

Forum

After Covid-19, What?

TDR Editors

At the start of May, Richard Schechner sent all *TDR* editors three questions—as prompts, not a straitjacket. Below are our editors' responses, in date order.

The questions:

1. How will performance art, theatre, dance, and music be permanently changed or different?
2. How will teaching and scholarship be permanently changed or different?
3. How will these changes affect you and those artists, scholars, and students closest to you?

Fawzia Afzal-Khan, 15 May 2020

I think theatremaking might become ever more globally attuned—and more aware and sensitive to issues of inequity, of the need to address social and economic and racial disparities than ever before, and their connections to global capitalism, to environmental degradation. In other words, I can imagine more work emerging post-Covid that is in the realm of what we call “political theatre”—a renewed interest in/commitment to art for life's sake, as it were. More work that experiments with online performances, that connects with remote audiences will surely also emerge and become part of a new way of “doing theatre” and music and other performances as a result of the social distancing imperatives that will stay with us for a long time to come.

Speaking for myself (but also having heard others express similar sentiments/experiences), distance teaching at a time of shared vulnerability has been an intense experience, connecting me to my students in ways I had not quite anticipated. While I could not “see” every student's face as some had no camera access on their PCs or phones (or hadn't combed their hair!), the ones I could see close-up I could have more intimate conversations with, even in the midst of a larger classroom discussion. I found myself more concerned for their well-being and their struggles than ever before, made more allowances for lateness in completing assignments, felt more maternal in my relationship to them than I've done before. Ironically, I felt I became a better teacher, more empathic as a result of the medium itself: Zooming allowed me to zoom-in to my students' lives and struggles in ways that the physical classroom experience did not, and though this empathy has been generated in large part because of the shared anxieties unleashed in all of us as a result of the pandemic, I think the long-term consequences will endure post-Covid.

As for scholarship—well, I think for many of us, the concept of *la recherche engagée* holds renewed attraction and promise. Indeed, inspired by Frank Hentschker's daily Zoom sessions with theatre practitioners and other performance artists from around the globe,¹ I've begun

1. Frank Hentschker hosted daily conversations Monday through Friday at noon from 30 March to 31 July 2020, livestreamed on HowlRound and archived on YouTube by HowlRound Theatre Commons. —Ed.

hosting a weekly series over Zoom called Love and Solidarity in the Time of Corona: Desi Feministas Envisioning Change Through Staying Engaged. I invited a core group of South Asian feminist colleagues with whom I cofounded the South Asian Feminist Caucus of the National Women's Studies Association a decade ago, to join me in conversations around our anxieties/hopes/strategies for surviving Covid lockdowns and building a post-Covid future that might look different, in which we might all behave differently, both at home and abroad. We've now started inviting colleagues and former students and other simpatico friends from around the world to join these weekly sessions, bringing their news to share in this forum as we collectively perform our solidarities in service of better, more equitable and ecologically balanced futures. I can see new anthologies of critical and creative performativities resulting from these weekly sharings emerge—a creative, engaged scholarship that gives renewed meaning to performance studies.

Watching, thinking, writing—these activities that have comprised the bulk of theatre and performance scholars' lives will continue, though with more of the watching done in front of our various screens at home than in live theatres or cinemas or dance and music recital halls. Though with the easing of social distancing restrictions over time, I imagine we will return with vigor and ever more desire to those “normal” ways of enjoying live theatre and performance, where the communal sharing of spectacle is such an intrinsic part of the experience, not just for the spectators but also the performers. In a world that is in so many ways an uncanny instantiation of Brecht's insights, how can we become spect-actors, seated in front of screens all day? OR can and will new times lead to new forms of theatres (as Brecht also proclaimed)—which will in turn create activist and socially conscientized theatre practices from digital platforms? Listening to Ralph Peña, artistic director of the Ma-Yi Asian American Theater Company on the Segal Zoom series, it is clear that “minority” companies like the one he runs, more than other more mainstream/established companies, first have to worry about how to ensure their company members survive the pandemic, which encompasses Covid but also the endemic racist structures that prevent such companies and their personnel from having access to the same visibility and better conditions of living and recognition as their more racially privileged peers. And then, perhaps, they can think about how to use technology to create theatre from within closed off spaces, but in a way that allows for audience participation to keep us all connected (via something like the Zoom chat function perhaps...though Peña did not sound keen on using this platform for his productions. I can understand his hesitance as Zoom is also a tool for surveillance, as most online tech tools are—and that raises interesting questions for us all moving forward).

One interesting example of online theatre work is provided by the play *Bubble*, a production of Theatre Uncut, written by Kieran Hurley, which brought together young actors from across Europe in an experimental production (prior to the pandemic) in a shared theatrical space without any of them actually ever meeting physically; *Bubble* raises several politically important questions of our times, including sexism and racism on campuses and the issue of “free speech.”

My final example is from Pakistan, where I'm on the jury for the Coronologue Festival sponsored by the Ajoka Theatre Company of Lahore. Meant to encourage/unleash creativity among young theatremakers stuck indoors during the pandemic, the entries consisted of 10-minute original monologues or plays (if acted by more than one person the actors are members of the same family); playwright-actors were asked to perform their pieces as one straight “live” cut, to mimic the theatrical experience of performing onstage, film the performances on smartphones and submit these to the Ajoka staff, who then uploaded these onto WeTransfer and sent them to us, allowing the jury members to watch them at our homes wherever we are “sheltering” in place. I'm happy to report that the short plays I've seen have been of mostly excellent quality, original and funny, occasionally sad, commenting on the imbrication of all the issues that we see surfacing and being discussed here in the USA as well.

Solidarity on issues of gender, class, race, and a will to expose the many hypocrisies of elite classes and state power connect these short plays to the discourses enveloping us here—and thus speak to the possibility of solidarity—building across borders that will continue through theatre praxis around the globe through whatever new forms may emerge.

Anna Deavere Smith, 19 May 2020

I am taking another stance with all of this which is not to know. If I do come up with any wisdom I will let you know, but for now I am speechless.

Amelia Jones, 21 May 2020

I don't think we can predict how performative modes of creative practice will have changed after the Covid-19 crisis is over, but I can say with certainty that it will take a while for folks to be comfortable attending live events in spaces that demand proximity. More interestingly, I would assert that finally our concept of the "live" will have shifted forever, since a number of enterprising initiatives have taken place "live" *via the internet* over the stay-at-home period. Thus, already we have seen a burgeoning of clever uses of Instagram Live, Zoom, and YouTube to present "live" performance events. For example, I've been following the legendary Guillermo Gómez-Peña's various interactive lectures where he speaks, listens, and answers questions.

As a second example: I witnessed *Full Pink Moon*, an impressive early stab at programming an international group of over 250 performers organized by Sean Griffin and his Opera Povera and taking place April 7 [2020]. Beginning with a panel including major performance artists such as Ron Athey and Cassils (interesting and strong), and segueing to a brief synchronized musical performance across time zones, the majority of the hours-long event was dominated by the over 250 artists each performing on their home screens (some with their coquarantiners). All of these recordings were broadcast simultaneously and live to form the vast Zoom grid (covering at least three screens) but broadcast over YouTube. Here the "live" took an interesting form—the performers thus performed live for Zoom (generally an interactive teaching tool) but, because Zoom does not have the capacity to invite hundreds or thousands of viewers, this footage was siphoned through YouTube, which does not allow interaction (at least not in this version). Those of us already by that time well used to Zoom had the frustrating experience of being forced to view only what the mastermind monitoring the Zoom broadcast was featuring; that is, someone else controlled what view of the multiple Zoom grids was visible, and which performers were, on occasion, transmitted full-screen—only Griffin's engineer could determine what showed up on our screens, and we couldn't look for our friends or favorite artists. Some of the performances as far as I could see seemed fairly carefully choreographed; others, such as Elliot Reed's delightfully meandering capers and noodling with the fake backgrounds and green screen that Zoom allows (spotlit for a prolonged 20 minutes), seemed spontaneous and experimental.

This is all to say that the "live" now means something quite different from what most performance studies scholars (attached to and privileging the proximity, the flesh, and the potential to touch) believed and argued it to be before Covid. (Obviously many media scholars and emerging students of digital media have long known otherwise...) I have revised my publicly known antipathy to claims about the "authenticity" of the live, not reversing it but nuancing my understanding of how live encounters differ from screen-mediated ones.¹ I stand

1. I articulated this position early on in these debates in "'Presence' *in absentia*: Experiencing Performance as Documentation" *Art Journal* (1997/98) and also the reprint of this article with a new introduction (2012).

by my argument that one version is not morally or politically or aesthetically superior to the other. But their differences seem more stark to me than ever, now that we are living in a state of continual virtual suspension.

I don't think we can say whether there will be permanent changes in making, writing about, and teaching art and performance (although I personally hope the over-hyped art market collapses along with the housing market so young people can afford to live and make art). But in terms of how teaching and scholarship is different *now*, I know I have by necessity shifted into watching a lot of performances and talks about performance or performative works online, and have also begun studying the way in which live art is being produced and disseminated online. I'm interested in exploring the range of innovative strategies artists are using to keep making work—such as *Full Pink Moon*, noted above—and this is finding its way into my work.²

I teach art and performance history and theory (performance studies and such) so the move to online teaching is not as profoundly disruptive as it is for my colleagues teaching hands-on visual arts and performance practice classes. However, I've been following debates and discussions about teaching dance, performance art, and theatre on the Facebook group called Performance Studies and Digital Pedagogy, set up by Tavia Nyong'o (who teaches performance studies at Yale).³ What is clear here is the need for new thinking due to the shift away from hands-on, bodies-on instruction since March and the move towards the delivery of theoretical and historical content via Zoom "webinars" and in-class discussions with performers. I have attended a number of these and they are fresh and fun (it's been very cool to be in the UK to participate in a webinar with Laura Mulvey while at home, for example). But after a few months the lack of actual bodies in spaces (performing and witnessing) starts to wear thin. Performers can only teach so much through the format of the talking head. It's fascinating to hear Ron Athey (for a class at CalArts) talk about queer countercultures in Los Angeles or Nao Bustamante producing an Instagram Live cocktail party performance, but it's not the same as sitting in a workshop as a researcher of this work having either one of these epic artists speak *and move* in relation to their audiences. Plus, I miss hanging out with them at our homes having food and drink, since we are all friends. That's one of my favorite ways of "doing research" on performance art!

I'm listening to Harry Gamboa Jr. doing an artist's talk for UC Davis on Zoom as I'm finishing these thoughts. I asked him in the Q&A what he thought artists will do in the future. This is a quickly typed paraphrase of his Zoom-expressed wisdom:

A virus is like a corporation. Corporations feed off of us like viruses do. "Culling the herd" is an anti-human idea [...] Disenfranchised populations are without income, without healthcare, without hope. Institutions are asking us to take pay cuts [...] The crisis is being used as a pivotal point to divide the country between those in favor of social distancing, and those who refuse. This creates a state of anxiety. The arts are the first thing to get cut—and anything that leads to critical thinking [...] But this is a time to learn, to create—we must continue to ask: how can you gain power even if you are isolated? We must increase the consciousness of people, connect and love and refuse these divisions.

I'll end with his words because I couldn't have said it better myself.

2. See also the article describing a huge range of online projects by Jerald Raymond Pierce (2020).

3. See www.facebook.com/groups/217277443017117.

Tavia Nyong'o is a TDR Contributing Editor. —Ed.

References

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- Pierce, Jerald Raymond. 2020. "Theatre by Any Other Name." *American Theatre*, 8 April. Accessed 21 May 2020. www.americantheatre.org/2020/04/08/theatre-by-any-other-name.

Branislav Jakovljević, 26 June 2020

Illness as Intel

1. All forms of performance that include a live audience will remain dormant until effective therapy for Covid-19 and vaccine against the virus that causes it (SARS-CoV-2) become widely available.
2. If extended to a longer period of time, this dormancy will bring permanent damage and, eventually, death of live performance as we know it.
3. One of the hardest hit areas of the US economy is the entertainment industry; in addition, the epidemic revealed the degree to which art and culture have been industrialized and concentrated in powerful institutions (foundations and museums). This will affect higher education, which had already silently adjusted to the industries it serves. As hard as they try, very few students in theatre and art departments can imagine their futures outside of entertainment and "culture" industries.
4. At this moment, live performance is powerless. It depends for its survival on medical science and on the pharmaceutical industry. What we, theatre and performance scholars, artists, and educators, can do is help them understand better what Covid-19 really is. The question of the future of live performance is directly tied to insights we can provide about this epidemic.
5. Since early March, online academic journals, magazines, and various online platforms turned to the literature of plagues in search for useful lessons. Not only Shakespeare, but Boccaccio, Daniel Defoe, Albert Camus, and Stephen King are filling web and printed pages. The whole literature of epidemics became newly relevant, with one notable exception. Antonin Artaud is rarely, if ever, mentioned in these inventories of literary responses to deadly epidemics. Why?
6. If Defoe offers a first-hand account of a 17th-century epidemic, and if Camus depicts a fictional mid-20th-century breakout to build an allegory about the sources of fascism, Artaud's vision of the plague seems unhinged to the point of incomprehension. This "scourge," he writes, is "the direct instrument or materialization of an intelligent force in close contact with what we call fatality" (1958:18). What is the plague's intelligence? Does it mean that the epidemic has a mind of its own? Or that the bacteria (or in the case of Covid-19, the virus) that causes the epidemic is akin to higher life forms? If not, what is the intelligence of the virus?
7. In the midst of this global pandemic, Artaud becomes more meaningful than ever before. The epidemic is not only a medical, or biological, but also a social phenomenon. It was quickly politicized precisely in order to conceal its deadly ideological dimension. That doesn't work, if we know where to look. The list of countries with the highest number of infections and fatalities can tell us more about this illness than all graphs that track and project its spread. Russia, India, Brazil, the United States, and China, which first experienced the onslaught of

the epidemic: they are all countries with strong totalitarian streaks. The crest of Covid-19 overlaps with the crest of 21st-century wave of illiberal democracies.

8. Covid-19 is an “intelligent force” insofar as it represents a material and tangible outcome of a certain ideological order. Ideology draws its force from its own self-concealment. It is a non-knowledge that makes certain social structures endure and thrive. Only in rare situations do we see it in full display, as we can these days. This spectacle of ideology will disappear from our view the very moment live performance returns. Will live performance come back transformed from its hibernation? If so, how?

9. There is more intelligence that Covid-19 has in store for those who want to listen to it. All we need to do is to look back at that list of the most infested countries: the United States, India, Russia, Brazil, and China, all in the hands of nationalist strongmen with totalitarian tendencies, are at the same time the leading contributors to the ongoing climate collapse. That is not a coincidence. By now, a number of scientists warned that Covid-19 might be just first in a series of similar world pandemics unleashed by capitalism’s onslaught against the planet.

10. This illness is not a metaphor, or even a metonym or a synecdoche. It is a direct expression of material operations of ideology, and as such it is inseparable from its representations. Was it because of its “blindness” that SARS-CoV-2 hit the hardest the communities of color in this country? It exposed racial oppression and injustice, just as it exposed the vast inequalities that are tearing this society apart.

11. In Artaud’s vision, at the peak of the epidemic, the exhausted population begins to “pillage riches they know will serve no purpose or profit. And at that moment theatre is born” (1958:24). This is not a rebirth, but a beginning from scratch. It is a new theatre for a different society. The racial uprising in the summer of 2020 is not only a response to police brutality and centuries of white supremacist oppression, but primarily an act of imagining a different kind of society. It is a knowledge that erupted into that vast zone of non-knowledge created by ideology.

12. The real causes of the climate collapse are wealth inequality and the narrowness of interest (national, class, and personal). Redressing climate damage will require bold acts of reimagining and restructuring of all human activities. In our discipline(s), that will mean the uncoupling of live performance from the entertainment industry and redirecting it towards the broadest possible range of social and communal life: from education, to social services, to medical institutions, to community organizations. By this, I don’t mean re-amateurization of performance or its massive redirection toward “applied” theatre. The uncoupling of live performance from the entertainment industry is its radical socialization, or it is nothing.

13. If that doesn’t happen, please see #2.

Reference

Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theater and Its Double*. Trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press.

Tadashi Uchino, 29 June 2020

My answers to Richard’s questions are all rather negative. That is: “not much”—at least not in my immediate surrounding context. The following are some of my observations as to why I

think that the Covid-19 pandemic does not affect much of what I and those I am concerned with do in terms of performance cultures.¹

One of the reasons is that the situation in terms of the death rate is low in Japan. As of today, Japan is 113rd in the world for the number of deaths per one million population.² There are other statistics as to the low impact of Covid-19 as well, and I am starting to think what Covid-19 brought to Japan is not so much pandemic as infodemic.³

The panic nevertheless has inevitably been with “us” through traditional mass media, starting with the sensationalized case of the cruise ship in February. It shortly turned into a typical mass media-induced “hysteria,” when cases started to be discovered all over Japan.

When the numbers were very quickly surpassed by that of Italy and New York, sensationalism escalated, and “they” kept warning us that Tokyo will be like NYC in two weeks. There was no lockdown by the government, however, simply because there is no such law to allow that to happen. The government declared the state of emergency on April 7th and “requested” the lockdown.

Most of the population, conservative or liberal, demanded more decisive measures, asking for zero risk without looking at numbers, as if being infected by the virus means instantaneous death and/or the threat to the entire nation. “They” started policing infected persons as “marked,” which fueled the fear as various kinds of conspiracy theories gained momentum.⁴

Artists working in Japan were subject to what they thought was a dominating voice; they completely stopped doing physical performances at the end of March, though there was no legally mandatory banning of such events. They moved very quickly to work together to ask the government to financially help them, in addition to the more universal aid package the government was preparing. As of today, some of them seem to be getting it, perhaps because we have populist national and local governments or there was what I call an officialization of performance cultures over the past 30 years.⁵

During the self-imposed lockdown period, not many interesting things happened in Japan. Okada Toshiki’s experiments stood out as his was something media-specific and critically provocative for thinking about the future forms of performance cultures in a wider context. There were other attempts at Zoom theatre by Ichihara Satoko of Q and Yamamoto Suguru of Hanchu-Yuei, but theirs were within my expectations.

1. In this note, I am not talking about financial issues. That is, the economic recess that is expected to come soon will damage the cultural sector, including performance cultures, but that does not mean something that specifically belongs to Japan’s performance cultures will change.

2. “Worldometer,” www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/japan/.

3. More objective views have become available later such as the following: Rochelle Koppi, “Is Japan’s low COVID-19 death rate due to a ‘higher cultural level’?” www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/06/12/commentary/japan-commentary/japans-low-covid-19-death-rate-due-higher-cultural-level.

4. The only influential thinker who objected to this totalizing effect of self-imposed lockdown was Azuma Hiroki, a philosopher activist, and he kept his Genron Café (humanities discussion forum) open during the entire period (many talk events were held though no audience members were allowed on the spot; but we could see all the events online).

5. See Uchino (2009). Different kinds of coalitions among various performing arts organizations were established very early, and apart from lobbying the government, some of them started crowdfunding for financial aid, and, interestingly enough, most of the coalition could get the targeted amount of funding. I say interesting because, though this is only a speculation, major part of Japan’s performing arts audience members seem middle-class or higher, so that they have enough money to donate in the time of the Covid-19 crisis.

Okada was in NYC for the performance of *Eraser Mountain* at NYU, basing the work on the idea of Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* (2007), on Feb. 28th and 29th. He extended this idea after the pandemic/infodemic into a series of new works using Zoom, called *Eraser Fields*. These are not live but recorded performances, in which we only look into a confined solitary space with participating actors through Zoom and, as no word is spoken, we are invited to "stare" and listen to the noise of their everyday lives.⁶

Okada extended his idea of Zoom theatre in his cancelled work *Ghost and Monster with Unfinished Business*, scheduled to open on June 3rd. The updated virtual version premiered live on YouTube on June 27th and 28th.⁷ This was a literal desktop theatre, in which the stories about Zaha Hadid and Monju are told. Zaha is an original architect for the Tokyo Olympics main stadium and Monju is a sodium-cooled fast reactor, which was decommissioned even before it started to operate.

The performance took place in a physical room with a desk, and paper sheets in various forms are put on the desk. The performers and accompanying musicians are projected on those sheets. In fact, everyone is staying in his/her own place; the performance, however, is not separately recorded, but was recorded at the same time using Zoom. It is a desktop, miniature theatre, but there emerged a sense of "theatre as a space" in this YouTube broadcasting format.

Most theatre practice in Japan is domestic and those involved are not really worrying about their future, if only they can financially survive for the duration of the pandemic. The problem is with those who are very much involved with intercultural and international projects, like Okada. It is difficult to re-start where they had stopped, because of the more severe situations in Europe and elsewhere. But, like Wiener Festwochen 2020, in which there were some interesting attempts at internet "theatre" like what Tim Etchells and Aisha Orazbayeva did,⁸ those artists I am interested in will surely come up with some creative and provocative solution to the difficult situation.

Reference

Uchino Tadashi. 2009. "Introduction." In *Crucible Bodies: Postwar Japanese Performance from Brecht to the New Millennium*. London: Seagull Books.

Tracy C. Davis, 30 June 2020

It is a simple performance.

Lift the cloth to your face and secure it. Breathe.

But breathing is complicated.

Respect science. Protect others. Live.

During the late summer and autumn of 1910, about 11,000 coolies traveled from Hebei and Shandong provinces to the Manchuria-Siberia border to hunt marmots for the European and American market. Whereas Mongols used traps and dogs to catch a food source, the migrants,

6. Currently, three versions are accessible on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF96_kZeU1c&t=1224s, www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjJdIHUMjeQ, and www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9H4TJYuFZw&t=482s.

7. It was a partial performance of the finished text, which lasted about 80 minutes. The live performance on YouTube was entitled *The Ghost of The Performance of "The Ghost and The Monster with Unfinished Business."*

8. "Festwochen 2020 reframed Tim Etchells und Aisha Orazbayeva: Live Improvisation Online," www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhrB9Kzjbc8&feature=emb_logo.

unaware of local practice, dug into animals' burrows. This is probably what exposed men to the endemic pneumonic plague bacillus (Lynteris 2013:308–10). They crowded into population centers across Manchuria and Mongolia to sell pelts, and in late October, when cases of plague were diagnosed by Russian authorities, restrictive measures kicked in. By 25 December, 400 marmot trappers, who slept packed together for warmth, had died. By mid-January, as more men traveled homeward for Lunar New Year celebrations, the plague was rapidly conveyed 1,500 miles by rail to the inland centers of Quiquihar and Shandong and the coastal cities of Dairen (Japanese controlled), Tianjin (Chinese, with garrisons of British, Italian, French, Japanese, German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarians), and Yantai (Chinese, with considerable British, American, German, and Thai trade). The contagion was poised to spread further. Russia and China closed their ports to all coming from known plague centers except for first-class passengers. Permission to travel on Chinese trains was severely restricted, passengers submitted to medical inspection, and some were subject to five-day quarantines on railway sidings.

The case fatality rate was 100%. Most deaths were among men aged 20–40 years (the migrant hunters and other coolies with whom they came in contact) but where the disease permeated households every member perished. When an inhabitant fell ill, people feared having their homes destroyed: the sick were sent into the streets and instructed to get as far away as possible before succumbing. Contrary to local custom, corpses were burned: the frozen ground was dynamited and scores of caskets were incinerated with kerosene. In Changchun, “concealment of death was rife” until local officials were replaced by regional commissars in cooperation with foreign-trained doctors. After a time, infection rates decreased “but there was much obstruction



16. Staff of Section I; Staff Doctor Lei on left. This station was once a theatre.

官醫正藥爲者立左裝西 役員處行執疫防區一第 六十

Figure 1. Plague staff (Harbin, China) 1911, outside the theatre converted into a hospital. Note that workers of various kinds are equipped with gauze masks. (From Views of Harbin [plate 16]; courtesy of Northwestern University Library)

from merchants ‘in the interests of trade’” (*Lancet* 1911a:1158). By springtime, the epidemic had been suppressed. Thanks to the imposition of classic measures—*cordons sanitaire*; isolation hospitals; home quarantine; disinfection of residences, businesses, and streets with sulfur and lime; special housing for the displaced; regular temperature-taking; proliferation of inoculation centers; and closure of schools, churches, and theatres—the outbreak claimed no more than 60,000 lives across the entire region (Summers 2012:78).

In his address to the International Plague Conference at Mukden (Shenyang) in April 1911, Dr. Wu Lien-teh¹ (Assistant Director of the Imperial Army Medical College in Tientsin) reported to colleagues from 11 nations about the outbreak. He was a Chinese Malay, educated at Cambridge, the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool, and the Pasteur Institute in Paris. He was accustomed to international scientific inquiry and teamwork. Manchuria was jointly controlled by Russia, China, and Japan, with myriad other foreign medical staff from missions and concessions abating the outbreak, so transparency was vital to cooperation.

Wu established that the pathogen was airborne: infective inter-human transmission occurred through droplets of sputum. When a French doctor who disputed Wu’s findings died, the tide turned (Lynteris 2018:444–45). Wu mandated masks for staff working with patients, their contacts, and corpses, and (to the greatest extent possible) also among the general population. Documentation suggests widespread compliance (Commercial Press 1911).

The London sport and athletics retailer A.W. Gamage—which had catered to motorists seeking relief from dust and smoke by marketing masks and hoods of silk, mica, and net (*Motor Car Journal* 1902:685)—offered the plague-stricken districts of China “masks made of oil silk and completely covering the face” with “a pad of absorbent wool placed between very fine gauze [...] inserted in the mask below the nostrils, and glazed metal cups [to] protect the eyes” in a design that could be repeatedly disinfected by dipping in germicide or antiseptic (*Lancet* 1911b:915). However, Dr. Wu derived something much simpler, asserting that “for effective personal prophylaxis, a gauze-cotton mask was essential” (Wu 1926:vi). Whether in the field or hospitals, the practical action was to put a 6 x 4-inch absorbent cotton pad in the midst of two folded layers of wide surgical gauze, cut the ends into strips, and tie behind the head. These masks cost only two and a half cents and were effective when properly worn (Wu 1926:394, 397; *Lancet* 1911c:1616).

Christos Lynteris, an anthropologist of this plague, concludes that the adoption of masks “transformed the public from a superstitious and ignorant mass into an enlightened hygienic-minded population [...] that accepted the contagious nature of the disease and corresponding, often brutal, quarantine and isolation measures,” constituting “an index but also a catalyst of hygienic modernity” (2018:451, 452). This is how mask-wearing came to be recommended worldwide during the 1918–19 flu pandemic. Lynteris argues that such masks remain an “apparatus of categorical transformation” for humanity “inhabiting the anteroom of its own extinction” (452). As a technology, the cloth mask is the ghost-light shining in wait between pandemics.

On 31 March 2020, the *New York Times* published a full-page pattern and instructions for fashioning homemade face masks: gather two 9.5 x 6.5-inch rectangles of cotton fabric, four 18-inch strips for ties, and thread (Ma and Shutler 2020). I emailed friends and family “We Can Do This!” Within days, I was at the post office, sending masks to loved ones; other colleagues, friends, and relatives sewed hundreds of masks for custodial workers, nurses, hospital volunteers, and shelters.

1. Also known as Wu Liande, 伍连德, and Gnoh Lean Tuck.

At first, there was not enough PPE. Then we made our own. Now there are people who adamantly will not wear it. Unlike combatants of the Great Manchurian Plague of 1910–11, we have no sera to prevent infection, no binding international coalition of physicians to mastermind containment, and no consistently applied abatement measures. But we do have many things in common with China in 1910–11: a great deal is determined “in the interests of trade,” too often the afflicted are pushed into the streets, science exists in tension with imperial interests (Summers 2012:130–48), and horrendous disparities in wealth and lifestyle are laid bare. Again, science-based and medicine-driven policy makers give advice for simple steps that can curtail transmission. We can only hope that, just as the Qing dynasty fell in the autumn of 1911, certain nations will experience regime change in 2020.

Anti-maskers’ refusal to cover up in public is a warped understanding of liberalism. It is a failure of leadership in league with reckless disregard for the common good. While it may be a refusal to treat all loci of social existence as a plague zone, failing to mask is a callous performance of bravado that creates what it denies. There are many things needed for breath security: sufficient habitable housing, dignified employment, safe transport, equitable access to health care, and a population willing to take up responsibility for performing the mutual safeguarding that they have been delegated. We can do this.

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Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 30 June 2020

My practice is curatorial and my “performance space” is the museum and the “museum without walls.” Even before the pandemic, the museum without walls—going out to the community physically and online—has been important. Under pandemic conditions, operating online was pretty much the only option. I speak from my experience with POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in Warsaw, and observation of what is happening in the museum field more generally.

A defining feature of the museum experience is being there “live,” being there “in person.” For some museums, this is understood as being in the presence of original works of art. For others, to be there in person is to be immersed in a 360-degree narrative space, the plot unfolding as the visitor walks—this is the case at POLIN Museum, whose multimedia narrative exhibition is a “theatre of history.” For all museums, whether or not they recognize its importance or consider it a priority, the experience of being in the museum is social—one is

present to others. Most people come to museums with others, whether friends, family, or in groups, and even if they come alone, they are there in the presence of other visitors.

POLIN Museum, like so many other museums, developed a strong online presence from the outset and was well positioned to ramp up its online content and communication when it was forced to close the building on 12 March [2020]; it partially reopened on June 26. Over the years, online platforms and tools have evolved and proliferated; Zoom was launched in 2013 and has become ubiquitous during the shutdown, competing with other videotelephony platforms that support live events and engagement.

The first response was to intensify what museums were already doing online—simply, do more of it. The second was to migrate online what they had been doing live. Third, there was the repurposing of recordings of live events that had taken place at the museum in the past (lectures, symposia, concerts, workshops, “virtual” tours). I don’t think of anything digital or online as “virtual,” but as actually exactly what they are. As for their relationship to the in-person experiences they purportedly “replace,” that is for another occasion. And, finally, at least for now, the reimagining of what the online space is and creation of new ways of inhabiting it.

Performance studies scholars have long theorized “liveness” and the relationship of live performance in the presence of a live audience, while artists have created work that moves across the live divide, hybrid or conceived entirely to be experienced through electronic media, for a live audience or on a device, a work in itself or a work that is both that and documentary. Among the most fascinating responses to the quarantine and forced social distancing is how artists and others responded—“performing” from home and reaching unprecedented tens of thousands of people through social media (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) with nothing more than a cellphone camera.

Now, for a few examples. The Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), Getty (Los Angeles), Hermitage (St. Petersburg), Louvre (Paris), Met (New York), and others picked up the “Stay At Home Challenge!” issued by Tussen Kunst & Quarantaine (Between Art and Quarantine), an Instagram account.¹

- Choose your favorite painting.
- Find three things lying around your house.
- Recreate the painting with those attributes.

Readers were encouraged to choose from a given museum’s collection. The result is a revival of the tableau vivant, a performance genre made for the stay-at-home Instagram age.

Missing in-person encounters with masterpieces? To reach youngsters who are unlikely to make their way to the Uffizi (Florence) on their own and impossible during the lockdown, the Uffizi has taken the radical step of playing havoc with their masterpieces in irreverent TikTok videos. Their goal is to overcome what they see as their stuffy image in a bid to attract and engage young visitors. This strategy requires nimble literacy across a fast-moving media landscape and across deep generational divides. Other museums are following Uffizi’s lead.² The hope is that having encountered these masterpieces in this form, the born-digital generation will be motivated to see the real thing.

During the lockdown, Igor Levit dealt with isolation by streaming evening piano concerts from his home. He then upped his game. He decided to address the toll the pandemic was taking on artists with a 20-hour marathon performance of Erik Satie’s *Vexations*, “one of the

1. Some of the better examples can be found here: <https://mymodernmet.com/recreate-art-history-challenge/>.

2. See www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/arts/design/uffizi-museums-tiktok.html.

longest works in the history of music, consisting of just a few notes played 840 times” streamed live on various platforms from a Berlin Studio.³

Juilliard found ways for their students to collaborate creatively while isolated from one another. Inspired by Larry Keigwin’s *Bolero*, a work that he had created anew with local community members in each place it was performed, the school invited him to create *Bolero Juilliard* under lockdown, an exercise he described as “art-making and shared experience amid physical isolation and uncertainty.”⁴ The result is a tour de force unique to the circumstances of its making. Paris Opera dancers created their work, from home, as a way to thank Covid-19 health workers.⁵

Comedian Sarah Cooper’s lip-sync impersonations of Donald Trump are pitch perfect, performed from her home to ours during the lockdown. These short homemade videos, tailor-made for TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms, bring us her skewered version of The Donald, whose shambolic performances are ubiquitous in damning clips on our social media.⁶ It is hard to imagine these performances as effective live, in a club or other venue, as under these conditions.

Turning to performance in everyday life, there is a plethora of adaptations to the impossibility of gathering for everything from Passover seders to funerals.

As for permanent changes, who knows? Certainly, we have learned a lot during this period as we have had to adapt to physical isolation and the many improvisations and adaptations to home confinement in a hypersocial digital age. Speaking personally, I have appreciated how much can be done at a distance, time saved, and the pleasures and not only the challenges of working from home, but I have the advantage of internet access to vast online resources and my own personal library, as well as opportunities to be in touch with family and loved ones online.

I can only begin to imagine the transformation of the university and impact on those they have employed at every level—dramatic loss of income, layoffs, and the challenges of operating in risky physical environments, whether classrooms, dormitories, libraries, cafeterias, and the like. First and foremost, the very nature of the university, university education, and the “university experience” are where to look for change both temporary and permanent. Clearly, distance learning will expand and is here to stay, and it will take even more different forms.

I anticipate devastating effects, first and foremost economic, as faculty and staff are laid off, students lose financial aid or refuse to accept distance learning as a substitute for the in-person education and experience they expected and paid for. Even when the pandemic has passed, the university (and the museum) will never be the same again.

Speaking of museums, an estimated 13% will close for good and another 30% will not survive the pandemic without significant help.⁷ Museums are facing massive staff layoffs, catastrophic loss of earned income, wary visitors, and experiences shaped by safety protocols that are likely to be maintained to some degree even after the worst of the pandemic has passed. How will they recover from these shocks?

3. See www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-german-pianists-20-hour-concert-to-raise-awareness-of-artists-plight/a-53627078.

4. See www.juilliard.edu/news/146351/creating-bolero-juilliard.

5. See www.classicfm.com/discover-music/periods-genres/ballet/dancers-film-enchanted-romeo-juliet-sequence/.

6. See www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/arts/television/trump-sarah-cooper.html.

7. See hyperallergic.com/565254/covid-19-unesco-icom-study/.

At the same time, museums will have learned much from the pandemic experience and not only from ramping up their online activity. Many museums have strengthened their commitment to their core values, chief among them, speaking for POLIN Museum, strengthening the resilience of civil society and democratic values, not only during this crisis but also by intervening in the crisis and in opposition to the exploitation of the crisis for political gain.

Joseph Roach, 30 June 2020

The future is crystal clear; it's the past that's hard to predict. We can be certain that after Covid-19, global warming will continue to spread disease despite whatever reductions in fossil-fuel emissions occur, if any, as more and more carbonaceous fumes waft up from the rotting corpse of nature. As will be the case with one novel virus or another, the geophysical success of methane is guaranteed: the permafrost will melt, the rainforests will burn, and millions of cows, before they become Big Macs, will fart. We can hold our noses for a little while longer, maybe, but we can't say we don't know what we're in for.

The Great Plague of London in 1665, by contrast, is still full of surprises. Historians once stated as fact that the Great Fire of London ended the plague by burning up all the rats that carried the fleas whose bites transmitted the disease to humans. Now we think we know for sure that the vermin made out just fine after all, running ahead of the flames and escaping to the suburbs, while the plague kept on reappearing sporadically until 1679. The official mortality figure came in at 68,596. Yet previously unknown mass graves containing uncounted dead keep turning up, nudging the total over 100,000, about one-fifth to one-third of London's population at the time. The sorting out continues every time an excavation becomes an exhumation. The plain truth is that the closet of history is so full of skeletons it won't close.

Three sources in particular document the Great Plague of London in ways that keep us on the edge of our seats, wondering what's going to happen next. Samuel Pepys's *Diary* (1660–69) records the day-by-day, eye-witness experiences of an Admiralty clerk who stayed in London during both Plague and Fire. Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) provides a retrospective fictional account that the author salts with more than enough vivid facts to provoke debates about the work's genre. Naomi Wallace's Obie Award-winning play, *One Flea Spare* (1995), compellingly dramatizes the way different social classes experience the Plague. An upper-class couple, the Snelgraves, become trapped in their home under quarantine with two working-class waifs—Bunce, a sailor, and Morse, a 12-year-old girl. All parties in the foursome appear to understand that they must perforce get to know one another better, making social connections at a time of imposed social distancing.

Pepys, Defoe, and Wallace foreground the effects of imposed quarantines after the authorities ordered infected households shut up and placed under armed guard. As the number of doors marked with a red cross and the phrase, "Lord have mercy on us," multiply, Pepys and Defoe remark on the cruelty of this desperate expedient, which condemns victims to die alone and without care, either from the disease itself or from thirst and starvation. Both diarists record the shortages of essentials and the eerie emptiness of the city streets where the few pedestrians who do venture abroad avoid each other "like the plague." First responders and service providers, such as Pepys's coachman, doctor, and baker, die first, while the aristocracy flees to the countryside. What surprises the reader of Pepys is how little his daily witnessing of the unfolding catastrophe ultimately affects him. He does regret having to set aside his favorite periwig for fear that the hair comes from plague victims. But at the office, it's business as usual, making naval war on the Dutch, while his sexual exploitation of compliant subordinates' wives proceeds as punctually as before. In the last entry for the year, 31 December 1665, the diarist looks back on the whole experience with satisfaction: "I have never

lived so merrily (besides that I never got so much) as I have done this plague-time.” He mentions it in the *Diary* only twice more, and that in passing, while his enthusiastically recorded theatre-going resumes apace as soon as the playhouses open again, which is soon.

Defoe, who was five years old in 1665, didn’t get around to publishing his pseudonymous *Journal* for 57 years. What shocks us in both Pepys and Defoe, therefore, is the speed of the enveloping silence, which betokens the efficiency of the forgetting. Wallace allows a momentary glimmer of possible change in the post-plague relationships of the characters in *One Flea Spare*. They have been through so much together. They resemble the lovers in John Donne’s “The Flea,” in which the oneness of the virgin and her would-be seducer is amorously insinuated by their comingled blood after each has been bitten by the same insect. When she goes to kill it, he remonstrates:

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.

But of course they are not married. In the play, Mr. William Snelgrave, the arrogant host under quarantine, lets the destitute Bunce try on a pair of his finely made gentleman’s shoes. His wearing them, they speculate wistfully, might throw history off course, at least temporarily. However unlikely that may seem, whenever we look back on the past from the deadly certainties of the present, the less we take for granted the better.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 1 July 2020

selected from his blog

[...]

Are artists, poets and musicians considered “essential workers”?
If you are a performance artist or activist,
How do you “embody” your online?
How do you cross the digital border with your wounded body?
Will we soon become “the society of walking zombies” of Giroux
Will my art troupe survive the lockdown?
Will we have to declare bankruptcy down the road,
like my family and my brown & black neighbours?
Is sex work considered essential?
Is love an essential reason for loitering or travelling?
If you live by yourself, who do you cuddle with?
Your dog or a paranormal entity?
Is dating nowadays illegal?
Is cyber sex still allowed? Zoomasturbation?
How do you spiritually survive extreme isolation?
Is it possible to domesticate fear overnight?
 (...)
 Can migrants and refugees living in detention centers and cages
practice social distancing?
Can prisoners (mostly black and Latino) in US penitentiaries
practice social distancing?
Where do those who have no home go back to?
Do people who survive from the informal economy of the streets
more than half of humankind
have the option to practice social distancing or staying at home?
Is my isolation a privilege? Yours?
If you are poor and live in a tiny one-bedroom home,

with 6 or more people,
 like my neighbors down the street,
 how do you avoid direct human contact?
 As unemployment increases on a daily basis,
 And the dollar decreases in value overnite
 can middle- and upper-class America learn to live in poverty?
 Is the full-blown Race War coming?
 How to continue crossing borders,
 when both your common sense and your government forbid the act?
 (...)

[...]

How to avoid depression and hopelessness.

[...]

Take daily selfies with your perplexed mother or cookoo neighbour.
 One, two, three projects a day.
 Reorganize obsessively your files and playlists.
 Talk to a doctor or shaman friend online.
 Language your dreams and desires..and pain...to no one.
 It's called "psychomagic."
 Speak in the language you hate the most;
 i.e., the language of your oppressor or your ex-lover;
 i.e., English, the lingua franca of neo-colonialism
 Learn a foreign language with an app, one word a day
 J'habite avec mes parents
 Draw 3 cards from your tarot.
 Zoom, skype, facetime, whatsapp, if you can.
 Practice experimental cooking with "whatever's in the fuckin' fridge."
 Email those who hate you; ask for forgiveness.
 Live every day as if it was your last one on earth.
 Cuddle tenderly your loved ones at night
 (If you are alone, there are many gorgeous professional cuddlers out there)
 Hug your pet; even if he/she/it is an imaginary "cryptozoid."
 Order your Roku stick. It will come in a month or 2.
 Blog...make more art; at least one project a day, at 3:00 am.
 Be careful to not get arrested when engaging in live activism
 in the public sphere.
 Remember: Insanity is a powerful minority
 And 'euphemism' is lingua franca for the "alt right."
 Shape-shift. clic..

[...]

The search for spiritual salvation without the help of formalized religion
 The importance of artmaking & writing without deadlines or grants
 The Death of the White Avant Garde
 Online sexual pleasures, online esoterica,
 virtual rituals to reconnect with humanity
 The daily existential torture created by forced isolation
 The shifting borders between isolation and alienation
 The myriad micro-universes in our "personal space"
 The birds, the bugs, the sound and light anomalies, the shadow people
 The joy and horror of paranormal and cult television
 90 Day Fianceé, Tiger King & the Dead Files...
 The meaning of "love me today/kill me tomorrow"

*The importance of not taking ourselves too seriously
The metaphysical power of taking a shit
What else have I discovered?
How to become a lap top intellectual and a stationary artist
How hard it is to embody critical thinking & live art in Cyberia
and most importantly,
How easy it is to forget the real threat:
President DT
& his international chorus of sicario clones...or clowns*

[...]

5.-Performance project #69: "The Selfie project in lockdown."

Wear a sexy S&M black mask or apply red mud to your face...and lipstick; make a peace (or truce) flag with the handwritten text "Free-falling... free-falling..." Now go to Walmart 2 test the racial tolerance of your neighbors and buy your groceries. Be carefull. Tweet.

[...]

9.-TODAY'S POEM: On Waiting...

What are you, we, they, waiting for?
Waiting...waiting...waiting for what?
Waiting for the wifi signal yo improve
Waiting for the postman to bring me the bad news
Waiting for the eviction letter
Waiting obsessively for the new "symptoms" to finally emerge
Waiting for the next CNN or BBC town meeting on the "coronavirus craze"
Waiting for today's news to contradict yesterday's news
Waiting for more trolls, hackers & zoom bombers
Waiting to walk/dance with my shadow across the city
Waiting for a lost bullet, a white supremacist drive by
Waiting for the afternoon nap that will never come
Waiting for the midnight church bells
Waiting for more borders to close overnight
Waiting for collective fear to turn into more violence
Waiting to return to "normality," even when "the normal"
was the problem in the first place
Waiting for PT to inject more Lysol into his brain
and for Lopez-Obrador to shoot up more mescal and posh
Waiting for your test to come out negative
Waiting for a vaccine made in china
Waiting to cross the "before & after" border
Waiting impatiently for my next tour

PS: Waiting to hear from you, to tell you how much I love you and miss you, and for you to tell me you love me, and to assure me we will see each other again, somewhere in reality number one, somewhere in Venice or Athens, or Veracruz or Mérida, or a distant tropical beach in Rio or Greenland...

WE keep waiting and blogging and waiting...

[For the full text & graphics, go to:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O7zoia07CbZNO4lF_sN2-2eHqObiF2lQ7lHkVZL1gEM/edit]

Erin B. Mee, 1 July 2020

Covid-19 is creating an exciting new performance environment in which none of the old “rules” apply, and artists around the globe are creating and embracing new modes of performance on platforms that come with their own specifications—creating new dramaturgical structures, and what often feel like new modes of engagement and interaction.

Counterintuitively, while Covid has hampered togetherness and travel IRL, some of these performances have brought artists and audiences from numerous nations together URL, and have created new possibilities for collaboration.

Digital Performance before the Pandemic

Even before the pandemic, artists were using digital platforms to create and disseminate art: Second Life hosts the Avatar Repertory Theater, whose mission is to challenge barriers and explore “art, theatre and stagecraft in immersive, user-created virtual worlds. Actors, directors, designers, playwrights and producers are connected around the globe, creating live stage performances in real time to be enjoyed by an international audience. Performances are enjoyed online, in the privacy of your own home” (ART 2016). ART has presented *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *The Learned Ladies*, among other classics (see www.avatarrepertorytheater.org/home/videos/two-men-in-verona/). Audiences must create an account and an avatar in Second Life to attend these productions, which do not re-imagine theatre so much as present theatre conventionally, but in a virtual space. By comparison, graduate students in NYU Tisch’s ITP department are creating a *new* virtual world for social interaction and performance of all kinds (from formal theatre to performances of self in online life). Called YORB, it continues to grow as people use it.

In 2010 Jeremy Gable wrote a four-character play for Twitter called *The 15th Line*, which is structured as a series of over 300 interrelated tweets between four characters over a period of eight weeks. Readers follow the four characters, reading the characters’ tweets as and when they come up in their feed. Thus, the dialogue of and between fictional characters is interspersed with unrelated tweets sent by real people, creating a fascinating mix of the “real” and the “fictional.” Like a good haiku, Gable packs a lot into 140 characters. What is not said is evoked, asking the reader to co-create the experience by filling in the gaps. The reader is also the actor: turning prosody into tone of voice (actual or imagined) and adding affect to each line of this new manifestation of closet drama. In spite of the brevity of each line, the play itself is durational. It lasts for eight weeks and requires constant engagement and re-engagement with the four characters every day. You cannot go see it, have dinner, forget about it, and then get on with your life. *The 15th Line* requires a kind of dedication that many plays do not ask for, while simultaneously asking for less of a commitment from us by taking advantage of the fact that many of us are on Twitter every day (for more information see Mee 2015; Gable 2015; and Mandell 2015).

In 2018 BuzzFeed hosted an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that asked: How would this story unfold if these characters had—and interacted via—Instagram? *Romeo and Juliet* became a queer, multiracial, interactive love story played out through the photos, stories, videos, and DMs of hopeless.romeo, mercutie_yo, Juliet_bythebook, queen_tybalt, senatorcapulet, and paris_not_perez. Adapting the play to Instagram was more than just a gimmick: the creators had something new to say about the characters, their relationships, the play, and our times, as well as the role of social media in creating and destroying alliances.

Smartphone plays (formerly known—when we had ipods—as podplays) are an emerging genre of theatre that take advantage of mobile technology to create site-specific audio-based theatrical experiences. In most cases, the audience downloads an audio file onto a smartphone or other mobile listening device, proceeds to a particular location, and presses play. One of the defining characteristics of a smartphone play—in contradistinction to a radio play, podcast, audio tour, or sound installation—is that the best ones take place in, make use of, and interact with the sites they inhabit. The listener co-creates the experience by “mixing” the intimacy of the dialogue spoken right into their ear with the vastness of the site they inhabit. This genre is receiving more attention as the pieces are perfect for social distancing since they can be done alone, like Janet Cardiff’s *Her Long Black Hair*, which takes the listener through a private walk in New York’s Central Park (<https://soundcloud.com/incredibleworksofart/sets/janet-cardiff>).

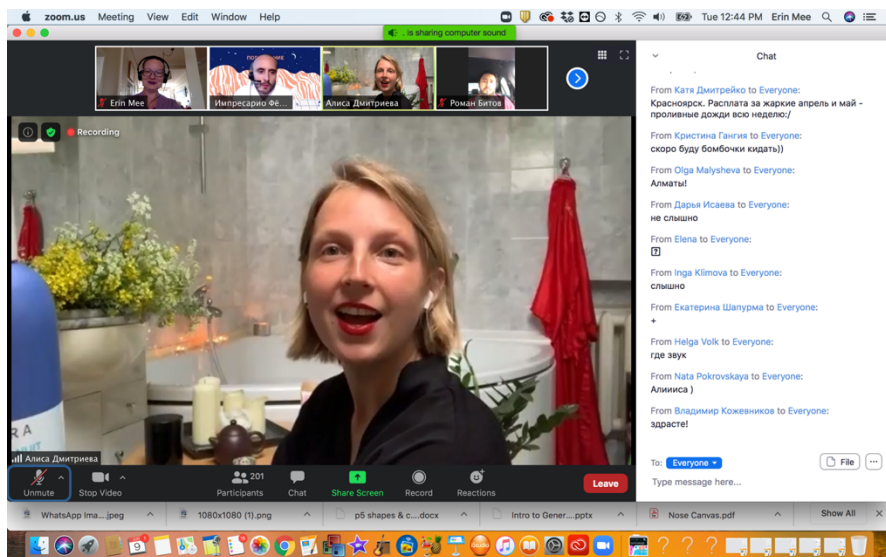
I am the artistic director of This Is Not A Theatre Company and directed TINATC’s *Ferry Play* (www.thisisnotatheatrecompany.com/ferry-play), for which the Staten Island Ferry and the Upper New York Bay becomes the set. Recorded voices from the ferry’s past and/or present mix with live voices from other people on the ferry (who become characters in the play), leaving audiences to consider their role in the live performance event that is the Big Apple. The dialogue encourages them to pay attention to every surrounding sight, smell, and sound, and those elements then play a substantial role in the experience. *Ferry Play* is a self-scheduled performance: audiences can ride the ferry late at night, early morning, or any time in between—they choose the day and time, which then affects the experience they have (the play is vastly different at sunrise than in the middle of the day, and different during a morning or evening commute than on a Sunday morning because of who is on the ferry, the light, and the temperature). *Ferry Play* has two acts: the first act takes place on the ride from Manhattan to Staten Island; the second act takes place on the ride from Staten Island to Manhattan. Act Two can be experienced right after Act One, or hours, days, or months later. This self-scheduled mode of theatre has become more common during Covid, with its different energies.

This Is Not A Theatre Company’s *Subway Plays* is a trilogy of smartphone plays for the New York City Subway’s N, L, and 7 lines (www.thisisnotatheatrecompany.com/subway-plays?rq=subway%20play). As the *New York Times* said: “Each play tells stories connected to the subway line where they take place. But they also invite the listener to engage with the world beyond the ride using their imagination and senses. [...] Part history lessons, part urban travelogues, the plays [...] are populated with New York archetypes, including lost tourists, annoyed locals and idiosyncratic passengers” (Solís 2020). Smartphones blend the communal experience of being in a crowded theatre with the excitement of having a unique experience. This is another thing pandemic plays such as the Pandora Network’s *Burying the Hatchet*, a multiday, interactive, group murder mystery on Facebook, or Sinking Ship’s *The Other Side of the Line* and Yannick Trapman-O’Brien’s *The Telelibrary* (theatre by phone) attempt to create.

Digital Performance during the Pandemic

Communicating with *everyone* over Zoom has shifted perspectives such that artists from around the world are gathering in virtual spaces and playing to international audiences rather than working with and playing to people who can get to a particular piece of real estate. From my location in Buenos Aires I was able to attend productions at the National Theatre in London, the Schaubühne in Berlin, La Comédie-Française in Paris, and the Stanislavsky Electrotheatre in Moscow, as well as lectures on theatre in Kochi and Beijing. While most of these were films of formerly live performances, several playwrights began immediately to write site-specific plays for Zoom, such as *What Do We Need to Talk About?* by Richard Nelson, which premiered at New York’s Public Theater in April 2020, and Jenny Lyn Bader’s *The Guru of Touch*, which will premiere in August 2020 at the Edinburgh Online Fringe Festival (I am the director).

Because they were already tired of their computer screens by the end of March 2020 (and suffering from headaches), This Is Not A Theatre Company created a 25-minute site-specific, participatory, multisensory *Play In Your Bathtub: An Immersive Audio Spa for Physical Distancing*. About 15 minutes before the piece begins, TINATC asks theatre-stayers to fill a bathtub (or footbath or bucket) with water. While it is filling, audiences gather their props and place them in or near the tub. Props include: “A relaxing beverage of your choice (wine, herbal tea, whatever you want); A candle (scented or otherwise—and we suggest turning the lights off in your bathroom); bath oil (scented if you have it, or any kind of oil you have around the house, such as olive, coconut, etc. You can also use bubble bath); a washcloth soaked in warm water; optional, but recommended if your candle is not scented: aromatherapy. You can make homemade scents by boiling rosemary, sage, lemon, or thyme—or whatever smells good to you—in water, letting it cool, and adding it to the tub.” They relax in the tub, sip their beverage, smell their scents, feel the warm water on their skin, listen to ASMR renditions of poetry, let their fingers dance across the surface of the water, explore the edge of their world with their tootsies, and participate in antiphonal singing. As of the time of writing, the English-language version has been coperformed by theatre-stayers in 29 countries, and will be featured at the Edinburgh Online Fringe Festival. It has been translated into Russian and presented by WowWowWow theatre in Moscow (<https://wowwowwow.ru/bath/>), and has been translated into Argentine, Colombian, and Chilean Spanish. Even as it is tied to a very specific location (the bathroom), it has been unmoored from any specific piece of real estate that necessitates physical travel, allowing it to roam the world freely. TINATC debated having the play available all the time, but chose specific performance times, which several audience members enjoyed because, though they were alone in their bathrooms, they knew that other people were experiencing the same play elsewhere, and it created a sense of community.



Sonya Grigoriadi in WOWWOWWOW's Russian translation of This Is Not A Theatre Company's Play In Your Bathtub: An Immersive Audio Spa for Physical Distancing, 9 June 2020. (Screenshot by Erin B. Mee)

The pandemic has also allowed for international artists to come together without visas or the expenses of international travel and hotels. Beginning on 3 April 2020, This Is Not A Theatre Company staged an online, durational, participatory adaptation of Charles Mee's

Heaven on Earth. Titled *Life on Earth*, it invited participants from around the world—Argentina, India, Nepal, Turkey, China, the United States, and the West Bank—to send in dances, poems, songs, and snippets of what life on earth felt like to them, which were organized according to the stage directions and dialogue in the original script. These artists showed us, through their own artistic practices, through their own cultural references, and in their own languages, what life during Covid felt like. They were joined by audience members who shared their own poems, recipes, and instructions for building IKEA sheet tents in the living room. This was *truly* experimental theatre: TINATC had no idea what would happen, how people would respond, what people would add to the experience, and, truth be told, they had only a rudimentary idea of how to use the platform Discord. Creating this piece required rethinking what theatre is, where it can take place, who writes it, what it means to direct, and what “live” and “participatory” means. It also meant rethinking the role of the Stage Manager, who coordinated participants from numerous time zones and with a wide variety of wifi capability “backstage” via Zoom, WhatsApp, and text. The experience lives on in Discord, and will remain there forever—or until Discord goes out of business:

<https://discordapp.com/invite/mzw6C3z>.



The dinner delivered to my apartment for Teatro Ciego's ongoing "Take Away" theatre production of Teatro En Su Casa, 9 May 2020. (Photos by Erin B. Mee)



While many arts organizations were going digital and international, Teatro Ciego in Buenos Aires went very local with what they referred to as Teatro En Su Casa, or what I call Take-Away theatre. I ordered two tickets to the show, which came with (in my case) a vegetarian meal and an excellent Malbec. The food was delivered to my door, and I opened it to find a 3-course meal, dessert, wine, and water, along with a placemat, napkin, and eye mask. I was instructed to arrange the meal as outlined on the placemat, turn off the lights in my apartment, place my eye mask on my eyes, press play on the audio, and listen to the audio play while eating the dishes that corresponded to each scene. Teatro Ciego describes this as a “gourmet experience” and a “game.” To me it was a new kind of take-out dinner theatre.

When there is a vaccine, some theatres will go back to business as usual. In the meantime, I would argue that new modes of theatre have been invented—some of them interesting enough to remain with us post-quarantine.

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Carol Martin, 10 July 2020

Requiem

When I was teaching in Paris in 2010, I spent a lot of time at the Louvre, in front of [*The Raft of the Medusa*](#) (1818–19) by Théodore Géricault, a classic of French romanticism and French history painting. The epic scale of the painting, 5 × 7 meters (roughly 16 × 23 feet), matches the gravity of the story it tells. The composition of interlocking triangles, naked bodies, turbulent sea, dark clouds, and human suffering speaks both of history and the current moment. Géricault unflinchingly depicts ordinary people crowded on a raft in the open sea, desperately waving to a rescue ship outside the frame of the painting. The event that caused their frantic condition occurred on 2 July 1816, when the *Méduse*, a French naval frigate, ran aground. Some 147 people were set adrift on a raft; all but 15 died. The story would have been familiar to spectators of the time. In its day, *The Raft of the Medusa* was largely understood to be "about" a crisis of leadership. The wreck was attributed to the incompetence of the captain and the corruption of the French government. What ensued on the small raft was unspeakable, and the blame was placed squarely on the government.¹

In another room of the Denon wing of the Louvre is Jacques-Louis David's enormous (roughly 10 × 6 meters, or 32 × 20 feet) [*The Coronation of Napoleon*](#) (1808), depicting the day when in Notre Dame Cathedral Napoleon declared himself the singular and absolute power of the state by crowning himself emperor. French schoolchildren learn well the five famous lies in the painting: Napoleon's mother is in the painting although she did not attend the coronation; Napoleon's wife, Josephine, is depicted younger than her years; Napoleon crowns a kneeling Josephine whereas Napoleon crowned himself; David paints himself among the spectators in the balcony, although he was not there; and lastly, Pope Pius VII blesses the ceremony, although he did not actually do so. The opulent visual vocabulary attempts to conjoin religious and state authority in a holy sanctuary. "History is a set of lies that people have agreed upon," Napoleon said. Relatively recently, I found myself mistakenly imagining that the two paintings were in the same room facing each other.

1. Géricault interviewed and sketched the *Medusa* crew members, read about the harrowing event, and studied drowned cadavers at the morgue. He also attended the trial of the ship's captain, Hugues Duroy de Chaumareys.

I don't know where our present ship of state is taking us, nor do I know what lies will rationalize our wreck. Threats to democracy were with us before Covid-19. I do remember when, half a year ago, I traveled to the theatre at least twice a week. In hindsight, this was a great thing to do. I can still see theatre—but without the buzz of the lobby, without the collective hum of consciousness meeting the performance halfway, without the quiet breathing of fellow spectators, without being squeezed into a small seat without social distancing, without the outside world, without digital devices, without the plastic take-home cup of wine, without the silence before the applause, without the possibility of observing other spectators before, during, or after the performance. Now I plunk myself down a minute before show time, all alone, in a chair with an ottoman, my cellphone nearby, a cat vying for my attention, a cup of coffee to stand guard against ennui, breathing without accompanying breaths...with nowhere to look except at the screen.

Now is its own time. We are all together and all apart. Our distance has created a chorus of connection. The foundations for our “new” online realities were already there. We have been watching videos of live performances already for a long time. Streaming and recorded performances, discussions about those performances, conferences, and talkbacks let us engage with artists and scholars from all over the world from the safety of our homes. Creative responses to making theatre and producing ideas about what theatre might become are indications of the future. Both Lola Arias's [My Documents / Share Your Screen](#) and the Belarus Free Theatre's [A School for Fools](#) are almost digitally born. Frank Hentschker's curated [Segal Talks](#) are urgent global conversations about what artists are experiencing in different parts of the world. *My Documents / Share Your Screen* simulates gathering in a lobby, entering a theatre and returning to the lobby to talk about the performance. The series is a beautiful adaptation to being alone together, using mediatized images, film, and the live presence of the artist. The Belarus Free Theatre has developed creative technology dramaturgy using Zoom frames as the given circumstance of their performance. Segal Talks creates a space to listen, consider, and reflect, attesting that discourse is crucial for both micro- and macro-communities of artists and scholars. In all three, creative coproducing and cost-sharing play important roles.

When the coronavirus arrived, Arias experienced an existential crisis about her job being irrelevant, nonessential. Being out of work foreclosed the creative space of being in a room with other people developing ideas together. Concerned about lack of employment and lack of creative opportunities, she consulted with the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm theatre in Frankfurt, which agreed to move her series *My Documents*, which began in 2012 as live lecture performances, to a streaming series newly titled *My Documents / Share Your Screen*. “In times of coronavirus, let's infect ourselves with ideas, stories and knowledge. Let's share our screens for debate, love and social encounters!” it says on the website of Kampnagel theatre in Hamburg.² Presented in Berlin by Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (in coproduction with Kampnagel Hamburg, Kaserne Basel, and Münchner Kammerspiele), which closed due to the coronavirus on 13 March, *My Documents / Share Your Screen* first appeared online the next week.³ “All artists associated with us across the globe are living, thinking and working from other places, as is the Mousonturm team,” it says on Mousonturm's website. “The on-going intense digital exchange is spawning new artistic ideas and projects that respond to the fundamental challenges that we now all face together.”⁴

2. www.kampnagel.de/en/program/my-documents-blue-house/; accessed 13 June 2020.

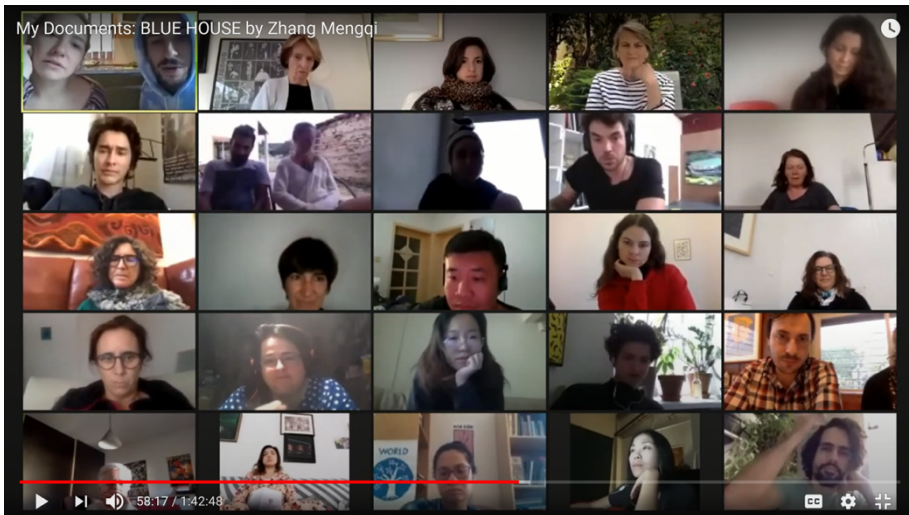
3. Supported within the framework of the Alliance of International Production Houses by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and supported by Hessisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst within the framework of the intergenerational audience development initiative.

4. www.mousonturm.de/en/projects/dmt-digitaler-mousonturm/; accessed 6 June 2020.

The series is live streamed lecture performances based on personal research, a radical experience, or something that secretly obsesses the artist. Arias invites international dance, documentary film, performance, and theatre artists to share their personal archives, their folders of ideas, images, and materials.

For Arias, the question became: “How can we create something that is not just streaming?”

We were concerned with creating the feeling of an audience in the virtual world. We wanted the virtual space to be a place where we meet and have the feeling of being together. In the theatre, there is the feeling that we understand together. We wanted to create the feeling of responsibility, the responsibility of being there, of being present. If I go, that means something just like it does in live theatre. We wanted the audience to be visible. We wanted to communicate that we care about them. Before each performance, I always said, “Let’s meet after the show and talk.” People felt free to speak, unlike in a live theatre where they have to stand up and be handed a microphone. And they spoke like they were speaking to people with identities. We want the idea of the present.⁵



Zoom squares of the audience for Blue House by Mengqi Zhang, part of the My Documents / Share Your Screen series curated by Lola Arias, 30 May 2020. (Screenshot by Carol Martin)

Arias brings her skills as a theatre creator, director, and curator to framing each performance in a simulation of liveness. Against a Zoom background of mottled blue and purple, she introduces herself and the artists she has selected for her series. As she welcomes us to the virtual lobby, international spectators sheltering at home appear on the Zoom screen, one square at a time. Arias asks some spectators where they are from, briefly creating a community of digital proximity and identity. When I watched Rabih Moure’s *Help Me Stop Smoking*, spectators said they were from Iran, USA, UK, Argentina, Germany, and Chile, among other places. Before the performance begins, Arias tells us that we are now “leaving the lobby,” and closes the spectator screens one by one. Once we are “in the theatre,” the performance begins as Arias switches to the artist’s screen. For the talkback, which Arias moderates, she brings all the spectators back to the virtual lobby by turning on their screens and making them all visible

5. Lola Arias, Zoom interview, 18 June 2020.

in gallery view. She switches between herself, the artists, and spectators—sometimes solo, sometimes as part of a screen populated with many spectators.

Creating the presence of the spectators and simulating the theatre experience in an online environment is a world-creating approach to curating. Arias first meets with the artists to discuss their personal archives. Sometimes there is a close collaboration, sometimes Arias functions mostly by giving feedback as the work is developed. “It depends on the artist,” Arias says.⁶ With Zhang Mengqi, a Chinese dancer and documentarist, for instance, Arias had several meetings. She looked at Zhang’s archive of images and interviews, and gave dramaturgical suggestions about ways to craft three portions of her archive: the Great Chinese Famine interviews, interviews village children, and the process of creating a new community space for art and learning, called *Blue House*, which is also the name of her online performance.

For *Blue House*, Zhang shares her archive of filmed interviews with people in her father’s village about the Great Chinese Famine (1959–61), when between 20 million and 43 million people died. Her work in the village was interrupted when, as she was on her way to celebrate Chinese New Year with her mother, China issued a quarantine order. Zhang finds herself experiencing daily life alone: staring out the window, eating, brushing her teeth, and looking at the webcam of the house she built as part of the Folk Memory Project in her father’s village. Quarantine gives Zhang a chance to reflect on the generational experience of the famine and how it compares to the time of coronavirus.

Zhang’s shared screen begins with a film of her taking off her hat and coat, plastic gloves, and face mask. She shows a map of China, pointing out the locations of Wuhan, Hubei, and her father’s village. There are film clips of Zhang herself as a child learning traditional Chinese dance, of her isolation in quarantine, and of her return to her father’s village once quarantine is lifted. She narrates the story of creating her work as she shares her screen. When asked what the coronavirus is, the children respond with answers that are visual, political, and conspiratorial. It’s a ball with spikes, it’s fake news. One child responds that she can only whisper what it is and walks off camera to tell Zhang that it is very serious. One child responds with a remarkable little haunting dance swaying from side to side. “Woooo,” he says. Maybe, Zhang confides, her grandchildren or great-grandchildren will come to this village to ask the villagers about the time of coronavirus.

The documents Zhang shares include interviews, film clips of creating a memorial to those in the village who died during the famine, teaching the children to dance and make films, and building a community space for the children of the village. *Blue House* moves from Zhang’s own isolation, to the older generation’s memories of famine, to the children of the village who begin to conduct their own interviews, dance, and make films. China’s modernization saw millions of people move from villages to cities, often separating families and leaving grandparents to care for children. Zhang captures the tone of the generational changes that the coronavirus has brought about. Adult children look at their parents as needing protection and as sharing a historical moment with them.

A School for Fools, an adaptation of Sasha Sokolov’s 1975 novel about life in the Soviet Union, began in rehearsals as a stage play but became a live Zoom performance when the pandemic hit. Using the features of Zoom, the performance seamlessly portrays the morphing reality of post–World War II Soviet Russia and the havoc it wreaked on individual and collective subjectivity and notions of reality. The protagonist narrator is two halves of a self experiencing the contradictions of Moscow after the war. Directed by Pavel Haradnitski, the performance is streamed live from Minsk and features the bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms

6. Lola Arias, Zoom interview, 18 June 2020.

of 12 performers. The 15-year-old Belarus Free Theatre is officially banned from performing in Belarus, making this performance with its quarantined cast unusual because it was more likely to be interrupted by a pizza delivery than by armed police. Performing live in different locations with 15 videotaping devices, including smartphones and drones, the production demanded creative technology dramaturgy. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* was ecstatic about the production, writing:

There's an inspired spirit of improvisation-born comedy in the cast's interpretations of gargoylish Dickensian authority figures (a judge, a psychiatrist, the tyrannical head of the "special" school to which our hero has been consigned); his exasperated, unhappily married parents; frightened, anxiously talkative Soviet citizens; and the people he idealizes, especially his beloved geography teacher, who may or may not be dead. (Played with elegant bemusement by Siarhei Kvachonak, this living corpse is hauntingly seen rising, in a sopping business suit, from his bathtub.)

We watch these varied souls interacting with our narrator—who is embodied by both Aliaksei Naranovich and Roman Shytsko—in schoolrooms, a graveyard, a psychiatrist's office, a streetcar, the family's cherished country retreat and the apartment where his mother (Maryna Yakubovich) conducts an affair with her son's accordion teacher.⁷

From 30 March to 31 July, every day at noon EST, Frank Hentschker of the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center interviews international artists and scholars about the challenges, sorrows, and hope for the world in the time of coronavirus. His interviews, under the rubric Segal Talks, have attracted viewers from more than 36 countries, with audiences between 800 and 5,000. His guests have included Tamilla Woodard, Zuleikha Chaudhari, Lola Arias, Anna Lengyel, Richard Schechner, Melanie Joseph, Milo Rau, Awoye Timpo, Toshiki Okada, Thomas Ostermeier, Meredith Monk, Jonathan McCrory, Shuyi Liao, Avra Sidiropoulou, Joshua Sobol, Woodie King Jr., and Rimini Protokoll, among many others. The information shared has been shattering, and the survival strategies described have been variously stunning, strategic, and inspired. "Having a [global] space to think, to listen, and to reflect helps us understand where we come from, where we are, and where we are going in this time of suffering in the arts," Hentschker told me in a phone conversation in June. "I am from Germany where we know when people could have spoken out, and they didn't. I had to do something. I needed to find a way to stay sane and to connect with the world. The theatre community is suffering, we have to do something."⁸ Hentschker's sense of urgency impelled him to get Segal Talks running in just one week exploring how the pandemic is playing out all over the world and how artists are responding with creativity and compassion. Hentschker continues to prove that the humanities are crucial to community life, and that theatre and performance studies are at the center of how we think about the future.

[HowlRound](#) has historically been the producing partner and distributor of the Segal Theatre Center's programs, getting it out beyond New York. Together with Vijay Mathew of HowlRound, Hentschker established the time (noon EST) that accommodates the greatest number of global time zones. HowlRound TV Livestreaming provides technical support for peer-producers (such as the Segal Theatre Center and hundreds of others). "We amplify and create a permanent archive of peer-producers' work. We are a nonproprietary, shared infrastructure for connecting practitioners world-wide to progressive and disruptive ideas, conversation, and performance," says Vijay Mathew.⁹ Structured similarly to an open-source

7. Ben Brantley, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/theater/school-for-fools-review.html; accessed 10 June 2020.

8. Frank Hentschker, phone conversation, 17 June 2020.

9. Vijay Mathew, email to author, 15 June 2020.

software project, HowlRound curates based on values of equity, identity, and giving voice to the historically marginalized. Programming can be simultaneously mirrored on HowlRound, on the Segal Theatre Center website, and on individual Facebook pages. “I think of it as associated producing where no money is changing hands. People are sharing resources, curating expertise, and technological expertise in a tie-in of networks,” says Hentschker. “I had to cancel an entire season and come up with a new one. We have had more viewers in one week than we would have in an entire season.”¹⁰

Hybrid narrative, mise-en-scène, and production models will continue to evolve along with changing circumstances. Immersive scenography, technological dramaturgy (how technology itself creates meaning), theatre made and shown from home, podcast plays, and dramatized audio tours of spaces, places, and people’s work are all forms of invention emerging from adapting to the conditions created by the pandemic. Hybrid forms and productions like documentary autobiography, live online, and personal archives as public performance, along with blending of different types of mediums, can be the material for theatre going forward.

Television broadcasts of theatre productions have been around for a while and will increase. They are an established feature of cultural life in some places. In Poland and elsewhere, theatre productions premiering at theatres with government support are recorded for archival purposes. Highly successful works are filmed expressly for television: for example, Grzegorz Jarzyna’s TR Warszawa Theatre production of Dorota Masłowska’s *No Matter How Hard We Tried* was filmed with three cameras and professionally edited. The recorded has not been the poor cousin of the live for a long time.

Everything has taken on new meaning in the time of the coronavirus. Things that escaped attention have come around again to capture our imaginations. Once understood as a substitute for live performance, performance on video is now a way of seeing what we missed or could not see. Now theatre lives online, both live streamed and recorded in innovative ways. Methodological mutations are already occurring. Mark Russell, founder of the Under the Radar Festival, has this to say:

Theatre will never be the same after this time. The events of 2020 will have substantial impact on the field of live performance. Though there will be some benefits found after this misery. Comfort with technology has expanded the tools artists and audiences are familiar with, including multiplatform events and deeper explorations. The pandemic lockdown has instilled a hunger for contact and live communal experiences that will fuel the desire for theatre once the barriers come down. The international exchange of live performances has completely fallen apart and it will take some time to come back. It was already confronting issues of environmental concerns—the carbon footprint of flying a company of artists or even the constant travel of curators was coming into question, not to mention the token exoticism of trading in cultures. Again, the desire for true intercultural exchange will be higher once the quarantines come down. Unfortunately waiting behind this crisis is a serious global economic depression. Its impact on the field of live performance will be profound. It is hard to calculate how we will navigate those challenges when they come. I believe it will result in a scrappier more vital theatre. A theatre that has had a lot of time to consider its place in the world. It seems clear that the fire the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement has started in the United States will change the type of theatre we make and the value of live events going into the future.”¹¹

10. Frank Hentschker, phone conversation, 17 June 2020.

11. Mark Russell, email to author, 17 June 2020.

The challenges to education, and to theatre education in particular, are great. Students have long been part of a numerology: the number who apply, the number who enroll, the number to meet enrollment targets, the number in large lectures, the number in seminars, and the number who transfer. Soon to be added: the faculty who survive, and those who do not.

On 21 May on Twitter, Matthew Dean Hindman, a professor of political science at the University of Tulsa, wrote that his university had sent an email to students “assuring them that every fall class will have a faculty understudy in case the faculty member of record gets sick or dies.” Faculty had not been informed of the policy. (Hindman later wrote that faculty were subsequently informed.) His tweet was widely retweeted, and sparked a series of sobering responses. “Undertakers being contracted, too?” “Course buddy is too close to corpse buddy.” “I prefer cliff list in case the instructor falls off a cliff.” “That’s okay: it’s understudies all the way down.”¹²

Frighteningly, now we are all numbers: the number of new cases, the number tested, the number hospitalized, the number who have died, and the number recovered.

The challenges of the coronavirus for educational institutions are unprecedented, including economic survival. Faculty have invented approaches to staging virtual productions that have led to discoveries in collaboration and conceptualization. They have devised ways to capture the attention of students whose lives have changed overnight, while suffering the same upheaval and uncertainty themselves. And they have actively embraced a renewed focus on teaching methodologies, including, but not limited to, generative methods of engagement for remote learning for both artistic and academic courses. Many faculty have gone from crisis to challenge to opportunity in a very brief period. Fall 2020 will present more challenges and will definitely not be a return to normal. That theatre and performance studies students participate in the full array of opportunities that colleges and universities offer is more urgent. Double



Black artists, including many female artists, painted the boarded-up windows in Soho in June 2020 during the BLM demonstrations in NYC. (Photos by Carol Martin)

12. “Understudies all the way down” is an allusion to “turtles all the way down,” an oft-quoted statement about what holds up the world.

majors, internships, transferable skills like writing, analysis, community building, group formation, professional performance preparation, theatre and citizenship. “Young artists must read. You have to know which direction you want to go and books will lead you there. You can’t wing it anymore,” said Woodie King Jr., during the 12 June 2020 Segal Talks. There will be no more graduating to wait tables.

The coronavirus has exacerbated inequality. The murder of George Floyd and so many others has created great activism but also has caused depression and anxiety. The black paintings commemorating black lives on the large canvases of boarded windows in Soho show the hope and worry, the ideal and the reality. The presence of death in the most excruciating terms: murdered on the street, or dying in a hospital without family or friends. Black Lives Matter is underscoring the extreme differences in valuing human life, not only in the United States but across the globe. Theatre can affirm collective human dignity, which cannot be negotiated on the market.¹³ At its best, it can be a safe space for empathy.

Students walk into the classroom wanting their personal and societal experiences to be present, including their unique subject positions of race and gender, without having to be spokespersons for those positions. They want to deepen their understanding of their own history, engage with diverse people and with those like themselves. My former student Josca Moore writes: “I don’t want nonblack people to be colorblind. I want people to see me as a black woman who has a specific perspective and has lived specific experiences that other people have not lived. I want to learn from other people who have experiences that I won’t ever have.”¹⁴ Another of my students, Lucas Kernan, thinks about it this way: “When I enter a classroom, it is important that the many facets of my identity and the identities of my classmates are incorporated into the communal thinking and discussion without preventing anyone from participating based on a lived experience they may or may not have had. Putting our complexities aside will only undermine our ability to have genuine and grounded conversation.”¹⁵ Lest we think students are a case unto themselves, consider what General Charles Q. Brown Jr., the new Chief of Staff of the US Air Force (confirmed by Congress on 9 June 2020), tweeted about his experience of being African American in the military: “I sometimes felt my comments were perceived to be the African American perspective when they were my perspective informed by being African American” (Broadwater 2020).

In the time of the coronavirus, university theatre education has specific challenges. “Taking in-person classes is a nuanced experience that includes watching people’s body language and continuing discussions after class. With Zoom classes, students can be on their phones and no one may know. They can spend half of the time looking at themselves on the computer screen and not others, and being home could be a distraction. So much about our craft, both conservatory and academic, are human experiences that cannot be effectively substituted by long hours on computer screens,” says my former student Kristina Paul.¹⁶ But for now, the virtual space is where we meet; students and faculty have to take responsibility for being present in that space. A strong notion of the common good has to inform the collective space.

When this is over, we will have collectively gone through the time of the coronavirus in different ways in different places and uniquely among diverse people—but also all together.

13. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Segal Talks*, 10 June 2020.

14. Josca Moore, email to author, 15 June 2020.

15. Lucas Kernan, email to author, 15 June 2020.

16. Kristina Paul, email to author, 12 June 2020.

We will remember the rapidly changing consciousness, the uncertainty, and the radically fluctuating notions of the near and distant future. This consciousness of what we did, how we adapted, of the overlap of the isolation of the virus with the massive public outpouring on the streets to protest the murder of George Floyd, a protest that spread around the world, will inform everything artists and scholars do and think. The new normal will have a new consciousness.

In his book *On Tyranny*, Timothy Snyder comments that faced with negative examples of leadership, members of professions can create forms of ethical conversation not possible with the government (2017:40). Higher education has to revisit its ethical convictions, both those institutions that are dependent on tuition income and those that are not. Capitalism knows only one value: money. And this value plays out in education on different people in different ways. Transparency is needed. The kind of lying that we have seen on the national stage and replicated by some at academic institutions must be understood as an intervention in the very possibility of ethical education and citizenship.

The perfect stasis of a painting, even one like *The Raft of Medusa* that captures turbulent motion, characterizes something of this moment. It is as if we are caught in the eye of a storm, turbulently moving while staying still in our homes. We cannot afford to look away from either our shared Zoom screens or from each other. We have to face in the direction of travel to navigate our collective journeywork. And the raft on which we travel is the stage where we must act.

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Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, 2 July 2020

Theatre in Times of Crisis and Transformation

In his book *Expressionist Theatre* (1948), Lothar Schreyer lays out the origins, ideas, and artistic methods of the expressionist movement, of which he was a central figure in the second and third decades of the 20th-century, and which took shape against the backdrop of WWI. In the introduction to her translation of the book, Helga Straif-Taylor points to Schreyer's use of the term *Kunstwende*, "a turning point in the arts," which he takes from Herwarth Walden's (founder of *Der Sturm*) reworking of the term *Weltwende*, "a turning point in history" (Straif-Taylor 1992:37). Schreyer reflects on the relations between human beings' lives and artistic forms in this context:

As strange as this may appear to those who misunderstood Expressionism then, and to those who misunderstand it again today, it was the human being that concerned us, and not art. We perceived the *Kunstwende* merely as a phenomenon, a visible feature of the *Weltwende*, which individuals had to realize within themselves. (in Straif-Taylor 1992:142; see Schreyer 1948:126)

Although Expressionism and other avantgarde modernist movements are now part of history, one cannot overlook their impact on what modern and contemporary theatre and performance have become. This means that the question how theatre reacts and transforms in times of crisis is an important but complex one. A century later, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, we are similarly experiencing "a turning point in the arts." However, unlike gradual

social and historical processes that inspire and yield philosophical and formal changes in the arts, the immediate and concrete reality of the pandemic requires quick adjustment to new kinds of personal and social behavioral modes, which accelerate cultural change and demand quick adaptation and change of artistic practices.

In order to think about the changes theatre and performance will undergo, I look at the requirements people around the world are asked to follow these days and which are practically and conceptually deeply related to and challenging for theatre and performance. These include the avoidance of physically gathering and coming together in large groups (especially in closed halls); social distancing and avoiding touch and bodily proximity; and the most theatrical of all, wearing masks. These practices are the givens through which theatre artists are forced to work and create these days and it is reasonable to assume that these constraints will be reflected in the ways we learn, teach, practice, and experience theatre and performance in the foreseeable future. They also set an opportunity to review some of the things we take for granted. From a practical, formal, point of view, the pandemic and its behavioral regulations affect and challenge some of the defining and fundamental cornerstones of theatre and performance as those have been grounded over the past few decades, and which include the unmediated liveness of the artistic event, the ephemerality of performance, presence, embodiment, and coming together. The unprecedented amount of video recordings of theatre performances that have been made available online by theatres worldwide exposes theatre works widely, transcending place and time. This phenomenon changes the ways theatre that has been created before the crisis can be experienced but it does not give an answer to the ways theatre will be created under and after the coronavirus conditions. In what follows I address these challenges not only as obstacles, but also as potentially fruitful points through which to think about theatre creativity.

Sitting together in darkened halls in order to watch a performance is not and has not always been the default of the theatrical experience. Quite the other way around. Some of the most significant eras in theatre history took place in open spaces. The current situation thus invites a renewed thinking of *where* theatre (the Greek *Teatron*, “a seeing place”) actually takes place, and how theatre architecture and buildings will change in the future. In addition to an expected increase of “site specific” forms of performance, perhaps theatre and performance will converge more naturally with other forms of social gathering, protest, and coming together in public open spaces: outside. This in turn invites a rethinking of the meaning of “public spaces” and of the “city square” in both physical and virtual contexts. Whereas physical open spaces will increase local forms of coming together and communality, the internet enhances global and international forms of interaction. Participating over the past few months in numerous Zoom meetings and events made clear that a sense of being part of an ad-hoc community and participating together in live events, which can be planned, set up, and *performed* in short and even immediate spans of time, has global and intercultural potential. The mere fact that in a Zoom event each member’s name (and face!) is seen by *each other*, or that participants can chat among themselves during the event, invites thinking of new modes of gathering, communality, participation, interaction, and reception.

Whereas online performance can maintain liveness, avoiding proximity and touch is a challenging one. Again, there are numerous historical, ritualistic, and stylized forms of theatre and performance, which are based on aesthetic conventions of distance among the performers and avoidance of touch. Some of these forms might encourage new research questions or even be practiced anew. Over the past few decades, however, the immediate presence and proximity of performers’ physical bodies have become so central to theatre and performance art, expressing a deep sense of artistic freedom, experimentalism, and fascination with the human body. Giving these up, even temporarily, is challenging for theatre artists and for theatre students. It is possible that the pendulum will move towards more metaphorical

representations of human relations and that we will see an acceleration in the creation of *humachine* hybrids.

Finally, wearing masks is at the heart of the philosophy and practice of the art of theatre. It is the ultimate metaphor of identity as a social construct, as masks have the ability to express, alter, or put into question one's visual appearance, identity, and social profiling. The unifying effect of covering the face with masks in the public sphere all over the world is evocative, especially in times in which privacy is infringed. Unlike *commedia* masks that cover the eyes, the pandemic's most clear visual signifier is the muted expression of the human covered face, all except the eyes. But this practice, too, gives playwrights, actors, directors, designers, and performance artists an opportunity to react. To call attention to the ways theatre and theatricality, masks and masking, reveal, and do not hide, give voice, and do not silence, human voices, faces, and bodies.

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Elise Morrison, 3 July 2020

Despite my hopes to contribute to TDR's Covid Forum, it has been impossible to find the time and mental space to craft something meaningful in response to your questions about the future of our field. The shift to providing full-time childcare for my two young children (four and six years old) has radically limited my ability to work these past months. That, coupled with the shifting ground at work, as my colleagues and I adjust to the impacts of the pandemic and respond to the deeply necessary calls to enact antiracism in our departmental culture and practices, has taken all I have to give right now.

I wanted to reach out to tell you this so that you know I value the invitation to be a part of this important forum, and also to make visible the reasons that I am not able to contribute. Even in my position of privilege, I am struggling with the profound impact that the pandemic is having on working parents. I do hope that this struggle, one of many made all the more acute and apparent by the public health crisis, can remain in view as we work as a community of performance makers, scholars, and teachers to build a more equitable and inclusive future.

Richard Schechner, 12 July 2020

From Archibald MacLeish's "Epistle to be Left in the Earth":

Each man believes in his heart he will die.
Many have written last thoughts and last letters.
None know if our deaths are now or forever:
None know if this wandering earth will be found.

At this moment, after restless sleep on too many nights, I don't know if "this wandering earth will be found." That's because so many things assail "us," the human community: global warming, pandemic, billions in poverty and disease, racism, ethnicism, civil wars, genocides, global tensions... At another level, the pandemics, warming, and extinctions tell us Gaia is rebalancing herself. Humans must change or pass on.

Yet in my neighborhood, my intimate neighborhood, life goes on more or less the same. I rise, bathe, exercise (sometimes), eat, defecate, write, edit, talk, regard the world around me, Zoom, Skype, cope, read, sleep.

I know that covid-19 has “changed everything.” But deep down I don’t believe it. Deep down I think that in 5 years or 50, this particular pandemic will be a “historical event,” long gone. The 1918–19 flu pandemic killed 50 million globally, 675,000 in the USA—the world’s population then was 1.8 billion, the US’s 103 million. So the relative impact of the earlier pandemic was magnitudes greater. Yet by the mid-1920s Weimar in Germany and the Roaring Twenties in the USA were in full swing. Yet, somewhere also deep down, I do think that with covid-19, a Rubicon has been crossed, in the USA at least. The murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery *showed* American racism in action. Other police murders and rampant racialized terror are also widely documented by cellphone cameras and police bodycams. Clearly, the country must change systematically, structurally, or become neo-Rome, mighty in its corrupt decline.

Change is always happening. Heraclitus told us that a long time ago. But certain snaps of time are particularly changeful, a “before” and “after.” Sometimes these are obvious while they are happening, the American, French, and Russian Revolutions for example; and sometimes the inflection point is identified only by means of consequences, Johannes Guttenberg’s movable type printing press, for example. The confluence of the coronavirus pandemic and Black Lives Matter certainly seems to mark a permanent change, in the USA at least. For the second time in my memory, huge multiracial and multicultural crowds are in the streets demanding recognition and correction of structural flaws in American society. (The other time was the Civil Rights/Freedom Movement of the 1950s–’60s; the anti-Vietnam War movement, though huge and important, was a single-issue cause.) The call to defund the police is the spearhead for reexamining and changing a deeply racist America. This racism is part-and-parcel of US history, specifically slavery, segregation, and ongoing social and economic oppression. This history is imperfectly recognized and taught. Under the trope of the “Founding Fathers” we cover up, distort, and under-tell the stories of the Native Peoples, Africans, and Spanish- and French-speaking settlers at the origin of “America” as we know it today. It’s a complex, bloody bundle of narratives. A lot more than Puritans sharing Thanksgiving turkeys with so-called Indians, Bostonians dumping tea into the harbor, and Virginia slave-holders proclaiming “all men are created equal” (women not included).

Ironically, covid-19 gives people chunks of time to toss aside sheltering in place and assemble for a cause that is worth the risk. To both protest and hope. Cellphone cameras and police bodycams provide horrific testimony of sadistic murder and out-of-control crowd control. But police bad behavior is symptomatic of larger faults in society. These have been with us from the start of African and European settlement, and even before. Tenochtitlan, Tikal, and Cusco were no democratic paradises. What BLM, what these demonstrations demonstrate, is the felt need for justice in a social order that has not yet existed. Across the board—in law, housing, education, jobs, and health. Reparations. Steps on the path toward a more perfect union.

To come down to local matters, performance and education after covid: As adaptable animals, we humans are coping with social distancing, Zoom conferences and classes, streaming and archived performances, and all the other “temporary” measures that may well become permanent. No one knows when the next pandemic will erupt. And when the economy comes back, it will not be what it was before. Corporations will move a substantial part of their workforce offsite; there will be fewer theatres, restaurants, and shops. Cities like New York will be hollowed out, at least temporarily. Many office buildings will be converted to multiple use; some of the wealthiest will debark for rural homesteads. Some universities—including major ones dependent on state funding—will collapse for lack of student and government dollars, and all will retrench and institute hybrid online-live courses. Hopefully, this will be the opportunity to radically improve K-12 education and open college to many more people. But there will be fewer small classes and almost no seminars. The humanities will constrict more than STEM. What money there is will go to laboratory, scientific, and

engineering research. For the non-college educated, jobs will abound in vast infrastructural projects the likes of which have not been seen in the USA since the 1930s and again the 1950s.

For me, virtual is tolerable, but live is so much better. A different social reality. I like the breaths and squirms of near neighbors in a theatre; the rush and roar of the crowd in a stadium; the give-and-go of immersive performances; the site-specifics and flashes of performance art. And what of the world beyond the performing arts, the world of the broad spectrum of performance? I do not savor the post-covid removal of many workers from their offices to their homes/aka home offices. Not only does coffee-klatching incubate creativity, it is also where human primates can delight in grouping.

A lot of fancy talk masks the real reason for promoting home-work: corporate greed. If the cost of having workers work at home surpassed that of having them in offices, the corp heads would surely call them back to offices. My solution? Have home office workers charge rent to the corps they work for. Say you work 8 hours a day from your living room, bedroom, or home office-study, and that space comprises 30% of your place, then your employer pays 30% of your monthly rent, mortgage, or maintenance. If it's less or more than 8 hours, less or more than 30%, it can be prorated. That's only fair. Workers should not be subsidizing corporations. Along with this, I strongly advocate for a "maximum wage" in addition to a minimum wage. In large-scale corporations, the maximum earnings of the highest paid executives would be topped at 5x what the lowest paid earned. So if the top execs of a big corporation make, say, \$900,000 per year, the delivery person and stock clerk are paid \$180,000. Earnings include not only salary but stocks, bonds, and other nonwage income. Imagine what would happen inside Amazon if Jeff Bezos's income was pegged to the lowest worker's income. As for mom-and-pop operations, the minimum wage needs to be at least \$40 an hour. The maximum wage proposal is a radical version of Elizabeth Warren's wealth tax because the cost of the program comes from what's now going to the top earners.

I am not holding my breath until the maximum wage is in effect. But *considering* it is something that happens in the epoch of covid. The interruption of the ordinary, the seclusion-yet-extreme-reachout of sheltering in place; the felt actuality of entertaining so many possibilities. Yes, "entertaining," an amusement, an opportunity, a pastime, an art.