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## About us

The *Scottish Journal of Performance* is an open access refereed journal which aims to promote and stimulate discussion, development and dissemination of original research, focusing both on performance in Scotland (contemporary and historical) and / or wider aspects of performance presented by scholars and reflective practitioners based at Scottish academic institutions.

Published bi-annually and run by doctoral students, the *Scottish Journal of Performance* welcomes submissions from both established and early career researchers and operates a peer review system ensuring presentation of quality research in performance.

Performance in this context encompasses a wide range of arts and entertainment and takes as central themes dance, drama, film, music and television. The *Scottish Journal of Performance* takes as a key focus the creation and execution of performance in various contexts, encouraging the adoption of a wide range of range of research methods and approaches.

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## Editorial

ANIKA MARSCHALL & IAIN HARVIE

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### **Performing North / South?**

For this themed issue we invited contributors to reflect on what it means to be situated in Scotland as part of 'the Global North West'. The contributions assembled here reflect on an attempt by the *Scottish Journal of Performance* to critically interrogate a geographical and also a political position in the so-called Global North. The *Scottish Journal of Performance* works as an open access platform for peer reviewed articles by emerging theatre scholars and art practitioners situated in Scotland. However, for this particular issue, we opened the platform for international scholars and arts practitioners who investigate their situatedness in relation to Scotland and / or the so-called Global North West.

The anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have proposed a reorientation of the theoretical emphasis on the North and move beyond a North / South (or centre / periphery) binary, by focusing on South / South relationships (2012). They understand the Global South as site of knowledge production, which operates globally and prefigures the North's future, by offering a space of theoretical orientation. North and South here do no longer mean specific locations and geopolitical sites only, but vectors, relations and non-linear directions. What kind of vectors are pointing towards scholarly and performance communities in Scotland, and which relations and non-linear directions can we open up with the platform that is the *Scottish Journal of Performance*?

The last issue published, in summer 2019, focused on hope and working towards radically inclusive futures. Since then, while working on this new issue, high profile world events; the murder of George Floyd; the murder of Sarah Everard; the Covid-19 pandemic and perhaps most importantly a growing cultural and political focus on the potentially catastrophic effects of unabated global warming, have created a different urgency and political necessity for working on the issues raised by thinking about North / South with heightened awareness, care and sensitivity, and a slow approach towards process, rather than published product. During pervasive times of crisis it seems increasingly important for us personally as the co-editors of the *Scottish Journal of Performance* (and in our collaboration with authors, reviewers, critics and readers) to understand and to continue working on decentring our positions as a white, cis-female, able-bodied, German migrant PhD graduate of the University of Glasgow and as a white, cis-male, able-bodied British DPerf student of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. We must all continue to work on making tangible and material changes to our lives in consideration of rapidly changing perceptions of the meaning of human society and culture while striving to find ways to be in solidarity with those impacted by trauma, loss, disease, mourning, mental and emotional distress. We believe that the infrastructure and platform of any academic journal must reflect this to remain vital and relevant.

Janelle Reinelt argued more than ten years ago that the future of performance studies would only become truly international by decentering 'Anglo-centrism' (2007. p.8), by ensuring that 'performance studies participates in the problem of monolingual scholarship, in spite of interest [...] in non-Western performance forms and practices' (p.9). By that, she means 'fostering comparativist research, developing cosmopolitan methodologies and perspectives with regard to our national and local scholarship, and seeking to understand and critique the complex and ever-shifting global context within which we live and work' (p.8). Reinelt contends that the term international is a challenging one and risks being totalising, because performance studies tend 'to be

presented and received as primarily an Anglo-American disciplinary formation' and there are 'the charges of imperialism that are sometimes laid at its door' (p.8). What might it take to not just present international objects and phenomena of study, but to also represent a global scope of the production of knowledge, 'without establishing a hegemonic grip on the future of the discipline'? These are questions that cannot be ignored with respect to academic publishing. Lucy Cathcart Frödén's essay in this edition directly addresses multilinguality as a manifestation of hospitality; in the previous edition Catrin Evans discussed her methods 'to actively move away from the hegemony of an imposed monolingual culture' (Evans, 2019), and while we editors and this issue's contributors continue writing in English in our work, the challenge to a performance journal based in Scotland to take seriously the multilinguality present across Scotland and move towards future multilingual conversations is obvious.

Together with our contributors, (theatre researchers, art practitioners and teachers alike) we therefore work towards 'new habits of thinking the discipline and not just an addition of new things to think about' (Bala, 2017, p.335). The contributions in this issue identify and contest cultural, racial, class-based, citizen-ist and geopolitical borders. They stay vigilant about how cultural values, aesthetics and other representational regimes continue to reproduce colonial structures of North / South, and North / South epistemologies. This issue asks: how seriously do performance practices and theatre research take the ordering of the world into North / South, since the term 'Global South' has entered political stages in the 1980s? How do practitioners and researchers negotiate the ethics, 'hierarchies of power' in cross-cultural engagement with North / South and / or the 'the economic and material conditions that enable it' (Gilbert and Lo, 2007 p.9)?

One need not dig deep to find a range of compelling literature, which deals with the how to challenge

pervasively dominant Eurocentric norms in knowledges, research methods and pedagogies (Ahmed, 2012; Bhabra et al, 2018; Land 2015; Manathunga, 2018; de Sousa Santos, 2014). Yet, the thinking and understanding of the world through ideas of North / South is bound up with the pervasiveness of colonial violence, (in)visible oppressive power structures, violence of archives and memory, public recognition and legitimacy, but also to epistemic injustice. Geopolitical and cultural codings of North and South continue to haunt our critical views and affective takes on the world and its cultural representations. The contributors in this issue wrestle with such predominant modes of looking from the North onto the South and ask about the usefulness of the binary North / South concept.

In *The Trial Against Ourselves, pre-enactment and utopia: imagining alternatives to contemporary global capitalism* Julian Blaue describes how he and his partner Edy Poppy developed a series of performances in the tradition of Augusto Boal and Milo Rau staged as a response to a traumatic incident they experienced on the streets of Rio de Janeiro while the city hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup. In these performances they press charges against themselves on the basis of structural violence—economic and cultural—that they might be held responsible for and that could be construed as the root cause of that incident. Blaue and Poppy's aim in these re-enactments is to set up a 'utopian dialect' that suggests an alternative to the existing structures of globalised capitalism.

Lucy Cathcart Frödén's article *We are the Sun: Multilingual collaborative songwriting as a hospitable, embodied and political process* describes a series of multilingual songwriting workshops run in Glasgow. The article focuses on the writing of one song in particular 'We Are The Sun', which uses seven languages: multilingualism is demonstrated as a source of integration and hospitality in the creative process and as something that can usefully query and ultimately undermine the binary oppositions (guest / host, central /



peripheral) that arise in cultural contexts that confront and attempt to dismantle the legacies of colonialism.

*How located can we be? About situated curatorial practices in Mediterranean Europe* is Viviana Checchia's investigation into the potential for curatorial practices to cultivate local understanding of art works. She proposes an alternative 'situated' model of curatorial practice that will help to free cultural production from overbearing historical, social, cultural and social perceptions and operate more effectively to support local knowledge frameworks and interests.

The review section of this issue draws together some of the themes which the research articles have opened up: Helene Grøn's review of the volume *Dramaturgy of Migration: Staging Multilingual Encounters in Contemporary Theatre*, edited by Yana Meerzon and Katharina Pewny, centres on migrant theatre and performing multilingually. With critical generosity, Molly Ziegler reads Sandra Young's monograph *Shakespeare in the Global South: Stories of Oceans Crossed in Contemporary Adaptation* where she investigates the potentials and limits Shakespeare offers for new story-telling and identity formation in non-Anglophone contexts and contexts of dispossession. Finally, Anika Marschall reviews *Migration in Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*, co-authored by Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston, and *Interculturalism and Performance Now. New Directions?*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Jason King. She contextualises her reading context self-critically in times of global crises, and discusses the books' potentials and limits in presenting testimonial theatre about the global crises of care, social reproduction and racial capitalism; as well as critical interventions into hegemonic knowledge production and 'hegemonic intercultural theatre' (Lei, 2011).

As an appendix to this special issue is *Not fewer resources, but different: Creative responses to practice*

and research during Covid-19, a report by Victoria Bianchi, Bianca Mastrominico and Anthony Schrag on three on-line seminars hosted by the Centre for Communication, Cultural and Media Studies at Queen Margaret University in January 2021. The Seminars were on Film-making Practice, Practice Research and Liveness in Digital Creative Processes.

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ANIKA MARSCHALL & IAIN HARVIE  
Co-editors, *Scottish Journal of Performance*

# **We are the Sun: Multilingual collaborative songwriting as a hospitable, embodied and political process**

LUCY CATHCART FRÖDÉN

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*Multilingual approaches to collaborative creativity can be seen as one form of resistance to inequality and neo-colonialism, through the potential to decentre the English language, unsettle entrenched linguistic hierarchies, and open up spaces of linguistic hospitality (Ricoeur, 2006). This article will share a song written in collaboration with displaced young people, in order to reflect on ways in which multilingualism in creative processes and performance might play a role in fostering solidarity and mutual care. The song, the writing process and the participants' reflections together act as a lens through which to observe small but significant shifts that can happen when linguistic repertoires beyond the dominant language are welcomed into a shared creative space. Multilingual approaches here are not seen as a quick-fix solution to systemic injustice, but as one way to illuminate questions of power and audibility in socially-engaged arts practice..*

*Keywords: Songwriting, multilingualism, collaboration, socially-engaged arts practice*

## **We are the Sun**

### VERSE 1

I am a unicorn, I am a flower  
I am a robin, a high tower  
I am a wave, I am a tree  
I am a lighthouse, I am green  
I am the town on a Friday night  
I am a magpie, a lucky sight  
I'm a sweet potato, surprise inside  
I am a well-worn scarf, nothing to hide.

### CHORUS 1

I am the sun  
Nos somos o sol (Portuguese)  
Ana alshams (Arabic)  
Awa ni Orun (Yoruba)

### VERSE 2

I am an ant, never stopping  
I am a robin, hear me singing  
I am a building, I'll keep you safe  
I am a survivor, a brown bear  
I am a listener, I am a fighter  
I am a daughter, I am a sister  
I am a rope bridge, a connection  
I am an old coastal ruin.

## CHORUS 2

Nnamal Suryan Aannu (Malayalam)

Sisi ni jua (Swahili)

Yo soy el sol (Spanish)

Kita adalah matahari (Indonesian)

I am the sun

We are the sun

*Music and lyrics by Asma, Fatma, Christianah, Nuha,  
Alhan, Olda, Shobhita, Vanessa, Clare, Donna and Lucy  
Recorded at Chem19 Studios  
Produced by Donna Maciocia  
Mixed and mastered by Jamie Savage*

## **Introduction**

It is strange to see the above lyrics in tidy, symmetrical lines, flat and immobile, when the song they belong to is so filled with movement, texture and vitality. The words come alive when voiced by the young women who wrote them, and I recommend that you begin your reading of this paper by having a listen, here.

<https://soundcloud.com/yкса-music/1-we-are-the-sun?in=yкса-music/sets/hidden-rhythms>

This paper emerges from a practice-based PhD that uses collaborative and often multilingual songwriting to explore how shared creativity facilitates human connection. The focus here will be on a series of three weekend songwriting workshops with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Glasgow, which I co-facilitated with Clare McBrien, Donna Maciocia and Diljeet Bhachu. The first two workshops were hosted through the Youth Community Support Agency, with around eight to twelve participants, as part of a project

that came to be known as *Hidden Rhythms*. The final workshop was hosted at a later date, at arts organisation Vox Liminis, and involved five participants. The young people were from a wide range of ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds, and most had experience of the asylum process. A number of songs were created as part of these workshops, and you can listen to a selection of them here.

<https://soundcloud.com/yкса-music/sets/hidden-rhythms>

In the context of this research, collaborative songwriting creates spaces for embodied knowledge creation through arts praxis, following Trimmingham (2002) and Nelson (2013). By sharing one of our songs alongside field notes, co-writers' perspectives and theoretical points of connection, this article aims to reflect on the potential of multilingualism in the context of intercultural co-creative encounters. The song and conversations referenced here are shared with the generous permission of the co-writers and the co-facilitators, as detailed in the acknowledgements.

This article will begin by discussing linguistic hostility and hospitality in the context of broader discourses of integration in the UK, and considering how multilingual creative encounters could support a shift from hostility towards conviviality. Then it will discuss three areas of reflection from the research, weaving together theory, practice and practical suggestions for creative collaborations across cultural and linguistic differences. By shining a light on some small moments of connection between differently situated people, I will explore how shared music-making might connect us, and how language and translation intersect with participatory arts processes.

It is important to acknowledge my own positionality at the outset. As a white, middle-class, educated, European woman, I am profoundly and uncomfortably aware of my

own privilege, and my own complicity in the structures and systems that maintain a status quo that is oppressive for the majority of people on the planet, in economic, political, ecological, social and cultural terms. I write not from the detached position of an observer, but from the engaged position of someone trying to listen and learn, to take meaningful action, and to play a part in finding new forms of solidarity and hospitality, aware that this will be messy, awkward and often inadequate<sup>1</sup>.

### **Integration, hospitality and language— beyond binaries**

This special issue takes up the theme of ‘Performing the North / South’, and the contribution of this article is to reflect on multilingual co-creation as one way to create spaces that are more capacious and relational than those focused on difference and on binary oppositions. In order to frame and contextualise this argument, we must first define what is meant by some of the key terms and suggest a movement away from understandings of these concepts that focus on binaries and differences.

The doctoral research from which this paper emerges considers integration in collaboration with two groups of people—people who have experience of the criminal justice system, and people who have been forcibly displaced. The intention of the research is not to explore the experience of migration, nor of the criminal justice system, nor to draw parallels or comparisons between these two groups. The research is located with these groups because it builds on my own previous experiences of working in community development projects alongside people facing these sets of circumstances. Rather than focusing on migration or criminalisation, the research creates spaces to consider what happens after these experiences, and how we might create conditions for community to thrive and meaningful connections to be made. This article focuses on a short series of creative research encounters with young people who have

migrated, and there is not scope here to discuss criminal justice-related aspects of the work<sup>2</sup>.

The term 'integration' is a problematic one, often used in the political arena as a synonym for assimilation, a 'conformance by outsiders with a normative, universal, and static national citizen subject' (McPherson, 2010, p.546). It is important to state that this research envisions integration differently, as a collective flourishing; an inclusive network of community relationships characterised by respect, solidarity and mutual care. This is a complex process of mutual accommodation, requiring action and change from all involved (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.177).

Just as 'integration' is a contested term, so too is 'hospitality'—too often understood as a binary situation where a benevolent and generous host holds all the assets and power, opening their home to a guest who is foreign, needy, and passive. Interestingly, the Latin root, 'hospes' can mean host, guest or stranger, which hints at a far less fixed definition of roles. I understand the term as a shared relational process where the roles of host and guest can be fluid, and where varied and reciprocal gestures of welcome are made. These may be physical (e.g. sharing food, making a cup of tea) or symbolic (e.g. sharing language, listening to one another). Lee Higgins conceptualises the 'community' in community music as hospitality: 'the making of time for another and the invitation to become included [...] an ethical action toward a relationship to another person' (Higgins, 2012, p.108). The value of this 'making of time' for one another is not to be underestimated, especially in the context of our rushed modern lifestyles, where time is so heavily monetised by market economics and where busyness and stress become a kind of status symbol.

In translation theory, Ricoeur describes 'linguistic hospitality' as an approach 'where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's



welcoming house' (Ricoeur, 2006, p.10). I draw on this concept for a participatory arts context, where I define linguistic hospitality as a way of working that actively welcomes languages other than the dominant one into a shared space or a creative process, and where the guest / host boundary is fluid and permeable. This permeability is possible because we all have a language to share, whereas in a traditional understanding of domestic hospitality, we might assume that ownership of a space is required, immediately implying a potential inequality—although Derrida and Dufourmantelle question this assumption: 'is it necessary to start from the certain existence of a dwelling, or is it rather only starting from the dislocation of the shelterless, the homeless, that the authenticity of hospitality can open up?' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p.56).

Postcolonial discourses in educational, academic, political, cultural contexts are often characterised by binary oppositions: North / South, coloniser / colonised, centre / periphery. There is no question that this is a necessary lens, highlighting the many oppressions and brutalities of centuries of colonial history, the values of which continue to underpin unjust and racialised systems at every level of society. Those of us in a position of privilege and from a 'colonising' background need to continually work to recognise and dismantle the legacies of colonialism that are all around us.

At the same time, too inflexible a focus on binaries can draw 'thick lines where porosity exists' (Phipps, 2019, p.8), oversimplifying complex and layered intercultural dynamics and perpetuating the very divisions that many seek to work together to overcome. Haifa Alfaisal's work helpfully explores how 'the dichotomising framework that postcolonialism applies to indigenous epistemologies is symptomatic of a profound shortcoming. This concerns postcolonialism's lack of a critical stance towards its own epistemological foundations' (Alfaisal, 2011, p.24).

In a community arts context, an approach that emphasises difference and binaries can lead to the creation of work intended to provoke empathy or pity from dominant groups towards marginalised groups. Indeed, projects that seek to instrumentalise the power of art to project a certain image or provoke a certain response can inadvertently objectify, sensationalise, flatten or homogenise unique and unrepeatable life experiences. Catrin Evans' groundbreaking work reveals and critiques this dynamic in community arts:

I would welcome participatory arts practitioners moving away from the work of solely humanising or provoking empathy [...] and instead building artistic spaces where inter-relations and shared moments of creation and responsibility can form the basis for localised solidarity (Evans, 2019, p.50).

Multilingual approaches to the creative process can constitute one way to help move away from binaries and towards more solidary and equitable spaces by 'decentering the dominant group' (Hill Collins, 1990, p.237) and shifting our perceptions of where knowledge is held. My experience from this research suggests that inviting languages other than English into our interactions can help engender more hospitable, democratic, and unpredictable spaces in which to co-create. Opening our ears and minds up to experiencing and valuing other languages is particularly meaningful in a society that often takes a deficit-based view of language skills, where the lack of English of people from migrant backgrounds is lamented, while their skills in languages other than English, which have the potential to greatly enrich our culture, are largely ignored (Scanlan, 2007, p.3).

In our multicultural and multilingual urban populations, language continues to function as a clear marker of 'us and them', an unhelpful binary. 'More than any other aspect of our social life, language, in its various modes,

participates in the constant struggle to define some version of our “self” over and against some “other”...’ (Ashcroft, 2009, p.96). Indeed, the move towards more explicitly racialised and discriminatory political and media rhetoric since the 2016 referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union seems to have legitimised an outpouring of racist behaviour across the UK. One example was a sign put up in a Norwich tower block wishing residents a ‘Happy Brexit Day’ and stating ‘as we finally have our great country back we feel there is one rule that needs to be made clear to Winchester Tower residents. We do not tolerate people speaking other languages than English in the flats.’ (BBC, 2020a) Thankfully, this was far from an uncontested act—dozens of residents responded by putting up messages of kindness and welcome (BBC, 2020b). Nonetheless, this episode demonstrates that language continues to be ‘a place of struggle’ (hooks, 1989, p.16).

It is against the backdrop of this bitterly divided, deeply prejudiced and fearful nation that examples of linguistic hospitality, diversity and openness might be able to play a role in shifting the public discourse towards a more positive relationship with languages, and in so doing, with integration in general. It is widely recognised that language plays a crucial role in the construction of identity (see for example, Stroinska, 2003), which may explain why some feel threatened by exposure to unfamiliar languages. However, our languages are not static or immutable, but constantly evolving, and Ashcroft reminds us of the potential for language to be a place of encounter:

The discovery we make is that language, far from being a mode of being locked up in a particular culture, is already an ambivalent ‘third space’ between people, a transcultural space that defies the essential location of subjects. (Ashcroft, 2009, p.96)

So how might we engender and inhabit such transcultural spaces? I would argue that multilingual approaches can begin to help us shift power and focus towards the margins; create space for each unique voice, and position our creative work in a broader political context.

### **‘We are the sun’: peripheries and centres**

‘We are the Sun’ was the first song to emerge from the workshops. It came together rapidly on the first evening we spent together. We began with an exercise where we reflected on all the different kinds of identity that might be assigned to us by others—a friend, a student, a migrant, a daughter. We drew around our hands and wrote these inside our handprints. Then we filled the rest of the paper with more poetic or metaphorical ways we might see ourselves: I am a wave, a lighthouse, a sweet potato. The line ‘I am the sun’ became the refrain of the song, moving to ‘we are the sun’, and together we translated it into all the languages spoken in the room. Each participant tutored us as a group in how to spell and pronounce the words from their language.

We found ourselves laughing, connecting, as we awkwardly tasted unfamiliar syllables, trying, failing, and trying again. Stumbling over each other's languages, like tree roots on a forest path, made us all slow down. We discovered that these linguistic roots, that hold us up and anchor us down at the same time, are complex and interconnected. Listening to and emulating one another's languages led to a more relational approach, where we as facilitators felt some of the ‘linguistic incompetence’ (Phipps, 2013, p.329) and vulnerability of a beginner, entering a place of new possibilities.

In symbolic terms the song came to represent a number of transitions—from being stereotyped in narrow, limiting or negative terms, to having freedom to claim multiple and complex identities; from ‘I’ to ‘we’; and from monolingual to multilingual. Although not explicitly political, the song's use of six minority languages (in

relation to UK culture) became an exhortation to welcome and tune in to unfamiliar words and sonic textures, and their speakers.

There is resonance here with the centre / periphery dichotomy present in postcolonial discourses. How do we acknowledge the profound inequalities in the distribution of resources and opportunities between the centre and the periphery, without taking an approach that emphasises difference over commonality and connection? Feminist theorist and social activist bell hooks powerfully dissects the way that her academic colleagues' fixation with difference and 'the other' became a form of colonisation in itself:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject and you are now at the centre of my talk (hooks, 1989, p.22).

Her words are, and should be, a clarion call for participatory arts work to move away from the familiar pattern of stories from the margins retold by voices from the centre. Hooks exhortation is not to ignore difference, but to consider whose voices are given space to be heard and whose are silenced, and to emphasise the agency of those in the margins, which she sees as 'not a site of domination but a place of resistance' (hooks, 1989, p.22).

I would argue that moves towards multilingualism, however inadequate, may be one step towards making it possible for all the voices present in a space to be heard

more fully. Listening to each other's unfamiliar words might make more apparent the unique expertise and situated knowledge that lies within each individual. In the case of our song, it is not more than a playful sketch or a fleeting gesture, but it does create space for languages and voices that are peripheral in relation to anglophone culture to be heard—and indeed for the co-writers to position themselves metaphorically at the very centre of the solar system.

A field note from one of the songwriting weekends illustrates how opening up to other languages also seemed to facilitate a shift in power dynamics. The youngest participant in this workshop was a native Spanish speaker, who was also new to the group. He co-wrote a hip-hop song with two other people, which featured a section of rapping in Spanish. Prior to performing the song, he had been shy and reserved in the group. This observation comes from a field note I wrote immediately after the performance.

After performing, J expressed himself more assertively than previously. It was like there was a part of him that was expressed through that language that could take control of the space or claim power in a new way. When somebody else, an older and more vocal member of the group, asked, “what was that, was it English, was it Arabic?”—J sat up straight and said confidently, “no it was Spanish” with a visible sense of pride in holding that knowledge. Then one of the facilitators offered to share a translation and, again assertively and confidently J said, “no, I don’t want to share the translation”. He hadn’t expressed himself this way in the space before but he obviously felt some ownership over the language and the song, and perhaps then also over the situation (Cathcart Frödén, 2018).

These are tiny interactions, and not in themselves revolutionary. But what is worth mentioning here is the organic way that the change in power dynamics came about. As the language itself took up space, it seemed to confer authority on its speaker, realigning our perceptions of knowledge distribution and making more profound changes in social interactions possible.

For those of us involved in academic work or community arts practice with people who have migrated, how can this learning inform our practice? Drawing from postcolonial theory, we can consider our group dynamics in relation to the unequal distribution of power associated with the centre and periphery, and how we might redistribute that power through listening, humility, and 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps, 2013, p.329). We can also be mindful to ensure languages do not exclude, in situations where some group members have a shared language that others do not speak, but that we form collective habits around openness, curiosity and polyphony in relation to language. Further, we can embrace and enjoy the inherent sense of playfulness and connection in 'tripping over one another's roots' as we attempt to sound new and unfamiliar words.

### **'Whatever is hiding inside you': voices and bodies**

A recurring theme in the research has been voice. Our language is, of course, mediated primarily by our voices—long before the written word gets involved (Thiong'o, 2013, p.159). From the moment we are born, our voices connect us with those closest to us. Bound up with the machinery of our breathing and our survival from moment to moment, our vocal chords mediate our needs, our fears, our grief, our laughter and our joy.

Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero considers the voice an embodied marker of our uniqueness as humans, whereby our physical bodies give each of us a

distinct voice, allowing us to connect through the resonance between the vibrations of one person's 'throat of flesh' (p. 198) and another's ear (Cavarero, 2003, p.178). Her work envisions new ways to break out from the patriarchal symbolic order, using 'a politics of voices' to form provisional spaces, places of resignification, where meanings, concepts and categories can be broken down and new relations can grow, based on the reciprocal exchange of vocal communication of voices (Cavarero, 2003, p.197). While Cavarero's work focuses on resisting the oppression of the patriarchal ordering of society, we can just as easily discern its value in resisting racialised and colonial structures.

The voice does not engage in masquerade; indeed, it strips away masks from the word. The word can say anything and its opposite. No matter what it says, the voice communicates first and always one thing: the uniqueness of she or he who emits it (Cavarero, 2003, translation in Smart, 2005, p.107).

This is not to say that our vocalisations cannot be violent or harmful or deceitful, but it does imply relationship: 'a mutual presence of speakers' (Cecconi, 2005, p.100). Crucially, then, the emphasis is on the very act of vocalisation and its relational and political potential, 'a sonic self-revelation that exceeds the linguistic register of meaning' (Cavarero, 2003, p.192).

In terms of practice, this understanding of the human voice allows us to loosen the ties that connect words to meaning, to be content to enjoy hearing without immediately understanding, to notice the shapes of new sounds and resonances, and to create auditory space for each person's individual vocalisations. Voice can also be conceptualised more broadly here. In practice, some participants in the songwriting workshops were eager to sing, while others enjoyed the creative process but were not comfortable singing at all. Broadening the concept of voice in a musical context beyond singing to mean a



unique, embodied, auditory contribution to the song, this could take the form of spoken word or rap, humming, clapping or beating a drum.

This capacious conceptualisation of voice concerns the *how* of personal expression. Inextricably entangled with this is the question of *what* we choose to express through the creative process, and Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us this is an equally embodied process:

For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil (Anzaldúa, 2007, p.75).

If there is freedom to be found in creating and expressing ourselves in ways that are rooted in our embodied experience, this is not without irony when the physical body in which this expression is rooted is very far from free. For the young women of colour involved in writing 'We are the Sun', Anzaldúa's 'pulling of flesh' is a brutal, daily reality. Located in bodies heavily policed by the UK's deliberately hostile environment (Gentleman, 2019) and subject to discrimination and precarious living conditions on the multiple grounds of race, gender and immigration status, the creative process is perhaps both a route to freedom and a painful reminder of a lack thereof.

In reflecting on voice and embodied creative practice, we can also consider performance. Following the first songwriting workshop, the group were approached and invited to perform 'We are the Sun' on the main stage in Glasgow's George Square as part of the cultural programme accompanying the city's hosting of the 2018 European Championships. After this experience I asked some of the participants to reflect on their experience of

songwriting and performing. Their responses resonate with Cavarero's philosophy in the sense that they refer to the experience of writing and performing songs as an embodied one, where the connection between the emotional and the physical is clear. Asma talked about having the opportunity to 'take out whatever is hiding inside you'. Nuha talked about songwriting as expressing "a story of something you can't really say or explain but [...] it turns out into your whole heart that you can't really speak but you put into words". Shobhita talks about this emotional release "I think I just had a lot of emotion inside, and I was, like in my previous life I had to shove it down and not be able to show a lot of things [...] I had a lot of emotion built up here and I just needed to spread it to the world rather than silencing it. Yeah!"

When the discussion turned to the multilingual chorus of the song, and the experience of performing it together, Nuha commented: "That made it amazing, like it made it feel like, you know, without bloodline you're still like family." Fatma agreed: "It feels like we are all one person and we all come from one place". These comments strike me as beautiful ways to describe the process of integration. Paradoxically perhaps, by highlighting all our different linguistic backgrounds, and celebrating them through collective vocalisation, what we held in common became more apparent and audible than the differences between us.

This focus on embodied expression can help to create space to acknowledge and attend to each other's physical needs as part of the co-creative process. Caring for one another through gestures of reciprocal hospitality became an increasingly significant feature of the songwriting weekends: sharing responsibility for feeding one another or making each other cups of tea. This seemed to echo the linguistic dynamics, as reciprocity in food and vocalisation emerged as analogous ways to connect and nourish one another. On one of the later weekends, I was working on a song with Christianah, a co-writer I had worked with before, and noticed a change in our shared process:

Songwriting with Christianah the first time round, in the main space, I recall an uncomfortable sense that she was deferring to me, that I was in control of the direction of the song. With this second co-write, we were in the kitchen. She was cooking Nigerian food for everyone's lunch, and took charge of the space, delegating tasks to me. Then once most of the cooking was done and Christianah was doing the finishing touches, I sat down at the kitchen table to work on her song, asking her questions about it and taking notes. She was immediately much more assertive than the last time we had worked together—"no I don't want to talk about that" or "I want the song to be more about X". This felt like a significant shift—she was articulating the vision and I was just helping her to realise it—just like the cooking (Cathcart Frödén, 2018).

In considering collaborative practice, the centrality of voice cannot be overstated. Opening up space to listen to everyone's vocalisations—be they spoken, sung, wordy or wordless, linguistically comprehensible or perceived simply as sonic and vocal texture—can be received by those involved as a moment of connection, a way to democratise a space and share power, and in showing mutual care, as a profoundly political act. This is recognised by Leah Bassel in her monograph *The Politics of Listening*, where she defends the importance of micropolitics: face-to-face practices that challenge inaudibility and political inequality (Bassel, 2017). When members of dominant groups focus on listening, face-to-face encounters can become unique sites of learning and growth. In interactions with people from a minority linguistic background, an emphasis on listening can allow space for the interlocutor's other languages to emerge. Alison Phipps reminds us that caring for one another's languages is not dry or dull but something that can be woven into the fabric of our lives and relationships in organic and life-giving ways:

A decolonial multilinguality would be more like a dance than a panopticon. It would be learned standing, moving, walking and especially eating. Lessons would begin in music, as a song is easier for the vocal training of pronunciation than speech. A decolonial multilinguality would take to the streets and learn from many patient speakers; it would be part of a befriending, community practice, a purposeful consideration of how the world around us is shared in speech (Phipps, 2019, p.92).

### **‘Strike a match’: Solidarity and a politics of noticing**

At the end of each songwriting weekend, we tentatively performed our newborn songs to each other—always a uniquely moving, slightly scary and deeply memorable experience. On listening back to one of these moments, I was struck by the ending of the song that Christianah and I wrote together in the kitchen. She is on lead vocals, and at the end she repeats the chorus refrain “strike a match and make my own flame”. As Christianah's voice begins to fade out, everyone else in the room gradually picks up the refrain, until we are all singing together, in quiet but persistent unison.

There is something in this moment that is striking, goose-pimpling even, and difficult to articulate; the way Christianah's rich, soulful voice settles in to a brand new song; the way the other voices in unison feel like they are all supporting one another rather than vying for attention. It is the kind of sound that can only be achieved when the focus of the singers is on listening, a kind of vocal solidarity, where every voice can be heard. This is not a protest song, nor a song trying to influence or persuade the listener of something, nor seeking to provoke empathy, nor a song whose lyrical content would be described as political in any way. And yet this collective, embodied expression of mutual care seems profoundly political.

Why is this so? Is it just the emotion of the moment? After all, one of the strengths of community arts practice can be the creation of a temporary bubble, a liminal and transient space where participants feel a freedom to express themselves and connect. This can often be a positive experience with a movement towards equality at its core (Higgins, 2012). Within this affective space, the way this line is sung evokes a unity that could be described as prefigurative—‘envisioning and enacting the interventions of a world to come’ (Brown, 2019, p.80). What makes this moment feel weighty and significant, then, is perhaps the contrast between this room and the world outside its walls. As soon as we step outside our temporary creative bubble, we find ourselves back in the hostile environment, in a world where ‘everything is political and the choice to be “apolitical” is usually just an endorsement of the status quo’ (Solnit, interviewed by Cohen, 2009). Where ‘washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral’ (Freire, 1985, p.122). So how do we go about situating our community arts practice, or our research inquiry, within a wider political context?

Returning to Bassel's *The Politics of Listening* is a good starting point, and I suggest that we add to this a ‘politics of noticing’. A politics of noticing means not only being present enough to observe the details and complexities of moments like the one just described, but also placing these moments in a wider socio-political context. Doing so makes clear not only the ephemerality of the shared creative experience, but also its potential to create imaginaries that sustain hope in circumstances of precarity and oppression.

A politics of noticing means tuning in to what is happening at the fringes of our encounters with collaborators who are subject to systemic violence. Noticing when participants leave early with lined faces to go and report at the Home Office, or have just received an official letter with worrying content, or do not turn up

because they have been told they need to vacate their accommodation in a matter of hours. And not just noticing but taking responsibility for our complicity with these unjust systems and working towards structural reform in tangible ways—even if it is hard to know how. Solidarity takes many forms but is always rooted in action to resist oppression and undertaking such action in reflective ways can bring about what Freire calls ‘conscientização’ or ‘learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (Freire, 1970, p.9 [translator's note]).

For practitioners in participatory and socially-engaged arts, this can be an uncomfortable process of recognising one’s own complicity and inadequacy in the face of systemic injustice. Resistance to colonial hierarchies cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of the status quo, as Frantz Fanon makes clear:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. (Fanon, 1963, p.36)

For practitioners of collaborative and socially-engaged arts who are not affected by the forms of oppression to which our collaborators are subject, our encounters constitute a space in which to listen and learn, and to be challenged. Instead of claiming ‘ignorance of unjust silencing’ (Mihai, 2018), this is an opportunity to listen to voices that have been suppressed, and to approach reflexivity not as a source of comfort but as a ‘practice of confounding disruptions’ (Pillow, 2003, p. 192).

Collaborative practice, then, can and should be an unsettling force. Indeed, Ida Danewid warns against a move to frame discourses of integration in terms of ‘empathy, generosity and hospitality’, suggesting that this

reinforces an image of the dominant, colonising forces as benevolent, and avoids the more difficult questions of ‘responsibility, guilt, restitution, repentance, and structural reform’ (Danewid, 2017, p.1675). I agree with Danewid's critique of responses that frame the action of dominant groups in terms of empathy or generosity. Reciprocal hospitality, however, has emerged repeatedly through this research as something vital and life-giving, leading to greater solidarity. Following Derrida, Urie et al conceptualise hospitality as something that:

‘interrupts our selves and disrupts our social settings [...] we argue that these interruptions and disruptions are necessary to and critical in the project of imagining something better than the hostility that prevails today’ (Urie et al, 2019, p.80).

Collaborative acts that involve learning new words, inhabiting the linguistic margins, and meeting in the hinterlands between languages can involve both risk and reward. Our collective making may be slowed down, there may be misunderstandings or confused silences, or we may all feel out of our depth. Perhaps this is just the kind of interruption that can help to disrupt the status quo and offer a new vocabulary to imagine something better.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

At this point, you are invited once again to listen to the voices on the recording of ‘We are the Sun’, and to consider the kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing that are present in the song. The song is a simple one, but both its form and its content refuse to conform to binary constructs or flattened identity categories that characterise oppressed groups as ‘depleted, ruined, and hopeless’ (Tuck, 2009). Instead, the co-writers collectively claim auditory and metaphorical space, painting pictures of complex and layered identities. By bringing their rich linguistic repertoires to the creative process, the co-

writers enabled a unique combination of the hospitable, the embodied and the political in our collaboration.

Gloria Andalzúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987), although based on the Chicana and mestiza experience in Texas, resonates with some of the hierarchies of language we encounter in the UK: 'So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.' (Andalzúa, p.59)

This idea of taking pride, I think, is a fitting phrase on which to end. We cannot give pride. We can only take pride: it has to be claimed—sometimes against the odds. When you are surrounded by a society that devalues your background, your skin colour or your language, taking pride is a bold, courageous and political act. Nuha, one of the inspiring young women who wrote and performed 'We are the Sun', tells us this:

"I felt like I was telling a story to them but on the stage, through lyrics and metaphors, and everyone was just listening and understanding... even though I was looking at the paper the whole time... I kind of sneak peeked... And... it just feels good to, you know, share. I'm glad I did it. I felt so proud of myself."

## Notes

1. Of course, stating my positionality does not make the difficult ethical questions about power and representation in this research go away. Early in my PhD, I asked my supervisor, Professor Alison Phipps, about uncomfortable gut feelings regarding privilege and complicity. She assured me that this was not something to suppress or overcome, but to listen to, and that 'if that knot in your stomach ever goes away, then you're not doing this right'. There is resonance here with Pillow's 'reflexivities of discomfort' (2003, p.175)—an approach to research that does not seek a linear trajectory towards 'a comfortable, transcendent end-point' (Pillow, 2003, p.193) but that recognises and holds the unease, the



impossibilities, and the complicities inherent in all kinds of participatory research processes. <sup>[1]</sup>

2. Those with an interest in reading more about collaborative songwriting as research with people affected by the criminal justice system are invited to explore the work of Vox Liminis (voxliminis.co.uk), and to find out more about the Distant Voices project through recent articles by Urie et al (2019) and Crockett Thomas et al (2020).<sup>[1]</sup>

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## **About the author**

LUCY CATHCART FRÖDÉN is a researcher, linguist and community artist, working primarily in music and sound. Her PhD at the University of Glasgow, entitled 'Echolocations: exploring integration and the ethics of participation through collaborative songwriting', sought to better understand how shared creative practice might help foster solidarity and mutual care and how in-between spaces - between languages, cultures, disciplines or art practices - can become common ground. She worked on the Distant Voices: Coming Home research project, exploring questions of crime, punishment and reintegration through songwriting with people affected by the Scottish criminal justice system, and she devised and produced the project's podcast series 'The Art of Bridging'. She is currently undertaking a Scottish Justice Fellowship, developing new resources on how narratives are compressed and distorted by the criminal justice system. She recently moved to Malmö, Sweden, where she is in the early stages of developing new work on multilingual urban soundscapes.

# ***The Trial Against Ourselves, pre-enactment and utopia: imagining alternatives to contemporary global capitalism***

JULIAN BLAUE

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*In this essay the author develops a concept for his and Edy Poppy's performance, The Trial Against Ourselves (2021). In their 'utopian' performance they enact alternatives to contemporary global capitalism. Juridical theatre has a tradition of trying to accomplish this: Augusto Boal (Legislative Theatre) and Milo Rau (The Congo Tribunal) attempt to enact similar alternatives through their re-enactments of injustice and pre-enactments of utopias. In The Criminal Complaint Performance (2018), the forerunner of The Trial Against Ourselves, Blaue & Poppy 'enacted' a law against structural violence and 'pressed charges' against themselves.*

*Keywords: pre-enactment, juridical performance, structural violence, utopia, practice as research*

## **Introduction**

The aim of this essay is to present methods of enacting alternatives to global capitalism by means of juridical theatre; and thus, to discuss possible dramaturgical tools for the performance *The Trial Against Ourselves*. This premiered (with two subsequent performances) on April 2021 at Kilden teater in Kristiansand, Norway while the article was still being written: I am lucky to be able to present the thoughts leading up to the performance, and

in the last paragraphs to look back on how the theatre trial was actually staged. The three trials were live-streamed on our self-created channel CourtStageTV via the online video platform YouTube<sup>1</sup>. In May 2021 we also performed it physically at Stamsund International Theatre Festival, Norway. It is the third and last performance in a series, previously including *The Criminal Complaint Performance* and *The Interim Report*. In this article, I put the discussion of the performance *The Trial Against Ourselves* in dialogue with Milo Rau's and Augusto Boal's juridical performance projects. It is my hope that my reflections upon the dramaturgical means of our own theatre tribunal will contribute to a wider discourse around artistic strategies for imagining and enacting legislative alternatives to contemporary global capitalism. The point of departure for this essay (and our performance series generally) is an armed assault my partner Edy Poppy and I experienced in Rio de Janeiro. I reflect on the problem of talking about socio-economically deprived and marginalised people in Brazil while I occupy a midde-class<sup>2</sup> position in Northern Europe. I argue that representing 'the other' is problematic but necessary in this case. Presenting the two performances leading up to *The Trial Against Ourselves*, I explore the notion of structural violence that plays a central role in the performance series. Here, the question of responsibility for structural violence, and juridical methods to combat it are essential. Further, I investigate how Boal and Rau re-enact injustice in performance, at the same time pre-enacting utopias as alternatives to contemporary global capitalism. With reference to José Esteban Muñoz, I ask questions about the potential success and failure in attempts to establish better realities, utopias. This helps me to introduce my dramaturgical concept of 'critically exposing circumstances', which is about showing-doing or even scandalising the very failure of specific utopian blueprints.

## The backstory: a reversed crime story?



*Julian Blaue after the assault at the Rio Tourist Police Office, Rio de Janeiro, Christmas Eve 2015.*

In Rio de Janeiro, Christmas Eve 2015, Edy Poppy, our baby boy Béla and myself, were robbed by two economically underprivileged armed men from a favela (a Brazilian low-income settlement). First, we felt we were victims, but then we began to reflect on the political background of the incident. We asked ourselves an obvious question: was the reason for the assault poverty, and could one define poverty as the unjust distribution of common global goods? Further, we considered the ways that the global upper and middle classes profit from this unjust distribution. According to Paul Farmer 'the world's poor are the chief victims of structural violence' (Farmer, 2009, p.25). Observations like these made us change our perspective, from a focus on our victimhood to centring on the two men's presumed motives for assaulting us. If the men's poverty is caused by structural violence, the ones responsible for acting out this structural violence against them should also be prosecuted. But who are the perpetrators, who are those responsible for structural violence against economically underprivileged people? One could reply: those who profit from the unjust distribution, generally speaking the global upper and middle classes. We, Blaue & Poppy, are a part of the



global middle class, so maybe in reality we perpetrated a structural crime against our assaulters that could be even more severe than the one they acted out against us. If this connection can be drawn in this specific case, should we press charges against ourselves?

## **Research ethics and the conditions of talking about other cultures and classes**

We, Blau & Poppy, are Europeans from the Global North writing, thinking, and making art about an encounter in Brazil and the social conditions leading up to it. Specifically, we are speaking about people within that society whom I have labelled as two 'economically underprivileged' men from a favela in Rio. Speaking from this positionality, it is difficult to avoid a colonial gesture, by which I also refer to the class divide; I perceive this divide to be even more significant than geographic north / south perspective. The middle and upper classes in different parts of the world are homogenized by globalization and 'the other' is now the non-globalized, local underclass (Baumann, 1998, p.92-102). In the case of Rio de Janeiro, one cannot (only) talk about a national-imperialist exploitation, the people of one country exploiting the other. It is the middle and upper classes in Rio, normally from the *asfalto*<sup>3</sup> or from abroad that exploit the local underclasses. Badly paid portieres, housemaids, nannies, drivers, factory workers and other relatively poor people, often from favelas, work for *cariocas*<sup>4</sup> and *gringos*<sup>5</sup> of the, as one could put it, 'global *asfalto*'. The colonialism I speak about is, in other words, one that describes the uneven power relations between the economically privileged and the economically underprivileged, who also could be termed the subaltern<sup>6</sup>. Accordingly, postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has claimed that 'the subaltern cannot speak' (Spivak, 1988, p.104); for, as soon as the subaltern speaks, and is *heard*, she or he is no longer subaltern. If this is true, that makes it only more important to speak *for* the subaltern, to represent them, even if one is in danger of misrepresentation. Spivak's ideal vision is that the subaltern speaks and thus stops to be subaltern. But



as long as that goal is not achieved, Spivak demands to represent them, fighting against their *assumed* bad political, cultural and economic conditions. She ends her essay, writing:

Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish (Spivak, 1988, p.104).

In our performance series and in this essay, we too can only represent the subaltern, the two men that assaulted us, not only because of the intrinsic impossibility of the subaltern speaking, but also because we were not able to get in touch with the two men to invite them to participate in our trial. We could have invited representatives of their class—but they would still only be, exactly: representatives and not themselves.

Talking about the two men, we assume to be economically underprivileged men, it seems relevant to reflect on the ethics of artistic research on 'other', especially vulnerable people. In the following, I outline the ways in which we as artist researchers are following 'The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities' by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee (NESH, 2016, p.12-18).

In section 5 the guideline says: 'While research may help promote human dignity, it can also threaten it.' (p.13). Poverty perceived as an effect of structural violence can be understood as a human rights violation, as I substantiate in the next section with reference to Kathleen Ho. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines all humans as being born equal and free in dignity (United Nation's General Assembly, 1948). Describing structural violence in a self-reflexive way thus also means to be critical to the middle class threatening human dignity of the economically

underprivileged (by, for example, forcing somebody into poverty or exploiting somebody's labour power not directly, but structurally). In the theatre tribunal *The Trial Against Ourselves*, Blaue & Poppy, aim to detect our responsibility for and implications in this structural violence, and imagine ways to end these unjust structures on a political level. The victims of this structural violence, for instance the two men in this case study could, at least potentially, be given back structurally enabled dignity.

More specific than this is the demand for confidentiality, explained in section 9 of the research ethics guideline (NESH, 2016, p.17). We are committed to following the demand for de-identifying personal data, that is, not mentioning addresses, real names, or characteristics that would allow anyone to identify the two men. According to the guidelines, one should only present identifiable data with consent from the subject of research (NESH, 2016, p.15). However, there are exceptions, for example when it is not possible to ask for consent. This is the case here, as we were not able to meet the two men again in person after the assault. The data we use in our performance is both de-identified and filtered through public Brazilian institutions themselves following their own ethical guidelines pertaining to personal security.

Regarding the epistemological status of the investigation around the two assaulter's socio-economic situation in Brazil, it is important to underline that this was an artistic exploration as part of our performance series, rather than employing social science research methods.

### ***The performance series***

*The Trial Against Ourselves* gives a jury the possibility to decide if we are guilty or not of having acted out structural violence against the two men in Rio. There are two problems this raises; first, as Kathleen Ho notes, there is no law against structural violence (Ho, 2007,

p.15); second, how are we to detect and measure our personal responsibility for structurally violent acts?



Edy Poppy and Julian Blaue in *The Criminal Complaint Performance*,  
Sørlandets kunstmuseum, 2018

### ***The Criminal Complaint Performance and The Interim Report: enacting a law against structural violence and detecting personal responsibility***

In our 2018 *The Criminal Complaint Performance* at Sørlandets kunstmuseum and *The Interim Report* performance at Kristiansand kunsthall, Teaterfestivalen i Fjaler, the University of Agder and Museu de Arte do Rio we had already tried to present an artistic response to these issues (Blaue & Poppy, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). In the first performance we used the theatrical frame to enact a law against structural violence, without, of course, official legislative effects (2019a, 9:45–10:31). In both performances we tried to detect personal responsibility for structurally violent acts. In the following, I discuss the term structural violence and possibilities to claim accountability for it.

The Norwegian anthropologist Johan Galtung coined the term structural violence and defined it as an 'avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs' (Galtung, 1993, p.106). He underlines that this is an indirect form of violence stating, 'there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (Galtung, 1969, p.171). Can structures, rather than living creatures, be (held) responsible for violence? German literary scholar and political activist Jan Philipp Reemtsma addresses this criticism of the term structural violence when he says, 'instead of pointing at the hand that is raised to strike, the speaker looks away and talks about "structures"' (Reemtsma, 1991, p.9).

In our performance series, Blaue & Poppy claim that it is both possible to look at the hand that is raised to strike as well as to talk about structures. We cannot rid ourselves of the feeling that the two men in Rio suffered from violent structures leading them to commit the crime, and that we are involved in these structures. According to Reemtsma's critiques against Galtung's notion, structural violence almost excludes the idea of human perpetrators. However, Galtung argues, and I agree, that the two do not exclude each other, but are interdependent. Because we imagine there always being on one hand, individuals who financially profit and on the other individuals who consequently suffer from socio-economic deprivation, we ought to hold profiteers responsible while supporting victims. Galtung points out the exploitative element by stating:

the archetypical violent structure, in my view, has exploitation as a center-piece. This simply means that some, the top dogs, get much more (here measured in needs currency) out of the interaction in the structure than others, the underdogs (Galtung, 1990, p.293).

The fact that Galtung knows about the paradox of personal responsibility for structural violence, does not mean that he explains how one might discover who is accountable. This inability to find those responsible seems to be something like the 'missing link' in the theory of structural violence. For example, Kathleen Ho understands structural violence as human rights violation, and is thus shifting the concept from inequality, as an ethical category, towards the tentative formulation of juridical crimes. (In Norway, where we are performing the theatre tribunal, human rights are part of the legal code, and a breach of them can subsequently be defined as a crime.) For Ho, like Farmer, poverty is a result of structural violence. However, Ho also concludes that ways 'to attribute responsibility for [...] poverty, remains' (2007, p.15). In other words, she too admits the difficulty of detecting the responsible perpetrators of structural violence.

Nevertheless, in our performance series we experimented with possible forms of literally measuring and financially calculating personal responsibility, if not official juridical accountability for structural violence.

We, Blaue & Poppy, literally estimated through calculation the amount of suffering we caused the two assaulters, and the suffering they inflicted upon us. We tried to calculate the guilt-question with 'harm- and profit-points', and thus to present a graspable way to determine responsibility for structural violence. In our calculation we also took into account the paradox that our careers have thrived due to the cultural capital gained by the assault, (including this very publication!). The estimation in *The Interim Report* performance (Blaue & Poppy, 2019d) was as follows: before the assault we imagine having caused harm in the lives of the two men from the favela by supporting the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and watching it on TV. This we estimated being equivalent to 10 profit-points. The sporting event had vastly negative consequences for the economically underprivileged of Rio de Janeiro: favela houses were

forcibly removed, people were displaced, and social programs were cancelled (Bußler, 2013, p.54-63). This negative effect of our profiting we estimated to be equivalent to 20,000 harm-points.



Julian Blaue in *The Interim Report Performance*, Kristiansand kunsthall, 2018

In turn, by assaulting us in 2015, the men produced harm in our lives (equivalent to 7000 harm-points). As a consequence, they were caught by the police and probably sent to jail (25,000 harm-points), whereas I began a well-funded artistic research fellowship (20,000 profit-points), wrote several articles, was interviewed by print and electronic media sources (about 2000 profit-points) and started the well-funded performance tryptic based on the premise of the assaulters act together with Edy Poppy (about 1250 profit-points). By 'selling' our traumatic experience, we gained both economic and cultural capital. Our concluding estimation was that we had indeed produced more harm in our assaulters' lives (and had even profited from it) than they in ours (and they had not profited at all). In *The Criminal Complaint Performance* we claimed that we had 'broken our own law' and thus we 'pressed charges' against ourselves for having committed structural violence against socio-economic deprived people, specifically, these two men.





*Julian Blaue and Edy Poppy on their investigation journey, Rio de Janeiro, 2018*

Directly after pressing charges against ourselves in Norway, we went on a journey to Brazil to investigate our estimations further (Blaue & Poppy, 2019a, 55:34-1:03:25). The Rio police officers confirmed that the aforementioned connection between criminality and the 2014 World Cup actually was a reason behind the assault: the two men had tried to rob tourists as a consequence of increased poverty due to the sporting event, which impacted their personal socio-economic situation. Although not being able to meet and speak with the two men in person, we visited the prison, where one of them was once held (he was now on parole) and gained some impressions of the environment he was exposed to. In *The Interim Report* performance, we presented our findings as evidences in fact affirming the calculation.



Julian Blaue and Edy Poppy in front of the prison where one of the assaulters was held, Rio de Janeiro, 2018

### ***The Trial Against Ourselves (2021)***

The political realities render *The Trial Against Ourselves* a fiction, while, nonetheless, the tribunal is directed towards a possible future realization, through a dramaturgy of 'pre-enactment'. As I show in the following, dramaturgies of pre-enactment present a powerful artistic strategy to envision juridical alternatives to contemporary global capitalism, whereas the dramaturgical concept of 're-enactment' (Czirak, et al., 2019) is an important means to perform critique of capitalism, as in Boal's theatre projects, for example. 'Re-enactments do not just re-live the past; they re-stage past events as a means to interrogate present and future', in Cavallo's definition (2019, p.183). I add that re-enactments also interrogate the status of the past events in themselves, shed new light on them, give new meaning to them, and re-interpret them. In Boal's Legislative Theatre (theatre that aims to propose laws), artistic re-enactments are used to re-live unjust events and restoring a sense of justice, by negotiating culpabilities for committed crimes. Future-directed, social alternatives are proposed in the form of pre-enactments, which present an 'artistic anticipation of a future political event' (p.130). In the examples I discuss in the following, these



events can be perceived as alternatives to contemporary global forms of capitalism. The core-notion 'enactment' means 'to act something out' Cavallo states (p.182). I make use of the term to describe the realization of the anticipated future political event, the situation in which the pre-enactment is finally enacted, the alternative is manifested, and the utopia previously only imagined in theatre has, if possible, become real outside the theatre.

### **Legislative Theatre: from re-enactment to pre-enactment**

Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre is an artistic attempt to enact juridical alternatives to, among other things, capitalism. It is built on the central form of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, called Forum Theatre (Salvador, 2014). In Forum Theatre, Boal calls the audience 'spect-actors' (1998, p.7) in order to underline their participatory roles as both actors and spectators. They are then presented with the re-enactment of a situation, in which some people oppress other people. Acting out of oppression in the theatre can be a personal rehearsal for conducting in an oppressive reality. But can it do away with it on a structural level, which might be as important if not more urgent? In response to this challenge, Boal changed his dramaturgical approach from this Forum Theatre with a new form: Legislative Theatre.

Recounting a Legislative Theatre session in which he participated in 2010 in Spain Eduardo Salvador illustrates this movement from the personal to the structural (Salvador, 2014). The issue acted out involved the case of a new-born immigrant whose parents wanted to present the baby to their family in Senegal but were not able to leave their adopted home of Spain. Salvador describes that it was impossible to alter the situation with the means of Forum Theatre—'at a certain moment, it became apparent that there was a structural deadlock that could not be solved by changing the actor's attitude. It could only be solved by changing the laws' (p.8). In

Salvador's case the laws for immigrants travelling to their country of origin would have to be transformed. Understanding this crucial point, which corresponds to the genesis of this theatrical genre, Legislative Theatre, the spect-actors are invited to formulate structural, that is, legislative solutions which could change the oppressive situation. They are reformulated as law proposals and then brought to legislators.

In a 2004 Legislative Theatre session by the Canadian company Headlines Theatre, they employed dramaturgical strategies of re-, and pre- enactment, key notions of this investigation and of *The Trial Against Ourselves*. The particular performance I refer to is titled *Practicing Democracy*, and it dealt with the effects of welfare cuts in Vancouver, B.C. in 2004 (Theatre for Living, 2018). The session was broadcast, and both spect-actors and the TV audience could propose new (legislative) solutions to each of the performers' issues. The *Practicing Democracy* performance contains a 24-minute sequence in which protagonists who are suffering from welfare cuts are playing out situations from each other's lives (Theatre for Living, 2018, 05:50–30:00). I read this as a series of re-enactments that follow a bottom-up logic and inductively begin with the individual's lived experience. The protagonists re-enact situations of people who, in a Western democracy and economy of the Global North, are forced into begging, freezing, outdoor sleeping, or other demeaning means of survival. When the same sequence is enacted a second time, the spect-actors may interfere and act out possible solutions, by stepping onto stage and replacing one of the original protagonists. The conflicts of two homeless people wondering where they should sleep is performed, or rather, re-enacted. Subsequently, spect-actors pre-enact together with an original protagonist a possible solution to the situation. In Legislative Theatre, pre-enactments function as imagined projections of new structures, laws, and their positive effects. In the Legislative Theatre session *Practicing Democracy*, a spect-actor interferes in the situation on stage and suggests that homeless folks receive a voucher for a hotel. Those vouchers do not exist in reality (37:20–

40:20). This proposal anticipates a future where those vouchers could exist on the basis of new laws, imagining possible alternatives to Canada's contemporary neoliberal conditions. Consequently, a lawyer theatrically announces that she will propose the idea as new, real legislation and submit it to the council (43:00–43:51). However, the enactment of these legislative proposals was, in reality, impossible as the Vancouver Council did not have the authority to enact them. In Boal's infamous case of Legislative Theatre, he achieved an enactment of an alternative to neoliberal austerity policies in the form of a law demanding geriatric specialists in all hospitals in Rio de Janeiro (Boal, 1998, p.75).

### ***The Congo Tribunal: from pre-enactment to utopia***

Legislative Theatre's explicit goal is to enact the law it previously has pre-enacted. If this does not happen, as was the case in Vancouver, the session has, in a sense, failed (a failure here caused by politics rather than by the theatre group itself). This ambition to succeed, I find inspiring for our own theatre tribunal. As I detail in the following, in the case of Milo Rau's *The Congo Tribunal* a utopian alternative to contemporary forms of capitalism is presented to the audience through a dramaturgy of pre-enactment, albeit in a realistic manner. In Rau's theatre tribunal, I identify a juridical drive and idealistic courage, which goes beyond a pragmatic correction of an existing jurisdiction, as is the case in Legislative Theatre. This example helps to imagine similar dramaturgical realism, when staging our own ambitions to think utopian alternatives to contemporary global capitalism in *The Trial Against Ourselves*.

In 2015 Rau staged two tribunals in Eastern Congo and Berlin dealing with representative cases of crimes committed during the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1996 (International Institute of Political Murder, 2018; Walter-Jochum, 2019). The

country had no functioning legal system in place (and an official global jurisdiction doesn't exist)—that is why Rau staged the theatre tribunals as realistically as possible: real jurists were part of the theatre tribunal, among them, as chief judge, Jean-Louis Gilissen, a counsellor at the international criminal court, and, as chief prosecutor, the Congolese lawyer Sylvestre Bisimwa. The participants (the accused, witnesses, and complainants) were local citizens and Congolese politicians. In addition, representatives of international companies participated in the theatre tribunal. Their brutal mining practices of coltan and other minerals are significant factors in the conflict. The Bukavu Hearings in Congo concluded on 31 May 2015 with a 'verdict' against the Congolese Government and the multinational raw material conglomerates. The second part of the tribunal took place in Berlin, where some of the foundational conditions of the Congolese conflicts were established as the European colonial powers cruelly defined the borders of their African colonies in the nineteenth century. The Berlin tribunal ended with a second 'verdict' on 29 June 2015, again not by means of legal enforcement, but by morally holding the World Bank and the EU accountable for their crimes in Eastern Congo.

### **Enactment as utopian institution**

Rau's tribunal is a fictional imagining of a potential real tribunal in Congo. Whereas Boal's method has led to the enactment of specific laws, the 'global jurisdiction' Rau tried to invent as a basis for his trial, reacting on globally profiting companies, has not officially been brought to life outside the theatre space. Still, there are attempts to turn the tribunal into an official institution in Congo. Rau's collective, the Institute of Political Murder declares on their website:

Now, the "Congo Tribunal" is the first art project ever to become an institution (...) The aim is to set up and establish an institution in Eastern Congo that will deal with mass and economic crimes in the region using a series of

local civil society Tribunals along the lines of the Congo Tribunal...(International Institute for Political Murder, 2018)

Rau explains to the audience in the documentary of the performance that 'this tribunal will be legitimized in the future.' (*The Congo Tribunal* 2017, 1:32:25-1:33:16) Rau believes in the importance of actually enacting the pre-enactment. However, this is only one of thousands of sentences uttered in *The Congo Tribunal*, and the fact that the pre-enactment has not yet effected real changes in legal institutions is not highlighted in the documentary. The significance of *The Congo Tribunal* lies in taking its dramaturgical realism seriously, to the extent that the Minister of Mining in Eastern-Congo was fired in the aftermath of the performance.

In an interview, Rau expresses his idea of 'utopian institutions' (Rau, 2017). The adjective 'utopian' may here indicate that the institutions are a result of a deductive, top-down logic, beginning with a very idealistic imagination (compared for instance to Boal's more pragmatic inductive reasoning and bottom-up logic), but then potentially become lived reality for people involved in and affected by the theatre performance. Rau defines theatre as a space, where the factual and the imaginary meet (2019, p.8). Following this thought, one could say Rau artistically imagined the potential impact and importance of the tribunal, and driven by that, staged it with an as realistic as possible dramaturgy, based on documentary evidence and including actual lawyers and antagonists.

This 'realism' seems to be an adequate method when staging a utopian juridical reality. Thus, the utopian precedent can, in principle, be taken seriously politically. So, when staging *The Trial Against Ourselves*, which aims to enact a law against structural violence, we should apply Rau's 'juridical realism' in order to give it political weight. But the futurity, an expectation that the tribunal

has to become reality, is not significantly present in Rau's performance (apart from the hope to be legitimized in the future quoted above). In our performance, it is important to combine Rau's realism with Legislative Theatre's strong demand to succeed, as I explain next.

Esteban Muñoz proposes that failure is a potentiality of all artistic utopias (2009, p.147-183). The idea of failing depends on a will to success—only on the background of an imagined success can an actual development be considered a failure. In other words, Muñoz's 'politics of failure' (Muñoz, 2009, p.154) implies that utopian art is a daydream that should succeed in reality. It is this aspect that is interesting for *The Trial Against Ourselves*, having the aim to be enacted also outside the realm of theatre. But let me explore this utopian will to succeed dialectically, learning in more detail from Muñoz's idea of failure, which he links to J.L. Austin's speech act theory. Austin argues that certain utterances do not merely refer to or describe reality but create it. Performative speech acts can succeed or fail in establishing a certain reality. For example, when a priest in a church says, 'I now pronounce you husband and wife,' (or 'husband and husband', 'wife and wife' and so on) this does not just describe a reality; it creates one (the couple being married), or fails to do so, when for instance the priest has no authority to marry the two or when the conditions are not in place for the speech act to become reality. Applied to artistic practices and theatre works striving to be utopian, what matters is, whether the artists succeed or fail in establishing a new, different, idealistic reality.

This focus on the success or failure aspect of utopian art opens up the possibility of asking if a utopian pre-enactment actually succeeds in creating the alternative it proposes, for instance juridical corrections of capitalism, or if it fails to do so—a relevant question for everybody who aims to cross the border of art for art's sake and demand political transformation. The question, whether an artistic idea succeeds or not, also opens up for the possibility of protesting: if a utopian proposal fails to be enacted, one can blame either the artist, or, more

relevantly, the public sphere that does not allow that proposal to succeed. If the utopian idea is just and good (which should be pleonasm) one can and should expect it to succeed.

### **Looking ahead: dramaturgical ideas for staging *The Trial Against Ourselves***

In the directing process of the theatre tribunal *The Trial Against Ourselves*, we take inspiration from Rau's dramaturgy and succumb to his realism when casting at least one juridically skilled actor, writing the juridical parts of the script, designing the scenography in accordance with official court rooms. Thus, we seek to establish a precedence case, in principle pre-enacting an official law against structural violence. We have a similar ambition to succeed as Boal had, when he actually enacted official laws through Legislative Theatre. Our demand will most likely not be fulfilled but the will to succeed, which we have dialectically trained by looking at Muñoz's 'politics of failure', will hopefully make the gap between our juridical utopia and the existing political reality visible.



*State Prosecutor Laura Mitzkus in The Trial Against Ourselves, Kilden teater and CourtStageTV, 2021*





*Defendants Edy Poppy and Julian Blaue in The Trial Against Ourselves,  
Kilden teater and CourtStageTV, 2021*

### **Looking back: specific experiences of staging *The Trial Against Ourselves***

Three issues which I have discussed in this essay became especially relevant when actually staging *The Trial Against Ourselves*: 1, the will to succeed in establishing a precedence case; 2, the idea of juridical realism; 3, critically exposing the circumstance that the trial and the law are not officially enacted. Each of the three themes happened to correspond respectively to the strategies of 1, the performers; 2, the actors; 3, the scenographers of *The Trial Against Ourselves*.

On 22 May 2021, at Stamsund International Theatre Festival, during the end of our most recent performance of *The Trial Against Ourselves* so far, we launched a way of performing trials against ourselves in many different contexts. This idea aims in principle to remove the law against structural violence from the realm of art and turn it into an official political-juridical reality; paradoxically this would happen by means of art.



1. *The performers: the will to succeed in being found guilty*

Inspired by Boal's real political achievements and Muñoz's focus on the potentially failing and hopefully succeeding utopia, I have in this essay, argued for the importance of not only having a theatre tribunal, but also enacting an official trial and, as a perspective, an official law against structural violence. That something is unrealistic does not mean that one does not have a right to expect it to become real. The utopian, understood as the ideal perfection, has, per definition, ethical truth on its side. In reality the law against structural violence and a trial against ourselves should have been enacted officially a long time ago. This argumentation, developed in this essay, had a strong effect on my performance in *The Trial Against Ourselves*: it became a driving force for my agitation. Under the impression of poverty in Rio as well as Farmer's, Ho's and Galtung's insistence on somebody—the global middle and upper classes—being responsible for the situation of the economically underprivileged, I was convinced of our guilt when speaking in *The Trial Against Ourselves*. In other words, the work with this essay gave my performance—and also Poppy's performance, as far as we agreed on this—a clear direction, and a reason to fight for something throughout the trial. In addition, only if we were found guilty could *The Trial Against Ourselves*, at least in the utopian logic of this project, be a precedence case for an official enactment of a law against structural violence. This was another reason for us, the performers Blaue & Poppy, fighting for being found guilty. But the same wish for creating a precedence case through *The Trial Against Ourselves* also led us, as directors, to insist on a certain juridical realism, that paradoxically contradicted our one-sided goal to be found guilty, as I explore next.

## 2. *The actors: juridical realism*

Inspired by Rau's realism in *The Congo Tribunal* we decided to follow juridical rules as much as possible when staging *The Trial Against Ourselves*. That implied hiring a trained jurist, Jacob Jensen, to play the judge, helping us, make the law against structural violence, to a certain degree, valid. But it also meant that we, as the defendants, had to give the actors, representing the defence lawyer and the prosecutor, and especially the actor playing the judge, the power to lead the trial. Even as the directors of the project, we had to give up the control for real: if we wanted it to be a more or less realistic precedent case, we as defendants could not be allowed to lead the trial, which would be against the basic rule of any court. This insight was in conflict with our desire of being found guilty. (A prosecutor has to prove beyond reasonable doubt that defendants are guilty, their own plea of guilty is not enough.) Since we were really convinced of our guilt, we did not only play this conflict—it was a real conflict between us, the defence lawyer and the judge. The tension between us and the jurist-actors, who themselves also had worked on the manuscript in terms of juridical consistency, generated the strongest dramatic conflict in the performance: us arguing for our guilt, the judge-actor asking for patience and objectivity and the defence lawyer-actress having good common sensical arguments—against our will—for us being not guilty.

In the three trial-performances at Kilden teater the audience-jury decided on three different verdicts: not-guilty (Blaue & Poppy, 2021a, 01:29-01:31), guilty (Blaue & Poppy, 2021b, 01:37-01:38:33), and not guilty in count one (being responsible for the two men's poverty as an aftermath to the World Cup 2014 in Rio) and guilty in count two (forcing one of the men into prison after the assault) (Blaue & Poppy, 2021c, 01:15:45-01:16:56). Obviously, being far from easy to decide, the different verdicts illustrate that our case actually was worth trying and reflecting on in terms of structural violence and juridical accountability.

3. *The scenography: exposing the circumstances—the law against structural violence is not officially enacted*



Defendant Edy Poppy in *The Trial Against Ourselves*,  
Kilden teater and CourtStageTV, 2021

Our utopian proposal should be but was, of course, not political reality when staging *The Trial Against Ourselves* (otherwise we would not have to pre-enact it, we could just have gone to a regular courthouse). This contradiction between our ‘political daydream’ and the ‘political reality’ made us, and the scenographers Pelle Brage and Julia Rosa, choose a visual aesthetic which went beyond Rau’s juridical realism. Our motto was: “As juridical as possible and as theatrical as necessary!” By that we meant that we, on one side, would follow juridical norms, but on the other side we would critically expose the following: a trial without juridical foundation—the scandalous lack of an official law against structural violence—is only theatre. That was the reason why we asked the scenographers to use explicitly theatrical items as, for example, a backdrop, visible flats and costumes. In order to expose that structural violence, unfortunately, is reality whereas the law against it, unfortunately, is fiction, they worked with a doubling effect. We had real coffee, real fruits, real Kellogg’s Corn Flakes and so on, on stage—commodities that are in fact often produced under the condition of structural violence. But we also had replicas of these products, thus somehow underlining

that the unethical commodities in their juridical representation are reduced to fiction—as long as the law against structural violence does not exist.

### **Live performance at Stamsund International Theatre Festival: a trial conflagration?**

In the end of our physical live performance in Stamsund, in protest against the audience-jury not finding us guilty—which implied that the audience did not find themselves guilty either—we set up an improvised courthouse at the harbour. Here we asked people from our audience and others if they, later on, would pre-enact a trial against themselves on the basis of our fictive law against structural violence. Four people agreed. They also promised to find new people who would again pre-enact a trial against themselves etc. If this happens and those trials also end with obliging new audiences to pre-enact trials against themselves and so on and so forth, could trial-conflagrations ignite? All of the juridical processes, at least if ending with a guilty verdict, should collectively demand to be officially enacted trials on the basis of a then also officially enacted law against structural violence.

### **Conclusion**

If Rau's *The Congo Tribunal*—an *artistic* anticipation of an *official* tribunal concerning war crimes in Eastern Congo—is so strong because it is so realistic, and Boal's Legislative Theatre is successful, because of its bottom-up pragmatism, what can our trial possibly contribute to the collective artistic attempt of enacting alternatives to globalised capitalism? Maybe that our pre-enactment explicitly problematizes its unreal status? That the form is protesting against itself, as pointed out when describing the doubling of the scenography and the idea of trial-conflagrations that may anticipate real trials against structurally violent perpetrators in the future?

An official enactment of our pre-enacted law against structural violence would be an alternative to globalised capitalism's ways of functioning. Our law and trial proposal is more utopian than Legislative Theatre's law proposals and even more utopian—in the sense of unrealistic—than *The Congo Tribunal*. That is not a reason to surrender but to hope for 'a utopian dialectic', that 'is unrealistic in a realistic way', to say it with Milo Rau (Walter-Jochum, 2019, p.166). For us that means to continue to scandalize in future trial-performances and to encourage others to scandalize the fact that the pre-enactments are, unfortunately, still mere utopias.

## Notes

1. A trailer to *The Trial Against Ourselves* is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVUZhKg8a8Q> The full performance can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VonM0SZtbm4&ab\\_channel=Kildenteaterogkonserthus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VonM0SZtbm4&ab_channel=Kildenteaterogkonserthus) (this is the version from 17 April 2021 at Kilden teater, Norway)<sup>[1]</sup>

2. By this I mean members of the world's societies who have an income that is significantly above securing fundamental human needs. By calling these classes global I am underlining that they have many features in common all over the world, for instance the fact that they, in a globalized world, consume goods from distant regions, often not knowing—or ignoring—the local modes of production.<sup>[1]</sup>

3. Carioca, Portuguese for inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>[1]</sup>

4. Gringo, Latin American slang, sometimes pejorative, for a Caucasian foreigner.<sup>[1]</sup>

5. Asfalto, a Brazilian expression for the official city in contrast to the favela.<sup>[1]</sup>

6. The subaltern is a position with no identity, a position 'where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action' (Spivak, 2005, 475-486). The subaltern does talk but does not achieve the dialogic level of structural utterance.<sup>[1]</sup>

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## About the author

JULIAN BLAUE (b.1975) is a Norwegian-German award winning performance artist, critic and research fellow. Blaue writes for all major Norwegian cultural newspapers and magazines and was Critic of the Year in 2017. Blaue has performed at prestigious venues around the world including Staatsoper Berlin, Nationaltheatret Oslo and the Rio Art Museum. He is part of the duo Blaue & Poppy who were winners of the 2019 Folk er Folk prize for 'building empathetic bridges between ideological poles' in their performance series about an assault in Rio de Janeiro.



# How located can we be? About situated curatorial practices in Mediterranean Europe

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*This article invites art workers to critically reassess the long-term effects of their practice on cultural and epistemological development in Europe. It addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies and encourages a fundamental role for these practices in deconstructing current hegemonies within the art system. The article approaches curatorial practices from positions other than North-Western European, and advocates for a situated model of curatorial practice. In doing so, it sets out to challenge existing definitions of 'the curatorial', adopting a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice, while evaluating curatorial methods in light of contemporary geopolitical developments.*

*Keywords: curatorial, located, situated, subaltern, Mediterranean, Europe*

## **Introduction: The other and us**

This article is drawn from practice-based research I have been undertaking since 2008, focused through a PhD by practice commenced in 2010 and completed in 2016, and deployed in my professional work as a curator of exhibitions and public engagement. Projects during this time frame set out possible developments for curatorial practice that would enable contemporary art in

Southeastern Europe to operate independently of what might be called the 'Northern hegemony' within a European context. This activity and research rethinks curatorial approaches within Mediterranean Europe. In doing so, it considers the potential for the discipline to enable the inclusion in cultural discourses of what academic and curator Irit Rogoff (2000) would call situated knowledge, a concept I propose as 'subaltern' knowledge.

This article invites curators and cultural workers more broadly to consider their responsibility to critically assess the long-term effects of their practice on cultural and epistemological development in Europe. It addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies and encourages a fundamental role for these practices in deconstructing the current hegemonies present in the art system. The article signals an attempt to write about curatorial practices and, thus, about the historiography of art and art making from positions other than North-Western European ones. It proposes an alternative set of methods, tools and considerations for a situated model of curatorial practice; it sets out to challenge existing definitions of 'the curatorial', adopting a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice and evaluating curatorial methods in light of recent geopolitical developments. This proposal promotes models of practice that enable effective local engagement in cultural production, thus allowing culture to flourish independently of larger hegemonies. The objective is to build a theoretical understanding of situated curatorial practices that can inform and guide alternative approaches. The article considers aspects of human geography, cultural studies, social science and European studies, combined with reflections on practical implementation and examination of the main discipline of interest: curatorial studies.

I will start with the essay *We and the Others (Russian Artists in the West)*, *the Others and We (Western Artists in Russia)*, by Slovenian art historian, curator, and writer, Igor Zabel (1997). Zabel opens by suggesting that the

title indicates that the contemporary world is determined by the experience of 'otherness', however, the title does not refer to these 'others', but to an especial 'other': to the West, to the Western art world. He asks: why is Western art understood not just as one of several, equivalent art idioms, but as the other, so to speak? The answer might be obvious: within the global network of art, Western art seems to hold the position of a 'commanding point'; institutions, capital, market, vocabularies, concepts are based in the Western world or essentially connected to it.

Zabel wants this relationship to be understood as applicable globally. And yet, is there not a danger inherent in this model in the elision of bona fide otherness inherent *even* in the West? There is no attention applied to understanding differences between South Italy, for instance, or the South of Slovenia. To what extent do such regions remain unknown, or unseen in such a Zabelian model, somehow unintelligible and thus, actually, equally 'other' for the West?

But Zabel gives us clear structures for understanding ideas of hegemony and homogeneity within the art system and the role that the curator could play within that. What is the role of curatorial practice in this relationship and how this might be better employed to counter cultural hegemony and more effectively represent and foster a diverse European culture? The control on ways of production seems a perfect strategy to perpetuate the hegemony within the art system. Therefore, might a focus on formats, methodologies and tools assist a reconsideration of this otherness?

Apparatuses like Biennales and large-scale exhibitions have been created and promoted for the most part in what can be understood as the North rather than the West and consequently selected and used influentially by curators globally. These formats and methodologies can be seen as obstacles to the distribution and

implementation of more Eastern / Southern context-based and responsive practices, which I consider as potential positive inputs to the development of a curatorial practice based on local epistemologies.

Problems concerning the cultural and geopolitical status and identity of Southern regions have been receiving increasing attention from scholars whose efforts could be connected to what Rogoff identifies as the need for 'systems of geographical signification' to be 'rewritten by contemporary art practices' (Rogoff, 2000, p.13). This attention has issued subsequent calls for the participation of local and regional knowledge in cultural production. Professor of Sociology, Boaventura de Sousa Santos speaks in his work of the 'discomfort of the Western hegemony' and the 'exhaustion of North Europe' in which established practices become engrained, and at times, ultimately obsolete (de Sousa Santos, 2014). He identifies a need for 'South-South connections' to be made. Although de Sousa Santos is referring to Europe as the North, his argument should also be seen, I argue, as relevant to North / South regional relationships *within* Europe. A good example of how this can be done is provided by sociologist and politician Franco Cassano (1996) in his book *Il pensiero Meridiano* (Meridian Thinking). Cassano addresses Southern thought and stakes a claim for a newly formed intellectual *koine* of philo-Mediterraneits towards a more active engagement with such issues, for politics and the public at large.

### **Between hegemony, homogeneity and normalisation**

The idea of hegemony is central to my ongoing practice-based research and curatorial strategy. Hegemony is here described as a power dynamic, applicable to places or geographies, their cultural production, knowledge, disciplines, formats and practitioners. That is to say that the idea of hegemony relates to the how, what, who, and when of the relevant epistemology.

As Mombasa-born, Oxford University scholar, Ali Mazrui has explained in one of his essays, hegemonisation is always accompanied by homogenisation (2001). Homogenisation is applied here to an idea that cultural production responds to the Western / Northern canon and enters into standards established by the dominant system. While Mazrui associates homogenisation with the phenomenon of globalisation only, I see value for this discussion in linking this concept with the idea of normalisation.

The term hegemony has various connotations: a geopolitical and imperialist idea of domination, perpetrated by a stronger party to the detriment of a weaker one, while a cultural dynamic and monopoly in knowledge distribution exists (on both an academic and community level), as well as an internal dynamic of the art world where the mainstream dominates. This means hegemony is used to describe geopolitical relationships (North / South dynamics) as well as the tools and formats (large-scale exhibition and Biennale) employed to vindicate and sustain mainstream practices within the art field.

The first and most eminent voice on the theorising of hegemony is Antonio Gramsci, Italian writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher, sociologist, and linguist. Gramsci devoted several pages to the concept of hegemony in his book *Prison Notebooks* (1971). In his words, hegemony resides in the predominance of one social class over others. This is realised not only through political and economic control, but also through the ability of the dominant class to impose its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it, acknowledge it as 'common sense'. This common sense is nothing else but the natural introduction to what Gramsci called 'cultural hegemony'. His theory of cultural hegemony describes how states use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies, not blind, of course, to the fact that non-capitalist states are wont to deploy such statecraft.

Mazrui sees a continuous and immediate correlation between homogenisation and hegemonisation. In his view, the more time passes, the more the hegemony of the centre influences people to be more and more alike across the world. In addressing this double phenomenon (hegemonisation and homogenisation) in relation to art, the aforementioned normalisation can prove a useful inclusion (2001).

Normalisation was defined in the East / West Europe context in 1999 by the Montenegrin curator Bojana Pejić (1999) and further investigated in 2006 by the Croatian collective What, How and for Whom (WHW). When Pejić used this definition in the catalogue of the 1999 exhibition *After the Wall*, she referred to the normalisation of Eastern Europe, reporting an ongoing process at that time, following what the philosopher Ales Erjavec called 'period of transition' (Erjavec, 2003, p.1), with reference to the years 1989 to 1991. Erjavec explains that while this transition was 'a stage of the journey that was also travelled by most of the countries in what was once popularly known in the West as the Communist bloc', normalisation represents a longer process, beginning in the 1920s and ending after the turn into the twentieth century when the East had been normalised and the Western horizon started to move (the premise of this research states that it moved towards the South, more specifically towards the Mediterranean basin).

The curatorial collective WHW, conscious of these dynamics, discussed the term 'normalisation' in 2006, during a project using the term as its title. In a press release distributed by e-flux, they announced:

The term normalization connotes concepts such as standardization, conformity, and control. It is of immediate interest in connection with for instance the discussion of the *enlargement* of the EU and of the political and economic development in the Balkan

States. However, normalization can also be seen as a mechanism of discipline, deeply ingrained in the social structures of the Nordic countries, and a common condition governing how we as individuals are produced by the society we are part of. *What are the consequences of the social standardization promoted in connection with the enlargement of the EU, and what are the effects of the EU as a normative system?* Is normalization about eliminating difference and, in that case, what are the cultural and social implications of this? (WHW, 2006. emphasis added)

This extract from WHW's press release shows the relevance of normalisation as a key concept in research surrounding East / West cultural identities. WHW are not only addressing the concept of normalisation, but also creating a direct connection between normalisation and the effects of the actions of the European Union (EU), emphasising its influence on new European cultural production. This draws attention to the cultural effects of this long period of European normalisation.

Such awareness was perhaps not possible for Pejić's project in 1999, at the dawn of this new European era. A sharp difference is noticeable between what was stated by WHW in 2006 and what Pejić said in her text and exhibition in 1999. WHW are problematising the normalisation and evaluating it within a certain geographical context. They discuss the prospect that normalisation is not an entirely negative process. On the other hand, Pejić's opening text includes a quote by Hungarian artist and sociologist, Ákos Szilágyi which discusses the desire for normality:

We want to be a normal country, with a normal economy, a normal political system, with a normal lifestyle. Normal—one among many. Normal—that is something comprehensible,

something in which you do not have to believe, but which you can live. No poetry, no sacrifice, no miracles. A normal country—that is a kind of place and a kind of time where not frantic and magnificent ideas, not absurdities nor utopias nor demi-gods, crazy monsters, wise leaders, rule any longer, but rather the one and indivisible world norm does. Because to be normal is promising. Because the future belongs to the normals. S/he who is normal is accountable. S/he is taken into account. S/he can be counted upon. S/he counts. S/he can be part of the normal world order of the global financial economy, S/he can take part in it. Normals of the world unite! This is the latest—already postmodern—version of abnormality in Russia. Fiat normalis, pereat mundus! (Szilágyi, 1997, p.138)

Using this position as a starting point is a serious statement for a curatorial text: it declares this aspiration for normalisation! However, this pretence of normality can be associated with a manoeuvre to avoid the so-called 'otherness': if I am normal, I am like the others, and if I am like the others, I am with the others. Possibly this was a good tactic to avoid a second exclusion after the Communist-enforced one which isolated the cultural 'East' for a long period. In addition, through Szilágyi's text, we have the complexity of a type of cultural complicity with hegemonic pressure; the artist cedes in his desire for accountability to the structure of hegemony, and not entirely unwillingly.

Though normalisation is a term adopted in this field by curators when talking about Eastern European art development after 1989 it can be expanded to the current Mediterranean European situation.



## **Subaltern**

Simply by being Italian, I am Western. But I actually come from that part of Italy which has been a victim of normalisation and has always been treated as the periphery of Italy itself. Therefore, with reference to the geopolitical and social realities of my lived experience and those of the South of Italy, Igor Zabel's 'West' could be construed, from my position, as a fraught totalisation. At this juncture the term 'subaltern' might be introduced to help us see the power dynamics at work for othering within the West.

First used by Gramsci, the term subaltern is derived from his work on cultural hegemony, which identified social groups excluded from established societal structures. The subaltern is a subject or group not part of the hegemony—socially, politically, or geographically. It is the excluded, the discriminated, the conspicuous other. As the scholar and poet Louai El Habib says in his research paper 'Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications' (2011), throughout the history of the subaltern concept, its definition has remained one of the most difficult to encapsulate.

El Habib's paper reaffirms Gramsci's use of the term, which he interprets in the following way,

The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation (El Habib, 2012, p. 5. Emphasis added).

For Gramsci this term is more class-related: the subaltern classes have an equally multifaceted, articulated history as the hegemonic classes. The difference does not lie in the development or level of complexity, yet the latter is officially accepted and distributed. One reason this happens is related to the hidden unity that subaltern history has, together with its episodic totality: even when the subaltern breaks with the established system, they finally have to submit to the authority of the ruling group. Circumstances deny the subaltern access to the means by which they might control and manage their own representation; consequently, they lack access to the social and cultural institutions of their own state.

Although this text acknowledges the class implications inherent in this term, the core point of its argument has no connection and reference to the class-related connotation, but rather with a more geographical and situational understanding of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis but is excluded by a hegemonic force.

Academic and critic, Gayatri Spivak, in her seminal essay 'Can the subaltern speak?', reconsidered 'the problems of subalternity within new historical developments as brought by capitalistic politics of undermining revolutionary voice and divisions of labor in a globalized world'. She disapproved in the first place of Gramsci's assertion of the autonomy of the subaltern groups. Yet, Spivak adopts the notion of subaltern essentially because 'it is truly situational. Subaltern began as a description of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis. This is so, because it has no theoretical rigor' (Spivak, 1988, p.68).

An additional iteration of this conceptualisation highly relevant to this discursive context is the idea of 'subaltern cosmopolitanism', as theorised by de Sousa Santos. For the historian Ranajit Guha (1982) and Spivak (1988), the subaltern is the lower class, on the margins of society. This is also the case in the work of Gramsci, for whom

this word is synonymous with the proletariat. In his book *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* (2002), de Sousa Santos uses the term ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ to refer to counter-hegemonic practices and the consequent struggle against neo-liberal globalisation—he uses it particularly when discussing the struggle against social exclusion.

For de Sousa Santos, interchangeable with subaltern cosmopolitanism is the term ‘cosmopolitan legality’, which he uses to describe a framework for equality in relation to difference and wherein the subaltern are oppressed people living at the margins of society. In this understanding, the context, time, and place determine—situation by situation—who the subaltern is. The subaltern refers not only to individuals, but can also be a place, an object, a narrative or a language. This short, yet precise, definition of subaltern cosmopolitanism, evidently suggests that to deal with the phenomenon (apropos context, place, narrative etc.) it is important to find specific practices and suitable formats to set against the conventional strategy in use for the major subjects. One premise on which I base my curatorial practice, informed by de Sousa Santos, is that the normative, Northern, exhibition format has often proven not to be the most appropriate mode by which to address subaltern geographies.

### **Subaltern geographies**

If we imagine that the only correct curatorial option for a supposed-subaltern context is to develop the episodic, sporadic format of the exhibition, then the cultural production of these other regions of the South (and West) will never grow strong enough to develop anything other than hegemonic structures and approaches. In one way or another, the cultural production of subaltern geographies will have to submit to the authority of the ruling hegemonic production. This dynamic of normalisation denies access to the means by which cultural producers (and citizens) might control their own representation.

It is important to stress that subaltern geographies do not correspond to a homogenous entity, as we come to discuss below with Doreen Massey and others. These geographies can still, of course, include an elite, one that can incorporate the hegemonic position, while being in actuality removed from the interests of the disenfranchised culture of subaltern communities. My interest lies in the potential for non-elite communities to participate and lead in modes of cultural production in ways that are meaningful for them, and conducive to their ownership of the authoring of their cultural history.

Maybe we are too late to write a history of the arts from a Southeastern European point of view. But, perhaps we could still attempt the writing of a history of curatorial studies using Southeastern European references? Privileging South and Eastern European authors for my article, as well as making a direct connection to curatorial projects coming from Eastern Europe, are epistemological strategies core to my ongoing practice-research.

### **The curatorial and its how**

Traditional definitions of the curatorial can be extended through a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice. One that uses tools appropriated from social science, anthropology and cultural studies. Curatorial practice is already, to some extent, multidisciplinary, but the intention in my practice is to further connect geopolitical developments and curatorship; in particular, it aims for a 'located' model of curatorial practice that actively benefits the culture of host regions.

Curatorial studies is here viewed as an expanded discipline that works through art and with artists to deliver ideas to the public sphere, actively participating in the public sphere by creating opportunities for creative development. Though curatorial studies as a field covers many aspects, the curatorial practices focused upon here

address cultural identities located in both national and transnational arenas.

It is important to consider the role of curatorial practice in this relationship and, more specifically, how this might be better employed to counter cultural hegemony and more effectively represent and foster a diverse European culture. The crux of the issue is no longer *what* exactly those exhibitions and events, relating to Eastern Europe, were trying to tell us, but rather *how they were doing it*; that ‘how’ is what is interesting to consider currently within Mediterranean Europe. This question of *how* refers, essentially, to the curatorial strategies that form the basis of these processes of cohesion.

The importance of this ‘how’ is found in the fact that the most popular formats, methodologies, and tools (such as Biennales and large-scale exhibitions) have been created and promoted in the ‘North’ and consequently selected and used by curators globally. These formats and methodologies are framed in this text as obstacles to the distribution and implementation of more Southern, context-based and responsive practices, here considered as potential positive inputs to the development of a curatorial ‘epistemology of the South’ as defined by de Sousa Santos (2014).

As I have argued, large-scale international exhibitions, such as Biennales, do not necessarily have a positive effect on ‘local’ cultural production. In terms of European cultural development strategies, the Biennale supports the mainstream—which artist Luis Camnitzer (1987) associates with the art market and strategies of homogenising capitalism—and can be instrumentalised as a device for touristic promotion, temporarily benefiting the economic development of host regions, but not necessarily developing those regions culturally in any sustained way. The host region provides a budget, and a set of venues and facilities, and in return gains the economic privilege from international visibility. While this

can benefit the global art world, and the touristic industries of host regions, it can resolutely fail to cultivate the local cultural activity of those regions.

The reasons that the Biennale format and other large-scale exhibitions fail to enrich local cultural activity are manifold. They are often nomadic and globalised (not tailored to the locality), short-term, product-oriented (temporary exhibition-based), and they address mainstream trends and discourses in contemporary art, defined by an international group of elite artists and curators. Any acknowledgement of 'local flavour' is often cursory, utilised in the marketing of the event rather than its content, and unable, or unwilling, to reach any depth of critical engagement. The process of constructing and delivering the exhibition is accelerated, with most labour imported. The sudden influx of visitors can place a strain on local infrastructures, and any improvement made in anticipation of this is likely not the most pressing concern for the local community. After the event is over, there is little evident cultural benefit to the host regions. Therefore, I argue that the Biennale does not prove to be a sustainable model; alternative models of cultural engagement should be sought. Ideally those would allow space for participatory research, 'time for reflection' as defined by O'Neil (Morland and Amundsen, 2010, p.8-9), deep analysis and self-reflexive revising of processes and outcomes.

The dynamic at play here means that the large-scale exhibition model is perpetuated by normalised, overarching funding strategies and this, in turn, perpetuates mainstream, globalised discourses and approaches in the arts, ahead of subaltern or local epistemologies. At the same time, there exist curatorial practices which seek to constructively address and reform this trend<sup>1</sup>.

Academic and critic, Nikos Papastergiadis and art historian, Meredith Martin discuss the wide propagation of the Biennale as an example of the proliferation of an

established Northern model, without sufficient critical reflection, and call for an epistemological enquiry that values the relevance of the local over global inclinations towards homogenisation (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011, pp.46, 53). Curator and writer, Paul O'Neill is also critical of the growing Biennale culture, registering it as potentially a 'homogenising force' that is instrumentalised as a promotional tool for city branding (2012, pp.51-85). In parallel, Rogoff describes an 'epistemological order' of normalising force, 'that masks fundamental shifts in identity formation' and argues for a renewed urgency to 'attempt to re-write those relations so that they actually reflect contemporary conditions' (2000, p.2). These counter-normalisation principles are ones I deploy at the centre of my curatorial research and practice.

### **An archival approach to curatorship**

A principal curatorial strategy in my practice has been the application of what we might categorise as an 'archival curatorship approach'. Inspired by what curator and critic Barbara Vanderlinden defined as 'the laboratory years' of curating (2006), under which exhibitions were made explicitly referring to previous ones, I started to make projects that would refer to previous exhibitions or publications coming from the South and East Europe. This would be one way of claiming and clarifying the relevance of Southeastern curatorial practice and its partially unwritten history.

I therefore propose through practice a set of methods and considerations for what I called a self-reflexive model of curatorial practice, intended to effectively enable the engagement of local knowledge in cultural production *against* normalisation. This proposal was reached through three stages of research: considering the political, geographical, and theoretical contexts of Southeastern Europe; evaluating the presence of local culture within existing models and identifying good practices; and, thirdly, applying and evaluating methods and frameworks

for local engagement through a series of curatorial initiatives.

Within my practice, these components are designated as the 'four elements of curatorial practice for local engagement': geography, time, process, and epistemology. These elements can be used to devise and evaluate any curatorial project that seeks to cultivate local epistemologies in cultural production and can be defined as a situated curatorial practice.

If applied in this way the curatorial can reimagine the 'epistemology of the South' in Southeastern Europe (and whichever other subaltern geopolitical domain) through refocusing upon how this epistemology is produced and promoted in the first place. The key is to re-discuss and re-describe the practice and create a more situated curatorial approach: to stimulate self-reflexivity. Important to note is that this self-reflexivity is not to be uninformed by transnational mapping points; its effective holism comes about through respect for the local, through parity of esteem, not a binary assumption that there is nothing to learn from, as it were, looking abroad. Once this shift to parity has been made, the curatorial practice will be able to engage with local knowledge through socially engaged art projects, participatory action research, long-termism, and process-oriented activities. This essay concludes with some elaboration of these four elements.

## **1. Geography**

In their book *Locating the Producers*, O'Neill and founding director of Situation Claire Doherty explain how cultural policy documents present places as fixed entities, in the touristic rebranding of places (2011, p.3), to which art practitioners are invited to respond with what sociologist Pascal Gielen would call 'good idea(s)' (Gielen, De Bruyne & Tol 2009). Geographer Doreen Massey offers an alternative approach to conceptualising



geographical 'space', as 'a mutable location'. Instead, she sees it as a 'living experience':

a constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus [...] Instead, then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relation and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region, or even a continent (Massey, 1991, p.315 ).

For Massey, concepts of 'places, spaces and geographies' are all fluid things in a constant state of change, always with something new to be discovered. Massey underlines the conception of space as a plurality of trajectories which coexist contemporaneously. This plurality is the essence of space: if we have no plurality, we have no space and vice versa—they are co-constitutive. Finally, Massey stands for recognition of space as a constant work in progress. Viewing space itself as the result of interrelations, it follows that it would be impossible to see these relations as static or fixed. They need to be carried forward and worked on; they are never finished.

In a series of international lectures and symposia *Rethinking Context in Contemporary Art* hosted at Situations (Bristol) since 2003, context specificity was discussed in order to challenge the orthodoxy of site-specificity. Many formats, whether large-scale exhibitions, international Biennales, public art regeneration initiatives or off-site gallery programmes, were growing increasingly place-related; this progressive attention to a sense of place started to be visible even in comparative disciplines such as human geography and contemporary archaeology. Art critic and curator, Lucy

Lippard called this the 'genius loci' in her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1998), referring to a response to the rootlessness of modern society: it is striking that in a hyper-nomadic society, this sense of belonging to a place or context gains increasing importance and visibility within art projects.

Conceptions of geographical space are relevant to the making and understanding of public art, site-specific projects, and community projects. Space, in this sense, includes a complexity of aspects: history, politics, philosophy, social discourse, representation, community, culture, landscape etc. The space paramount for this article, of course, is the local: the site of knowledge through which culture is constructed. This concept of the local privileges the culture and ideas of a place over its materiality or physical borders. Local, here, does not only refer to the location of the 'event' but also to the culture it owns (this can also be understood in terms of 'situated knowledge' and, importantly does not preclude international crossovers and commonalities).

In his book *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday*, Papastergiadis suggests that we should understand place as being 'constitutive in the production of contemporary art' and also that '[w]e need to develop new models for discussing art that are made from the materials that are available in the place of its encounter' (2006, p.15). It is in response to this need that the curatorial practice I am practicing and promoting aims to develop new models of art and cultural processes that focus on local discourses, making them central to cultural processes. From this perspective, the place itself provides the raw material to work on and with. In this way, this situated curatorial practice aims to overcome what Massey sees as 'one of the effects of modernity, the establishment of a particular [post-colonial] power / knowledge relation' (2005, p.64). A situated curatorial practice aims to include regions and localities that would be marginalised (by design or by innate prejudice) within existing cultural frameworks.

## 2. Duration and time

Considerations of the element of time depart, also, from the profile of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale based on a temporary and transitory framework. With reference to broader philosophical contemplations about the nature of time, what is at stake theoretically is the impossibility of 'slicing up' time. Philosophers Henri Bergson and, later, Constantin V. Boundas (1996), offer the understanding that a continuum cannot be broken up into 'discrete instants' or an 'aggregate of points'. Movement cannot become static. In her text *Spatial Disruption*, Massey underlines the 'impossibility of reducing real movement / becoming to stasis multiplied by infinity'; the impossibility of history as the result of a succession of slices (1997, p.222-223). In Massey's understanding, these slices cannot produce 'becoming'.

The timeframe of a Biennale or large-scale exhibition can be seen as a slice, or multiple slices, interrupting the real flow of local time. Gielen explains that such cultural formations generally take place over a short period, typically between five and eighteen months for their creation, plus around three months for the public-facing event. This scarcely helps the 'local' to develop on a long-term basis, obliging the context, counterproductively, to accelerate and adapt in order to host a short-term, large-scale event (Gielen, 2013, p.30, 41). As a result, time does not move organically, it is being sliced and accelerated, controlled artificially by normalisation impositions.

It is not only the flow of time which is important, but the typology of it. In this regard it is interesting to consider the point of view offered by O'Neill in an interview entitled 'The Politics of the Small Act' (Morland and Amundsen, 2010, p.8-9). O'Neill maintains that academia allows him 'time for reflection that the constant state of production can disable', while his practice gives him the opportunity of operating in 'response to immediate conditions and to local constituencies'. O'Neill emphasises the importance of two different time

conditions which are not prioritised within the exhibition-making time frame: the 'time for reflection' which is, I would say, a moment of deceleration, rather private and not necessarily spectacular, and the 'local time', a time of direct response to a certain context, a time made of urgencies and emergencies difficult to contemplate and follow through in one hundred days only.

The time proposed here is that which O'Neill and Doherty have defined as 'durational' (2011). They define durational as a series of 'processes to public art curating and commissioning [which] emerged as an alternative to nomadic, itinerant and short-termist approaches in recent years'. While O'Neill and Doherty explored projects based in England, the Netherlands and Denmark, where they encountered such durational forms of practice, my research has focused on the specific case of the curatorial endeavour within the South and its epistemology not yet, perhaps, operating in a 'durational' way. The durational proposed in this text is an open process, at some times more loose than at others, often a cyclical time of self-reflexivity without a pre-designated endpoint.

### **3. Process**

Process necessarily includes both the local and the durational: a continuous engagement with geography and an open-ended trajectory. This conception of process is founded on participation and collaboration, and largely experienced through dialogue.

In O'Neill's opinion, participation creates at least two relevant shifts in what we can call the production of culture. In his essay 'Three stages in the art of public participation' O'Neill explains how participation changes the meaning of the audience and the format when applied to a cultural project. Thanks to participation, and the engagement that comes with it, the 'passive' audience is turned into an active participant and the format is no longer an 'outcome-focused' project, but becomes, rather, an outcome, an end product in itself (2010, p.1). By

means of the project being a participatory process based on the durational, it is, in a serious sense, already an outcome.

In the introduction to her book *Participation*, Claire Bishop (2006, pp.10-17) refers to this shift as a 'social turn' in which the emphasis is now placed on 'temporal processes of engagement with people' rather than on 'art as product'. O'Neill sees the participants as 'actors with their actions being part of a cumulative process of engagement with both imaginative and tangible potential' (2010). Of course, shifting emphasis from product to temporal, relational interactions does not remove risk of ulterior motive on the part of protagonists nor, of course, funders of such a cultural shift. Participatory art strategies, as Bishop explains, can be prey to the ulterior motives of political inclinations; community art care versus robust funding of national health infrastructure; mental health palliatives versus systemic, sustainable support in the community properly funded, and so on.

Collaboration is firmly connected to participation and therefore to components of process. And dialogue is very important here. By default, collaboration requires some ability to engage with this dialogue and manage immaterial co-production. The sociologist, Scott Lash stresses the relevance of 'inter-subjective communication' and sees in the use of process, participation and collaboration a 'way out of the productivist system which makes us passive receivers rather than active producers of meaning' (1996, p.112-129). Lash supports the idea of a plural experience, in flux and shared with others, rather than an individual and immediate experience based on pure representation.

#### **4. Epistemology**

Though the ideas and references presented in this section are addressing the global North and global South, I argue that these ideas can be related to areas that would not be

described under this geo-political definition. My research registers that the South can be seen to be aligned to what Cassano (2007) calls the Mediterranean basin and Southeastern Europe, including my region of origin. The Mediterranean basin is in the words of Ian Chambers an 'in-between' place where the global North meets the global South in a new 'space of flows' (2008). So, the inclusion of the Mediterranean in de Sousa Santos's definition of the epistemology of the South would not be that far from reality.

As previously mentioned, the theories developed by de Sousa Santos account for an 'epistemological diversity of the world' (2012, p.43). To achieve this, the epistemologies of the South should be as much part of cultural production as the epistemologies of the North. De Sousa Santos does not argue for this is an equalising or normalising condition of dedifferentiation, rather as a claim for equality and a need for diversity. Furthermore, he calls for an acceptance of the fact that theories are situated and therefore 'theories produced in the global North are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of the global North' (de Sousa Santos, 2012, p.45). De Sousa Santos demonstrates in his work the need for a rebalancing of the situated South and the 'given from the North', and advocates for a constructive visibility and mobility across both 'hemispheres'.

## **Conclusion**

It goes without saying that the same would be valid for the (global) South: theories from the South would account for realities of the (global) South, which means that first and foremost there is a need to create a space in which these theories can be created, distributed, and promoted. Though in de Sousa Santos's opinion the West / Global North 'claims the right to the dominant view of the world' (2012, p.45) it is time for the South to re-appropriate its own view of the world. This will give the South an opportunity to better respond to 'political needs of radical social transformation' (2012, p.45). This 'social

transformation' will finally end the imbalance between the North and the South.

In order to reimagine an 'epistemology of the South', or to enable the engagement of local knowledge in cultural production, these four principles (geography, time, process and epistemology) can act as headings under which methods may be considered and implemented. Each must be considered in relation to the other three, regarding both the *design* of curatorial projects, and their *evaluation*. In this way, the framework can inform and drive an iterative process of reflexive curatorial practice that is both context-responsive and self-critical.

## Notes

1. For the evaluation of examples of curatorial practices from the Mediterranean region which successfully engage local cultures see also: Checchia, 2017. <sup>11</sup>

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## **Book Review: *Dramaturgy of Migration: Staging multilingual encounters in contemporary theatre*, edited by Yana Meerzon and Katharina Pewny**

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***Dramaturgy of Migration: Staging multilingual encounters in contemporary theatre*, edited by Yana Meerzon and Katharina Pewny. London: Routledge, 2021; ISBN: 9781032088983 (£16.99 pb.)**

In *Dramaturgy of Migration* the editors, Yana Meerzon and Katharina Pewny work from the hypothesis that 'multilingual theatre practices bring forward new 'dramaturgies of self' that reflect the everyday alienation experienced by both migrant theatre makers and their audiences' (p. 2). Set against an era of mass migration and a rise in right-wing-populism, the chapters cover the artistic, political and interpersonal realities of migration, as the authors consider stage practices and dramaturgical choices from settings ranging from rehearsal, workshops and performance, and from processes of translation, conception and audience reception. Guided by theatre's inherent multilingual and non-verbal potential of embodiment, transcending language, and speaking across cultures, the chapters keep in mind how political backdrops are ever able to impose set frameworks on both bodies and language, by drawing, for example, on theoretical frameworks around migration, hospitality / hostility, colonialism / post-colonialism. The chapters are further united in their aim to explore the entanglement between stage-space, text-

space and worldly space, and the dramaturgy developed in staging the political and lived aspects of migration.

At a time where several Western countries are renegotiating their asylum systems with increasing efforts to externalise migration management and increasing the hyper-precarity of asylum seekers' journeys to safety, Christopher Balme's chapter on hikesia and rites of asylum in Ancient Greece reads pertinently. Hikesia 'can be regarded as a legal and ritual extension of hospitality' (p. 6), which needs to be performed in order to be effective, making it a more 'ancient practice than a legal principle' (p. 8). Set against the ambivalence of the host / guest paradigm offered for example by Derrida, hikesia nonetheless provides ways of thinking about asylum as a rite and a right beyond its legal dimensions.

Todorovic's chapter takes the reader inside the complexities of being an exilic artist. Considering the process of translating his book back into his native Serbian after receiving Canadian recognition, Todorovic becomes a stranger in his own language (p. 20). Circling the notions of nostalgia and home, Todorovic considers what it means to be displaced without occupying a legal category of displacement. Nonetheless, his chapter also delves into the creative freedom and potential that arises from working across languages and cultures, thereby following Meerzon's 2009 study on the potential of exilic artistry.

In 'Part 1, On migration and self-translation', the chapters explore translation as an embodied practice, a textual mediation and a cultural and political process. Ana Candida Caneiro explores the position of an artist and undocumented migrant by building a theoretical framework around the opposing desires of a migrant to fit in and to preserve connections to their roots. Caneiro grounds this in an analysis of the multilingual dramaturgies of her play *All is Filthy in Wonderland*. Set in an Italian detention centre, Caneiro further examines

the possibility of art and artistry as a uniting factor for the two main characters.

Kasia Lech's chapter proposes acting as a translating practice that opens new vistas of mobility and multilinguality. For Lech, embodiment becomes a way to 'actively employ and embody translation' (p. 39), and a tool by which actors 'highlight their authorship of the theatre event, and shape their representation within transnational socio-political and cultural spaces' (p. 39). Lech considers these notions in the context of the Irish-Polish production *Bubble Revolution*, and from her own position of a practice-as-research participant and a 'Polish-born and trained actor co-creating and performing the production' (p. 40).

Ameet Parameswaran looks at the adaptation of O. V. Vijayan's iconic Malayalam novel *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* for the stage, which was 'regarded as the novel of the century [and] credited with the transformation of the Malayalam literary language itself' (p. 53). Parameswaran here considers several languages: the languages of the stage and of the novel, the multilingual medium of the theatre, the multilingual nation-space of India and the region in which the play was performed, and, importantly, how the dramaturgical choices of the production play into this. Parameswaran foregrounds this analysis by problematizing the universalism sometimes assumed in theatre's ability to bridge divides while overlooking the hierarchies and cultural imperialism of theatre making.

The conversation between Margareta Sörenson and Jonas Hassen Khemiri looks at translation through the themes of Khemiri's writing, while paying attention specifically to the techniques of working differently between the mediums of stage and literature. Sörensen and Khemiri unfold the question of embodiment in the stage-space, on the page, and in the space of Sweden, as police were instructed to find undocumented people, and would stop anyone who looked foreign on the street (p. 66). Khemiri

here writes a letter to politician Beatrice Ask, asking her 'to switch bodies and memories with [him]' (p. 66) detailing that '[i]f I entered her body, I would understand male privilege, and if she entered my body, she would remember being followed in stores by security guards, being stopped in customs at airports, being stopped and put in the back seat of police cars, for no reason whatsoever' (p. 66).

'Part II On inter- and intra-multilingualism of migration' starts by bringing the reader into an ongoing conversation between Azadeh Sharifi and dramaturge and sociologist Laura Paetau about the production, *Frutas Afrodisíacas*, dramaturged by Paetau. Taking academic and dramaturgical perspectives into account, Sharifi and Paetau draw on frameworks of intersectional feminism, decoloniality and multilingual stage practices. Concretely, they consider how *Frutas Afrodisíacas* confronted and challenged the colonial gaze through its performance aesthetics and its multilingual aspects. Paetau here understands the dramaturgy of migration through multilingualism's potential to shift set patterns of meaningmaking and challenge 'one-dimensional translation' (p. 76).

Indu Jain's chapter explores the work of avant-garde director Anamika Haksar against the setting of forming a national theatre in a post-Independent India. Jain proposes that the 'challenge to the patriarchal, hegemonic, and post-independence national canon came from women directors who emerged in the capital in the 1980s' (p. 78), and takes into account Hakasar's training from the Soviet Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow. Hakasar's theatre, then, 'deliberately seek[s] to present subject matter that does not conform to conventional patriarchal discourse, thus opening up a space for resistance by depicting these subaltern identities' (p. 78), not least by encouraging actors to consider their own regional identities able to contribute to 'a worldview of multiple perspectives through the language of their bodies in performance' (p. 79).

Alvin Eng Hui Lim takes the reader inside the question of Mother Tongue policy in Singapore, where English is a first language and where native languages often occupy only second-language status. Lim explores partly how this makes certain demands on cultural identity, and partly how the theatre challenges this; 'Singapore-based theatre companies often stage the struggle to embody language, whether consciously or not, and such stagings sometimes resist a simplistic performance of language' (p. 89). Lim here remarks on concrete text-based translingual choices and on performance being its own act of translation, while continually paying attention to the hierarchies and fluidities of language, ranging from the choice of performance surtitles, through to the development of pidgin, creole and language adaptation in the process of acquisition.

The chapters in 'Part III on dramaturgy of globalised, transnational and cosmopolitan encounters' speak to performance practices of making theatre across cultural, linguistic divides and in settings that are often multicultural and multilingual. Judith Rudakoff writes about working in culturally and geographically diverse communities, often without a shared language. This inspires creative, visual and embodied practices and 'dramaturgical tools that would work transculturally to inspire creativity' (p. 103). Taking the reader through a process of using these tools, Rudakoff describes the making of *The Ashley Plays: Blood and Water* when she was an artist / scholar in residence at the University of Cape Town.

Sun Weiwei interviews the Beijing-based artistic / social project *Folk Memory Project* about their work with African refugees project *African Memory: Crossing* to understand how 'these artists employ the artistic methodologies they developed in China to work in an international context and how they arrange the diverse languages to reflect the personal memories of the refugees (p. 117). Weiwei and Wenguang's conversation considers elements of memory and storytelling,

translingual and / or non-verbal communication in workshop-settings, and postdramatic performance practices converting 'oral memories into physical movements' (p. 120) and utilizing recordings as 'separated texts composing a socio-symbolic scene rather than a drama' (p. 117).

Alvina Ruprecht analyses Madagascan-born poet, musician, singer and performer Jean-Luc Raharimanana's work, and how Raharimanana's writing was driven by the impulse to explore the collective and personal trauma resulting from the colonial and postcolonial period in Madagascar. Having French citizenship by affiliation only because of to this colonial history, Ruprecht understands how Raharimanana's work seeks to recover Malagasy culture even if French became his first language. These issues are raised in two works, the play '47 and the essay *Madagascar 1947*, taking up the topics of postcoloniality, what kinds of history is available in official records, the imprisonment and torturing of his father and the colonial massacre of thousands of Malagasy farmers in 1947-1949, something rarely spoken about

Art Babayants chapter focuses on 'the potential of multilingual dramaturgy' (p. 133) of his practice-as-research project entitled *Sundry Languages*, where 12 mono and multilingual performers dramatize the process of language acquisition and its failures. Remarking on the difficulty of rooting the process in theory, Babayants proposes Ahmed's 'queer phenomenology' as a framework for considering multilingual realities. Babayants here argues that 'orientation and disorientation are not and should not be limited to sexual orientation' (p. 134). Rather limiting linguistic access can force the 'viewers [of *Sundry Languages*] to re-orientate themselves towards the presence of multiple languages' (p. 138).



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## About the review author

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## **Book review: *Shakespeare in the Global South: Stories of Oceans Crossed in Contemporary Adaptation*, by Sandra Young**

MOLLY ZIEGLER

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***Shakespeare in the Global South: Stories of Oceans Crossed in Contemporary Adaptation*, by Sandra Young. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019; ISBN: 9781350035744 (£85.00, £29.99 pb.)**

Sandra Young's *Shakespeare in the Global South: Stories of Oceans Crossed in Contemporary Adaptation* offers an important contribution to the Bloomsbury series on the relationship between Shakespeare and the supposed 'other', *Global Shakespeare Inverted*. Young's book draws attention to the ways in which Shakespeare's plays and legacy have entered into the so-called 'Global South' and shaped theatrical and artistic practices of non-Western, non-Anglophone regions. In doing so, Young seeks to address how such practices have informed cultural theory and performance studies, and how Shakespeare's works constitute a tool for 'telling new stories' in an increasingly globalised and postcolonial world (p.248).

Much of the book's initial aim is to distinguish what is meant by the 'Global South'. According to Young, this term refers not to a geographic separation between northern and southern hemispheres. Rather, it serves as a way to highlight 'cultural and political alignments' between regions. While acknowledging the flaws of the term itself—no map can account for where the 'Global South' begins and ends—Young articulates the book's interpretation of 'Global South' as follows:

the framework of the global South enables a perspective on relations of domination and freedom across a complex world that differs from the signal points generated by post-colonialism. Instead of treating colonialism's abuses and postcolonialism's resistances as the defining moments for all contexts of historical domination across an uneven world, the term draws attention to connections and affinities between diverse contexts across the South (p.23).

Young further argues that critical attention to these 'Southerly' contexts helps reveal the limitations of other cultural and postcolonial theoretical studies. Young claims that,

analyses of these settings are too complex to fit neatly within a post-colonial framework, as postcolonialism assumes an inimical divide between 'modernity' and 'tradition' that is not reflective of real life (p.47).

For example, Young cites that 'the language of "diaspora" assumes a sense of dislocation that may not be true for a new generation of South Asian Londoners' (pp.47-48).

Belonging and exclusion, possession and dispossession are therefore key themes within this book, with Young seeking to establish where cultural identities situate within a contemporary, globalised world.

Shakespeare, Young suggests, forms an important mechanism for discussing culture and identity in the 'Global South'. His works 'can make visible the struggles of local contexts of dispossession and injustice in a post-colonial world' (pp.46-47). This book explores such 'visibility' through four main sections on 'Creolization', 'Indigenization', 'Africanization' and 'Diasporic

disruptions'. Though Young 'seeks to resist the predictable region-by-region framework familiar within the field of Global Shakespeare', these chapters are largely distinguished by their attention to different regions (Mauritius, India-administered Kashmir, Africa and South Asian communities in London, respectively) (p.17). Regardless, these discussions highlight the ways in which Shakespeare's works have been employed outside of traditional English spaces. The chapters on Creolization and Indigenization each centre around core case studies: Dev Virahsawmy's reimagining of *The Tempest*, titled *Toufann*, in the chapter on Creolization, and Vishal Bhardwaj's 2014 film adaptation of *Hamlet*, titled *Haider*, in the chapter on Indigenization. These chapters begin with surveys of key discourses around postcolonial and indigenous theories within Mauritius and India before engaging with discussion of their selected examples. While the focus on cultural theory and identity is fascinating (particularly when drawn across multiple regions), the chapters do not take into account the theatrical and performative impact on their communities. Specifically, discussions of these works remain largely at the level of the script, as opposed to examining how they offer new meaning through their chosen theatrical and filmic media. Similarly, in the later chapter on diasporic disruptions, Young's analysis of the Silk Road Theatre Company's production of *Merchant on Venice* is primarily concerned with how Shakespeare's source text has been altered to suit modern Los Angeles and London contexts.

Despite the need for further incorporation of theatre and film studies, the drawing together of these seemingly disparate examples into one study helps establish connections between cultural crises of identity and belonging. Of particular note is Young's chapter on Africanization, which offers an interesting departure through its look at how not only Shakespeare's plays but also his legacy have forged a relationship with African cultures. This chapter explores how Shakespeare's writings have entered into the continent's literary landscape via their inclusion in school curricula and political activism. Also examining the Royal Shakespeare

Company and Cape Town's Baxter Theatre Company's 2009 production of *The Tempest*, the additional engagement with non-theatrical employments of Shakespeare highlights his continued cultural currency and exposes the ever-present debates over Westernization, colonialism and African cultures. When balanced with the other chapters, this discussion helps broaden the scope of Shakespeare's influence in the Global South and raises additional questions of what it means for his works to be performed and included in non-Anglophone communities.

According to Young, the book's exploration of Shakespeare in a variety of regions is 'not so much a question of the malleability of the plays', nor is it about how Shakespearean stories should be taken as universal (pp.247-248). However, though seeking to centralise the 'Southerly' and not the 'Shakespearean' voice, the repeated referrals to Shakespeare as 'traveling through' these regions somewhat confuses these efforts, as it suggests that Shakespeare is the dominating, conquering presence that connects one part of the world with another. Young acknowledges that this is indeed a problematic feature within other scholarship, with Shakespeare remaining 'the dominant figure—the noun—and the region under focus is positioned as a colourful variant, qualifying the primary' (p.18). To that end, there is further room to probe precisely how Shakespeare's plays may 'bring into view the vulnerabilities and dispossessions that haunt twenty-first-century mobilities across an unequal world', without merely imposing an English ideal onto the experiences of non-Western cultures (p.249). Young's work certainly takes impressive strides towards this goal, while at the same time highlighting the need for additional study into how Shakespeare is present within the 'Global South'.

### **About the review author**

MOLLY ZIEGLER is a Lecturer in Drama and Performance Studies at the Open University, specialising in early modern English theatre, c.1500-1700. She holds a BA in theatre and psychology from Saint Michael's College (Colchester, Vermont) and completed

her MLitt and PhD in theatre studies at the University of Glasgow. She has taught theatre and English literature at the University of Glasgow and the Scottish Universities' International Summer School. Molly has also served as a dramaturg for work performed at the Citizens Theatre (Glasgow) and the Traverse Theatre (Edinburgh), and has written performance pieces staged at the Tron Theatre (Glasgow) and for the 2016 Shakespeare 400 Dream On! Festival.





**Book reviews: *Migration in Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*, by Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston**

***Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Jason King**

ANIKA MARSCHALL

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***Migration in Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*, by Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston. Routledge, 2019; ISBN: 9780367138301 (£38.99 pb.)**

***Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Jason King. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; ISBN: 9783030027049 (£109.99)**

Reading has, for me, turned out to be one of the nurturing practices that has kept me grounded and lifted my spirits during the lockdown. The global health crisis in 2020 has, perhaps, prompted many of us to notice and understand viscerally how much our lives and health are interconnected with those living far away in unimaginable distances. The books presented in this review deal with two of the most pressing and exacerbating issues of our times: care and racial inequality.

We are witnessing ongoing crises of care in the Global North, powered by racialised capitalist exploitation of labour migrants, their abuse and repression through

tightly woven legal, political and cultural systems. Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston address this overwhelming mine field, by attending to the politics of storytelling in their book in *Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*. In a genuinely kind and caring way, both authors situate themselves carefully with their academic, white, Canadian privilege, including funding access and travel possibilities. Yet, in their reflection and documentation of their sociological and theatre practice-based research about the labour migration scheme for Filipino/a domestic workers in Canada, the lived experience shared by the migrants in testimonies and in personal encounters takes centre stage.

The book tells of the making and disseminating of a testimonial play *Nanay*, both on and off stage. With the book, the authors document their collaborations between the academy, arts and the people having experienced and lived through what the play tells of. Pratt and Johnston ask what is at stake—not least life and death—when presenting narratives of racialised domestic care labour on theatre stages across the globe, sometimes in places where family members whose struggles are told and shown have been left behind. In particular, they deconstruct the ‘familiar scholarly story, typically told as the dehumanisation and exploitation of women from the global south [...] within a worldwide system of racial capitalism’ (p.3). These are stories that usually have limited reach beyond the pitying ivory tower, and their play *Nanay* tells of the entanglement between both academic sociological research *about*, and the testimonies *of* Filipino/a domestic workers.

Therefore, poignantly, the book’s introduction starts with questions, rather than neat answers and the culminating question is: how can we understand a mother leaving her children with her sister in the Philippines to care for another family's children in Canada?

To disseminate their stories more widely than with sociological publications alone, Pratt and Johnston staged

a testimonial play from the testimonies of Filipino/a domestic workers in Canada, thus affecting and engaging audiences. Drawing on Julie Salverson's seminal research on the erotics of injury as well as indigenous and black feminist resources, they deal with the whiteness of the theatre production and the overarching research narrative:

there is nothing inherently radical about conceiving theatre as an intensified site of circulating affect, intersubjective encounter and ethical communication. Quite the opposite, theatre as a heightened space of emotionality potentially maintains the hegemonic (and gendered) distinction between emotionally laden leisure time and artistic practice, and the rationalities of economic and political life. The problem is compounded when it is women from the global south who are the object of empathy in the global north' (p.7).

Throughout the book Pratt and Johnston continuously wrestle with the nuances of their own authorities and position, destabilising the idea of the white ally as a stable category.

In *Crossing the Colonial Present* the authors self-critically analyse the journeys the theatre productions of *Nanay* takes. In four chapters, they show how the theatre play developed its own dynamic, gaining international interest, input from various audiences and developing a life on its own. After the first production in Toronto, *Nanay* was invited to a theatre festival at HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin, bringing the researchers, so to speak, 'along on its travels' (p.8). In turn, the agency of the thing itself opened up their research and knowledge production in an iterative, organic way through forming collaborations with every new community encountered.

In chapter 1, Pratt and Johnston rigorously document the first productions of *Nanay* in Toronto and Berlin, and offer a tenacious engagement with audience reactions to it. They pay particular attention to a difficult testimonial encounter with a Colombian migrant in Canada, who left the performance crying and called the play out as self-serving whiteness. Drawing on Jacques Rancière and Jill Dolan, they discuss the fraught and compromised modes of witnessing stories of suffering by racialised women, which always risk falling back into reinforcing race constructs and geopolitical privilege.

Chapter 2 documents the rewriting of the initial script, reacting to previous audience reactions and talkback between employers, care workers, activists and ambassadors from the Philippines after the first production. Their aim is to present a more nuanced narrative of Filipina agency and show the play in the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) Theater Centre in Quezon City in Metro Manila and engage through the theatre production with families left behind. They carefully deal with audience feedback from Philipinian dramaturgy students, who here too, raise the issue that this play was a 'white man's' made for his problems only.

The next chapter sheds light on the potentials and pitfalls of their subsequent collaboration with the activist organisation Migrante International. Translated into Tagalog, the play was shown outside the urban centre for Manila to the poorer, migrant-sending community of Bagong Barrio. Gayatri Spivak's criticism is taken into account here, whereby feminists who 'begin their analysis of migrant stories at the moment of landing in the destination country' consequently leave readers of such analyses aloof because they 'remain within their predicament of a multicultural society' (p.95). The authors also tell of the communication and decision-making process between themselves, the non-professional youth actors of Teatro Ekyumenikal and the Manila-based director Rommel Linatoc, who finally decided to cut half of the testimonies in the play, thus leaving out the

immediate link to Canada's labour migration scheme. He also changed the dramaturgy drastically towards the Filipino/a 'puro arte'. The authors discuss their initial hesitations about the director's suggestions, but through this process came to learn about the history of union organising and protests during the repressive years of martial law in the Philippines. This new production initiated new field work and encounters with long-term residents, who shared their stories of migration, often 'histories and experiences of intense precarity, permanent transience and economic desperation', family separation, personal sacrifice and strategic planning (p.100).

The final chapter takes us back to the Canadian north and another reworking of the play, which explores potential connections and differences between colonial experiences, showing the play in a Filipino/a community in Whitehorse, Yukon. Here, Pratt and Johnston collaborate with a Filipina actress who moved there and a Tlingit elder and drag performer to move the play 'away from a model of minority immigrant success within narratives of state multiculturalism, towards new ontologies of belonging and social relatedness, including familial relations imagined and lived beyond the private family' (p.127). Through the interactive community performance, First Nations' experiences of state-enforced family separation and settler colonialism, as well as Filipina/o experiences of family separation and racialised labour migration are shared.

In their conclusion, what resonates most with me (and is deeply felt when reading the whole book) is the authors' insight that '[l]earning from *Nanay* was not simply analytical. It has been embodied. It has been felt within a process of creating relationships and exchanging stories. The play has been a thing that has generated and extended worlds within and around it' (p.159).

Something in the book that is not directly unpacked, despite always thinking about the power dynamics of gender and social reproduction, is motherhood and the more intimate agency of thinking of oneself as a mother or performing some kind of mothering in the role of a nanny and caretaker. However, here again, my white longing for a hopeful, loving encounter, and colonial images of family and care risks perpetuating what the authors rigorously sought to counter-practice. While highly vigorous and critically astute, reading *Crossing the Colonial Present* felt very personal and close to home, notwithstanding the great geographical and political distances the research covers. I highly recommend reading Pratt and Johnston's work to all those in the arts and humanities (and beyond), who are interested in complex global questions of care, intercultural theatre and *showing doing* research differently.

I am reading and engaging with the books this review is concerned with in an age of severe militarisation of borders and racialisation, anti-immigration nationalism, xenophobia and right-wing conservatism, which further unsettle questions of what to do with such colonial residues, prevailing challenges of racial inequality and intercultural theatre and research. Charlotte McIvor and Jason King have edited the volume *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?* with manifold cutting-edge approaches to the question of interculturalism, including theoretical and practical contributions, case studies full of integrity and case studies full of (in)visible violence. The editors champion the assembling of a rich plethora of contemporary and historic contexts in between Mexico, Southeast and East Asia, Australasia, Ireland and Canada, France and Afghanistan, South Africa and Britain, United States, Greece, Germany and the EU. They identify and take seriously the discursive shift in understanding and applying the paradigm of interculturalism: the shift from a Western oriented, hegemonic framework of assimilation and integration, towards more grassroots, rhizomatic, diasporic theatre practices and diverse voices within, a shift that is disrupting binaries between cultures and of West / rest, white / non-white, urban / rural. I would

recommend reading both works, *Crossing the Colonial Present* and *Interculturalism and Performance Now* in tandem as the former details this paradigmatic shift in intercultural theatre and research, offering a long-term study of the processes of un/learning biases and rewriting against Northern hegemonies.

In the introduction, McIvor understands this new shift of interculturalism as one which speaks to 'something that actually begins at home rather than being primarily mediated through elite international exchanges' (p.2). This 'newness' of interculturalism emerges in the 2000s / 10s when scholars such as Tan, Ric Knowles, Royona Mitra, Leo Cabranes-Grant, Hae-kyung Um and Diana Looser critique many of its revisionist and hegemonic theoretical and practical foundations in the 1980s / 90s. As this rich volume exemplifies, the New Interculturalism moves beyond binary exchanges between East / West, North / South and toward multi-partner-driven models of analysis, and includes also non-theatrical case studies. Scholars in this volume (and beyond) centre thinking about the institutional frameworks at work, including production conditions, funding structures, state policies and the involvement of supra-national bodies, historical genealogies, and the predominance of English-language works and analyses. The volume is compelling as McIvor's own work sheds light on how interculturalism has been conscripted as social policy and used as political instrument by, for example, the EU for engaging with recent migrants and refugees (pp.14-15). She carefully dissects the potential violence of this political instrumentalisation both in her own contribution to the volume, and in her latest monograph on intercultural theatre in Ireland (McIvor, 2016). For this and New Interculturalism, Daphne P. Lei's concept 'HIT', or 'hegemonic intercultural theatre' is of utmost importance (Lei, 2011). With that, she describes and critiques the classic model of intercultural theatre which 'has been embodying ethnicity or nation without naming it, and the subject of the experimentation (or resultant contention) seems to be about cultures or artistic traditions, which are often kept distant in time and space; that *culture is*

*not race* seems to be of a general consensus for intercultural theatre practitioners.' (p.237).

*Interculturalism and Performance Now?* is divided into four different parts. In the first part of the volume 'New Interculturalism as Methodology', Leo Cabranes-Grant, Alvin Eng Hui Lim, Julie Holledge et al. shed light on different histories of intercultural theatre work and historiography, dealing with the violence and potential of archival research and material networks. Their focuses range from sixteenth century Mexico, Shakespearean adaptations in South and Southeast Asia from the nineteenth Century to the present, and intercultural theatre in post-2003 Australia.

The second part 'Redirecting Intercultural Traffic' represents some of the seminal companies and paradigmatic cases of the 'old' intercultural theatre through this new lens of interculturalism: Jason King investigates the Maliseet First Nation peoples' Akwiten Grandfather Canoe in Ireland; Emine Fişek deals with Théâtre du Soleil's workshops in Afghanistan through discussing the notion of humanitarian intervention; Yvette Hutchison discusses the prominent examples of Handspring Puppet Company and Brett Bailey and what got lost when they toured the international festival circuit in Europe; and finally Ric Knowles writes about Soheil Parsa's work with Modern Times Stage Company in Toronto and the director's appreciation for modernist theatre makers and theatre making.

'Intersectional Interculturalisms' is the third part of the volume, which centres on critical race studies, intersectionality and feminist thinkers to unpack a plethora of constructed, intersecting and dynamic socio-ethnic categories. McIvor and King here assemble contributions, which raise pertinent issues concerning the representation, expression and cultural performing of, by and with minority ethnic and religious identities and diasporic communities, on stage and in the public sphere. Brian Singleton discusses intercultural



misunderstandings by investigating the protests against the stagings of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's 2004 play *Behzti* and Brett Bailey's 2014 performative installation *Exhibit B* in the UK. In her chapter contribution, Daphne P. Lei investigates the performing of 'yellowness' and Asian-ness during the proclaimed 'century of China', and discusses new Orientalist stage practices in three different examples of 'yellow face, yellow drag, and yellow play' (p.235). Justine Nakase, studying the mixed-race Irish musician Phil Lynott, offers the metaphor of a Russian nesting doll for analysing the multiple analytic scales of an intercultural performance, ranging from the individual, community and emergent to the national, historic and global.

Part four, 'Migrant Interculturalisms' includes three contributions, which look at the shifts in performing arts and social policy regarding interculturalism from a European and EU perspective. Natasha Remoundou maps emerging intercultural performances by refugee community groups in Greece, which deal with their performing of statelessness, forced migration and displacement. Lizzie Stewart meticulously analyses the success and aesthetics of three different productions of Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel's 2005 play *Schwarze Jungfrauen (Black Virgins)*, shedding light onto intricate dynamics of intercultural funding policies and discourses of inclusion in postmigrant Germany. McIvor's final chapter examines the case study Terra Nova, a Northern Irish theatre company, and their performance series *The Arrival's Project* (2013-2018), working with racially and ethnically diverse writers, actors and community members, to theorise how the EU's vision for intercultural dialogue as vessel for identity transformation and structural social change, might be practised on the ground.

Both publications will, I believe, be useful and compelling resources for readers from across the arts and humanities and beyond, to rethink their own 'trodden paths' and roles as researchers within hegemonic cultural relations,

and to shape our understanding of how theatre and performance reinforce as well as undo some of the violent, persisting, representational matrices of race, class and gender.

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## **About the review author**

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SEMINAR REPORT:

## **Not fewer resources, but different: Creative responses to practice and research during Covid-19**

VICTORIA BIANCHI, BIANCA MASTROMINICO &  
ANTHONY SCHRAG

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*The cultural and creative industries have been one of the hardest-hit by the international Covid-19 pandemic. In the wake of this seismic shift, there has been a proliferation of events and publications exploring how artists have responded to living and working in a pandemic. There exists a sense of lamenting those things that seem lost or, at the very least, placed on pause. However, while Covid-19 has undoubtedly had a lasting impact on practitioners, the temporary digitisation of artistic practice has resulted in new possibilities for practice and national / international collaboration. It was this sense of possibility that was the focus of a seminar series recently held at Queen Margaret University, which forefronted the potential positive adaptations within practice research due to Covid-19. Certainly, the cultural and creative domains have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis, but the series aimed to argue that creative practitioners are experts in exploring new ways of thinking and being and suggested that in these difficult times we don't have fewer resources; rather we have different resources. The central thrust of these seminars, therefore, was to reflect on positive changes to practice.*

*Keywords: online performance, covid adaptation, practice research, media, performance*

This report offers an account of the three seminars. The events emerged from the newly formed *Practice Research Cluster: Finding and Using Creative Knowledge*<sup>1</sup> that operates as a part of the Centre for Communication, Cultural and Media Studies at Queen Margaret University. The Cluster was formed with the recognition that cultural work often operates in affective, ephemeral, relational and active modes: its unique knowledge lies in the production and reception of cultural work, and such knowledge is difficult to translate into linear, rationalised, and traditional formats. Working across production and reception of cultural work, as well as other expressive forms, the Practice Research Cluster focuses on the expansion of practice research and to support 'practice' as a research tool. Each seminar has been reviewed by different members of the research cluster, giving unique insights into each event.

### **Seminar 1: Filmmaking Practice in the Time of Covid-19**

BIANCA MASTROMINICO

Witnessing a discussion about filmmaking on the video conferencing platform Zoom proved slightly unsettling, as the event was inflicting a dose of remoteness and hybridity upon a discourse already focused on the immateriality of the celluloid. The seminar, which aimed at exploring how filmmaking had changed and adapted during the pandemic both within the academy and as a creative industry, invited guest speakers to consider the resulting changes to protocols in a positive and forward-thinking way, also looking at what might be retained in a post-pandemic future.

Dr. Itandehui Jansen and Rhys Smith presented their ongoing practice-led research aimed at mapping the digital distribution of independent films in order to

'distinguish best practice', while Freya Billington considered how film education has been challenged in a higher education context and shared innovative patterns of engagement with both students and the industry via social media. Lili Sandelin provided an analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on film production, highlighting the many challenges that film crews are facing, while Andrew Rooke's presentation discussed practice research in its adaptation to the digital.

Jansen and Smith, both operating from a filmmaker's perspective within an academic research context, focused on Film Festivals before and after Covid and how they have adapted to the limitations and restrictions imposed by the pandemic, adopting 'unusual and creative hybrid solutions'. Using distribution of their own films as a case study, the researchers highlighted the importance of film festivals as vital circuits for small independent films, for which avenues of distribution are much less clear than for mainstream cinema, firmly housed on streaming platforms such as Netflix or MUBI. In future stages of the research, Jansen and Smith aim at exploring 'opportunities and possibilities to create audience engagement and build communities around online screening of small independent films' as well as looking at successful stories and solutions to improve digital distribution.

As a filmmaker and pedagogue, Billington focused on how repeated lockdowns impacted on her practice-based subject and the need to find solutions to keep students 'engaged and on track' through a way of teaching which is 'responsive, adaptable and interactive'. This led her to create an Instagram event called *Tea at 3 with Mam Fromage*, aimed at reflecting how the filmmaking sector was coping with the Covid restrictions through informal conversations with a broad range of guests 'from all sorts of disciplines, different levels in the industry and different types of work engagement'. Notwithstanding online fatigue and the scarcity of university budgets in

replicating the new industry models in line with Covid guidelines, Billington's positive adaptation enabled new strategies of participation in film education while connecting professionals, learners and teachers in one (digital) interactive community, and in so doing innovating her pedagogy of filmmaking in ways that were impossible to predict before Covid-19.

As a freelance producer, production manager and academic, Sandelin highlighted some of the major issues which brought film shoots to a standstill, such as insurance not covering for Covid, provoking huge losses and budget cuts, or productions being stuck abroad in difficult situations, as well as postponement of smaller independent shoots and the creation of the new job role of Covid Supervisors. While the online move of development, casting and meetings worked well, Sandelin also considered affordability, pointing at the discrepancy between big films which could absorb the costs of self-isolating their cast and crews, while smaller crews had to think more creatively about how to achieve 'a visual sense of filmmaking' with what was available, and in a safe way. Despite the 'headaches' of pre-planning and rescheduling—which is now the new normal in film production—Sandelin identified positive adaptations in 'having more time to develop the stories, much lighter shooting days and healthier ways of shooting film' as well as more international collaboration in post-production.

As a PhD graduate in the middle of a pandemic, Rooke had to reconsider his filmmaking-based research methods for his project on 'how male intimacy is performed cinematically'. While the original research entailed working as a director with actors in a physical space to explore 'homosocial intimacy', the inability to create that space during lockdown resulted in a 'remote acting exercise' called *Digital Intimacy*, with local actors performing a scripted sequence as friends on a Zoom call in a 'display of homosocial bonding'. In testing the waters of filmmaking as recordings of live performance through and on digital (be it Zoom or mobile phone cameras), Rookes online adaptation of his practice research project

opens a window into the digital as an alternative practice for filmmaking, beyond broadcasting or streaming of regular films, and as a process which generates ‘a different knowledge’.

For a post-Covid reboot of the industry, one particular question has arisen from this seminar: with so many flaws in the system beforehand, would we return to the old normal? At the end of the online discussion, the shift in reflection and understanding provoked by each individual contribution of knowledge was palpable: filmmaking as we know it has been shaken, and it is now re-emerging from the Covid battleground as a mode of cultural production which needs to reframe its sustainability, politics and working approaches. What clearly emerged from the discussion was: a focus on de-colonising film, locality, and local resources; the wellbeing and employability of film crews and graduating students; protocols and good practice for mitigating stress in the workplace and finding a holistic approach to counter the ruthlessness of filmmaking as the ‘norm’; equality in accessing resources and community building through a fair distribution of independent films.

As we cannot live without each other and our stories—and the pandemic has heightened the importance of this—what are the new attitudes filmmakers and educators can bring to the cinematic ‘gaze’ to capture our fast-changing world under Covid in all its complexity? Perhaps it is time for re-thinking and for reflection.

## **Seminar 2: Practice Research in the Time of Covid-19**

VICTORIA BIANCHI

The second event in the seminar series concerned the differing approaches academics and practitioners have

used to carry out practice research in the time of Covid-19. Dr. Anthony Schrag and Dr. Ann-Christine Simke chaired the seminar, along with invited speakers Dr. Stacey Sacks and Dr. Viviana Checchia. Sacks' presentation focused primarily on her PhD research into decolonisation of the mind (specifically in relation to Southern African culture), whereas Checchia's work is rooted explicitly in community arts practice. Furthermore, the form of these presentations echoed the locus of their enquiries: Sacks offered an embodied, performative piece alongside Checchia's more conversational, communal discussion. What emerged from these ostensibly separate works, however, were a number of thematic commonalities and shared questions of the current landscape of digital practice research, and what the future might hold. The following section of this report will focus on the points of connection across the presentations and the discussion; what we can learn from this digital turn, how corporeal connections can adapt, and how we can slow down.

In a similar vein to others in the seminar series, this event was distinctly marked by an atmosphere of optimism. The theme that we have 'not fewer but different' resources available to us was continually revisited reflecting the notion that we may not have chosen this shift, but asking what can we gain from it? Sacks, for example, posed the question of which potentials might emerge in these new interfaces? In her performance, Sacks was able to specifically frame what she wanted the audience to see. My focus, placed upon her digitally-framed face, was pulled to the shift in pace and tone of her presentation when she switched between reading from her paper and speaking off-the-cuff, as it were. This renewed attention on the presenter, far closer to an audience than in a large lecture hall, were mirrored in Sacks' description of how we listen, and how we must learn to engage with the words of others in a more attentive, Barthesian manner. There emerged a hypersensitivity to every aspect of Sacks' presentation, a new level of attentiveness that Sacks herself was calling for in her own research. Checchia's presentation took forward this enquiry of what we might gain from this new format of working, arguing



that we may be at the inception of a new ontological paradigm. Her work, which focuses on what she has termed 'collective contagion' asks whether we are more open to discussion and exploration now that we are forced to be comfortable with the unknown. Throughout her paper, Checchia continued to revisit the idea that this style of working is not new, but there has never been a universal necessity to question or embrace it before 2020. She proposed that we must take on this opportunity to fully explore the digital as an integrated tool for art and for community-building, rather than a secondary option. That humans cannot gather, however, continued to be a topic of debate for the panel. It is this question of community and presence, therefore, that will be explored next.

Both Checchia and Sacks' work were unified by the same inherent issue that the majority of artists and creators have experienced since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic; how can a process that involves corporeal (inter)action be translated online? This presented a specific obstacle for Sacks' research, which drew from a range of embodied approaches including improvisation, clowning and play. Checchia, on the other hand, noted that much of her previous work involved engaging with communities, walking around cities, meeting people for coffee and inviting people to her home for dinner. The intricate networks of community and of improvisational practice are not dissimilar: both rely on chance, and on human connection as a springboard. In a climate where many elements of chance and connection have been removed from our daily lives, the question that remains is whether these practices can flourish. It was clear from the seminar that we are currently in a position of having more questions than answers. Checchia referred to online processes she had used in the past where young Palestinian artists were able to collaborate with those living in the West Bank. She noted that,

Being Palestinian does not mean you can enter the West Bank, so projects took place online in order to maintain equitable experiences. These systems give us the opportunity to find new ways of sharing knowledge across borders, even if they can't replace the 'real'.

This notion that the digital can afford us opportunities for connection that the 'real' world cannot offered a tone of hopefulness throughout the seminar. Sacks, for example, discussed how she had found generative connections between the digital format and the theme of segregation so prevalent in her work.

The seminar was bookended by an advocacy for a slower approach to art, research and practice. In Sacks' opening presentation she discussed how the pace of her work has shifted and that findings occur in an incremental manner, which seemed to align somewhat with the stilted, paused nature of the life amidst Covid-19. In one of the closing remarks, Simke argued that there is a necessity to embrace this slowness, that just 'cramming in more stuff just because it's digital' might not be the most useful way to approach our current circumstances. Furthermore, Checchia and Schrag reflected on the waiting and the pauses that seem to permeate pandemic culture: waiting at the start of a Zoom call, accepting that emails cannot be responded to so quickly, taking more time to build links within a community. As with every point or theme that was raised throughout the seminar, however, there was an acknowledgement that there are caveats to this slowing of working life. Deadlines and meetings and submission dates continue to pervade the careers of academics and researchers, even when the rest of the world appears to be at a standstill. The ability to find the benefits of online creativity, to foster a community, and to force ourselves to slow down come with conditions, that are aligned with privilege. These messages, however, of what we might gain from our digital turn, how we might connect, and how we might embrace slowness / stillness arose as key aspects of evolving practice research within a digital, distanced context.

### **Seminar 3: Liveness in Digital Creative Processes in the time of Covid19**

ANTHONY SCHRAG

The final seminar aimed to explore 'liveness' and how those who work in embodied practices were (re)considering their work in this complicated time: it reflected on issues of interactivity and participation, as well as corporality, chance, and how to sustain collaborative, responsive practices.

As with the Film seminar above, there was a jarring 'meta'-ness in viewing a discussion *about* performances on the internet *via* the internet, and the intersection of the medium and the message is still as closely intertwined as McLuhan suggested in 1964 (McLuhan, 1964). Indeed, reflecting on historical insights about media is a helpful place to begin, and it is useful to remember that in its inception, the aim of 'digital domain' (the internet) was to be 'interactive'; designed as a system of connectivity and it embedded that approach into its very name. As such, the 'problem' of how practitioners interact with audiences is not a new one. Indeed, this was a concern addressed by Dr. Christina Papagiannouli who confidently began the seminar by reminding us that live digital performances have existed in variety of guises for decades; and that the tools available for such performances are not particularly new. Rather, she suggested we are becoming more confident and nuanced with these tools, and there is no need for us to 'reinvent the wheel' in regard to live, digital performances. As such, the 'problems' of digital liveness—body, materiality and space—are not problems *per se*, but rather are a red herring to the contexts of participation and interactivity. Consider the distinction between television (now almost exclusively a digital medium) and a digital performance—the main difference lies in the ability of a live audience to subtly alter the experience by their 'live' presence. A live audience's intangible moods can fire a performer onwards or

dampen them down like a cold towel: so, too, should live audiences be able to impact and affect digital performances. In this way, they become participants rather than passive audiences, enacting the performer / audience feedback loop. As such, Covid has forced digital performances to consider going beyond mere broadcast and to explore the interactive context of the web: Papagiannouli sees this as potential to expand inclusion and giving more space for access as well as the chance to develop new forms of performance.

Dr. Paul Sadot similarly embraced the potentiality of the digital context, and his presentation also harked back to a historical framing that referenced the early architectures of the internet as distributed, non-hierarchical mechanism. For him, the pandemic has placed the means of production into individual creatives' hands: no longer controlled by the gatekeepers of the big companies or producers, the covid-shift has political potentialities that allow makers to bypass standardised ways of theatre. Serendipitously, his presentation involved a technical glitch that highlighted the realities of working with digital tools which are not fully developed. However, he argued practitioners embrace the precarity of such interruptions as they bring us back to 'liveness'—of the chaos of *not knowing*. The jeopardy of such glitches is exciting and we should welcome the ghosts in the machine. Indeed, this potential highlights that performers don't have to create 'theatre' on the screen, but use the skills, histories, tools and contexts of theatre to make something new: a DIY Digi-corporeality.

The collective Digi-corporeality of Sadot's suggestion was counteracted by the physical / corporeal interventions proposed by Dr. Victoria Bianchi and Stephanie Arsoska. To reflect on shared and contrasting issues both in a classroom setting but also in performative contexts, their work focused on the importance of 'doing' rather than mediating creativity via the screen. Like the digital glitches and ghosts Sadot suggested we embrace, Bianchi and Arsoska used dice to invoke chance microtasks—for example, a '2' meant walking for 1 min, and a '4' might

mean writing without stopping for 3 min—which would then be enacted in our own space, individually yet collectively. As such, the asynchronous work of teaching and working online found moments of connection in these chance encounters and improvisations. These shared chance microtasks act to keep disparate performers / students linked and—from a practice research perspective—there was something effectively simple in the ability to share *via doing* something physical. While we could not *be* together, these chance interventions allowed a certain collective activity that was effortlessly simple but highly effective.

Bianca Mastrominico and John Dean are similarly fighting against the remoteness and awkward disconnection that Covid has wrought, and they reflected on how they have adapted their practice to this digital form: not only the process, but also the encounter. Working with performer Madeleine Worrall they described being led by the medium itself, exploring the struggles with the context of Zoom performances as the professional and the domestic and performers began to collapse and merge. Indeed, the overwhelming and ubiquitous nature of the internet was present in these reflections: on the internet, the screen becomes an equal and active performer, sometimes leading and sometimes overwhelming the work itself: where does the single body exist when we are constantly all interconnected? How do we retain self? How can they find a more 'human' performance exchange, rather than relying purely on the digital functionality? When we disconnect from Zoom, does the digital body also disperse? Where does it go and how does this digital haunting continue? While their practice is currently exploring the answers to these questions the ghosts of history ask the question: if the context is half the work, is the decision to go *beyond* the screen, or go *into* the screen? Indeed, as practice research is concerned with *doing* could we consider Covid as a productive mechanism that is pushing practice in interesting ways towards new ways of being?

## Conclusion

Reflecting upon this seminar series, what becomes clear is that the digital is not simply a format through which these works were developed, but an active agent in the formation of art, research and praxis. In the late 1960s, Barbara Steveni of The Artist Placement Group (APG) coined the term 'The Context is Half The Work' (Artist Placement Group, 1966). It was a slogan for their sculptural and participatory work that was aligned with the post-studio, conceptual art tendencies of the time. What she meant by this phrase was that the situations surrounding the work—its context—was as important to the meaning and understanding as the piece of work itself. The APG 'placed' artists in specific contexts, organisations such as the Hille Furniture Group, British Steel, The Coal Board, or the Scottish Office and invited them to respond to the particular aspects, limitations and ecologies of these situations. They all but invented the modern day 'artist residency' in which an artist is located in a place and responds to that place.

It may seem odd to reference such a dated, sculptural process when reflecting on the very modern issues of Covid, however, the notion of a 'context being half the work' had conceptual resonance to the content and manner of all the sessions. The combination of lockdown's limitations and mechanisms of the internet have not resulted in less work: rather, there seems to be a recognition of *new* work emerging. Indeed, this was a common theme from all participants of these seminars: the work occurring now *because* of Covid is not supplanting 'older' ways of making: but rather, the work is changing, merging, and finding hybrid forms: different ways of making due to shifts in finance structures; different practices emerging because of technological capacities; different types of engagement that the pandemic has engendered. This is not something to be feared, rather, there are opportunities in and amongst the threats to the cultural sector. The aim now is to focus on the practice itself in order to develop and nurture these cultural expressions.

## Notes

1. The *Practice Research Cluster: Finding and Using Creative Knowledge* is a subset of the Centre for Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (CCCMS) at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, which carries out world-class internationally excellent research on cultural and creative industries, communication management and public relations, film and media. The Centre aims to deliver exploratory reflective research of relevance to practice communities, policy-makers and the wider society.[<sup>1</sup>]

## Details of the Seminars

Online Seminar 1: *Filmmaking Practice in the Time of Covid-19*  
January 25th 2021, Online

Speakers:

Dr. Itandehui Jansen, Lecturer in Film and TV, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh.

Rhys Smith, Producer, Risky Whisky production company.

Freya Billington, Creative Consultant & Programme Leader of BA Honours Filmmaking, Boomsatsuma.

Lili Sandelin, Producer, North Isle Productions.

Andrew Rooke, Lecturer in Media Practice, Queen Margaret University..

Online Seminar 2: *Practice Research in the Time of Covid-19*  
January 26th 2021, Online

Speakers:

Dr. Stacey Stacks, Researcher, Stockholm University of the Art.

Dr. Viviana Checchia, Senior Lecturer - The Crafts and Fine Art Unit, University of Gothenburg.

Dr. Anthony Schrag, Senior Lecturer in Cultural Policy and Arts Management, Queen Margaret University.

Dr. Ann-Christine Simke, Lecturer, Queen Margaret University.

Online Seminar 3: *Liveness in Digital Creative Processes in the time of Covid19* January 27th 2021, Online

Speakers:

Dr. Christina Papagiannouli, Research Fellow-Performance and Interactive & Immersive Technology, University of South Wales.

Dr. Victoria Bianchi, Lecturer in Drama & Performance, Queen Margaret University.

Stephanie Arsooska, Associate Artist of Duende Theatre Company, and Assistant Lecturer in Drama & Performance, Queen Margaret University.

Dr. Paul Sadot, Visiting Research Fellow in Performing Arts at The Centre for Interdisciplinary Performative Arts (CIPA), Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

Bianca Mastrominico, Co-artistic director of Organic Theatre, Programme Leader of BA (Hons) Performance and MA Digital Performance, Queen Margaret University.

John Dean, Co-artistic director of Organic Theatre, Senior Lecturer and Head of Division for Media, Communication and Performing Arts, Queen Margaret University.

## References

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McLuhan, M (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.