

Time for Repair:
A conversation about
theatre & the future

An Open Space event
Hosted by BAC and Improbable
Held online 22nd May 2020

Collected Reports

Improbable

BATTERSEA
ARTS CENTRE

Overview

On Friday 22 May 2020, Battersea Arts Centre and Improbable hosted an online Open Space conversation. This was the first in a series of events held by Battersea Arts Centre & Improbable in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Around 100 people attended across the course of the 2.5 hour conversation.
- The majority of participants work in theatre & performing arts – around 30% were artists or makers; 30% were producers or programme managers; and around 15% freelancers.
- Around 25% of participants described themselves as being in senior management or leadership roles, 30% as mid-career, and 30% as early career.
- Participants attended from Band 1, 2 and 3 NPOs, Arts Council England, the British Council and other funders.

The agenda was set by the participants as a group at the start of the conversation. Four main themes emerged across the sessions called:

Inclusion and access in future planning

- Challenging and speaking about inequality
- Should I stay or should I go? The future of migrant theatremakers in British theatre
- Now we're all in this together, how do we "make" together and stay together?

Radical dreaming

- What funding structure do we need in order to see the change we want to live?
- Artist mutual aid
- What do we want to happen?
- What / how are buildings doing to access advice and expertise from artists?
- How can theatre learn from and contribute to Community Organising?
- What responsibilities do venues hold in the years to come?
- What happens if our theatre gets mothballed?
- What might the future of international touring look like?
- Rip it up and start again

Communicating the value of theatre & performing arts

- How can audiences trust us and find us?
- The Value of Art

Creative practice in the online space

- Building an online learning community for digital practice
- Cinema techniques for online theatre
- Is Zoom a new artform?
- Digital liveness, spontaneity & improvisation – how are people breaking through the wall?

- Can design / lighting / sound be used to create online work?
- Does socially distant theatre exist?

This document contains the reports from this event – the reports have not been edited or curated in any way and are presented as they were at midday on 25th May 2020. We hope that these ideas, provocations, themes and questions may be picked up by participants at (or organisers of) future events.

For information about future BAC and Improbable events visit www.improbable.co.uk or www.bac.org.uk.

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Artist mutual aid (plz no venues) (Josh)

Session Convener: Josh

No report

What about us? Challenging and speaking about inequality (Yasmin)

Session Convener: Yasmin

Participant names: Rafia Hussain, Rebecca Manson Jones, Griselda Yorke

A real fear that inequalities within society and the arts that existed pre Covid 19 will be magnified post Covid 19. How do ensure that diversity led charities and arts charities continue to receive funding and support in what will be an even more challenging financial landscape.

Is there a way that we can support one another?

Conversation about (over?) reliance on ACE - discuss.....
? needing to know how to write the application to be successful?

NO chance to think long-term when fire-fighting for immediate survival and support of participants.

People will get to make work sooner than others and there will still be a vicious cycle of MH for diverse artists....

What will be left?

Not as much change has happened as people think....

How do we take care of the diverse artists who won't be able to 'go back to work' as soon as others - emotionally, financially and artistically?

We need to prepare Emotional, physical and financial tide that is coming....

Power of theatre is the live presence - do we want to be digital anyway?

How to plan in levels of uncertainty on timelines

What to tell the participants about when we will be back?

Predictable reactions in the more influential areas of the sector - receiving challenge....

What messages are getting to the top

How are we floating to the top?

How do we keep the RMs up to speed and make the challenges that need to be made?

How do amplify what we're doing?

Group collective conversations and make a collective voice....

I am finding it too difficult to verbally contribute to this conversation at the moment.. but I am very conscious of how difficult creatives with protected characteristics find getting their foot in the door and then advancing their careers relative to their privileged counterparts. I would like to see NPOs etc. centre finding ways to create financial stability for those creatives (who are more likely to be freelance vs within an organisation). The artists of colour, neurodiverse, working class that I know are not plugged into these Zoom meetings.

I think we all need to take responsibility when we are invited to zoom meetings where 'influential' are talking. I ask for the list of who else will be there, and if it's not appropriate or I know people who are missing, I reply asking for them also to be invited.

<https://fueltheatre.com/an-open-letter-to-theatre-and-performance-makers/>

We are all fire-fighting - at whatever scale we're working / being

Afua Hirsch was featured in this morning's opening session about **Women, Leadership and Progress** together with Julia Gillard and Hindou Ibrahim. **You can watch her** from about the **38:50 mark** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/events/epz5q9/live/cmdwrz>

She talks about this being a moment to take stock as a country. To reshape our national story. About the need for a new social contract, with minority people at the heart. She talks about the long-overdue acknowledgement of the value of key essential workers, so many of whom are women and from ethnic-minority backgrounds ... and hugely disproportionately affected by the current crisis. Black women, for example, are twice as likely to die of Covid-19. And Black men are *four* times more likely to die than any other group.

Building an online learning community for digital and hybrid theatre/arts practice (Simon)

Session Convener: Simon

Participant names: Simon, Jason Freda, Kelly, Kaya, Melanie, Amy, Nina Dunn, Ellie

Devised Theatre Network on Facebook - sharing resources

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/devisedtheatre/>

Devising Online course - The Cockpit Theatre Maker programme (I've just finished running this course, will do another in July)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1588379831337428/>

Coney are offering free "virtual cuppa" sessions to talk to them about making playable theatre, or using these kinds of tools to make with

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe6Azbh8z3j97MXqthfD_glwIHSdqAJEMhQxPbTaroTOWc7Bg/viewform

Finding places to collaborate and learn from?

Connecting hubs to each other

Here's the hub: <https://digitalstages.mn.co/>

Curtain call event - how to use Zoom as a creative tool

(Not just Zoom, but also Instagram Live, Facebook Live, Google Meets, etc. etc.)

Important for creative community to exist, especially for people who have just graduated into this industry

Need to create a network of various communities, some who are already doing online performance, and have been for years.

We have to be careful not to pretend that we're creating something new. A lot of this exists already - especially in gaming, mixed reality, etc. How do we find those collaborators/use those techniques?

How do we bring this to a theatre audience (who are maybe not tuned in to what's happening in gaming)?

How can we ensure that new creatives entering this industry know about the communities and the groups that they can access?

Maybe go through the drama schools, ask them to send info out to their students & alumni?

Liveness is really key - not only because it's a core value of theatre, but also because without liveness, aren't we just making 'bad' films? Liveness is also not JUST video calls. We can use text messages, phone calls, other mediated experiences of liveness.

examples like: <https://landproject.tumblr.com/>
<https://aabraahams.wordpress.com/about/>

Interesting new work in 360, AR, recording of performance spaces

Theatre is about imagination. We don't have to see the thing (as perhaps you do in cinema), you can create the story between different technological and real world elements.

Performers take control of the medium. Using to-camera as direct address.

Engagement and participation are guided by performance, but use the tools which come as part of the various platforms.

Creation Theatre Company: The Tempest and The Time Machine - experimenting with the integration of audience participation, engagement and 'liveness'

Creation Theatre:

have a show this weekend that might be interesting to watch
here are details

And it's back by popular demand!

Big Telly present four more shows on the 23rd and 24th of May. Tickets are on sale now at <https://www.creationtheatre.co.uk/book-tickets/>

Riotous, get involved fun for all ages.

Watch the trailer <https://youtu.be/Dg4GT6MK1Cg>

I'm developing a producer training programme which will be cloud-based over 15 weeks - so it is a digitally connecting and collaborative space to look forward to a post repair world. Producers' Pool is also now connecting much more widely because of this lockdown world. I have decided that PP won't return to just on-the-ground, and the training course allows teachers from all over the world. Chris G

Great, Chris - I teach the Video Stream at RADA so let's connect.

Simon - thanks everyone for coming along, I'd love to hear your voices and ideas in the community some time soon: here's the instant sign up

link: https://digitalstages.mn.co/share/msButeczNujRx4rW?utm_source=manual

Jessica: I arrived after everyone had left. I work with MICHA - the Michael Chekhov Association and we are producing our first international workshop on line this June. We are dealing with many of these questions.

Does socially distant theatre exist? (Jonny)

Session Convener: Jonny

Participant names: Dawn Walten, Ruth Lass, Simon A, Ellie, Rachel, Kate Carmichael

Are there any existing forms?

Light nights and trails - enjoy work separately

Producer wise - South Korea - track and tracing in the theatres - able to reopen with social distancing

Work that happens outside? Infection risk is lower

Promenade - site specific - resurgence with distancing built into the work

What's happening with theatres across the world?

Sweden - they're building work but it'll be in rep for longer to recoup costs - committing to smaller audiences. Only 50 people but they'll get the full show.

Sounds like a big risk - what if you have a hit

How do back stage and actors have social distancing? How to keep staff safe? Hordes of understudies

Find ways to create and explore intimacy without being able to touch each other - different means of expression

Neighbours have started filming in Australia - how are they doing it? They're splitting the studio into 4 companies and they are forming a bubble. Straight artistic solution

Like making shows under censorship - everybody knows that there are limits - something connecting

Still nothing in Melbourne theatre-wise

It's a process - have to go through what we can't do in order to get to what we can - Lyn G - maybe small scale touring will be the way. Still doesn't deal with how you rehearse or create?

Imagination and audiences - seeing the creative team getting through these challenges could be magical

Looking to produce next year, safeguarding of performers, what distance is creating in us. Actors training, rehearsing, a space of time which is going to need holding of the space.

Well being - film industry - socially distancing - stressful for some staff - consideration of staff

Gives us a chance to reimagine all that - tread carefully in terms of being space, what feels right, what's best practice

Thinking about art going to people rather than the other way round. What would art look like if it happened in a neighbourhood. How could it be supported? Just on your street. Can ensure audience are safe. Build a sense of community greater. Kind of example happening soon - Manchester council - putting a drone down people's street to record them singing. ('Together In One

Voice' is part of Manchester International Festival's online Live programme of events) Making work outside nursing home

Work for care homes - open windows still open

Germany doing something online and increasing revenue!

Shopping centre, parks

Taking theatre to people - facilitate - tech expensive?

Just headphones - not that expensive, promenade pieces that already use the language

Philosophically - spent last 13 years bringing people to theatres - now we take it too people? Why have we focused on venues? The flip side of it.

Community venues - might not have tech, but are very beautiful and have an audience Make theatres made of glass?

Back to question of feeling safe - biggest concerns - will there be social distancing - toilets are a stumbling block.

Indigo survey - <http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/supercool-indigo/After-The-Interval-Wave-1-Report.pdf>

In Netherlands - already being put into place there - this is what you're allowed to do - phasing in you can rehearse, but strict amount of people in place - 100 PEOPLE by 1st July
Shorter shows, no bars - trial and error - organised

Task force - political move - resources of theatres - political argument rather than the practicalities - always caveats attached to state money

Pilled containers in which you are socially distanced but can share an experience

Cultural taskforce announced - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/culture-secretary-announces-cultural-renewal-taskforce>

SOLT <https://solt.co.uk/about-london-theatre/press-office/dcms-sets-up-new-entertainment-and-events-working-group/>

<https://www.soniafriedman.com/news-press/theatre-stands-on-the-brink-of-ruin>

Short plays so that people don't have toilets - actually an access issue – a lot of access issues in a lot of the discussion - shouldn't be pushed to the back of our minds

Composer – no one is representing music on the task force.

Designers - are the people we should perhaps have conversations with.

Casts will need to get together earlier to have covid tests

Difficulty of companies - welfare of all involved. Caring responsibility

Small companies more fleet of foot than venues? But we don't have to make the work shorter or smaller or less significant - pursue the ambition and size of work - doesn't have to be smaller

As an independent - something exciting about the possibilities of empty spaces - live with a collaborator - talked to directors - wants to cast people who live together? Get more people on stage who aren't trained actors

Maybe stop making theatre for a while?
(BUT, we can't stay at home forever)

Initially thought we'll do it next year, but then decided rethink how, where, and why one might tell a particular story - reframing the discussion, what's the context, where else could it connect - reasons to rethink how we might tell a story

How to deliver a one person show - still approaching theatres (doing a tour) - but doing it digitally - but with the theatre's partnership - so structuring it as a different sort of tour. Using the infrastructure of theatre making as a structure for making online world

How to facilitate transactions, no shortage of digital content - perhaps if the audience are all there, rather than watching. Perhaps it about existing in the moment. Engaging in shared space.

Platforms looking at how you do shared experience ZOOM and another one, together/separately

Good Night Out - how to make it shared - send people sweets

Prototyping - playing - it's what the arts do – what's the story - try it in another platform.

END OF SESSION

SOLT press release: <https://solt.co.uk/about-london-theatre/press-office/dcms-sets-up-new-entertainment-and-events-working-group/>

What funding structure do we need to see the change we want to live? (Lora Krasteva)

Session Convener: Lora Krasteva

Participant names:

SUMMARY:

Current funding structures defined the length, type and reach of the work we make as artists and orgs.

Artists have been working on tight turnarounds, often bound by precarious project funding and constantly applying, seeking commissions, building fragile networks to support touring etc. This hinders rather than supports creativity.

Current funding structure need to change (with or without the additional financial support from government as a result of the COVID crisis) to ensure a broader number of people and activities have access to long term, stable funding.

To this effect, we propose four mechanisms.

More is to be done to re-distribute the wealth there is in the sector, by engaging with successful artists, the commercial sector and working with big venues and organisations receiving the biggest % of public funding:

- Inspired by Universal Basic Income, a basic income for all artists, administer by ACE and homologue bodies in the regions. This will cover basic necessity of individuals irrespective of their other income or financial status (freelance or not etc.). This will NOT be subject to an application or reporting baring proving proof of activity in the " creative industries".

- longer term pots of funding to allow research, connections, reflection etc. NOT subject to producing and making (public) work. Accessing those shouldn't bare people from accessing other, more "commission like" post.

- a condition of funding for larger organisations to have at least 1 artists in residence part of the fabric of their building/org whereby the residency is of mutual benefit and the artist can affect decision-making, policy and procedures as well as artistic life of the org. This can take the form of associate directors, resident companies etc. and needs to be at least 1 year and renewed after end of term.

- Private funders to ease application process and move away from project funding and towards core costs support and long term funding over several years, riding the changes they made to adapt to COVID 19 (emergency funding, core support, less complicated applications etc.)

END OF SUMMARY

Session notes, for reference:

How funding structures define the type of work we make

Is there a better way to give people a base to work from? Other than project based?:

ACE is discussing what the future could look like

What can the funding model look like?

Britain is alone in requesting money to save the buildings - other countries are investing so that money goes to artists, freelancers

Is it about a "proper" subsidy so that theatres are not in this position

Acknowledgment of new generosity that wasn't there before - venues being able to be more transparent on how their model work.

If there is more money to venues - what is their civic venues?

What is the core funding equivalent for artists?

We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm - our boats.

Allowing for more core support to be a higher percentage

Universal basic income - should we be lobbying for this at a macro level? It is impossible/too soon/not the right time can we imagine an equivalent of cultural workers/artists? Giving a base from which to build on.

time and speed of making theatre - is it tied into the funding cycles? More opportunities to take time to have "time out" / thinking, research, meet etc.

Questioning how much freelancing is a choice VS a necessity?

Could you make a note of the countries you mentioned here - France was one I missed the first one? Chile

What are companies doing/good practice?

Funding artists for longer term. What if venues re-distributed funding?

But will trickle down work? We don't think it will.

Resident artist at the core of the decision making - how you create the balance between structure and freedom. A partnership that everyone understands

Funding right now - where is the funding going? We are not charging, things are available for free online.

Thanks!

taskforce from the government - seems created to keep the status quo

is there a way that we can re-equilibrate the funding scales.

"Storytelling" around redistribution of wealth

What will happen if venues are asked everyone to be payed the same wages (living wage?)

If anyone is payed the same, would there be other things that becomes currency?

Question of representation seem to be shared in different conversations.

Audiences who were propping up the "old" model will be the last ones to come back.

Who has power / everyone gets the feeling that they are disempowered?

The Value of Art – (essentiality, needs...communicating these) (Victor Esses)

Session Convener: Victor Esses

Participant names: Chris Grady

We discussed the way our very sector and artists don't always value the arts when faced with the current pandemic, we feel it's not worth it. And yet people need and consume arts all the time for their mental health, joy, health, it generates a lot of money.

There's a huge issue around all theatre being offered for free at the moment. Where artists as ever are expected to work for free... it's ok for the big venues to offer it but that creates a huge culture of it that does not benefit the sector and doesn't value the work of people involved in the work.

People could charge £5 would make a difference and perhaps have a £1 option for people who can't afford.

We must discourage the sector of offering it all for free!

The headlines are also mainly worried about massive venues like the Globe and National, and not as interested in the smaller venues around the country.

Probably what will come back first are community gatherings and small audiences' work.

Some commissions have such a complicated form (Scotland) that is a huge issue.

Germany is helping its sector

- value the arts! they are essential
- get the word out
- discourage free stuff

Should I stay or should I go? - The future of migrant theatremakers in British theatre (Nastazja)

Session Convener: Nastazja

Participant names: Chris Grady, Amy Clare Tasker, Emma, Carla

I was at another session and wanted to join the discussion here. I am developing training programmes for creative producers and the key area of my concern is that the producers of the future need to reflect the diversity of the population as a whole. That population includes migrants (1st, 2nd, 3rd) generations and those who hold another heritage in their hearts.

-- How do we help encourage aspirational theatremakers who want to bring stories and worlds to life which engage with the migrant audience, and how do we help migrant / newer arrival performers to be part of those companies that are making work.

What can existing arts infrastructures do to help - the fastest growing populations here in Scotland are those growing with non UK born citizens. Their voices need to be seen and heard on stage AND in the creation of the work through producers, directors, creatives.

[I type this sitting solo in the space from a place of ignorance because I am not engaged in any projects where this is happening or working at the moment. My questions are partly to myself as I develop training programmes for Creative Producers to see how to serve this question best]

Please stay and make our countries and cultures richer.

- Chris

Migrant Theatre Artists resources

Info from the May meeting:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1I4vyW2vjSxOYmBI6eeXF6qAYatHCFsbu>

Link to sign up to the network

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfyg3heaH-0X8hy37Yg3uj9G-ZgFpPicsfsrxlJHLw6pZDmmg/viewform>

Voila! Europe Theatre Festival

will be going ahead in November in one form or another, TBC very soon.

www.voilafestival.co.uk

I am really sad that so many people are feeling unwelcome in the UK, and I'm furious about our government's policies and societal shift towards xenophobia and nationalism. London's blend of

cultures is so rich and inspiring - but on an individual level, if it is painful to stay here, I wouldn't blame anyone for leaving to go somewhere else where existing is easier and art is better funded. It will be our loss. Perhaps one silver lining of the pandemic and shifting our lives online, is that the geographical barriers matter less than they ever have before. We can still collaborate from anywhere there is wifi.

- Amy

More cross cultural collaborations in between various institutions

Migrants make work that will attract new audiences/ new communities

British theatre doesn't utilise on the variety of migrant experience that exists in this country

I know we don't know what's going to happen but.... what's going to happen?!!! And what do we want to have happen? (Matilda)

Session Convener: Matilda

Participant names: Louisa, Kully, Chloe, Morven, Luke, Amber, Jessica C, Lloyd

I called this because it felt like the elephant in the room - except the elephant is so big that it is the room!

Can we work towards something less hierarchical?

"Brain fog - how to make work when you don't know how or when or for whom you are making it?"

Overwhelm terror inertia

System fucked anyway so it's a wake up call

Living with uncertainty and lack of access of provision - normal already for many reveals inequality

Not a hierarchy - a spectrum

Theatre not back on till next year

Something big that can allow for social distancing - in the street?

We can't go back.

We have broken our own rules - we won't be able to retract these

If live theater involves noticing something together - I have been noticing when that happens in daily life during covid. I am noticing that people in my community are driving to parking lots to watch the sun set. I'm noticing that people are connecting more at places like gas stations and grocery stores and I'm wondering about how we can reclaim these spaces as our theater venues for "pop up" performances.

How we monetize these kinds of performances is another question.

In Amanda Palmer's book the Art of Asking she talks about creating a culture of giving.

What if this is the norm for next 5 or 10 years? Is monetising online content realistic for small scale companies? Will they survive?

Could larger organisations took smaller organisations under their wing, in order to survive?

Do we need to turn to corporate sponsorship more, should corporations have a legal responsibility to support local artists and organisations?

It's 'investment' not 'bail-out' - we need to get better at making a case

More facts and figures needed - what different institutions need to keep going - less sitting on hands and kicking the can down the road but be clear about what's needed

Discussing how best to support graduating students and recent graduates - Ellie suggesting contacting Adam Morley who is putting together some kind of platform / showcase / support network.

Important to give ourselves time to process all information as it comes to us each day and compartmentalise each problem at a time

are buildings fit for purpose? and how much should we adapt not knowing whether or not this might be over in a few months?

Neil Mendoza - 'there is no budget' (in an interview on R4 yesterday talking about his role as Commissioner for Cultural Recovery

How can communities and audiences trust us and find us? (Sagar)

Session Convener: Sagar

Participant names: Louisa

communities and audiences - disconnected. Segregation between community theatre, popular entertainment, and 'high art'

Bubble of online audiences determined by algorithms

Be careful not to disconnect from what's really going on, these experiences are real

We are not reading communications from theatres and artists anymore, most things are coming through social media – are we at risk of just communicating in our bubble?

There is very little curation of online content.

Internet/online cannot be the be-all end-all of how we deliver. We lose huge chunks of people we could / should be serving – older people, households with few internet devices, if any.

New relationships

1927 found themselves building new dynamics with local schools in Margate. Instigating creative projects, using the teacher staff as a means of reaching young people who are not online. Also, Schools are coming to artists to find new, creative ways of communicating with young people during this crisis.

'Touring' during lock down has fostered tighter relationships with marketing/comms people and artists. WhatsApp groups that run parallel to online performances has created better quality conversations.

Audience confidence

Theatre buildings all need to find similar ways of safe working and CONSISTENT communications with audiences to build up trust. People need to have an expectation of a safe theatre-going experience which will be met wherever they go.

Bringing artists into communicating with audiences. Example of this – Relaxed Venues with Jess Thom.

Culture Banks and paying-it-forward

Visual arts world is using pay-it-forward models at the mo (i.e. buy one of my works and I'll buy someone else's). Theatre can do more of this.

Can we create CULTURE BANKS, like food banks, that people can donate to help people access culture in economic hardship. Can we use existing networks such as STAMP to develop this?

If people's priorities post-lockdown are to see family & friends, how can we communicate that the arts is a place to connect, share, be together, with people you know and also a wider audience community

Can we shift audience's and community's thinking toward theatre/ the arts to be more in line with football, or something where you feel engaged, loyal, you want to come back to and follow the journey along with other fans or artists?

Could this open gardens platform be opened out? An arts organisation can open a 'building' and different communities can come together in different 'rooms' throughout the day to learn, run a workshop, rehearse, do exercise, facilitate a focus group, put on a performance... and then everyone has an option to go to the 'bar' or 'cafe' or 'smoker's area' spaces to socialise and meet all different kinds of people (the part we're not getting out of digital platforms so much, without the massive weight and noise on social media).

How can theatre learn from and contribute to Community Organising in our quest to shape the world as it is into the world as it should be? **(Rachel Griffiths)**

Session Convener: Rachel Griffiths

Participant names: Rachel, Ben, Danny, Lloyd, maddy, Bryony, Patrick, mberry, Dawn

Community Organising

How do we avoid the risk of people becoming invisible?

The community we have built, takes a front seat as the theatre we make takes a back seat

How do we avoid doing good things locally which others are doing in different organisations without talking to each other?

Boal's Legislative Theatre naturally connects with organising

Transition Towns phrase "Community Resilience"

Where are the voices of those with chronic illness, disability

The rush to get back to normalis that inclusive?

Could run a listening campaign - reaching out to members, staff, stakeholders, audiences, participants.... ask what they need to feel safe

Community building over the internet pre-COVID 19 is a tremendous resource. How can we use those skills?

How can we build back, better? A question asked in community organising: is this intervention helping / 'making things better'?

How can we have more representation of artists, workers in the creative sector, in community or faith organising? Open more spaces and make the dialogue richer - with creative strands you can talk using narratives, storytelling, image, sound...more inclusive than hypothetical or bureaucratic discussion?

Skills of participatory artists so valuable in facilitating community spaces

"Community Art and the State: Storming the Citadels" by Owen Kelly (1984)

"To be a cultural revolutionary salaried by the state is a contradiction in terms" Discuss.

How do we make the work we do important enough to people that it's not affected by / dependent on state influence

Community Organising techniques - starts with listening and then leads to action, which is where theatre can be most useful. Theatre techniques great for testimony.

People to check out <https://sociocracy30.org/>

Read Irish Government's Citizens Assemblies documentation

Department of Public Transformation: publictransformation.org

Rules for Radicals - Saul Lewinsky.

How and where can we create work - is Zoom a new art form? (Ruth)

Session Convener: Ruth

Participant names:

Hi Ruth (and anyone else interested in this topic!) I have called a session in session 2 about combining cinema & theatre techniques for online live performance in Zoom and similar apps. I would love to connect about this! But now I'm off to the online learning/collaboration chat. Please feel free to get in touch! amy@amyclaretaker.com Thanks!

Asking Less of people getting strong connection: Ideas / Experiences (Jessica Cerullo)

Session Convener: Jessica Cerullo

Participant names: Jessica Cerullo

I'm Jessica Cerullo and I called this session. I am the artistic director of an international organization called the Michael Chekhov Association. Our community is 20+ years strong and multi generational.

It is growing during Covid so now we are a community and many have never met in person. Many are educators and artistic directors. Those who lead creative experiences for others...

In the here and now of the pandemic, I find it difficult to engage with big ideas, with big projects across time zones and lifestyles.

I wonder about successful ways folks have connected through an art practice in these covid times. Ways that people did this asynchronously and synchronously but meaningfully. Where it was easy to say "yes I'll join" because the ask was small enough and yet the reward was meaningful.

One example I know of that took place before Covid was a participatory theater piece called ORBITING TOGETHER: <http://tiakramer.com/orbiting-together-participatory-performances>

If you like, please leave examples in the notes section detailing projects you have been involved with or heard about that draw upon performance in some way.

Or, if you'd like to brainstorm or just chat, I'd love to hear from you today or in the future. Jessica@MichaelChekhov.org.

Pathways to Producing careers through Repair (Chris Grady)

Session Convener: Chris Grady

Participant names:

The reason for calling this session is to begin to understand how to give the best opportunities of training and support to aspiring producers who may not know the routes in, or may not feel the industry would/will welcome them ?

---I'm settled here bringing thoughts from other sessions:

a) value the art - producers and providers/creators have to value (monetise) in order to survive, and politically we (little people) have to shout with the big boys and girls (NPOs etc.) to government to change a perception of the value (as opposed to elitism) of arts. How can freelancers work together to do this.

b) migrant communities - how to ensure (or at least work towards) the point where a gathering of Producers who are actively making work is reflective of the make-up of the UK population as a whole. Or the community in which they wish to work. How do we make our organisations and casts more diverse. How do we tell stories that talk to all our audience...or more importantly all the audience we would like to attract.

I'm preparing to run a 16 week cloud-based creative producing programme. My applicants so far do not, yet, show the diversity of the UK population that I would like to see. It is one thing to 'fill the places' with great new producers, but how do I work outwards to find applicants who are not like younger versions of me, and are not people currently 'at the table'

Producers' Pool - monthly meetings for self-identifying producers , now in the cloud last Tues of each month, and slowing building branches around the UK (South West and North West England set up). More info to join this FREE network please email me chris@chrisgrady.org or go to the Facebook Group and ask to join [small charge to attend meetings]

4.15pm I'M SLIPPING AWAY FROM MY OWN SESSION. DO ADD NOTES

AND I WILL RETURN WHEN I SPOT PEOPLE GATHERING

What responsibilities do venues hold in the months/years to come (Susie and Ellie)

Session Convener: Susie, Ellie

Participant names:

Transparency and holding a space for dialogue is key to the continuous relationships with artists and freelancers.

CPT will hold STAMP events and panel discussions, series of webinars

Communications from venues have been 'bitty', not as unified.

We've been crap at communicating so far. So many potentially different audiences to communications, and each require a different way to communicate: freelancers vs staff vs political perception. Hard to communicate to all of those in one.

Very difficult to communicate cohesively

We have to have the plan to what we deliver if we can't open, and that is dependent on many variables. We don't know anything. Trying to think about what our role is.

Whole sector is coming into a stage of thinking of the next few months. Better headspace to be able to do that.

If we can't open our doors, what else do we do?

Have campaigns of how essential theatre/storytelling is/charging for stuff online to value the work/reimagining the sector

Creating space for conversations/culture bank with pay it forward method.

What are you adding? We're people on laptops now.

No one can buy tickets - barrier is broken down. Can we make this model work, of not relying on tickets being bought.

There are 'pay what you can' model. It's all about how culture is funded. Values have power of capitals, when we get through the immediate crisis we need to think about how we can sustain art accessibility and go back to basics. We need to have positive conversations with our funders.

Opportunity for venues and independent artists to share ideas and resources on a more equal/democratic level

Requires a dedicated person to form those opportunities and communication, job role

Fuel taskforce/open letter

How to recruit to ensure it is democratic, by nature exclusive

Prioritising access in its widest form

Ensuring that access and inclusivity is baked into all theatre when we re-emerge into a new normal
Rethinking the paradigm of taking a show out into the world

Psychically huge, will only adjust to paradigm slowly over time
Need to dig deep, need to have courage

Cinema/screen techniques for online live theatre (Amy Clare Tasker)

Session Convener: Amy Clare Tasker
Participant names:

This topic is connected to several other sessions today:

Building an online learning community for digital and hybrid theatre/arts practice (Simon)

How and where can we create work - is Zoom a new art form? (Ruth)

Digital liveness, spontaneity & improvisation: how are people breaking through the wall?
(Katerina)

How can creative arts -design/lighting/sound be used to create online work? Or can they! (jess Worrall)

I'm off to one of those other sessions to take part in the discussions, but before I go:

I have an idea to create an event/competition/collective creative impulse for theatre makers and filmmakers to collaborate on live online performances (in Zoom or similar). As a theatre maker, I want to work with people who have experience with creating for the screen, but I want to make something that retains the liveness and feeling of assembly that we all love about theatre.

I know there are lots of people working in small groups on this sort of thing - could a competition be a way to bring them all together and share our experiments? There could be prizes and a big broadcast party for the winning entries. I have some resources available as part of The Cockpit's Theatre Maker programme and broadcasting capabilities.
Who wants to kick this idea around with me?

Please get in touch! amy@amyclaretasker.com

Now that we're all together, how do we "make" together and stay together - Inclusive work (Rebecca Manson Jones)

Session Convener: RMJ
Participant names: Rebecca Manson Jones

Young woman with chronic illness is feeling more included now but what will it be like afterwards?

There 5 million people not on internet in UK

levels of isolation will be different afterwards

can we keep the solidarity after Lockdown
not just on Zoom what other ways?

living alone.....
communal experience of working with theatre...

Recovering from the virus, it's not wrong of me to want to get back to my normal. But I hope to remember what it's like for someone who can't, or for whom 'normal' is unequal

Alive to multiplicity. experience.

In the future, let's hold on to the practical idea that lots of people across different experiences can be part of conversations

If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. How can we get in the room in decision making?

If I'm finding myself joining more spaces, decision making panels, discussions... who am I bringing with me?

In this time, if you can buy a zoom subscription, does that give you an equality with a venue that you've never had before?

Ebullient moment - worry though,,, the opportunity
How do we make this not a blip....?
There's been good stuff,,,,,
Improbable and LARSH - LD

Zoom mustn't take over and replace physical access. We need to be able to do both tailored to needs and desires of people who need support....

Sally Philips (actor) talking about access to creativity for her son with Downs Syndrome - he will be scared to join a gathering because he doesn't know anyone.

The accessibility we have to talk to people in all areas of the industry since working online, is exciting. Will that remain?

no money no collabs/mo money mo collabs (Josh)

Session Convener: Josh

No report

What happens if our theatre gets mothballed? (Katie)

Session Convener: Katie

No report

Digital liveness, spontaneity & improvisation: how are people breaking through the wall? (Katerina)

Session Convener: Katerina

Participant names: Amy Clare, Angela Clerkin, Ben Pettitt Wade, Victor Esses, Chloe Kennedy

I believe zoom and other digital platforms are potentially a hugely fruitful new format bursting with creative opportunities for spontaneous creative communication - even though for me they present significant challenges.

Of course the distance, latency and artists' relative lack of literacy of these forms are hurdles - but they are also restrictions which stimulate us to play perhaps even more creatively than in the rehearsal room.

The performative frame: playfulness with the boundaries of the 'box' we're stuck in

- Daring each other to play with those boundaries
- Passing energy: physically (and vocally) developing ideas back and forth, passing imaginary items, we've had some great fun with object improv exercises too using real life everyday objects everyone's got at home, and also conceptually - simple games like one word stories, yes and, etc., work nicely, and that goes for more complex improvisations / etudes too
- Passing sensations: I touch your nose, you stroke my hair, we hug, we boink bums
- Passing pitch: latency challenges rhythmic music but drones can be exploratory, connecting, spiritual sensation, even with the annoying interference of the tech when it comes to hearing everyone on some platforms, by playing with how you structure it you can still make something beautiful and new together
- Passing movement: following or bouncing off each other's creative physical ideas generates a sense of physical connectedness

This kind of responsive work has the capacity to make us feel together in a way that's really precious and curative right now. It has the potential to draw audiences away from being passive participants too. I think if we dismiss it as just making attempts at low-calibre TV, we risk missing incredible creative opportunities. Chance to help people make sense of the world as they now experience it by expressing shared challenges too.

Music really challenged by latency. Latency is a bitch. But it work if one person sings and others sing along - can record harmonies and live sing together, beautiful. Comedy tricky because of timing. - There's comedy in the latency - play with the challenge - the zoom is the third player - eg. counting down from 21 is funnier cos much harder - we can't read the room cos we're not that literate of the tech - comedic possibilities of the challenges we all face eg. not knowing how to tell when it's ok to speak, knowing we're not synced - everybody knows that feeling of not knowing when to speak - ensemble can develop a series of gestures or sound cues to signal when they're about to talk

Angela is doing a sound improv group of 2 perfs, sound person and director, where they turn the visual off and improvise with sound, she thinks it's a more freeing headspace

Amy has co-run cockpit's group with 9 people and that feels like a comfortable max, even 3 x 3 grid, can still take it all in, definitely more than one page is unworkable. We played Zip Zap Boing by calling out the name of the person we wanted to "send it" to, and then saying Zip/Zap/Boing. So we didn't need to know where everyone was.

Hi-Jinx have done games like Whizz Bang Boing with up to 20 / 25 participants, they tell everyone the order at the start, fun of embracing the chaos and exploring what does and doesn't work, lots of hilarity with wink murder, less about the challenges and more about the fun of getting stuff wrong. This is brilliant as you just can't get it right, creatively freeing, Keeping community going, boost for us in the team as well as the participants Can have up to 40 in one screen

Haven't gone over 1 hr - Amy's had 3hrs but they're gonna make it 2.5, we're trying 1.5hrs, Chloe says 1.5hrs felt more like a 3hr teach cos it was quite heavy.

Chloe teaches a lot around neurodiversity, found the session became more verbal / discursive as people struggled with the boundaries

Access issues: they've spent a lot of time supporting their participants to get online, now about 80% of 100 around Wales interacting with us online. Tech support and training ongoing responsibility.

Interested in devising and making something new - what's the creative potential for this tech and whether a journey can be created through the use of the break out rooms.
Is it gonna just become necessarily more verbal??

You can do physicality but there's kind of a stop in between
Distanced physicality
Devising via zoom for theatre that is intended to be shared in real space eventually
Building bridges between meet-ups - as a company connecting up

Can the current situation make things more spontaneously creative? Yes - a lot of people work from a place of control, the challenges can shake up working systems and show you how elastic you are (eg. of uni saying that)

Starting with a particular discipline to devise as usual, so the in is using what we have, this tool this tech, to explore the potential of it and how our artists interact with it and take to it, the limitations and the possibilities

QiQochat is incredible as a potential platform for giving audiences agency to choose their experience

Important to still have that live element, entering rooms where somethings happening

Games on multiple streams - Google Meets has an add-on where you can order the screens, it's a free extension called Meets Grid View Extension for Chrome

Order solutions

Pointing

Very clever thing I don't understand described by Chloe to do with turning video off/on

US director Carrie Klewin Lawrence/3rd Space Theatre Collective have created a devising online laboratory, and shared findings/videos from those sessions:

"The Red Wolves, a virtual devised theatre laboratory, has been exploring the challenging, exciting, frustrating, and inspiring possibilities of directing devised performance from a distance - starting from scratch on Zoom. We are collaborating with 14 directors who are observing and providing feedback. These recordings are intended for use and distribution as educational resources. We hope they are useful to you."

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLteivbrRfdTgC-x45p9kX-BPmibq27tvx>

"Lessons Learned Directing on Zoom" document and added the feedback collected from the sessions. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JLuD175tYGs9Tehx958N3JM2M3zHkPFa?usp=sharing>

If you are interested in attending the live virtual performance if/when it happens, you can sign up here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeLW4iK3KADXgMooHWOpKrwRgv-14MPBFcAxx-IDQRt_KMUHQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Opening Space online - what works and what doesn't? (Lloyd)

Session Convener: Lloyd

Participant names: Ruth, Emma B, Clea R

How can we use this tech to create a platform for other people to take part in?

This didn't turn out the way I intended, people came with a different interpretation than mine "Opening Space" - hurrah!

Stuff about mutual aid and the difficulty of asking for help

NT Live doesn't work for us - it's not made for online and in particular it rubs up against our expectation that online stuff will be participatory (remembering that we participate in a meatspace performance too, just in a different way)

Interesting ideas about making theatre through online open space, the idea of an immersive piece, where everyone started out in a waiting room and then moved into different rooms where different parts of a narrative were being played out - like eg Punch Drunk's Drowned Man.

Noting that this Open Space we're in is essentially a bit of improvised immersive participatory theatre where we've all fooled ourselves we're actually in real life.

Something about being relaxed and being at home. Returning to the idea of relationships being build online and off- bootstrapping from one space to another, evolving as you go. But also the weirdness of us all feeling like we are in the real world and creating something together that isn't in the real world.

Also the physicality of the space is important. I'm missing actually being in a circle, imagining isn't enough. I love the mutual respect I've seen here between participants.

Mute and Video off help to enhance the feeling of conviviality and I was heard to say "my conviviality doesn't have to disrupt your experience"

How do we feel as artists and makers generally both work wise and personally? (Kelly)

Session Convener: Kelly

No report

What might the future of international working look like? (Neil Webb)

Session Convener: Neil Webb

Participant names: Neil, Jo C, Rachel, Malu, Morven, Danny, Ben, Kathryn, Kully, Lore

How do we use this hiatus(?)/pause to problematise how the best international exchange can happen without flying?

Celebrate the international in your community.

regional / local ways of working and linking that into international collaborations

facilitating international network conversations, the access to the network itself has value

zoom has a weirdly democratising factor; everyone online within their homes wherever in the world they are

Grassroots networks

Engaging the international within our borders (and the networks/efforts they are already creating in small-scale, independent ways with little resource) - migrant artists and cultural workers (especially in a time when migrants are subject to the hostile environment, No Recourse to Public Funds etc.)

I'm developing CGO Institute Diploma: Building training opportunities for producers around the world, coming together in a single classroom, collaborating, and then being mentors/tutor locally. I look forward to growing other cloud-based training opportunities around producing creative people. The next one will grow from the workshops that British Council kindly funded for me to start teaching Musical Theatre in Russia. - now looking at cloud-based bilingual teaching.
chris@chrisgrady.org

Lots of international meetings have been taking place online, oddly this has made it feel even more connected than the travelling (of lack of resources to do so) has been in the past

Any producers - UK, International in the UK, International not in the UK - check Producers' Pool - currently 500 producers invited to meet monthly for a conversation chris@chrisgrady.org or Facebook Producers Pool

Rip it up and start again. (Luke Jeffery)

Session Convener: Luke Jeffery

Participant names: Luke Jeffery, Nadia Iftkhar, Emma Blackman, Natalie Songer, Bryony F-D, Claire Saddleton, Yasmin S, DredaOB, Jonny Humphreys, Dawn Walton, Eagle 203, Emily Stride, Ben Monks, Rachel Griffiths, Angela Clerkin, Jason Crouch, Kate McGrath, Bryony Rumble, Jes

Cerullo, Alice Massey, Nastazja Somers, Griselda Yorke, Ellie Zeegen, Danny Braverman, Sharron Devine, KellyG, Victor Esses

We don't want to go back to normal
People talking about community again
How do we change things while protecting livelihoods?

Gulf between freelance artists/small companies and larger companies/venues - need to bridge this gap in order to move forward together as a sector. This is a power imbalance as well! 100%. I've seen in my journey from being a freelance artist to working for an NPO how suddenly in certain rooms your voice has clout which it never had before, just because of your job title....that is bonkers and has to change

Time to face the inequalities that are rife in the sector.
Venues have a role to play in facilitating RISK TAKING which is at the heart of art making.

In Battalions: Fin Kennedy report on risk-taking in the landscape of austerity <http://finkennedy.blogspot.com/2013/02/in-battalions.html>

In Good Company
<https://www.derbytheatre.co.uk/artist-development/in-good-company>

Transparency - organisations and artists, especially those with clout or power, explaining where they are in this current scenario. The more we as a sector know about each other's circumstances, the more we can work together to make things happen. This leads to better decision making from funders and support bodies.

Sharing of resources
Existing business models untenable. What radical thinking are we capable of without jeopardizing the things we want to keep?
Alternative business models?
Proving our value to others. Explaining the value of the arts - not just economic benefits. The arts makes people feel good. How can we celebrate that as much as / alongside the economic benefits?
Should the arts be so reliant on funding? Other ways of making money?

We've been herded into a corner where we are only able to prove the value of what we do economically. We know that the arts has so much more to offer than just what we contribute to the Treasury - how do we a) prove that and b) celebrate that again?
Benefits of the arts. Mental health. Wellbeing. Values. Makes us human. Creative ways of thinking, or approaching problems, helps us problem solve creatively
Why isn't the arts valued in education?
Seeing the arts as they are instead of how they are imagined to be. Which is to say, young people seeing different modes of performance might excite them and generate interest in the other things on offer, rather than it's all Shakespeare etc.

Yes to young people seeing^^, and also young people creating too?

Return to the sense that the Arts Council was formed in the first place. The value of the arts was a given, and it was KNOWN that the commercial sector will not make the huge and wide ranging forms of arts that form the sector. Hence, a process to fund cultural work (bad phrasing, written in anger)

Difference between indoor and outdoor theatre. Outdoor audiences more diverse. Transforming place and people's lives.

Free spaces. Outreach. Pathways and progression routes. Bringing people into theatre. Importance of youth theatre.

What's holding us back? (Apart from a global pandemic)

As a sector how do we lobby for change?

Is there a place for the unions? Do we need to start a new one?

Solidarity and the power of collectivism.

How do we pool resources?

Rediscovering the joy of making.

Do we need to stop thinking about what we do as an "industry"? We're not an assembly line and there is no clear career path through it. The conversation about who is in / out of "the industry" is counterproductive

What are we for? What do we do?

An opportunity to rethink things. The buildings are at their most vulnerable.

Independent artists in a better place to create something new.

Long term damage of the pandemic. Artists are the people to help with the healing process. How can we help locally? Working in our communities.

Rural touring. Hyperlocal. Tackling the climate crisis. How do you keep a global perspective?

Concern about organisations shifting into community centres and seeing these spaces as an "opportunity" when they don't have any history or knowledge of working in that context. Perhaps they can better resource the artists and organisations who are already there instead.

How do young people get into theatre? Elitism. Pricing. Telling everyone's stories.

Need for a campaigning activist group

We need a louder voice collectively

Widening the conversation. Platforming voices who aren't artists.

Bottom up rather than top down.

Disability rights movement. Nothing about us without us.

Social bonding. How do we create dialogue across difference? Creating community.

Our role as part of learning.

Feeling and emotion missing from democratic discourse

What makes our work more memorable than other culture?

Creating something spiritual. Energy in a space.

Live energy is irreplaceable. Technology no substitute.

Public campaign for the arts. Postcards to DCMS from theatre lovers.

How do you localise your practice? Not shoe-horning what you do into a local/community context, but finding and looking for windows of opportunity to apply what you are really good at to your locale.

Dialogue Across Difference in communities

Four interlocking elements:

The Social

The Educational

The Emotional

The Spiritual.

"Nothing about us without us"

Not just artists who should be burdened with public advocacy for the arts. Our advocates are out there. What if there was a public campaign where anyone who loves, or knows someone who loves the arts, writes a postcard and sends it to DCMS? They'd be inundated!

How/What are buildings and spaces doing during this recovery re accessing the expertise/advice of independent Artists. (Sharron Devine)

Session Convener: Sharron Devine

No report

How can creative arts - design/lighting/sound be used to create online work? Or can they! (Jessica Worrall)

Session Convener: Jessica Worrall

Participant names: Simon A, Josh C, Grace S, Nina D, Tanya S, Amy Clare Tasker, Jason Crouch

The challenge of the 'role' of designers - reskilling or expanding our skills - hybrid roles

The liveness of theatre design - not replicating film/TV

How to move beyond the square boxes of Zoom format?

The form is key to the way the audience experiences the work - how do socially distant works create shared experiences?

Secret Sofa - online version of Secret Cinema, watching a film together

The opportunities for IRL theatre - visually driven, but in communities - eg in a street

Let's get weird on zoom - and tiktok, insta live, etc. etc. - the kids are already doing it, they don't need to be taught, they just take the tech and run with it, so why don't we? it's like the early days of video in 1970s/80s (where so much experimentation was done by performance/live artists).

Experimentation is where artists and audiences find the edge cases of the technology, hide behind the stage and jump out from under the seating bank.

What do we have to let go of in order to design/make work?

- Perhaps we need to shed the idea that we can, or *should even try to*, replicate the IRL experience of being in an auditorium-type space (e.g. by asking a zoom audience to turn off their lights; by trying to somehow fight home-life background noise in order to recreate the magical 'pin drop moment' that happens in a theatre)

- Perhaps letting go of certain expectations around production values, gloss/finish?

- BUT maybe it is too painful, the possibility of having to let go of experience/knowledge/skills gained in live theatre contexts - given all the time spent and personal sacrifices made to build this... The thought of letting all that go is daunting, terrifying.

The energy needed to try new things - will some of us want to go back to theatre? Will we have the energy?

Where is the collaboration - with funding in short supply do we lose the designer because we can't afford them - preference for collaboration over money

Can the job roles shift in this new world of theatre - we become more hybrid by design/requirement.

Do we wait (no!) for institutions to set the parameters or do we just start and instigate the work?

However much experimentation can be done, we still need work [income?] - we need to pay for groceries etc.

Forced Entertainment having meetings in the dole queue, a bit like a contemporary arts version of the Full Monty

Romanticising the dole era - it was pretty shit! But maybe today's shit is even worse?!

Feeling frustrated because we can't, at the moment, be *practical* in the ways we usually instinctively turn to, as designers /technicians - e.g. physical making, playing with objects, using materials

"Somehow - we are going to cut windows out again" - Grace ref Grayson Perry

We WANT model box theatre!

Theatre without actors is the best theatre

The visually exciting or the aurally exciting can still make the difference

<https://vimeo.com/403771894> - Philippe Quesne // La Nuit des taupes

How can creatives be part of conversations with buildings/organisations as to how theatre can evolve/adapt change in post covid world? Can we be invited to play? See what could be possible?

Fear that creative values/skills won't be part of how we make work in future given the financial implications of post covid theatre. How do we make sure that we are? Is it important to theatre buildings/organisations that we are? That we can help/inspire new forms of theatre as we all move forward

How can creatives instigate work as we are all pretty much dependent on being asked to make work by either director/producer etc.

Some doodles made during the event (Lora Krasteva)

Session Convener: Lora Krasteva

