blank Paper, C0N5P1R4.CY). In addition to his work for the theatre, Konradin works as a filmmaker for animated films. He has worked with Flinn Works since 2011 *(A Small, Small World, The Power Play, Krishna's Elite, Maji Maji Flava*, his solo lecture-performance *Schädel X/Skull X, Kosa la Vita*, the video sculpture and exhibition *Mangi Meli Remains and Fear & Fever*).

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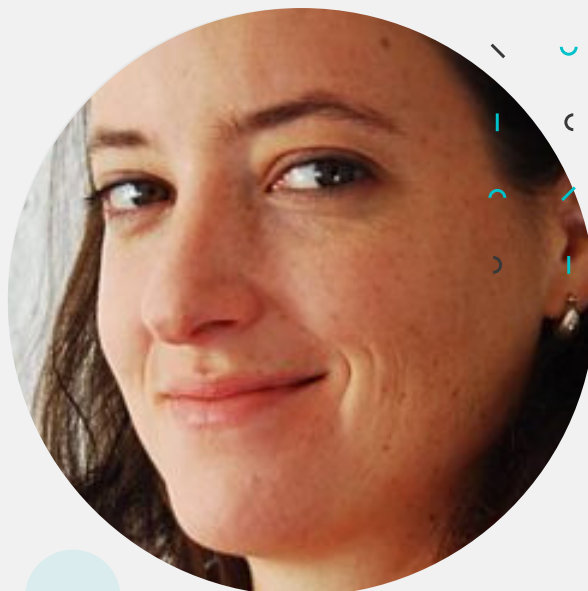
SOPHIA STEPF

mail@sophiastepf.com

**THEATRE DIRECTOR, DRAMATURG AND CURATOR
BERLIN, GERMANY**

Sophia Stepf is a theatre director, dramaturg and curator based in Berlin. She is the Artistic Director of Flinn Works (Berlin). She holds an MA in dramaturgy for theatre and media from the University of Music and Theatre Leipzig. Since 2001 Sophia has been writing and directing contemporary theatre, exploring the friction between globalisation, cultural identity and local realities. With Flinn Works, she has been creating international works with partners like Sophiensaele Berlin, Staatsheater Kassel, Theater Freiburg and venues and companies in India, Tanzania, Rwanda. She keeps developing educational projects and workshops for professional performers and non-actors, mostly on devising theatre and dramaturgy. Since 2003, Sophia has been developing & curating theatre projects for Institutions like Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan in India, international theatre festivals (Linz 2009, Vienna Festwochen 2007, Linz 2009, Schwindelfrei 2013-2018).

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Martine Dennewald

dennewald@aol.com

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CURATOR
LUXEMBURG

Martine Dennewald is the seventh artistic director of the Theaterformen Festival that has presented international theatre production in Lower Saxony since 1990. A native of Luxemburg, Ms. Dennewald studied dramatic composition in Leipzig and cultural management in London. From 2007 to 2011, Ms. Dennewald was drama assistant (head of the drama department) and curator of the Young Directors Project at the Salzburg Festival.

In 2012, she was appointed dramaturg of the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt, which she ran together with Marcus Droß and Martina Leitner on an interim basis. She is the former Artistic Director of the Festival Theaterformen Hannover and Braunschweig and is a Vice President of the International Theatre Institute.

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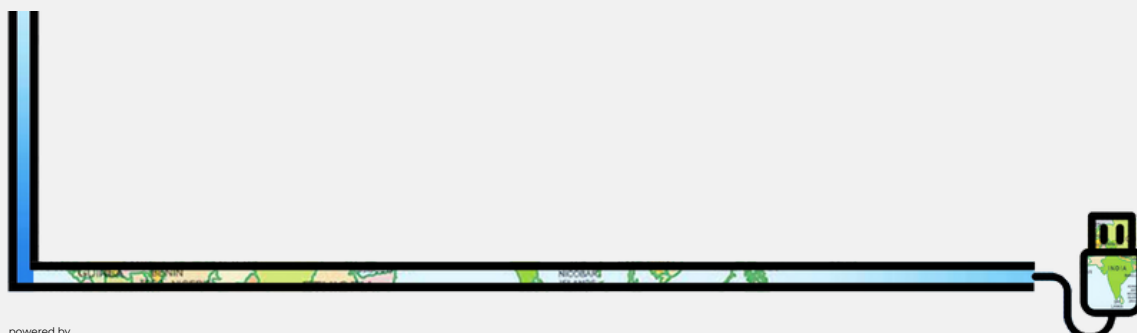
ABHISHEK THAPAR

abbu1985@gmail.com

THEATRE MAKER, PERFORMER, PUPPETEER AND ARTIST
AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Abhishek Thapar (1985, Moga) holds a postgraduate diploma in Physical Theatre from London International School of Performing Arts (LISPA) and a Masters in Theatre from DAS Theatre, Amsterdam. His works 'My home at the Intersection', 'Surpassing the Beeline' and 'The art of walking' have been co-produced and presented at various international festivals around the world.

He is currently developing artistic research and practice in postcolonial epistemologies, historiographic metafiction and storytelling. He is a recipient of Netherlands Fellowship Program (2015), 3Packadge deal (2018) and currently in residence at Standplaats Utrecht. He is currently working on a new performance called 'Cow is a Cow is a Cow' which will premiere at the Spring in Autumn Festival, Utrecht.
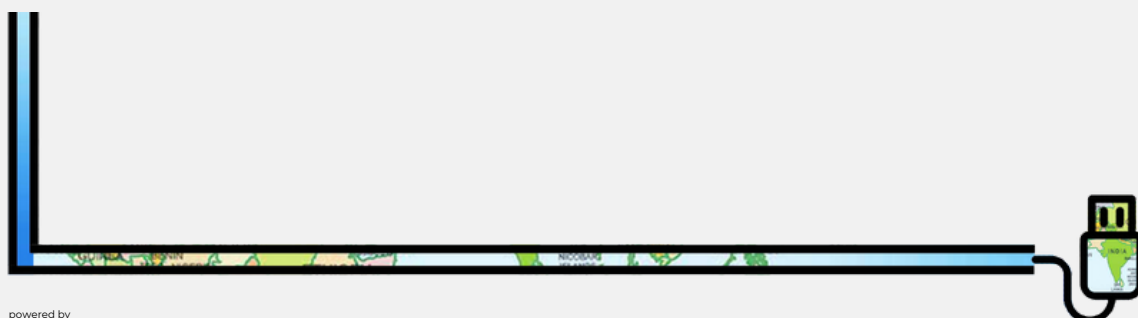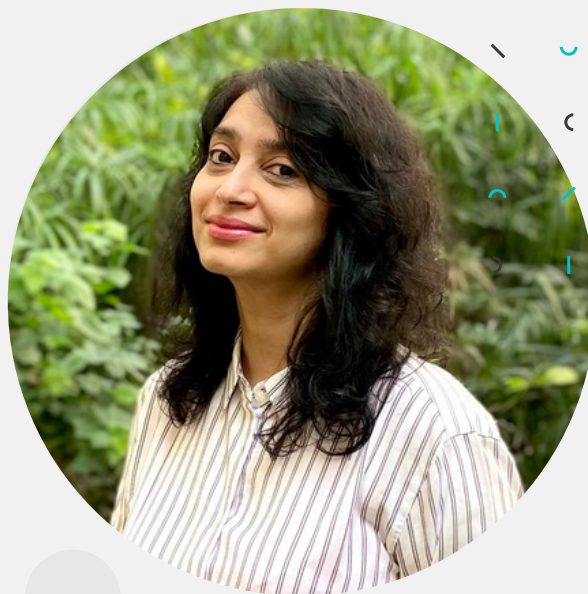
T H I N K

ANUJA GHOSALKAR

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FOUNDER OF DRAMA QUEEN (A DOCUMENTARY THEATRE COMPANY)
BANGALORE, INDIA

Anuja Ghosalkar is the founder of Drama Queen – a documentary theatre company evolving a unique form of theatre in India since 2015. Her practice focuses on personal histories, archival absences and blurring the hierarchies between audience and performer – to extend the idea of theatre to create audacious work. Iterations around form and process, modes of (social) media, technologies, reclaiming narratives on gender and intimacy are critical to her performance making and pedagogy.

As artist-in-residence at Art Lab Gnesta, Sweden she created her debut show, Lady Anandi, which travelled extensively across India and was showcased independently in Berlin and Stockholm. Her performances and workshops have been programmed by University of Oxford, New York University, Abu Dhabi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Serendipity Arts Festival, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Forum Transregionale –ZMO, First Post, Kerala Museum, among others.

Anuja is the curator of the international workshop series on Documentary Theatre - with her German collaborator - which programmed artists like Boris Nikitin, Rimini Protokoll, Zhao Chuan and Gobsquad. She is also the curator for the Serendipity Arts Virtual 2020. As guest faculty at Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, she uses practice-led pedagogy.

In the past, she was a programme officer at India Foundation for the Arts, a film programmer for Experimenta and India researcher for the University of Westminster. She is an Art Think South Asia Fellow (2017-18) and has written on film and performance for Nang Magazine, Art India, Bioscope, Hakara, Scroll, and Ladies Finger.

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BENJAMIN KRIEG

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VISUAL ARTIST AND LECTURER
BERLIN, GERMANY

Benjamin Krieg is a Berlin-based visual artist working in the fields of photography/video/film. He enjoys collaborating with other artists within the realm of performance art and theatre, and has done so with Damian Rebgetz at the HAU Berlin; Yael Ronen and Hakan Savaş Mican at the Maxim Gorki Theatre Berlin; Amir Reza Koohestani at the Kammerspiele Munich; and the Deutsches Theater Berlin, among others.

A long-standing artistic relationship connects him with the German performance collective She She Pop. He is a lecturer at the Institute for Media, Theatre and Popular Culture at the University of Hildesheim and conducts workshops frequently.
His work has been shown internationally at numerous festivals and exhibitions.

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IRAWATI KARNIK

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PLAYWRIGHT, SCREENWRITER, ACTOR
MUMBAI, INDIA

Irawati Karnik is a writer, playwright, screenwriter, translator and actor based out of Mumbai. She writes in Marathi, Hindi and English.

She participated in The Royal Court/British Council programme, 'Writer's Bloc' (organised by Rage, Mumbai) for which she wrote Satellite City (English, Marathi and Hindi). She also wrote Gasha (Hindi) directed by Abhishek Majumdar. She co-wrote Sex, Morality and Censorship (Hindi) directed by Sunil Shanbag, The A Casting (English, later translated into German) and C Sharp C Blunt (English) directed by Sophia Stepf (Flinntheater, Berlin) Thook (Hindi) commissioned under the project 'Hunger For Trade', by The Deutsche Schauspielhaus Theater, Hamburg. Thook travelled to Connecticut, U.S.A and engaged with the faculty and students of University of Saint Joseph, Wellesley College and Yale University.

Her Marathi plays include Teech Ti Diwali, Vadani Kavala Gheta, Mrugacha Paus, Varle Ahet, Aaltoon Paaltoon and Chhapa Kata which had a very successful run in Maharashtra completing more than 200 shows. A number of her translations, both fiction and non-fiction, have been published by Oxford University Press.

An alumnus of Sir J.J. School of Fine Arts, Irawati has also worked towards Research and Documentation of Indian contemporary art. Her writing and translation feature in books published by Bodhana Arts & Research Foundation. She has been a resident writer at the international writers' residency Sangam House. She has several Marathi films to her credit including Anandi Gopal, Smile Please and Ekulti Ek.

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LEA DIETRICH

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PHOTOGRAPHER, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER AND COSTUME/STAGE DESIGNER
GÖTTINGEN, GERMANY

Lea Dietrich, born 1977 in Freiburg, studied at art colleges in Hamburg, Bremen and Marseille. She worked for several years as a theatre photographer and after graduating, she designed numerous stages and costumes for the Deutsches Theater Göttingen, Moks Theater Bremen, Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, Bayrische Staatsoper Munich, Theater Heidelberg, Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg and the Ruhr Festspiele, among others. Stages and costumes for drama and dance were created under the direction of Konradin Kunze, Felix Rothenhäusler, Babett Grube, Antje Thoms, Werkgruppe2, the choreographer Birgit Freitag, DinA 13, the Israeli choreographer Saar Magal to name just a few.

In 2019, she designed the set and costumes for the dance piece "für vier", for which Birgit Freitag was awarded the German theatre prize "Der Faust". She was responsible for the set design for the multi-award-winning short film "Marina" from "Werkgruppe2".

In addition, she works as a freelance artist, photographer and documentary filmmaker. She lives in Göttingen with her husband and two children.

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THINK TANZ

MARK CONIGLIO

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COMPOSER/MEDIA ARTIST
BERLIN, GERMANY

Recognized as a pioneering force in the integration of dance and media, composer/media artist Mark Coniglio creates performance works that integrate music, dance, theatre and interactive media. He co-founded the media-intensive dance company Troika Ranch (http://troikaranch.org) in New York and served as the company's artistic co-director for twenty years. As an outcome of his artistic practice, he also created the Isadora (https://troikatronix.com) – a software tool used by thousands of artists worldwide to realize media-rich performances.

His hybrid role as an artist and technologist has put him in great demand – both as an artist, but also as a lecturer and speaker in relation to media performance practice and research. He has been invited to perform internationally at the National Gallery in Prague, the Vértice Festival in Mexico City, the Platforma Festival in Moscow, Judson Church in New York, and locally at spaces such as Dock 11.

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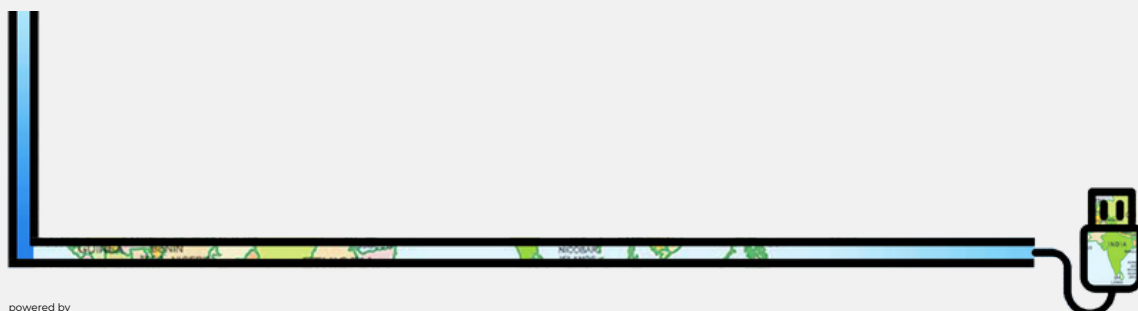
NIMI RAVINDRAN

nimi.ravindran@gmail.com

THEATRE DIRECTOR, PRODUCER AND CURATOR
BANGALORE, INDIA

Nimi Ravindran started her career in the theatre as a performer and moved towards directing. She has directed 12 full-length theatre productions including plays for children and young adults and has also worked in the theatre in various capacities for nearly 20 years. She has been part of the core team of Ranga Shankara, a well-known theatre located in Bangalore from 1998 to 2007.

Between 2005-07 she conceived, conceptualised and executed a fundraiser to raise funds to create a performance residency for The Company Theatre, Mumbai. The funds went towards acquiring land and creating a residency space in Kamshet.
In 2013 she - with Shiva Pathak - co-founded Sandbox Collective, an arts collective that produces, commissions and curates performances and festivals. In 2015 she conceived and curated (for Sandbox Collective) the first edition of Gender Bender, a one of a kind gender festival that provides grants to artists to re-imagine the idea of gender through artistic work.
Her most recent work was a site-specific performance titled, On a Different Note (co-directed with Vinod Ravindran) commissioned by The Serendipity Arts Festival.
Her current preoccupations include gender and diversity in the arts and a personal project on memory and loss. She also holds a senior fellowship in theatre from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

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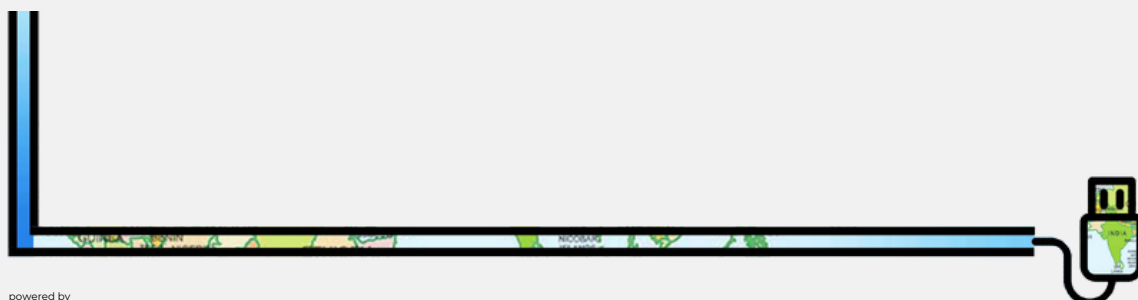
THINK TANK

SHABARI RAO

shabari.rao@gmail.com

**INDEPENDENT ARTIST, EDUCATOR AND RESEARCHER
BANGALORE, INDIA**

Shabari Rao's work focuses on the relationship between body, identity, and power, and takes the shape of performing, directing, teaching, writing, and more recently, experimental film and audio work. Over the last 20 years, her work has been presented internationally through conferences, festivals, residencies and publications. This year she was scheduled to be an Artist in Residence at New York University, and the inaugural Global South Fellow at the annual International Federation for Theater Research conference in Galway, Ireland. Her most recent works include: Are You Here; Nothing to Show; and Learning 'Unlearning'.

Shabari holds a BA in Kathak and Choreography (Bangalore University), a Professional Diploma in Dance Studies (Trinity Laban Conservatoire for Music and Dance, UK) and an MA with distinction, in Dance and Education (Royal Academy of Dance, UK). For more details visit www.shabarirao.com.

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SHARON PAZ

info@sharonpaz.com

VISUAL ARTIST
BERLIN, GERMANY

Sharon Paz, (1969, Israel) lives and works in Berlin. She received an MFA from Hunter College, NYC. Paz exhibited extensively in Galerie in Körnerpark, Berlin, Weserburg Museum for Modern Art, Bremen, The Bronx Museum of Art's, the Herzliya Museum of Art and Petach-Tikva Museum of Art, Israel. Paz is part of a leading team of the project REMEMBER, an interactive permanent public memorial path in Campus Charité Mitte, Berlin.

Her multimedia performance was shown in Sophiensaele and Dock 11, FFT Düsseldorf, studiobühneköln, Germany and Akko Festival, Israel. The Senate of Cultural Affairs and Hauptstadtkulturfonds, Berlin; The Fund for Video Art and Experimental Cinema, CCA Tel-Aviv; Goethe Institute supports her work. Paz's video works are part of the collection of Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Video-Forum Collection, Berlin and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem and were screened in numerous festivals and galleries such as Art in General, NYC and Transmediale 11, Berlin. For more details: www.sharonpaz.com

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SRIVIDYA SRINIVAS

ssrinivas@theatreprofessionals.co.in

THEATRE EDUCATOR AND APPLIED THEATRE PRACTITIONER
BANGALORE, INDIA

Srividya completed her MA in Applied Theatre from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London in 2019. She has worked extensively with schools, especially in the IGCSE, IB MYP and DP spaces and has helped design curricula for Theatre Professional Education's Middle School Programme curriculum as well as the IB MYP drama curriculum for an international school in India.

Srividya has engaged inclusively with various communities, including inmates at a prison, young people with severe and multiple disabilities, children on the autistic spectrum and young people from low-income communities, among many others.

Srividya firmly believes in the arts being inclusive and the key to create change. While being a part of the team at Theatre Professionals Education for the past 8 years, she also runs an inclusive applied theatre company called Aakaara: The Applied Theatre Company, based in Bangalore.

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TANVI SHAH

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INDEPENDENT MULTI-LINGUAL THEATRE-MAKER
BOMBAY, INDIA

Tanvi Shah practices as director, dramaturg, writer and adaptor, documenter of oral narratives and archivist of theatre history, curator of arts experiences, and conductor of literary encounters.

She has previously worked with theatre organisations like CRY HAVOC Company (New York), The Woodstock Players (New York), Tamaasha and Arpana Theatres (Mumbai), Junoon Theatre (Mumbai), and Indian Ensemble (Bangalore).
She was one of seven individuals trained under Indian Ensemble's Directors' Training Programme 2017 – '18. She went on to receive a Trust scholarship from The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and graduated with an MA in Theatre Directing (Classical and Contemporary Text) in September 2019.

She approaches theatre – a form that encompasses all her preoccupations – as an investigation into identities, histories, languages, and perspectives.

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VENURI PERERA

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CHOREOGRAPHER AND PERFORMANCE ARTIST
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

Venuri Perera holds an MA in Psychology, Pune University and a Postgraduate Certificate in Dance from Laban, London. (Michelle Simone Award for 'Outstanding Achievement in Choreography'.) Since 2004, she has collaborated in multi-disciplinary performance projects locally and internationally. Her solo works have been invited to festivals including Zurich Theater Spektakel, Art Basel, SIFA Singapore, TPAM Yokohama, Dhaka Art Summit, Colombo Art Biennale, Asia Triennale Manchester, Tanztage Berlin, Colomboscope, Ignite! Delhi.

Perera's works have dealt with violent nationalism, questions of rights of access in a racialised present and attunes with the woman's body through its many thresholds of strength and vulnerability. She is interested in anonymity, the power dynamics of gaze and creating conditions for intimacy and empathy. Perera was curator of the programmes of Colombo Dance Platform supported by the Goethe - Institut. She is currently a participant at DAS Theatre, Amsterdam.

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VIVEK MADAN

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THEATRE PRODUCER/CURATOR AND ACTOR
BANGALORE/BOMBAY, INDIA

Vivek Madan is a theatre producer/curator and actor based equally in Bangalore and Bombay. As an actor, his recent credits include Duncan McMillan and Johnny Donahoe's *Every Brilliant Thing*, Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* and Steve Canny and John Nicholson's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

He has served as Programming Executive at Jagriti Theatre (2011-15) and as Festival Director of Rage's Writers' Bloc 4 (2016) and the Ranga Shankara Theatre Festival 2018.

He is currently a trustee of Indian Ensemble Trust and a director at Bhasha Centre for the Performing Arts, a new dream in the making, besides advising on and spearheading several independent theatre projects.
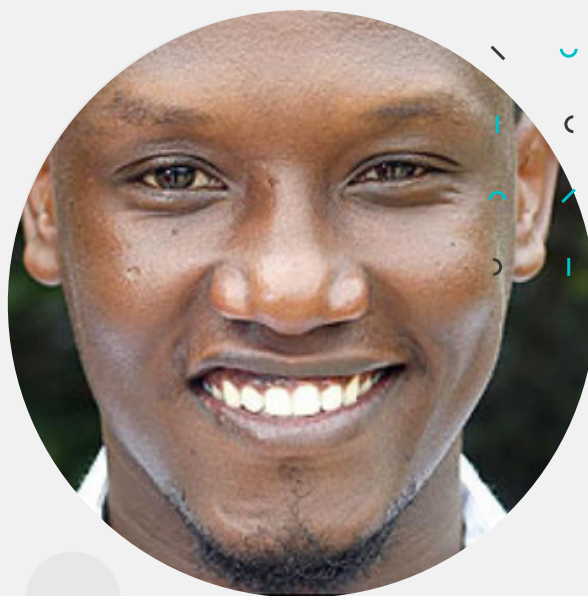
THINK TANK

WESLEY RUZIBIZA

wesley.ruzibiza@gmail.com

CHOREOGRAPHER AND DANCER
KIGALI, RWANDA

Wesley Ruzibiza is the Artistic Director of Amizero Kompanie and the East African Night of Tolerance. He studied dance at École des Sable in Senegal and in Paris, France. He has taught for over ten years at the Arts and Drama department of the University Huye, Rwanda. He has been in numerous international collaborations across the world and is currently the designated Artistic Co-director of École des Sable, Senegal.

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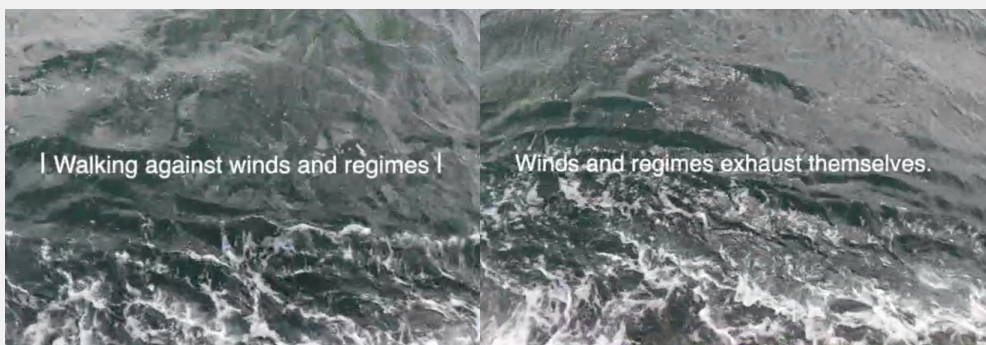## Abhishek Thapar

The Art of Walking

In March 2020, as India went into lockdown and various essential services including transport were shut, several migrant labourers were left stranded in cities. Most of these were daily wage labourers. Their means of income had disappeared, landlords were demanding rent and they realized it had suddenly become impossible to survive in cities. However, the government took no cognizance of their plight and eventually they were left with no choice but to walk back to their villages thousands of kilometres away. For the next several days, thousands of them walked. Old men, children, pregnant women... Many lost their lives.

Abhishek, based in Amsterdam, along with his collaborator Panjak Tiwari found themselves confronted by images of this all over the news as well as social media. They decided to walk from Amsterdam (Netherlands) to Calais (France) covering a distance of 348 kms in 12 days. It was not meant to be an athletic exercise or a social media event or even a piece of performance art. It was about 'feeling with the other'. 'An experience of bodily solidarity'. An attempt to deeply connect with one's own empathy. Through this, they were able to financially support 89 migrant families in India for 3 months. His presentation is a short film he made about this walk.
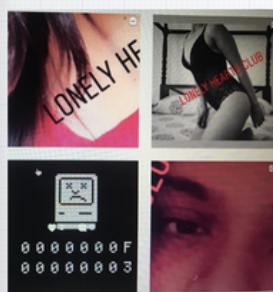

Screen grabs from the film
click here to watch it

| Walking against winds and regimes | Winds and regimes exhaust themselves.

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## Anuja Ghosalkar

THE LONELY HEARTS CLUB

Hashtags

#makingloveintroubledtimes #erotica #eroticliterature #love #queerpoetry #sensual #body #pleasure #ecstasy #climax #orgasm #clit #turnedon #audio #aural #washyourhands #listeningpleasure #eroticverse #darkalleys #kisses #sexguide #copulate #gspot #warmth #lover #bootycall #cyborg #vegetarian #cheese #cinnamon #ajantaellora #hollywood

* Subvert the algorithm
* Site- social media/ reflect on the media itself?
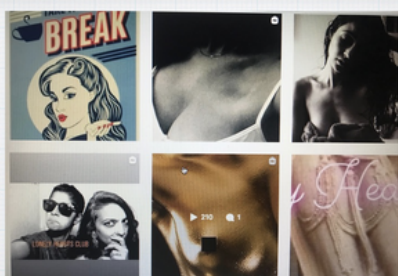
Arundhati Roy, Rosalyn Demello, Ananis Nin, Jeanette Winterson, Cathy Song, Evolutionary Biology, Diary, Journal Entries, Poems, Andre Aciman, Necrophilia Variations, Sharon Olds, Prakrit Poetry, Michael Ondaatje, E.E. Cummings, Vanessa Kissule, Queer Sufi Poetry, Sylvia Plath, Andrew Shane Greer, A.K Ramanujan, Han Kang, Alexis Rafael, Shah Hussayn, Gathasaptasati, Muddupalani
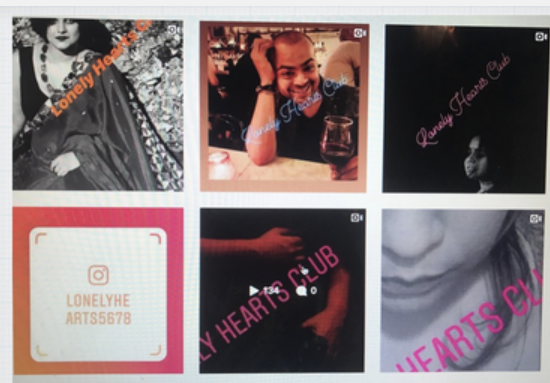
Vulnerable | Strangers | Revolution | Freedom

"Future is Now" - Ursula Le Guin, Science Fiction writer, poet

From Pulitzer Prize Winning "Less" by Andrew Sean Greer-Aarushi Vats

"He kisses—how do I explain it? Like someone in love. Like he has nothing to lose. Like someone who has just learned a foreign language and can use only the present tense and only the second person. Only now, only you. There are some men who have never been kissed like that. There are some men who discover, after Arthur Less, that they never will be again"

1 My sharing focussed on the present moment and our response to it as artists. Re-imagining my practice of performance making that I call Documentary theatre (the local Indian homegrown one) in the last 9 months has been refreshing. I hold optimism about our role as artists and thinkers. This rupture - in time, life, a way of making that we held dear - is an opportunity of re-imagination for me. Never the purist, and almost always looking to challenge the status quo, the pandemic pushed me to think of new strategies to make work and engage with my audience.

'Future is Now' showcased two projects made since March 2020

> The Lonely Hearts Club
https://www.instagram.com/lonelyhearts5678/?hl=en
> Along the Lines

The Lonely Hearts Club
opened on Instagram on the first night of the lockdown in India on the 25th of March. Since physical theatres were closed, it tried to explore social media as a site for performance making. It invited readers & listeners to send in gender positive, queer erotica. One of its key intentions was to play with the form of Instagram— a primarily visual site, with aural artworks, where the audience rather than scroll mindlessly, had to stop, listen, while staring at a black screen. Using hashtags like "g-spot", "morning glory", "cinnamon buns" to drive audiences to posts, they were confronted with erotic works of writers like A.K Ramanujan, Arundhati Roy, Sufi Queer poetry and so on. Finally, the attempt was to reclaim narratives around the body, pleasure and bring intimacy back into our socially distanced lives. It now has a dedicated Instagram page with 500+ followers.

Promise of the Internet: What's that?

- Internet access is not equal for all in India.
- Along The Lines of access, creating equitable voices, and making a performance, it has been challenging.
- That it's history is disordered and chequered is obvious, but perhaps needs reiteration.
- The students attend classes on their phones, re-jigged lap tops, fluctuating electricity. They are from varied backgrounds, some with modest means.
- Many children have stopped attending school because of no access to devices or internet.

Along The Lines
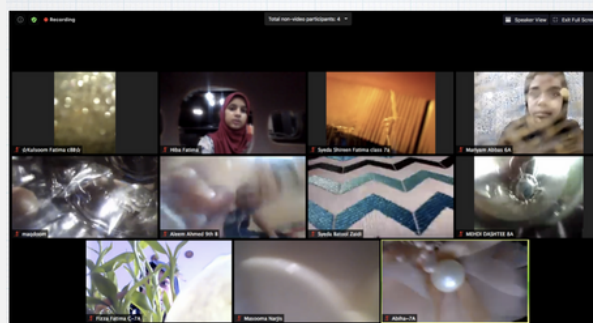
2 Along The Lines

Along The Lines supported by University of Oxford—is a children's performance based on a short story written by Amelia Bonea for young audiences, called The Magic Mango

It is about the history of Telegraphy in India. For this, I worked with students (aged 9-13) of Focus High School, Dar-ul-Shifa, in the old city of Hyderabad. I had worked with these students in January 2020 at the height of the CAA protests in India— using archival photos of the city of Hyderabad and spiritedly questioning the legacy of the Nizam, the children had reclaimed the streets in a playful and fragile manner, when the entire country was erupting. Needless to underline, this is an Islamic school where all the students are practicing Shias. Along the Lines, was rehearsed and presented live on Zoom. This is perhaps the most challenging performance I have worked on. The children couldn't leave their homes, most of them come from extremely modest backgrounds. They accessed the internet on their phones or re-jigged or borrowed laptops. A day before the show, Hyderabad witnessed torrential rain, some of them had no electricity for over 24 hours. Internet access in India is not free and equal for all, this project emphasized that. What is the promise of the Internet?

Along The Lines opened to an overflowing Zoom room, with heartening reviews about mis-en-scene and form. It is a show about home, technology, distance and communication and the isolation our children are experiencing in the present— stuck in the 4:3 boxes.

Figure 1: How to look at archival photos? With heart emojis, of course!
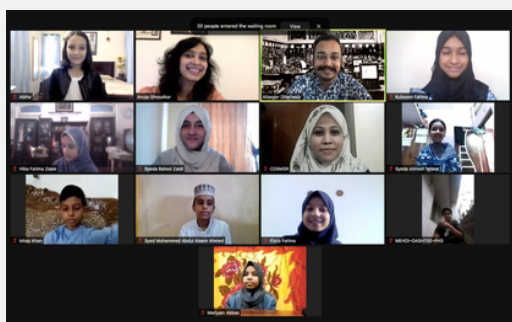

Figure 2: Redrawing the colonial map

Figure 3: Screenshots are the NEW cast & crew stills

THINK TANZ

Benjamin Krieg

THE GLITTERING STREAM - the DAYS OF SHINING ACTION of THE ASSOCIATION OF THE MANY

on May 8 and 9, 2020

I want to report from a real world/online event even if it's not *"classical theatre"* but rather a political demonstration/action albeit of a very performative nature. I think it is interesting as an example for mixing online and real world public space. Even if I were participating practically and/or artistically, I wouldn't call it my personal project as it is a collective work of *THE ASSOCIATION OF THE MANY*.

The Association of the Many - DIE VIELEN e.V. is a registered, not-for-profit association founded in June 2017. Its aim and charitable purpose is the promotion of an international mindset: tolerance in all areas concerning culture and public education. THE MANY frequently organizes demonstrations and actions in public spaces and in the midst of preparations for one of those - the SHINING DAYS OF ACTION on May 8 and 9, 2020 - was caught up in a global crisis in the form of a deadly health risk. So plans had to be adapted to the situation:

THE MANY were creating a space where it was possible to come together while remaining physically distant. Events took place in urban spaces, cultural locations and on the internet in more than 32 different cities. Hundreds of people were singing an alternative European Anthem of THE MANY on live streams and on their balconies: no one should be left behind - not at the borders, not in the crisis of this pandemic and not in their homes!

This was quite a wide-ranging event with a central studio, different live streams from different cities, lots of pre-produced videos that had been sent in over days from different parts of the country and at the end was a big choir singing at the Brandenburg Gate which had also been live streamed. But the part that I want to report was taking place in the evening of May 8 for around four hours. In this time, two teams were driving in two cars through Berlin, using powerful torches with simple lenses and slides to project slogans from the windows onto the city, *while filming this and streaming it* to the central studio where it was mixed with a live dj-set that was going on there. Additionally, during these drives, there were longer breaks where the two team met at well known cultural places where - with the help of a powerful spotlight and video projector - slogans had been projected onto the facades and the waving of a big golden flag - the sign of THE MANY - was shown in the projection. You can get an idea in this trailer:

watch - https://vimeo.com/440682315

I wanted to talk about this as I think that in times when theatres are closed and temporarily lose their function as physical public spaces, it is worth considering possibilities of bringing theatre/performance to public spaces (where they just might also be seen by people who are in touch with performative actions in the real world) and at the same time trying to reflect these acts back to an online community/audience. If anyone would like, I can also go into details about the technical and logistical aspects of this project.

Further Information about the project can be found here:

https://www.dievielen.de/en/dievielen/ [general information about THE MANY]
https://www.dievielen.de/en/stream [info about the GLITTERING STREAM including longer press text as pdf]
https://vimeo.com/user119097822 [vimeo-channel of THE MANY]

THINK TANK

Irawati Karnik

SEX, MORALITY & CENSORSHIP : A guided viewing on insider.in
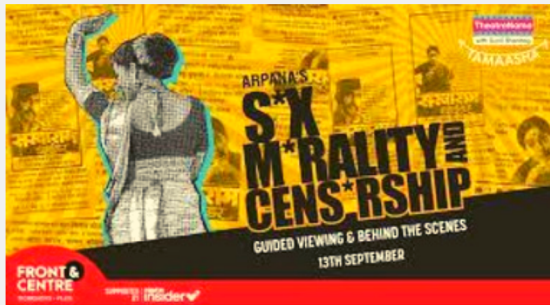
1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Sex, Morality & Censorship (SMC) was co-written by Shanta Gokhale and Irawati Karnik and directed by Sunil Shanbag. The play was first staged in 2008. It can be categorized as what is often described as 'documentary theatre'. It attempted to look at and analyze censorship – both state-sponsored as well as the kind imposed by self-proclaimed guardians of culture. The play did this using three frames:

(a) Sakharam Binder, the play

First staged in 1972 by Kamlakar Sarang, Sakharam Binder is a Marathi play written by the renowned playwright Vijay Tendulkar. It is the story of a bookbinder who brings home the castaway wives of others. He is unapologetic about his drinking, his whoring and he declares this in the choicest of language. The play asks a lot of difficult questions about marriage as well as the hypocritical and superficially moralistic ways of a middle-class society.

1 Sakharam with Lakshmi, the first woman he brings home in the play.

(b) The court case and 'Binder's Days'

The Censor Board for theatre – which only exists in 2 states in India, Maharashtra being one of them – had advised as many as 36 cuts in the script of Sakharam Binder. The cuts were unreasonable and would completely mutilate the play. The team of Sakharam Binder led by its director Kamlakar Sarang fought a court case against the State Censor Board...and won. It was not an easy process in any way and Kamlakar maintained a detailed diary of everything that transpired during this time. This diary was later published. It is called 'Binder's Days'. Parts of this diary and developments in the case constituted the second layer of 'Sex, Morality & Censorship'.

2 Champa beats up her husband in front of Sakharam and his neighbour Dawood. Champa is the second woman Sakharam brings home in the play.

(c) The cultural/socio-political scene in India during the 70s and across the world.

The third layer of Sex, Morality and Censorship was an overview of what was going on in the film, theatre, advertising and other media in India and what it reflected about the society. This overview provided an insight into why Sakharam Binder disturbed people the way it did. Alongside this, was a look at what was going on across the world in terms of political movements as well as rock music.

3 Shubrojyoti Barat, the actor who played Kamlakar Sarang, the director of Sakharam Binder

4 A bit from a play called Vichha Majhi Poori Kara in the tamasha form, a folk form of Maharashtra

5 A scene from Madanachi Manjiri, a play by Vidyadhar Gokhale - one of the plays that was running before Sakharam Binder appeared on the scene like a bull in a china shop.

6 That 70s show - a song that was projected on the backdrop - that threw light on various political upheavals across the world

7 That 70s Show

2 THE PLATFORM

One of the team members of SMC suggested doing an online performance of it. But that was soon seen as impractical and particularly difficult to execute since it involved live music. When the suggestion to stream a video of the play was made, several questions arose:

- Why was this theatre?
- What was 'live' about it?
- How was this taking into cognizance the platform it was being shown on?

Some of these questions were answered through the idea of a 'guided viewing'. The viewing would consist of the following:

- The director of the play, Sunil Shanbag as well as the writer Irawati Karnik would take the (online) audience through this viewing.
- They would be the narrators of the evening and would hold the different pieces together as well as provide context and make connections.
- The video of the play was edited such that none of the elements were missed and the (online) audience got a sense of the arc of the play.
- This was then cut into smaller bits. In between each bit, the (online) audience got a chance to hear from the other players in the play.
- Various actors were interviewed 'live' by the writer and director and focused on various aspects of the play-making as well as experiences and stories during the process.
- An off-screen team was organized.
- Two people who knew which features of Zoom would be used and would make sure that the evening ran without any technical glitches.

3 THE CHALLENGES

- Editing the original play without losing coherence/ essence.
- Getting everyone on the same page while being in different cities, different rooms.
- Arriving at a common visual language.
- Technology: There was a lag in the video and the audio of the play and that had to be figured out.

8 The entire cast of Sex, Morality & Censorship performs the curtain call song
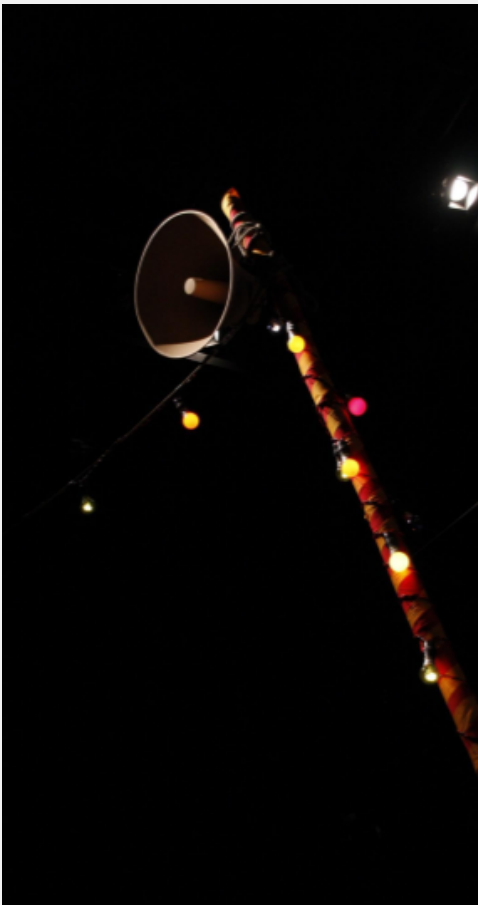
4 THE LEARNINGS AND WHAT REALLY WORKED/ DIFFICULTIES AS GROUNDS FOR NEW POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE

- Considering what the country is going through at the moment under the current government, the subject has acquired a renewed relevance. People felt extremely connected to the subject matter and found an opportunity to discuss and share a lot of common concerns.
- A fresh and new engagement with work seen earlier.
- Larger conversation on 'play-making' – its processes and challenges framed within 'play watching'.
- Opportunity for building an 'informed audience'.
- The importance of maintaining the 'lightness' of the evening.
- The Backstage idea: This is perhaps the feature of the evening that was most successful. At the end of the show, a link was posted in the public chat of Zoom inviting the audience members to participate in a 'backstage hangout'. This took us away from the commercial platform Insider that had hosted the show to a private Zoom meeting, where, as many as ninety-something audience members ended up just to 'hang around'. People interacted with the actors, with each other. It was informal and unstructured. Some people spoke, others were happy to quietly watch. But several of them were grateful for a place to 'loiter' after the show, which they felt is such an inherent part of the experience of going for a play.
- We learned that focusing solely on trying to create an experience that would feel like a substitute for theatre in the physical space would never feel like enough. Instead, it was about trying to understand what unique modes of interaction the online space offered and pushing what performance can mean here.
- The birth of a new idea: As a result of the guided viewing, Tamasha Theatre had the idea to start a new series of shows titled: Theatrenama. This consists of guided viewings of a similar kind that combine performance and theatre history. The first show that they did as part of this was titled: 'Playing to Bombay'.

powered by

FLINN WORKS

Lea Dietrich

"Cellar and Secrets - Beyond Reason"

Digital live dance performance from "DIN A 13"
Choreography Gerda König (Germany) and Jordi Cortés (Spain)
Premiere October 23, 2020
Stage design: Lea Dietrich

The project was intended as the third in a series and deals with the trauma of victims of imprisonment, violence and torture by the dictatorships of Germany and Spain in the past: 45th year after the end of the Franco dictatorship / 75th year after the end of the National Socialist dictatorship.

Actually, like the other two in the series, this piece was supposed to be performed live in Cologne and Barcelona as a dance performance. But due to Corona - the difficulties of international productions in such times and the fact that at least one of us belongs to an extreme risk group - it quickly became clear that we either had to cancel or adapt to an Online stream.

The topic seemed appropriate to us and we set out to look together in a medium that was previously unknown to us. The result was a digital live performance with a follow-up discussion

60 minutes
4 performers
8 cameras
5 live streams (so far)
590 spectators (stayed inside / Vimeo)
+ 3000 viewers (Facebook / Instagram)

Due to the current situation in Spain, we organised digital tours of the homes of the dancers and finally decided on a room that looked almost the same in all their homes. Four rooms which might be in the same house... or the same prison? We picked the smallest room - the cell - the bathroom with its (mostly) white tiles.

The video artist Jürgen Salzmann and the dancers visited historical places in Spain and Germany with a camera and the dancers moved there. A lot of video material was created, which Jüregn is now adding live to the performance via "livestream studio".

After trying and experimenting with the eight cameras, we installed four of them on the ceiling. This perspective works like a surveillance camera and supports a voyeuristic view, the feeling of being watched all the time. The other camera shows the subjective view of the performers and details. You get the impression that the dancers' direct look at the camera - because it is live - is the direct look at the audience. Camera places change. The sound was switched on and off by the host (in Zoom).

With the movements of the four dancers, the smallness of the bathroom, the split-screen (from one to eight windows) and the coloured video recordings of the historical places/memorials, the picture was already quite full.

For me as a set designer, it wasn't that easy. Where was my "room"? Where was the three-dimensionality? At rehearsals in the theatre, I am used to throwing ideas and materials in, trying them out and discussing them every day. During this process, there were a lot of ideas for the room. But the distance made it difficult. Sending items via post took a long time and was unreliable. So in the end, we decided on simplicity: bodies in a white room, simple light from a light bulb, a cigarette, drawings with black paint in the bathtub and on the wall, fire, ashes and a child's shoe with a small plant in it. I made patterned tiles white, got soft pads so that the dancer in the wheelchair could lie in the shower and dance. People have often asked me about the meaning of the "set designer" in this medium. Set design has never appealed to me this much.

An important part of the evening, which many people also took part in, was the live follow-up discussion (zoom) with viewers, performers, choreographers, video artists ... The evening was live, but it was very cinematic too. It was so beautiful and important to talk together afterwards while the dancers still had the black paint stuck to their costume or the sweat could still be seen.

As an experience, I can say for myself that:

- that we were busy with technology. With sound, eight live images and pre-produced material putting together. In the end, the sound suffered a bit because we reached our technical limits. (People danced and communicated via zoom, the host sorted and arranged the images live and cued the sound. The video artist played the screen in "livestream studio": layered his recorded video images live in various masks and played it via Vimeo.)

- that the dramaturgical work was more like film work than theatre.

- that it can be incredibly hard to motivate yourself in front of your screen for so long (a special thank you to the dancers who rehearsed and danced alone in their bathroom for weeks!)

- that we had to learn another form of communication/discipline for online rehearsals. (And that in German, English, French and Spanish!) Those who know "plus one" have a clear advantage ☺

- that you have to get used to the fact that when they are online, not all viewers sit as well from beginning to end as they would in the theatre. (Maybe that changes something about how you set up the evening?)

- that I wonder where is the difference in this medium, between set design and stage design? Whether there is one and how we can work it out?

- that it was very important for me (and for many of the audience too) that, despite the lack of "evidence" (for example in form of interaction) it was still live dancing every evening; that I was impressed to be able to reach so many viewers all over the world (there were viewers from Hong Kong who followed the performance at 4 in the morning.) ☺

DIN A 13: https://www.din-a13.de/de/tanzcompany/produktionen/cellar-and-secrets-beyond-reason

Making off Cellar and Secrets – Beyond reason: https://vimeo.com/471361985

cutouts early rehearsal: https://vimeo.com/462988643

THINK TANK

Nimi Ravindran

Before we forget to remember

Start date: March 2020

A performance about memory, loss and death

- The idea was born in 2014 after a very personal experience.
- It was initially meant to be a play, with a script, but that idea seemed redundant as time went by
- Finally in March 2020 (a week before the lockdown in India) I found a person who was interested in being part of the project. We decided to think about form only after some initial research.

A project that failed!!

- I'm still reluctant to call it a project that failed.
- As of now, I think I can reconcile to the fact that it has failed to take off. Postponed at best!
- The lockdown seemed the perfect time to get it going, but maybe there's nothing called a perfect time. Certainly not a lockdown period.

Reasons for Failure to take off

- Finances
- Lack of planning
- Not taking into consideration caste/class/cultural context and other inequities in a country like India at a time like this.
- The complete dependency on technology and the lack of both know-how and interest in the field.
- Language and communication

The difficulties of a transnational collaboration: Benjamin Brix in Berlin

Distance/Travel | Time Zone differences | Language | Finances | Cultural context

A multi-disciplinary performance

I won't name the other three collaborators. I'll refer to them as X, Y and Z.
X: Research Asst
Y: Technical Assistant to work with Ben
Z: Production Manager

Caste, Class and Covid

X insists that despite claiming to be woke, we (the rest of the team) were tone-deaf to caste and class politics. He was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I plead guilty, we have not thought about it (which is a problem) we talk, reconcile and move on cautiously. A small misunderstanding with Y and Z thanks to tech glitches.

August 2020

We decide on a site-specific performance at 1, Shanti Road in the gallery and courtyard to a small audience of 40 people.
The show will incorporate live performance, sound and video installations

October 2020

The best-laid plans come to naught. Almost everyone on the team (except me) is dealing with a Covid-19 related crisis, we make very little progress. And the tech glitches make even a regular zoom call unbearable. The new plans look like this:

- The venue will most likely be my house
- We have run out of the ₹ 25,000 that I started with and we haven't broken any ground yet.
- Covid doesn't look like it's going anywhere
- Filming without Ben seems a recipe for disaster

Update as of November 2020

- Start work on research (personal)
- Looking for some funding.
- Rest of the team to come on board only after we find funding.
- Hold off performance till October ' 21.
- Continue with research work.
- Find a local filmmaker to work with Ben remotely.
- Collaborate with someone locally who can visualize new possibilities on zoom, for/with a live performance.

Before we forget

- Last group call: 18 November' 2020
- I hope someday in the future we can look back and laugh at all this, I say.
- I hope we can afford to laugh, X says.
- No one is sure of anything, except that the project is on hold...
- This was a project about memory, what will we remember of this time, how will we remember it?
- In fact, that sounds like a whole new project... Remembering the 'Before we forget to remember' project.
- To be continued.....................................

Shabari Rao
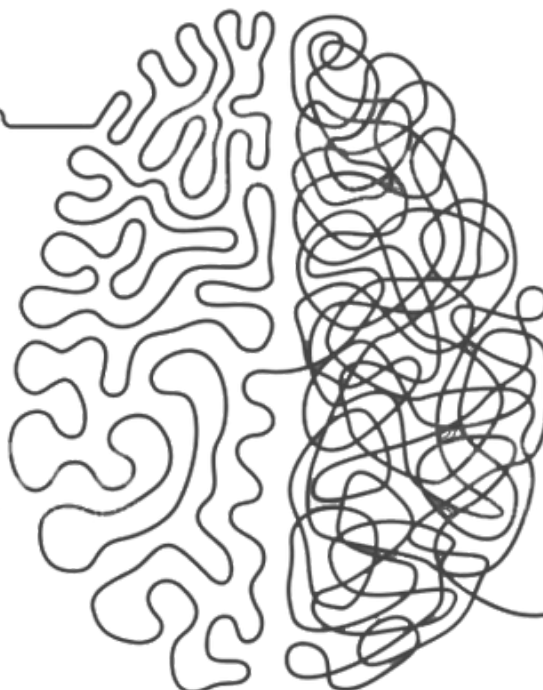
From March 2020 when I, along with 4 other women, were on the verge of leaving on tour to perform in Rotterdam for the International Community Arts Festival, and then to New York as artists in residence at NYU, I have not engaged in any performance making or doing as I have known it in the past. Not even a version of something that looks like what I have done before.

Like many others, I had to deal with the immediate implications of the lockdown: kids, home, health (mental, emotional and physical). And a lot of my time and energy was spent in undocumented care work with nothing to show at the end of each day even though I'd be completely exhausted! I had a renewed respect for the feminists of my mother's generation and before, who gave us the possibility of aspiring to more than this!

The early days of the pandemic and lockdown felt, simultaneously, like a very busy and a very empty time. I felt a great sense of paralysis in terms of work, not knowing how to respond and what to do. It made me consider what my role is, what I want it to be, and what it can be. I am providing this personal context because I think my work and response to the times really came out of what I was going through myself. For me personally, not being too attached to an identity of artist, performer, etc has helped. As an independent practitioner, without any institutional or organisational affiliation and therefore no demands, I have the freedom to create (or not) what seems most relevant to me.

I see three interlinked crises unfolding in the world around me. One is a crisis of community: where there is a lack of connection with 'other-ed' human beings. One is ecological: where there is a disconnect with the natural world. And one is personal: where there is a deep feeling of internal disconnect. All of these, it seems to me, are symptoms of a breakdown in relationship and connection. And it is systemic power that creates, sustains, and perpetuates these divisions. So it becomes an act of criticality and resistance to offer a way of reconnecting, at least in one area of the breakdown.

I made a set of three voice recordings that offer the listener a 'form-agnostic' way of connecting back with the body, without focus on any kind of commonly expected outcome – even 'mindfulness' is now an outcome to be measured!

I consider this good practice because:

1. I was able to use my skills, interests and training, to
2. respond to current needs, and
3. work with(in) the constraints of the times.

To expand:
1. Skills in taking people through an experience that is focused on the body; interest in rebuilding a connection between a sense of self and the body; and training of focusing one's attention on discovery within the body.
2. Current need to rest and release in times of anxiety, and to reconnect with the body in times of isolation.
3. Constraints in terms of contact, or lack of it; use of technology to disseminate the artefact, working individually and remotely.

In other words, I was able to take what I had, and respond to what I saw, in a way that seemed relevant and meaningful.

What I made looks nothing like a performance – it's not focused on external communication or storytelling in any way. But what is becoming more and more clear to me, is that my primary interest is the body as a site for discovery and connection/relationship. That is the body in all its messy complexity and all its far-reaching implications.

You can find the recordings here:
https://soundcloud.com/user-275487812/sets/somatic-exercises-june-2020

Gaps in this project:
I don't know, and can not know, the full impact of this project. It has been made accessible to the public through a website. So I'm not sure how many, or what kind of people heard it, and what their responses were. In performance, one gets an immediate sense of how the work is being experienced and received by the audience. But in this case, the experiencing of the work feels very remote, much like a paper that is published. I have also independently sent it to people who have expressed an interest, and the feedback there has been very much in line with the intent of the offering. But I don't know for sure what the reach and response has been.

Sharon Paz

Engagement of audience beyond watching on screen

In my short presentation, I would like to present three different projects I made as an example for possible formats of engagement in our strange times today. What bothers me with online viewing is the passivity of the viewer.

The three projects are: "WE FORGOT" (2015) - a performance developed for a small group of max 30 people; "REMEMBER" (2018) - a memorial path that uses mobile devices for an individual virtual experience in relation to site-specific; and a new work, "DARE TO DREAM" (2020) - an interactive video that can be viewed online.

Those are three projects that I think can still work today with social distancing; they all mix between technology and physicality, they create a reaction, interaction, and avoid passive viewing.

Since my background is visual art, my focus in creating performances is to stretch the conservative frontal experience. "WE FORGOT", is an example of a close combination of video and performance - the space was divided into two by video screens, and the audience moves from one to the other after 30 min.

The work "WE FORGOT" does not represent moments of forgetting as much as it depicts the re-construction processes of individual memory. In the first part, the spectators are invited by performers to explore everyday acts against the background of a video projection. Like the film images themselves, they are matched to particular objects such as a broom, a candle, or a shovel. In the second part, the spectators' walk to the other side, they see different images showing the interactions of the next group of participants. A soundtrack complements the visual narration with personal fragments of memory, war and displacement from the perspective of a storyteller. The visual and textual collage is based on stories and memories of the different group members.

Link to trailer: https://vimeo.com/132304701

"REMEMBER" is a Public Art permanent project in Campus Charité Mitte. It was developed in collaboration with Danielle Ana Füglistaller, Jürgen Salzmann and Karl-Heinz Stenz. The work is presented with an App available both for iOS/Android. There are 6 Sculptures spread on the campus and function as departure points, the whole tour is around 45 minutes, depending on the viewer.
As an interactive memorial, "REMEMBER" brings traces of this past into the present. It connects current technologies that we all use every day with meaningful content. In each station, the viewer accesses different experiences: one is a 360-degree film, one station is a video walk where the audience walks into an active psychological department, in another the camera is open to have an AR experience. Through the combination of the video art and the original environment, the project activates the viewer to create a living remembrance and reflection on history.

Project website: remember.charite.de

Link to short trailer: https://vimeo.com/243618092

"DARE to DREAM" is an interactive video installation that positions the viewer in between reality and fiction, based on research into the Olympic games in 1936 Berlin, focusing on two very different women who were eventually used for fascist propaganda. The video is shot like an interview, addressing past events, partly as a reenactment of the archival testimony and interviews with Margaret Lambert (Gretel Bergmann) and Leni Riefenstahl, later in their life.

The format presents a selection between two choices, sometimes choosing what question to ask, choosing what subject to talk about or choosing between different answers. The viewer can navigate the story through their choices.

Link to short trailer: https://vimeo.com/463772535

Srividya Srinivas

Theatre Professionals Education and The School Library Project

Some of the roots of the work we are doing in **Theatre Professionals Education** began with the intensive German Methods of Theatre Pedagogy workshop we had done with Sophia and Edda Holl, back in 2012. The work has grown and adapted over the years to our context in urban India. We have grown from what was initially the Drama in Schools Programme to the Young People's Theatre Programme and now, we are Theatre Professionals Education. While we still work directly with children and young people, our aim was to ingrain drama pedagogy within the school culture itself. Therefore, our focus has shifted from working directly with children to working with educators. Unfortunately, drama as a subject tends to be pigeon-holed with only 1 teacher working in isolation, while other subjects tend to have a team of teachers working together. No one seems to have an understanding of what is taking place in the drama classroom. Therefore, during budget cuts, the arts are the 1st to go.

With all this in mind, we designed the *Using Drama for Learning Programme*, or the *UDL*, which consisted of 4 stages of intensive workshopping and mentoring and training 24-28 teachers at a time in workshops, and then going in to see their work in the classroom. We typically worked with homeroom and primary school teachers to use drama as a pedagogical tool in every subject. This also helped in making learning more visible across subjects and created more dialogue between teachers. Unfortunately in India, teaching is a monologue, which happens in isolation, so peer learning is an alien concept. So through the UDL, we set up systems to encourage teachers to work together in peer groups, thereby creating a support system as well through drama based tools.

We now come to the pandemic. Schools in India shut on the 13th of March and lockdown happened across India between 20th and 30th of March. While schools took some time to figure things out, we also took a pause to start figuring our next steps. It was also at this time, when the lockdown started, that we started **The School Library Project**, a collaborative initiative by Theatre Professionals Education. We are a group of 5 librarians sitting across Mumbai, Bangalore and Delhi. All of us use the designation "librarian". Librarians are after all multi-faceted and talented people who are dedicated to spreading knowledge, joy, fun, and good stories. Sitting in our respective homes during the India lockdown, we felt that though we are social distancing, it matters to keep our communities strong for our children and young people. Every video, piece of content, or information has come from our love of sharing. Our community of contributors are made up of performers, storytellers, artists, etc. who share their work with us. We had to ensure TSLP was free because a) we didn't have the funds but most importantly, our content has been used by NGOs for their children in low-income communities, for example by Hasiru Dala in Bangalore and Slam Out Loud in Delhi. We currently have a collaboration with Sarmaya, an online museum of Indian culture, as well as with ThinkArts.

Meanwhile, we started getting feedback from various educators about how levels of engagement was drastically decreasing among learners, with students pretending to have bad connectivity, to students zoom-bombing online classrooms. After hearing all these stories, we all sat down to brainstorm. We have a whole lot of tools, but the question was how they would work online. Meanwhile, NEP 2020 was also published, which really looked at adopting an arts-based pedagogy. We had to look at what was already available in the online space that would work for us, such as the chatbox, breakout rooms, spotlighting, etc. We then looked at the transferability of these tools and have designed our online Drama For Learning, or DFL course for teachers of all subject areas, with 3 workshops of 2 hours each.

Our main component for this workshop was Social Emotional Learning or SEL. This component was mainly for teachers, though they could take the tools into their classroom as well, as it was important to address the wellbeing of teachers, which was not being addressed otherwise.

Apart from this, we have also been running online drama workshops for children, Drama Time by TSLP as well as masterclasses for educators and drama educators, from around the world, such as Stefan Hermann and Sylvie Meltzer, who is in Australia. This would not have been possible, if not for the pandemic. While we would have collaborated with these people when they come into Bangalore or Bombay, this kind of collaboration would not have been possible had we not gone digital, and putting them out in to the community who are already working in the applied theatre field.

In all of this, the team also recently did our first performance of Devashish Makhija's When Ali Became Bajrangbali. While working on this performance, we had initially decided to do a live zoom performance, but with our actors sitting in different cities, and our internet connectivity not being reliable, we decided to do a pre-recorded version. Through this play, we got our audience to think about the environment and how we can use everyday objects that are lying around in our house, like ladles, staplers and cello-tape rolls to tell a story. In fact, Devashish Makhija was impressed by how our performance was, in his words, sending out a message about recycling, not wasting and nudging everyone to move closer and closer to nature. We are now trying to take this performance into schools with an educational component, where our young audience get to hot-seat all the characters they saw in the performance and understand the importance of preserving our earth.

We are yearning for the physical space of working and collaborating, but we know the digital has allowed us to cross cities, states, and countries to work in a way we haven't before. So hopefully once things normalise we keep a healthy blend of the two.

The School Library Project is a collaborative initiative started by *Theatre Professionals Education.*

All of us use the designation "librarian". Librarians are after all multi-faceted and talented people who are dedicated to spreading knowledge, joy, fun, and good stories. Sitting in our respective homes during the India lockdown, we felt that though we are social distancing, it matters to keep our communities strong for our children and young people. Every video, piece of content, or information has come from our love of sharing.

As we grow, we hope, like the best of school libraries, we have something that excites every child. We don't believe in barriers, so age, language, and topics have not been limited on this platform. We do however ensure that all content has been proofed or watched by one of our librarians.

We at **The School Library Project** enjoy watching each piece of content we share with you. We hope that anyone who comes to our pages on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube feels that same sense of enjoyment.

As teachers and educators, we realise that stories and knowledge hold the key to unlocking ways of living that will save us. We know being engaged with an activity where you make something is a way to heal your mind, body, and soul. We hope that every person, adult or child, finds something they enjoy on our pages.

**The Online Drama for Learning (ODFL) programme**

was designed in response to the feedback we received from educators who were struggling to make the online space more engaging for their learners, as well as the NEP 2020 that came out recently, which really looked at adopting an arts-based pedagogy. We had to look at tools available in the online space, such as the chat-box, breakout rooms and spotlighting. These workshops are over 3 days, of 2 hours per session.

Our main component for this workshop was Social Emotional Learning. This component was mainly for teachers, though they could take the tools into their classroom as well, as it was important to address the wellbeing of teachers, which was not being addressed otherwise.

"When Ali Became Bajrangbali"

Tanvi Shah
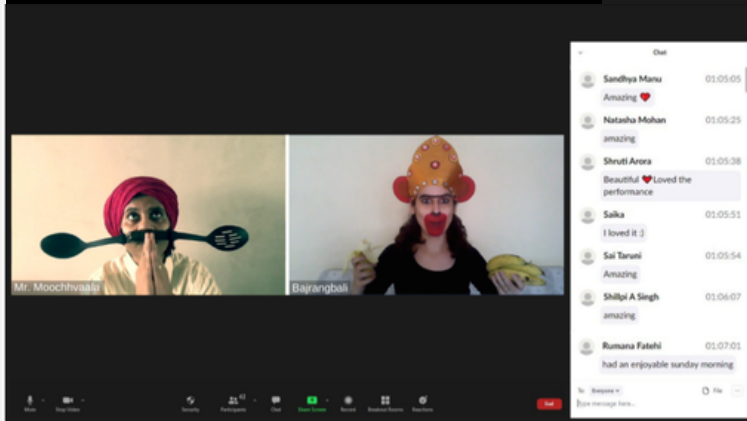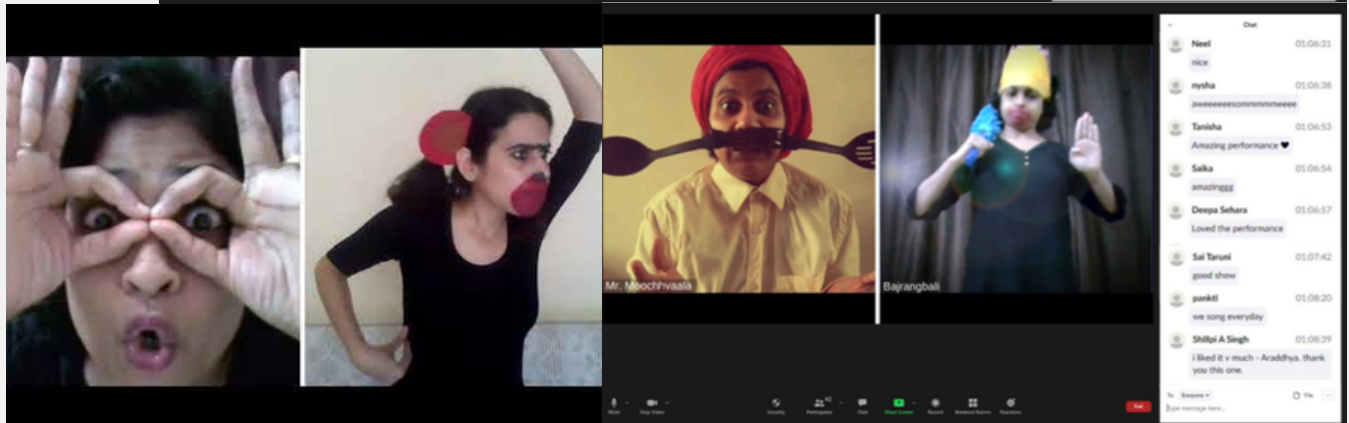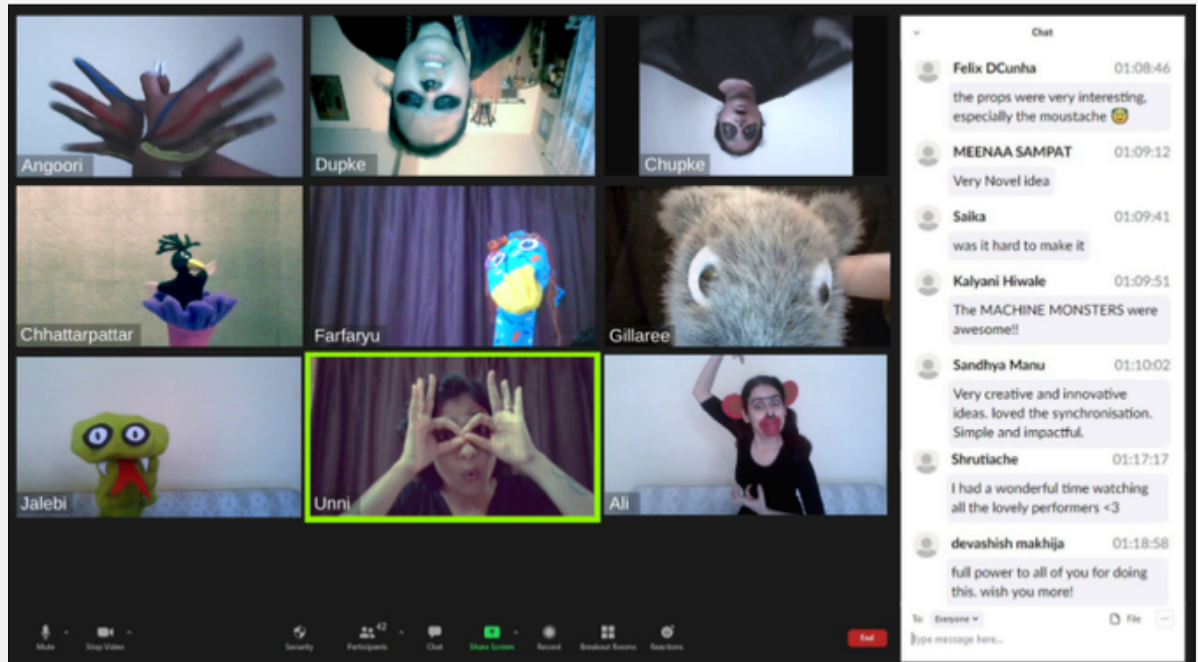
The Theatre Broadcast

"I am primarily a theatre practitioner, but have been exploring my role as a mediator and curator during the pandemic, and want to share a fledging pet project I embarked on May 18, roughly two months into the lockdown. The project is an irregular theatre broadcast shared via WhatsApp that shared recommendations for upcoming theatre pieces and works worthy of a wider audience. This is something I had been doing for friends and family for years but wanted to do in a more or less regular way.
My objectives starting out were :

- To retain and build theatre audiences during the pandemic when live theatre had halted but there was a proliferation of online dramatic work – either archived and pre-recorded or created in response of the time and current online platforms.

- To start conversations around theatre watching, thereby making it more of a routine and less of an "event" or a novelty. The idea was to make theatre conversations part of living room conversations.

- To understand whether watching more theatre could have any bearings on audiences seeing themselves as active patrons, not just passive viewers, who support the journey of specific artists/forms/causes.

- Addressing a demand I'd seen in several family friends and acquaintances – usually between the ages of 30 - 60 years – who told me that there are curious about theatre but don't know where to go looking for it or what to look for. They felt like they could be invested but had no mediator recommending a way into theatre the way there exists widely for films and OTT content.

- To see whether captive OTT audiences – who often let their streaming apps' current top picks decide their evening's entertainment for them – could be co-opted for the digital theatre boom, and perhaps grow to watch performances that they normally wouldn't, even ones that aren't a "98% Match" for them.

- To build a community so that our viewing habits needn't always feel so individual.

- To share my enthusiasms about our access to a wide range of national international performances – both ticketed and freely available – that we may never have gotten to see live, regardless of the pandemic.

I currently have 159 people on my broadcast list, which has grown organically from the initial 120 friends and acquaintances I invited. I have not yet publicized it on any social media platforms, and the strangers who requested to join the list came due to word-of-mouth recommendations. 2 people have also requested to opt-out of the broadcast since May, saying that they didn't have the mental bandwidth to watch anything I was sending to them and it was making them guilty to see my suggestions pop up on their phones.

So far (at the time of this presentation), I have sent the broadcast audience 54 viewing recommendations, not including calls for theatre/artists related donations for pandemic-relief funds. That is an average of 2.5 theatre recommendations via personal WhatsApp since May. These messages include the performance details (synopsis, theatre company, language, duration, availability until x time/date) alongside some personal insights/research/thoughts on the process, or company with additional posters, theatre trailers, reviews and of course ticket links. I usually end my long-form messages asking folks to engage with me if they do catch the recommended performance and tell me what they thought. I tend to send a large number of these broadcasts over or prior to the weekend since my target audiences are non-theatre folk who have regular day jobs and are keen to explore something new in their downtime.

I've had some really interesting conversations through the broadcast. I had a bout of 'short plays to begin your day with' which worked well in terms of engagement – people enjoyed the idea of a 12 – 15 minute play they could watch before breakfast. The Swedish translation of Abhishek Majumdar's short play 'Salt' – a gripping tale about a mother raising two daughters on stories and salt, a response to the starvation crisis in India due to the pandemic and its poor management – got a strong response. People who I can safely call right-leaning and privileged, who could not otherwise have been persuaded to watch a piece like 'Salt' at the theatre – they would have found it too "preachy", "heavy", "too political" – saw it online and wrote in to say that they were shaken and moved. Archival footage like that of Habib Tanvir's historical play 'Agra Bazaar' by the Sangeet Natak Akademi from The Ministry of Culture brought forth a whole new older audience who remembered watching the play live decades ago. An 11- minute short film created by theatre-maker and puppeteer Anurupa Roy on the crisis of the migrant workers engaged people who professed that they had been vehemently avoiding "anything depressing" in the news (as is our privilege) but couldn't escape the paper puppet piece and its impact due to its brevity and accessibility. Sharing work spurred people to share their own suggestions – from poetry to folk mystic songs! A broadcast audience member shared an interesting insight when discussing this spurt of engagement – "Covid has made people want to spend time engaging with cultural things because this lockdown has been branded as a time for self-development."

When this Think Tank came along, I realized I had many intangible takeaways from 6 months of sharing digital theatre recommendations from India and across the world but had never attempted a quantitative survey of theatre-watching habits before, to see what can be done to bring more audiences and retain older loyal ones.

Presenting some of the survey findings – I shared this survey of 26 questions with a select number of people from the broadcast who were engaging/had at some point engaged with me through it. I received 26 responses, which is 16.35% of the total broadcast size. I am no market data analyst, so I'll glean insights where I can!

I used to think that the long con objective of the broadcast was generating more live audiences for theatre post-pandemic, but these survey responses have shown me the need for both live and digital theatre, as some potential audiences can only engage digitally. I also see that while most folks prefer to watch pre-recorded digital theatre on their own time instead of live events, that choice strips away the essential community viewing aspect of theatre. So, while I'm glad people seem to be watching more theatre, it's not theatre as I know it. I've also been wondering about the complacency brought on by access to free resources, and this is something I want to explore further. One of my key takeaways from this little experiment has been this – I see myself not only as a theatre practitioner but now more than ever also as a cultural mediator and curator because I believe I need to be the latter in order to actually create and build audiences for my own work and the work of my contemporaries.

Many more learnings to come, I am sure."

THEATRE BROADCAST SURVEY RESULTS

9th November 2020 | Flinn Works Think Tank

What for you is the difference between the experience of watching shows and films on OTT platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar etc) v/s watching digital theatre?

- "Theatre always has a personal feel."
- "The prospect of chatting with the Cast n' Crew immediately after or sometime later."
- "The live component and the economy of scale in terms of set design and devising."
- "It's not as good. Digital theatre is trying to put plays on a screen platform. So it's jarring because the element of live presence does matter for a play. The moment a play comes on screen it becomes part of the film spectrum."
- "I find the digital theatre performances more engaging and intimate. Possibly since many of the performances are live, and also because they're on streaming apps like Zoom where there's scope for interacting with the audience."
- "I cannot pause a digital theatre performance. This is as it should be, but the problem is that I don't want to stare at a screen for so long."
- "The production quality. OTT platforms offer a more immersive experience with sound and visual effects. Digital theatre not so much. Miss the warmth of people clapping together in an auditorium."
- "Its live and you see raw talent perform - without any editing. And the content is very intriguing." · "Supporting smaller productions."
- "More experimental, and less formulaic, predictable. Some online performances truly inspire and expand the mind."
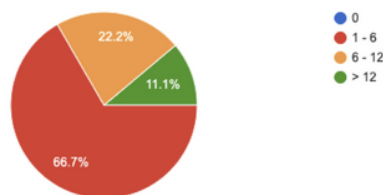
On average, how many live theatre plays did you watch annually before the pandemic?
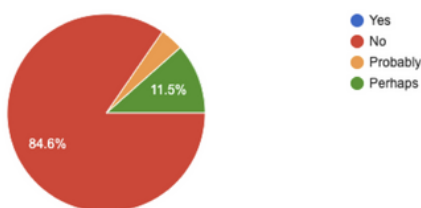
27 responses

- 0
- 1 - 6
- 6 - 12
- > 12

14.8%
11.1%
70.4%
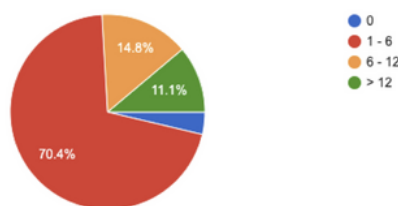
Roughly how many digital theatre offerings did you watch during the pandemic? (March - Nov 2020)

27 responses

- 0
- 1 - 6
- 6 - 12
- > 12

22.2%
11.1%
66.7%

Would you have watched these plays anyway, regardless of my recommendation?

26 responses

- Yes
- No
- Probably
- Perhaps

11.5%
84.6%

Would/Could you have watched the theatre pieces you saw over these past 8 months if there wasn't a global pandemic?

27 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- (Some wouldn't have been available, but others I guess I would have

14.8%
7.4%
74.1%
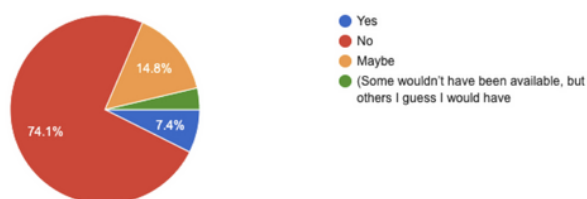
Have you watched more experimental/unconventional work these past eight months, that you may not have gone to watch otherwise?

27 responses

- Yes
- No

40.7%
59.3%
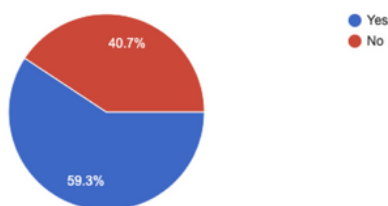
What productions attract you more from my broadcast?

27 responses

- International theatre productions
- National theatre productions
- Doesn't matter where they're from as long as the subject matter seems interesting

81.5%
14.8%

How do you feel about paying to watch theatre online?

- Paying without good reviews or enough information is more a difficult choice to make · It raises my expectations. Not necessarily in a bad way. I feel like I'm a lot more critical.
- It makes me bound by the time constraints to watch the show which I find difficult due to my work commitments.
- I feel good supporting the artist while at the same time I feel invested in the performance
- Unfortunately, it does put me off from watching shows.
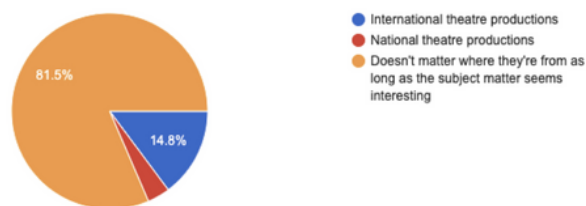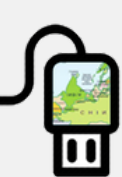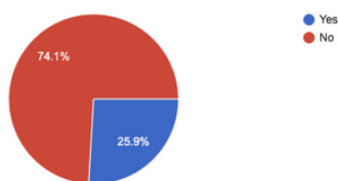- Ticketed shows make me feel like a responsible member of the arts community - artists must be well paid so they can continue to create work for us.
- Depends on the story and the cost of the play. If the cost is prohibitively high, I do get put off.
- Nothing should be free. I'm happy to pay.
- I think a subscription model would work best compared to ticket sales. It does have an impact on me if I don't know how good the play is going to be or if there are no notable actors or if I have never heard of the director or if the content seems too heavy.
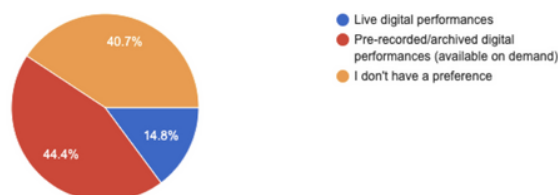
Have you ever thought of theatre as a difficult-to-access, high-brow, "goes-over-my-head" art form?
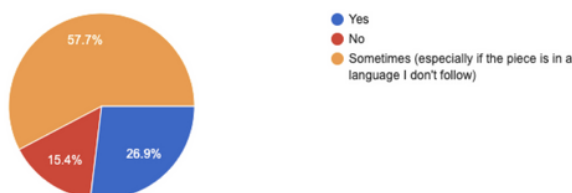
27 responses

- Yes
- No

74.1%
25.9%

In the online theatre viewing world, which of the following do you prefer?

27 responses

- Live digital performances
- Pre-recorded/archived digital performances (available on demand)
- I don't have a preference

40.7%
44.4%
14.8%

Do you avail of the subtitles offered in many digital theatre events?

26 responses

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes (especially if the piece is in a language I don't follow)

57.7%
15.4%
26.9%

What sort of theatre events have you watched these past eight months?

27 responses

- Free shows
- Ticketed shows
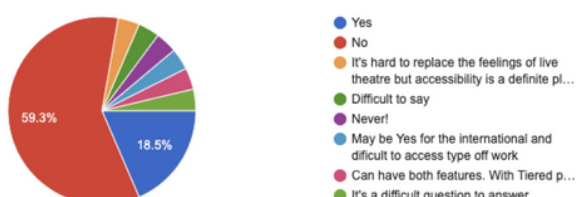- Both free and ticketed shows

51.9%
40.7%
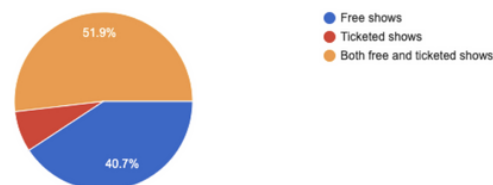
What value - if any - does this theatre broadcast add to your life?

- "Broadened my experience and views as saw quite a few international broadcast."
- "Being less tech-savvy, this was a new experience for me, which gave me an opportunity to explore and experience theatre digitally. Also, I had access to so many different genres of theatre."
- "The labour of scouring for options myself. Sometimes I've simply gone to your list to see what I'm in the mood for - like my own personal Bookmyshow! Thank you for starting this!!!"
- "I live alone and haven't stepped out of my campus since March. The broadcast makes me feel connected to the outside world in a way that OTT platforms and sports don't."
- "It reminds me that the theatre world is still alive and adapting. I may not attend much, about I'm happy to know they're happening."
- "It brings the world to my Whatsapp. Plus the curator's note helps justify if I should give my time to it."
- "I think it's of great value for people like me who don't actively look for plays until it is recommended by someone. This adds value as it is being recommended rather than just a listing on another app."
- "It's an enjoyable experience giving me access to more narratives and styles of production. Thank you for bringing this to me."

Do you think a play's increased accessibility in the digital sphere is worth the price of losing the live experience?

27 responses

- Yes
- No
- It's hard to replace the feelings of live theatre but accessibility is a definite pl...
- Difficult to say
- Never!
- May be Yes for the international and difficult to access type off work
- Can have both features. With Tiered p...
- It's a difficult question to answer.

59.3%
18.5%

Post-pandemic, do you think you will watch more live theatre than you used to?

27 responses

- Yes
- No
- Depends on accessibility in the place I love
- Maybe
- Yes, but still offline. Still as a social experience rather than purely for the a...
- Unsure.
- I used to watch a lot anyway
- If more of it is available online then de...

29.6%
48.1%

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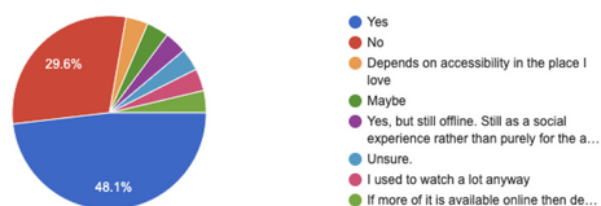
Venuri
Perera

In 2018, Zwoisy Mears - Clarke, (Jamaica/Germany) and I began a collaboration where we would interrogate our proximity to whiteness and our inherited privileges of being English speaking middle class from former British colonies. Supported by the Goethe Institut's coproduction fund, the work in progress titled 'Porcelain White' was presented in Colombo. In this project, we also addressed equal collaboration and we had two dramaturgs - Sunila Galapatti from Sri Lanka and the only German in the project, Sara Mikolai, who is of Sri Lankan Tamil and German descent.

We didn't have adequate funds for us to come together for the time necessary to really work on it and complete it. So we had decided to work separately in our own countries, and create two solos, and that the work would be mainly a kind of a diptych. We were offered a two-week residency in Sophiensaele, Berlin where we were going to find the connections and complete the work. This was to premier at Theaterformen Festival in June 2020. Due to Covid, it was no longer possible to go ahead with festival, so Theaterformen offered us the possibility of participating in a part-online festival and to think differently about how we would like to engage with the work. We were invited to have a conversation with an art scholar, but we decided instead to talk to each other.

Conversation and interviewing each other had been the main dramaturgical framework of our work initially, but most of these conversations did not find its way into the Colombo version where the text was very minimal. We thought this would be a good opportunity to bring these conversations back and go even deeper. In the beginning, we had a very basic and naive idea of maybe recording a zoom conversation, but we were saturated with this and thought no let's film us in different locations, and edit it together somehow. I knew I wanted to be situated in my ancestral home, and Zwoisy would be in the botanical gardens in Cologne which also has complicated colonial history.

One thing led to another, I invited my friend Arun Welendawe-Prematilake who is a theatre maker, writer and aspiring filmmaker on board as this was not our medium. Zwoisy invited a cinematographer Florence Freitag from Germany. And we ended up with a film. 'Porcelain White: The Conversation'. We had a rough plan - we had some texts, we would continue to work with the objects we had in the performance - tea cups and a toilet, and we had certain movement sections or traces from the previous work. We had to wait till curfew in Sri Lanka was lifted, so we could travel to a location in Kitulgala, which is three hours away from Colombo. Zwoisy and I decided to shoot on the same days, we had a zoom conversation the night before about what kind of shots we would take. Arun and I received all the footage, and the film was edited by Arun and Ryan in four days. Although we had talked, certain things had got lost in translation and we had very different kind of footage in terms of rhythm, duration and quantity. So it was kind of like choreography, putting the film together. The film is overlaid with a voice-over, the conversation between me and Zwoisy. The overall sound was designed by Isuru Kumarasinghe from Sri Lanka who had been with us since the beginning of the project.

This was a really nice experience because we were able to go deeper into our very different contexts and realities, map our bodies on these spaces laden with complex histories, and to bring the audiences into the intimate space of my family home.

Normally our works are for small audiences, sometimes just one audience member at a time, and with this medium, going online allowed for a large cross section of people to be able to see the work. Which was in one sense scary and 'exposing' but in another sense deeply satisfying. It brought out so many conversations we don't think we could have had if it had been just with the usual theatre going audience. Zwoisy had never shown his work in Jamaica and this film opened up some very difficult conversations for him with his family back home.

I just moved to Amsterdam and Zwoisy lives not far away in Cologne, and we had been invited to present the performance at Veem here in Amsterdam. But as we didn't think we would be able to realistically work on it further to really make a final work, we proposed the option of showing the film with a post film chat. Having the film made it possible for us to go ahead despite the increasing Coronavirus precautions. The film was not made for the big screen but for computer viewing, but in the end I think it worked quite well. There was a small gathering of people on site, plus a few more online. The talk was moderated by activist-artist politician Quinsy Gario, and it brought out another layer of conversation. There was a Dutch man of mixed Sri Lankan descent who had come for the showing and it was moving to hear his own complex feelings and reflections about his ancestry and the Dutch colonial presence in Sri Lanka.

We were scheduled to the show the film in Dusseldorf NRW on the 5th and 6th of December but everything is cancelled until the 30th of November. Here, we were to show the film to a limited audience, have a conversation as well as a workshop for the few people who could be physically present. *

This film has really allowed for us to share the work in the current situation. The most important thing for us is to be able to continue to have these conversations and contribute to the growing discourse around the complex traces we embody with our colonial heritage, the complications of our proximity to whiteness, our privileges and how that shifts - now that I too am in Europe, clearly my position and how others position me is very different.

But we also want to insist on finding creative ways to gather as much as possible without it just being online. We have been thinking of different formats that could work in the future. We have a lot of footage that was not used in the film, and we could do part-installation part-performance, or go back to the idea of the separate solos, or think of other ways. Even going further with the text and think of some sort of publication.

*The film and a recorded post film conversation will be online at Tanzhaus NRW 11/12th December 2020. https://tanzhaus-nrw.de/en/event/2020/12/zwoisy-mears-clarke-venuri-perera

Excerpt of the performance in Colombo - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46Uy02RE_Ns

Short documentation of the collaboration (for Colombo version) - https://vimeo.com/318986739

Vivek
Madan

Performing Online and Live

I am Vivek Madan, an actor and producer/curator based out of Bangalore.

My most recent offering as an actor is QTP's production of Every Brilliant Thing, a solo interactive piece written by Duncan McMillan and Johnny Donahoe, and directed by Q. We opened the play in March 2019 and completed 45 shows around the country until we were forced into a hiatus, like the rest of the world, because of the pandemic.

Without giving too much away, the play follows the journey of a 7-year-old boy dealing with the inexplicable fact that his mother is unhappy and wants to die. So, he begins making a list of brilliant things to cheer her up, not realising that the list, rather than help its intended recipient, is something that gives him strength. Eventually, he grows into an adult, has his own tryst with depression and at the end, turns the corner by seeking help.

The play is written very cleverly, using the audience at various points to read out items from the list of brilliant things, or 'recruiting' them to play some of the characters the protagonist interacts with. By making the audience participation an essential and non-negotiable part of the storytelling, the playwrights allude to the criticality of community participation, of needing support from those around you, in the healing process

So, when we went online with the play, there were, obviously, numerous challenges. This is a short and in no way exhaustive list of those challenges, and the things we did (or tried to do) to mitigate their effects on the performance, and on ourselves.

Some things to keep in mind: This is a solo piece. We performed it in my home, using my laptop, its inbuilt camera and a wireless headset, while on Zoom.

The first thing to take a toll on me was the fact that I was cameraman, stage manager, lighting assistant, coffee-maker and actor. Now with lockdowns having eased, it'll be easier to have some support 'on location' but at the time, it was just me and it was taxing to do all of that and rehearse and perform.

Coming to performing. There are so many small hurdles that I hadn't considered…

The fact that I had to look into the camera on my laptop, in order for it to seem like I was making eye contact. I couldn't look at the faces of the audience on my screen, except at certain specific points, because looking at them in their homes, rather than looking at them on my screen, was my only link to them.

Then there's the fact that everyone is on mute.

And I could only hear myself.

It was *really* weird.

And it changed my relationship with the silences in the play.

Another thing that changed tangibly, was the tone of certain sections. Since I couldn't rely on subliminal communication through gesture, through a glance at a particular person, I found that I needed to be more instructive in my interactions. I needed to spell out what I needed, whom I was requesting help from, and that meant the tone, the pace, my hold on the play changed significantly and had to be balanced with more ease, more candour.

There were other challenges (I had to constantly look at myself on the screen to check if I was in the frame, it was oddly hypnotic and very distracting; I hated the way I would use my hands in mid-shots; I had to work hard to stay off-centre in the frame because that's so much more interesting, but so much riskier and so not natural) but in the interest of brevity, I will jump to the most significant one. Because of all of these various reasons, every acting impulse, every change in mood or tone or tempo, every reaction, had to be self-generated. For the most part, I simply had no idea how the audience was receiving it so I couldn't course correct. And except for the parts where I engage in dialogue with a member of the audience, I had nothing to play off of. It was like performing in (or into) a cave with Echo as my only audience member, invisible but there, giving back only what I gave and not an iota more.

As daunting as all of this sounds, we worked it all out, one by one. And the things that held us in good stead are the things that haven't changed in the transition from stage to digital.

1. **How do we use what we have**, to the best of our ability? Less is more is our mantra. But the camera shows more by default. How do we make the most of it? How do we use the camera to help us tell the story, rather than view it as a transmitter? Strange, new territory.

2. We always sought the answer to the **question of why**. Why would I move now? Why switch now? Why does the frame need to be wide for this portion and why come so close at this other one? An example: we wondered why I was telling this story. At the stage show, we had made the room feel like a support group, a unified and unifying space: something that bears out towards the end of the play. But here, with no way to unify anything, we said that I had invited people 'home' to simply share my story. I couldn't make it work. Which brings us to…

3. **Rehearsal. Trial and error. Serendipity.** Endless discussion, unpacking, unknotting, unlearning. I would say the words, "Thank you for being here, in my home" at the beginning of every preview. A couple of days before we opened, thanks to some feedback from a preview audience member, I added "And thank you for having me in yours" And that was it. It had taken us a long time to realise that we were so focused on how people were in my home; we hadn't caught on to the fact that I was in theirs! We had opened the door to that feeling of unity, of community!

4. **Trust.** In a long-distance rehearsal, it's almost like it has to be renewed. Because you expect the relationship to be the same, but it isn't. It loses some nuance, some of the ease; it gains a hard edge. You can sense it in interruptions, or when you have to repeat something because of audio failure, or when you can't quite see where the other person's attention is or where the tension in their body is. So, trust. Same as in the stage version, but with a premium.

And then there are some things that even rehearsal can't help with. Internet issues. Power cuts. Audience members forgetting their lines or their cues (as simple as they were), people moving around during the show with their camera, unwittingly taking everyone else on a tour of their own homes as they combed their hair, made coffee, smoked a cigarette, turned on a mixie, drove a car!

For these things, **there was a team**. On the stage show, we have one stage manager who runs sound, and one person on lights. Here, we had a team of five people. Someone was monitoring audience participation and stepping in when they missed a cue, someone else was writing closed captions (a medium-based addition that really mitigated the distance), a third person was on sound, four and five were on tech support. And every member of the team had a backup person, in case their internet or power fluctuated. It was a large-scale operation with multiple redundancies built-in.

I'll leave you with two thoughts to consider. One is practical: we were only given permission to do 8 shows because digital performing rights is a new animal and agents and estates haven't quite figured it out yet. Until they do, in the way of most bureaucratic setups, the default response will be no. We were also affected by the IPRS (Indian Performing Rights Society) tariff for digital. They asked us for Rs. 60,000 per show. So, **copyrights and licenses for performing published works** can be a major hurdle.

And the second is philosophical. **Was what we did theatre?** Personally, I think there are several definitions of what can be construed as theatre and what can't and we all make that for ourselves.

Regardless of what that definition is, the digital medium for live performance is here. It was always coming, maybe in 10 or 15 or 20 years; the pandemic has forced it on us and perhaps it's that that sticks in our craws. But it is here. And some of us will use it, some will eschew it. Some will use it poorly; some will excel at it. Some will dabble in it, call it inter-disciplinary, experimental, avant-garde. Whatever it may be, it is here, it is legitimate and it requires the same honesty, rigour, patience and pattern of failure and problem-solving innovation that we have embraced while creating for the stage.

Long live the theatre.

A version of this piece first appeared in https://theatre-ink.com/ in September 2020.

Wesley
Ruzibiza

Transnational Challenges

With the pandemic situation taking the world by surprise, most arts organizations - theater and especially dance - accept the necessity for the virtualization of events. Most of us wanted to consider it a non-permanent situation that was more necessary for the survival of our work and our own survival.

With the movement restrictions and the whole world almost shut down, webinars, online conferences, performance live streaming on social networks, online courses, etc. challenged our way of working by creating new event formats that have affected our way of thinking about the arts, and impacted our professional sphere. Most cultural events have been cancelled and some have been postponed. It was critical that these major events be redesigned, adapted using the technologies already available (digital being the solution). Fortunately the arts world did not wait much to take on the challenge and customize their products to keep their industry alive, some of them being successful and some others being total failures due to the lack of experience that most of us had to offer to this unique artistic experience.

Social media has become even more established in our lives offering digital platforms as a canal of exposure to artists with limited means.

Most of the projects we created this year had transnational challenges, as we had to rethink a new way of collaborating, preparing and presenting shows with the travel restrictions in place. We had the opportunity to work in different transnational programs. In all of these different projects, we connected through video. The most challenging part was connecting through different time zones (being sometimes in different continents), and with different quality access to the internet bandwidth that gives us the option of communicating. But we decided to keep at our work and keep the creative process front and centre, against all odds.

For one of the projects, from the perspective of dance, we realised that however physical we would get, or however big our movements, the relationship between dancers wasn't building; it was becoming increasingly difficult to relate directly to the others' feelings to the point that we decided to cancel the project. It was just impossible bringing 3 different time zones in one room, time affecting the energy of the dancers (you can't have the same results if you are rehearsing in the morning or the evening etc.)

In this context, digital technology has taken on an even greater dimension, which I believe will certainly lead to major changes in the choreographic experience and the creation of new models of production and distribution support.

LEARNING FEMINISM FROM RWANDA:

Snapshots of the process, outcomes, and future plans of a "corona-related production"
Photo credits: Mayra Wallraff

Flinn Works' Lisa Stepf introduced the logistics and timelines of the process of 'Learning Feminism from Rwanda', their latest production that opened during the pandemic. Research for the performance began in February 2019, with artistic director team Sophia Stepf and Lisa Stepf travelling to Rwanda to conduct interviews and find collaborators.


After a year of research, the team went back to Rwanda's capital Kigali in February 2020 to cast the show and conduct workshops. The team also managed to get three days of live rehearsal with the selected cast, which turned out to be crucial at the brink of a global lockdown. Due to the pandemic, the rehearsal period in Rwanda and the live participation of Rwandan performers had to be reimagined. The format shifted to digitalized representations of three Rwandan performers pre-recorded on video, alongside two live performers – Lisa Stepf and Nirere Shanel, a Rwandan performer from Paris.

In August 2019, Sophia and Lisa directed the Rwandan performers on Zoom: devising, rehearsing, writing, and recording the three Rwandans in Kigali. Production assistants, videographers, and a dramaturg helped tell the story from their own remote locations.

In October 2020, the two live performers inhabited a theatre space with the recorded videos from the three Rwandan performers for a three-week live rehearsal period. The show opened at the end of October for limited audiences, and Flinn Works managed to have four shows in Berlin till another lockdown was announced in Germany on 2nd November 2020. They then went on to have four shows in Switzerland, where theatres were still open. A total of 336 people have seen the show so far.

THINK
TANK
2020
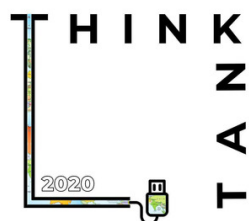
investigating and
innovating
transnational
theatre practises

Flinn Works entertained the idea of "undoing the existing format into a fully live performance" in January 2021, but since decided that it was unlikely given the global confusion re: travel rules and lockdown restrictions. There was also a realization that a show created to accommodate video and audio is created with a very specific lens, and cannot be turned into a live show which needs to be something else entirely. Instead, the Rwandan performers have been allotted some of the show's budget to create an artistic response to the current show and do live performances in Rwanda – something that was originally intended for 'Learning Feminism From Rwanda'.

Sophia shared that the changes in plan – unavoidable due to all things unprecedented – resulted in a lot of push and pull re: funding.

Wesley Ruzibiza – one of the performers recording from Rwanda – spoke about the challenges of having limited rehearsal time, of working without the director in the space with the performers, of the lack of live-ness since the performance was recorded, and the lack of debriefing time after rehearsal to discuss conflicts or observations. He also spoke of how the filming aspect took away the need to push oneself over and over to evolve with the performance every night. Finally, he shared how the process required him to place complete trust in his director and the dramaturg, since he had no idea how his recordings would be used and how much screen time he would get.

Konradin Kunze – Flinn Works member, but a spectator for this show – saw the final show on 1st November, before they shut the production in Germany to comply with the closing of theatres. He spoke of the audience's heightened collective sense of finality – their last theatre experience before the lockdown – and the excitement. With regards to representation, Konradin spoke of how the performers projected on video were either the same size as or bigger than the live performers on stage and each actor was given equal time to have their stories heard. The choreographed interactions between the projected and live bodies – whether they were fights, multilingual conversations, or dance routines – all added to a sense of collaboration, and made the digital-physical-hybrid piece seem like the right solution for such themes and such times. The only moment of disconnect, he recollected with a twinge of sadness, was when the audience realized that their applause wasn't reaching the Rwandan performers, who were not truly sharing the live moment with them. He wishes he could have thanked them for what they had done.

Sharon Paz

Access: How can we overcome the digital divide and engender access to technologies of creation and distribution?

Considering the question of how to address the audience with today's physical limitation and how this can become an advantage for creating new formats, my first line of thought was in two sections. The first is about a low tech or analogue approach, not using the internet but rather finding alternatives in the physical world and the second is by using the internet and the structures that are already being massively used.

Analogue performance using audio:
Using sound pre-recorded or live, creating a tour in the city where the audience follows a set of instructions. Suitable for individuals or groups, the audience can be the performer or interact with people they meet. Or it could be an active, game-like approach.
For example, *"Remote X"* by Rimini Protokoll (2016).
A group of 50 people set off into the city wearing headphones. They are guided by a synthetic voice - as we know them from GPS navigators. The encounter with this artificial intelligence leads the group to perform an experiment on themselves.
Link: https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/remote-x

Another example using "low-tech" such as telephone calls to communicate, creating a bridge between the audiences, the space and performance. *"Signs & Wunder"* at the Jungen Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, by Stockholm Syndrom (2014).
On 13 different routes, visitors to »Signs & Wunder« are guided by Altona in a 1: 1 situation by mobile phone. The voice at the other end of the line knows where it's going and sounds confident. Along the way, you will meet people, people with special abilities that will help you find the next way. This is a game.
Links: https://www.schauspielhaus.de/en_EN/archiv/signs-wunder.1007250
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adjpObH_ip0

I saw - or participated, rather - in "Remote X" in Berlin. As an audience, it was a very detached experience but also powerful, the context was also interesting placing the viewer in the digital world, using a computer generator voice, asking questions about AI and its role.

These ideas can be enhanced by developing multi tours for people where they remotely interact with each one another in the public space. Getting them to act and perhaps also giving others instructions, filming their actions, re-projecting this outcome in a different place on the globe live.

Using the internet: *Using social networks as a tool for storytelling*

Recently I started developing a new online story for Instagram, *"the_secretary_story"*. Creating alternative content for the social network platform. The new project focuses on inventing a character inspired by several leaders' secretaries, for example, Brunhilde Pomsel, the secretary of the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels; and Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries. A fictional story based on research includes their memories from the past combined within a reflection on nowadays events. The project is set to publish using social media as an Instagram story. The experimental work is a visual essay using contemporary tools to bring the past history into a dialogue with the present.

Link to "The_secretary_story", work in progress: https://www.instagram.com/the_secretary_story/

An interesting example for a non-art project: A Holocaust Story for the Social Media Generation. Eva's Instagram account, based on a diary kept by the real Eva Heyman in 1944, was live for the start of Israel's annual Holocaust Remembrance Day 2019. Link: https://www.instagram.com/eva.stories/?hl=de

While thinking about the project a different question came up: "How can we use the social media techniques of making people addicted to screen time, to become addicted to art?" Analyzing the rewards a user receives on those platforms, like share, for keeping the audience engaged in a virtual art or/and performance.

Remote interactive

The last idea I like to present is titled remote interactive, the idea to try to create a situation where there is a performance in a physical space, people watch the performance online but can interact. The viewer from home can choose a position, try several cameras on stage and can choose what to see, whom to follow, zoom in, a bit like this experience of using a drone, controlling the view of the camera. Giving the audience the ability to create their own editing, mimicking the stage where the perspective stays and moves from one action to another.

Srividya
Srinivas

Access: How can we overcome the digital divide and engender access to technologies of creation and distribution of art?

As a company, we set out with a vision to get into as many schools as we could. To change the schools' culture to weave drama and theatre into the fabric of the way teachers were delivering content. Our current work focuses on empowering teachers to use drama as a pedagogical tool for learning, making learning more experiential and embodied and joyful!

The School Library Project was created as a way to reach children while they couldn't attend school. Right now everything we do is online. We are also limited by doing much of our work in English. We sometimes have Hindi content on TSLP, and even more occasionally Marathi. So really the big access gaps for us are the digital divide and language. There is also a more subtle barrier which is the online fatigue that children who do have digital access are facing. The fourth access barrier we recently faced was the unchecked violence that is growing online.

I would like to just lay out a very real idea of the language divide we face when we think of reaching children across India. We have found that the bulk of our viewers for The School Library Project are from Mumbai. We haven't really thought about it, but we set out to put content on TSLP in various languages. So far we have mostly English. Some Hindi content and a few videos in Marathi. This means that really our reach may not grow beyond a certain point unless we actively find ways to make work in other languages and find ways to deliver that content.

Which brings us to our next barrier, the digital divide. Even if we wanted to extend our reach in Maharashtra, it wouldn't go beyond Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. Rural Maharashtra is completely cut off. We recently conducted a workshop with teachers in Ratnagiri which is a town in Maharashtra and they bus their teachers onto campus to conduct their online classes because they don't have connectivity themselves. We don't even know how many of these students in a fairly progressive school are actually able to successfully do their online classes.

Imagine you are in rural India. Perhaps a remote village in Maharashtra. During this time of lockdown and pandemic, many children have lost their access to education. A study showed that only 35% of India have access to smartphones. The smartphone is the only device available to rural India for the online classes that the government has prescribed.

Now imagine a group of five children in a small village in Maharashtra. 3 are girls. Even when the smartphones arrive and they get over the issues of connectivity and understanding how to use it. Only the boys are given access. Now from those 3 boys two of them only get to use the phone when their parents are home and not at work. If their parents don't work. They can't eat. Only one of the five children can actually attend those online classes. There is no question of extending TYA to them or the pre-recorded content that we have on TSLP.

Now even if we accept our limitations and then concentrate on the reach we have, there are other barriers we face.

"54% of parents state that their kids are spending up to 5 additional hours on an average online in front of a screen" Economic Times, June 2020

We have been trying to sell Drama Workshops online at various points during the year and every cycle we struggle a little more to fill them. Parents aren't willing to sign their kids up, because these kids are burnt out from looking at screens for everything.

Then we have the questions of how much are children actually learning in this format? There is no real feedback. It is a monologue most of the time. Like now….I know you are all there, but I can't hear you laugh. That lack of feedback may just be diminishing our desire to engage and this is probably more true for children.

I can't even imagine what certain children with ADHD or Autism might be experiencing while they try and engage with people online.

Vivek
Madan

Access: How can we overcome the digital divide and engender access to technologies of creation and distribution of art?

While pondering this question of the digital divide and how to propagate art in and to communities with no access to high-speed internet, I recalled how a now-dormant group in Kolkata, Mad About Drama, had tied up with their local FM radio station to broadcast weekly episodes of radio plays that they would script and 'stage'.

Coincidentally, I was also on the Jury/Mentor Panel for Audio-torium, a unique initiative from Thespo, Mumbai that provoked young people from across the country to conceptualise and present ideas and scripts for 'audio storytelling'; essentially plays or stories told in the audio format. Given the travel restrictions during the pandemic, this seemed to them to be a good time to explore this alternative, where remote collaborations could become the norm.

I read some fantastic applications with out-of-the-box ideas and plans for nuanced sound design, and I'm sure some of them will come to fruition in the coming months. But while this was a great example or avenue of analogue disbursement, it was still a digital intervention as far as creation goes: Zoom rehearsals, lots of research on the internet, significant use of technologies to edit and layer sound, and so on.

It was a small leap from here to a distant conversation with a senior theatre colleague, Ashish Sen, whose organisation VOICES, had instantiated India's first independent community radio initiative in the southern state of Karnataka in (circa) 2003.

While community radio has been a struggle over the past couple of decades in terms of legalities, it seems like a viable mode of creation and distribution of everything in and above hyperlocal circles of art and artists.

A 2008 research paper titled The Arts and Community Radio was released by CapeUK which provides several instances of Community Radio helping shape and disburse artistic works. One quote, in particular, stayed with me - Ed Baxter from Resonance FM says, *"In my mind, the community is an amorphous blob that the station re-creates on a minute-by-minute basis: I personally think that the station has brought a community into being rather than articulated a pre-existent community."*

Some more digging unearthed some good news in the form of news articles about alive and vibrant community radio stations in several parts of India that are run by and serve distinct and small geographical areas. The programmes are directed and produced by a local team, trained by Foundations and NGOs. They deal with agricultural issues and innovations, social issues and a significant amount of storytelling, music, poetry and even an adaptation of Sesame Street for children. Pooja O Murada, director, communications at SM Sehgal Foundation & Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8. says *"Technology and affordable internet have no doubt connected people with the world, but for our broadcast area, these technical advancements are still not inclusive. Access to mobile phones is still limited for women. A large chunk of the population are not on smartphones and, above all, the information from the community radio is local, in the local dialect and about local people's issues, something which cannot be fulfilled by the new media".*

As of a 2019 Government report, there are 251 operational community radio stations in India. It is certainly worthwhile to consider creating work for and by these communities, to break not just the digital divide, but also dent those of language, gender, class and caste.

THINK TANK

Nimi Ravindran

BODIES: HOW CAN BODIES EXPERIENCE PHYSICALITY AND BREATH IN A DIGITAL SPACE?

BODY OF PERFORMERS & AUDIENCE

BODIES EXPERIENCE LOSS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

- The body of the performer experiences physical touch, even if it's only an embrace or a handshake from fellow performers or crew members. Entering the stage from a dark backstage, a performer ' feels' the presence and gaze of the audience, and the weight of expectation-this flow of energy between the performer and the audience is nothing short of magical, and we must find a way to minimize its loss in the digital and online space.

- The audience also experiences touch and warmth from fellow audience members and the moment when they hold their breath, before the start of the performance. This is vital. Lounging in your pyjamas in bed with a bowl of popcorn, no matter how comfortable, is not conducive for this experience. Do we tackle this loss or try to create other new experiences to replace this?

DIGITAL PERFECTION

- The digital medium does not allow for lapses, unlike human lapses in a physical space. An audience that buys a ticket for an online performance expects perfection. Power failure, poor connectivity or other technology-related problems with the internet are not good enough. An error on stage is not only forgiven but looked at endearingly by an audience, unlike a film or a filmed performance.

- One way to try to recreate a little of this experience is by performing live instead of recording/ filming shows. This allows for problems to be immediate, to be solved not just by the performer but also by the audience, because it is LIVE, even if the two parties are not in the same physical space. This is true especially for countries like India where high speed, uninterrupted internet and electricity is a privilege.

- The only performance that I watched (fully-start to finish) online was 'What do we need to talk about?' Written and directed by Richard Nelson. It opened up a world of zoom plays, but what began with that play also ended with that (according to my limited understanding). We need more imagination and for something new to click. In the meanwhile, we can keep trying.

IT WILL NEVER BE AN EITHER / OR SITUATION

- Personally, having accepted that what we create in a digital space is neither theatre nor film nor video art but something new altogether has helped me cope with this a little better. I'm still not inspired to watch performances online, but I guess I'll get there.

- Theatre, dance and music, the way we know it, has taken hundreds if not thousands of years to evolve and reach its present form and state, accepting that there is no way we can crack something new in under eight months also liberates us. This is not a mathematical formula that can be 'cracked'; this is a process that will take time. Humans might be very innovative, but there's still no point rushing this process.

- Just like LIVE theatre is irreplaceable, performances for the digital space will now be irreplaceable even when things get back to normal... Our new future must include the digital space, even as we figure out the hows and the therefores.

A PERSONAL EXPERIMENT

Even as I stare in terror at the zoom link, there is a part of me that wants to engage in a small experiment to create an online performance. Given the questions that remain unanswered and my concerns, here is what I have in mind. As an aside: The germ of this idea was born on the night after Think Tank 1.

- A LIVE performance with 4 women in a live space. Each performer occupies a different room in a physical space.
- 4 audience members who watch the show on zoom or another interface.
- The performance begins, Each of them are assigned to a room or get to choose a room. They go into that room. The audience member and the performer see each other and engage one to one... There is a performance in which the audience member is complicit. The audience member is expected to participate in this performance. When it is over the audience moves to or is assigned the next room. Every encounter lasts 10 minutes.

HOW IT WILL UNFOLD

- My hope is to create an exchange between audience members that is real in a digital space. A new real, if I may.
- Make the audience complicit in the performance which is the opposite of lolling in your pyjamas. The audience is invested in this. Even if the internet fails, they are in this together and will fail together.
- The interactions are short. 10 minutes each. 10 minutes before the show and 10 mins after. 60 minutes in all.
- Each audience member experiences each room, but live and therefore differently.
- The physical space is a big part of this performance.
- The show will, through its form and content come full circle, so each person ends up where they began, but everything is now different... because of the journey they have undergone.

HOW

- How does something like this get created? I don't know.
- I plan to collaborate with people who understand and thrive in the digital medium. I hope they will create the digital landscape that this performance requires, while we - the four performers - navigate the form and the content that we will create for this performance.
- The aim is to try a different approach, but to include the tenets of theatre, what is most important to us - the ephemeral - and how to find a way to retain a semblance of that.

WHY

- Why do this at all? The best answer would be Why, not?
- Also to not run in fear from the inevitable, but to try and adapt (embrace seems too hunky-dory) to the future that awaits us where technology and the digital space will play a big part, Covid or no Covid.
- Drawbacks: In the search for physicality the way we know it, we will try to recreate theatre the way we know and love it, and that will keep tying us down. We must try to think of a new physicality. A new way to breathe.
- Finances: Four performers and four audience members try to recreate the flow of energy between the two. They might or might not succeed. Even if they do, this is financially not viable in countries without funding support for such experiments. But, we would still have tried something that is worth trying. And that itself will be worth everything.

Wesley
Ruzibiza
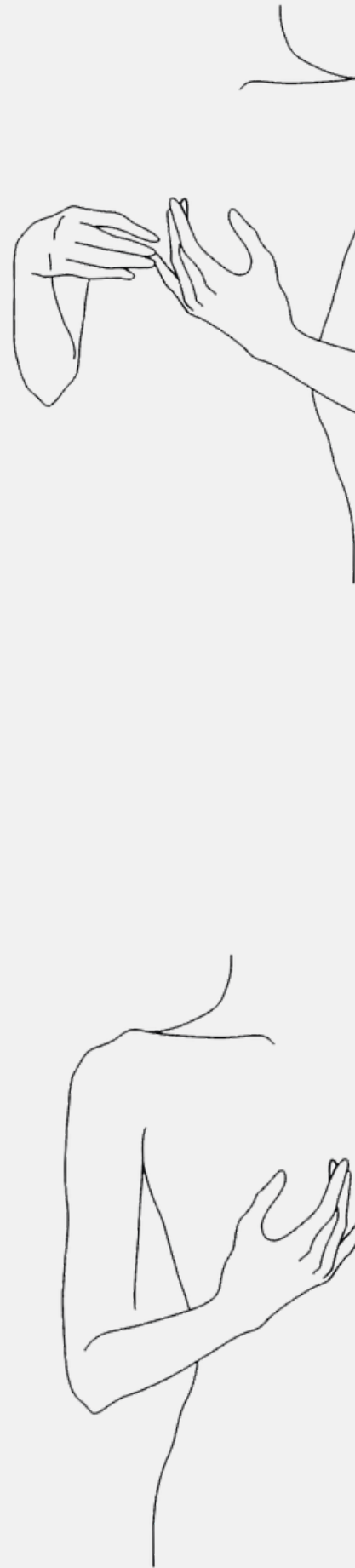
Bodies
How can bodies experience physicality and breath in a digital space?

Everyone is trying to imagine what our lives will be like after this crisis, this temporary halt in the world. Some believe that we will soon forget this crisis and return to our past habits, others are sure that we will create a new normality and this new normality will have to deal with digital.

One thing is certain, physical distance will strongly permeate our lifestyle and stimulate the potential and creativity of the digital world.

This crisis will lead to structural changes that will develop new activities. It is clear that many players in all sectors will find levers for growth and opportunities in this crisis, while others will suffer from the inequality already existing in the world - access to technology differs from one location to another. In this new digital market, people with limited accessibility will not be able to connect, go beyond the traditional theatre box to evolve in a world where the transitioning to that new way is becoming the norm and the way of disseminating arts. We as artists have to think of adapting, it is very important to the survival of our sector (dance in my case), but we also have to rethink, take time, understand our values to process what is involved in this new world with our bodies, mind and soul.

What I have learnt so far, taking the experience of Learning Feminism from Rwanda, bodies, connection, transformation, access, collaboration, these different element do not act the same way in the digital and physical spaces. The digital needs more technical than human inputs, while the physical demands human input; mixing or creating something that will respect the balance both requires time and also requires rethinking our collaborative process.

In this context, digital technology has taken on an even greater dimension, leading to major changes in the theatrical experience and in the creation of new models of consuming and producing arts. As this increases, we need to create safe spaces that are equally beneficial to the artist and to the project. The transformation shouldn't be dictated by fear but by the need of and for the arts, the accessibility to artistic production i.e. performing arts in a digital space should be able to allow the distribution of the work to be even and accessible to the people to which the story is delivered. Also, we need to create space for improvisation in the digital space, to allow the theatrical bodies' experience to be real and not controlled, not just about the result to the project and product.

Experiencing art should focus in moving away from being a privileged and niche activity to something that is possible in a fun and innovative way. At least have one thing live: it could be a ritual suggestion, a phone call, a moment to connect together in this digital space that is tangible and real for everybody, where everybody is involved... That's the only way we can recreate the body-touch, connection to transform our experience in the digital space.

Anuja
Ghosalkar

Towards Collaboration - An Incomplete Manifesto

For Think Tank 2, I was placed in a group that focused on trans-national collaborations. For this presentation I drew from my personal experience of collaborating with a German dramaturge, Kai Tuchmann whom I first met in 2013.

We have been working together towards a common goal (curating Asia's first Documentary theatre festival) since January 2018. This festival was scheduled for December 2020. The momentum and support to realize this was in place, but the pandemic changed the world. An international collaboration between two artists where travel was critical; the new world meant we needed to abandon our plans, years of work and a long-cherished dream.

The new age is perhaps about the survival of the most adaptable - we decided early on to respond to the virtual world. We decided we are not going to let the pandemic stop us, but instead persist and work through this pandemic towards every dream and idea we had held dear for two years. That meant of course, re-thinking terms of engagement, how art is made, or even how or what is conceived as art. The digital space asks of us to be innovators again as if we are the beginning of time or maybe to transpose ourselves to a time of wonder - perhaps the way audiences who might have experienced the Lumiere Brothers' Arrival of the Train. A moving object coming at them at great speed!

We spent the early part of the year working on building a website which would act as a resource for theatre practitioners, journalists, lawyers, activists, archivists and students. It is a website that captures the presentations, lectures that we curated last December in a symposium that looked at the existing practices of performance-making in India that can be understood as Documentary Theatre. Each panel/presentation is carefully transcribed as a downloadable document that can be shared, distributed, published under the Creative Commons License.
It is a vital resource for thinking of and making performances in India through fresh, homegrown frameworks.
Here is the link. https://connectingrealities.org/

The artists we brought together for the symposium were also approached to make virtual work for us. A "festival" of sorts. The nine artists are responding to Bertolt Brecht's radio play Lindbergh's Flight. Brecht imagined that he could involve invisible audiences to sing the major parts of the libretto. We imagined that our audiences appear as avatars in a virtual space when physical theatres are closed. We decided to use the open-source, lesser-known Mozilla Hubs platform for this experience.

The ideas of embodiment, breath, witnessing, alter significantly in this virtual reality space. How you move, what you hear, see, distance, height, volume every variable is controlled by the audience's avatar. Are we or our audiences ready for it? Or we and our technology are not natural as yet?

Look, here is your machine. Get in! will open on December 15th 2020 as part of the Serendipity Arts Virtual. https://www.serendipityartsvirtual.com/project/look-here-is-your-machine-get-in/

This project has tested the collaboration severely because unlike a symposium, or a physical theatre festival, the rules or grammar for virtual reality experiences are hitherto unknown outside of the gaming world. As I write this, we had our first test audience witness it - and it was a resounding disaster. A week before we "open" our virtual environments. But collaborations are about accepting failures, building on learnings but most importantly for my type of practice - that of an outlier - collaborations are about traversing new paths, leaving comfort zones far behind, and finding new idioms of expression, fresh ways of responding to reality because the old tools of dissent don't work anymore!
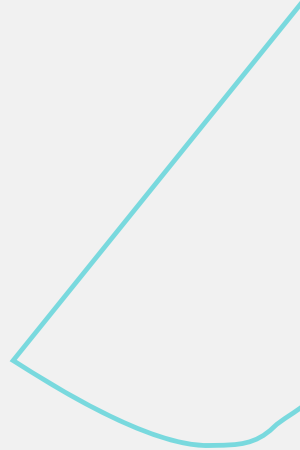
As an exercise for Think Tank II, I constructed a playful manifesto for cross-cultural collaborations. It is gleaned from my learnings of having been part of successful and failed collaborations with individuals from across the world. I requested my break out group to add, edit it. I offer the same to whoever reads this!

Towards Collaboration - An Incomplete Manifesto

1. **Make Kin Not Babies (Donna Haraway)**
2. **Collaborate even in the absence of funding**
3. **Work towards a movement**
4. **Foster courage**
5. **Do not merely tick a diversity box**
6. **Acknowledge cultural, gender, racial differences**
7. **Become symbiotic rather than parasitic**
8. **Allow for solitude & for exchange**
9. **Be open to changing your mind and try your darndest to change your collaborator's mind**
10. **Disagree with each other, argue vociferously**
11. **Write together, read together**
12. **Make outrageous plans to change the art/world**
13. **Strive towards equitability**
14. **Not all collaborations are successful**
15. **Your collaborator need not be your biggest fan**
16. **Laugh, drink, gossip together**
17. **Pandemics need good internet connections to sustain collaborations**
18.
19.
20.
.....
.....

Venuri
Perera

Collaboration

How can we create intense transnational performances without meeting in physical spaces working together?

Three types of examples were found for working together, creating and making performances across borders where physical meeting may not be possible.

1. Modular method - Going deeper into the local contexts, working separately to create online and offline performances.
2. Transmitting work onto other bodies - through conversations, listening, writing, archive boxes 3. Taking time, building long term relationships and communities - focusing on process, collective study, publication, making radio

Huhu and the Multitudes of Peer Gynt

This Inter-Asia collaborative project was initiated by Teater Garasi director Yudi Ahmad Tajudin and dramaturg Ugoran Prasad in 2018 to explore the themes of mobility/immobility, fear and anxiety in 'Asia' from multiple perspectives. Artists from Indonesia, Japan and Sri Lanka met in East Flores, Tokyo and Shizuoka over a period of two years. Various iterations of performances we created based loosely on to the Act IV and V of Peer Gynt by Henrik Ibsen. The final collaborative moment was to take place in July in Jakarta. But as this was not possible, after postponing a number of times and many discussions, it was decided to take the project online.
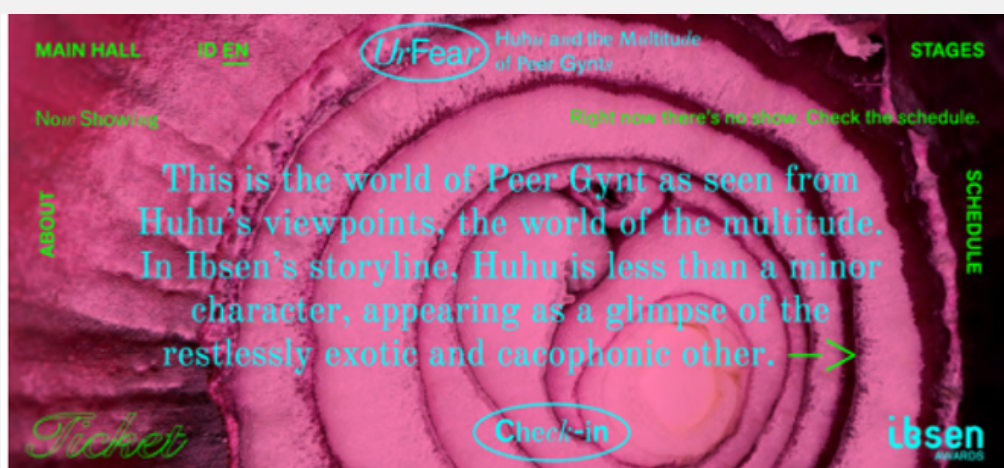
This version, a modular format in the form of an online festival, 11 artists' diverse performances.

"This performing arts network is a multifaceted interpretation of the drama, seen from the perspective of the global South represented by Huhu," said Yudi at the opening night. "It's not far-fetched to say that the performances reflects how Asia sees the rest of the world as a counter to how the rest of the world always defines Asia from their own perspective."

There were four 'stages' on the website based on the various themes such as 'Empires', 'Othering'. The performances were available on selected days in the month of November. The presentation of the performances was designed to give the audience control of the videos can only be seen at scheduled times.

There were live performances - the interactive show 'The Messiah for Dummies' by Gunawan Maryanto relies on the instant poll from the audience on what costume he should wear next as a false prophet. Pre-recorded performances, lecture performances, interactive gaming style performances - so you could choose your experience. Monopoly: Asylum Edition by Andreas Ari Dwianto was the mini version of the whole idea to give the audience the freedom to create their own story. Roll a virtual dice to move around the "monopoly" board and, as a game piece stops in a certain box, a video will play.' Sound artists Yasuhiro Morinaga (Japan) and Nyak Ina Raseuki (Indonesia) collaborate to create soundscapes of primordial vibrations of today's sounds from the perspectives of multiple Huhu's. In the lobby, there were videos of the actors doing collective actions in their homes like eating, peeling onions and wearing sarongs on their heads. Other live aspects were a festival launch, three artists' talks where audiences were invited to ask questions of participating artists and a closing ceremony.

Because the performances went online, and artists took ownership of the work, (with advice and conversations with the director and dramaturg) there was a diverse range of aesthetics and perspectives. The East Flores Theatre Collective, who would not have been part of the staged performance, were able to make a work in their locality, in film format. 'In search of the lost favourite song', by M. Nur Qomaruddin in collaboration with a group of Sudanese refugees in Indonesia, Abdal Majed Danko, Abu Baker, Alyas Hassan and Alhadi was one of the most poignant, as they were able to have ownership of and tell their own stories in a playful way. This would not have been possible if the production had been in the original format where the actors would speak for the other. This had been a recurring conversation and concern during the collaboration process in the previous iterations.

Problems during the creation process included not having adequate technical support, uploading rehearsal footage taking hours, time differences etc. The website also had some technical glitches. Overall more than 4000 audience members, mainly from Indonesia and Japan, Germany, Sri Lanka, are recorded to have attended the 'festival' although we cannot say if they watched all the performances to the end or skimmed through! Initially, some of the performances were also supposed to have a live audience element in their localities, but this was not possible due to Covid-19 regulations.

Multitudes of Peer Gynt - https://multitudeofpeergynts.net/project-profile/

Trailer -http://ibsenawards.com/scholarship/winner/multitude-of-peer-gynts-unmapping-the-verge of-asia/on-the-origins-of-huhu/

About - http://ibsenawards.com/scholarship/winner/multitude-of-peer-gynts-unmapping-the verge-of-asia/

http://urfearmpg.net/CtrlStage/about

Review - https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/11/24/urfear-huhu-redefines-live performance.html

Acts of transmission

'are understood as an extension of one context into another and vice versa. It is about the specific encounters, their translation and an awareness of the in-between as well as of the two different bodies and realities.'

THINK TANK

Benjamin Krieg

THOUGHTS / QUESTIONS ABOUT POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND PERFORMERS (IN ANY COMBINATION) IN REMOTE PERFORMANCES

After the first session of the Flinn Works think tank I was reflecting on the question, how performers and audiences can loiter, hang out and feel connected in the forced physical isolation of a pandemic?

Even if the possibility to attend a performance online by watching a video stream evokes a feeling of connection in some viewers, it is a very uncommunicative one-way connection that is probably most of the time very far from the experience of sharing a physical space with other spectators and performers. So which strategies/ techniques/ channels exist or can be thought of to enable a stronger feeling of connection through participation and interaction? I still have many more questions than answers, but I want to present one example and recommend a book.

The example is an adaptation of an existing performance. In the late 2019 production "Canon" the performance collective She She Pop asks:
"Of all the events we have seen on stage, which ones do we not want to forget? Which ones do we *have to* talk about? What was so fascinating and sublime, or painful or plausible, liberating or amazing that we need to remember it?" (...) The evening ranges from simple re-telling to an attempted reenactment. (...) Canon was developed by She She Pop and other artists: selected guests from the independent arts scene have been invited to participate in this collective ritual of remembering. But audience members who happen to be present at the show are invited to participate too by writing down their own memories of special moments in theatre. Thus, Canon will develop into a new and spontaneous community performance every evening."
[https://sheshepop.de/en/kanon/]

How can a show with seven performers on stage based on the idea of a present community forming every single show be adapted into a remote performance? She She Pop decided to stay away from the internet and use a much older technique: the phone. "We are switching to a medium just as transient as theatre, albeit not as public and thankfully less infectious, at least in these times: individual telephone conversations. Phone tree, helpline or hotline: Telephone Canon isn't a show, it's a service. Whoever calls up will get one of the cast of "Canon" on the phone and hear about an essential moment in the performing arts. But the canon is also open for your own tales and entries." [https://sheshepop.de/en/telefon-kanon/]
I find this strategy interesting, as it tries to adapt a performance that is based on the connection and interaction of a temporary present community to a (much more intimate) one on one connection between performer and audience – and as it uses the quite old and accessible communication technology of the telephone.

My book recommendation is the anthology "netztheater" which is a neologism and could be translated as "net theater", "web theater" or even "network theatre". It was published in the end of October 2020 in Germany. It contains 21 articles of theatre practitioners and observers describing actual developments, present experiments, changed working methods and groundbreaking productions in a theatre trying to combine the online and the offline world. The articles are rather short, compact and good to read, and as a hybrid of theoretical positions and reflective practice, the publication bundles practically usable and developable knowledge in a compact form. There is, for example, the report of a theatre play that is only created live on twitter, reflections on the performative parallel world of TikTok, a tabular typology of interaction, collaboration and participation or the discussion of the question whether it could be the task of the theatre to create positive counteroffers to QAnon and other conspiracy mythologies that respond to the longing for community, exchange and shared narrations.

Unfortunately it's only available in German, but fortunately it is downloadable for free as pdf document and with the help of the common online translation engines it might be worth to look at even for non-German speaking people. [https://www.boell.de/de/netztheater] There is also a very elaborate review of this book by the theatre scholar Stefanie Schmitt - unfortunately also in German.
[https://rezenstfm.univie.ac.at/index.php/tfm/article/view/5064]

THINK TANK

Irawati Karnik

CONNECTION: How can performers and audiences loiter, hangout and feel connected through online performance?

I looked at this through three online performances.

1 CORONA VARIATIONS

https://www.convergencetheatre.com/corona-variations

This play happened in the form of 6 phone calls across one evening; one call every half an hour. Each phone call was an independent play. The phone would ring, the audience member answers and has to say 'CONVERGE AGAINST CORONA' and that was the cue for the actor to begin. 3 of these plays simply required the audience to listen in but 1 had a surprise moment of improvisation and 2 required the audience to take on a character. The audience member would read from a script that they got just before the show and that had their lines only. I felt that there were certain factors in this performance that had the potential to create a strong feeling of connection :

- The fact that the audience had the opportunity to actually participate in the show
- The audience member had the option to hear it with a group. It did not require one to listen alone.
- The audience member had the choice to add a friend to the phone call. All they had to do was before they said, "Converge against Corona", they would have to say, "Hang on while I add a call."
- The audience was encouraged not to mute. The actors welcomed laughter and vocal responses from the audience.
- At the end of a show, the audience would get a link – sort of like a secret password – that would take them to a place online where they found out about the cast and the crew and other information that is usually included in the program.
- This is quite an interesting part: The audience had the option of leaving a personalized audio or video message for the cast telling us about your experience.

2 EVERY BRILLIANT THING

Medium: Zoom

The second performance I looked at was a play written by Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe, directed by Quasar and performed by Vivek Madan called 'Every Brilliant Thing'.

The reason I chose to look at this was because I had seen two shows of this play in an actual physical theatre and then I heard that it was going to be performed online and my first reaction was skepticism. I thought that it depended so much on live interaction and timing both from the performer as well as the audience members that there was no way it was going to work online. But then I saw it. Again not one, but two shows.

This is the story of a boy who makes a list. When he is 6 years old, his mother gets admitted to the hospital as a result of an attempted suicide. He finds out that she is depressed and decides to make a list of 'every brilliant thing' he can think of to give her to show her that there are all these things to live for. The show relies heavily on audience interaction as mentioned before and <spoiler ahead> the audience turns into a kind of support group for the actor by the end of the show.

Here are the ways in which I thought the play created opportunities for connection :

- The list of 'every brilliant thing' in the play is a long one. It literally has thousands of items. And through the show, the actor performing announces a number – six hundred and seventy-five for example – and the audience member with that item number unmuted themselves to say the item out loud – peeing while swimming in the pool, for example! The audience members received these numbers perhaps a couple of hours before the show and during the shows, I watched several of them spontaneously personalized these 'announcings' with props, drawings, charts, and what not.
- The audience is also required to play certain characters like the protagonist's teacher who interacted with students through a sock puppet, the protagonist's father, the love of his life, etc. And what is more, the characters reappear a number of times and a real feeling of a fictional family is created even among the several cast members comprising of the audience.
- Because the play has so much to do with mental health, the team had organized a post-show interaction with some professional therapists each time. The audience seemed so eager during this interaction. They allowed themselves to be vulnerable and asked difficult questions and even the online space felt extremely open and full of warmth and support. This was particularly significant in the context of the pandemic.

MERIDIAN

I looked at this project, not as one with answers but one in which I have been struggling with questions myself.

'Meridian' is an online performance piece that is being written and directed by Neel Chaudhuri. I am the dramaturg on this project. The performance unfolds over an IVRS: an interactive voice response system. Audience members are required to download an app that gives them access to making a special kind of call. On the other side of this call, the performance begins.

The voice on the other end welcomes you, explains what Meridian is and offers you the first set of choices. 'Meridian' is an empathy gymnasium. The choices offered are :
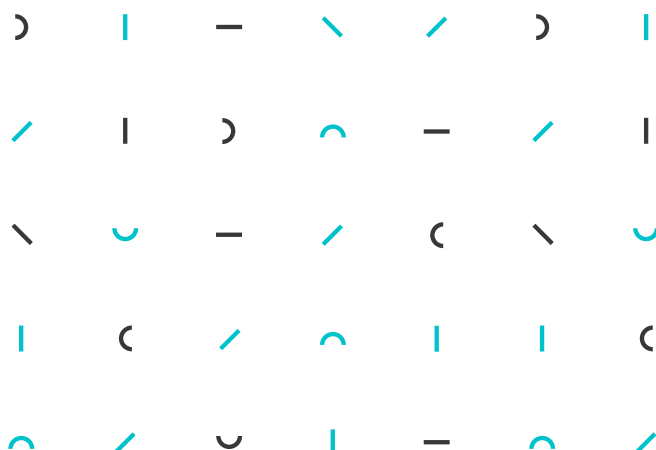a) Journey b) Rehearsal c) Accident d) Dream.
The 'journey' choice is about trying to move away from something or trying to come to terms with something; addressing an issue that needs catharsis of some sort. The rehearsal choice is a relational one. It necessarily involves another person. It is about a confrontation you may need with someone, or a confession you may need to make, or revenge you need to take etc. 'Rehearsal' offers you the opportunity to play this out before you actually do it. 'Accident' is about dealing with the unexpected and 'Dream' takes you into a world that is fantastical and abstract.

Once one of these choices is made, a little bit more of the narrative unfolds and you are offered some more choices. Each audience member chooses an option that leads them to the next choices. The narrative they build depends on the choices they make. So in that sense, they are deeply connected to every single thing that happens. They make it happen. At first, the audience member is the protagonist but as the play unfolds, the voice taking them through this experience starts to become more and more human.

The piece itself is about human connection and empathy. It is about offering people the opportunity to enter into the life of something you consider less human and discovering something about yourself as well as about how you connect with other people. But the one thing we as makers are struggling with is trying to figure out the community aspect of this 'theatrical' experience. The piece is necessarily experienced individually. How then can we create a feeling of community and give each audience member an opportunity to connect with other 'users' of Meridian?

One possible answer that has come up so far is the idea to create some kind of a chat room that is always live. You only get access to it if you have participated in Meridian but once you have, you can log in any time and interact with whoever may be present here. A kind of 24/7 loitering space. There may be other ideas in the near future. Let's see. There were a few other resources I found that I think are relevant to the larger question of connection.

Here is one such article: https://theconversation.com/theatre-companies-are-pushing-storytelling-boundaries-with-online-audiences-amid-covid-19-141583

Lea Dietrich

Connection: How can performers and audiences loiter, hangout and feel connected through online performance?

1 Since I haven't seen so many digital pieces myself so far, I decided to ask around and sent questions to friends, theatre professionals and potential theatregoers.
- What did you see?
- What did you remember particularly?
- Did you feel like you were spending an evening together with others?
- Was there an exchange between the audience and/or the performers, after or during the play?
- What did you miss?
- Have you bought tickets for another play? (if so, which one?)

To my surprise, I found out that only 1 from 14 respondents had seen a digital theatre screening. (It was "Swanlake" from nitehotel). Not bad, but although they flew through the rooms as dragonflies with the other spectators that evening, there was apparently no feeling of a group.

My approach failed. The question arose all the more, why people who normally went to the theatre did not seem to take advantage of the wide range of online theatre shows. Why? What is the difference? What do they miss? I for example, personally miss the feeling of being around people. To experience something together, to share, to discuss together.

2 I saw a piece in which all these feelings were produced relatively well even though it was online. But it was the only one that worked for me in this regard.

"Homecoming" by machina eX, at the theatre "Hebbel am Ufer", Berlin.
The evening begins with a prologue that is sent to you by post (!). First thing I found out is, that a show might impress and capture you if at least one thing is not digital.
In this prologue you are led through a kind of "test" which involves almost all your senses. You move your fingers over a sheet of paper, stick stickers, QR codes are created that are scanned. The time you take to answer the next questions is determined by the length of time you need to suck a candy that was sent as part of the 'kit'. And: you should withdraw and take your time.
The test result is referred to in the piece afterwards.
You are already in the middle of the game, in the topic and in communication (via telegram) with "Gordon", a virtual employee from whom you buy the theatre tickets.

The evening itself runs on Telegram. A performer leads you through the piece together with 3-5 other visitors. Puzzles are solved together, strategies are considered, searched and researched on websites. You have to call phone numbers and you follow blogs. It's a game.
The whole evening only works with active participation. If the spectators stop, the piece wouldn't go further.
In the end, you have the feeling that you have actually experienced and reached something together and that you had an evening together with the other viewers. Afterwards, there is still the possibility for a live exchange with your own group and other groups.
So far so good. But it is and remains a game. Similar to "Exit" games or "Escape Rooms". And I wonder if and how it is possible to transfer such an interaction to other theatre plays, evenings and more profound topics.

3 My personal feeling to the answer of connection in digital space is... Either you should be able to see each other or be able to communicate (could be writing or have a live call or whatever).
I think a kind of prologue is a good thing to immerse yourself. If you go to the theatre you get dressed, you have a way to travel, you get focused when the lights are going down.
At home, it is much more difficult to catch and hold your attention to the screen. Viewers have to share and participate or they get distracted and do something else.
At last, I think it's nice and helpful for the experience to have "something real". That could be another place, a way you prepared or set up the place at home, that can be something outside the screen, on which you concentrate and can relate to in the piece, something sent by post, or something that you are asked to do in real life...

https://clubguyandroni.nl/voorstelling/swan-lake/
https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/en/programme/pdetail/machina-ex-homecoming/

powered by
FLINN WORKS

Abhishek Thapar

Alagi

What have we lost or gained as artists, cultural workers, performers during this crisis we are facing today? What is the role and function of the artists in these times and beyond? How do we look back at the work we have done during these times and how does this reflect in our future practices?

We all know that theatres, performance spaces, cultural venues will be back, up and running in the near future. We will soon go back to rehearsal spaces, invite collaborators, audiences, critics to engage with the work. The amount of time spent in our homes will gradually reduce, so will our engagement with this space as well. Our bedrooms were transformed into dressing rooms or storage spaces, living rooms into performance spaces, the tiny little dot at the top-centre of laptops became our audiences. Will our homes still continue to hold that space in the future? Maybe… I feel this strong urge to transform our practices into something completely different: destabilize, de-locate, transpose, re-contextualize. To restart in a new/different time, in a different space, with a new contract with audiences and ways of working with our collaborators which are imaginative and explores probable impossibilities. Here I am specifically talking about artists/performers/makers who engage their skills, time, effort and work in a specific community rather than engaging in the pure act of creation or creativity within a fast moving consumption pattern at art festival circuits. I couldn't help but think and collect these keywords at large which resonated within me while trying to think about 'Transformation'; roles which I embodied during these times in my house and surroundings: doer, worker, homeworker, provider, activist, assistant, researcher, consultant, interpreter, inventor, janitor, manual laborer, hod carrier, speaker, writer, listener, subworker, pieceworker, welder, technician, electrician, caseworker, chef, caretaker, caregiver, carer, giver, fighter, civil servant, civic practitioner, repair person, farmer, self-employed, self-sufficient, entrepreneur, book-keeper, landscaper, cleaner, mediator, picker.

When I think of transformation, I am compelled to think of one work called 'Haircuts by Children' by Mammalian Diving Reflex, a performance collective based in Toronto Canada. Mammalian creates performances by looking for contradictions to whip into aesthetically scintillating experiences. They create site- and social-specific performance events, theatre productions, participatory gallery installations, videos, art objects and theoretical texts to foster dialogue and dismantle barriers between individuals of all backgrounds by bringing people together in new and unusual ways. We've named ourselves after a reflex found in mammals, which increases the chances of survival when we're plunged into a cold watery environment. For us, this is a metaphor for surviving difficult times, not through a comprehensive rational plan, but by getting the mind out of the way and letting the body do its job. With our work, we're always trying to overwhelm ourselves and our audience with ideas and sensations so that we're abandoned by the intellect, allowing intuition to lead the way. We trust we'll get through this century in one piece, we just have to get out of the way and let our natural tendencies of generosity unlock and redistribute the world's abundance. We explore the creative potential in the everyday by bringing ordinary people together in new and unusual ways. We create moments that obliterate the separation between artists and audience members and between performance and casual reality, providing face-to-face encounters that are desperately needed in this time of intense polarization.

We live in an 'adultitarian' state, where the rules are based on very adult priorities and understandings of reality. Young people are disenfranchised and powerless; they understand they're subject to an authoritarian regime whether they buy into it or not. But their unique perspectives also offer incredible potential for social, cultural and economic innovation. Haircuts by Children is exactly what it says on the tin: a group of children are given a crash course in hairdressing and run a salon where they offer free haircuts to members of the public. Haircuts By Children invites you to take part in an event that will test your courage and faith in the future. Let them cut your fears away as they prove themselves creative leaders, capable and responsible citizens and dedicated coiffures. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76KpaBT66IY&feature=emb_title https://mammalian.ca/

Shabari Rao

Transformation:

I would like to offer 4 questions as provocations for us to consider collectively. I would like to propose this a method of research that goes inwards rather than outwards. These are questions that I have been thinking about quite a lot and to me, they provide a way of locating myself in the larger picture.

What is my role in my world now?
    Moving away from an individualist position, to a collective position.

What is my world?
   Far away through Zoom, and very close at home.

What are the needs that I perceive most strongly?
    Fatigue. Disconnect. Discontent.

And what can I offer in response?
    Art that is more participatory. Where the audience is offered the benefit of the process and not only a product.

There is a need for expansion. We need to expand our concept of 'self' as artists; expand our realms of practice; expand the concept of art itself.

Tanvi Shah
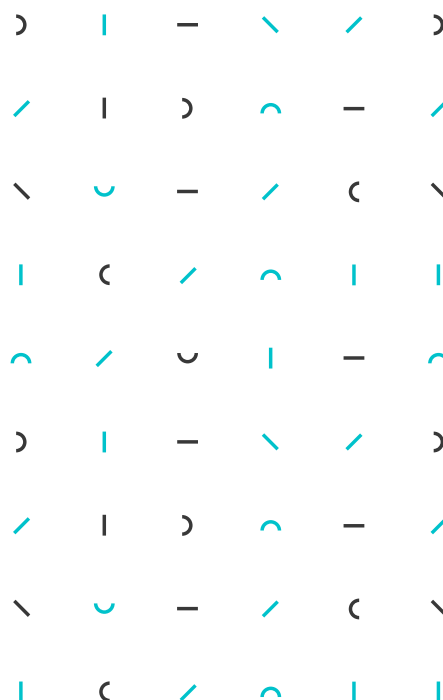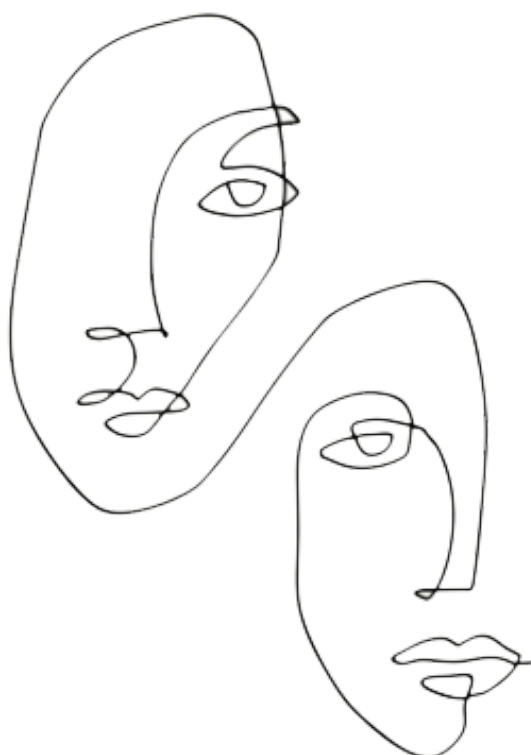
Transformation

"How can we use our capacity and skills to reinvent our roles as artists and/or performers?"

Isabel Allende memorably wrote, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." I usually return to this quote a lot, but it's been rather hard to during the pandemic, to fearfully wonder if this is how we will be spending our lives.

I've always been the youngest person in rehearsal rooms largely run by older men, and as a consequence have always tried very hard to have a strong separation between my work and my life so as to appear more professional, more efficient. One wouldn't be able to see through my tough work-mode exterior, and actually know the lighter, gentler parts of me because I had completely separated "our selves that live" and "our selves that make". As the pandemic goes on, however, I am finding more and more now that my myriad preoccupations are bleeding into my occupation, blurring these lines I'd drawn for myself.

What I've done for this presentation is begin by listing out some of the skills and capacities artists have, that seem more poignant and necessary than ever.

The Artist as Memory Keeper and Historian of Their Time

First – artists as people who have a sense of history and are able to place themselves within their cultural context. I am currently reading a book called 'Plague and the Athenian Imagination' by Robin Mitchell-Boyask. Its synopsis reads thus:

"The great plague of Athens that began in 430 BCE had an enormous effect on the imagination of its literary artists and on the social imagination of the city as a whole. In this book, Professor Mitchell-Boyask studies the impact of the plague on Athenian tragedy early in the 420s and argues for a significant relationship between drama and the development of the cult of the healing god Asclepius in the next decade, during a period of war and increasing civic strife. The Athenian decision to locate their temple for Asclepius adjacent to the Theater of Dionysus arose from deeper associations between drama, healing and the polis that were engaged actively by the crisis of the plague. The book also considers the representation of the plague in Thucydides' History as well as the metaphors generated by that representation which recur later in the same work."

What has struck me from reading this is that the meaning-making that happened after the plague was done by artists who had to find metaphors for their collective condition and ask – "How will we remember this?"

I have also been working on a series of short writings called 'Of Ghost Lights and Phantom Theatres', on physical theatre spaces that once were and no longer exist within India's big cities. I fear more will be added to the list with this pandemic and news of several spaces shutting down, and am interested in exploring what effect this void, this absence, this taking away of spaces that seed artistic interventions and communal sharing has on urban cities. Speaking of the artist as historian, I'd quote Sunil Shanbag's recent digital sharing titled 'Playing To Bombay', where he traced the theatre practice in the city through anecdotes and spaces, connecting the evolution of the art form with the city's geography, thereby situating it in a particular place and time. In the current absence of geographical and historical precedents since theatre has moved online, how do we talk about theatre's evolution? Which timelines and theatre-making contexts do we now place ourselves in?

The Artist as Reanimator

Second – artists are people who unearth the dramatic potential within material. Now more than ever, we must ask not only what material we decide to animate and reanimate as theatre, but why. I recently was part of a panel discussion on the future of Indian theatre archives – spaces that in India are largely seen as dead spaces for academicians and not artists – and began thinking of the archive of voices emerging online due to the pandemic. Of voices, reflections, and retrospectives that make one think of how we envision not only the archives of the past but also the archives we are currently building with the glut of information available online. How best do we talk about and represent the spirit of this time, and why does it deserve to be manifested?

The Artist as Cultural Curators

Third – the artist as someone who curates an audience's experience. I spoke about this in the last Think Tank with my theatre broadcast. Recently – depending on who you're talking to – one hears of art being seen either as a distraction to escape into or as something that is very serious and needs emotional preparedness, and I'm wondering where the middle ground is. How can we embed art into our lives in more natural ways that doesn't feel either like the artform is being elevated or shunned?
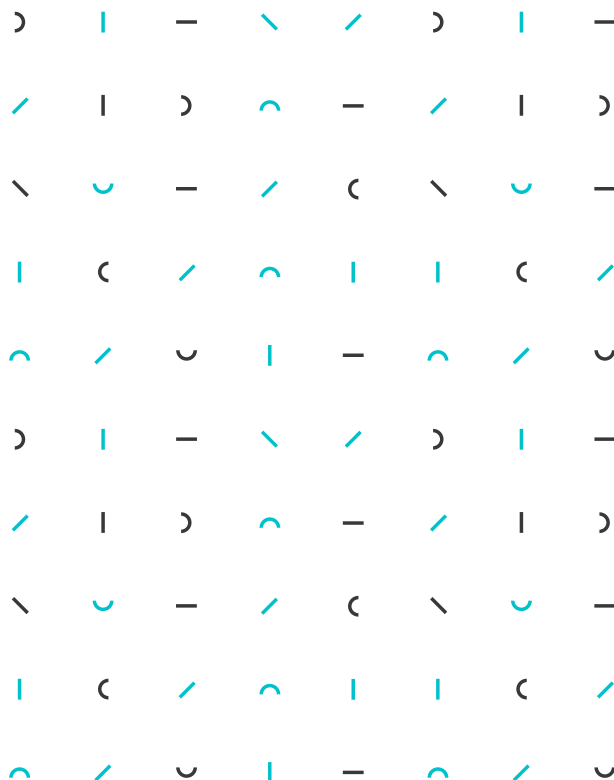
The Artist as Best Practice Advocate

Fourth – the artist as someone who can create safe spaces for sharing. Recently, I moderated a conversation that spoke about best practice – of mindfulness, ethics, allyship, representation, inclusivity – which isn't often discussed within the Indian context. It made me wonder how this practice could translate into the online space, and also how we could bring our reflections from creating spaces for joyous sharing into our more immediate surroundings. How can we take these takeaways from our intense rehearsal rooms – these notions of safe spaces and shared vulnerabilities – and push them online and bring them into our own home for non-artists? I think of Professor Marc Silberschatz who teaches and practices theatre in Scotland and devised a process he calls "Performance Of The Unconscious" – designed to make artists drop down into their bodies and embody cognition till they are thinking with the tips of their fingers – and wonder how we can give that experience to folks online and live in these times. Moreover, it may be more interesting to now give audiences the benefit of the process of theatre-making and not just the product as a way of bringing them in and having them take as much as they intellectually and emotionally can from each performance.
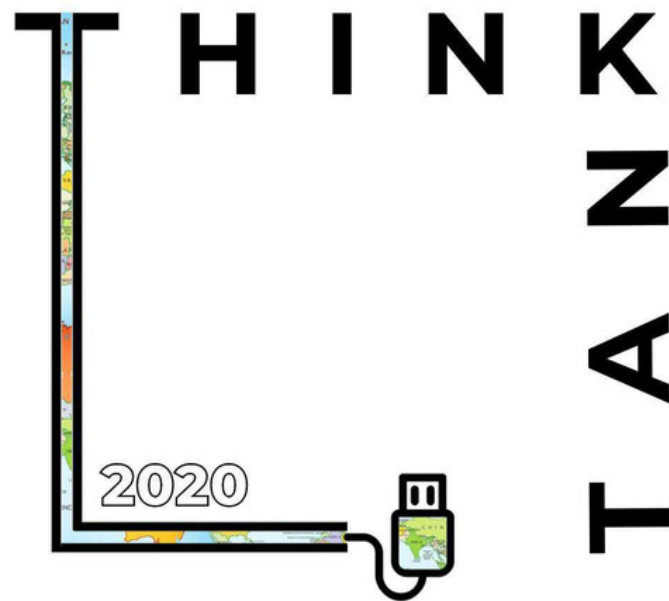
The Artist as Repetitor

Fifth – artists are people who are able to evolve by practicing their craft with precision and intuition over and over again and grow and discover new things through it. A question that has emerged for me recently – many folks are doing one-off performance experiments online, but most people practicing digital theatre are not able to evolve with their plays because of the limited run of online shows. I wonder how we can reintroduce repetition in digital theatre, and find ways to evolve not only in rehearsal rooms but online in front of live audiences.

Some final thoughts – artists as cross-pollinators, artists as provocateurs, artists as people who need their 'riyaaz' (their warm-up routine) regardless of the audience.

The idea that I'm focusing on, given my interest in history, is looking back to look forward. This I believe works with the notion of not only creating work for and during the pandemic but also thinking beyond the pandemic, to a time where our days more optimistically reflect our lives.

THINK TANK

2020

investigating and innovating transnational theatre practises